

Armagh Banbridge and Craigavon Labour Market Partnership

2023/2024 Action Plan

ARMAGH BANBRIDGE AND CRAIGAVON

Labour Market Partnership

Working Together



March 2023

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1. Executive Summary

1.1. Introduction

1.1.1. *Background to the Labour Market Partnership*

The aim of a labour market partnership (LMP) is to improve employability outcomes and labour market conditions by working through coordinated, collaborative and multi-agency partnership. This approach enables regional objectives to be achieved whilst providing the required flexibility to meet the needs presented by localised conditions. LMPs sit as an initiative under Department for Communities' (DfC) Employability NI Programme. Furthermore, LMPs bring together, in a single body, the necessary local knowledge and expertise, to build on existing structures locally, operating in a holistic, streamlined and joined up way.

In autumn 2022, Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon (ABC) Labour Market Partnership undertook a Strategic Assessment of employability outcomes and local labour market conditions in the local government area. Food for Thought were appointed to support the LMP with this process and to formulate an LMP Action Plan for 2023/2024.

The LMP seeks to ensure that the priorities identified continue to reflect employability and labour market challenges in the area and are led by statistical evidence and the findings of stakeholder consultations across the local area. The robust Strategic Assessment and consultation process undertaken ensures that the Action Plan developed by the LMP reflects the challenges and opportunities particular to the residents and businesses of Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council.

1.1.2. *Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council's vision*

Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council's vision is for a happy, healthy and connected community and a local economy that is both vibrant and sustainable. The ABC Community Plan promotes equality and inclusion and aims to improve quality of life for everyone. A target outcome of the plan is to ensure people are better equipped to take full advantage of the opportunities provided by the dynamic local economy. The Council has been working in co-operation with other agencies to realise the goals set out in the Community plan since 2016. The opportunity to support the local labour market through multi-agency collaboration was welcomed by the LMP core partners from the outset. The LMP recognise the unparalleled opportunities this brings to support local communities with targeted interventions and funding support tailored to their needs. The LMP can reduce inequalities in the labour market by supporting the most disadvantaged while working to connect employers and prospective employees at this challenging time.

1.1.3. *Purpose of this document*

This report details the work of the LMP in carrying out a Strategic Assessment and producing a local Action Plan, which combined comprise the submission for funding support from the Department of Communities (DfC) and the Regional LMP.

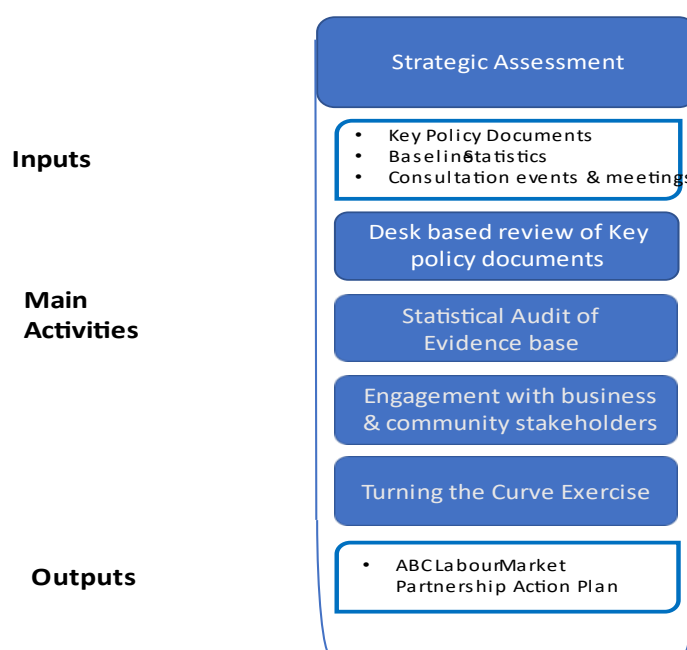
Subject to approval by the Regional LMP and DfC, this Action Plan will be

implemented by the ABC LMP, their secretariat team within the Council’s economic development department, and their appointed delivery partners.

1.2. Approach to developing the ABC Labour Market Partnership 2023/24 Action Plan

1.2.1. LMP strategic planning methodology

Figure 1 sets out the approach taken to the development of the 2023/2024 LMP Action Plan.



ABC LMP Action Plan approach

Figure 1

Labour Market Partnerships are required to:

Undertake a Strategic Assessment - consisting of:

- a desk-based review of existing local and regional strategies and policies;
- a review of the statistical evidence relating to the health of the labour market and nature of economic activity in the ABC region; and
- conduct a programme of direct engagement with stakeholders. In this region a series of interviews, events and workshops was conducted with more than 80 organisations representing business and community stakeholders with an interest in the labour market.

Develop and implement an Action Plan using: -

- Turning the Curve methodology to aid forward planning for relevant projects and programmes of work; and
- Outcomes Based Accountability (OBA) performance management principles to monitor and measure the impact of their programmes and the implementation of their Action Plan.

1.2.2. Process for the Statistical Audit and Engagement

Information was gathered in three distinct stages as illustrated in Figure 1.

A desktop review of key strategic, research and policy documents was conducted. Links to these documents are provided in the attached Partnership Plan appendices.

- Programme for Government
- Armagh Banbridge Craigavon Community Plan
- Mid South West Regional Economic Strategy
- Council Corporate Plan
- Maximizing potential: A review of labour market outcomes for people with disabilities in Northern Ireland UUEPC 2022
- 10X Economy: An economic vision for a decade of innovation - DfE 2021
- Employment Outcomes and challenges for the Disabled in N. Ireland DfC 2021
- NI Skills Barometer
- The Labour Market Profile for Armagh Banbridge Craigavon by DfE 2021
- ABC Recovery and Growth Framework
- Manpower Group Report: The Great Realisation- A look at the 2022 labour landscape
- Harvesting Tomorrows Skills Report Northern Ireland Food and Drink Association (NIFDA)/ Invest NI 2019
- ABC Employability and Skills Strategy and Action Plan 2019
- World Economic Forum - Future of Jobs Report 2020
- Green Growth Strategy
- Annual Further Education (FE) Activity Reports DfE
- Annual Interdepartmental Business Register Office for National Statistics (ONS)
- Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings
- Employer Skills Surveys
- NI Childcare Survey

The second stage comprised a desktop statistical audit of the existing evidence base available from the Labour Market Insight Dashboard, Northern Ireland Neighbourhood Information Service website (NISRA), Labour Force Survey, Ulster University Economics and Policy Centre - UUEPC, Invest NI, NOMIS, Department for the Economy (DfE), Office of National Statistics (ONS) and data from LMP member organisations.

Finally, an extensive programme of direct engagement took place with 82 business and community stakeholders across the region. There was a focus on meaningful engagement with the vast majority (96%) of the consultees either interviewed by phone or engaging with the survey team through consultation events.

A wide range of material was reviewed and multiple stakeholders were interviewed. The goal in this activity was to spread the net as wide as possible in terms of understanding the issues faced by ABC employers and the local community, current provision in the field of employability and skills and gain a view of future needs. The objective at the front and centre of this task was to formulate a fit for purpose LMP Action Plan.

1.3. The Strategic Priorities

The LMP Strategic Priorities are described below.

Strategic Priority 1 - To form and successfully deliver the functions of the local Labour Market Partnership for the area by:

- Reviewing available statistical information and engaging key stakeholders to identify employability or labour market issues locally and addressing those issues;
- Preparing Labour Market Partnership Action Plans and organising the work of the partnership to meet priority needs;
- Putting in place implementation structures that will contribute towards improved labour market conditions and outcomes; and
- Increasing LMP awareness with the public and key stakeholders by planning communications activity to more proactively inform and promote the work of the LMPs.

Strategic Priority 2 - To improve employability outcomes and/or labour market conditions locally by:

- Working in partnership with partners, local statutory bodies/agencies, businesses the voluntary sector and the community to address locally identified issues;
- Ensuring the local statutory bodies and agencies address employability and labour market conditions locally in their area, and where possible in collaboration with other key stakeholders;
- Providing comprehensive input into decision making processes about tackling actual and perceived barriers or negative impacts on employability or labour market conditions locally and giving feedback on the impacts of interventions;
- Identifying and implementing ways to educate communities and the local work force about employment opportunities or local labour market conditions; and
- Contributing to the delivery of LMP Action Plans and initiatives that improve employability outcomes locally.

Strategic Priority 3 - To promote and support delivery of existing employability or skills provision available either regionally or locally

- Promotion of local and regional initiatives and building confidence through locally based engagement;
- Inclusion of initiatives within local LMP Action Plans aimed at meeting the relevant objectives of the Programmes for Government;
- Contribute to the development of local and regional initiatives at a regional level aimed at improving employability and labour market conditions;
- Escalation of relevant issues and/or identifying priorities to be considered by the local and regional LMP and:
- Contributing to public facing events and supporting effective engagement with an emphasis on improving employability outcomes and/or labour market conditions.

1.4. Summary of the Strategic Action Plan for 2023/2024

The key outcomes and deliverables from the Strategic Assessment process are the 2023/2024 Action Plan and the associated LMP Budget (See Section7). An executive summary of the 2023/2024 strategic Action Plan is set out in Table 1 below. The 2023/2024 Plan will invest a total budget of £683,969.80

Strategic Priority 1	To form and successfully deliver the functions of the local Labour Market Partnership for the area
Key	SP1.1: Regular LMP meetings.
Activities:	SP1.2: Review of the 2024- 2027 ABC LMP Strategic Assessment and Annual Action Plan for 2024 - 2025.
	SP1.3: Research study into profile and needs of ABC economically inactive.
Strategic Priority 2	To improve employability outcomes and/or labour market conditions locally
Activities:	SP2.1: Female Focus Programme.
	SP2.2: Disability Employment Programme.
	SP2.3: Rapid Response Programmes.
	SP2.4: Ready to Employ Programme.
	SP2.5: Progression Programme.
	SP2.6: Employability Clubs.
	SP2.7: Underemployment Programme.
Strategic Priority 3	To promote and support delivery of existing employability or skills provision available either regionally or locally
Key	SP3.1: LMP and Employability NI Communication Plan.
Activities:	SP3.2: Job Fairs and Employability Events.
	SP3.3: Get Future Ready -Employability and Skills week.

This innovative Action Plan contains a wide range of new initiatives to be piloted. The evaluation of these pilots during 2023/2024 will be used to inform the development of future programmes of work and LMP Action Plans.

2. Armagh, Banbridge Craigavon LMP Structure

The ABC Labour Market Partnership (LMP) was established in February 2021 and has been built on the foundation of existing structures within the local government district namely the Community Planning Working Group and the ABC Local Works Forum. These established and successful groups combined a wealth of knowledge and diverse experience and enabled the council area to respond quickly to the introduction of Labour Market Partnerships. The LMP has since evolved to encompass the core partner recommendations made by the Department for Communities and to broaden the knowledge base in areas where the LMP identified more experience was needed e.g. migrant communities. The partnership fulfils an important advisory role for the ABC region and needs the right blend of skills and experience on board to design interventions that will have enduring value for local populations. The ABC LMP has developed into a dynamic partnership based on good working relationships and committed to making a positive difference through a collaborative approach.

A collective leadership approach has been adopted with effort and commitment in evidence from all partners. The partnership operates with a culture of mutual respect as per the conduct requirements and is led by a Chair and Vice-chair, presently Head of Economic Development ABC Council and Head of Business Engagement Southern Regional College.

ABC LMP currently comprises a representative from each of the following organisations:

- Southern Regional College (Further Education College);
- Jobs and Benefits Office;
- The Antrim, Down and Armagh Rural Support Network;
- Invest NI;
- Enterprise NI (Banbridge District Enterprise Ltd) ;
- Careers Service NI;
- ABC Council Economic Development Services Department;
- Business Partnership Alliance (BPA);
- NI Food and Drink Association;
- Manufacturing NI;
- ABC Community Network;
- NI Union of Supported Employment;
- NI Migrant Centre; and
- Southern Health and Social Care Trust.

The membership of the ABC LMP will continue to be reviewed throughout its lifetime to ensure it meets local need. The code of conduct issued by DfC has been adopted by all partners. A terms of reference has been agreed. It has been agreed by the LMP that they will fulfil and observe the following intentions:

- To drive forward and implement agreed shared goals and activities;
- To co-ordinate information sharing and action planning between strategic partners;
- To retain a culture of mutual respect and collaboration;

- To utilise available labour market data and baseline evidence to inform recommendations, identify priorities and support an effective partnership response;
- To co-ordinate resources to improve opportunities and outcomes;
- To align as appropriate with regional and national approaches; and
- To support social inclusive economic growth by helping to tackle inequalities within the local labour market.

The LMP partners have received training in 2022/23 related to Governance, Equality and Outcomes Based Accountability™. LMP members meet monthly as a group fulfilling their obligations under the LMP Action Plan for 2022-2023. Seven meetings have been conducted this year and the LMP are on track to meet their yearly target of 10 meetings. Monthly meetings are usually physical meetings held at Craigavon Civic Centre unless the agenda is not sufficient to justify a physical meeting, in which case the meeting is held in a virtual format via video conferencing.

LMP members engaged effectively throughout the action planning, turning the curve and implementation phases and are responsible for developing this LMP Action Plan. The aim of the LMP is to ensure the issues and challenges impacting local people and businesses are addressed resulting in an improvement in both labour market conditions and quality of life conditions in the local area.

3. Strategic Context for Employability and Skills in Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon

The period between the development of this LMP Action Plan for 2023-2024 and the preceding partnership plan has been eventful and economically turbulent. Alongside the combined repercussions of leaving the EU and the Covid-19 pandemic, the power sharing institutions have not been fully functioning in Northern Ireland since February 2022. The UK has seen a significant period of turmoil at Westminster and in financial markets. The period has also been marked by a conflict in Europe, inflationary pressures and a cost-of-living crisis. Inevitably the economic landscape has a direct impact on the labour market, where conditions are significantly altered. Businesses have faced not just escalating costs during this period but increasing levels of risk and uncertainty. The programmes adopted by the LMP will provide much needed support to the labour market at this challenging time. In the case of a further unexpected shock to the economy, there is some welcome flexibility built into the LMP mechanisms through Change Control Requests which can be agreed with DfC.

Labour Market Partnerships are required to contribute to strategic local objectives and the NI Executives strategic objectives, including the achievement of targets set in:

- NI Programme for Government;
- Community Plan for the local area; and
- Any other relevant plans including corporate plans of LMP members.

Furthermore, The Regional LMP have identified a number of priority areas for consideration by LMPs which include:

- Disability Employment Outcomes;
- Regional Growth Deal strategies; and
- Supporting the aims of the 10x Economy Skills Strategy.

In the policy context of economic recovery and employability, the Programme for Government, the Armagh Banbridge Craigavon Community Plan, Mid-South West Regional Economic Strategy, Council Corporate Plan, ABC Employability and Skills Strategy and Action Plan (2019), recent studies regarding disability employment outcomes and the 10X Economy Skills Strategy (2021) were considered. This Action Plan prioritises initiatives which will support local people to get closer to work and into work as part of the Councils commitment to economic recovery and long-term inclusive economic growth. In line with LMP guidance particular attention has been paid to those policies listed above.

3.1. Review of Key Policy and Research Documents

3.1.1. *Programme for Government*

A key focus of the Programme for Government (PfG) is on delivering sustainable skills and employment for people. The ambition behind the programme is to deliver a strong, competitive, regionally balanced economy in order to give children and young people the best start in life. Government and partner agencies are tasked

with increasing the proportion of workforce qualified to higher levels, getting more people working in better quality jobs, raising the number of graduates progressing into professional or management occupations and creating conditions in which people can achieve their potential. Of particular interest in the context of the LMP are the PfG indicators and outcomes that relate to employability and skills. The current relevant outcomes (may be subject to change following any revision of PfG) are:

Outcome 3: We have a more equal society.

Outcome 6: We have more people working in better jobs.

Outcome 8: We care for others and help those in need.

DfC is the lead department for a number of indicators through which progress on these outcomes will be measured:

Indicator 17: Economic Inactivity rates excluding students.

Indicator 19: % of population living in absolute and relative poverty.

Indicator 32: Employment rate of 16-64 year olds by deprivation quintile.

Indicator 33: % of people working part-time who would like to work more hours.

3.1.2. Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Community Plan

The Council produced a Community plan for the period 2017-2030, ‘Connected’ which describes its vision:

‘We have a happy, healthy and connected community, a vibrant and sustainable economy and appealing places for living, working and learning’.

The Community Plan identifies three cross cutting themes which are a central focus within all outcomes and actions identified. One of these over-arching themes is Equality. The plan states:

‘We are committed to promoting equality, good relations and inclusion and believe them to be central to improving quality of life for everyone’.

The ABC Community plan highlights a number of areas relating to the provision of a skilled economy, in particular by stating a long-term outcome of making sure people are better equipped to take full advantage of the opportunities provided by the dynamic regional economy. The short- term outcomes identified under this measure were that:

- Stakeholders are more knowledgeable about current and future skills needs and are working in partnership to improve career pathways and equip people for employment.
- Individuals, particularly young people, have a better understanding of existing and future employment and enterprise opportunities, how to access them and the skills required.

The key indicators under this theme are:

- Percentage of the workforce in employment qualified to level 1 and above, level 2 and above, level 3 and above, and level 4 and above.

- Employment rate (age 16- 64).

The plan also highlights a number of priority areas relating to the supported development of an enterprising economy and the desire to inform, co-ordinate and promote initiatives which support enterprise, investment and business growth. One short-term outcome identified under this theme is that:

- The borough is an enticing, collaborative and supportive environment for business start-ups, growth and innovation.

A key indicator under this measure is:

- Percentage of the population (aged 18- 64) who have started or are in the process of starting a business.

There is strong correlation between the vision outlined the ABC Community Plan and the Labour Market Partnership Action Plan. The clear synergy between the two strategic plans is evident in the following extract from the Community Plan:

'It is important that everyone, and in particular young people, is encouraged to reach their full potential. We must ensure that our potential workforce has access to clear and relevant pathways to employment which reflect their own interests and skills, as well as the needs of the local economy. Good businesses recognise that their people are their strongest asset. To ensure a thriving economy we will also need to promote the benefits of lifelong learning with progression routes for existing employees wherever possible. To deliver our goal, we need to support closer collaboration between local businesses, education and training providers and the voluntary and community sector. We need to identify, understand and address skills gaps, work with employers to understand the options for skills-based recruitment and better promote higher level apprenticeships and vocational pathways'.

