

# SKILLS PILLAR UPDATE



## 1. The Plymouth Economic Strategy

The ambitious Plymouth Economic Strategy incorporates four interlocking pillars of work. These are: Productive Growth and High Value Jobs, Inclusive Growth, Sustainable Growth and Civic Pride and Regeneration. Underpinning these is the key cross-cutting pillar of Skills, as shown in the diagram below.



Naturally, skills and workforce development are a core element of achieving our ambitions with and for our residents and key to our growing economy. It is essential that the local training offer meets employer needs across our sectors. The Plymouth Economic Strategy is therefore closely aligned to and complements our key local skills strategies, including the Skills 4 Plymouth Plan, Local Skills Improvement Plan and the Plymouth and South Devon Freeport Skills Plan. As a result, we are committed to maintaining and growing investment in training local people for employment in these sectors. This includes those who live, work and learn within the city's travel to work area.

## 2. Growth Alliance Plymouth

Growth Alliance Plymouth (GAP) has been created to maximise the opportunity of significant defence investment and is key to driving sustainable and inclusive growth, encouraging innovation, and building far reaching opportunities.

The aims and outcomes of GAP:

**Strong Foundations** – the plan will be based on data and a strong evidence base. Team Plymouth Executive Management Board will share intelligence and insight to make good quality decisions.

**Driving Economic Growth** – the plan will deliver growth through partnerships with a focus on business innovation and technology that embraces Maritime Autonomy and AI. Supporting local people, graduates and veterans to take advantage of the high value jobs and new opportunities.

**Regeneration and Attraction** – the plan will deliver an enhanced living environment with 10,000 new homes, particularly in the City Centre, creating a safer town centre.

**Breakdown Barriers to Opportunity** – the plan has a clear focus on skills from pre-16 education through to post-16 skills. This will raise attainment and achievement amongst our school children while building skills to enable everyone to take advantage of the opportunities that growth will bring.

The scale of this opportunity is significant and has the potential to transform our city and realise our ambitions.

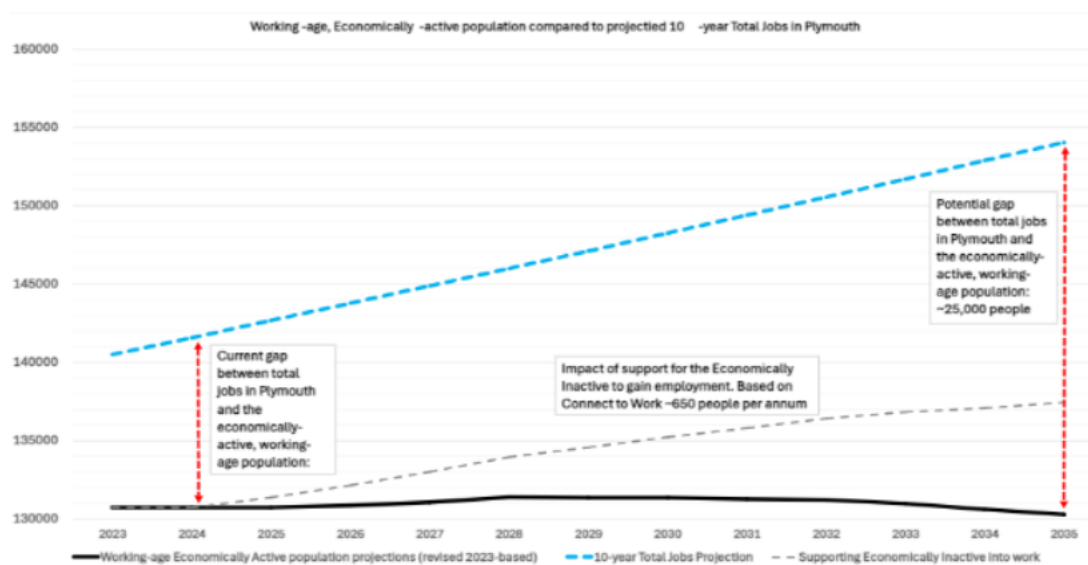
HMNB Devonport is the largest naval base in Western Europe and serves the nation. It is where the UK undertakes operational, training and maintenance activities for its naval fleet. An example of the scale of investment is Home of Continuous at Sea Deterrent (CASD) to receive £4.4 billion investment over 10 years. Therefore, Plymouth has an extensive skills requirement, a need for 5,500 people over the next 10 years, made up of 1,800 entry level jobs and 3,700 experienced workers for Babcock. In addition to this at least 2,000 construction workers (2,000 jobs min, profile raising to 4,250 in 2027) will be required to meet the scale of need and ambition. This represents a once in a

