



**The Skills and  
Business Hub**

# Annual Report

From Classroom to Boardroom



**2024/25**



August 2025  
**The Skills and Business Hub**

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# Introduction

## Message from the Chief Executive

2024–25 was a year of significant change and opportunity as we transitioned from Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) to The Skills and Business Hub. This shift followed the transfer of LEP functions to local government in April 2024, and we were proud to be endorsed by Berkshire’s six Unitary Authorities to continue delivering key programmes that support our region’s economic growth.

Our work this year spanned business support, careers guidance, and workforce development. Through the Berkshire Growth Hub and UK Shared Prosperity Fund grants, we helped SMEs start, grow, and access finance. We expanded our Skills Bootcamps programme, doubling learner numbers and launching in-house delivery through our Growth Academy, which received a glowing OFSTED report. We also continued to deliver the Berkshire Careers Hub across two academic years, helping young people find their best next step. A major highlight was leading the development of the Berkshire Economic Strategy 2025–35, setting a clear vision for sustainable growth and skills development.



*A. Wheeler*

## Message from the Chair



The transition to The Skills and Business Hub marks a new chapter in our organisation’s journey. While our legal structure as a private company limited by guarantee remains unchanged since our founding in 2011, our new name better reflects our mission to support economic growth from classroom to boardroom. We remain a unique, independent, not-for-profit organisation aligned with the Berkshire functional economic area.

Our continued collaboration with local government partners has been central to our success. Their support enabled us to deliver three major government-funded programmes—Berkshire Growth Hub, Berkshire Careers Hub, and Skills Bootcamps—all of which met or exceeded expectations. As we look ahead, we remain committed to working in partnership to deliver inclusive, sustainable growth across Berkshire

*R. Barber* 1

# Who we are

The Skills and Business Hub is a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to driving sustainable economic growth across Berkshire. We support individuals, businesses, and communities through a blend of business support, skills development, careers education, and strategic initiatives—connecting public and private sectors to meet the county’s evolving needs.

**We have a mandate to deliver the following Government Grant funded programmes for Berkshire:**

**Berkshire Growth Hub**  
Department for Business and Trade (DBT)

**Skills Bootcamps**  
Department for Education (DfE, Skills for Life)

**Berkshire Careers Hub**  
Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC/DfE)

**LEVI**  
Local Authorities



Our journey began in 2011 as the Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), a government-funded body focused on regional development. Today, we continue to build on that legacy- delivering programmes that support county-wide growth while evolving our offering, with a clear mission to unlock potential and create opportunity through people, skills, and collaboration, from classroom to boardroom.



The Skills and Business Hub

# From Classroom to Boardroom

## Delivery in 24/25:

Key moments along the way

### Supporting individuals and businesses at Every Stage:



## Berkshire Skills Bootcamps



We are the managing authority for Skills Bootcamps in Berkshire, responsible for the delivery through a network of independent training providers and colleges.

Skills Bootcamps are flexible, employer-led training programmes funded by the Department for Education. Designed to tackle skills shortages and support economic growth, they help individuals upskill for in-demand roles and enable employers to build the talent they need. Whether you're returning to work, changing careers, or growing your team, Skills Bootcamps offer a practical route to new opportunities. With over 976 learner starts and £8.6 million in funding secured across Berkshire alone, these programmes are making a real impact—supporting individuals, businesses, and communities alike.

## Berkshire Careers Hub



Berkshire Careers Hub connects schools, colleges, and employers to improve careers education and prepare young people for the future. Delivered in partnership with the Careers and Enterprise Company and funded by the Department for Education, the Hub supports over 87 institutions—including all SEND schools—through tailored guidance, employer encounters, and work experience.

Our network of Cornerstone Employers plays a key role in delivering impactful initiatives such as Teacher Encounters, Apprenticeship promotion, and careers support for disadvantaged students. Together, we help schools meet the Gatsby Benchmarks and embed national Employer Standards, aligning education with Berkshire's evolving labour market.

