

CW Chamber Training: Sally Lucas, Executive Director

Questions:

- 1. What's your view on these 10 priorities? Describe the areas that you agree with and disagree with. Is the language of these priorities suitable?**

Overall, I think the priorities cover the range of audiences. Don't disagree with any as such.

How will the priorities be measured to know what success looks like ? I'm not sure what the starting point is or what the end goal is.

I think 10 are quite a lot of priorities and there is probably overlap in some areas eg. 8 and 9.

- 2. Is there anything you would add? Any gaps?**

I would probably group the priorities and have some as a sub-set of the high level aim eg. Overall skills levels with 2 and 3 as a sub set ?

- 3. What actions do you think Coventry should take to help achieve these priorities?
Please suggest:**

- Actions that would support individual priorities
- Actions that would support multiple priorities

Would need to know the baseline starting point under each priority and what success looks like.

Provide the structure to join skills provision up/access existing structures to influence and inform.

- 4. How could you and your organisation contribute to these priorities.**

Offering practical options eg. ESF NEET provision opportunities, traineeships and apprenticeship vacancies. Provide a bridge into employment and employers. Work with schools/FE to seamlessly progress.



5. Can you make suggestions for how these priorities should be measured?

Identify the starting point eg. current skill levels of Coventry residents and current skills priorities of local businesses. Benchmark with nearest statistical neighbours.



Lee Osborne, Development Manager Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire

Introduction

The Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) is the UK's largest business support organisation, promoting and protecting the interests of the self-employed and small business owners. Established over 45 years ago to help our members succeed in business, we are a non-profit making and non-party political organisation that's led by our members, for our members.

The FSB in Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull welcomes the opportunity to respond and input to Coventry Skills strategy which aims to give Coventry based businesses the skills they need both currently and in the future.

FSB research has consistently shown that small businesses are facing real skills challenges.

According to our latest small business confidence the share of small businesses who say lack of access to the right staff is holding them back is at its highest level in six years at 38%. Close to a quarter of employers in the West Midlands state that it is difficult to find individuals with the right skills in their area and a similar proportion say hiring is a struggle because they require individuals with niche skill sets.

The FSB is therefore keen to support Coventry City Council and other partners to help deliver an effective and locally relevant skills strategy. This will not only aim to enable the development of skills within the local population but also help ensure businesses can employ people with the right skills sets and achieve their growth ambitions, having a positive impact on the local economy.

We would therefore welcome the opportunity for further involvement as the document progresses and evolves to help address shared priorities and outcomes. We have provided some initial thoughts on some of the questions within the consultation below:

Consultation questions

What is your view on the priorities?

The FSB can agree with the summary of priorities, outlined in the consultation document.

While we have a particular focus on priorities 8 – 10, we would agree that all the priorities within the document are relevant and should be supported.

While the language of the priorities is suitable, there could be further reference in here as to how they fit in with Government priorities and initiatives at a national level around apprenticeships, skills bootcamps and lifelong learning aims. It would also be useful to provide some context around the priorities and provide an understanding as to how the skills strategy will link in with other skills initiatives and strategies that are being developed across the region such as Local Skills Improvement Plans and regional skills strategy developed by WMCA.

We would also welcome reference to the self-employed and sole traders under priority 8 and a focus on entrepreneurship.

Is there anything you would add?

While Priority 3 aims to outline and provide clear progression pathways, consideration should be given to including points around effective careers and employability advice. When recruiting young people, small businesses are seeking individuals who are able to successfully transition from education to the workplace and possess the skills their firm needs to grow. Careers advice, information and guidance that covers a range of education, training and employment pathways and facilitates opportunities to gain experience of the working world, can help to achieve this and should be included either in the existing priorities or as a separate priority.

