

# **Investing In Our People:**

**Building Skills, Producing Jobs, Powering our Communities**

**West Lindsey Employment and Skills Strategy and Delivery Plan 2026–2030**

# Introduction

West Lindsey is committed to ensuring residents can live, learn and work locally by improving access to skills development, progressing clear routes into employment and strengthening relationships with employers.

This Employment and Skills Strategy sets' out how the Council will work with partners, businesses and communities to tackle skills gaps, increase economic participation and support inclusive growth across the district.

The Strategy complements and enables delivery of the Council's Economic Growth Strategy 2025–2030. While the Economic Growth Strategy focuses on driving business growth, investment and regeneration, this Strategy concentrates on equipping local people with the skills, confidence and opportunities needed to access and benefit from that growth.

In particular, it supports priority sector development and major investments such as STEP Fusion, ensuring that skills provision, employer engagement and employability support are aligned with West Lindsey's long-term economic ambitions.

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## About our District

- Population of 99,208
  - 16,329 are aged 0 to 15 years
  - 25,519 are aged over 65 years

West Lindsey is a large and predominantly rural district in Lincolnshire, made up of market towns, villages and dispersed communities. Gainsborough, Market Rasen and Caistor provide important service, employment and community hubs, while much of the district's identity and economy is shaped by its rural landscape, heritage, land-based industries and strong sense of place.

The district has a population of just under 100,000 residents, with a growing older population alongside children, young people and working-age adults who will shape the future workforce. This creates both opportunities and challenges: supporting young people to see a future locally, helping adults to progress or retrain, and enabling residents of all ages to access learning, employment and wider support in ways that work for their lives and communities.

West Lindsey has a diverse local economy with strengths in manufacturing, engineering, construction, health and social care, logistics, land-based industries, visitor economy and business services. Major opportunities linked to clean growth, advanced manufacturing and STEP Fusion have the potential to create new employment pathways, raise aspirations and strengthen the district's long-term economic resilience.

However, residents and employers do not experience opportunity equally. Rurality, transport connectivity, digital access, health, confidence and the availability of local training can all affect whether people are able to participate in learning, enter employment or progress in work. Some employers also face persistent recruitment and skills challenges, particularly where specialist, technical or higher-level skills are needed.

### Sources:

- (1) [State of the District Report – West Lindsey District Council](#)

# Our District in Number

## West Lindsey Employment and Skills Baseline- 2024/25

### 1. Labour Market Overview (Resident-based)

#### Employment and Economic Activity

- Economic activity rate (ages 16–64): 80.0%
- Employment rate (ages 16–64): 80.0%
- Economic inactivity rate (ages 16–64): approx. 20%

West Lindsey's economic activity rate is slightly above the East Midlands average, reflecting a generally strong labour market, although there are significant variations between communities, particularly around rural accessibility and deprivation hotspots.

[\[nomisweb.co.uk\]](https://nomisweb.co.uk)

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#### Unemployment

- Model-based unemployment rate: 3.1%
- APS indicative unemployment rate: approx. 3.9%

Unemployment in West Lindsey remains lower than regional and national averages, though caution is advised due to small survey sample sizes at district level.

[\[nomisweb.co.uk\]](https://nomisweb.co.uk), [\[plumplot.co.uk\]](https://plumplot.co.uk)

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## 2. Young People and Participation

### Young People (16–24) in Education, Employment or Training

- Estimated participation rate: c. 86–88%
- NEET rate (16–24): estimated 12–14%

While West Lindsey performs broadly in line with England overall, data indicates pockets of risk, particularly among:

- young people with SEND
- those living in rural or poorly connected areas
- those transitioning from education to work without clear progression routes

Local authority-level NEET data for 16–17 year olds indicates low headline NEET levels, but a persistent cohort of “not known” young people, representing disengagement risk.