## Berkshire Growth Hub



**Berkshire Growth Hub**

The Berkshire Growth Hub is a government-funded programme providing free business advice and support to any business in Berkshire. The funding is awarded by the accountable body, Wokingham Council. Offering up to 12 hours of one-to-one guidance, the Hub helps businesses at every stage of their journey. In 2024/5 over 2700 hours of support were given to over 1300 businesses.

To inspire entrepreneurship and drive economic growth, we run a comprehensive Start-Up Course designed to give new founders the tools and confidence to succeed. Complementing this, our Business Booster Webinars provide practical insights on specific business topics to help owners strengthen and grow their enterprises.

## Growth Academy Berkshire

Growth Academy Berkshire, part of The Skills and Business Hub, is a high-quality training provider specialising in Skills Bootcamps for Sales, AI, and Entrepreneurship. Founded in 2024, they focus on helping small business owners and solopreneurs build confidence in essential business skills through a coaching-based approach rather than traditional presentations.



The Growth Academy has achieved exceptional recognition with their recent Ofsted evaluation receiving "significant progress" ratings across all themes - a gold standard achievement in UK education. Their programs are designed to be transformational, with participants dedicating 4 hours per week over 15-16 weeks to develop practical skills that address real-world business challenges.

## The Levi Project

The Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) programme supports Berkshire's transition to cleaner transport by helping local authorities roll out and commercialise public EV charge points.



Coordinated by The Skills and Business Hub, the project brings together councils, energy providers, and charge point operators to deliver cost-effective, scalable solutions. Through shared knowledge platforms, regular collaboration, and strategic procurement, LEVI ensures residents — especially those without off-street parking — have access to reliable charging infrastructure. Funded by the Office for Zero Emission Vehicles (OZEV), the programme is unlocking long-term value for communities and accelerating Berkshire's low-carbon future.

## Thames Valley Berkshire Funding Escalator



The Thames Valley Berkshire Funding Escalator is an £11.3 million revolving loan fund established by Berkshire LEP using Growing Places Fund investment to address critical financing gaps for high-growth businesses in the region. Unlike traditional banks that focus on historical performance, the Funding Escalator provides projection-led funding to support businesses with strong growth potential but limited access to conventional financing. The fund serves as an "evergreen" financial resource designed to create and safeguard jobs that wouldn't otherwise exist, drive regional productivity growth, and foster sustainable economic development across the Thames Valley Berkshire area while collaborating with the broader SME finance ecosystem to inject private sector capital into supported businesses.

# Outputs and Impact Of Our Delivery 2024/2025

## Berkshire Skills Bootcamps

 <p><b>50 Skills Bootcamps delivered</b> in Digital, Engineering, Life Sciences, Green Skills, Film and Television, Health and Social Care, Education, Leadership and Project Management, Sales, AI, Construction and Entrepreneurship.</p>	
<p><b>258</b> learners achieved a positive job outcome as a direct result of completing the programme</p> 	<p><b>416</b> SB graduates have had a job interview as a direct result of completing the programme</p> 
<p><b>118</b> learners received additional needs support</p> 	<p><b>446</b> learners completed a sector-specific Programme</p> 

## Berkshire Careers Hub

 <p><b>87 Schools engaged with</b> (99% of eligible schools) to improve careers education for young people</p>	
<p><b>81,870</b> students reached with careers advice and support through careers leader support and guidance</p> 	<p><b>26</b> teachers spent a day with a local business to get practical industry experience, through our Teacher Encounters programme</p> 
<p><b>60</b> volunteer Enterprise Advisers from business recruited and trained, to work in schools</p> 	<p><b>67</b> additional projects to engage students delivered to schools with the highest levels of disadvantage</p> 

