

PLANNING AND PRIORITISING FUTURE SKILLS, TRAINING AND BUSINESS SUPPORT NEEDS FOR RURAL BUSINESSES ACROSS THE SELEP REGION

Talent is evenly spread – opportunity is not. Creating more opportunities relies on the ambitions and skills of all ages. Success requires close collaboration.

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Robin Gowers: Writtle University College

Howard Lee: Hadlow College

Ross Newham: NIAB EMR

David Stokes: Plumpton College



A1 Background and Cross Cutting Themes

Background

This pan-Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) project scoped, planned and prioritised the future rural skills, training and business support needs to upskill a new land-based generation. It encompasses the four SELEP Federated Areas of Success Essex; Kent and Medway Economic Partnership; Opportunity South Essex; and Team East Sussex. The project has been informed by the SELEP Rural Working Group, the SELEP Employment Task Force, and industry supported and linked to representative bodies, such as the Farming and Rural Issues Group South East (FRIGSE), the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB), including the new Institute of Agriculture and Horticulture. All developments have been linked to, and are compliant with, the SELEP Assurance Framework and support the strategic objectives within the SELEP's SEP, skills and rural strategies, and the Government's Industrial Strategy.

This report was drafted initially based on the findings from the period before Covid-19 and reflected an ambition for businesses to develop and grow and access new markets using new approaches and technologies. This presented a greater need for skills at Level 3 and above (A Level and Degree Level); the demand for practical skills at lower levels was low. During the consultation phase within the period July to September 2020, the Covid-19 impact in businesses has been significant, and sourcing suitable labour has been a real challenge, continually exacerbated by

reach their full potential. To achieve this will require joint effort to improve the lives of residents and boost growth, real incomes and opportunities for all.

This report provides an analytical snapshot of how the South East performs in the key aspects of human capital development. The main areas of concern are:

- The South East's working population is ageing and, as a result, the level of skills (as measured by adult qualifications) is below the national average.
- Low skill levels result in stagnation in worker productivity and real wage growth.
- Until the pandemic, despite falling unemployment (especially among the young) the jobs being created tended to be low skilled.
- Inequalities across the system from early education to ongoing training and support for older workers.
- Low levels of aspiration in some demographic groups within the county.
- Access to the infrastructure to be able to benefit from the opportunities on offer (this can vary from access to transport to attend a course to broadband to help set up and run a business).

Socio-economic factors are the main cause of the imbalances and inequalities across the South East. These factors can have life-long impacts on areas such as earning potential, job opportunities, crime, and health. Any vision for learning, education, work, and skills should be for all people in the SELEP region to enjoy equally wherever they live and whoever they are. By being proactive rather than reactive, resources can be better utilised and life for people in the South East improved.

For our region to thrive, its human and social capital must be nurtured and developed so that productivity and opportunities grow. Without this growth, there will be further strains as its population ages and requires greater support.

We need to link in with the incredible changes that are occurring across all our lines of rural based expertise. As Michael Gove highlighted in his speech in January 2019 at the Oxford Farming Conference, we are going into the 4th industrial and agricultural revolution. This, coupled with Henry Dimbleby's review of the British food system (the first for around 75 years), shows that we are at a sweet spot to develop skills and training at all levels. Because of technology, sustainability, Brexit the pandemic and climate change how we produce, distribute, and consume food will fundamentally change over the next generation.

The SELEP region should be looking to lead the way in which these new opportunities and skill requirements are met. The range of knowledge and skills required are wide reaching in our rural areas, from basic training to manage machinery to higher level skills such as being able to apply AI, IoT, sensors and precision farming, big data, drones, etc.

We need to have a strategy that pulls together all these driving forces so that we have a story and a unified vision that helps people develop the skills required to maximise progress in their productivity - the UK lags behind most other countries with regards to this aspect in the primary sector and in many related industries. To do this means marrying the theory to practice - turn the top down model of what most

universities/colleges do into a collaborative model that also recognises what best practice players do. So, we also require bottom up communication, a true collaborative effort.

It will be crucial that rural businesses are fully involved as there is a desperate need for quality workers. We are on the cusp of the deepest, fastest, most consequential disruption in food, rural and agricultural production since the first domestication of plants and animals ten thousand years ago.

Human capital

Human capital is a measure of individuals' skills, knowledge, abilities, social attributes, personality and health attributes. Human capital is important because of its positive contribution to a range of well-being aspects relevant to policy makers and researchers. Firstly, it has been shown that individuals' labour market outcomes are linked to their human capital. In general individuals with low skills or levels of education are more likely to be unemployed and face social exclusion. Unemployment can have a negative impact on an individual's well-being.

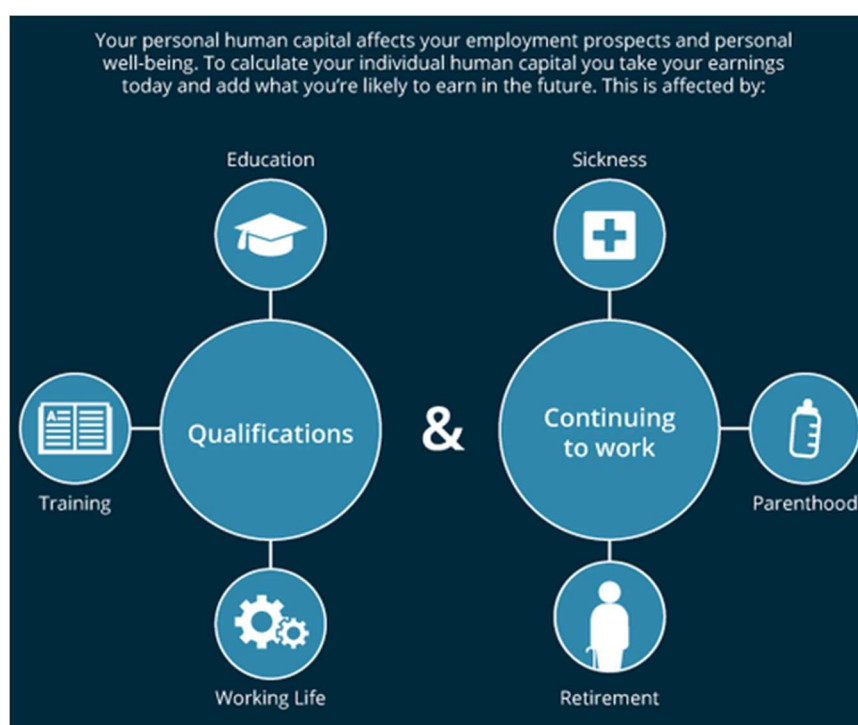


Figure 2: Relationship between qualifications ability to work.