The Community Plan asserts that supporting unemployed individuals on their journey into work matters: not only does it help to increase the employment rate and the economic activity levels in the economy, which will have a positive effect on growth, it also mitigates the deterioration of skills, confidence and health that can occur with prolonged periods of worklessness.

Lastly, the Community plan considers some useful actions in this context:

- Examine the potential for a multi-sectoral employment and skills forum
- Raise awareness of existing and future skills needs, and their potential impact upon the local economy and business growth.
- Develop Collaborative initiatives to address skills' deficits in target sectors.
- Work in partnership to improve career pathways and work readiness.

3.1.3. Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council (ABC) Corporate Plan 2018-2023

With its broadened remit following Local Government Reform in 2015, Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council is a local authority well placed to lead the development agenda. Through its vision, aims and values the Corporate Plan focuses

its efforts and resources firmly on ‘Place, People and Position’ with priorities tailored to support business development and growth, developing workforce skills, progressing regeneration plans, growing the economy in an inclusive way and enhancing the health and wellbeing of residents.

3.1.4. 10X Economy: An economic vision for a decade of innovation - DfE 2021

The economic vision set out for Northern Ireland in this strategic vision is for a ‘10X Economy’. The strategy states *‘Northern Ireland’s decade of Innovation will encourage greater collaboration and innovation to deliver a ten times better economy with benefits for all our people’*. The strategy identifies five key steps to developing interventions which deliver the vision:

- Technologies and Clusters;
- Talent;
- Diffusion;
- Funding; and
- Place.

The strategy emphasises the need to build on Northern Ireland’s reputation for excellence in providing the skills which investors are looking for and supporting indigenous companies. At the same time, the strategy aspires to see a skills system developed which will address growing inequalities, providing everyone with access to education and training opportunities that will enable them to fulfil their potential. A series of challenges are defined which the region must overcome to ensure Northern Ireland continues to make progress in meeting demands on the labour market. The strategy references the NI Skills Barometer which forecasts fewer and fewer job opportunities for individuals with low and no qualifications. It highlights that the most significant skills undersupply will be in mid-level qualifications and the need to see a realignment of the fields of study being delivered with a growing emphasis on the core sciences, maths, computers, engineering and technology.

The policy also describes how technology, demographics and global politics are rapidly changing how advanced economies and the labour markets that support them function, a process which was accelerated by the recent pandemic which acted as a catalyst for change. Labour markets in advanced economies are being revolutionised by digitisation, robotics, artificial intelligence and virtual reality. The strategy references several research studies and examples of how these changes are apparent in our everyday lives. At the macro level, it is anticipated that there will be an overall increase in the number of employment opportunities, productivity, growth and improved living standards. At the micro level however, the greatest impact is expected to be on low skilled workers, where employment opportunities are likely to fall. There is a need to improve levels of lifelong learning in Northern Ireland, the UK has lower levels of lifelong learning participation than other comparative countries¹ and participation in further education in Northern Ireland by adults over 25 is low and declining².

¹ OECDs Skills Strategy Northern Ireland

² Annual FE Activity Reports (DfE)

The strategy underscores that NI has a significant role to play in delivering against the UK's net zero carbon emissions by 2050 target. These goals will have a substantial impact on our labour market. The skills strategy stresses that this region must develop the knowledge that will drive innovation in the search for low carbon solutions as this will have a tradable value across the globe, making 'Zero Carbon Tech' an enabling technology for NI.

3.1.5. *Mid-South West Regional Economic Strategy 2020*

Regional Growth Deals are aimed at helping regions to harness additional investment, thus creating jobs and speeding up inclusive economic growth. The Mid South West Economic Engine is a collaboration of three local Government partners, Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council and Mid Ulster District Council. The economy in this area is driven by a thriving private sector. The region has significant strengths in manufacturing, engineering, agri-food, health and life sciences, tourism and construction. The region stretches along the border corridor of the Republic of Ireland enjoying a natural co-dependency in terms of trade and tourism.

The Mid South West regional economic strategy identifies four pillars for action all of which align with the remit of the Labour Market Partnership to some extent:

- I. Future proofing the skills base;
- II. Enabling Infrastructure;
- III. Boosting Innovation and digital capacity; and
- IV. Building a high-performing visitor/ tourism economy.

The headline ambition within the strategy is to raise productivity levels and in so doing create better paid jobs for our residents and close the productivity gap between the Mid South West region and the rest of NI. Given that the economy is near full employment, the strategy identifies the need to intervene with actions to ensure the requisite skills for the future are there in scale and profile. These interventions will embed new technology and automation in businesses such as robotics, cobotics and AI; which will fundamentally change the skills needed in the workplace in the future. Significant capital funding bids are being prepared under the Mid South West Growth Deal to support businesses in the adoption of new and emerging technologies to drive productivity and green growth, and it will be important to ensure LMP skills investments are aligned to complement these funding streams to maximise overall regional impact and return on investment.

3.1.6. *Maximising Potential: A review of labour market outcomes for people with disabilities in Northern Ireland*

The report demonstrates that disabled persons in NI face a multitude of barriers to accessing employment. It acknowledges that over the past two decades little progress has been made to improve outcomes for those with disabilities here in spite of a number of government interventions. Significantly, the report recognises that a multi-agency approach is fundamental to success in tackling the wide range of barriers presented.

The report highlights that just over 1 in 3 disabled people work in NI compared to 57.5% of disabled people elsewhere in the UK. Amongst UK regions NI has the lowest disability employment rate and the largest disability employment gap.

There are structural differences in the composition of the NI disabled population and the NI business base which are important factors in understanding the story behind the baseline. The report identifies that Northern Ireland's disabled populations have a higher incidence of more limiting conditions and a strikingly lower qualification profile than comparative population groups elsewhere in the UK. Less than one third (28%) of those with disabilities in Northern Ireland aged 16-64 have achieved NQF Level 4+ qualifications compared to 49% of the non-disabled population. However the report emphasises that labour market opportunities are reduced for disabled people even with the highest qualifications. Disabled individuals are much more likely to work part-time - this equates to one third of the disabled population in work in this region and one fifth in the rest of the UK. Employment statistics also show that self-employment is a favoured option for those with disabilities in Northern Ireland which is most likely due to the comparative flexibility it offers.

The report highlights significant potential opportunities for the labour market here. For instance, seven in ten out-of-work disabled people have previously been in employment. Of disabled people who are currently economically inactive almost one in four want a job. By comparison one in ten non-disabled people who are currently economically inactive want a job. Finally, one fifth of the population aged 16-64 are disabled (based on Labour Force Survey self-reported data). This is almost a quarter of a million people, representing a significant potential boost to Northern Ireland's labour supply. The Armagh Banbridge Craigavon area has a widening disability gap indicating growing challenges in accessing the labour market for this section of the population. If Northern Ireland were to match the current UK disabled employment rate, it would represent a major influx into its workforce, with the potential to generate a £1.3 billion Gross Value Added contribution and £400 Million in exchequer savings.

3.1.7. *Manpower Group Report: The Great Realisation - A look at the labour landscape 2022*

The most recent Manpower report identifies some of the key trends affecting the labour market and the ways in which workforces and employers are adjusting to the changed landscape. The key theme which emerged from this year's report is the transformative change within workplace culture.

- The re-invention of work by workers- Hybrid work models are more in-demand than ever. The top three most important work flexibility factors were: - the ability to choose start and end times (45%); more holiday entitlement (36%) fully flexible workforce options (35%). Nearly half of workers (49%) surveyed would move to another organisation for better wellbeing.
- Culture as an attraction and retention tool for employers is a key trend as there is a heightened focus on reshaping company culture in a way that builds trust and energises the employee experience. The majority of workers (two thirds) want to work for companies with similar values to their own.
- A scarcity of talent was strongly evidenced with 69% of employers reporting that they are unable to find the skills they need in the labour market. This is a 15 year high. *'Shifting demographics including shrinking birth rates,*

reduced mobility across borders and the rise of early retirees means talent is scarce’.

- Reskilling and Upskilling are expected to remain key trends as roles continue to require more skills than before in the midst of a tightening labour market. There is a new urgency for organisations to upskill their people so they can analyse data, make data driven decisions and combine human and machine learning to create value.
- Younger workers are set to grow the workforce and as inflation rises and savings dwindle it is expected that there will likely be a return to certain roles particularly the live events work boom.
- Trends in recent years have seen closing the gender gap come to a sudden halt as women have been leaving the workforce in high numbers. Mass exodus from sectors typically dominated by women (e.g. education, nursing and hospitality) have coincided with growth in logistics, tech and sales where women are typically under-represented. However trends in higher education show change is coming. Between 2011 and 2020 the number of women accepted onto full time STEM undergraduate courses increased by 50.1% in the UK. STEM degrees offer some of the highest earnings returns for female graduates (Dept of Education- Education Hub Blog UK Feb 2021). The manpower report asserts *‘Choice, flexibility and performance over-presenteeism will attract and retain women while driving the skills and growth agenda’.*
- Evidence shows the technology revolution has gathered pace as investment in digitisation has accelerated as a result of the pandemic with more than 80% of employers surveyed reporting that they have accelerated digitisation. However there has been an increasing realisation among employers that deploying technology and innovation is the straightforward part. Human capabilities and having the right culture to execute these changes are key to successful technology adoption and new value creation opportunities. The report highlights that 1 in 5 organisations globally are having difficulties finding talent including IT project managers, software developers, AI and machine learning specialists and cyber security analysts. Employers anticipate IT (23%) and manufacturing (21%) will see the most significant headcount changes due to more technology investments (Employer Outlook Survey Manpower group 2022). Organisations are now seeking to balance higher wages with productivity growth. Technology can unlock ways of producing more with existing inputs or producing the same outputs with fewer inputs. The report explains that this is a win-win dynamic and does not carry latent inflationary pressure because it expands the potential of the economy.
- Another key trend for companies surveyed centred on ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance Commitments) particularly around climate action driven partly by the convergence of standards and reporting.
- The final key trend identified in this years’ Manpower Group report is dubbed ‘the great reset’, as 83% of organisations believe they need greater agility and speed to cope with change. *‘Supply chain fragility, exacerbated by climate, consumer demand and skills shortages is re-prioritising risk. Mono-suppliers and vertical supply chains are out; circular, networked, regional, sustainable and resilient are in. Over half of organisations are currently assessing their extended supply chains (e.g. 3rd parties, sub-contractors) in order to reduce risks’.*

3.1.8. *Conclusion on Strategic Assessment*

As demonstrated in the preceding paragraphs and commentary on the aforementioned strategies and policies, significant opportunity exists for ABC LMP to respond to key emerging trends. The sheer breadth of scope in opportunity is too broad to address solely in the 2023/24 LMP Action Plan. However, these strategic observations will be used to create a longer term strategy for ABC LMP, and key outcomes to be sought from both the 24-27 Strategic Assessment and the 2023/24 Action Plan will include:

- Improving equality and good relations;
- Growing the economy in a fair, inclusive way;
- Improving levels of lifelong learning;
- Reducing rates of economic inactivity;
- Supporting disadvantaged individuals to reach their full potential;
- Addressing skills gaps;
- Supporting enterprise, investment and business growth;
- Making zero carbon tech an enabling technology for NI;
- Improving productivity in the region;
- Supporting those with disabilities and other barriers to access the labour market; and
- Supporting the necessary reskilling and upskilling of workers.

4. Findings from the Desktop Statistical Assessment

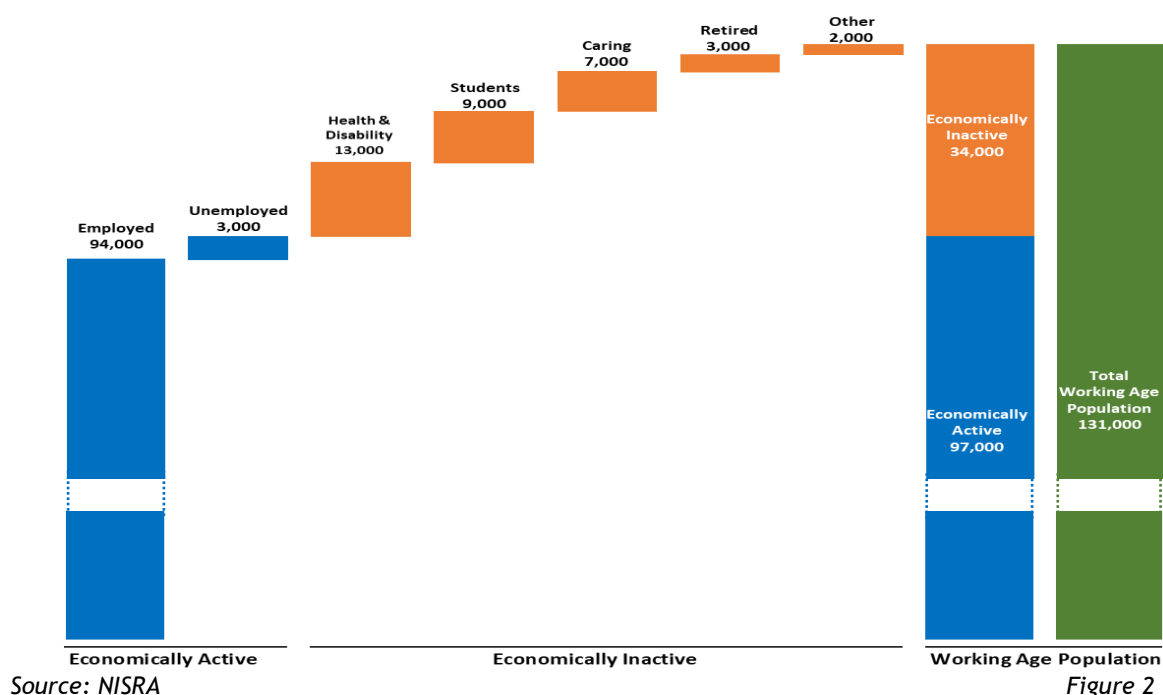
4.1. Sources of baseline information

There are numerous and diverse sources of labour market data currently available at local government district (LGD) level. Furthermore, data is made available at various times throughout the year and may cover different reference periods. To better inform the development of LMP Action Plans and interventions, DfC’s professional services unit has established a local Labour Market Insight (LMI) dashboard which was launched in 2022. The local LMI dashboard aims to provide an objective evidence base with a LGD administrative area focus to support LMP partner organisations. The portal has proved beneficial during the Strategic Assessment process. The Strategic Assessment examines employability and labour market issues locally (e.g. deprivation or unemployment) and helps the LMP to take an intelligence-led and early intervention approach. The source of the evidence presented is identified throughout the analysis set out in the sections to follow.

4.2. Overview of the Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon Labour Market

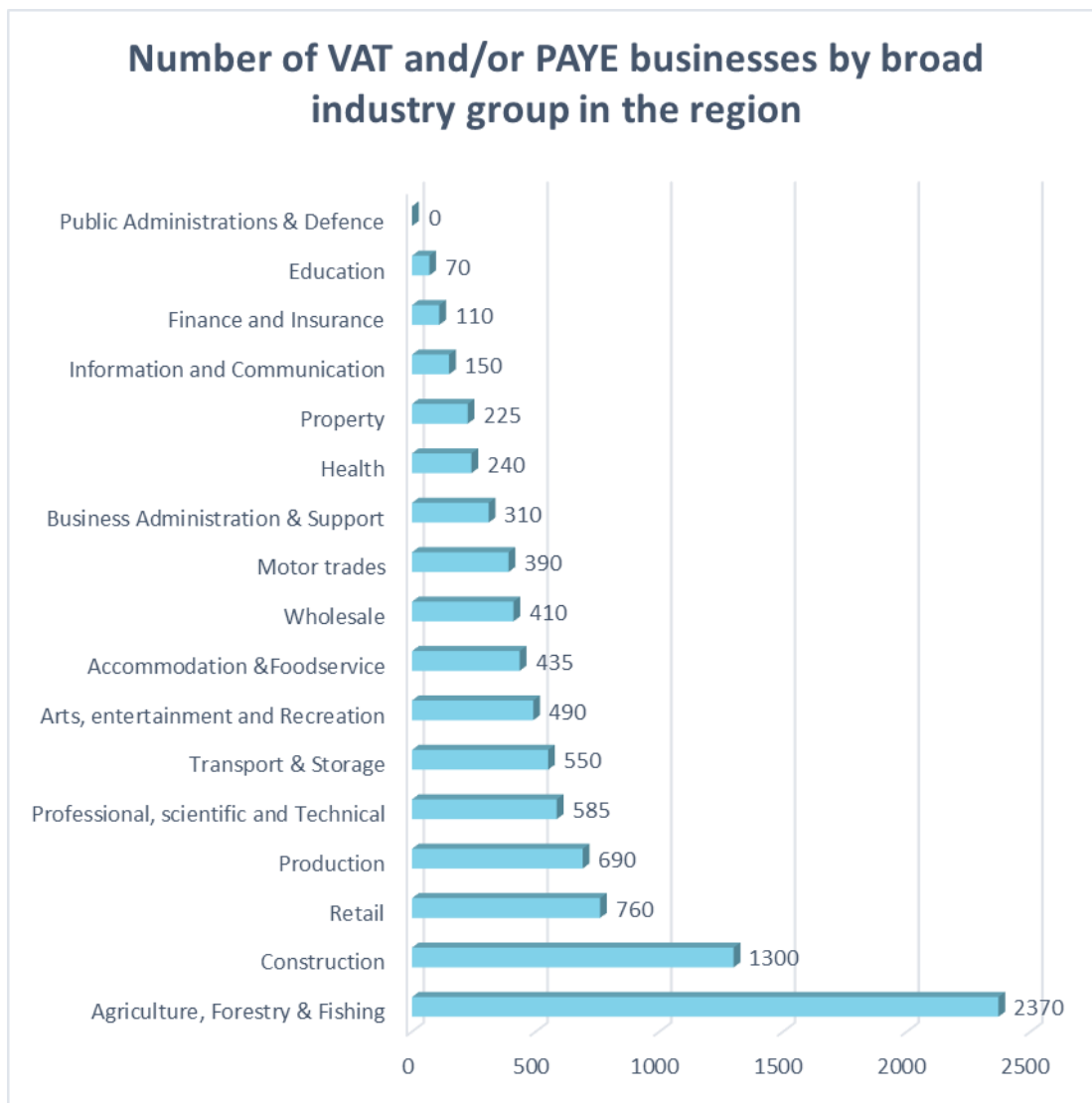
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Local Government District is the second most highly populated district in Northern Ireland after Belfast (217,232 residents). Rates of economic inactivity in the LGD are slightly lower at 16.5% compared with overall economic inactivity rates of 19.2% for Northern Ireland as a whole (Source: DfC Labour Market Insights Dashboard -excluding students).

