

# STEP SKILLS

PREPARE FOR SUCCESS IN HERTS

2021 to 2024

Strategy

Extended to 2025

The Adult Community  
Learning and Employment  
Support Service in  
Hertfordshire



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# Introduction

In Autumn 2023 we made the decision to extend our strategy for another year as we are approaching a general election that is likely to affect governmental priorities going forward. This is our extended Strategy, reflecting our dual purpose in education and supported employment.

This strategy builds on our previous one, while recognising we are potentially in a period of significant change as we await both local and national elections. As such we have retained our over-arching aims from our 2021-2024 strategy as still relevant at this point in time. However, we have updated our goals for the coming year to reflect the progress we have made over the last 2 years and to better express our current plans.

Our work has always been focussed on residents with barriers to education and employment and this has not changed. We intend to keep this focus in the coming years, as it is these people who will struggle most with re-engaging or staying in touch with their communities, adopting and maintaining healthy lifestyles, trying to gain or sustain employment, and learning online.

This strategy sets out our key aims for the year. It shows how we will meet the needs of the residents in Hertfordshire who need that extra help to live healthy, fulfilling lives in thriving, prosperous communities.



# The Skills and Employment Picture in Hertfordshire and Beyond

The skills and employment agenda is complex and constantly changing to reflect the impact of policy and economic changes and our service must remain prepared to respond to these changes. We have seen over Covid how an unexpected event can have a significant impact on the way that we work, our target audience, the interventions that we need to provide and the speed that we need to make changes. While the immediate threat from Covid is past, we must continue to have a service that can respond quickly to a changing landscape, whether through changes in policy / political leadership, further pandemic type crises or economic changes.

There is still the possibility of devolution of funding which could change the expectations of what we deliver in Hertfordshire, moving away from the national drivers and becoming more locally focussed. In the meantime, the funding methodology for the Adult Education Budget is also changing and is likely to impact on the numbers of learners we can reach and possibly the types of courses we can offer.

# Step2Skills Mission, Vision and Values



## Our vision

To close the gap in skills, learning and employment for people facing challenges in Hertfordshire.



## Our mission

To inspire and support people from diverse backgrounds in Hertfordshire to overcome challenges and realise their ambitions.



## Our values



We care:

- We put our learners and participants at the centre of everything we do
- We reach and support people who may not easily engage with other services
- We empower our learners and participants to raise their aspirations and reach their ambitions
- We listen to our learners and participants to ensure that our service meets their needs
- We believe inclusion, equality and diversity are key to success



We are open and honest:

- We are committed to working together with organisations from all sectors
- We work openly and honestly with our partners, learners and participants
- We are transparent about our successes and challenges when reporting to senior management and partners.

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# Step2Skills Mission, Vision and Values



## Our values (continued)



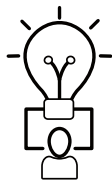
We use money wisely:

- We offer services that are not being offered elsewhere and we complement other local services.
- We thoroughly monitor and evaluate our service to ensure that our intervention is good value for money and deliver what we are supposed to
- We apply for funding from different sources to keep our service sustainable and to offer the best service for the people of Hertfordshire



We try to do it right:

- We use funding to deliver a high-quality service that supports our learners and participants to progress
- We welcome and act on feedback from partners, learners and participants about how to improve our services as quickly as possible
- We take pride in what we do and encourage our partners, learners and participants to celebrate their achievements



We embrace new ideas:

- We actively seek new ideas from partners, learners and participants to advise and support each individual learner or participant
- We are agile in our planning and development of different types of interventions or programmes to meet current and emerging priorities
- We quickly adjust our ways of working when needed to make sure we remain effective and engage with people who require that extra help

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# Key aims of the service strategy



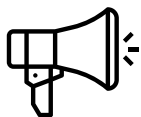
**01.** To create seamless links between the skills and employment support aspects of our service.



**02.** To develop our offer for both skills and employment support, supporting Hertfordshire adults with barriers to develop skills that are fit for the future, including in health and wellbeing, digital skills and sustainability/green industries.