Small businesses can play a key role in helping improve young people's awareness of apprenticeships, facilitate access to opportunities to experience the workplace first hand and inform young people's understanding of enterprise and self-employment. We believe that this priority area should see schools, colleges, Coventry careers hubs and other key stakeholders working with small firms to identify and pursue opportunities for successful engagement and to provide careers advice guidance to young people, raise aspirations and meet local labour market need.

In relation to priority 8 and 9 which will be critical in terms of future employment, we would also like to see reference to the importance of leadership and management skills training and support small firms to invest in this area emphasising the link between skills training and improved business productivity and competitiveness.

What action do you think should be taken to help achieve these priorities?

FSB research has consistently shown that small businesses are facing skills and employment challenges. The share of firms citing lack of access to appropriately skilled staff as a barrier to growth has risen in the FSB quarterly small business confidence surveys and in the Q2 2021¹ survey had soared to its highest level in a

¹ <https://firstvoice.fsb.org.uk/first-voice/regional-voice/fsb-west-midlands-sbi-2021-q2-report.html>

number of years (37%) for West Midlands firms, with the proportion of respondents citing it as a barrier up 18 percentage points compared to Q2 2019, before the pandemic hit.

The FSB is therefore keen to support Coventry City Council and other partners to focus on education and skills development, employability skills, technical skills and local skills development. This will help to inform the key skills requirements and provision now and for the future to ensure businesses can grow and have a positive impact on the local economy.

We would welcome continued engagement with Coventry City Council and other stakeholders locally in liaising with small businesses to tackle skills challenges and future skills needs. Key actions here could include:

- Hold joint events or webinars to help inform a wider network of small businesses about the role that local stakeholders including the local authority, colleges, careers hubs and Universities all play in this space and how it can benefit small businesses across Coventry
- There is still a lack of general awareness from small businesses about the services and initiatives that are available to help them with skills and recruitment challenges.

Therefore, consideration should be given to holding an event specifically targeted at small businesses to include businesses sharing skills and recruitment challenges, awareness raising of local support services and benefits of supported internships, apprenticeships, traineeships and funded skills programmes for businesses. To help inform about the benefits of these initiatives it would also be useful in sourcing a number of business case studies to share at these events.

- FSB would be willing to organise and coordinate a roundtable with a group of small employers to discuss skills and employability challenges locally to ensure there is direct feedback to the Coventry City Employability and Skills team and other partners locally of the types of challenges and issues being faced.
- We welcome increased engagement with SME's through specialist advisers at the local authority to work with them to identify and support their skills and employment needs. This would again help highlight initiatives and resources such as use of the Apprenticeship levy to provide fully funded training and the promotion by member representative organisations of case studies to help showcase the



benefits of this service and engagement would also be beneficial to any service provided.

How should these priorities be measured?

We would like to see some important outputs and outcomes included in the description of each of the priorities. These should have timescales and targets attached to help make it easier to evaluate progress and specify more clearly with success looks like.

The FSB see the outcomes around reducing the number of businesses reporting skills shortages and the focus on apprenticeships is being amongst the most important from a business perspective. We would also like to see more emphasis placed on increased engagement from small businesses in supporting local programmes which encourage apprenticeships and work with schools and colleges to help raise awareness of careers and self-employment opportunities. Specific measures could also include an increased business representation on local skills boards to make it accessible for local employers to input.



**Violence Reduction Unit CCC/West Midlands Police: Caroline Ryder,
Programme Manager**

Thanks for sharing the draft strategy. Just a few points from me. I don't really need you to come back to me with answers but I just wanted to point them out for your consideration!

Priority 1: Could be measured by taking the baseline of current skills and then again at a later point - however, things like GCSE attainment may take 5 years to show an improvement..... I would think that the closure of Henley college will hamper this ambition somewhat. Perhaps mention in the strategy how this can be addressed?