lifetime opportunity to transform the skills agenda, building on very strong foundations within our city.

At present, the city does not have sufficient skilled labour to meet the demands of this investment, due to legacy challenges of educational outcomes, poor health outcomes and skilled labour retention, as well as a lack of high-quality housing.

### 3. Skills Demand Data

Plymouth City Council forecasting, reinforced by commissioned research by Stantec, shows a growing gap between local jobs and the local workforce. This indicates that over the next 10 years, an extra 15,000 workers will be needed in the city to meet the growing number of jobs and subsequent labour demand.



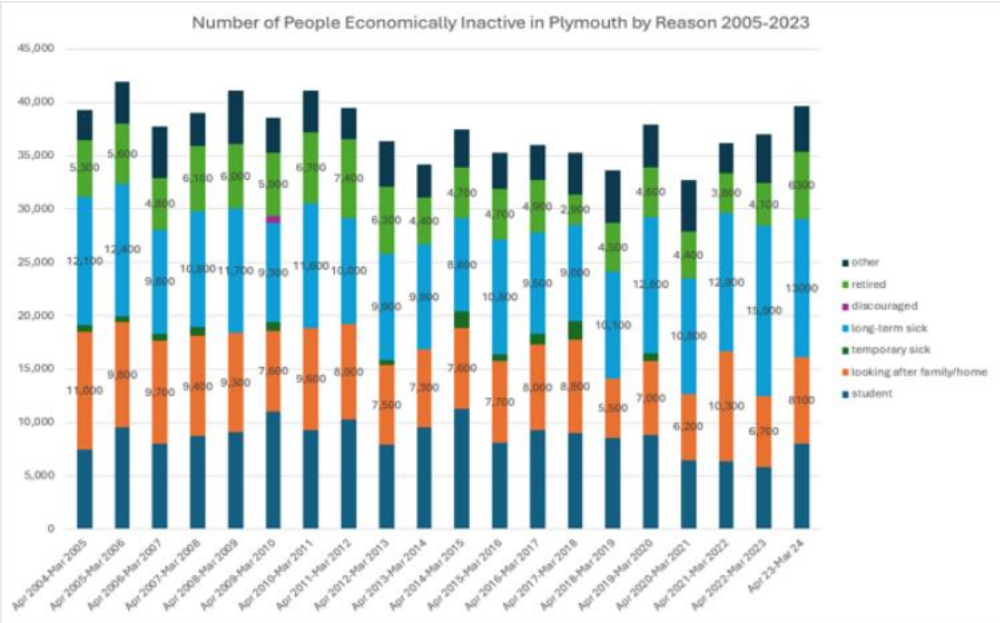
Our strategy for skills and work we undertake is demand-led, and demand informed. We know we have a very real need for skills in the city across many different sectors and industries including healthcare, construction, manufacturing and engineering, education, administration and defence. The opportunity to utilise this investment to go further and deeper is extensive and exciting. It also presents a real challenge as we can foresee specific skills challenges for many industries.

Taking construction as an example, the latest Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) southwest report highlights the need for an additional 42,000 construction workers across the region in the next 4 years ([ctbl003\\_csn-rep\\_regional\\_south-west\\_aw2.pdf](#)). We know the city has a significant un-met skills requirement in construction that will only grow over the next decade, particularly as the extent of our ambition requires significant home building for a growing labour market.

