

Get Sussex Working

Executive Summary





The Get Sussex Working Plan (GSWP) has been developed in response to the UK government's Get Britain Working white paper. Its purpose is to reduce economic inactivity and increase long-term employment by taking a whole-system approach to employment, health, post-16 education and skills support across Sussex.

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Vision

A dynamic Sussex workforce, enabled by integrated support across employment, health, post-16 education and skills. All residents are empowered to aspire, to develop the skills they need now and for the future; and to access meaningful employment that improves lives, addresses inequalities, and enables businesses to thrive.

The Get Sussex Working Plan (GSWP) has been developed in response to the UK government's Get Britain Working white paper. Its purpose is to reduce economic inactivity and increase long-term employment by taking a whole-system approach to employment, health, post-16 education and skills support across Sussex. This is a live and evolving plan, to be delivered and reviewed over the coming decade.

Sussex is located in the South-East of England and is generally assumed to be prosperous, an area with high employment, high skills, high productivity and high pay. However, the reality is a Sussex that faces multiple challenges in relation to work and skills, including:

- High unemployment
- Low employment density and a high proportion of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)
- Low wages and low economic activity
- An ageing workforce
- Inter-generational worklessness
- Low educational attainment
- High deprivation
- Skills and labour shortages in key industries

In addition to addressing these and other challenges, such as coastal deprivation and rural access to work and learning, there is a need for solutions that address the specific requirements of different groups of residents.

Our priority groups include:

- Unemployed people with multiple complex needs including mental and physical health conditions and disabilities
- Young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET), including those who are vulnerable, with special

educational needs, or disabilities (SEND) or experience of the social care system

- Residents who are aged 50 and over
- Adults with learning disabilities and neurodivergence
- Global majority communities – particularly migrants and refugees
- Parents and unpaid carers
- Adults with low skills and low incomes

Each group needs tailored approaches to effectively support them into learning and work.



Tinwood Estate Vineyard

To meet needs and realise the region's full potential, this Plan presents clear, credible, evidence-based ambitions, that will provide stability during the coming period of change:

Ambition one: Build a skills and employment infrastructure to achieve the Get Sussex Working Plan.

Ambition two: Address needs of diverse resident groups to increase economic activity.

Ambition three: Develop a joined-up approach with employers to inclusive workforce development, training and career progression.

Ambition four: Respond to diverse place-based needs to increase economic activity, health and wellbeing outcomes.

Ambition five: Embed careers, employment and skills at the heart of decision-making to facilitate a systems-wide approach.

Ambition six: Develop and upskill our workforce to boost employment and growth.

Under each of these ambitions, the Get Sussex Working Implementation Plan outlines the strategic and aspirational short- and medium-term actions that we will undertake to move towards our key performance indicators (KPIs).

Sussex's abundant natural assets, historic towns, villages, cities, rural areas and protected landscapes such as the South Downs National Park make it an attractive place to live and work. However, these protected landscapes and its coastal boundary restrict development and economic opportunities and create challenges for transport and digital connectivity, particularly in remote, coastal and rural areas.



Balfour Beatty

The Sussex economy is broad and varied, with a diverse, polycentric nature and presents with a mix of urban, coastal and rural challenges and opportunities. While many coastal and rural communities continue to face long-term productivity issues, there are significant areas of strength across the county. The economy around Gatwick Airport and Crawley in particular is a major driver of growth, with strong transport links and a concentration of businesses including in the aviation supply and value chains, logistics and advanced manufacturing. In 2024, according to the Centre for Cities Outlook Report 2025, Brighton & Hove had the highest share of new economy (technologically advanced knowledge-driven) firms per 10,000 population and Worthing was the fourth most productive city or large town for Growth Value Added in 2022.