[\[gov.uk\]](#), [\[data.youth...dation.org\]](#), [\[explore-ed...ice.gov.uk\]](#)

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## 3. Skills and Qualifications

### Qualification Levels

- Level 3 and above: lower than national average

- Higher-level technical and specialist skills: undersupply relative to demand

Evidence suggests:

- strong demand in health & care, manufacturing, engineering, construction and low-carbon energy
- gaps in technical, digital, engineering and supervisory skills
- progression from entry-level training into skilled employment is not always clear or sustained

This baseline reflects findings from the West Lindsey Skills Study and Nomis qualifications data. [\[west-lindsey.gov.uk\]](https://west-lindsey.gov.uk), [\[nomisweb.co.uk\]](https://nomisweb.co.uk)

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#### **4. Apprenticeships and Work-based Learning**

- Apprenticeship starts (resident-based): increasing year-on-year
- Concentration at intermediate and advanced levels
- Lower participation at higher and degree-level apprenticeships, particularly in STEM subjects

Apprenticeship take-up is positive, but alignment with future skills demand (STEP Fusion, energy, advanced manufacturing) is at an early stage. [\[msn.com\]](https://msn.com), [\[ons.gov.uk\]](https://ons.gov.uk)

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## 5. Employer Engagement and Workforce Demand

### Employer Profile

- Dominated by SMEs
- Strong employment in:
  - manufacturing and engineering
  - health and social care
  - logistics and land-based industries

Baseline evidence shows:

- high vacancy churn in some sectors
- recruitment challenges linked to skills availability, pay, transport and shift patterns
- positive employer appetite to engage with skills solutions where coordination is led locally [\[west-lindsey.gov.uk\]](https://www.west-lindsey.gov.uk)

## 6. Barriers to Employment

Identified baseline barriers include:

- Limited transport connectivity in rural areas
- Digital exclusion
- Health and long-term conditions
- Lack of confidence and prior negative experiences of the labour market

These factors contribute to economic inactivity and underemployment, despite relatively low headline unemployment. [\[west-lindsey.gov.uk\]](https://www.west-lindsey.gov.uk)



## 7. STEP Fusion: Skills and Employment Baseline

### Current Position (2024/25)

- STEP Fusion is in early delivery and design phases
- Local workforce pathways are emerging but not yet embedded
- Skills demand expected to rise significantly post-2030, particularly in:
  - engineering
  - digital and data
  - advanced manufacturing
  - construction
  - project management and systems integration

### Baseline position:

- No established local STEP-specific workforce pipeline
- Skills infrastructure development underway but not yet mature
- Significant opportunity for early alignment to avoid future displacement

## Our Themes

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Skills Provision Aligned to Employer Demand</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employers report improved confidence in the readiness and suitability of the local workforce</li> <li>Skills provision is responsive to labour market change, with outdated provision reduced or redesigned</li> <li>Residents can access training that leads to clear and realistic progression route</li> </ul> | <b>Youth Pathways and Early Intervention</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More young people see our district as a viable place to begin and build their careers</li> <li>Transitions from education into work are smoother and less fragmented</li> <li>Youth aspiration is raised to support young people to make informed choices about careers based on local opportunities</li> </ul> |
| <b>Removing Barriers to Employment</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employment support is coordinated around the individual rather than delivered in isolation</li> <li>Residents who previously struggled to engage can sustain participation and progress</li> <li>Fewer people repeating short-term interventions</li> </ul>                                                                   | <b>Employer Engagement and Workforce Development</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employers take a leadership role in shaping skills activity rather than acting as end-users</li> <li>Strong, ongoing relationships exist between employers, providers and the Council</li> <li>Employers demonstrate increased commitment to workforce development and local recruitment</li> </ul>     |
| <b>STEP Fusion Skills and Legacy</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local people are visibly prioritised within STEP Fusion skills and employment opportunities</li> <li>Training infrastructure developed through STEP Fusion benefits wider sectors and communities</li> <li>STEP Fusion leaves a lasting skills legacy beyond the lifetime of the programme</li> </ul>                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |

# Priority Groups

## Residents:

- Children and young people
- Young adults (19–25), including those at risk of becoming NEET
- Adults furthest from the labour market
- People with disabilities or health conditions
- Residents with low or outdated skills
- Care leavers and other vulnerable groups
- Economically inactive residents seeking to re-enter employment
- Residents affected by rural isolation that limits access to training and employment

## Local Employers:

- SMEs and larger employers in priority and growth sectors
- Employers experiencing persistent recruitment or skills shortages
- Employers seeking to upskill or retain their existing workforce
- Businesses engaging with STEP Fusion supply chains and opportunities

The strategy focuses on residents who face the greatest barriers to education, employment and progression, alongside local employers who play a key role in creating and sustaining jobs. Supporting both groups ensures that local people can access opportunities as they arise, while employers are better equipped to recruit, retain and develop a skilled workforce, particularly in priority and growth sectors.