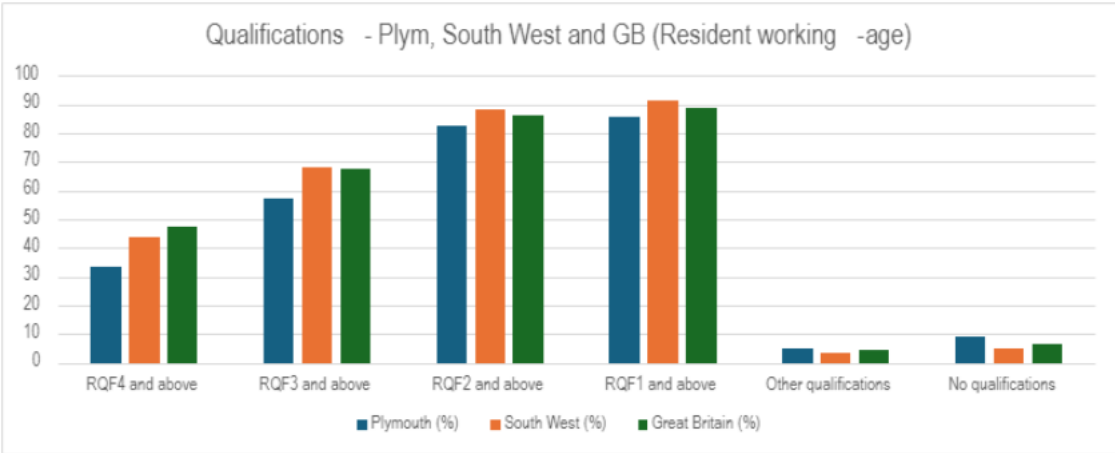
Plymouth has seen improvement in the unemployment rate over the last 5 years. Pre-Covid Pandemic, Plymouth had on average 1% higher unemployment rate than the national average. However, over the last 5 years we have seen this reverse, and Plymouth has consistently had a lower unemployment rate than nationally, by approximately 1%.

Plymouth has approximately 40,000+ people economically inactive, a rate of between 24% and 25%. Higher than 21% in Great Britain and 19% in the southwest. A significant proportion of these economically inactive people is due to long-term sickness, a specific issue in Plymouth (8.3% of working-age population compared to 5.3% for England). Economic inactivity is also a specific issue for

the over 50s. Therefore, our activity will continue to support these individuals back into work, within this wider context of real need and stong investment.