This report has a focus on human capital formation within the SELEP region as it includes developments from birth, throughout the educational pyramid and continues through working life and into retirement. Learning, education, work and skills all form important parts in the development of people's and societies human capital. An analysis of its key aspects will help us to build an understanding of the current situation in the area and it also enables us to identify key issues and trends. Inequality in levels of human capital might persist over time as educational attainments of children are related to the educational attainment of their family, particularly their parents. Thus, human capital can also have social impacts. In particular, it is associated with improved health outcomes, lower crime rates, and higher rates of trust and social participation.

As an individual's human capital improves then so should their productivity and therefore wages (and living standards). However, since 2008, productivity has stagnated as more people have been employed to produce the same level of output. Output per worker is currently 17% below where it would have been had the pre-recession trend continued, which explains why there has been over a lost decade for living standards yet employment levels are at all-time highs (until recently) since UK records began in 1971. This is reflected in human capital levels in the UK peaking in 2008 then falling and remaining flat since 2011. With a focus on the SELEP region and the impact of learning, education, work, and skills we can consider how well the area and locations (districts) within it perform. We can also spot areas/locations for concern and identify related issues bubbling under. Piketty (2014) has helped to re-establish distribution and equality as one of the central issues in economics. Linking these central themes to a focus on the SELEP area we hope to establish the debate over this key issue.

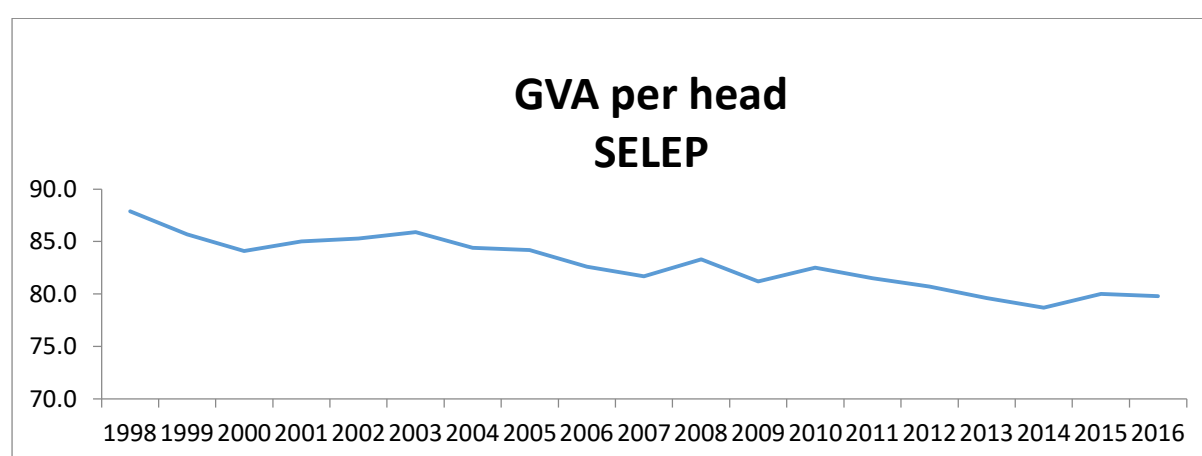


Figure 3: Gross Value Added per Employee across the SELEP region

Several reports have shown that there is a direct correlation between educational attainment and deprivation. Research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2010) found that “Children growing up in poorer families emerge from school with substantially lower levels of educational attainment. This is a major contributing factor to patterns of social mobility and poverty.” Educational qualifications, including those relating to adult learning, help to influence an individual's labour market position and are also the key drivers of their quality of life (income, housing options, consumption, health, etc.).

One of the most effective ways to allow students of any age to achieve their full potential is to offer a good quality education that also inspires students to aim high. In terms of learning and skills, the SELEP region is an area of contrasts. Excellence is illustrated by the fact that the region is home to some of the top schools and university departments in the country, but it is also home to some of the lower performing ones.

In terms of qualifications the SELEP region underperforms compared to national averages at nearly every level. For the four sectors that are the focus of this report, this is very relevant as they tend to be viewed as lower skilled type work. Clearly, the less qualified staff are the less productive they will be.

SELEP Skills and Qualifications

A potential issue over skills acquisition for businesses is the cost and the time support that can be offered to employees who are looking to be upskilled. A key limitation is company size and the SELEP region reflects a national issue in that most firms are small to medium enterprises (SMEs).