**03.** To contribute to the delivery of the Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) Corporate Plan, the Adult Care Services (ACS) Plan and the Hertfordshire Skills and Employment Strategy, while linking with other local, regional and national drivers.



**04.** To promote the skills and employment agenda effectively across Hertfordshire.



**05.** To improve how we measure and report the wider impact of our service.

# 1. To create a cohesive approach by establishing a seamless link between the skills and employment support aspects of our service.

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Step2Skills is now well-established as the Hertfordshire Skills and Employment Support service. We have successfully delivered on both strands over the past years and are gaining wider recognition both within and beyond Hertfordshire County Council. However, there is further work to be done within our team and with our partners and stakeholders to bring together the skills and employment parts of the service.

We will develop a simple single entry point for all learners, participants and employers (whether they contact us online, by phone or face to face), creating a triage and referral system which will mean that everyone who comes to us gets a personal Skills and Employment Pathway Plan that reflects their aspirations and needs. This will cover all interventions that might be useful for an individual including our Community Learning courses (encompassing basic skills, health and wellbeing and a first step to lifelong learning), skills for life and personal development, skills for work, accredited learning, volunteering and employment support including Supported Employment delivered according to the standards set by the British Association of Supported Employment (BASE).

By doing this and making sure that any learner or participant is offered both learning and employment support where they need it, we will create a cohesive approach and a cohesive service and offer the best opportunities for our learners and participants.



“Our key priorities must be recovering from the economic impacts of the pandemic, tackling the challenges we had before the crisis, and building a prosperous and inclusive future. That includes helping people back to work and limiting rises in long term unemployment, creating good jobs with progression opportunities, and building active and engaged communities. Adult learning has a central role to play, engaging adults who too often miss out on support, inspiring people to learn, building people’s confidence, linking to employers and working with other council and public services.”

Stephen Evans, Chief Executive,  
Learning and Work Institute



To create a cohesive approach...

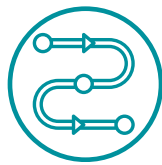
# We will;



**01.** Continue to promote the Step2Skills brand so that we are recognised across Hertfordshire and with wider partners outside of the county as Hertfordshire's Skills and Employment Support Service.



**02.** Bring all parts of our service closer together to provide a cohesive journey for all learners, participants and employers regardless of their needs and ambitions.



**03.** Create a system for planning a learner and participant "Individual Pathway to Skills and Employment" from first contact to destination.



**04.** Develop our Information, Advice and Guidance offering to ensure that all learners and participants are given the support they need to identify their next steps.



**05.** Optimise the website for our service to make it easy for learners and participants to access information and book courses or introductory conversations to explore how our service can support them



**06.** Develop an overarching employer engagement guidance to ensure that employers are given the opportunity to explore with Step2Skills the skills needs of their existing low paid/low skilled workforce and consider what adjustments may be required to create a more inclusive workforce.



Connecting people is not just about connecting people to others nearby. Social care staff and providers should be motivated to think beyond just 'good care'; and look wider than their own care regime to initiate and supporting people to sustain relationships. Generally people who are socially isolated experience poorer wellbeing outcomes.

Connected Lives, a model for social care in Hertfordshire

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## 2. Develop our offer for both skills and employment support keeping our focus on Hertfordshire adults with barriers to engagement and supporting them to develop skills that are fit for the future workplace, including in digital skills and sustainability

Step2Skills prioritises working with people with barriers to education and employment. These people could be those who have a disability or learning difficulty, are experiencing mental health issues, who have low basic skills (English, maths and digital skills), are facing complex life challenges, for whom English is a second language, who are digitally disenfranchised, or who had a bad experience at school and lack confidence to engage with learning and development. It could also be people who have had their confidence knocked by unemployment – either long term or recent redundancy – or who simply need some additional support to achieve their goals.

