

Growing Kent and Medway – Growing Talent Workforce 2030 Strategy

Consultation Summary

1. Introduction

The Workforce 2030 Strategy builds on research with employers from across the landbased and food sector that took place in late 2021 / early 2022. The full draft strategy and underpinning research report can be found here [link] on the Growing Kent and Medway website. A project Advisory Group of industry and education leaders helped to frame and ‘reality check’ the work.

This summary has been prepared for consultation with Kent and Medway companies and a wider group of industry stakeholders.

2. Key Skills Issues that Need to be Addressed

The research suggested that the skills strategy needs to address six key issues:

1. **Recruitment and retention challenge:** this has never been greater and is a long-term issue, and access to migrant labour will always be required. There is, however, also scope to make the sector more attractive to people in the local labour market, if we can build the profile of the sector and promote the many good career pathways available.
2. **The Level 2 and Level 3¹ sector-specific offer is not fit for purpose:** college-based courses and apprenticeships don’t fully match industry needs. For example, horticulture tends not focused on food growing and there is no viticulture offer. Given the growth of technology and automation, staff in food growing and processing require more technician and data-related skills at ‘user’ level. There is an opportunity to make the new T Levels in a number of subjects work for the sector. And there is also potential, for example, for specialist programmes such as the Level 3 Food and Drink Maintenance apprenticeship, the Food and Drink Compliance Passport, the MDS flexible apprenticeship, as well as more personal development opportunities in subjects like digital, IT, English and Maths for staff with few qualifications.
3. **More engineering:** the growth of automation and robotics, and the increasing importance of data science, means that engineering and technical skills will grow in two ways. Firstly, entry-level staff will need to be more digitally and technically literate, able to work with technology adaptively as users, becoming more technicians than operatives. Secondly, mechanical engineering, electrical engineering, software engineering and data science will become more important at intermediate levels, especially for Level 3 apprentices, but also with requirements for progression to Levels 4,5, Degree and post-graduate. Larger, more complex companies will have more sophisticated needs in this respect.
4. **Sector-specific leadership and management skills:** generic leadership and management programmes do not address the complexity of the sector, which tends, for example, to have a diverse and multi-lingual workforce and is subject to quite specific quality regimes, standards and regulation. Because companies like to ‘promote from within’ the focus needs to be on helping employees progress through lower-level supervisory roles and then into middle and more senior management potentially. Short, ‘bite-sized’ courses could be especially attractive to companies.

¹ Level 2 is at the level of GCSE or Level 2 vocational qualifications; Level 3 is A Level or Level 3 vocational qualifications.

5. **Learning to support innovation:** companies need to be able to ‘horizon scan’ and understand emerging trends in technology, processes and approaches. Key areas they need to learn more about include automation and robotics; data collection and analysis; sustainability and climate change; nature crisis and biodiversity; compliance, regulation and standards; and technical and scientific aspects of food, including food science, food hygiene, food reformulation, product development and packaging.
6. **Communication and engagement:** companies need to be better engaged in education and skills, and Kent and Medway residents need to be made more aware of the many work and career opportunities and the learning pathways that can lead to those opportunities.

3. Strategic Response – Proposed Actions

The following actions are proposed in response to the key skills issues that need to be addressed.

Issue to be Addressed	Action
1. Recruitment and retention challenge	1.1 Deliver a programme of activities for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people in schools and colleges. • School / college careers advisers, Jobcentre advisers, and National Careers Service advisers. The activities will build awareness and understanding of sector work and career opportunities, learning and skills development pathways into them.
	1.2 Make new careers and jobs resources about the sector generally and specific to Kent and Medway employers available to young people and adults through the Skills Hub. Update these annually. Promote to schools, colleges, universities and DWP. Focus on explaining learning and skills pathways into sector jobs and careers.
2. Level 2 and Level 3 sector-specific offer not fit for purpose	2.1 Kent Further Education, through North Kent College / Hadlow College and sector employers to complete a landbased and food sector ‘solutions panel’ process to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify a small number of priority learning and skills pathways into sector jobs and careers – what qualification will get you into which job, and then how you can progress your career further. • identify and progress opportunities for curriculum improvement and new curriculum co-development, responding to the pathways identified and building on the list in section 4 of Figure 2.1 (above).
	2.2 MDS Flexible Apprenticeship launched in Kent and Medway.
	2.3 Relevant Level 2 and 3 training service information from providers inside and outside Kent to be available on the Skills Hub. Update this information on an ongoing basis.
3. More engineering	3.1 Kent Further Education, through North Kent College / Hadlow College to run a landbased and food sector engineering ‘solutions panel’ process with employers to identify and progress opportunities for curriculum development.
4. Sector-specific leadership and management skills	4.1 Identify with employers whether there is scope to develop a bespoke leadership and management offer for the sector, via the ‘solutions panel’ process set out in 2.1.

5. Learning to support innovation	5.1 Run a programme of events, expert talks, learning visits, short courses and masterclasses in the subject areas identified in the research, plus other themes identified in the preparation of the programme. The programme will include expert talks and events by the three Kent universities, local companies, subject experts and companies from outside Kent.
	5.2 Establish 3 thematic good practice sharing groups, hosted by the Skills Hub, for the sharing of practice in relation to: 1) Automation, robotics and data; 2) Sustainability, climate change and nature crisis / biodiversity; and 3) Quality, compliance and standards.
6. Communication and engagement	6.1 Establish a curated repository of education and training information, links and resources for employers, individuals and careers advisers on the Skills Hub. Update on an ongoing basis. Will include all local providers and the Learning to Support Innovation programme. Promote to the sector.

4. Consultation

Growing Kent and Medway is seeking the views of landbased and food sector companies, and wider sector stakeholders, on the draft strategy, with the aim of finalising the details and starting implementation from the autumn of 2022.

We would welcome feedback on any aspect of the current thinking, especially:

1. Does the strategy identify the most important skills issues that need to be addressed? If not, what's missing or what needs more attention?
2. Are the actions the right ones, and what are the key priority actions in your view?
3. What else should Growing Kent and Medway be doing about the skills issues the sector faces?

Please give us feedback on any aspect of the draft strategy by email to growingkentandmedway@niab.com or by completing this short online form bit.ly/2030workforce.

You can also get involved by coming to speak to us at Fruit Focus (13 July 2022, NIAB, East Malling) or join the skills conversation events hosted online by our Skills Champion on the following dates. Register at growingkentandmedway.com/events.

- Monday 18 July, 12-2pm
- Wednesday 17 August, 8.30-9.30am
- Tuesday 13 September, 8.30-9.30am