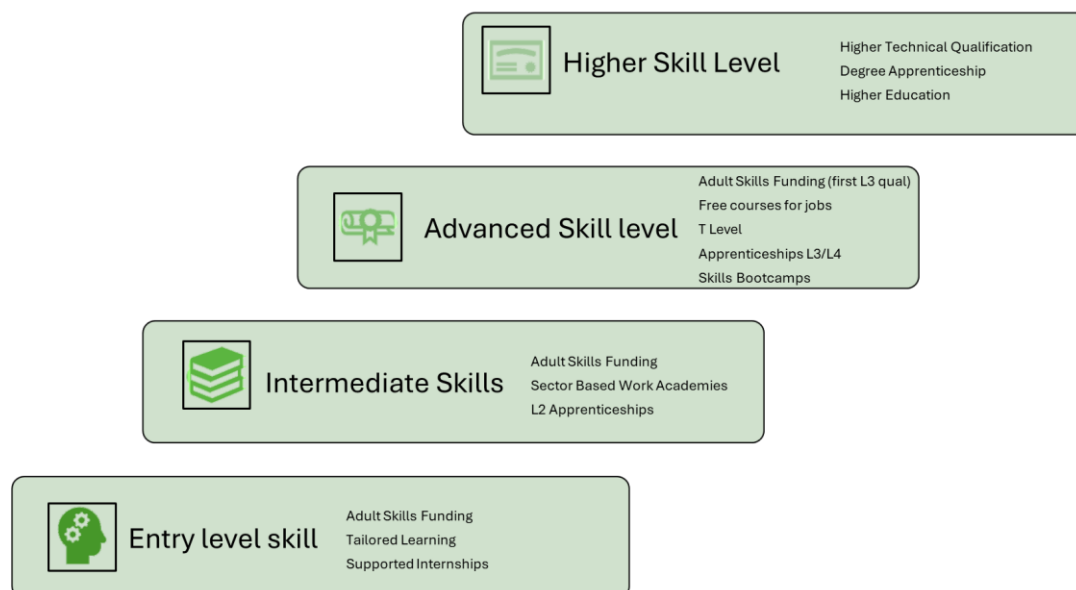


Overall skills levels, measured through qualification rates, are also low in Plymouth when compared to national and regional averages. The greatest gap between Plymouth and National is in the higher-level qualifications (RQF4+). Thirty-three percent of Plymouth residents have a qualification at this level compared to 47% nationally. More people in Plymouth have no qualifications (9.4% compared to 6.5% nationally).



These is, alongside the national challenges of youth unemployment, an aging workforce and relatively stagnant growth in the working age population.

We tackle this head on through targeted action to improve the skills base of our residents to help people transition into employment or into higher skilled, higher paid employment, effectively creating a skills escalator (see diagram below). We are ensuring people have the right skills they need now and, in the future, so they can access employment and progress in their career. Supporting and investing in training and further education with our anchor Further Education and Higher Education Institutions alongside our Independent Training Providers remains critical to accelerate skilled workers into industries with skills shortages.

**Skills Escalator:****4. Further Education (including independent training providers).**

There are over 50 training providers in the south west delivering:

- over 600 routes to apprenticeships (in foundation apprenticeships, apprenticeships, supported apprenticeships and degree apprenticeships)
- over 24 different T levels
- Internships
- Supported Internships
- GCSEs
- foundation courses
- skills boot camps
- vocational training
- adult and community learning.

There are approx. 2,000 apprenticeship starts in the city per year, 16% of school and college leavers enter into an apprenticeship compared to 10% nationally

City College Plymouth has more than:

- 4,000 fulltime students
- 8,000 part-time students
- 500 apprenticeship starts per year
- A wide breath of skills training providing of 100 different courses, tutors with industry experience, high quality / high tech teaching spaces.
- The green/blue skills hub (Civic Centre) will support the development of over 60 new courses, delivered to 2,000 students.
- OCSW (Plymouth City Councils in-house provider support over 7,000 learners, has a growing apprenticeship and supported internship offer.

## 5. Skills Pillar – Plymouth Economic Strategy Delivery Plan Projects

Below is a breakdown of the projects in the Plymouth Economic Strategy Delivery Plan that are primarily aligned to the Skills Pillar, these range across several project areas. Marked in grey are the projects focus on pre-16 education elements:

Project Area	Project Name	Lead Orgainsation
Reinforcing our pre-16 education system to meet future workforce needs	Accelerating the local belonging framework	Plymouth City Council
	Investing in Early Help	Plymouth City Council
Supporting and building the capacity of our post-16 provider	Levering existing resources to address skills priorities	City College Plymouth
	Building providers capacity	City College Plymouth
Supporting and developing the current and future workforce	Developing skills brokerage	Plymouth City Council
	Enhancing cultural education	Plymouth Culture
	Increasing the number and quality of work experience	Plymouth City Council
Talent Retention	Retaining graduates	University of Plymouth
	Retaining veterans	Plymouth City Council
	Building recruitment events	University of Plymouth
Support for economically inactive people and NEET young people	Supporting those furthest from the labour market	Plymouth City Council
Construction and aligned skills	Establishing a Construction Taskforce	Homes England
	Adopting new modes of construction	Building Plymouth

### Approach to Monitoring:

The Plymouth Economic Strategy will be monitored through the pillar approach as outlined above. The intention is to keep this both light touch and outcome focused around the 10-year aspirations in the Plymouth Economic Strategy rather than trying to measure individual / cumulative outputs.

The monitoring will have two levels:

- Quarterly review of progress using a RAG rating system to cover: progress, barriers/issues, funding etc.
- Annual review of baseline data to report on cumulative progress, leading to annual update of Driving Growth brochure

The PCC Officer Lead for each Pillar, will gather the individual project RAG reports and liaise with the Political Pillar Lead and the External Pillar Lead on progress reporting.