The region is home to roughly nine thousand registered businesses, with 90.5% of these being micro businesses. The number of jobs in the ABC district is 76,884 which accounts for 10% of all jobs in NI as a whole (NISRA). Services, manufacturing and construction are three of the regions key employment sectors. Figure 2 below illustrates the profile of ABC’s working age population.



4.2.1. *Business by broad Industry group in the ABC region 2022*

The region is home to over nine thousand registered businesses, accounting for 11.7% of the registered businesses in Northern Ireland. The bar chart below illustrates the breakdown of these 9,115 businesses registered in ABC according to broad industry group.



Source: Inter-departmental Business Register

Figure 3

When compared with the breakdown of businesses in Northern Ireland as a whole, it is evident that the ABC region attracts a disproportionate number of businesses from the Transport & Storage, Motor trade, Wholesale, Retail, Production and Agriculture sectors. Comparing the current Interdepartmental Business Register for ABC with the register for 2017 shows that industries experiencing comparatively high growth in the ABC region in recent years are Production, Motor trades and Education. It is reassuring to note that no broad industry groups have experienced a more than 1 percentage point decline in business numbers over the period 2017- 2022. This is indicative of a strong, varied and growing business base in this region. Further detail is provided in the table below.

Table 2: Number of VAT and/ or PAYE businesses by broad industry group in ABC & NI, and ABC share of NI activity by sector.

Broad Industry Group	ABC	NI	ABC Proportion
Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing	2370	18340	12.9%
Production	690	5495	12.6%
Construction	1300	11195	11.6%
Motor trades	390	2890	13.5%
Wholesale	410	3195	12.8%
Retail	760	5930	12.8%
Transport & Storage	550	3250	16.9%
Accommodation & Foodservice	435	4480	9.7%
Information and Communication	150	2085	7.2%
Finance and Insurance	110	1220	9.0%
Property	225	2415	9.3%
Professional, scientific and Technical	585	6275	9.3%
Business Administration & Support	310	3015	10.28%
Public Administration and Defence	0	35	0%
Education	70	715	9.8%
Health	240	2775	8.6%
Arts, Entertainment and Recreation	490	4540	10.6%
Total	9085	77850	11.7%

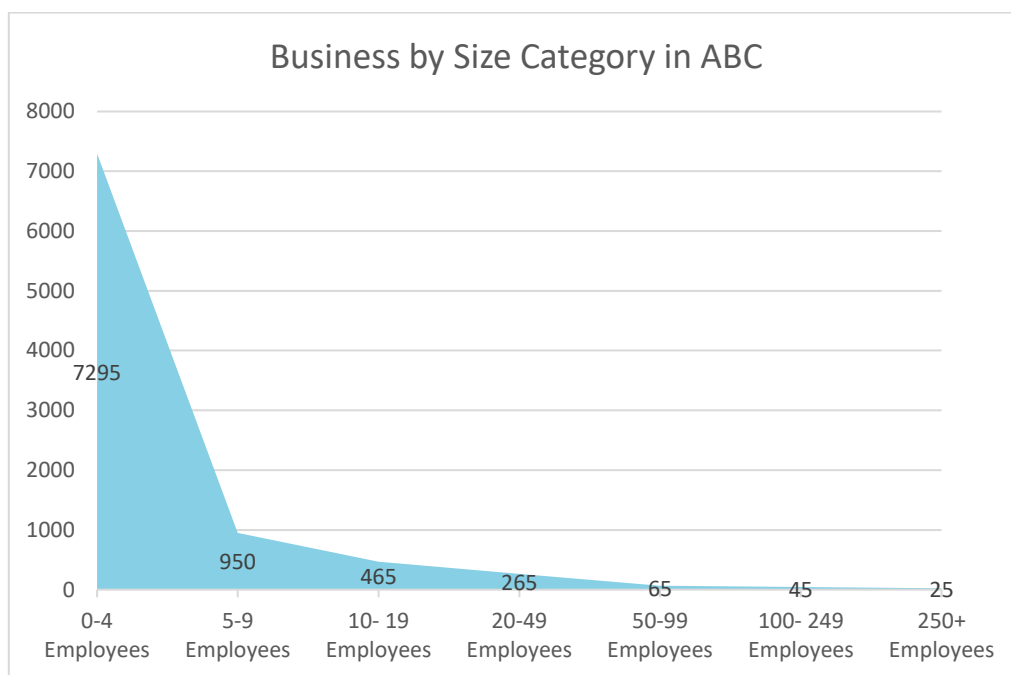
Source: Interdepartmental Business Register

Table 2

4.2.2. *Business by Size category in the ABC region 2022*

When the number of ABC registered businesses is appraised according to size category, it is clear that the business base is composed of mainly very small businesses. Businesses in the smallest size category (0-4 employees) constitute 80% of the businesses registered in the region, the equivalent figure for NI as a whole is

79%. Only 0.3% of the businesses in ABC fall into the largest size category of 250+ employees, which matches the breakdown for NI as a whole (0.3%) for this category. The composition of the business base in ABC is typical of the region, with the breakdown of the numbers of registered businesses by size matching the overall NI breakdown almost exactly. Overall, 90.5% of businesses in the ABC region are micro businesses employing less than 10 people, while this is on a par with the rest of NI, it does pose additional challenges when engaging with businesses and implementing labour market interventions.

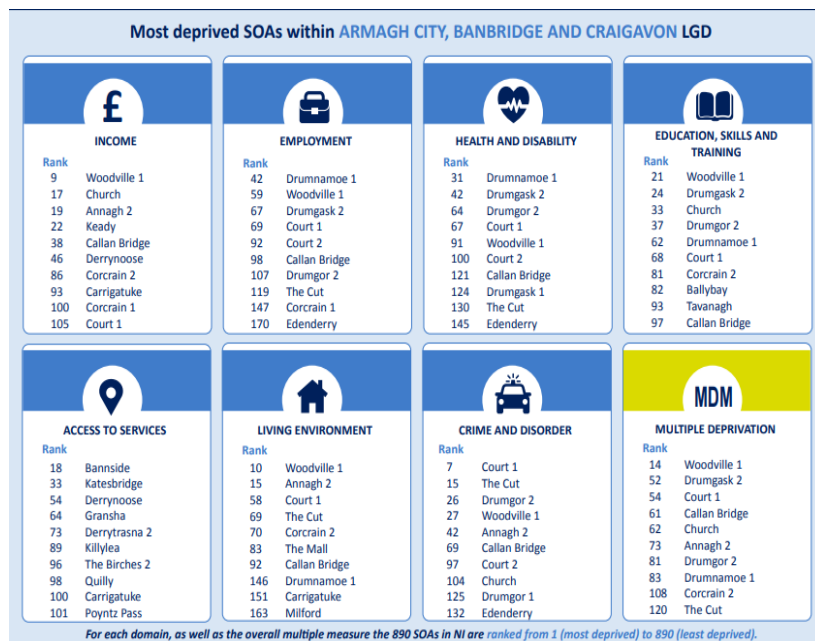


Source: *Interdepartmental Business Register*

Figure 4

4.2.3. Deprivation in the ABC Region

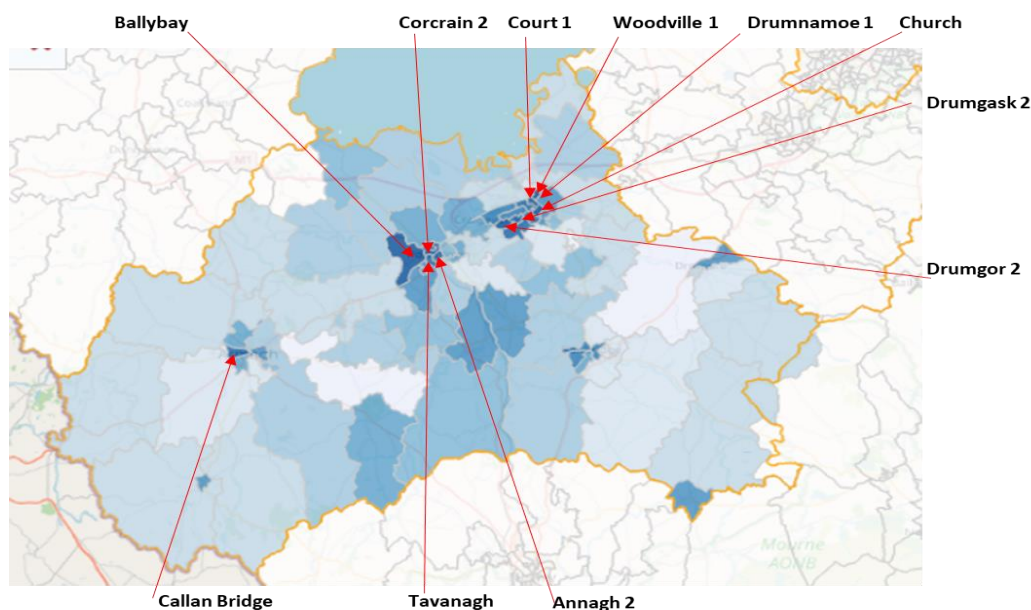
Eight of ABC’s super output areas (SOAs) rank in the top 100 most deprived SOAs in Northern Ireland in terms of multiple deprivation rankings. Eight of ABCs Super output areas also feature in the top 100 most deprived in terms of income level. To give just one example Woodville 1 is ranked 9th out of 890 (9/890) SOAs in terms of the level of income deprivation, 10/890 in terms of poor living environment and 21/890 in terms of education deprivation. A number of SOA’s in the ABC region have similar levels of deprivation across a multitude of measures. The most deprived SOAs in the district are shown in the graphic overleaf, which identifies areas of high deprivation across all categories measured by NISRA.



Source: NINIS/ NISRA

Figure 5

The figure above shows that Education, Skills & Training is a particularly weak area for the ABC region on the deprivation index. The map below shows many of the deprived areas within the borough are located in urban settlements. It is striking that many are geographically close to SOAs which are relatively privileged by comparison and where the quality-of-life indicators for residents are very different, thusly masking the areas of deprivation within most surveys.



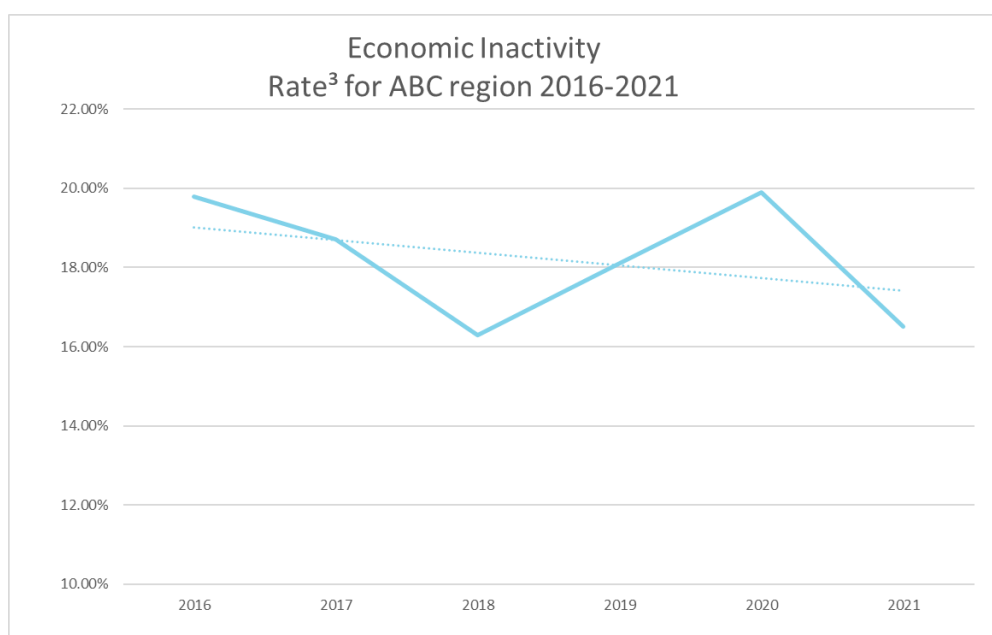
Source: NINIS/ NISRA

Figure 6

4.3. Economic Inactivity

Levels of economic inactivity in the ABC region show scope for improvement however they compare favourably with other local government districts in Northern Ireland. Economic inactivity rates show the number of people who are economically inactive as a percentage of the working age population. LMPs are recommended to use economic inactivity rates excluding students. Students are likely to become economically active when they have completed their courses of study, as such the

department considers it useful to remove students from the analysis on economic inactivity in order to gain a better understanding of the group actively targeted for support into employment by the government. It is important to note that the ABC area ranks mid table in terms of economic inactivity³ rates amongst council areas but has some particular challenges in terms of the economic inactivity gaps for gender and disability. Exploring economic inactivity across the available timeseries on the LMI dashboard shows that ABC is one of only three LGDs in Northern Ireland which have experienced an overall decline in their economic inactivity rates. The line graph (figure 7) below illustrates this improvement in overall economic inactivity rates (excluding students) in the ABC area.



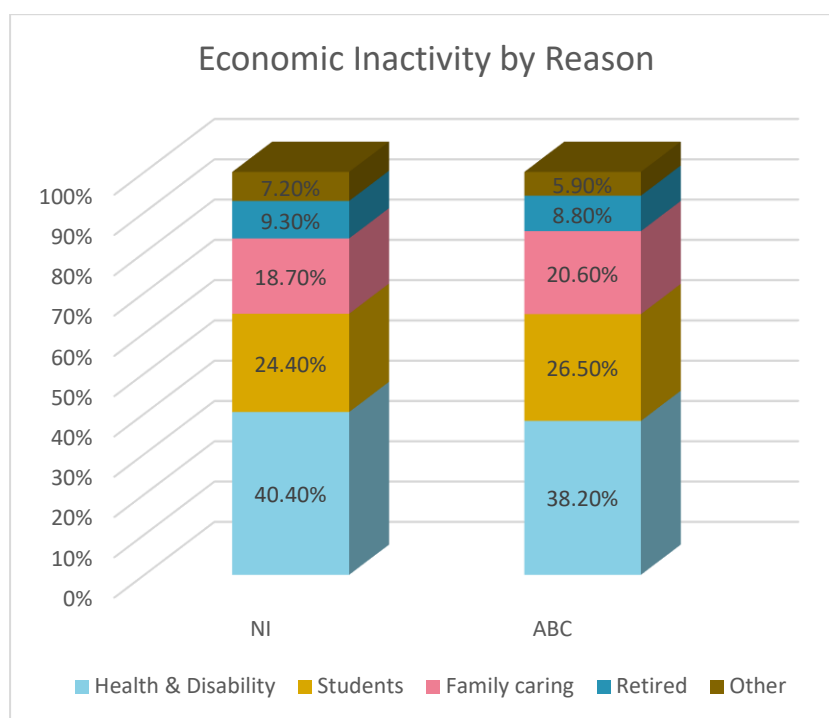
Source: Department for Communities Labour Market Insights Dashboard/NISRA

Figure 7

Research has been undertaken to improve the LMP’s understanding of the profile of the economically inactive of this area and to take a look beyond the baseline at the underlying stories and trends. This shows economic inactivity linked to health and disability is the single largest cohort both in the ABC region and in Northern Ireland generally.

The graphic below illustrates the baseline position in the borough currently in terms of the percentage of those economically inactive according to the underlying reason recorded.

³ Economic Inactivity rate Excluding students for population aged 16- 64 in ABC region



Source: NISRA

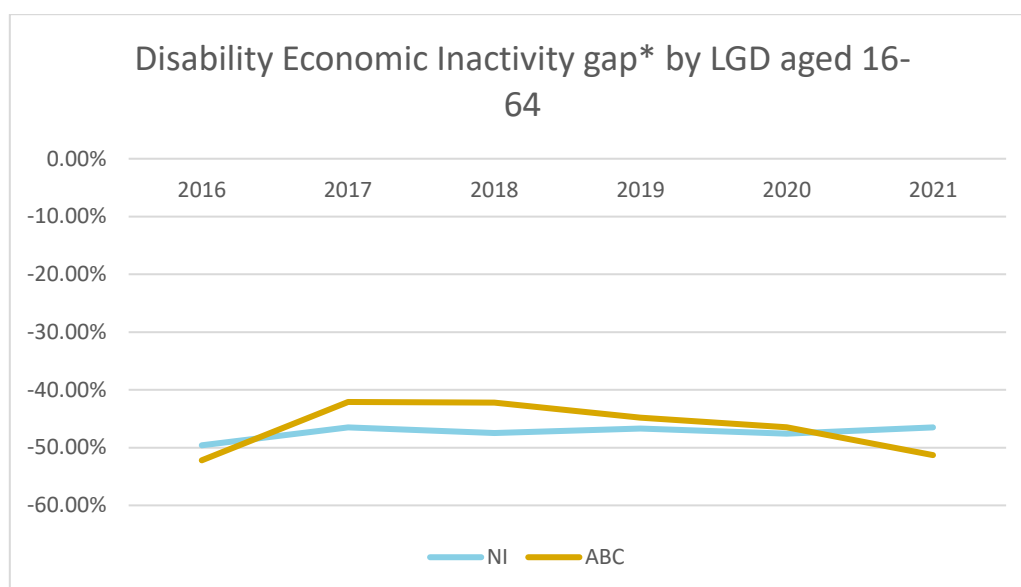
Figure 8

4.3.1. Economic Inactivity linked to disability

Northern Ireland as a whole performs poorly in terms of employment outcomes for those with disabilities. NI has a higher prevalence of limiting conditions. A number of studies have been undertaken to quantify the extent of this variance and also to examine the underlying reasons behind this trend. In Northern Ireland, 60.2% of disabled people were economically inactive compared with 42.5% in the rest of the UK according to a study undertaken by DfC in 2021 (Employment Outcomes and Challenges for Disabled People in N. Ireland). The report showed that employers of those with disabilities were more likely to fall into the categories of utilities, hospitality, public administration, education and health bodies.

Further research conducted by the Ulster University Economics Policy Centre recently (described in more detail in section 3.1.6 of this report) provided useful data regarding the underlying reasons behind these trends. The report showed Northern Ireland’s disabled populations have a higher incidence of more limiting conditions and a strikingly lower qualification profile than comparative population groups elsewhere in the UK. The report emphasises that labour market opportunities are reduced for disabled people even with the highest qualifications. Disabled individuals from Northern Ireland are much more likely to work part-time - this equates to one third of the disabled population in work in this region and one fifth in the rest of the UK. Employment statistics also show that self-employment is a favoured option for those with disabilities in Northern Ireland in comparison to the general population.

