

SERVICE UPDATE

<u>Name of Cluster:</u>	Education and Lifelong Learning
<u>Date:</u>	February 2025
<u>Title of Update:</u>	Overview of work being undertaken to address skills shortages
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1. Purpose of Service Update

At the Education and Children's Services Committee on 25th November 2025, Members requested an overview of work being undertaken to address skills shortages across the organisation, in addition to provide information on the pathways available to support people (including our young people in schools) into growth and volume sectors.

2. LOCAL CONTEXT

Skills Development Scotland, on behalf of the Regional Skills Partnership, carefully track both growth and volume sectors. For Aberdeen City these are currently:

2.1 Health and Social Care

- Top employing sector with large expansion and replacement demand.
- Demand will accelerate due to ageing demographics.
- Requires coordinated pathways, training expansion and recruitment from new demographic groups.

2.2 Engineering, Energy and Net Zero Sectors

- Pressure arising from energy transition, diversification and technological change.
- The Energy Transition Zone (ETZ) Skills Hub, NESAs, and the Transition Training Fund (TTF) 2025 provide essential support for upskilling but are reliant on short term funding from government.
- Strong potential for green skills development and transfer from oil and gas.

2.3 Construction and Infrastructure

- Skills shortages across trades, technical and professional roles.
- City regeneration, housing and infrastructure programmes risk delay without supply-side action.

2.4 Digital and Data Roles

- Growing demand across every sector.
- Digital transformation increases requirements for basic, intermediate and advanced skills.
- Artificial intelligence (AI) adoption is expected to reshape job roles and increase reskilling needs.

2.5 **Hospitality, Retail and Service Sectors**

- Recruitment difficulties and competition from higher-paying sectors.

3. **REGIONAL COLLABORATION**

3.1 As well as both Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeenshire Council, who have a statutory duty on employability, the delivery of skills and workforce interventions involves a broad partnership ecosystem, including:

- Local Employability Partnership (LEP)
- Regional Learning and Skills Partnership (RL&SP)
- Regional Economic Partnership (REP)
- Skills Development Scotland (SDS)
- North East Scotland College (NESCol)
- Robert Gordon University (RGU)
- University of Aberdeen (UoA)
- Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) North East
- National Health Service (NHS) Grampian
- Aberdeen City Health and Social Care Partnership (ACHSCP)
- Energy Transition Zone (ETZ) Ltd.
- Opportunity North East (ONE)
- Scottish Enterprise (SE)
- Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)
- Third-sector employability providers

3.2 The City Development and Regeneration Cluster supports the coordination of our work with our partners.

4. **COUNCIL RESPONSE**

We remain committed to Developing our Young Workforce and maintaining our Young Person's Guarantee employer status. This work aligns closely with some of our hard to fill roles, in particular our approach to apprenticeships and internships which has provided a solution to some of the current and future workforce capacity challenges by developing a pool of talent to fill our roles. We continue to link with local schools and attend career events and talk to pupils about potential pathways and the diversity of roles within the Council. Council clusters are actively shaping responses through a mix of workforce development, recruitment innovation and partnership working:

4.1 ***Education and Lifelong Learning***

- Expanding school-to-work transitions and senior-phase pathways.
- Increasing Foundation Apprenticeships (FA), vocational learning and employer-linked programmes.

- Strengthening targeted support through Pathways Advocate roles.

4.2 **Employability and Skills (ABZWorks)**

- Delivering all-age employability support via No One Left Behind (NOLB).
- Providing sector-specific training (construction, digital, hospitality, early learning and childcare, green skills).
- Expanding paid work experience, which has supported internal recruitment into Council hard-to-fill roles.
- Delivering high-impact job fairs (c.1,000 attendees) and targeted events such as Get Into Construction.

4.3 **Grow-Our-Own Strategies**

- Increasing traineeships and apprenticeships.
- Retraining existing staff into shortage areas (e.g., digital, early years, health-aligned roles).
- Working with the Talent Team to align internal vacancies with employability pipelines.

5 **A SCHOOL PERSPECTIVE**

5.1 **What is school data saying about intended careers (e.g. what is the supply)**

Considerable work is undertaken to support young people to have a clear understanding of the growth and volume sectors to help inform decision making.

5.2 Our secondary schools in Aberdeen City have been working collectively since 2021 to ensure that the content and rationale for their curricula reflects the intended careers of young people whilst also responding to the workforce needs of our local economy. Each year data is collected from school systems around intended career destinations from S4-S6. A recent summary can be found in *Figure 1* below.

