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YOUTH JOBS GAP WIDENS IN NORFOLK AND SUFFOLK AS EMPLOYERS SAY TOO MANY YOUNG PEOPLE ARE NOT WORK READY

New analysis of Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs), published today by the British Chambers of Commerce, has found that too many young people are still entering the labour market without the skills, confidence or behaviours employers need.

The report comes as the number of young people classed as not in employment, education or training (NEET) has risen to 957,000, its highest point since the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, with 12.8% of 16–24 year olds now locked out of work and learning¹. This is a challenge reflected across Norfolk and Suffolk.

The report shows that LSIPs have successfully brought together thousands of employers, education providers and stakeholders to better align training with the needs of local economies. However, it also identifies missed opportunities, particularly in engaging younger people earlier and creating clearer pathways into employment.

Across Norfolk and Suffolk, employers are reporting the same pattern reflected nationally. Businesses say too many young people are entering the labour market without the behaviours, confidence and practical skills needed to succeed, particularly around communication, resilience, and workplace expectations.



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Evidence gathered through the Norfolk and Suffolk LSIP shows these gaps often emerge before young people leave education, reinforcing the need for earlier, employer-informed engagement in schools and colleges.

Key findings from employer engagement undertaken by Norfolk and Suffolk LSIP include:

- Work readiness now a “very high concern” for Norfolk employers across multiple sectors
- Gaps in communication and behaviour evident before young people leave education
- ‘Digitally confident’ does not mean ‘workplace ready’, employers warn
- Rural transport barriers blocking access to jobs for young people
- Employers ready to help, but the skills system is not set up to connect them with schools early enough

Digital capability is also a growing concern. While many young people are confident using technology, employers highlight a gap in practical, workplace-ready digital skills. Around 30% of Norfolk businesses² now view AI awareness as a desirable capability, underlining how quickly expectations are evolving.

In rural parts of Norfolk and Suffolk, these challenges are often compounded by transport and connectivity barriers, which can limit access to jobs, training and work experience. Employers in sectors such as engineering, agri-tech and clean energy report that talent is being lost due to access issues rather than ability.

Despite these challenges, there is clear progress locally. Through the LSIP and Local Skills Improvement Fund investment, colleges and training providers across Norfolk and Suffolk have introduced new courses, facilities and employer-designed programmes aligned to key sectors including clean energy, advanced manufacturing, construction and digital.

Employers are increasingly involved in shaping provision, helping ensure that training reflects real-world needs and that learners are better prepared for the workplace.

The British Chambers of Commerce national report highlights that the skills system is being held back by fragmented funding, limited influence in earlier education, and a lack of consistent engagement with young people before they enter the labour market.

Dean Pierpoint, Skills Director for the Norfolk and Suffolk LSIP, said, “The national picture is playing out here in Norfolk and Suffolk. Too many young people are still leaving education without a clear route into work, and employers are feeling that gap.

“We are seeing clear progress through the Norfolk and Suffolk LSIP, with stronger collaboration between employers and education and more provision aligned to local industry needs. But there is more to do, particularly in supporting younger people earlier and making pathways into work much clearer and more accessible”.

Kate Shoesmith, Director of Policy at the British Chambers of Commerce, said, “LSIPs have been really successful, involving thousands of businesses, training providers and learners over the past four years to deliver strong employment outcomes.

“But they are being held back from achieving more. There is an urgent need to improve the quality and consistency of careers advice available to schools. Many LSIPs report that schools are not aware of the growth areas in their local economies or the breadth of careers available.

“With almost one million young people not in employment, education or training, earlier intervention is essential to connect young people to the world of work. The tools to do this already exist through LSIPs. It is now a matter of giving them the long-term support and authority to deliver at scale.”



The Norfolk and Suffolk LSIP continues to work with businesses, education providers and partners to strengthen skills provision, improve progression pathways and support economic growth across the region.

For more information about the Norfolk and Suffolk LSIP, please visit www.nslsip.co.uk

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Notes to Editors

1. The figure of “nearly one million” young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) is based on data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS), which estimates that 12.8% of 16–24 year olds in the UK are NEET (2025).
2. In Norfolk, employer feedback (2025) indicates: 30% of businesses now view AI awareness as a desirable skill
3. Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) were introduced as part of the Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022.
4. There are currently 39 LSIPs across England, with 33 led by Chambers of Commerce.
5. LSIPs bring together employers, education providers and stakeholders to identify and address local skills needs.
6. Norfolk and Suffolk Chambers spokespeople are available for interview.
7. The full BCC report is available [here](#).

For media enquires please contact adam.cracknell@norfolkchambers.co.uk.

About the Norfolk & Suffolk Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP)

The Norfolk & Suffolk Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) is designed to put employers at the heart of the skills agenda in this region.



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Working in collaboration since September 2022, Norfolk and Suffolk Chambers of Commerce, in conjunction with the Department for Education (DfE), continue to highlight the fundamental skills requirements for key sectors across our region and have developed a roadmap for change to help address those skills shortages.

The LSIP advances stronger relationships with a range of stakeholders, including local authorities, colleges and independent training providers and has continued to ensure that the employer voice is clearly heard.

About Norfolk Chambers of Commerce

The Norfolk Chambers is a not-for-profit independent business and is one of 53 accredited Chambers by the British Chambers of Commerce.

We are a business membership organisation, from start-up businesses, small and medium enterprises, and on to global brands, the Norfolk Chambers of Commerce embraces and represents the County's business community.

About Suffolk Chambers of Commerce

The Suffolk Chamber of Commerce has been providing unwavering support for the success of businesses in Suffolk, and the region's thriving economy, since 1884.

As a private sector, not-for-profit member led organisation, our core competencies of Connect, Support, Inform, and Inspire reflect our commitment to advocating for our members' interests at all levels. Through lobbying and advocacy, strong relationships with policymakers, networking events, professional development, business resources, and access to exclusive services, we empower businesses to grow and thrive.