The Disability economic inactivity gap in the ABC region (excluding students) has grown from -42.1% in 2017 to -51.3% in 2021. This clearly demonstrates that labour market conditions have become more challenging for those with disabilities in the region during this period of time. The Northern Ireland Disability Gap has remained high but relatively stable over the same period of time.



Source: Department for Communities Labour Market Insights Dashboard/NISRA

Figure 9

ABC currently ranks as the third lowest performing of Local Government Districts in Northern Ireland in terms of the Disability Economic Inactivity gap (excluding students) as set out in the table below.

Table 3: Disability Economic Inactivity Gap (Excluding students) by LGD aged 16-64 for 2021

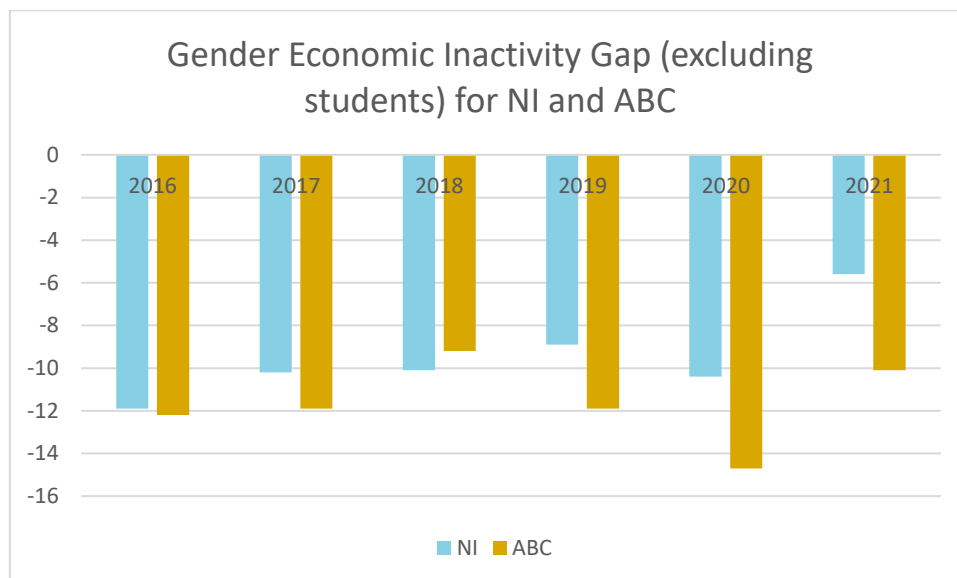
Local Government District	Disability Gap
Lisburn and Castlereagh	-32.2%
Ards and North Down	-37.6%
Causeway Coast and Glens	-37.8%
Mid-East Antrim	-38.3%
Antrim and Newtownabbey	-46.1%
Belfast	-47.4%
Fermanagh and Omagh	-49.7%
Newry and Mourne	-51.2%
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon	-51.3%
Derry and Strabane	-52.0%
Mid Ulster	-61.7%
Northern Ireland	-46.5%

Source: Department for Communities Labour Market Insights Dashboard/NISRA

Table 3

4.3.2. Female Economic Inactivity

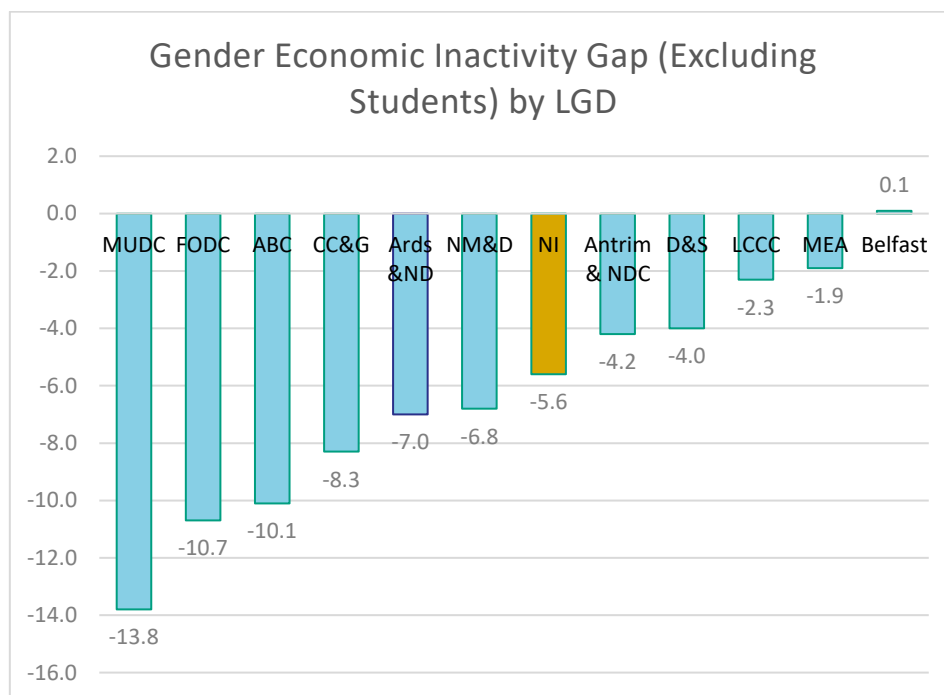
The gender economic inactivity gap in the ABC region has been consistently higher than the NI inactivity gap in every year since 2016 with the exception of 2018. This means that the area consistently performs poorly with regard to Female Economic Inactivity. Furthermore, the statistical analysis showed the gap is intensifying over time. The most recently published data (2021) shows that the gender inactivity gap in ABC (-10.1%) is almost double the NI level of -5.6%.



Source: Department for Communities Labour Market Insights Dashboard/NISRA

Figure 10

The ABC local government district currently ranks third lowest performing of all local government districts in NI in terms of gender economic inactivity* gap based on 2021 data excluding the student population.



Source: Department for Communities Labour Market Insights Dashboard/NISRA

Figure 11

4.3.3. Economic Inactivity by Age

Previous analysis shows there is a **higher** proportion of students and carers in the ABC region compared to the NI average. An examination of the age profile of the Economically Inactive demographic group reveals that a slightly higher proportion of the economically inactive are 16 to 24 year-olds. The vast majority of this cohort are likely to be students. An examination of the NEET rate over the period 2017-

2021 which measures the proportion of young people (aged 16-24) who are Not in education (NEET), employment or training shows that the ABC region ranks mid-table. The area has a NEET rate for that period of 10.9% which matches the overall rate for NI exactly⁵. A significantly higher proportion of 35 to 49 year -olds are economically inactive in the ABC region. This negative trend reduces the economic contribution of this prime working-age group.

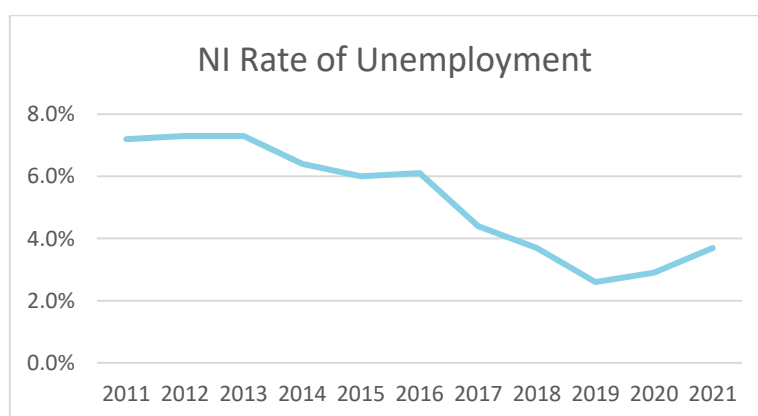
Figure 12

	NI	ABC	ABC:NI
16 to 24	31.7%	32.4%	-0.6%
25 to 34	12.1%	8.8%	3.2%
35 to 49	16.2%	20.6%	-4.4%
50 to 64	40.0%	38.2%	1.8%

A data development need was identified in relation to this cohort during the Outcomes Based Accountability™ assessment, as the LMP would like to have a better understanding of the composition of this group. It is probable that these circumstances and those outlined in the Female Economic Inactivity section above are linked *in part* to the high cost and/or availability of childcare in this region as evidenced by the NI Childcare Survey (See section 4.8 for further details). The demands of family life are likely to be just one factor contributing to the economic inactivity within this age group and amongst females. There is a need for further analysis and profiling to better understand the reasons behind this trend.

4.4. Unemployment

The unemployment rate (16 and over) for NI for 2021 was estimated at 3.7% by the NISRA Labour Force Survey published recently. This represents an increase of 0.8 percentage points (pps) over the year and a decrease of 3.5 pps over the decade. Headline rates of unemployment in Northern Ireland have seen a general decline between 2013 (when the rate stood at 7.3%) and the lowest point in 2019, the rate has increased over the last two years, but it still low compared with historic figures (NISRA).



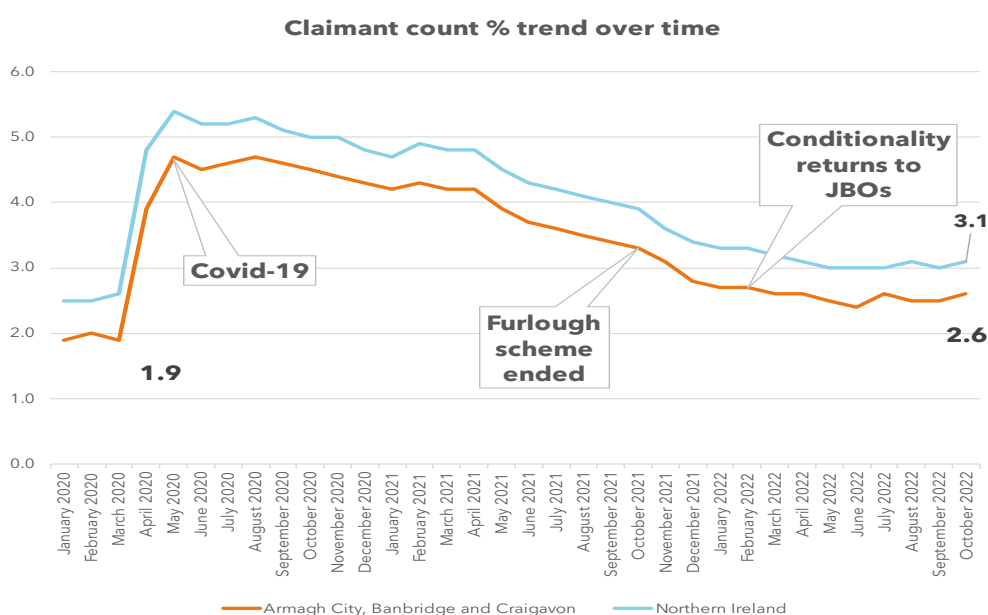
Source: NISRA

Figure 13

⁵ Source: DfC Labour Market Insights Dashboard.

In total 730 redundancies were confirmed across NI during 2022, the total for the ABC region was 30. These are the lowest figures for redundancies recorded in this time series (NISRA).

Similar to many other council regions the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic saw the number of claimants increase exponentially in the ABC area during March and April 2020. The pandemic caused a 240% rise in the levels of claimants in the Borough and the trends show that while there has been a significant recovery in the local labour market, levels of claimants has not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels. The ending of the furlough scheme in September 2022, had no negative impact on claimant numbers which continued to fall. In recent times, recovery has plateaued and the claimant count in October 2022 remains 32% higher than the pre-pandemic count in March 2020⁶.



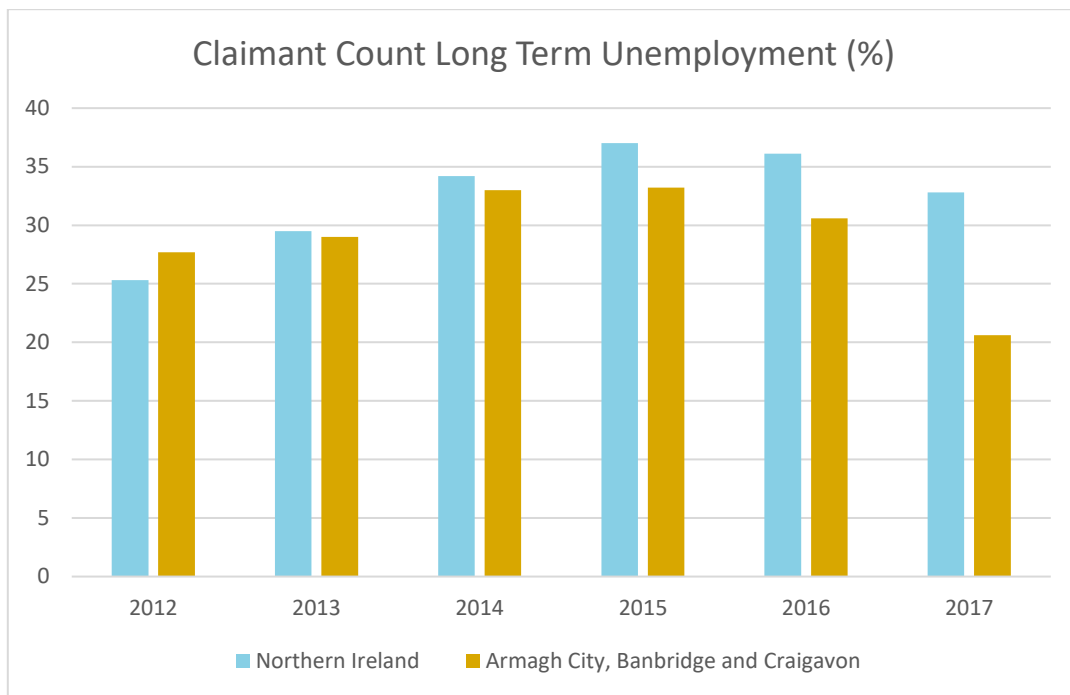
Source: NISRA

Figure 14

On a positive note, this trend mirrors closely the overall recovery pattern for Northern Ireland and ABC’s claimant count is consistently lower than the NI average. These trends show that the economic recovery from the pandemic is not fully complete. This group are relatively close to the labour market having been employed until recently. The trends indicate more action is needed to enable progress to resume for this portion of claimants. The line graph below illustrates the change over time.

Unfortunately, statistical analysis of levels of long -term Unemployment within the borough was hindered by the lack of availability of data on NISRA for years following 2017. This is an issue which is currently being addressed. However the data available for the borough shows a positive trend in which levels of long term unemployment have been consistently lower than the NI average since 2013 having been consistently higher than the NI average from 2010 to 2012.

⁶ The October 2022 claimant count (3,445) remains 32% higher than the pre-pandemic count in March 2020 (2,610).

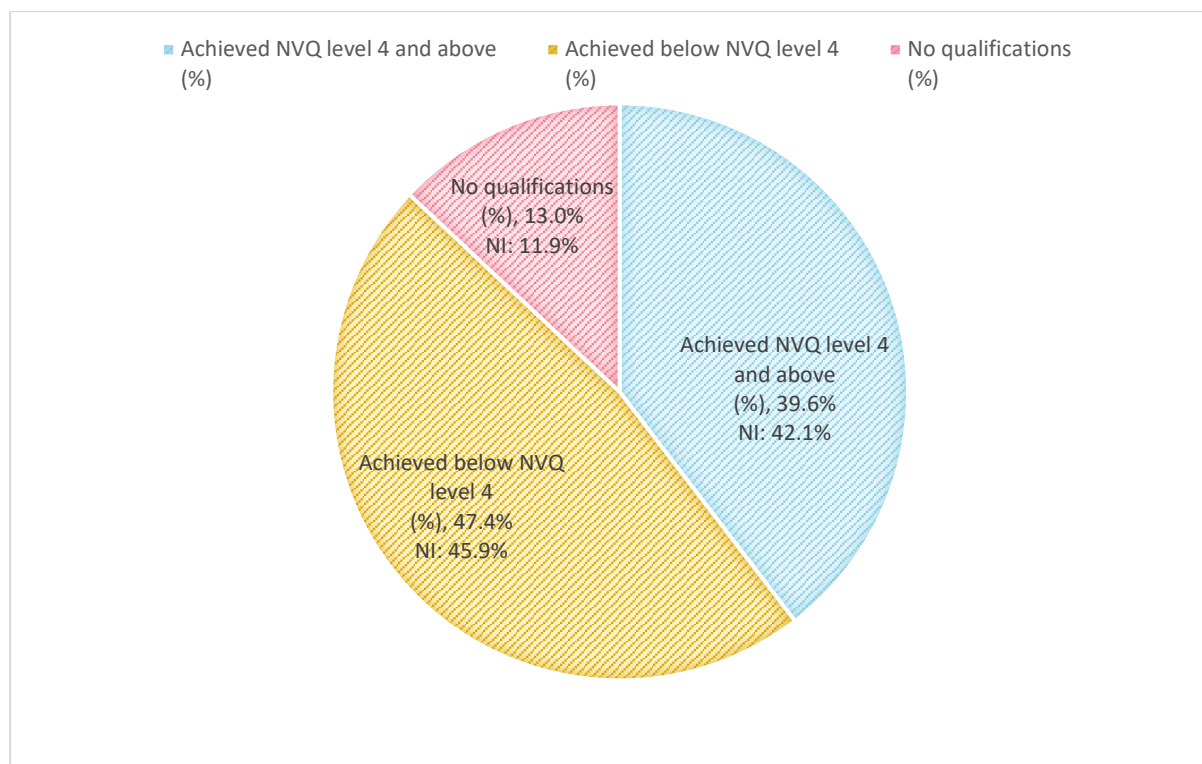


Source: NISRA

Figure 15

4.5. Educational attainment and lifelong learning in the ABC region

The desktop statistical audit also highlighted that the educational attainment levels in the area fall below the NI average. The chart below illustrates the level of qualifications held by the working age population of ABC in general.