Across Sussex, there are important economic hubs and clusters of small and medium-sized enterprises operating in key sectors such as advanced manufacturing and engineering, creative industries, digital technologies, health and life sciences and a growing green economy. Brighton & Hove continues to be a hub for digital and creative industries and professional services. The city has the biggest concentration of games companies outside London, while areas like Crawley, Burgess Hill, Worthing, Hastings and Horsham support a growing number of tech, engineering and manufacturing firms. Sussex has a strong coastal and cultural visitor economy offer and a significant land-based sector with strengths in agritech, farming, horticulture and a growing viticulture presence. These clusters are not only vital to the resilience of the local economy but also provide real opportunities for future-focused growth, innovation and high-quality employment.

Anchor institutions (large, established organisations such as local authorities, universities, education providers, hospitals and major employers) are deeply embedded in their local communities, unlikely to relocate and therefore play a pivotal role in supporting social and economic wellbeing. These organisations have a stake in the prosperity of Sussex, not only through providing essential services and employment, but also by fostering partnerships, investing in local development and driving inclusive growth. Their presence enables collaborative approaches that address the region's specific challenges, helping to adapt and expand innovative practices in employment and skills provision across diverse communities.

It is critical that these strengths are recognised and built upon as we collectively shape and deliver the future strategy for growing work and skills capability in Sussex. Adopting a place-based approach which harnesses the potential of our sectoral clusters, addresses longstanding challenges, seizes existing opportunities and ensures inclusive access to skills development via a strong employment and skills infrastructure will be vital.

Significant changes that will affect the skills and employment infrastructure and funding in Sussex are imminent. The Plan covers the period when a Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA) will be formed for Sussex and Brighton. Powers will be devolved from government to the new authority, which will have an elected mayor from May 2026, with authority over skills and employment support. Future funding such as the Adult Skills Fund and Skills Bootcamps, which are key to employment pathways, will be devolved to the MSA.



We need coordinated efforts... not just individual projects, but collaboration among councils, services, charities and employers

Sussex Jobseeker

In addition, local government reorganisation will see the whole of Sussex made up of unitary councils by 2028. Jobcentres and the National Careers Service will integrate to form a new Jobcentre and Careers Service, and it has been proposed to NHS England that the Integrated Care Boards of Surrey and Sussex combine, to deliver on the government's 10-Year Health Plan to improve outcomes for the populations of Surrey and Sussex.

Some key funds will cease to exist in 2026, such as the UK's Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), which currently supports some programmes for young people not in education, employment and training (NEET), and some programmes for unemployed adults who are furthest from the workplace and careers provision. Employment support programmes and funds such as the Adult Skills Fund (ASF) and Skills Bootcamps will be devolved to the Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA), which will need to secure more and longer-term funding to meet employment and skills objectives.

Nationally, the UK Industrial Strategy and Sector Action Plans aim to drive coordinated action across government and with partners at national, sectoral and regional levels. This will support informed decision-making on labour market and skills policy, helping to align investment, innovation and workforce development and address fragmentation in the skills system. This coordinated action aims to ensure that strategies and policies work together to meet current and future economic needs.

Other national reforms expected to have an impact on the future workforce include changes to the immigration system ('Restoring control over the immigration system' white paper), reforms to employment rights (the anticipated 'Employment Rights Bill', education and skills white paper), 'Pathways to Work' (reforming benefits and support to Get Britain Working) and the Department for Business and Trade policy paper 'Backing your business: our plan for small and medium-sized businesses' (July 2025).

As policy, governance and funding change, Sussex must secure the investment and strategy needed to grow its economy, strengthen its workforce, support residents in finding meaningful jobs and help businesses to access a skilled workforce.

The success of the Get Sussex Working Plan (GSWP) and its six ambitions will depend on:

- Adopting a clear, shared, strategic vision and dynamic and committed collaboration across a wide range of Sussex stakeholders.
- Making effective use of existing financial and infrastructure resources.
- Availability of new and additional long-term funding streams to facilitate the delivery of the Get Sussex Working Implementation Plan.
- Government policy and reforms, including to housing and business taxes, being conducive to the delivery of the Get Sussex Working Implementation Plan.