Our target audience are people who would not feel able or do not wish to go to a college or other formal education or employment support settings but need a different approach to start their journey. This is a unique approach to education in Hertfordshire and by offering learning and employment support to people with barriers, we are meeting a need not fulfilled by colleges or large, national employment services.

We recognise that our learners and participants have a wide range of needs. Therefore, we offer support for people to find and sustain employment. In some cases, work tasters and volunteering opportunities will be used as stepping-stones to paid employment. We also offer a full range of opportunities from Community Learning enabling people to improve their confidence, self-esteem, mental health and wellbeing as well as gaining new skills, to accredited learning in, for example, English (including English for Speakers of Other Languages or ESOL), maths and digital skills. We regularly review our interventions to respond to the changing needs of the people and employers in Hertfordshire. To ensure that we can continue to deliver the right interventions, we will continue to bid for funding that can support our Mission and Vision.

Our curriculum and employer links are designed to ensure that our learners and participants have discovered the joy and benefits of lifelong learning and are prepared for employment, particularly in the current sectors of growth and opportunity in Hertfordshire.



Everything we should do should enable citizenship and the rights and responsibilities that go with this. By making a commitment to citizenship for everyone, we are putting in place the building blocks for stronger communities.

Independence for people gives them the means and motivation to have choice and control over their life and over their care and support. Independence doesn't just mean not having a service. Very often a service may give people independence.

Connected Lives,  
a model for social care in  
Hertfordshire

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To develop our offer...

## We will;



**01.** Continue to target people who do not easily engage with other services to close the equality gap in Hertfordshire.



**02.** Develop our lifelong learning offer, aligned with central and local government policies, to meet the needs of the people and employers of Hertfordshire.



**03.** Develop our lifelong learning offer to include environmentally based courses to meet the sustainability/green industries agenda and increase the number and types of digital skills courses, including covering suitable aspects of AI.



**04.** Explore how we can strengthen our Health and Wellbeing offer to support people to live healthy, independent lives.



**05.** Make sure that all learner and participant ambitions are catered for, or signposted to – from improving health and wellbeing to gaining paid employment and progressing in education.

*“HOLEX represents a network of 140+ adult and community learning providers. HOLEX members have the largest geographical reach of all providers, and they educate, train and retrain 700,000+ adult learners annually. They are judged by Ofsted as the sector best for teaching and learning and are often top of the league table for customer satisfaction. All HOLEX members share a joint mission to provide skills and learning that give adults and often their families a chance to succeed in life and support their employment prospects and wellbeing, which in turn improves productivity and creates the circumstances for economic success.”*

HOLEX website

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### 3. To contribute to the delivery of the Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) Corporate Plan, the 3 Year Adult Care Services (ACS) Plan and the Hertfordshire Skills & Employment Strategy, while linking with other local, regional and national drivers.

As part of a Local Authority as well as the skills and employment sector, Step2Skills contributes to many national and local strategies and plans. We clearly respond to the priorities of our funders when planning our curriculum and employment support interventions, but we also must meet the specific needs of our local population. Our strategy includes developing and maintaining effective relationships with borough and district councils to respond to local need.

We are an active member of the Steering Group responsible for the Hertfordshire Skills and Employment Strategy, linking with Hertfordshire Futures (previously known as Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership), other HCC departments, employers, Job Centre Plus and colleges, and we take the lead on theme 2 – Adult Learning and Employment. We have set up and lead on the Pathways to Employment Forum for Adults with Disabilities. We contribute to the ACS plan by supporting people with disabilities into work and volunteering.