## 6. Progress in Education and Skills

Several initiatives have been developed, and significant progress has been made in addressing skills challenges in Plymouth. We have also seen city-wide improvements in some skills measures because of these programmes and improved alignment:

A vital part of this has been the continued growth of Skills Launchpad Plymouth (SLP), with over 60,000 unique visitors to the online website (since it was developed in 2022). Since its creation in 2020, SLP have supported 989 young people and 911 adults furthest from the labour market, of which 484 have entered employment and 351 into training (This rate is above the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) target of 30% into Education, Employment or Training). This has had a direct positive impact to the residents of Plymouth and worked to grow the supply of skilled labour to support economic growth. As well as the development of numerous sector skills partnerships such as Building Plymouth and Caring Plymouth, where we work alongside Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the private sector to fill critical job vacancies in key sectors.

Furthermore, to support the previously high level of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), we established the Unlocking Plymouth Potential, young people Seeking Employment, Education or Training (SEET) plan. This change in our language and how we measure young people moving from NEET to SEET to Employment, Education and Training (EET), and the interventions and support in place has been helpful in recognising positive steps towards education, employment and training and offering our young people a sense of progress and steps forward. The work here has been extensive, and we have established a SEND employment panel, multi-agency NEET panels to enable and ensure a detailed understanding of the interventions and support to young people and the steps towards improved outcomes.

A key contributor to this achievement is our work with our local training providers. In January 2023, we had one provider delivering 9 Supported Internships. As of July 25, we have four providers delivering 67 Supported Internships. This will grow to seven providers, with an aspiration of delivering 100 Supported Internships during the 2025/2026 academic year.

We have grown the SEN provision for post-16 students in mainstream settings by 37% in a year, to enable greater access to skills provision.

One of our aims has been to close the gap between Plymouth and England-average in both GCSEs and A level attainment rates, which has been achieved.

Furthermore, the place based working group has been established and is recognised by the regional Department for Education (DFE) as an effective way to deliver improvements across the city in the school's education system, and has had discernible impact on reducing suspensions and exclusions in our city.

Several partnerships have been established across the city and wider region following the Building Plymouth model. These include Caring Plymouth and Welcoming Plymouth, as well as a talent retention programme.

### **Impact:**

With wider city alignment, improvement have also been seen across several key skills measures which include:

**Plymouths Unemployment Rate:** Over the last 5 years, Plymouth has seen significant improvement in its unemployment rate. Pre-Covid Pandemic, Plymouth had on average 1% higher unemployment rate than the national average. However, over the last 5 years we have seen this reverse, and Plymouth has consistently had a lower unemployment rate than nationally, by approximately 1%.

**Plymouth NEETs:** The development and introduction of Unlocking Plymouths Potential 2023-2025 plan has introduced direct action around those NEET young people in the City. The numbers of NEET young people were a particular challenge for the city and through this targeted action we have seen the rate drop from 10% to 4% over the last few years. In addition to this we have seen the rate of young people with a Special Education Need or Disability in Employment, Education or Training significantly increase from 72% January 2023 to 92% in July 2025.

In 2024, Plymouth has seen the GCSE attainment exceed national averages alongside continued improvement in A-level attainment rates. The overall attainment-8 score (GCSE) in Plymouth is now 47.0 (up from 45.3 in 2023) compared to 45.9 nationally, attainment-8 score for the disadvantaged cohort is also significantly above national average 40.0 compared to 34.5. Plymouth's A-level average point score in 2024 was 33.3, an increase of 0.4 from 2023, compared to 35.5 nationally. However, we can see the gap between Plymouth and National results continues to close.

The Place Based Working Group has implemented and continue to develop a citywide approach to share information and improve support for children at key transition points through the early years into primary and primary into secondary transition portals. All schools have engaged with this process meaning that many more children have their needs identified at entry to primary or secondary school. Evaluate the effectiveness of the enhanced transitions project in preventing suspensions and permanent exclusions to build on areas of best practice.