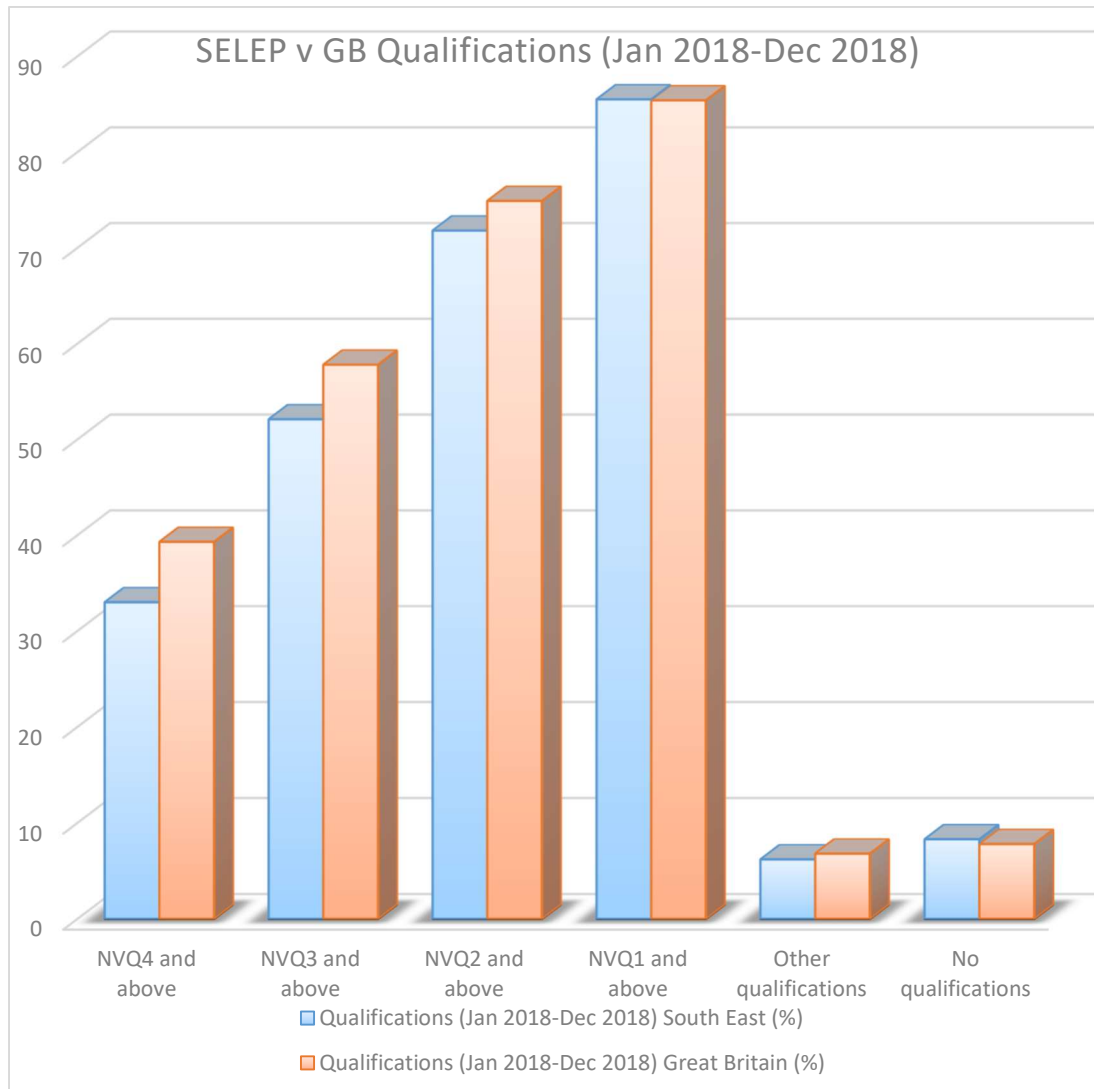


Figure 4: The proportions of individuals with Level 2, 3 and 4 qualifications lags behind the Great Britain average.

With unemployment expected to massively increase following the ongoing impacts of the pandemic, support for all ages to train up and re-skill will be vital.

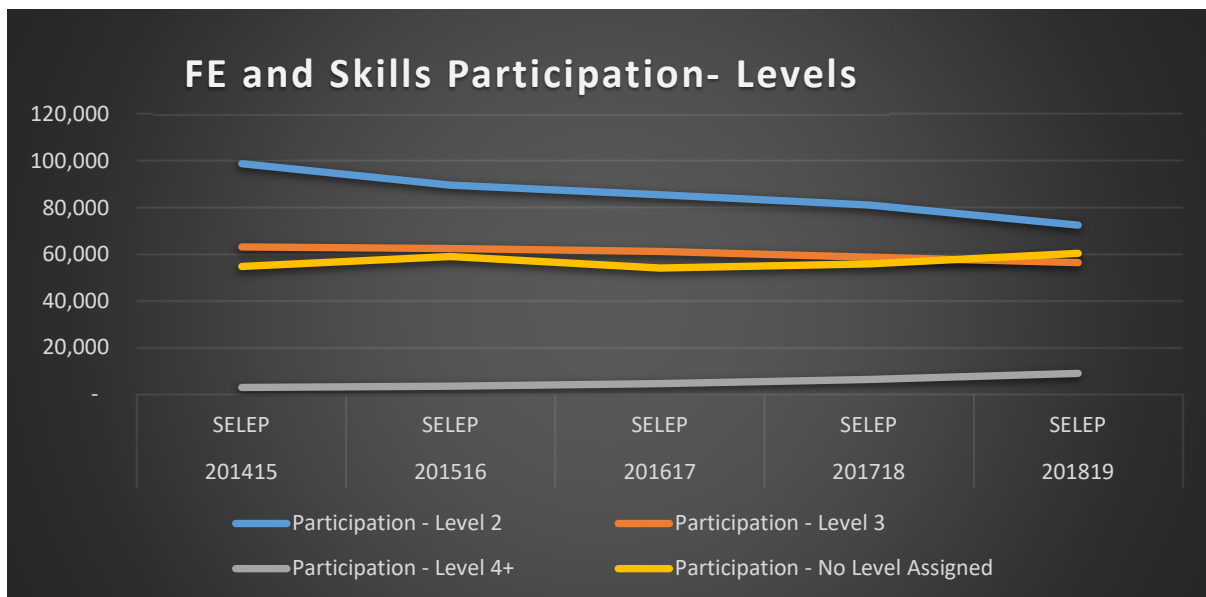


Figure 5. Skills participation levels across SELEP showing the reduction in Level 2 training, important for the skills escalator, the declining trend for Level 3, too high a level of non-assigned levels and the very low number of Level 4 and above qualifications.