Source: Labour Force Survey

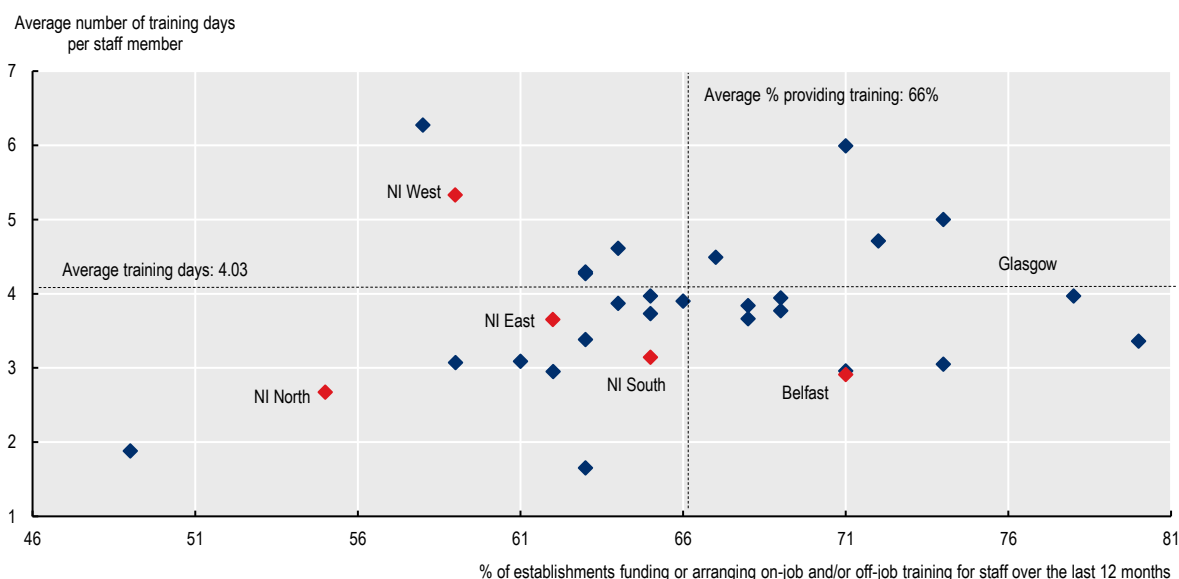
Figure 16

The percentage of ABC school leavers achieving 5 or more GCSES grades A* - C is 90.5%, this is the lowest attainment percentage of all local government districts in Northern Ireland. The NI average figure is 92.8%. Fermanagh and Omagh are the highest performing area in this regard with 95.8% achieving 5 or more passes. Similarly, ABC has the lowest percentage of young people leaving school with 2 + A Levels compared with other council areas. In ABC, 50.7% of school leavers achieve this level of qualification, which is well below the NI average of 60.5% and significantly behind the highest performing LGD which is Fermanagh and Omagh (68.6%). The number of school leavers in the ABC area moving directly into employment is lower than in any other local government area and that has been consistently the case since 2017/2018. It should be noted that the vast majority of school leavers move into Further and Higher Education and the percentage of school leavers moving into unemployment in this area is low (3%) and declining⁷.

The OECD Skills Strategy NI 2020 report found persistent challenges remain for NI which will present increasing difficulties with time. In addition to poor economic inactivity and labour productivity rates, a key finding was the skills levels of adults in Northern Ireland are lower than those in Ireland, the UK and most other OECD countries. Participation in formal and non-formal adult education was lower in Northern Ireland and lower participation rates are largely among male and lower - educated individuals. The report focussed on analysing NI's performance as a region rather than at local level. However, it did include the following analysis showing training provision and intensity by NI region.

Figure 17: Training Provision and intensity across the UK regions 2017

⁷ All data cited in relation to school leavers is derived from the Dept for Communities Labour Market Insights dashboard and relates to 2021 academic year unless otherwise stated.



Source: OECD Skills Strategy 2020

Figure 17

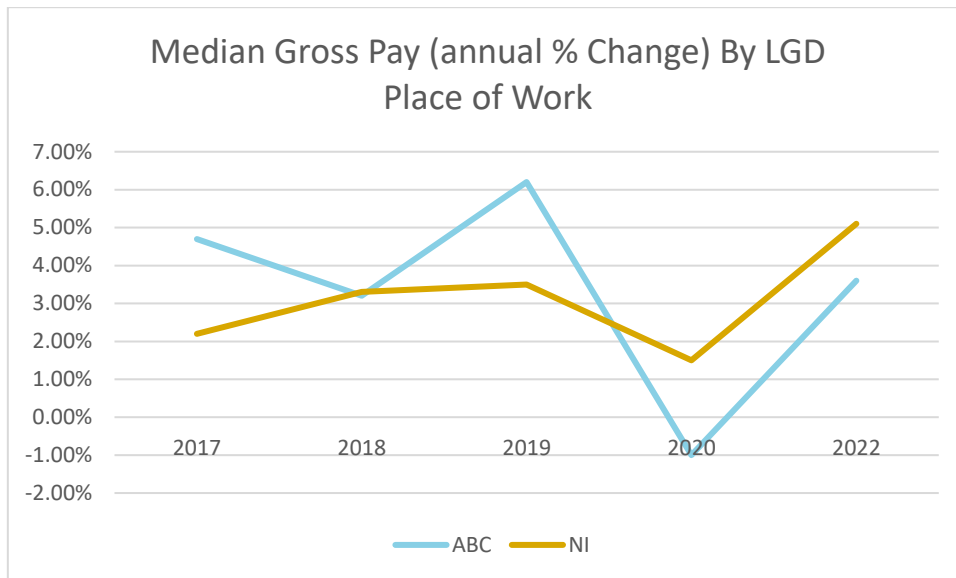
Recommendations from the strategy included: the establishment of a ring-fenced fund to subsidise the provision of training for adult learners; and ensuring sufficient provision of management and leadership programmes for micro and small businesses by introducing new programmes or expanding existing ones.

4.6. Labour Supply Misalignment

The Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings shows that salaries in the ABC region have historically tracked the NI average but have started to plateau in the last two years. There is also evidence of a misalignment between salary levels of those living in the borough and those travelling here to work. With higher earnings being achieved by those leaving the area for work.

The line graph below tracks the annual percentage change in median gross pay in the region for jobs located within the local government district⁸. It is evident that the annual change in pay levels in the ABC region is now falling below the NI average. The rate of change is far from stable but it demonstrates that in previous years the percentage change in pay in this region had been tracking above the NI average. This graph does not show the annual percentage pay changes experienced by **residents** in the borough; it is worth noting that those rates are also now tracking well below average.

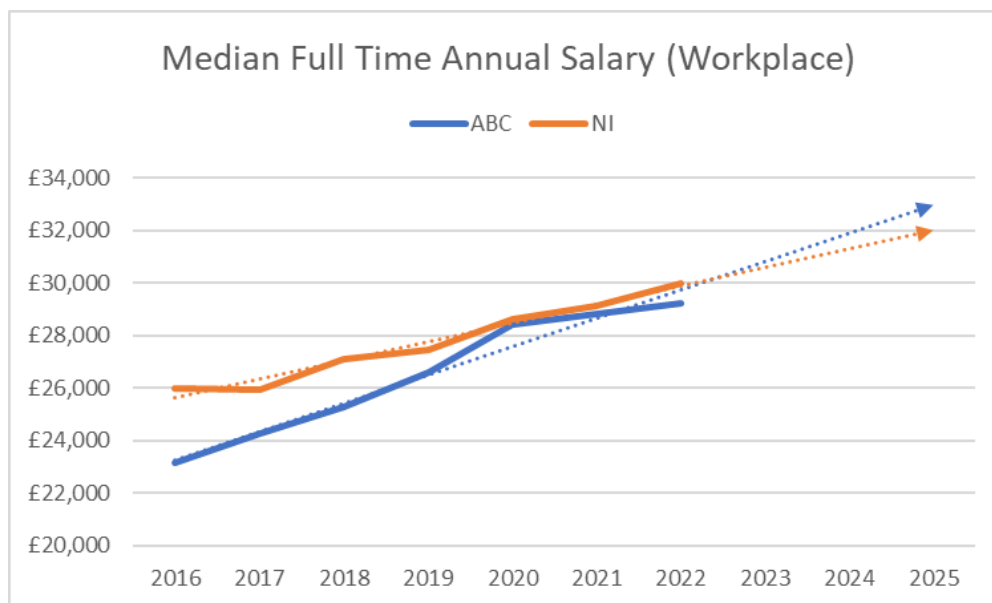
⁸ Dataset for 2021 is not available for this measure – explanation not given.



Source: ASHE Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings

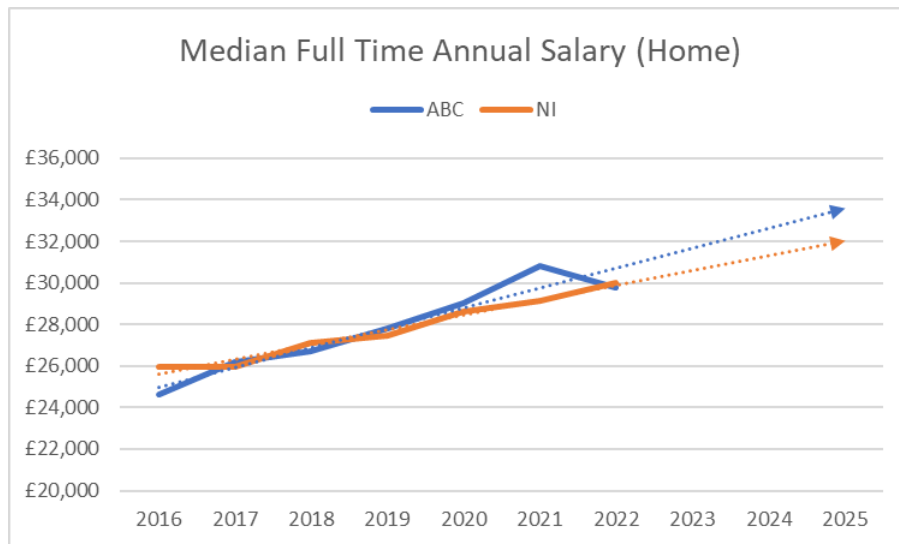
Figure 18

The following charts illustrate the median full-time salary achieved in the ABC region by firstly; those attending workplaces in the ABC region and secondly by those residing in the ABC region. The misalignment between the two indicates that those leaving the area to work are achieving higher median salaries than those attending workplaces in this region. This endorses the recommendations of the Community Plan for the area and feedback received during the recent consultation with stakeholders which expressed the view that better quality jobs are needed in the ABC region.



Source: Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings

Figure 19



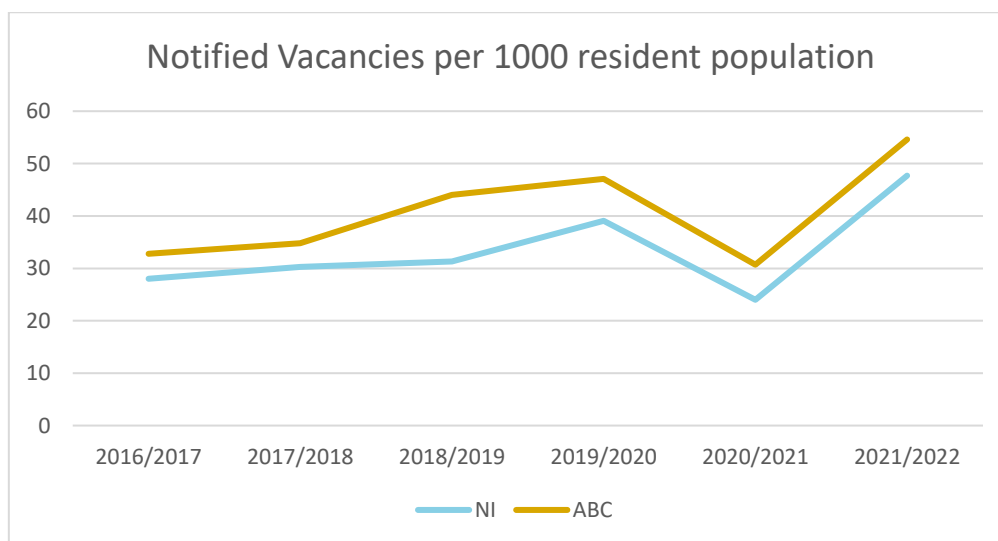
Source: Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings

Figure 20

4.7. Notified Vacancies

The demand for workers in Northern Ireland is strong and this is demonstrated by the sharp rise in vacancies notified to DfC (Jobs and Benefits Offices) across NI in the 2021/2022 year. In total 91,087 vacancies were notified to DfC last year almost double the 2020/2021 figure which was 45,784. In 2021/2022 the number of notified vacancies in the ABC district was 12,042 again almost doubling the figure for the previous year (6758). Current levels of notified vacancies are now higher than at any time previously across the time series.

When the number of notified vacancies is considered (with adjustments to account for varying sizes of population), it is apparent that the demand in the ABC area for jobs exceeds the relative demand across Northern Ireland as shown in the line graph below. Labour markets are classified as ‘tight’ or ‘slack’ when relative demand is very high or low. The graph illustrates the tightness of the labour market which was the dominant theme of the consultation recently conducted with employers in this area.



Source: DfC Labour Market Insights Dashboard

Figure 21

4.8. Access to Childcare

The economic impact of childcare matters because it sustains local economies. In order for parents to enter the workforce or to remain employed, access to childcare provision is essential. The NI Childcare Survey produced annually by Employers For Childcare NI identifies growing issues with the high cost and the availability of childcare in NI. In ABC, 68% of parents interviewed for the 2021 NI childcare survey feel there is insufficient childcare in the area. The report also highlights the impact the COVID pandemic has had on the childcare industry showing the number of childcare providers now reporting financial losses or having closed altogether.

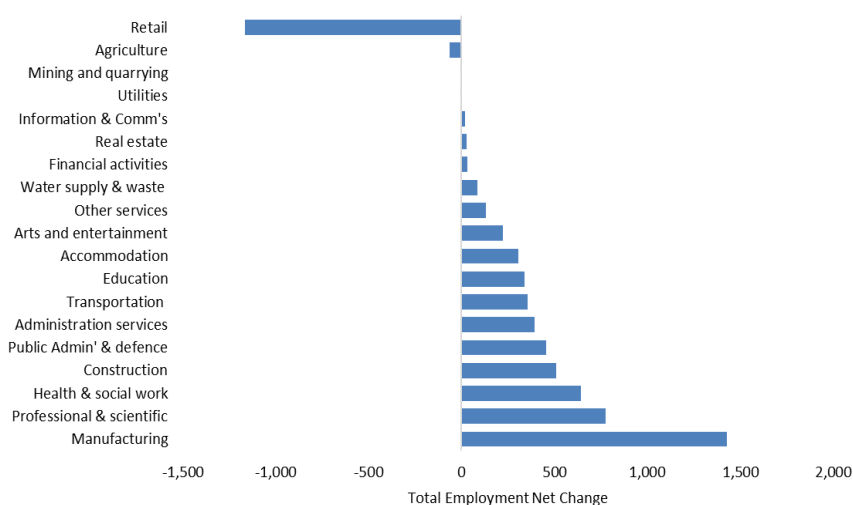
The average weekly cost of a childcare place in County Armagh is high at £172, second only to Antrim (£174). By comparison, the average cost in County Tyrone was £150 per week. The report records the number of families with a stay-at-home parent annually, this trend is increasing sharply since the pandemic and continuing to rise. The number of families with a stay-at-home parent increased from 3% in 2019 to 7% in 2020 and has now reached 9% in 2021. The 2021 report showed that in 73% of these instances the stay-at-home parent was a mother.

The high cost and /or availability of childcare are likely to be a significant factor contributing to economic inactivity within the female population and within certain age demographics in the region. Other parents have likely chosen to step back from the workforce due to quality-of-life considerations during the recent COVID pandemic.

4.9. Future Needs

Socio Economic forecasting carried out by the Ulster University Economic Policy Centre (UUEPC) for the southern region of Northern Ireland demonstrated that employment in the retail and agriculture industries will continue to decline while the most significant rises in employment will be derived from the professional, scientific and manufacturing industries.

It is important to note that the Southern region of Northern Ireland was defined for the purposes of this study as comprising both the ABC and Newry Mourne and Down Council regions.

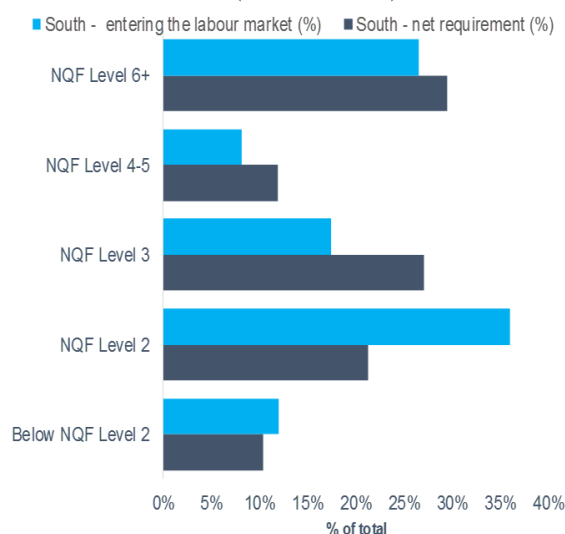


Source: NISRA (BRES) and Provisional UUEPC Local Model Forecasting Spring 2022

Figure 22

In the region, UUEPC highlights a continuing shortage of people with mid-level qualifications (NQF level 3-5), as illustrated in the graphic below.

Net requirement vs qualification profile (NQF) of labour market entrants, South (2020-2028)



Source: UUEPC Future Skills Needs Southern Area

Figure 23

An over supply of low-level skills (NQF level 2 and below) is indicated as demand for this skillset is projected to make up 32% of labour force requirements in this area over the next decade but 48% of candidates entering the labour market are expected to fall into this category over the same period.

According to profiling data provided by UUEPC to Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council in March 2022, ABC is forecasted to gain an additional 7,700 jobs by 2030. The Manufacturing and Professional & Scientific sectors are forecast to contribute 2,400 additional jobs between them by 2030. Retail is set to lose approximately 1,100 jobs due to the changing nature of the sector and pressures on the high street ICT is expected to remain a smaller sector than average, whilst opportunities will continue to grow in the expanding transport and storage industry.

The picture in terms of future demand (data for ABC and NMD) by qualification level shows high demand for degree level qualifications among employers, with highest demand for lower skill levels (L3 and below) in Wholesale & Retail, Restaurants & Hotels and Admin & Support Services. Crucially only 10% of the net requirement is identified as being below NQF L2.

4.10. Conclusion

The LMP have sought to ensure that the priorities identified for action reflect accurately the prevailing labour market conditions of the local area and are intelligence led. The statistical audit highlighted key areas where the ABC labour market is underperforming relative to other districts and also areas where Northern Ireland as a region needs to make significant strides to improve employability outcomes for sections of the populations such as those with disabilities. Key statistics have been selected by the LMP for analysis in the Turning The Curve exercise and these are set out in section 6.