*“Disabled people are a neglected source of quality labour as the UK economy faces the twin challenges of Brexit and Covid recovery. Many employers are discovering the motivation and skills that disabled people have to offer but both they, and disabled people themselves, need high quality support to navigate the many structural barriers and ensure that a sustainable job match is agreed. Supported Employment services have a key role to play in meeting employer needs and satisfying disabled jobseekers’ aspirations.”*

Huw Davies, Chief Executive British Association of Supported Employment



We make a clear contribution to the HCC Corporate Plan and the ACS 3 Year Plan through supporting:

- the ‘A Cleaner and Greener Environment’ theme of the Corporate Plan (developing environmentally based courses, preparing people for work in green industries)
- the ‘Sustainable, responsible growth in our county’ theme of the Corporate Plan (ensuring that our learners and participants have the skills needed for good, sustained employment)
- the ‘Healthy and Fulfilling Lives for our Residents’ theme of the Corporate Plan (providing interventions that support people to improve their confidence, self-esteem, wellbeing and physical and mental health)
- the ‘Excellent Council Services for All’ theme of the Corporate Plan (Ensuring our service is citizen focused, is innovative and embraces diversity while also investing in our staff wellbeing and development)
- the ‘Maintaining Wellbeing’ theme of the ACS 3 Year Plan (Promoting resilience, connecting people to stay fit and well and supporting people back to independence through our Community Learning and Employment Support interventions).

In addition, our work to support those with disabilities, mental health issues and suffering from loneliness ties into the Public Health agenda.

To contribute to the delivery...

## We will;



**01.** Work with employers to support them to embrace a diverse working culture and sign up to, or increase their level on, the Disability Confident Scheme (Hertfordshire Skills and Employment Strategy 2021-2024).



**02.** Continue to support our learners and participants to develop personal skills and improve their health and wellbeing.

**887,400**  
**ADULTS**  
in Hertfordshire

**100,000** | planned by  
**NEW JOBS** | **2031**



**Residents to make changes to their lives to improve and maintain their own health.**

**18%**



aged 16 and over have no **QUALIFICATIONS**  
Compared to 22.5% of people in England

**Our residents to be engaged in local issues, helping to shape services to meet local need and making a personal contribution through a range of volunteering opportunities.**

**Taken from the Hertfordshire County Council Corporate Plan 2019 - 2025**

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#### 4. To promote the skills and employment agenda effectively which includes improving awareness of information and advice services available to residents

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on our economy has meant that the skills and employment agenda has recently become even more important than ever. Add to this the potential impacts of Brexit and we are in a position where the need for people to be able to access lifelong learning, retraining and employment support becomes imperative. However, to be effective, the people who need to use these services must be aware of where and how to access them and what is on offer.

Step2Skills therefore will work to ensure that all of our partners, elected representatives and local authorities are aware of the interventions available and able to signpost the people of Hertfordshire to the right place to access them. We have to link in with, and promote the use of, other resources already available in the county, such as the Herts Opportunity Portal (HOP) and Herts Help to create, as much as possible, simple access to information which can be an effective tool for promoting our work and for using to support the Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) required by our learners and participants. We will work closely with our Advisory Board to extend our reach to a wider audience.

We will develop a clear marketing strategy to support the raising of awareness of the skills and employment agenda and the promotion of information and advice opportunities. We will actively contribute to the development of a Hertfordshire wide Lifelong Learning Strategy which will both promote skills and retraining for adults aged 16 and above and create a more cohesive offer across the county.



*“Step2Skills has an essential role in Hertfordshire supporting our residents, often with multiple barriers to employment, with bespoke interventions to enable their progression onto further learning and meaningful employment. Through their excellent partnership working, particularly within the voluntary and community sector, they are the conduit between reaching vulnerable adults in our disadvantaged communities and enabling their progression onto mainstream provision through our FE colleges and wider learning and employment programmes such as apprenticeships and the Lifetime Skills Guarantee.”*

Caroline Cartwright, Skills Employment and Apprenticeship Manager, Hertfordshire Futures (Previously known as Hertfordshire LEP)

To promote the skills and employment agenda...