## Wider West Lindsey Workforce – enabling group

Residents already in employment who

- need skills to progress
- want to change sector

- need reskilling due to labour market change or technology

While not defined as a priority group, residents already in employment are critical to productivity, retention and sector transition. Supporting progression and reskilling strengthens both the existing workforce and future labour supply.

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## Priority Sectors

Delivery will be aligned to sectors with growth potential and skills shortages, including:

- Energy and clean growth (including STEP Fusion)
- Engineering and advanced manufacturing
- Construction and retrofit
- Health and social care
- Logistics and transport
- Digital and business services
- Land-based and Agri-tech industries
- Visitor economy
- Defence and security

These sectors align with the West Lindsey Economic Growth Strategy and have been prioritised based on a combination of current labour market demand, forecast growth, skills shortages and their importance to the West Lindsey economy. They reflect areas where there is strong potential to improve employment outcomes for residents, support business growth and maximise the local benefits of major investment such as STEP Fusion and the former RAF Scampton.

Focusing delivery on these sectors helps ensure that skills provision is aligned to real job opportunities, supports workforce resilience in essential services, and prepares residents for emerging and higher-value employment. This targeted approach also allows the Council to work more effectively with employers and providers, concentrating resources where they can achieve the greatest impact for both residents and the local economy.

## A Whole System Approach

We recognise that we cannot deliver our strategy without support. To make a meaningful and lasting impact, we will work collaboratively with partners who have a common purpose. By taking a co-ordinated approach, we can maximise our collective knowledge, resources and create sustainable outcomes.

|                                                        |                                 |
|--------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Further & Higher Education Providers                   | Employer Groups & Sector Bodies |
| Voluntary, Community & Social Enterprise Sector (VCSE) | Combined & Local Authorities    |
| Careers & Youth Services                               | Local Employers                 |
| Department for Work & Pensions (DWP)                   | Health Organisations            |
| Business Networks                                      | STEP Fusion Partners            |
| Regional Skills Bodies                                 | Schools                         |
| Funders                                                |                                 |

## **Delivering the Strategy`**

Our Delivery Plan explains what we will do to help achieve the outcomes of our strategy. By working in partnership and taking a place-based approach, the Council can maximise impact, reduce duplication and ensure that support leads to meaningful progression for residents and a workforce that meets the needs of local employers.

Key principles of our delivery will be:

- Partnership-led: Working with providers, employers, schools, colleges, DWP, the voluntary sector and regional bodies.
- Employer-informed: Training shaped by real workforce needs.
- Inclusive and accessible: Removing financial, practical and confidence barriers.
- Place-based: Designed around West Lindsey's communities and economy.
- Outcome-focused: Clear measures of impact, not just activity.

### **Governance and Review**

As part of delivering the strategy, we will:

- Annual review of progress and priorities
- Have oversight through relevant partnership and internal governance arrangements
- Refresh the strategy in line with labour market change and funding opportunities

## Funding the Strategy

In the absence of dedicated programme funding, delivery of this Strategy will focus on leadership, coordination and influence rather than direct commissioning. The Council will work closely with employers, education and training providers, the voluntary sector and national agencies to ensure any existing provision is aligned with local priorities, limits duplication and strengthens access to skills and employment opportunities for residents.

This approach reflects the Council's role as a facilitator and enabler within a complex employment and skills system, ensuring that existing investment delivers maximum benefit for West Lindsey without creating additional financial commitments in the approach to Local Government Re-organisation.

Delivery of this strategy will rely on influencing and aligning investment from growth-sector programmes led by partners such as GLCCA, Lincolnshire County Council and national agencies, alongside private-sector investment. In particular, the Council will seek to ensure that major growth and inward investment initiatives support local skills and training development, maximising benefits for West Lindsey residents and employers.



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## Contact Details

West Lindsey District Council

01427 676676

E: [community@west-lindsey.gov.uk](mailto:community@west-lindsey.gov.uk)

W: [www.west-lindsey.gov.uk](http://www.west-lindsey.gov.uk)