5. Consultation and Engagement with Stakeholders

5.1. Consultation scope

In developing its LMP Action Plan for 2023/2024, ABC LMP has been keen to ensure meaningful engagement with a wide range of stakeholders able to offer useful opinion and perspective on the employability, skills and labour market priorities and needs in the local area.

In the course of developing this Action Plan, a programme of engagement was rolled out to include community and voluntary stakeholders, post primary schools and businesses. The programme of engagement prioritised meaningful engagement with only 4% of participating organisations engaging online, the remainder engaged through a series of consultation events held across the borough, through one-to-one telephone interviews and zoom interviews. This gave participating organisations the chance to speak directly to the project management team. Findings are based on the experiences of employers at the establishment/site level. Interviews were conducted with the most senior person with responsibility for human resources and/or skills development.

The consultation took place from early November 2022 and closed on 21st December 2022. Consultation engagement events conducted as part of this process are listed in Table 4 below:

Table 4		
Consultation Engagement Events		
Event	Venue	Date
Local Enterprise Agencies Stakeholder Event	Virtual	15 th November
Post Primary Schools Stakeholder Event	Virtual	15 th November
Local Business Stakeholder Event	Banbridge Town Hall	16 th November
Community and Voluntary Stakeholders Event	Virtual	22 nd November
Local Business Stakeholder Event	Armagh Palace Demesne (Council)	23 rd November
Community and Voluntary Stakeholders Event	Virtual	25 th November
Local Business Stakeholder Event	Craigavon Civic Centre	28 th November

In total, 250 organisations were directly invited to take part in the consultation including 35 community and voluntary sector organisations and 17 post primary schools. 82 local organisations participated representing a broad range of sectors and types to ensure the LMP Action Planning process was robust and secured input from a broad range of perspectives. The engagement with local community and voluntary stakeholders was also extensive. Supported employment programmes are delivered by a myriad of stakeholders in Northern Ireland with wide regional variations, the input from community and voluntary providers was important in terms of understanding the baseline provision and the gaps identified by local current service providers. Figure 24 below summarises the key industry sectors

which participated in the business stakeholder consultation, while figure 25 illustrates graphically their scale.

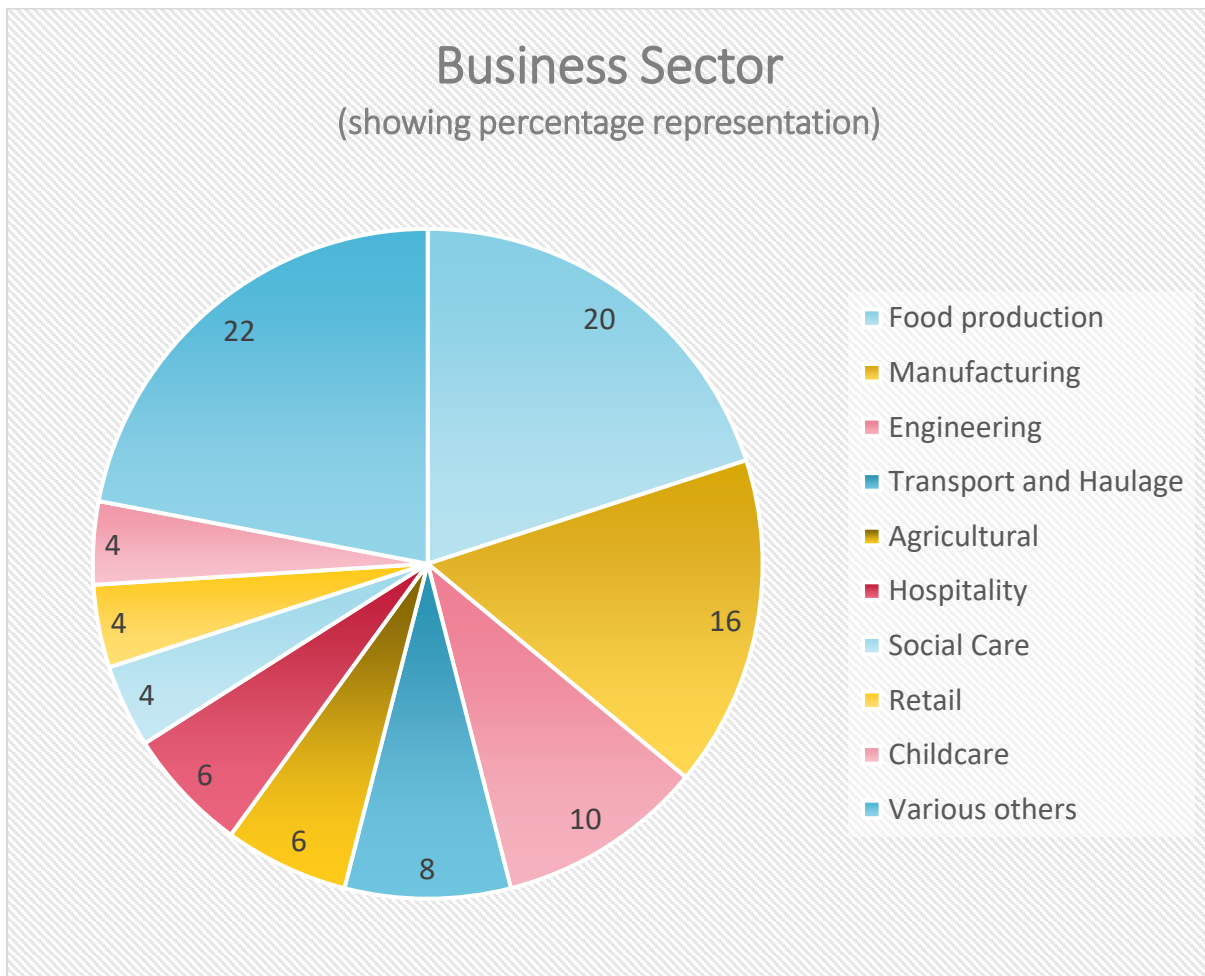


Figure 24

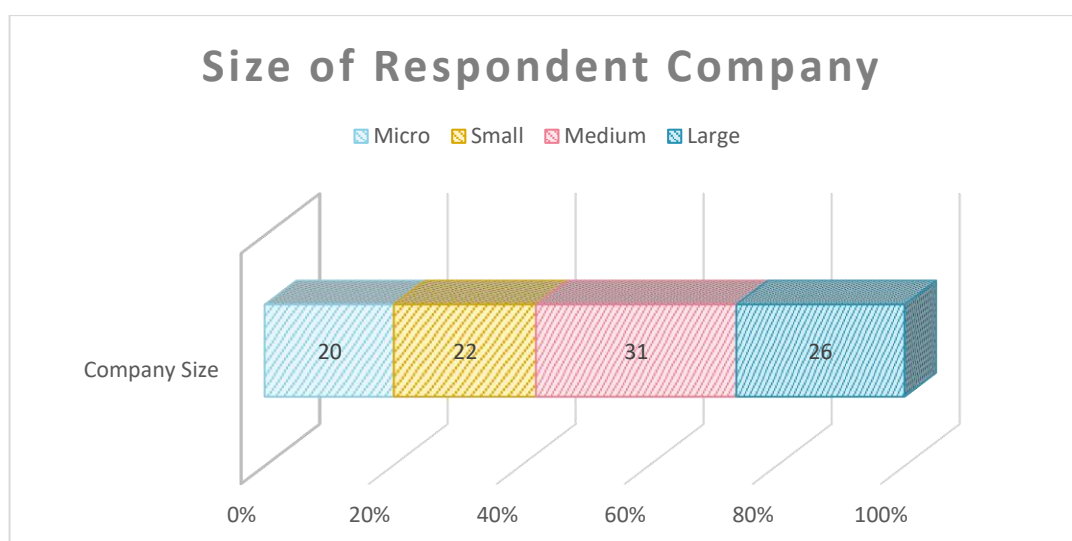


Figure 24

5.2. Key messages from stakeholder engagement

5.2.1. *Feedback from ABC employers regarding confidence in business financial position and the labour market*

The findings from the consultation produced some notable results in terms of employers' experience of the labour market. 64% of companies reported that they are currently experiencing difficulties attracting staff generally and expect this to continue over the next three years. In terms of entry level staff, 50% of respondents found their ability to attract entry level staff was declining. The highest levels of shortage were recorded for skilled and experienced staff with 67% of business respondents stating that their ability to attract these workers was decreasing.

The outlook of businesses in terms of their financial position was more positive with 57% of companies interviewed expecting their sales to increase over the next three years and the remaining 43% expecting sales to plateau.

In relation to staff training, 87% of business respondents reported that the amount of time and investment required for training staff was increasing and would continue to rise. This is at odds with recent Employer Pulse Surveys and Employers Skills Surveys conducted across the UK in 2021 and 2019 respectively which had indicated that the proportion of employers who had arranged staff training was falling. Many local employers interviewed attributed the increased need for investment in training to the shortage of skilled workers available in the local labour market.

5.2.2. *Identified Skills shortages*

Some of the most commonly stated difficulties being experienced by employers centred on skills and labour shortages in their respective industries. As noted above 67% of businesses interviewed found recruiting skilled workers challenging. Skills gaps identified included:

- Welders/Fabricators
- Refrigeration Engineers
- Construction workers
- Childcare workers
- Mechanics
- HGV Mechanics
- Carers
- Chefs
- Drivers (All categories)

Businesses were also experiencing shortages of staff for entry level positions including:

- General labourers
- Warehousing staff
- Administrators
- General operatives
- Service staff
- Production operatives

While 50% of businesses found recruiting unskilled/ entry level staff challenging, it is important to note that some of these businesses were experiencing acute shortages. For example, one local fruit producer had 30 vacancies for production operatives on their factory floor at time of interview with an obvious impact on production. This is recorded as a single business experiencing difficulties recruiting entry level staff which doesn't truly reflect the scale of the problem and there were a number of local factories and manufacturers surveyed in this unfortunate position.

5.2.3. *Suggested Interventions*

Businesses were asked for their suggestions in terms of local employability programmes which could benefit their respective industries. Stated constraints included a one year delivery timeframe and limited budget of up to £100,000. Our responses from ABC employers included a number of recurring themes which are important to note.

Repeated suggestions included the following (it should be noted that some suggested interventions are beyond the scope of a one year programme):

- CSR Card Training (11% of respondents)
- Warehousing/ Builders Merchants type programme to include Health & Safety, Customer Service, Forklift training and Manual Handling (22% of respondents from various sectors)
- Training for Mechanics 4%/ HGV Mechanics 6%
- Taster Course in childcare aimed to showcase the value of career in this industry including special needs training, first aid for children, play work and a work placement (7%). This was suggested to counteract a perceived decline in the appeal of this sector relative to other sectors such as the beauty industry. The local FE College have noted a relative decline in enrolments for childcare.
- Welders/Fabricators training schemes (9%)
- Refrigeration engineering training in response to acute shortages locally (4%)
- Training for the social care industry to include, first aid, manual handling, dementia training and a work placement.
- Training for administrators (7%) with suggestions including IT skills, estimation, finance and stock taking.
- Training for businesses regarding the administration required to bring in migrant workers from overseas.
- Programmes for hospitality including an employer accreditation scheme, food hygiene training, customer service and barista training. Employers perceived the sector to have a negative image particularly in the aftermath of the pandemic and consider urgent steps need to be taken to address this.
- Customer Service and Retail training to support the retail sector including EPOS, stocktaking and customer service.
- Other specialist & niche requirements - Including MIG and TIG welding, welding automation, steel-milling, animal welfare training, animal husbandry, grain milling, AutoCAD, Revit and a myriad of other suggestions.

5.2.4. Employability support programmes

All businesses interviewed were asked about willingness and ability to support individuals facing barriers to employment. A portion of employers surveyed take steps to actively encourage those with disabilities to apply for their vacancies (15%) while 57% were open to recruiting those with disabilities where possible. Willingness to provide flexible working opportunities was also well supported by local employers with 26% of respondents actively promoting such opportunities and 46% willing to provide them where possible. Workers with low or no qualifications were welcomed actively by 53% of employers interviewed although it is worth noting that 13% of respondents had no positions on their payroll suitable for educational underachievers. The perceived barriers were highest for ex-offenders with only 4% of businesses actively encouraging applications from this group although 49% were open to recruiting those with previous convictions where possible. Figure 27 below illustrates the views expressed by business respondents in relation to employing individuals with perhaps greater needs for support.

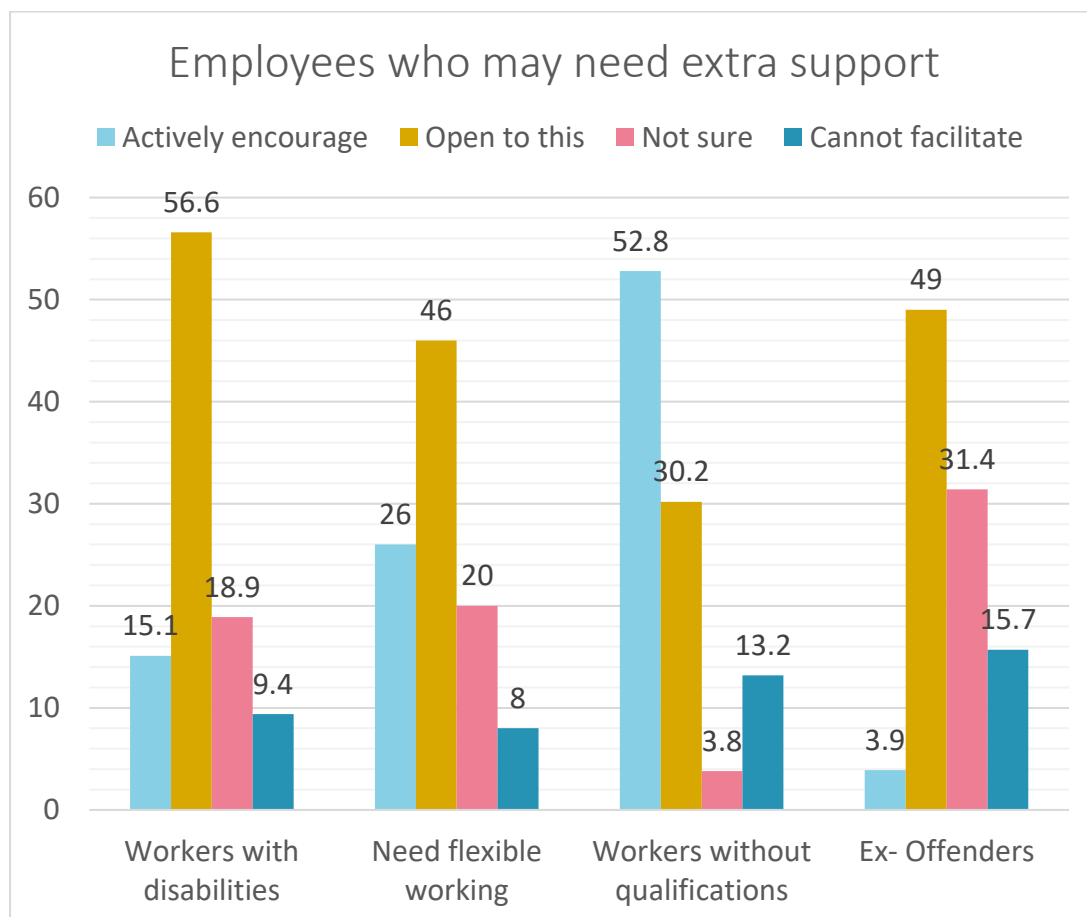


Figure 27

General awareness of current employability support schemes amongst employers was poor. A total of 63% of respondent businesses stated they were aware of Apprenticeships NI, while Job Match and Workable NI schemes had 14% and 29% awareness respectively. Generally, employers were not aware of the other

employability schemes e.g. Access to Work. This demonstrates a need for improved communication and promotion of existing employability schemes.

Employers also cite they have difficulty in understanding the make-up of the economically inactive and consider there is a need for further research to understand the skills, aspirations and challenges faced by key cohorts of ABC's economically inactive if tailored solutions are to be developed that promote and support access to employment.

5.2.5. Key Messages from Business Stakeholders

The vast majority of business stakeholders were interviewed via a one-to one telephone interview with the remainder predominantly attending in-person or virtual events. Just 4% of businesses submitted their feedback electronically. As part of the consultation all respondents were given the opportunity to express any general comments or concerns they had in relation to the labour market. The manner of the consultation undertaken allowed the project team to engage meaningfully with participants in this regard. Key comments from business respondents included:

- Need for support for businesses who are wishing to take on staff for the first-time regarding payroll, insurance and HR considerations. Businesses often take this step long after their initial start-up training and need support.
- Acute shortages of Refrigeration Engineers - which is '*ultimately going to force local businesses to close*'. Refrigeration Training programmes in Belfast and Enniskillen have closed and the only remaining training provision is in Lisburn. Armagh is perceived as the hub of the refrigeration industry in NI with 15 businesses operating in a cluster. The businesses who engaged with the consultation from this sector were deeply concerned that their businesses cannot meet demand or grow and will eventually close. Engineers who work in this sector earn significantly more per hour than college lecturers. Businesses suggest the problem stems from the inability of colleges to recruit skilled professionals to teach the course and the need to commit further resources if needed to sustain this profession and industry.
- Hospitality Industry needs support and an improved image. Suggestions included a select employer accreditation scheme, on-the-job training linked to hospitality qualifications. Hospitality programmes should be better promoted and receive more investment.
- Need for programmes to support women to set up their own business which can be a favourable option for women with caring responsibilities who need to work from home or have flexible hours.
- Furthermore, respondents identified a need to support women returning to work once their children have started school. Suggested programme content included addressing gaps in the CV, confidence training and 'Zoom' interview techniques.
- There was a need identified for more programmes focusing on training welders and fabricators in the local area.