Priority 2: I think this will be very difficult to measure. I'm not sure what the Gatsby benchmark is. My personal experience of careers advice for my own kids has been that it's flaky at best. it's very much an optional thing and most kids wouldn't take it up because at 15, if you don't have to do it, then likelihood is you won't. What "added value" can the careers advisor bring? It's no longer enough to just give people the information - young people need coaching/guidance. It may be that we have to prioritise certain areas of the City or schools. In Marmot we often talk about proportionate universalism - this would be a perfect example. For some kids, telling them about an apprenticeship is enough- they can do the rest. For others, they may need additional support to be able to access opportunities because of barriers they face.

Priority 3: Have "we" been in consultation with local business/industries about what their expectations are not only of school leavers but also older adults. Business want staff with certain skills and with some investment from them they could pay for short courses in for example, basic IT. I know we had an annual skills summit so not sure if any data was ever captured about the skills gap but I know it's something employers talk about a lot.

Priority 4: I suppose a good example of this would be the classroom facility at Moathouse - not sure if they are well used but with Henley College closing, it would be good to make more of that facility. Are we making the most of on-line learning opportunities? There is so much stuff out there now that's accessible on-line, the quality varies enormously but there must be some valuable learning to be done online.



Priority 5: No comments

Priority 6: I think it would be useful to link in with people like the probation service here. I have contacts if you need. Also - positive choices, the young peoples drug, alcohol and sexual health service. Again I have contacts. I'm just thinking of community organisations that could signpost people into provision.

Priority 7: No comments

Priority 8: I haven't seen the new social value strategy - if you can lay your hands on a copy I'd be interested to look it over. Thanks.

your feedback form said 10 priorities, but I count only 8? Also, are you completing an Equality Impact Assessment on this strategy? If not, give Jaspal Mann a shout and she can assist you. It's something that often gets overlooked but needs to be completed to ensure we aren't overlooking any protected groups.

Sorry for the lengthy email!



Coventry University: Joanne Dobson, Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Group Policy)

Apologies. I thought I had followed up on your email but can't see a reply in my sent mail. I hope this is still useful.

I think that the main piece of feedback would be to raise the importance of education and not just skills.

I'm pleased to see a priority of "aspiration" so high up the list. As one of the city's universities, our Mission of "Creating Better Futures" fits well with that.

We also agree with the need for clear progression pathways. I'm not sure if you're aware, but the government recently (last week) announced the new Office for Students Director of Fair Access and Participation and that universities would need to revise their Access and Participation Plans. This may mean increasing activity in schools, which could well support clear progression – and indeed aspiration. This may also impact on diversity and supporting areas of highest need. Finally, there may also be some measurements in our APP that could be useful for you in terms of measuring the priorities. Please let me know if you'd like me to reach out to the relevant team here as this new plan develops.

Re: Priority 6. Should this be worded more to reflect inclusivity of those with the highest need? Does it currently read as though the skills system focusses primarily on those with the most need? Interestingly, we welcomed the Labour Councillors onto campus recently and there was a discussion about support for veterans. Is that an area of high need in the city?

We welcome the acknowledgement of support the skills needs of companies in the city. I would be happy to reach out to colleagues on the Technology Park on that point if that would be helpful.



Finally, there are almost certainly other areas on this that our 2030 Strategy could support. This can be found here:

<https://www.coventry.ac.uk/globalassets/media/global/09-about-us/corporate-strategy/group-strategy-2030-compressed.pdf>

Happy to have a conversation on any of these points if that would be helpful.

CCC Public Health: Sue Frossell

Priorities 1-3:

To achieve this, proportionately more resources will need to be applied across the gradient of skills need. Below references reflect a need to measure 'overall skills measure' (hides unequal uptake), moving out of poverty, helping most in need (both focus on most need). Can we apply our resources across a gradient of skills need and measure this uptake? Rather than most, can we use the term more? Uptake by postcode is a crude measure but might be helpful alongside other measures?