Roughly, 9 in 10 enterprises in the region are defined as micro enterprises employing less than ten people. It should also be noted that until this year, the number of such enterprises was increasing, showing the entrepreneurial drive across the region. It is important to appreciate that government and regional bodies do not create jobs and wealth, entrepreneurs do. What those at the organisational level can do is to provide the supportive environment for entrepreneurs to be able to thrive in. Importantly, most micro businesses do not have the infrastructure to support staff development programmes and training; often employers tell us they are too busy keeping the business going.

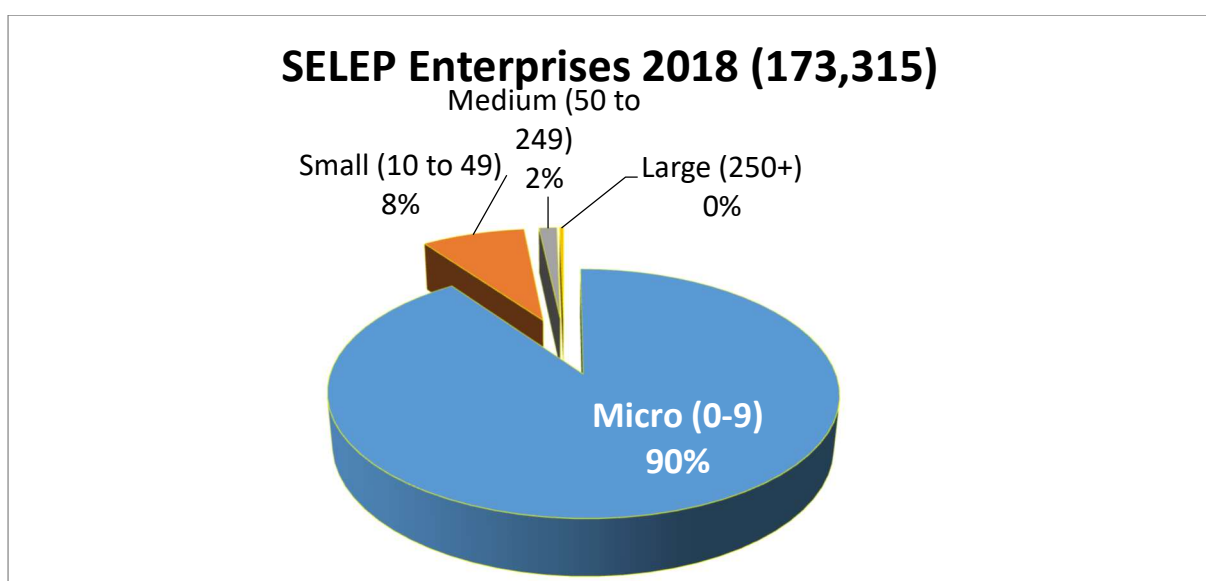


Figure 6: Proportion of micro businesses across the SELEP region

It has become clear throughout this work that businesses in rural areas are facing a near perfect storm of events. Doing what they have done for decades is not guaranteed to succeed – they need support to respond to the challenges and diversify. For example, many farmers and growers are asset rich but generate poor returns. Those in rural areas who possess land/asset holdings must make better use of them. However, many lack the knowledge of how to do so and manage the related risks.

Risk taking and management will be key. For example, most farms are traditional family businesses and conservative in their outlook. It is not easy to commit to make change and SELEP need to offer the support for these businesses to take on the risks involved.

Brexit offers a huge incentive to make such changes. It is a similar situation to what business in rural areas of New Zealand faced in 1973 when they were shut out of the UK market after Britain joined the EEC. The New Zealand Government responded and created the environment that helped their farmers to raise productivity – they cut regulations and subsidies and their farmers became more global in their approach. Like the Netherlands, New Zealand's food producers have become highly efficient and utilise technology to follow market demands and raise productivity. New sectors have emerged as world leading over time such as wine production.

The 2008 financial crisis again illustrated that when there is an economic downturn the number of start-ups rise and those in employment also develop second income streams from entrepreneurial activities. The range of innovative start-ups in SELEP's rural areas is incredible and illustrates the huge number of sectors and uses to which skills support can be provided and underutilised assets developed. Our rural businesses must emphasise their local credentials, provenance, and authenticity. New business models are required, and any support offered must be married to the correct incentives for skill development to be accrued. Gaining any new skill requires time, commitment, and money – it is a classic investment where upfront costs put in will deliver future positive returns.

This Project

This project is a contribution to solving the SELEP conundrum of insufficient skills availability and focusses on the land-based sectors and hence shortages in high and low skills, and in careers pipelines. This review has been informed through the evaluation and prioritisation of the potential approaches to creating more skills to meet the future needs to the key land-based sectors. The review draws heavily on the partnerships across the four organisations and is specifically informed by the increasing number of skills related reviews produced in the last two years, mainly at national level. Covid-19 has impacted negatively on wider consultation but the review is presented as a continuing discussion document to inform the debate on future strategies for skills support. Many rural businesses are facing significant uncertainty coming from the impacts of COVID-19, Brexit, the implications of the first detailed review of the UK food system for 75 years, technological change, climate change and a growing population. But one must also remember that these challenges should also be seen as opportunity. SELEP is in a unique position to lead a response that puts rural businesses and skills at the heart of raising productivity of the region – and

therefore improve the quality of life and opportunities for those living and working in our rural areas. The recommendations here focus on the skills needed, but just as importantly, the need to develop wider partnerships across the sectors from employers, to representative bodies, to colleges/universities/schools. Only with such a cooperative approach can we continue to safeguard and develop the early stage training of those skills held by younger and unemployed people, and the retraining for workers from other backgrounds. The current dearth of training taken up by many employers reflects a continuing trend in reduced funding to support the training in practical skills with a growing focus on larger qualifications, which has largely eliminated the bite size packages of training hitherto valued by employers. It is clear to us that there is also a lot of uncertainty from businesses over what training and funding is available.

We advocate an urgent specialist post-Covid recruitment and upskilling initiative to raise productivity, growth and opportunities in rural areas. These innovations will require new ideas, talent, and support networks and we suggest how this might be achieved. Each initiative championed should address three questions:

1. Does it meet our rural skills needs?
2. Does it help the disadvantaged to climb the skills/education ladder of opportunity?
3. Does it ensure skilled and decently paid employment for those who undertake it?