Skills Launchpad Plymouth delivery of focused support to specific cohorts through DWP funded contracts has seen significant numbers of residents supported into education, employment and training over the last 5 years. Coordinators are delivering support to Health and Care, Visitor Economy and Construction sectors alongside a specific provision for young people through the Youth Hub.

Additionally, the UK Shared Prosperity Funded Skilling Up Plymouth project activities focus on working to support adults, armed-forces, veterans and their families. This is alongside a Mentoring Programme Coordinator working from YMCA Plymouth to support young people. Over the first year of delivery, the project engaged 410 economically inactive people and provided sustainable support and services to 250. These individuals were provided tailored support across several areas such as participating in education, gaining qualifications, work experience programmes, life skills and job searching, with many engaged in employment, education or training as a result.

## **7. What next:**

An additional supporting context is our delivery of the Families First for Children, social care reforms, and specifically the “front door” to Children’s Services which enables children, young people and families as well as professionals to have early conversations with multi-disciplinary practitioners available to wrap around issues children and young people may be facing, that can cause barriers to attainment and development of skills, helping these barriers to be overcome. Where other local authorities have adopted and implemented this model, this has been key in establishing a culture of early help and prevention, which is key to a robust system that supports personal skills and growth and a dynamic labour economy through supporting all family members. It is too early to measure impact at this stage. However, we anticipate this will help earlier action to support the education, training and skills agenda, alongside the wider reforms.

## **Connect to Work**

Formerly known as Supported Employment, Connect to Work is a new workforce programme announced by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), delivered by clusters of Local Authorities. Plymouth is part of the Delivery Area which consists of Torbay Council and Plymouth City Council with Devon County Council as the Lead Accountable Body. Devon County Council will therefore need to work in partnership with Plymouth and Torbay to design and deliver the programme.

Connect to Work is part of the wider Getting Britain Working initiative, it focuses on enabling local areas to stand up plans to tackle economic inactivity and expand employment opportunities for those

outside the workforce and facing greater labour market disadvantages. Specifically, the programme will support disabled people, those with health conditions and people with complex barriers to employment, to find sustainable work, by offering them voluntary support based on high fidelity supported employment.

Connect to Work has seen some revisions to the national budget and profiles, these have impacted on the targets for the Devon, Plymouth & Torbay delivery area. The final budget allocation and outcome target for the entire delivery area is to support approximately 5,900 participants over the full 5 years of the programme.

The Plymouth allocation of funding will support approximately 2,100 participants over the 5 years of the programme. This allocation is not a flat yearly profile but instead follows a 'ramping-up and ramping-down' approach, with year 3 (2027/28), the peak delivery year of the programme. At peak, Plymouth will be supporting 700 participants to start the programme during the year.

The total value of the Connect to Work allocation for the entire Devon, Plymouth and Torbay delivery area is approximately £22.7m over the 5-year programme. Plymouth City Council have worked with Devon County Council and Torbay Council to design this delivery and have planned to deliver £6.8m of this allocation in the city.

### Delivery Team

To ensure integration across PCC and the city, we have explored different delivery models i.e. locality working, multi-functional case workers (Employment Specialists) and building specialist teams. Following a review, we have decided to move forward with specialist teams and case workers. This approach will help to create an integrated system approach; case workers will be integrated into teams ensuring a singular referral point. This will also ensure that case workers and team leads can effectively manage key relationships and can respond both effectively and with agility to meet the needs of the service and participants. Allowing effective working across PCC, health and wider community groups, so that the right support is provided at the right time.

To ensure we can maximise community outreach, we have established a new physical presence for both the Connect to Work team and other Skills teams in Plymouth City Centre.

We will also be establishing supportive working structures and patterns. These will include the teams co-locating on agreed upon days and different teams joining key meetings to identify barriers to moving residents into paid employment.

We will ensure the programme delivery is informed by the experienced teams already operating within Plymouth City Council. This, alongside the above approach, will help us to support some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged residents to become financially independent whilst reducing financial pressure on public services.