Coventry City Council Skills Strategy

Contact: Glen Smailes, Employment and Skills Service (T: 07967 820436)

Priorities Consultation:

A comprehensive, citywide skills offer that raises aspirations and allows each and every learner throughout their lives to reach their full potential

We want aspirations to be high at each level of Coventry's skills system, from Primary education through to Adult Education including 'lifelong learning'. We want Coventry's young people and adults to be ambitious and realise their potential. To enable this, we need clear pathways which empower both young people and adults to make the right choices. We need to be responsive to emerging need, shaped by changes to the labour market such as growing and emerging sectors.

Ambition Priorities:

1. Overall Skills Levels: Improve the overall skills levels of Coventry residents

Our ambition: Bring skills levels for number of residents with no qualifications and numbers with NVQ1, 2 and 3 and above in line with National Averages.

We will achieve this by: Enable our primary schools, secondary schools, and further education (FE) colleges to continue to improve educational attainment through taking a multi-agency 'One Coventry' approach. Increase participation in Adult Education whilst maintaining quality.

2. Aspiration: An aspirational skills system that inspires residents to achieve through from primary school to lifelong learning

Our ambition: For high aspirations to be built into Coventry's Skills System from a young age (primary school) and to remain all the way through to lifelong learning.

We will achieve this by: Schools and FE providers supported to be aspirational, seeing the potential in their learners. Supporting schools to achieve the Gatsby Benchmarks, working in close partnership with careers advisors including the



Careers and Enterprise Company. Look after the wellbeing of young people and working in partnership to address barriers which can affect aspirations and attainment for young people.

Continue to push adult residents to be aspirational, with good quality careers advice and flexible course options which make use of the new 'Lifetime Skills Guarantee', and entitlements to flexible lifetime student finance from 2025 onwards.

3. Progression Pathways: Clearly built in throughout Coventry's skills system

Our ambition: Clearly defined routes through all educational levels which lead into good quality employment. For residents to easily re-engage in the skills system once in employment; continuing 'lifelong learning' and increasing their earning potential and facilitating career development.

We will achieve this by: Support Coventry's Education and Skills Providers to map clear pathways developed in partnership with local and regional employers and higher education providers. Ensure these are clearly defined and communicated to learners with co-design of courses between residents, education providers and employers where relevant. Ensure that learners see the value of their course and know the destination(s).

A skills ecosystem that ensures that all, including those most in need, are able to participate in, progress and achieve success

Coventry's Skills System needs to include all residents with no disparities in access, educational attainment, or progression. Skills Providers need sufficiently flexible provision, tailored delivery and content - including bespoke courses to support residents with different needs. We also need to work together to promote skills provision widely across the City and ensuring no residents view provision as 'not for them'.

4. Community: A skills system which meets the needs of all residents and is widely accessed by all Coventry communities

Our Ambition: Ensure all areas of the City are widely accessing skills support, at all levels and with good evidence of progression.

We will achieve this by: Support Skills Providers to have offers which are relevant, effectively communicated – including through close partnership work with community organisations, widely accessible (i.e blended learning and delivery within communities) and of high quality.

5. Inclusion: A skills system which is fully inclusive and representative of our diverse City

Our Ambition: Ensure all ethnic groups are well served by the skills system, ensuring engagement practices reflect our communities' needs and appropriate provision and support is available to enable full participation and progression at all educational levels.

We will achieve this by: Support Skills Providers to have offers which are widely accessible and effectively communicated (including in other languages). Ensure high participation in ESOL classes to remove language barriers from learning. Ensure progression from ESOL into higher level skills provision and work.

6. Highest Needs: A skills system which supports those most in need, supports people out of poverty and helps create a more equal City.

Ambition: Ensure Coventry's skills system is widely accessed by areas of higher deprivation and demonstrates progression into work - especially higher paying work. High participation of those who may be considered higher needs due to disability, health/mental health conditions, drug/alcohol misuse, lone parents, teenage parents, ex-offenders, and young people at risk of gang violence. Able to demonstrate a positive impact on people's general wellbeing.