- There are problems associated with a perceived lack of life-skills among young new recruits and apprentices which has increased since the pandemic.
- Some business respondents highlighted the need for more young people to study science subjects in school.
- Need expressed by some sectors for more access to entry level workers. This was a recurring theme amongst those businesses with acute shortages of entry level staff e.g. food producers and manufacturers. The need was reiterated by some industry umbrella organisations interviewed. Many industries clearly need access to unskilled and semi-skilled labour in addition to highly skilled employees and are struggling to recruit.
- Businesses also highlighted a need for support programmes teaching English for non-English speaking workers once they take up employment.
- Training support is needed for employers regarding the use of social media to engage with potential staff, including the different platforms for different age-groups and how to create more effective content. This was also suggested by some community sector organisations in their consultation interviews.
- Businesses from the Childcare industry perceive a decline in the appeal of the sector in comparison to other industries such as Beauty. They would like to see taster programmes which showcase the value of childcare as a career to counteract this trend. Childcare providers have also commented that women returners to the labour market are interested in entering this profession. However funding is only available for those under the age of 25 to enroll for the legally required qualifications. The cost of childcare qualifications and the requirement to self-fund can be an insurmountable barrier for some women returners. Some respondents noted that the skillsets of mature women who had experience of raising children had particularly high value in these workplaces. It is worth noting that the childcare sector is recognised as a key driver for regional economies, with an impact which reaches beyond the numbers employed to include the general workforce dependency on childcare provision.

5.2.6. Key Messages from Community and Voluntary sector stakeholders

As part of the consultation all Community & Voluntary sector (CVS) respondents were given the opportunity to express any general comments or concerns they had in relation to the labour market. This year, the consultation with the Community and Voluntary sector were overshadowed by the fast-approaching deadline for the cessation of European Social Funding (ESF) in Northern Ireland which is explored in the following section.

As many of this respondent group are supported-employment providers, a key purpose of this engagement is to identify gaps in provision and ensure there is no duplication of existing supports. In addition, respondents provided important feedback relating to the needs of young people, women, those with disabilities,

those living in disadvantaged areas and migrant workers. Useful suggestions for interventions were also supplied by this group, many of which have helped to shape the content of this plan. Full details of the findings of the Community and Voluntary Sector consultation are attached at Appendix A.

5.2.7. Cessation of European Social Funds as a key risk to LMP outcomes

Concerns were raised in almost every community and voluntary stakeholder interview regarding the cessation of European Social Funds (ESF) funding in March 2023. This theme dominated the consultations with the community and voluntary sector. At the end of March 2023, the last remaining EU funding for employability supports in Northern Ireland will cease, which means employment support organisations reliant on this funding are now facing a cliff edge. Pressing concerns from community stakeholders fell into a number of categories. Firstly, Jobs and Benefits offices deliver their prescribed services but don't have the capacity to 'hand- hold people' and deliver intensive support for those who need it. The system relies on ESF funded partners to provide intensive supports to disadvantaged individuals on referral. One stakeholder remarked *'One way or another, the support is needed and the need is not going to go away. Our regional employment support services will need to provide it'*.

Secondly, many stakeholders highlighted the risk of an adverse impact on economic activity rates if alternative funding is not made available to sustain the depth and breadth of interventions currently funded by ESF. The Shared Prosperity Fund was initially identified as a replacement for ESF funds. Stakeholders are concerned that the funding available is not sufficient to replace ESF funding even if the supported employment sector were to receive all of it, which is unlikely. It is not clear that replacement funding will be in place by the end of March 2023 when ESF funded organisations will lose their core funding stream. CVS stakeholders report that talented individuals are leaving employment support organisations for more secure roles elsewhere. The majority of stakeholder organisations interviewed were preparing to issue redundancy notices to staff in January 2023 and close programmes at the end of the financial year. Understandably, these concerns dominated our consultation discussions with many CVS organisations at this time.

As current ESF funding far exceeds the budgets currently proposed for LMP activity, the loss of this level of supported employment provision should be noted as a key risk to LMP's ability to deliver improvement in employability outcomes for Northern Ireland populations in a post-ESF environment.

6. Summary of Thematic Areas and Priority Actions

A cross cutting theme was identified which underpins the core foundation of the LMP Action Plan.

- Deprivation and social Inclusion

As part of the development of each theme and set of proposed actions consideration was given to how this cross-cutting theme would be progressed. This identification was carried through the LMP action planning process. This allowed the partnership to ensure that the theme of deprivation and social inclusion remained integral to all actions taken and enabled contributions to be tracked against them.

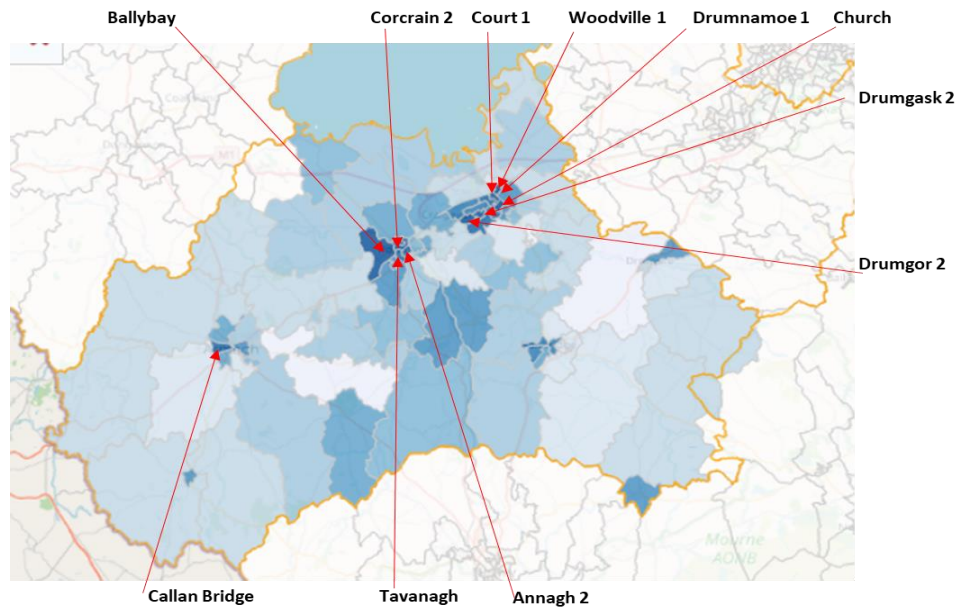
As a result of the Strategic Assessment the following themes have been identified as local priorities:

- Economic Shock
- Economic Inactivity
- Disability
- Skilled Labour Supply

Following a comprehensive analysis of the local labour market, using available local data from the sources detailed in the Strategic Assessment, with strategic stakeholders including local businesses, the Jobs and Benefits Offices (JBOs) and local community representatives, the Partnership has agreed that the above listed themes are the most critical population groups in need of support in order to tackle the most pressing labour market challenges in the ABC Council area.

6.1. Deprived Communities and Inclusion

There are persistent challenges facing some deprived areas in the ABC region with residents experiencing multiple disadvantages. Ten super output areas (SOA's) rank in the top 100 most deprived areas for education, skills & training - mainly in 2 key clusters. While eight SOA's rank in the top 100 most deprived areas in NI across the multiple measures. Eight of ABCs Super output areas also feature in the top 100 most deprived in terms of income level. Education, Skills & Training is the weakest area for ABC on the deprivation index. The areas of deprivation and the clusters formed are shown on the graphic below.



The LMP are keenly aware that participants from these priority areas will be disproportionately impacted by the current cost of living crisis. The LMP aspire to have participants from these SOA's prioritized for support across all programmes offered by the LMP during the 2023-2024 year, meaning choice and opportunity are not limited to one or two interventions. Awareness raising activities will be conducted within these communities regarding the programmes available. Local community groups and trusted intermediaries will be engaged where needed to build awareness. Additional supports will be put in place for participants from these SOA's when enrolled on LMP programmes such as additional mentoring hours, childcare support, support with cost of travel, lunches and so on as appropriate. The number of participants enrolled on each programme from these super output areas will be monitored and evaluated.

6.2. Turning the Curve: % LMP members who feel the local LMP is making a positive contribution and delivering effectively (LMP)

The ABC Labour Market Partnership (LMP) was established in February 2021 and has since evolved to encompass the core partner recommendations made by the Department for Communities

The ABC LMP has developed into a dynamic partnership based on good working relationships and committed to making a positive difference through a collaborative approach. A collective leadership approach has been adopted with effort and commitment in evidence from all partners. The partnership operates with a culture of mutual respect as per the conduct requirements and is led by a Chair and Vice chair, presently Head of Economic Development ABC Council and Head of Business Engagement Southern Regional College.

LMP members engaged effectively throughout the action planning, turning the curve and implementation phases and are responsible for developing this LMP Action Plan. Whilst the extent to which the LMP members consider the local LMPO is making a contribution has not been formally measured, anecdotally the culture, ethos and work ethic of the group is currently very positive. The LMP will commence formal measurement of its contribution from a 2023 baseline.

<p>1. Understanding the baseline.</p> <p>INDICATOR: % LMP members who feel the local LMP is making a positive contribution and delivering effectively (LMP)</p> <p>ABC LMP have not formally recorded this indicator in the past. A baseline figure will be established in 2023.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">% LMP members who feel the local LMP is making a positive contribution and delivering effectively</p>	<p>3. What can be done?</p> <p>Ensure the LMP Action Plans are focused on the clear priority needs for the ABC region.</p> <p>Ensure the Action Plans are fully implemented and meet their expected Outcomes Based targets.</p> <p>Survey the LMP members each year to monitor the % LMP members who feel the local LMP is making a positive contribution and delivering effectively</p>
<p>What factors are causing the problem?</p> <p>Lack of formal monitoring of this indicator to date means the LMP does not have a baseline measure to comment on.</p>	<p>4. How do we measure success?</p> <p>Increasing % LMP members who feel the local LMP is making a positive contribution and delivering effectively</p>

6.3. Turning the Curve: Economic Shock

There is strong demand for labour in ABC with many employer vacancies currently unfilled, and yet job claimant levels in the ABC (and across the UK as a whole) have not returned to pre-pandemic levels. In the past year recovery has plateaued and without further intervention, the number of claimants may not return to pre-Covid levels. Data demonstrates that the labour market has not recovered from the economic shock caused by the pandemic. To bolster economic recovery, the LMP must support actions that will support claimants back into the labour force. This group are relatively close to the labour market having been employed prior to the pandemic. It is widely recognised that the longer unemployment persists the more difficult it is to address.

<p>1. Understanding the baseline.</p> <p>INDICATOR: % Claimant Count Annual Averages ABC (NISRA LMI Portal)</p> <p>ABCs claimant count is lower than the NI average but it tracks a nearly identical trend to the NI claimant count showing that the recovery is not fully complete in this part of the UK. The October 2022 claimant count is 32% higher than the pre-pandemic count in March 2020 in spite of strong industry demand for workers.</p> <p>*With reference to the Turning the Curve exercises, the term “Now” refers to the assessment of the most recently available data made at the time of the review</p>	<p>3. What can be done?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Vocational training interventions to support unemployed to re-skill and refresh their work experience -Sectors should be aligned to those identified with most employment need during consultation for example: Warehousing & Building Retail Administration Dispensary Green Growth Fabrication Childcare -Childcare support and part time job opportunities should be offered -Training programme for first time employers re: recruitment, payroll, HR, legal and insurance considerations.
<p>What factors are causing the problem?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Covid-19 may have caused people to re-evaluate work- life priorities. -Older workers have opted to take early retirement. -Reduced availability and higher cost of childcare may have increased barriers -Existing vacancies may be perceived as unattractive by potential applicants. - Employers delay taking on staff for the first time due to lack of knowledge. 	<p>4. How do we measure success?</p> <p>Reduction % claimant count.</p>

6.4. Turning the Curve: Economic Inactivity

The overall trend in economic inactivity rate in the ABC region has been improving over time.

That said, the labour market in the ABC region consistently performs poorly with regard to some cohorts within the economically inactive population e.g. Female economic inactivity. The ABC local government district (LGD) currently ranks third lowest of all LGD’s in terms of the gender economic inactivity gap (excluding students) based on 2021.

The LMP had identified this issue in the Action Plan for 2022-2023 but due to the reduced availability of funding the planned intervention or this population group did not go ahead. In focusing on improving the % working Age Economic Inactivity Rate, the LMP are particularly keen to support actions that will support women who wish to return to the labour force after a period of absence.

<p>1. Understanding the baseline.</p> <p>INDICATOR: % Economic Inactivity Rate ABC (Excluding Students)- (NISRA LMI Portal)</p> <p>The economic inactivity rate in ABC has shown consistent improvement over the last five years, but opportunities exist to drive a faster pace of improvement by focusing on underlying population cohorts who are under-represented in the workplace.</p> <p>In this regard, the gender economic inactivity gap in the ABC region has been consistently higher than the NI inactivity gap in every year since 2016 with the exception of 2018. Furthermore, the statistical analysis showed the gap is intensifying over time. The most recently published data (2021) shows that the gender inactivity gap in ABC (-10.1%) is almost double the NI level of -5.6%.</p> <p>*With reference to the Turning the Curve exercises, the term “Now” refers to the assessment of the most recently available data made at the time of the review</p>	<p>3. What can be done?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A women returners programme to support women ready to return to work. Offer intensive support - 22 weeks programme with 8-12 week placement. To include: mentoring, CV building, addressing gaps in CV confidence building, zoom interview training. -Self-employment programme focussing on women, as some women need more flexible options. -Noted that childcare should be provided. -Part time work opportunities and placements given some of the decline in female economic activity is linked to quality-of-life issues.
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<p>2. What factors are causing the problem? -Covid-19 may have caused women to re-evaluate work: life priorities -NI Childcare survey shows the number of families with a stay-at-home parent tripled between 2019 and 2021 from 3% to 9% (In 73% cases, this is a mother) -Older workers have opted to take early retirement. -NI Childcare survey shows reduced availability of childcare due to closures and increasing costs of childcare - these represent increased barriers in terms of accessing employment for women.</p>	<p>4. How do we measure success? Reduction in the % Working Age Economic Inactivity rate.</p>
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6.5. Turning the curve: Disability

Northern Ireland as a region performs badly in terms of employment outcomes for those with disabilities- 60.2% of disabled people were economically inactive in NI compared with 42.5% in the rest of the UK according to a study undertaken by DfC in 2021(Employment Outcomes and Challenges for Disabled People in N. Ireland).

This group represents significant potential opportunities for the NI labour market. A higher proportion of this economically inactive group want to work in comparison with other economically inactive groups. One fifth of the population aged 16-64 are disabled (based on Labour Force Survey self-reported data) which represents a significant potential boost to Northern Ireland’s labour supply.

<p>1. Understanding the baseline.</p> <p>INDICATOR: % Employment rate of people with disabilities: ABC (NISRA - LMI Portal)</p> <p>*With reference to the Turning the Curve exercises, the term “Now” refers to the assessment of the most recently available data made at the time of the review</p> <table border="1"> <caption>% ABC Employment rate of people with disabilities (NISRA - LMI Portal)</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Year</th> <th>ABC (%)</th> <th>Forecast(ABC) (%)</th> <th>Turning The Curve (%)</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2016</td> <td>30.40%</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>2017</td> <td>44.50%</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>2018</td> <td>44.40%</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>2019</td> <td>40.50%</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>2020</td> <td>34.50%</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>2021</td> <td>31.50%</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>2022</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>2023</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Year	ABC (%)	Forecast(ABC) (%)	Turning The Curve (%)	2016	30.40%			2017	44.50%			2018	44.40%			2019	40.50%			2020	34.50%			2021	31.50%			2022				2023				<p>3. What can be done?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A disability programme (group of 12 max) with job coaching & mentoring with a 8-12 week paid placement and support for employer as well. -Reverse Jobs fair -The training programme for Employers taking on staff for the first time should include a module related to Disability- -The self-employment programme for women could also be widened to incorporate those with disabilities as this is an option favoured by this disadvantaged group due to the flexibility it can offer.
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<p>2. What factors are causing the problem?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Covid-19 and the current NHS waiting lists may have increased these trends -Those with disabilities are seeking more flexible & part time options -There is a higher prevalence of limiting conditions in NI -The business base consists of mainly very small businesses -The consultation showed employers are often amenable to employing those with disabilities but there is a lack of knowledge with regard to available supports and the spectrum of disabilities which exist. 	<p>4. How do we measure success?</p> <p>Reduction % Disability Economic Inactivity Gap excluding students.</p>
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6.6. Turning the Curve: Skilled Labour Supply

The annual change in median gross pay for the ABC region had previously tracked closely to the NI average but in recent years ABC Median Gross Pay has fallen behind and is growing at a slower rate than the NI average. A misalignment exists between salary levels of those living in the borough and those travelling here to work- with those leaving the area to work elsewhere achieving greater earnings.

To bolster economic recovery and quality of life within the area, the LMP seek to support disadvantaged individuals to secure meaningful employment that is commensurate with their level of skill and ability. This benefits the individual, the labour market and creates entry level vacancies for other suitable candidates.

<p>1. Understanding the baseline.</p> <p>INDICATOR: All Persons Median Gross Wage ABC (£) (NISRA LMI Portal)</p> <p>Median Wage indicators in ABC had historically tracked closely to the NI average but have fallen behind in the last two years. A misalignment exists between salary levels of those living in the borough and those travelling here to work.</p> <p>Underemployed: Can be defined as a person not having enough paid work or not doing work that makes use of skills and abilities</p> <p>*With reference to the Turning the Curve exercises, the term “Now” refers to the assessment of the most recently available data made at the time of the review</p> <div data-bbox="207 1523 1053 1948"> <table border="1"> <caption>ABC All Person Median Gross Wage (£)</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Year</th> <th>ABC</th> <th>Forecast(ABC)</th> <th>Turning the Curve</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2018</td> <td>£21,977.00</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>2019</td> <td>£22,719.00</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>2020</td> <td>£23,443.00</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>2021</td> <td>£24,243.00</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>2022</td> <td>£25,138.00</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>2023</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>2024</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table> </div>	Year	ABC	Forecast(ABC)	Turning the Curve	2018	£21,977.00			2019	£22,719.00			2020	£23,443.00			2021	£24,243.00			2022	£25,138.00			2023				2024				<p>3. What can be done?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Programme intervention to link underemployed individuals with a mentor to act as an ambassador for them, support with C.V and employment related paperwork. -Support with converting qualifications to equivalent values in NI -Support or signposting where appropriate for English for Non-English speakers training. -There is a need for intervention programme for workers with low or no qualifications/ skills. This would include working with employers to upskill workers supported by local training providers.
Year	ABC	Forecast(ABC)	Turning the Curve																														
2018	£21,977.00																																
2019	£22,719.00																																
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2023																																	
2024																																	

<p>What factors are causing the problem? - more better-quality jobs need to be created -those who have become ‘stuck’ in entry level jobs in spite of being over skilled or overqualified need support to progress creating more opportunities for entry level candidates. -Many Migrant workers from other countries are underemployed and not working in the right field or at the right level. Need support to access employment in their chosen field and bridge skills gaps in the labour market.</p>	<p>4. How do we measure success? All Person Median Wage £ (LGD)</p>
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6.7. Turning the Curve: Number of LMP referrals to existing regional/local employability/skills provision (LMP)

A key objective for the LMP under SP3 is to promote and support delivery of existing employability or skills provision available either regionally or locally. Although referrals have been taking place since the formation of the ABC LMP, the successes have not been formally tracked. Going forward the LMP will implement a method of logging the number of referrals to existing regional/local employability/skills provision.