Ultimately, will the training increase rural human capital and therefore productivity? Further education establishments will have a role to play as rural skills providers. Businesses in rural areas face an acute skills shortage at every level. Success will require the right incentives for all involved to make it worthwhile for businesses to invest the time and money, for students and employees to want to train and for providers to ensure that the infrastructure and trainers/teachers are in place to deliver this skills training. As the Economist stated on 29-8-20, “Changing cultures and institutions – to decentralise power, for instance, and to raise the status of technical education will require a degree of patience, steadiness and co-operation which the people currently in charge in Britain lack.” Thus, SELEP have the opportunity to lead this change. This report considers some ways in which this might be achieved.

Overall, it is proposed that there is now a ‘perfect storm’ of Brexit, trade and food security, the Covid pandemic, technological evolution, connectivity, demographic movements, climate change, sustainability challenges, and environmental decline. All these impact upon food, rural and rurally located businesses, which are vital to the prosperity. Food is by far our biggest manufacturing sector.

- Our national productivity in the rural sector has continued to decline and needs to be rejuvenated
- Our workforce needs upskilling across the full range of employment – from pickers to senior managers

We need to offer courses and skills development that reflect the risks and opportunities faced by rural businesses. This will be vital for upskilling workers and enhancing their human capital. We will have to collaborate more with both key

players and other institutions to provide the platforms for skills development and lifelong learning to:

- Expand the current workforce across a revitalised industry and we need to explore how such an enlarged workforce can be recruited and upskilled to face the challenges of the next decades.
- Improve accessibility, sustainability and quality of training provision for food and drink businesses of all sizes and located in all regions of the UK:
- Create a National Network of Providers leading on Food Engineering and technical skills.
- Professionalise leadership and management skills across the sector, and to ensure managers are prepared for a changing workplace.
- Professionalise leadership and management skills through third-party validation
- Place skills at the heart of a National Food Strategy to 'deliver well-paid jobs' across the country
- Encourage passionate sector leaders to champion lifelong learning."

The above are related to skills acquisition, which has also been falling in the SELEP region, especially at the lower levels.

There were a number of generic themes from our discussions with employers and businesses that have broad implications for the rural sector and the support provided to the, for example:

- Improved coherence between local skills training and the aims of the national body Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board
- Facilitate knowledge exchange between AHDB, colleges and the industry
- Support colleges to continually develop their staff to be always up to date
- To feed into AHDB emerging industry needs - both research and training
- Develop more impactful new entrants to the industry
- Develop the existing workforce to better meet future challenges

Industry perceptions of the skills people will need in the future make it more overtly clear that technical skills are not all that is required and focus more skills development for:

- Business management
- Technology
- Ecology (in its broadest sense), leading to the ability to justify production decision making

The main categories of 'wider attributes' that need developing for new entrants and existing employees can be grouped by:

- Improved understanding of the financial implications of current practice and future potential developments
- Better innovation and greater entrepreneurship

- Developing minds for better resilience and management of change (to drive change rather than be driven by it)

...hence, '**...Thinking is more important than just doing...**'

Greater use of project-based problem-solving activities was strongly advocated by employers – eg business appraisals and evaluations would lead to better:

- understanding business finances
- enterprise and whole business evaluation
- confidence to make suggestions and proposals for change
- entrepreneurial approaches to drive change
- structured business management knowledge

and, would have the added impact of...

- Changing the behaviours of individuals to create more confident proponents of 'different thinking'
- Provide more appropriate skills development for the current workforce; in particular those that are 3 – 5 years out of college.

There was a range of generic topics which employers and businesses identified as being valuable to their business development for the next 10-20 years. These included:

- Research methods - elements of the research process
- Change management – planning and preparing for change. Implementation, monitoring and evaluation
- Health and safety - regulations and systems for development and recording compliance and competence
- Professional development skills – self-learning, digital literacy, academic skills, development evaluation and planning
- Business data analytics to work with data and produce information using industry standard software
- Marketing principles to integrate marketing concept in various business contexts, including new product development, and sales and customer service
- Global food production -context of human dietary needs, agricultural production systems, agricultural biotechnology and concepts of food security and sustainability, and quality and food safety
- Market research – development of market research techniques and analyses
- Communication technology for businesses - accurate and compatible information interchange with both internal and external members of the supply chain
- Quality and business assurance - ability to conform to quality and food safety standards to meet the technical needs of food processors, manufacturers, retailers and consumers
- Sales and customer service - selling, negotiation, critical evaluation, service design, people management and training

- Leadership and people management - human motivation and management for effective interpersonal relationships and the responsibilities of employer and employee
- Supply chain management – competition in a dynamic marketplace
- International impacts on businesses - management of companies trading in an international environment, including managerial expertise, leadership ability and creativity
- Legislation relevant to the business – laws, codes of good practise, evidence of compliance
- Community engagement - recognise the importance and opportunities, developing approaches and planning engagement activities
- Virtual co-operatives - reach buyers and access market information and share experiences and advice, pose questions to industry experts
- Insect protein production – eg crickets for high-protein blended flour
- Food processing and adding value – approaches and planning for secondary processing to add value
- Direct retail to customer groups – principles and practices of retail systems and approaches
- Technological applications – reviews of new technologies and applications within business operations, including automation and robotics

Arising from discussion it became clear that there was an increasing need to change/ adapt the culture within the rural workforce (some sectors more so than others) by facilitating the change to a more innovative, risk taking culture by:

- Creating a perspective which is longer-term to foster engagement in innovation and technology
- Developing better business acumen and the understanding of the financials driving the business to create confidence in changing the 'model'
- Increasing the understanding of the nature, complexity and stakeholders involved in supply chains to better improve the returns through better contracting or shorter supply chains
- Building capacity to do many tasks very well, many of which are not the 'physical farming' but office related
- Developing a confidence to be more self-critical, working to their strengths but planning changes to improve on weaknesses
- Developing business plans to support the earlier transition from the older to the younger generation, freeing up more innovative thinking
- Exploiting the knowledge base by developing the wider personal skills to be more creative
- Empowering individuals to gain technical skills more autonomously through user guides and technology enabled equipment
- Developing minds for better resilience and management of change (to drive change rather than be driven by it)

In pursuing the discussions about skills acquisition and the approaches most likely to bring about the required changes, employers and businesses told us that there was a desperate need to make upskilling for the existing workforce far more accessible for current employees. Approaches suggested included:

- Developing learning through project based themed delivery programmes
- On line access - self-access, open source outlines of topic content (menu of development courses)
- External consultants - work with outside consultants on the identification and successful solution(s) to a business problem
- Preparation and presentation of business development plans – review of scenarios for unit and whole business development proposals by industry experts
- Individual research projects – in depth analysis and evaluation of topics requiring research and development
- Group research projects – in depth analysis and evaluation of topics requiring research and development, including team working
- Work placements / experiences – at range of levels to experience change management / innovations
- Work shadowing – for potential new managers to experience the culture of change management and introduction of new approaches / systems
- Coaching – in work development skills and techniques for staff management and motivation
- Mentoring – in work support and guidance to facilitate the leading of change management
- Seminars – discussion groups / forums for sharing ideas eg developing approaches to change management

Key Recommendations:

Throughout this work, employers and businesses kept telling us that there was a need for general skills development to improve worker flexibility and not just their technical skills. Essentially, employers are now requiring more of their staff to more proactively support business improvement by questioning the status quo more effectively to stimulate fresh ideas for the development of the business.

These generic needs led to the setting out of 11 general recommendations set out in this section on cross cutting themes.

Firstly, the report recommends that SELEP take a lead role in the pursuit of rural skills support and development by establishing itself as a hub for regional collaboration and become a conduit between businesses, educational establishments, governmental and charitable bodies to stimulate skills development and lifelong learning. SELEP already has a number of related interest groups (such as the SELEP Skills Working Group, Digital Skills Partnership, Growth Hubs, Skills Advisory Panel, etc.). These groups should be linked into including how best practice can be learnt from other similar initiatives in the UK and abroad and applied to rural skills development here. Linking the region into the newly developing national

initiatives will be key – eg the skills competencies and careers development programmes being developed by the Skills Leadership Group (part of the Food and Drink sector Council, supported by the NFU and the AHDB), the Teaching Bursary Programme, Apprenticeships, Local Industrial Strategy.

We also recommend that SELEP work with rural stakeholders and facilitate business engagement to develop a long-term vision that will stimulate greater co-investment by employers in the skills supply pipeline. Skills training cannot just focus on new entrants through colleges and universities but must be more sustainable within the business itself. For example, many rural businesses are micro businesses and are capacity and time restricted, limiting the potential to coordinate training.

Also, that SELEP foster more cross LEP working to support the prioritisation of rural skills and the joint support for programmes where rural employment sectors cross LEP boundaries, for example linking approaches to skills programmes to Coast to Capital and to Enterprise M3.

There need to be new approaches - we are facing the greatest economic downturn in over 300 years and it is vital that people can gain the training and support to be able to re-skill and upskill. To facilitate this upskilling in rural areas, SELEP should be the key enabler of the changes and novel strategies that will be needed. This is especially important for rural SMEs where resourcing pressures, capabilities, size or location might preclude traditional training routes. Apprenticeships are a possible route for school leavers. However, most of this group will have studied mainly academic subjects at school and will not have the practical and technical skills such as teamwork, digital design, problem-solving and the ability to make things.

The key priority is for the support of a skills-based programme at the basic technical level to assist Covid impacted redundant workers to gain the basic technical skills (Level 1 and 2) to secure and engage effectively in rural businesses, especially horticulture, viticulture and forestry and arboriculture.

1. Fund a coordinated programme of rural business development programmes to:

- Develop the existing workforce to better meet future challenges, upskilling for resilience and flexibility
- Improve potential recruits' workplace readiness and employability
- Focus on business management, technology, sustainability and ecology to better articulate the environmental implications of the businesses' activities to an increasingly environmentally conscious public
- Improve understanding of finances, innovation entrepreneurship and in so doing, creating employees who are more innovative and able to challenge the status quo
- Develop resilience and better ability to manage change rather than being driven by it
- Create a focus to review this review in the light of the new Agriculture and Environment Bill to stimulate support for skills training

The need is to focus on what employers have told us about what they need their current employees to be able to do to be more impactful for the business. These included:

- Employers and academic institutions working much more closely together to upskill, reskill and keep aware of the opportunities from emerging technologies
- Learning centred around project-based, problem-solving activities that develop real time problem-solving abilities
- Developing behaviours to create more confident proponents of 'different thinking and to be and able to articulate this clearly
- Refocussing the skills development landscape for the current workforce in particular, especially for those that are 3 to 5 years out of full time training or who have come out of furlough and seek to retrain.
- Encouraging co-investment by Government with employers, especially micro businesses to partly support the costs of upskilling, until at least the end of 2022
- Providers being more responsive to the view from employers: spreading the training effort more widely across the business. At present much of the government support for training is invested relatively few individuals who consume a relatively large proportion of the training effort, eg through large and long qualifications.
- Developing more 'bite size' courses which can be spread across a larger proportion of the workforce, ie the focus on bite size provision would help fill the gap which will not be funded by central government.