We will achieve this by: Support Skills Providers to have offers which can be flexible and responsive in delivery and able to overcome barriers to attainment and progression. Strong community provision and good communication of offers. Strong progression pathways which support residents into good quality paid work. Clearly evidenced wellbeing benefits.

A flexible and responsive system that works together with our growing, investing and local businesses to deliver the right skills mix for our dynamic labour market

Coventry's skills system needs to support our businesses and encourage new businesses to invest in the City. It also needs to support these businesses to deliver on social value and provide the skills needed for the 'green' jobs of the future.

7. Skills for business: A skills system which provides the skills required by Coventry's businesses, both current and future and contributes to economic growth and the prosperity of the City

Our Ambition: Ensure Coventry businesses can find the skills to grow, including upskilling/reskilling existing workforces through in-work skills provision. Ensure Coventry has the skills base to attract inward investment. Maximise opportunities for residents to benefit from large developments such as the planned electric vehicle 'Battery Gigafactory'.

We will achieve this by: Effectively provide Skills Providers with labour market intelligence to ensure courses are designed to meet current and future skills needs. Strong links between employers and Skills Providers to provide suitable in work skills provision. Work in close partnership with Coventry City Councils Economic Development Service and their partners, aligning skills provision to Coventry City Councils Economic Development Strategy.

8. Social Value and Sustainability: A skills system which is well positioned to maximise increased commitment to social value and Coventry's commitment to tackling climate change

Ambition: Aligned skills provision to support residents to capitalise on social value opportunities generated through Coventry City Councils new Social Value Strategy. Ensure skills provision is geared towards jobs growth created by sustainability actions including those linked to the Net Zero 2050 Plan.

We will achieve this by: Working in close partnership with Coventry City Councils Procurement Team and strategic partners, especially large businesses through the Councils Anchor Alliance. Close partnership working with employers and industry bodies, supported by intelligence from regional and sub-regional bodies such as CWLEP, WMCA and FSB.



Coventry City Council

Questions:

Migration Team feedback

The Migration Team are particularly interested in the following areas that will contribute to the Skills Strategies high-level priorities and other parts that have a more operational focus.

1. What's your view on these 10 priorities? Describe the areas that you agree with and disagree with. Is the language of these priorities suitable?

Yes, we agree with all 10 priorities. There are clear areas of strength and synergy with our service, particularly against Points 2, 4, 5, and 7 and there are also some identified gaps below.

A skills section will form part of our Integration Strategy where we will add key priorities from the Skills Strategy, it will also include more details on sector-based academies and surveillance.

Point 4 'Community' and 5 'Inclusion' expand the wording to include "newly arrived communities", this sends a positive message to contributors and the community that the skills strategy helps to achieve for this group.

Points 2 and 7 there are missed opportunities for newly arrived school aged children and adults. Point 7 Newly arrived communities can help to fill some of the gaps of skills shortages for businesses and be part of the workforce for the future. There are challenges with former qualifications being recognised.

Newly arrived communities contribute to economic growth and employment and it is important they can access well-coordinated skills services, which recognise and meet their needs.

There is a lot we have learnt about barriers and the need for skills to be available and acquired flexibly.

Improving the position of those already in employment through well-developed personal plans to achieve their career aspirations. Within employment, progression should continue, with sustained skills journeys leading to better social and financial outcomes.

Links between formal classroom and community provision, to be flexible between the two to access support.

Provide opportunities to use spaces like the library to access support for newly arrived communities.

Include skills support for UAC (unaccompanied) young people – approximately 100 in the City.

2. Is there anything you would add? Any gaps?

Suggested wording to include in the Skills Strategy:

“To support integration the skills strategy commits to better access to skills for newly arrived communities. It recognises the skills refugees and the wider migrant population bring and aims to help people to pursue their ambitions.”

