

Plymouth Centre for Engineering Skills

Skills and Post 16



1. Background

The Plymouth Centre for Engineering Skills opened in 2014 due to a growing demand from employers for quality provision in the city. It now acts as a training hub for apprentices from multiple local and international manufacturing companies, as well as providing daytime and evening courses for school pupils, adults and businesses. The Centre is fully fitted out for manufacturing, electrical and maintenance training as well as TIG, MIG and arc welding, CAD/CAM and PAT testing.

Cornwall College Group (CCG) has announced its intention to withdraw from the Plymouth Centre for Engineering Skills at Sisna Park, following guidance from the Department for Education to consolidate delivery across fewer campuses. However, the DfE (Department for Education) has requested that provision in Plymouth continues, and CCG has approached Plymouth City Council's in-house provider, On Course South West (OCSW), to take on delivery.

2. Opportunity and development:

There is potential to significantly increase the revenue within this facility through growth in apprenticeships, supported internships, adult skills delivery (e.g. Skills Bootcamps), and bespoke courses for employer.

We would like to propose Plymouth City Council take over the Plymouth Engineering Centre (Centre) to further expand our post-16 skills provision and increasing the engineering skills development in the city to support addressing the current and rapidly expanding future demand. The centre would be part of On Course South West (OCSW) as a dedicated centre and curriculum area for the provision of post-16 engineering education and skills. This is detailed in the attached spreadsheet (PESC Budgets) for the next three years.

This Centre would provide significant opportunity to support delivery of the planned objectives for skills and employment in the city, including The Plymouth Plan, Policy GRO2 Delivering skills and talent development; Improving learner access to employability skills and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) and low carbon subjects. As well as addressing the priorities for skills in Plymouth Economic Strategies, through building capacity for post-16 provision in the city. It would also provide additional capacity to upskill local residents furthest away from the labour market to transition into well paid, local sustainable employment. Further sustainability measure would be introduced in the sourcing and disposal of materials related to teaching in the centre (please see attached impact assessment).

Expanding delivery into the Centre also aligns with the significant growth forecast from the defence investment into Plymouth, articulated by Team Plymouth. This investment will require significant numbers of additional skilled workers, the engineering and technical courses offered through the Centre align with this need.

Through the centre, we can also maximise national opportunities to deliver new provision and funding planned by Skills England, such as non-apprenticeship levy provision and Higher Technical Qualifications, as well as investments through the Industrial Strategy to Enhance skills and increase access to talent, in priority sectors including Engineering.

Through the centre we will work with existing employers to provide continuation of the highest quality delivery of apprenticeships (Cornwall College Group was graded Outstanding by Ofsted in 2025, including for Apprenticeship provision). As well as expanding provision to include Skills Bootcamps, Supported Internships and Apprenticeships and introduce the Foundation Apprenticeship (Engineering and Manufacturing), and Higher Technical Qualification as well as employer responsive commercial training. We will respond to emerging areas of demand, such as from Team Plymouth, in offering relevant courses both wanted by individuals and in demand from the City.

We would look to move existing staff at the centre across to PCC (Plymouth City Council), as part of the OCSW Team to ensure continuation of management, delivery and employer engagement, whilst adding to our existing key sectors for delivery with clear oversight from the OCSW Leadership Team, with significant expertise and a clear strategy to deliver improved skills provision in Plymouth.

By maximising current and emerging opportunities for funding, whilst also maintaining consistency of delivery and employer engagement and providing clear leadership and oversight for the centre, would be mitigations for risks associated with this proposal, particularly the financial, personnel, academic and management risks associated with this proposal.

In addition we will look to build additional post-16 SEND provision, delivering level 1 and level 2 engineering courses (there is currently a gap in provision for small groups of high needs learners), ensuring that young people are able to access apprenticeships and high value jobs through a registered provider, and reduce expensive placements funded via the high needs funding.

3. Strategic Alignment and Benefits to PCC:

Supporting Green Investment, Jobs, Skills and Better Education

Taking on the Centre aligns with PCC's priority to invest in green jobs and skills. The Centre's advanced engineering facilities (including welding, CAD/CAM, and electrical training) support high-value employment and technical education pathways, ensuring people have the skills to be work ready. This also directly aligns with the objectives of Team Plymouth, supporting the enhanced and expanded provision of vital technical skills.

Promoting Fairness and Opportunity

OCSW's inclusive, high-quality delivery model ensures that learners from diverse backgrounds can access training, supporting PCC's mission to address inequality and promote fairness.

Strengthening Local Economic Resilience

With 82 apprentices currently enrolled and strong employer engagement, the Centre supports local and international manufacturing businesses. PCC's stewardship will safeguard and grow this vital talent pipeline.

Enhancing Financial Sustainability and Value for Money

The Centre currently generates approximately £120,000 in net profit annually. With manageable staffing and operational costs, and capital equipment valued at £115,000, there is clear potential for sustainable growth through expanded apprenticeships, adult education, and supported internships.

Delivering on PCC's Vision and contributing to the Plymouth Economic Strategy

By retaining and enhancing this provision, PCC demonstrates leadership in skills development, contributing to the city's long-term vision of being one of Europe's most vibrant waterfront cities

with outstanding quality of life. This also directly contributes to the aspirations of the Plymouth Economic Strategy, creating a highly skills workforce and supporting people into employment.

Aligning with Team Plymouth articulated training demand

Providing courses and training opportunities that align with the need presented by Team Plymouth, including in the priority sectors of Defence and Construction.

4. Analysis of Benefits and Strategic Fit

The proposed transition of the Plymouth Engineering Centre to Plymouth City Council's in-house provider, On Course South West (OCSW), presents a strong strategic fit with the Council's priorities, the priorities of Team Plymouth and offers substantial benefits. It aligns with the Plymouth Plan and the Plymouth Economic Strategy by enhancing post-16 technical education, particularly in engineering and green skills.

The Centre supports economic resilience through its established employer relationships and contributes to fairness by expanding inclusive education opportunities, including for SEND learners. Financially, the Centre is already profitable and holds valuable capital assets, with clear potential for growth through apprenticeships, adult education, and national funding streams. The proposal also enables PCC to maintain continuity of high-quality provision, mitigate risks through experienced leadership, and strengthen its role in shaping the city's skills landscape.

5. Options Appraisal:

Option 1: Our preferred option is for Plymouth City Council to take over the Plymouth Engineering Centre, becoming part of On Course South West. The Centre would then become a dedicated space and curriculum area for provision of post-16 engineering education and training. The Centre is fully equipped for delivery and would provide significant opportunity to grow provision of skills and employment in the city, working towards objectives of The Plymouth Plan (GRO2) and the Plymouth Economic Strategy.

Option 2: PCC could facilitate a takeover of the Plymouth Engineering Centre by another training provider. This option has no financial risk to PCC and continuity of provision should be maintained if the college/training provider are able manage the transfer. However, it does limit the choice for employers in available apprenticeship providers in the city. Other providers (including those not currently operating in the City) may have limited capacity to takeover this provision resulting in significant interruptions to learning for apprentices and service to employers.

Option 3: Alternatively, the centre could be closed resulting in employers having to find new apprenticeship delivery, which would result in significant disruption to learning for apprentices and inconvenience to employers.

Therefore, we recommend that Option 1 is taken forward with OCSW taking ownership of the Plymouth Engineering Centre.