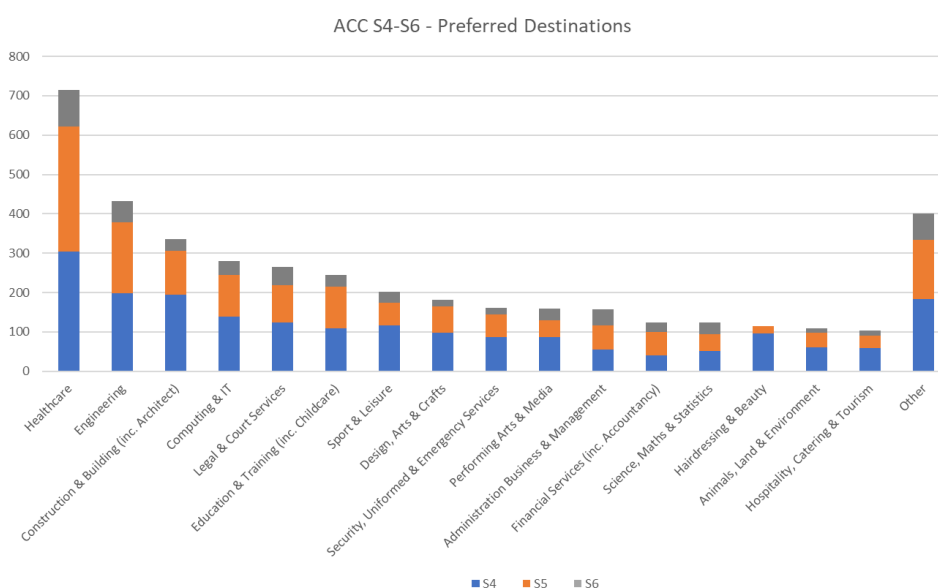


Figure 1

5.3 What improvement can be seen?

The individual and collective response from secondary schools has been to broaden the curriculum offer whilst maintaining a strong position to encourage young people to attain the highest and best course award possible. Key evidence of the broadened curriculum offer can be found in *Figure 2*. For example, there has been a 152% increase in the number of SCQF Level 6 courses in just two years between 2023 and 2025. When compared to the work of the other thirty-two local authorities, Aberdeen City schools now sit in firmly in the top ten offering curriculum breadth in this way.

ACC Wider Courses	2025	2025 RANK (Comp ACC with 32)	2024	2024 RANK (Comp ACC with 32)	2023	2023 RANK (Comp ACC with 32)	2022	2022 RANK (Comp ACC with 32)	# change from 2021
Level 4	575	11	600	9	415	13	365	9	1
Level 5	1495	9	940	12	685	14	625	17	980
Level 6	1095	7	730	9	435	10	160	20	880
National 4, National 5, Higher or Advanced Higher. They are wider courses such as Skills for Work and National Progression Awards that are the equivalent but not the same as the National Qualifications referenced above.									

Figure 2

5.4 How is ABZ Campus contributing to responding to growth sector areas?

ABZ Campus is the banner under which Aberdeen City schools and partners deliver a wider set of courses that would not otherwise be able to be offered by individual schools. This work commenced in Session 2023-24 and is now in the third year of running. From the outset, this work was designed to offer courses that young people want whilst also responding to the needs of the economy. *Figure 3* shows how the incremental increase of course offers from ABZ Campus over the last three year period by growth sector relevance (it should be noted that this summary shows only those courses that are collectively offered, and not the many innovative course offers that are available at individual school level).

Session	Courses	14	15	16	17	Agriculture	Childcare	Construction	Digital	Energy	Financial & Business	General	Healthcare	Life Science	Tourism & Hospitality	Providers	In Person	Virtual	Anytime	Twilight
2023-24	36	1	2	15	18	0	4	0	2	5	5	7	4	4	5	10	35	1	0	0
% 2023-24		2.8	5.6	41.7	50.0	0.0	11.1	0.0	5.6	13.9	13.9	19.4	11.1	11.1	13.9	27.8	97.2	2.8	0.0	0.0
2024-25	71	1	14	30	25	6	5	4	5	9	6	12	6	6	11	16	55	1	12	2
% 2024-25		1.4	19.7	42.3	35.2	8.5	7.0	5.6	7.0	12.7	8.5	16.9	8.5	8.5	15.5	22.5	77.5	1.4	16.9	2.8
2025-26	78	4	14	30	30	5	5	3	5	10	8	20	5	4	11	18	57	1	16	4
% 2025-26		5.1	17.9	38.5	38.5	6.4	6.4	3.8	6.4	12.8	10.3	25.6	6.4	5.1	14.1	23.1	73.1	1.3	20.5	5.1

Figure 3

5.5 Education Next Steps

There is no room for complacency and there is much still to be done. One aspect of this is to cement the curricular pathways opening up to young people through the individual and collective work of schools with increasing the opportunities for work placements as part of the curriculum. *Figure 4* shows where young people who leave Aberdeen City schools go to in relation to positive destinations. Although it is pleasing that we out-perform our virtual comparator in those who stay on in further and higher education, it is notable that our young people do not proceed directly into employment in the same numbers. It is believed that the early work underway to provide strategic direction to work placements as part of the curriculum in S4-S6 will positively impact on this aspect of

positive destination, although it should be emphasised that this is a long-term strategy where improvement should be expected over the next 3-5 years. Time will be needed to grow our portfolio of employers offering placements, to allow our Senior Phase young people to experience these placements, and then to make decisions and act on these decision on their positive destinations.