<p>1. Understanding the baseline.</p> <p>INDICATOR: # of LMP referrals to existing regional/local employability/skills provision (LMP)</p> <p>Indicator: # of LMP referrals to existing regional/local employability/skills Provision(LMP)</p> <p># of LMP Referrals</p> <p>Year</p> <p>ABC Forecast(ABC) Turning the Curve</p>	<p>3. What can be done? LMP to develop a quarterly monitoring process and embed this within the administration of all LMP projects and initiatives, including the referral activities undertaken by the LMP members themselves.</p> <p>LMP to maintain a quarterly tracker of the Number of referrals made</p>
<p>What factors are causing the problem? Lack of formal monitoring of this indicator to date means the LMP does not have a baseline measure to comment on.</p>	<p>4. How do we measure success? # of LMP referrals to existing regional/local employability/skills provision (LMP)</p>

7. Armagh Banbridge Craigavon LMP 2023/24 Action Plan

7.1. Baseline information

The Baseline Information table that follows supports the LMP and stakeholders to understand where we are now and envisage the route that will be taken to achieve our shared goals. The Action Plan in section 7.2 details an ambitious range of innovative measures which can be realistically delivered by March 2024. It should be considered as a living document with flexibility to evolve – particularly in the current climate. The Action Plan also recognises the need to further invest in local intelligence to inform the future direction of travel of the LMP and subsequent Action Plans. The LMP is confident this Action Plan (2023/24) will complement existing provision and services to provide a strong foundation to achieve longer term inclusive growth.

Strategic Priorities	Indicators to which Local LMP makes a contribution (Source)	2022/23 Baseline
Strategic Priority 1: To form and successfully deliver the functions of the local Labour Market Partnership for the area	LMP Delivery and Development % LMP members who feel the local LMP is making a positive contribution and delivering effectively (LMP)	% LMP members who feel the local LMP is making a positive contribution and delivering effectively (Baseline currently at 0 as data has not been collected until Q4)
Strategic Priority 2: To improve employability outcomes and/or labour market conditions locally	Economic Shock Indicator: %. of claimants in ABC council area. (Claimant Count % by LGD (NINIS))	Claimant Count % (ABC LGD) 2021: 3.7% 2020: 3.8% 2019: 2.0% 2018: 1.8% 2017: 1.9%
	Economic Inactivity Indicator: ABC % Working Age Economic Inactivity Rate (NISRA - Labour Force Survey)	ABC % Working Age Economic Inactivity Rate (ABC LGD) 2021: - 16.5% 2020: - 19.9% 2019: - 18.1% 2018: - 16.3% 2017: - 18.7% 2016: - 19.8%
	Disability Indicator: %/# Employment rate of people with disabilities (NISRA – LMI Portal)	%/# Employment rate of people with disabilities (ABC) 2016 - 30.40% 2017 - 44.50% 2018 - 44.40%

		2019 - 40.50% 2020 - 34.50% 2021 - 31.50%
	Skilled Labour Supply Indicator: All Persons Median Gross Wage ABC (£) (NISRA LMI Portal)	# Median Wage £ by LGD Weekly ABC Area ABC 2022: £479.60 2021: £450.40 2020: £423.40 2019: £420.60 2018: £420.00 2017: £395.80 NI 2022: £497.80 2021: £470.00 2020: £432.00 2019: £428.60 2018: £420.20 2017: £393.80
Strategic Priority 3: To promote and support delivery of existing employability or skills provision available either regionally or locally	Referrals to relevant existing projects/initiatives # LMP referrals to existing regional/local employability/skills provision (LMP)	# LMP referrals to existing regional/local employability/skills provision (LMP) (Baseline currently at 0 as data has not been collected until Q4)

7.2 ABC LABOUR MARKET PARTNERSHIP ACTION PLAN 2023/2024

Strategic Priority 1: To form and successfully deliver the functions of the local Labour Market Partnership for the area

Indicator		% LMP members who feel the local LMP is making a positive contribution and delivering effectively (LMP)					
Theme	Title of Programme/Project, Aims & Description	Key Activities	Start Date	End Date	Resource or Cost	Performance Measures	Delivery Quarter
LMP Delivery	<p>SP1.1 - LMP delivery and development</p> <p>Effective delivery of the LMP through the Members, appropriate structures and mechanisms</p> <p>-Develop the ABC LMP as the single body that coordinates all activity associated with improving employability and labour market</p>	<p>1. Prepare and deliver on LMP's Action Plan to meet priority needs; including putting in place implementation structures and delivery mechanisms that will contribute towards improved employability outcomes and/or labour market conditions.</p>	01/04/23	31/03/24		<p>How much did we do? 10 LMP Meetings Held</p> <p>How well did we do it? 128/160 (80%) attendance at LMP meetings</p> <p>15/16 (94%) of LMP Members who feel that their views have been taken into account with regard to the Action Plan</p> <p>15/16 (94%) of LMP Members who feel that their views have been taken into account with regard to the Strategic Assessment</p>	1,2,3,4

	<p>conditions in the local area.</p>					<p>Is anyone better off? 13/16/ (81%) of LMP members who feel that they are contributing to the delivery of the LMP. 13/16/ (81%) of LMP members who think that the LMP is making a positive difference. 15/16 (94%) of LMP members reporting increased awareness of local employability and labour market issues</p>	
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Strategic Priority 2: To improve employability outcomes and/or labour market conditions locally

Indicators: **Economic Shock:** % Claimant Count: Aged 18-24 (NINIS - LGD2014, Ward & SOA)
Economic Inactivity: % Working Age Economic Inactivity Rate (NISRA - Labour Force Survey)
Disability: % Disability Economic Inactivity Gap (excluding students) for Council Area
Skilled Labour Supply: # All Persons Median Wage (NINIS - LGD2014)

Theme	Title of Programme/Project, Aims & Description	Key Activities	Start Date	End Date	Resource or Cost	Performance Measures	Delivery Quarter
Economic Inactivity	To reduce the current levels of economic inactivity focusing on women as a priority group.	<p>2.1. Female Focus Programme</p> <p>Aimed specifically at supporting women returning to the labour market who have been out of work for more than 6 months. This programme will be delivered over 22 weeks and includes a placement, This programme will incorporate an optional 8–12-week placement. It will have a particular emphasis on providing</p>	01/04/23	31/03/24		<p>How much did we do?</p> <p>30 participants enrolled on the Programme. 24 Work Placement available.</p> <p>How well did we do it?</p> <p>24/30 (80%) of participants completed the programme. 24/24 (100%) of participants reported satisfaction with the project.</p>	1,2,3 & 4

		<p>employability and skills support for those returning from a period of childcare or eldercare e.g. addressing gaps in the C.V. and confidence building. Support will include a dedicated mentor for each participant.</p>				<p>19/24 (80%) of Participants completed the work placement.</p> <p>24/24 (100%) of the Participants reported satisfaction with the work placement.</p> <p>Is anyone better off?</p> <p>24/24 (100%) of participants who completed some aspect of the project felt more confident to apply for a job.</p> <p>21/24 (87%) attended an interview following completion of the programme.</p> <p>15/24 (63%) gained employment following completion of the programme.</p> <p>8/15 (53%) participants remained in sustained employment 6 months post programme.</p>	
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<p>Disability</p>	<p>To reduce the current levels of economic inactivity focusing on those with disability as a priority group.</p>	<p>2.2 Disability Employment Programme</p> <p>Aimed specifically at supporting those with disabilities to secure sustained employment. This programme will be delivered over 22 weeks and include an optional 8-12 week placement, It will commence with client engagement and vocational profiling, programme will be aim to meet the bespoke needs and preferences of the individual. intensive support such as Job coaching and mentoring for participants. Support and signposting will also be provided to the employer. There will be an emphasis on careful job matching and part time opportunities and placements. .</p>	<p>01/04/23</p>	<p>31/03/24</p>		<p>How much did we do?</p> <p>40 participants enrolled on the Programme.</p> <p>32 Work Placement available.</p> <p>How well did we do it?</p> <p>32/40 (80%) of participants completed the training.</p> <p>32/32 (100%) of participants reported satisfaction with the Programme.</p> <p>24/32 (75%) of participants completed a work placement.</p> <p>24/24 (100%) of participants reported that the work placement was beneficial.</p> <p>Is anyone better off?</p> <p>32/32(100%) of participants felt more confident to apply for a job following completion of the programme.</p>	<p>1,2,3 & 4</p>
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						<p>24/32 (75%) attended an interview following completion of the programme.</p> <p>16/32 (50%) gained employment following completion of the programme.</p> <p>8/16 (50%) participants remained in sustained employment 6 months post programme.</p>	
Economic Shock	<p>Claimant levels have not recovered to pre pandemic levels and have plateaued. This programme aims to support remaining claimants impacted by the disruption back into work by leveraging existing skills or acquire new skills in line with in-demand</p>	<p>2.3. A rapid response employment programme (RRP)</p> <p>Direct and specific interventions to reskill in areas where demand exceeds supply. Particular areas of focus will include Warehousing/ Building Retail, Dispensary, working with children, engineering and one sector to be confirmed based on emerging needs identified by LMP</p>	01/04/23	31/03/24		<p>How much did we do?</p> <p>140 participants enrolled on the programmes (28x5= 140)</p> <p>How well did we do it?</p> <p>112/140 (80%) of participants completed the programme.</p> <p>112/112 (100%) of participants (who completed) reported satisfaction with the programme.</p> <p>Is anyone better off?</p> <p>101/112 (90%) of participants who gained a</p>	1,2,3 & 4.

	sectors and occupations.	potentially green growth). The programme will focus sector specific training to upskill/reskill people in areas listed above.				qualification as a result of participation on the project 78/112 (70%) of participants gained employment. 50/78 (64%) of participants remained in sustained employment 6 months post programme.	
Economic Shock	To support businesses who need to take on staff for the first time to take that important step.	2.4. Ready to Employ programme for businesses with professional advice and support regarding HR, recruitment, payroll, legal and insurance considerations for employers taking on staff for the first time. Including workshops and one to one support. Workshops will also include attracting talent, managing talent and building a team. A one-day module will also be provided on disability friendly employment practices and the supports	01/04/23	31/03/24		How much did we do? 24 employers enrolled on the programme. How well did we do it? 19/24 (79%) of employers completed the programme. 19/19 (100%) of employers were satisfied with the programme. Is anyone better off? 15/19 (79%) of employers have created new jobs as a result of the support received	1,2 & 3.

		available for employers with reasonable adjustments etc. At least one guest speaker to showcase social inclusion in the workplace.					
Skilled Labour supply	<p>To support employees with low levels of skills/ qualifications to increase their skills levels helping the individual to achieve their potential and better meet the requirements of the business and the local economy.</p> <p>Enables participants to progress to higher paid employment and</p>	<p>2.5. Progression programme</p> <p>providing direct interventions to reskill and gain qualifications in areas which will boost progression prospects. This could be a maths or numeracy, report writing, IT, leadership & management or Project management training.</p> <p>The programme will focus bespoke accredited training to upskill people with low levels of educational attainment.</p>	01/04/23	31/03/24		<p>How much did we do?</p> <p>14 participants enrolled on the programme.</p> <p>How well did we do it?</p> <p>11/14 (79%) of participants completed the programme.</p> <p>11/11 (100%) of participants are satisfied with the programme.</p> <p>Is anyone better off?</p> <p>11/11 (100%) of participants feel more confident regarding their employability.</p> <p>11/11 (100%) of participants who gained a qualification as a result of</p>	1,2,3 & 4.

	creates opportunities for entry level candidates					participation on the project. 7/11 (64%) of participants move into higher paid employment within 6 months of programme completion.	
Skilled Labour Supply	To support those who have become 'stuck' in entry level jobs in spite of being over skilled or over-qualified to progress. This action will create more opportunities for entry level candidates and support any Migrant workers locally who are not in roles which match their skills/qualifications.	2.6 Underemployment Programme Programme will include a vocational profiling exercise, then underemployed individuals will be linked with a mentor to give them one to one support and coaching, support with C.V and employment related paperwork. Placements or job trials could be implemented if needed. Support with converting qualifications into their equivalent values here. Referral pathways for 'English for non-English speakers'	01/07/23	31/03/24		How much did we do? 30 participants enrolled on the programme. How well did we do it? 24/30 80% of participants completed the programme. 24/24 (100%) of participants are satisfied with the programme Is anyone better off? 24/24 (100%) of participants feel more confident regarding their employability prospects in the related area. 14/24 (58%) of participants move into higher paid employment	2,3,4.

		and programmes needed.	training were				within 6 months of programme completion.	
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Strategic Priority 3: To promote and support delivery of existing employability or skills provision available either regionally or locally							
Indicators		# LMP referrals to regional/local employability/skills provision (LMP)					
Theme	Aims & Description	Key Activities	Start Date	End Date	Resource or Cost	Performance Measures	Delivery Quarter
Increased awareness	<p>Aim</p> <p>To raise awareness of regional employability schemes and ABC LMP programmes.</p> <p>To support programme participants to</p>	<p>3.1 Get Future Ready.</p> <p>A month-long programme of events, speakers, workshops, visits and experiences. Creating interesting and engaging opportunities for all those seeking employment to speak to employers, explore options and become better equipped to secure employment locally. Creates opportunities for employers</p>	01/09/23	31/03/24		<p>How much did we do?</p> <p>1,000 attendees attended up to 20 Events.</p> <p>25 employers participated in ABC Get Future Ready Week.</p> <p>5 Support Organisations engaged.</p> <p>How well did we do it?</p>	3,4

Strategic Priority 3: To promote and support delivery of existing employability or skills provision available either regionally or locally

Indicators # LMP referrals to regional/local employability/skills provision (LMP)

Theme	Aims & Description	Key Activities	Start Date	End Date	Resource or Cost	Performance Measures	Delivery Quarter
	<p>move into employment</p> <p>Description</p> <p>Programmes designed to complement current provision and to positively impact on employability and skills of programme participants.</p>	<p>to showcase their current and future skills needs to a wide variety of audiences to help secure future capacity and capability. Costs will include event costs, promotion, transport and sub-cover costs for schools.</p> <p>This element will be promoted across <u>all</u> themes and target groups & include raising awareness of regional employability programmes and opportunities such as Apprenticeships.</p>				<p>160/200 (80%) of attendees surveyed reported satisfaction with the event.</p> <p>23/25 (92%) of employers surveyed rated the events as a good platform to showcase their sector.</p> <p>Is anyone better off?</p> <p>160/200 (80%) of attendees feel more informed about career opportunities</p> <p>20/25 (80%) of employers surveyed feel confident that participation in this event will assist them in</p>	

Strategic Priority 3: To promote and support delivery of existing employability or skills provision available either regionally or locally

Indicators		# LMP referrals to regional/local employability/skills provision (LMP)					
Theme	Aims & Description	Key Activities	Start Date	End Date	Resource or Cost	Performance Measures	Delivery Quarter
						filling vacancies in the future	
Increased awareness	Actively advocate & promote regional employability programmes and local initiatives including LMP to a wider public audience.	<p>3.2 Promotion & Awareness Raising</p> <p>Deliver a captivating local 12-month PR campaign to raise awareness of regional employability programmes and LMP programmes This includes working with partners to update existing websites and existing newsletters, social media etc.</p> <p>Costed promotion will include paid social media adverts on Facebook, video creation for engaging social media content and direct promotion to target groups eligible to be supported, for example targeted promotion for each</p>	01/04/23	31/03/24		<p>How much did we do? PR Strategy/Plan for 2023-24 is produced detailing the campaign.</p> <p>How well did we do it? 15/16 (94%) of LMP Members feel the PR Campaign has had a positive impact on raising awareness of the LMP.</p> <p>Is anyone better off? 80 referrals to local LMP provision.</p>	1,2,3 & 4

Strategic Priority 3: To promote and support delivery of existing employability or skills provision available either regionally or locally

Indicators		# LMP referrals to regional/local employability/skills provision (LMP)					
Theme	Aims & Description	Key Activities	Start Date	End Date	Resource or Cost	Performance Measures	Delivery Quarter
		<p>programme that will aid in the overall promotion of the LMP.</p> <p>All design and content will require approval from DfC and other relevant partners as appropriate in advance.</p>				320/400 (80%) of people with increased awareness of regional and local LMP programmes	
Increased awareness	Public Facing Events including Job fairs	<p>3.3 Public Facing Events</p> <p>Series of job fairs/public facing events sponsorship of SRC Big Apprenticeship event and Rural job fairs as piloted this year. These events raise the profile of the LMP and help to drive referrals to the LMP programmes. They also provide a crucial opportunity for local employers to</p>	01/04/23	31/03/24		<p>How much did we do?</p> <p>1000 attendees at events.</p> <p>30 employers to be engaged at public facing events.</p> <p>How well did we do it?</p> <p>27/30 (90%) of employers surveyed</p>	1,2,3 & 4

Strategic Priority 3: To promote and support delivery of existing employability or skills provision available either regionally or locally

Indicators # LMP referrals to regional/local employability/skills provision (LMP)

Theme	Aims & Description	Key Activities	Start Date	End Date	Resource or Cost	Performance Measures	Delivery Quarter
		connect with potential employees who meet their requirements.				<p>reported satisfaction with the events.</p> <p>27/30 (90%) employers reported that the event was a good platform to showcase their sector.</p> <p>160/200 (80%) of attendees surveyed reported satisfaction with the event.</p> <p>Is anyone better off? 27/30 (90%) of employers surveyed are more aware of the role of the LMP and employability programmes locally and regionally.</p>	

Strategic Priority 3: To promote and support delivery of existing employability or skills provision available either regionally or locally

Indicators		# LMP referrals to regional/local employability/skills provision (LMP)					
Theme	Aims & Description	Key Activities	Start Date	End Date	Resource or Cost	Performance Measures	Delivery Quarter
						<p>160/200 (80%) of attendees feel more informed about career opportunities</p> <p>67/200 (34%) of attendees intend to apply for a job as a result of the event.</p>	