2. Develop approaches / mentoring / coaching to support changing the culture of the workforce.

Set out a communications process to raise awareness and support the development of a more innovation culture amongst employees to:

- Create a perspective which is longer-term to foster engagement in innovation and technology
- Develop better business acumen and the understanding of the financials driving business to create confidence in changing the 'model'
- Increase the understanding of the nature and complexity of supply chains to better improve the returns through better retail options
- Build capacity to do many tasks very well, many of which are not 'physical production' but office related
- Develop a confidence for employees to be more self-critical, working to their strengths but planning changes to improve on weaknesses
- Develop business plans to support the earlier transition from the older to the younger generation, freeing up more innovative thinking
- Exploit the knowledge base by developing the wider personal skills to be more creative
- Empower individuals to gain technical skills more autonomously through user guides and technology enabled equipment
- Develop minds for better resilience and management of change (to drive change rather than be driven by it)

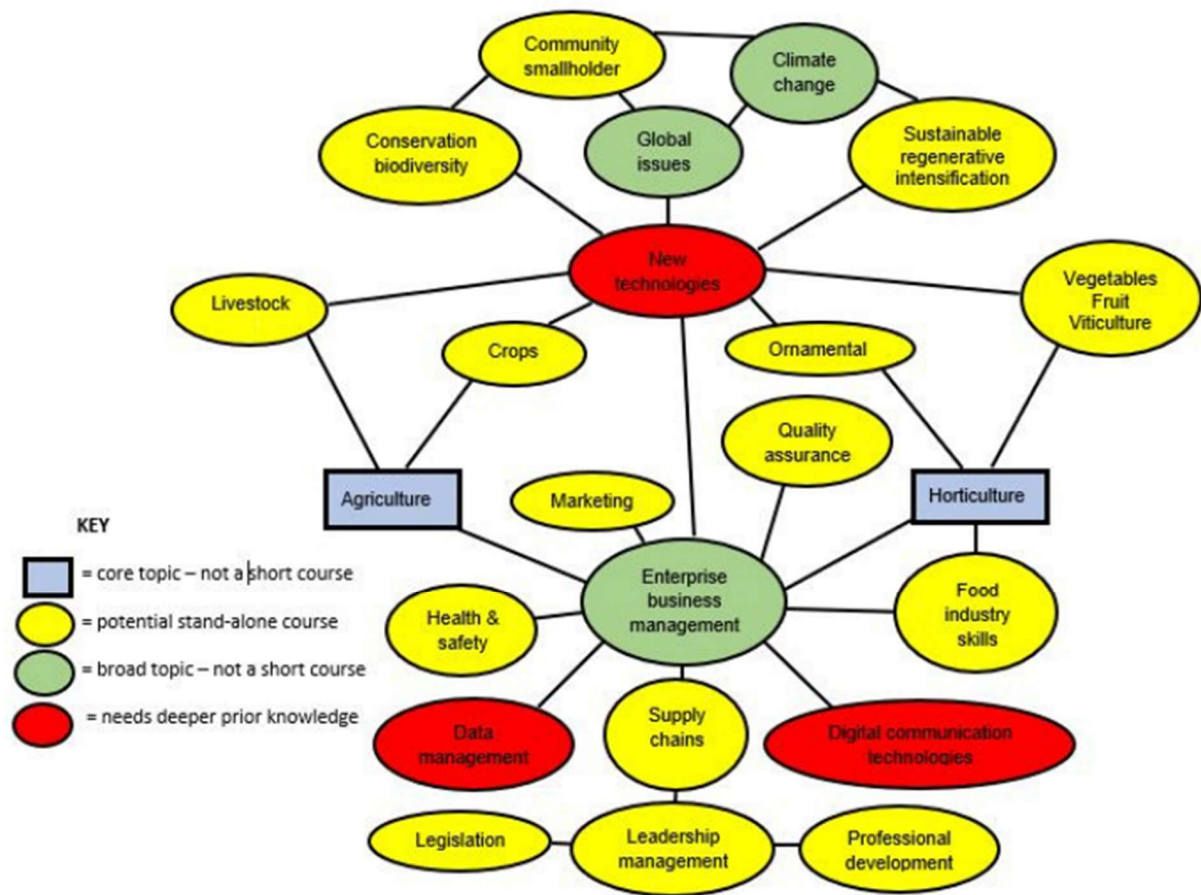


Figure 1 Shows the interrelationship between skills and emphasises what employers tell us that they need and which span more than one technical subject. This illustrates the complexity of developing a coherent strategy for rural skills across all age groups and districts.

3. Support new, more flexible approaches to learning, using project-based themes:

- Lobby government for flexible use of existing funding streams, to create better training solutions which businesses can more effectively engage with (develop the business as well as the individual); on line access - self-access, open source outlines of topic content
- External coaching and mentoring to identify successful solution(s) to business problems. Preparation and presentation of business development plans – review of scenarios for unit and whole business development proposals by industry experts. Individual research projects – in depth analysis and evaluation of topics requiring research and development
- Group research projects – in depth analysis and evaluation of topics requiring research and development, including team working
- Work placements / experiences – at a range of levels to experience change management / innovations
- Work shadowing – for potential new managers to experience the culture of change management and introduction of new approaches / systems.

Coaching – in work development skills and techniques for staff management and motivation

- Mentoring – in work support and guidance to facilitate the leading of change management
- Seminars – discussion groups / forums for sharing ideas e.g. developing approaches to change management.

4. Supporting people into employment – establish a regional skills platform for rural business, linked into national development and programmes

There is a need to develop a web-based platform, or equivalent, freely available to interested stakeholders for reference and support with content maintained and validated by a college and therefore ‘trusted’. This would comprise three interlinked sections:

a. Employer supported:

- Searchable job advertisements
- Real business examples of career structures, job profiles, progression prospects, remuneration packages
- Vocational and personal skills attributes and requirements
- Testimonials from employees
- Testimonials from employers
- Work experience opportunities
- Contact details for registered employers

b. College supported:

- Access to information, advice and guidance, careers information
- Programmes and opportunities to develop the skills for (a) above
- Facilitated and managed work experience to get a ‘foothold in the door’
- Supported recruitment processes for employers
- Employer-based Continuous Professional Development to continue to support new entrants after leaving college
- Careers materials based on employers’ needs, made available to schools and parents
- College and work place-based visits to support teachers to understand careers in rural businesses and support them to embed the opportunities through a more dynamic school curriculum
- Development of entrepreneurial skills and talents

c. School, supported:

- Material to foster interest in rural businesses to dispel the false perceptions
- Confidence to develop curriculum structures which generate interest and enthusiasm for rural subjects
- Scope to be more confident to utilise college-based activities and work place visits to bring the curriculum to life
- Access to employers’ visits to schools to bring the pipeline materials to life
- Careers teachers confident to direct parents / guardians to use materials and make contacts with employers to explore the land-based careers opportunities available

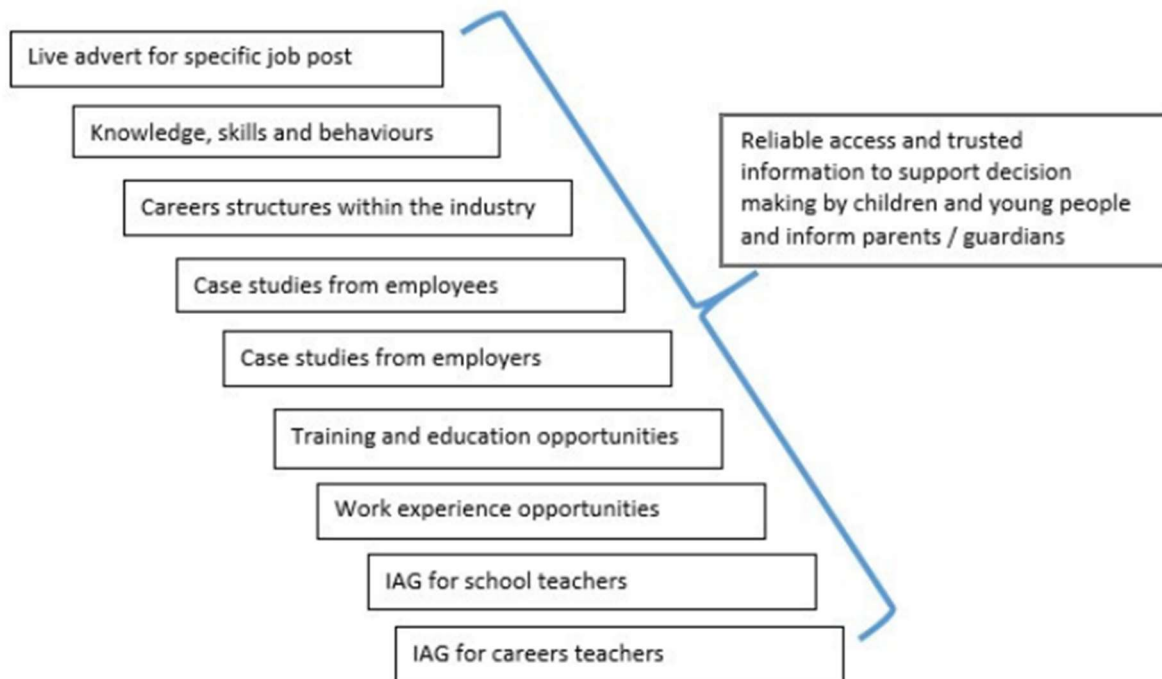


Figure 3. Schematic approach for a regional/rural skills platform to develop a better more coherent skills pipeline

5. At the higher level skills required for some rural businesses, the volume of candidates progressively decreases as the skills level increases.

Historically this has meant that the delivery of training and education is sometimes not efficient, especially where multiple organisations have a similar offer. Our recommendation is for the providers of rural skills to start a dialogue to agree where these skills are delivered and the referral mechanisms for candidates. This would safeguard the delivery of the higher-level management and technical skills. This recommendation would largely be taken forward by the Colleges and Universities.

6. Promote rural businesses as a priority sector to raise their profile and aspirations and increase the likelihood of better access to central government funding

Create the culture of 'importance' for rural business to respond to the challenges now faced; Support the rural strategy revision through the Rural Working Group Increase the focus on routes for minority ethnic entrants to the sector

7. Promote and encourage through use of showcases, the use and impact of robotics and machine learning technologies

It is anticipated that adaptive robotic systems using machine learning will increasingly enter into everyday working environments and the question often posed is how do ordinary (ie non-technical) workers become effective practitioners in robotics, such that they can have confidence in their operation and gain skills in their use?. There is an urgent need to:

- Test the emerging field of machine learning to develop new tools for training and evaluating people's skills in artificial intelligence and robotics
- Test for a step-change in making smart, yet affordable, collaborative robotic systems accessible and practical for businesses involved in all kinds of horticultural and agricultural production across scales from small to large;
- Support collaboration between educational establishments, research centres, businesses and venture capitalists to ensure that the SELEP region can become a centre of excellence in horticulture and agriculture
- Stimulate the use of virtual learning to create more interest in the skilled sectors, for example, simulator training for raising awareness and training in forest and tree machinery solutions

8. Develop the covid response strategy specifically for that business support activity which cannot be funded from central government

Support for sectors critically still short of skilled capacity but which could be met by retraining covid-19 impacted sector redundancies to increase the supply to:

- Vineyards and wineries
- Protected food crop producers
- Field scale vegetable growers
- Soft and top fruit growers

9. Centralised pilots of training offerings to build business aspiration and confidence for continued training and development of current staff. This should be focussed at all levels with a specific emphasis on those identified as disadvantaged. For example, joint development of L3 and L4 skills training and higher level technological skills training aligned to the 4th agricultural revolution.

10. Continue to invest in the technical skills still required – employers consistently tell us that whilst new skills, attributes and behaviours are required for the future, the demand for practical skills have not disappeared yet. The demand for technical skills at Level 1 and 2 (introductory and operator level) have risen sharply in the last 6 months due to Covid-19 and is now a key priority for the rural sector, especially horticulture, viticulture and forestry and arboriculture. Support the entry to the workplace to help gain the technical skills through focussed support initiatives to bolster careers advice and services, supporting employers to offer effective work placements and progression in employment.

11. Review – to evaluate progress against this report at 6 months and annually to ensure a currency and ongoing dialogue with employers and business principals.

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