The city receives approximately on average 1,500 newly arrived individuals per year (this number increased last year due to the Afghan resettlement); it can take between 1-5 years to rebuild their lives from the day they arrive to become fully assimilated. Access to work is a key marker of integration

Engagement – How can we use lived experiences to help understand user journeys and respond on the ground? Engage the migrant population in processes to design and develop skills programmes.

Aspirational - Research and identify unused skills in the migrant population and local skills gaps and provide pathways to fill the skills gap. The West Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership is developing a regional resource to be applied to unused skills and better connections to the jobs market.

Practical Pathways to fill skills gaps - EDS (Business Advisors) working with businesses to provide pathways to fill skills gaps. Mi-Friendly Cities worked with the Chamber to complete a survey of SME's vacancy gaps, build on this work to offer practical pathways to jobless refugees and migrants into work.

Untapped potential of migrant and refugee women in employment and skills, re-engaging with women to build digital skills.

Working with individuals to develop entrepreneurial skills and talent and access business development services.

Point 8 – Social Value Policy - the inclusion of Refugees and Unaccompanied migrant children is not included as a group in the policy, this needs to be revisited.

3. What actions do you think Coventry should take to help achieve these priorities?

Please suggest:

-Actions that would support individual priorities

- Working with the Migration Team and partners to help newly arrived communities and refugees address the challenges and create bridges to access the skills support on offer.
- Actively engaging with clients to understand and provide the support they need.
- Actively engaging with the wider sector that works with these groups including organisations with specialist experience.
- Dialogue with employers to sign up to support newly arrived young people with developing basic skills and traineeships to become economically active.
- To broaden network of organisations that provide support and access to employment with additional support i.e., mentoring.
- Migration Team and Employment and Skills Team working together to deliver support and work on joint programmes i.e., UKSPF

-Actions that would support multiple priorities

Labour Market Integration for Newly arrived communities - lack of understanding of the labour market, pathways to employment and their options, including vocational training and apprenticeships, can limit their opportunities to gain meaningful employment, which makes best use of their skills.

- Provide clear communication on what skills support is available for newly arrived communities. Requires more comprehensive communication on the skills support offer to enable Liaison officers and others to provide information to clients.

- Specific communication on the different routes and journeys into skills and training i.e., eligibility and requirements to access apprenticeships, training, schools, courses.
- Work with networks across the city to engage in delivering skills support i.e., Refugee Employment Network
- The West Midlands Strategic Partnership would help to support and provide a general understanding of the processes and systems in place in this country.
- Employers' perceptions of refugees/newly arrived communities can limit opportunities and success in gaining employment. There is a lack of opportunities to gain experience, particularly through volunteering, work placements and work shadowing, which could lead to paid employment or provide references for job applications.
- Raising awareness of what our new communities can bring to the table, working with local businesses and partners to understand the needs and experience of newly arrived communities and what they can offer. Establish a campaign (sensitive use of media) to promote skills and experience and case studies.
- Build on the Mi-friendly Cities work on supporting employers to understand the checks that are required to employ refugees and HR team skills/training required to support this element.
- Shared apprenticeships schemes for sector-based working with a number of different employers, to gain the skills they require.

4. How could you and your organisation contribute to these priorities.

- Migration Team representation on the Skills Strategy strategic groups
 - We can provide intelligence on newly arrived communities skills needs and challenges and work with employment hub to provide support.
 - Engage with migrant groups and people when they arrive.
 - Integration Strategy will contribute to delivering the Skills Strategies priorities linked to our service area.
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- Can you make suggestions for how these priorities should be measured?
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- People progressing towards goals to get a sense of individuals learning journey at the outset and how to accelerate the journey and measure the ongoing impact.



- Hard outcomes, those that are already employed and have got into higher skilled/paid employment.
- Social Value supporting newly arrived communities' skills development.
- Ask clients how they feel about the process? Have they really achieved what was promised when they started the programme?
- We can suggest targeted indicators once we have a clear idea of which priorities you will focus on for newly arrived communities.