## We will;



**01.** Further develop relationships with MPs, Elected Members and Civil Servants to raise awareness about the impact of Community Learning and employment support interventions



**02.** Ensure that we have strong links with the Herts Opportunity Portal (HOP) and Herts Help, referring learners and participants to it, using it for IAG and advertising our courses and opportunities on it



**03.** Develop clear marketing and engagement strategies that will include raising awareness of the skills and employment agenda and information and advice opportunities



**04.** Develop an in-house Information, Advice and Guidance service for Step2Skills learners and participants

### Working Futures 2017 - 2027 - Qualifications (UK level)

- The supply of skills in the labour market is set to continue to grow, as educational participation levels remain strong and more people (especially young people) are acquiring higher level qualifications. At the same time, older people who are less well qualified on average, will retire from the labour force
- The qualification profile of those in employment will continue to see a shift towards more people holding more high level qualifications
- By 2027, around 56.2% of people in employment are expected to be qualified at level 4 and above, whilst the proportion of people with level 1 or no formal qualifications at all is expected to fall to 10.6%
- Growing demand for formal qualifications is more clearly reflected in the marked shift in occupational employment structure in favour of the three highest skilled occupational major groups, which tend to employ higher qualified people

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## 5. To improve how we measure and report the wider impact of our service

While Step2Skills is very good at collecting data for each individual part of our service, we need to be able to report on our impact as a whole. We have funding from a range of different sources, all of which require different reporting measures. However, to be able to evidence the overall impact of our service, we have to find a way of collating and reporting all that information together.

Some areas of our service are easier to report on than others, often due to the length of time that we have had to develop that reporting. However, we need to focus on developing the less direct reporting now – so rather than just the numbers of people engaging with us we need to look at the number of employers we are working with and the impact that has on our learners and participants. We need to consider what each employer offers us – and what we offer them – to get the full picture.

We are very good at reporting the simple measures (e.g. the number of people who have achieved a qualification or of the number of people who have got a new job), but we also need to consider the social outcomes of our intervention and where people go once they leave our service. We know from case studies and learners' and participants' feedback that people gain confidence and improve their self-esteem and mental health from engaging with our interventions, but we do not currently measure and report on these as a standard.

By developing systems that can evidence our social impact including the development of learners' and participants' health and wellbeing, their skills and employment chances and their progression within and beyond Step2Skills, we will truly be able to demonstrate our wider impact as a service.

*“Hertfordshire Adult Community Learning Service (HAFLS) is a vital element of adult community services offered by Hertfordshire County Council. I greatly value community learning as I have seen first-hand its impact on some of our residents. It has helped them improve their well-being, get them into employment or volunteering and is often beneficial for the family as a whole. In a context where social prescribing is a recognised viable alternative to the medical model and a society where loneliness is identified as a contributing factor to poor health, community learning is an essential part of the recovery pathways.”*

Owen Mapley, former CEO, Hertfordshire County Council



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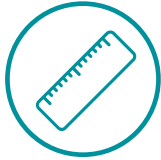
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To improve how we measure and report...

## We will;



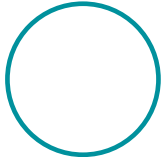
**01.** Create baselines for soft / social outcomes and progression with a view to measuring and reporting improvements and setting targets



**02.** Develop better systems to evidence the impact of the different types of interventions within Step2Skills, particularly around soft / social outcomes and progression beyond Step2Skills



**03.** Develop reporting processes around employer engagement, activities and impact.



**04.** Create systems for reporting the impact of Step2Skills as a whole rather than as separate projects



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## Get in touch

The management team at Step2Skills

Head of Service - Chantal Lommel

Strategy Manager - Philippa Morton

Senior Project Lead Manager (Multiply) - Barbara McDonagh

Adult Skills Curriculum Manager - Evelyn Djan

Quality Assurance Manager - Lyn Keates

Marketing and Outreach Manager - Wendy Nurse

Operations and Administration Manager - Gemma Jeffreys

Team Manager - Emma Gladdish

Project Manager - Jo Beazley

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**Website:** [www.step2skills.org.uk](http://www.step2skills.org.uk)

**Social media:** @Step2Skills

**Telephone:** 01992 556 194

**Email:** [step2skills@hertfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:step2skills@hertfordshire.gov.uk)