Establishment	Year	% Employed	% Further Education	% Higher Education
Aberdeen City	2023/24	17.24	28.59	43.59
Virtual Comparator	2023/24	23.6	26.79	40.08
Aberdeen City	2022/23	16.39	28.9	44.63
Virtual Comparator	2022/23	25.69	26.89	38.84
Aberdeen City	2021/22	17.45	29.38	43.65
Virtual Comparator	2021/22	25.46	25.84	40.64
Aberdeen City	2020/21	13.79	30.84	45.72
Virtual Comparator	2020/21	23.4	24.21	43.06

Figure 4

6. CITY DEVELOPMENT AND REGNERATION

- 6.1 The Council's Employability and Skills service, known externally as ABZWorks, receives No One Left Behind monies from Scottish Government's Economic Development Division, and has also secured United Kingdom Shared Prosperity Fund monies from the UK Government to support city residents to progress along the employability pipeline towards employment or other positive destinations – education, formal training, volunteering. The focus is, in line with the No One Left Behind strategy, primarily on those furthest from the labour market and who have multiple barriers to employment. No One Left Behind requires an 'all-age, all-stage' approach, which means the support is open to people of working age from 16 up who are not in education, training or employment (with exceptions for those who are underemployed or experiencing in-work poverty).
- 6.2 A condition of the No One Left Behind funding is that the strategic approach should be determined by the Local Employability Partnership (LEP) which is chaired by the Employability and Skills lead, vice-chaired by Skills Development Scotland, and membership also consisting of DWP, NHS Grampian, ACVO, DYW-NE, NESCol, Education, Business Gateway, ACHSCP, and a representative of the Aberdeen Employability Training Providers Forum. The LEP has identified key target groups of people for support, determined by local data and insights, while also determining that, in line with the No One Left Behind funding conditions, anyone who meets the broad eligibility criteria and who is in need of support can receive it.
- 6.3 Contracts have been let by the Council, as managing authority for No One Left Behind, for a broad range of training provision activities, as well as sector specific training provision in areas where there is local skills and/or volume shortages, including, but not limited to, construction, digital skills, hospitality, early learning and childcare. Green skills contracts have also been let and an individual green skills training fund launched using UKSPF monies to enable city residents to undertake green skills training. UKSPF criteria allows for support to be provided not only to

unemployed city residents, but also to those in employment seeking to upskill or reskill.

- 6.4 Paid work experience schemes via No One Left Behind and UKSPF have created a multitude of opportunities for individuals to undertake work experience placements, paid at the Real Living Wage rate both within and outwith the Council. For work experience interns placed within the Council, they can access ACC vacancies which are advertised internally. This has led to considerable success internally, with a number of paid work experience placement participants going on to secure roles within the authority, including two securing employability keyworker roles following placements within the Employability and Skills team, parents securing ELC roles or moving onto the relief pool, and others securing posts within Corporate Landlord, roads, waste, business support, and school catering. Others have gone on to secure roles outwith the Council or go on to further or higher education.
- 6.5 The Employability and Skills team works closely with the Talent team to identify opportunities within hard to recruit areas and to create placements there, with a view to individuals sustaining long-term employment post-placement and benefitting the organisation. We are also looking at areas where there are recurring vacancies and how the Employability and Skills team can support individuals to prepare to apply for such recurring vacancies.
- 6.6 Discussions as to how those links can be strengthened and how potential future opportunities can be identified are ongoing including internships for Care Experienced Young People.
- 6.7 External placements have been similarly successful with individuals accessing opportunities across a broad range of industries and securing long-term sustained employment. Some case studies demonstrating the success of individuals who have participated in placements, and from other employability support, can be viewed on the ABZWorks [website](#).
- 6.8 In addition to this, the employability keyworkers actively support people gain the skills required for and apply for Aberdeen City Council posts which are advertised externally and has enjoyed significant success in this approach across a range of Council areas, including Environmental Services and Corporate Landlord.
- 6.9 An employer forum is being created as a sub-group of the Local Employability Partnership. This group will be employer-led and ensure that employer voice and insight is fed into the LEP, that relationships between employability partners and employers are strengthened thus opening the doors for increased joint working, and that more opportunities for employability participants are created.
- 6.10 The Employability and Skills team was involved in the creation of the Regional Economic Strategy Skills Action Plan and the team leader is the named lead for a number of actions within it. The Action Plan is focused on growth sectors.
- 6.11 The team is also heavily involved in the delivery of current LOIP projects, has been involved in the development of the Economy strand of the new LOIP, and we anticipate will be involved in delivery of elements of that.