## Berkshire Growth Hub

<p><b>62</b> high growth businesses helped to grow and develop</p> 	<p>Business Advisers spent <b>2,728 hours</b> with individual business</p> 
<p><b>1328</b> SMEs triaged through the Growth Hub offer</p> 	<p><b>113</b> Start-Up businesses supported</p> 

## Berkshire Growth Academy

<p><b>38</b> learners enrolled onto a Sales Skills Bootcamps Programme</p> 	<p><b>35</b> learners completed a sector-specific Programme</p> 
<p><b>20</b> graduates increased sales or gained more responsibility in their job interview as a direct result of completing the programme.</p> 	

## Thames Valley Funding Escalator

 <p><b>106 businesses supported, 1,528 jobs created/safeguarded, £63.17m private investment leveraged, £22m invested by FSE since 2013</b></p>
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## The LEVI Project

 <p><b>Facilitated investment of £5,022,000 LEVI Capital Funding</b></p>
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# Finance Statement

2024/2025

Here are the Operating Overheads of the Skills and Business Hub including delivery costs of our Government funded programmes for the full financial year 2024/2025:

## Operating Overheads

Staff costs	£1,540,744
Activity costs	£1,612,416
Premises	£23,670
Marketing	£1,078
General Costs	£23,309
IT and Communications	£69,532
Finance & Governance	£118,286
	£3,389,036

# Success stories

## Collaborating for Careers Leader Support

"Thanks to our work with Berkshire Careers Hub we've been able to really drive careers education forward. By utilising the careers hubs resource as a network, we have enhanced our careers provision. The majority of our schools are now 100% Gatsby benchmark compliant. We've been supported with links into workplaces too, which has increased our activities around apprenticeships and technical education."

**Rob Buck, Director of Maiden Erlegh Institute and Trust Professional Learning (Wokingham)**

## Supporting Schools' Initiatives

"The consistent relationship we have with the Berkshire careers hub has helped our school's Careers Leader to test ideas and shape new initiatives. Work related learning has been one of our areas of focus and Berkshire Careers Hub colleagues have supported us to step up our activities in the past year."

**Katie Moore, Executive Principal at King's Academy, Binfield and King Academy, Oakwood (Bracknell)**

## Offering a Range of Business Support

"Since I discovered **Berkshire Growth Hub** at the end of 2024 I have been truly impressed by the services and support available. Since then I attended quite a few sessions and found them very helpful and empowering. I would recommend Growth Hub to anyone who is either at the start of their business journey or needs some support or simply talk through things. It still amazes me how much support is available through GH, from 1-2-1 sessions, Lunch & Learn, to start up programme and Skills Bootcamps. It is truly amazing and definitely more people should hear about you and the range of services available!"

**Izabella Jakubowska, Grace In Colour Studio (Reading)**

## Supporting Small Businesses

"Very grateful for the focused help with creating a business plan to progress a grant application. The sessions I have had provided clear and actionable tasks to help with setting up a business. I'm grateful for the advice, resources and opportunities I've had since finding **Berkshire Growth Hub**. The staff have a genuine interest in what they do and go out of their way to assist small businesses to grow. Thank you so much!"

**Sheena Bulpitt, Shenna Bulpitt Fine Art (Slough)**

## Learner voices

"The update to date knowledge that received helps us to stay relevant and find new avenues of work, especially in the renewables area. Talking to other people in the industry is one of the best parts of it. It's what we're interested in and it's well worth it."

**Daniel Corkin, Retrofit Skills Bootcamp, Langley College (RBWM)**

"The Skills Bootcamps programme provides valuable, practical training directly supporting professional development and career readiness. It offers a fast-tracked, focused approach to gaining essential skills for SEN roles, making it an excellent alternative to traditional qualifications."

**Swati Waghmare, Skills Bootcamp for SEN Professionals with Educate2gether Training (Slough)**

## Delivery Partner Feedback

"I love them. We've had a long-standing relationship. Alison's great. Joanna's great. Claire is brilliant. The team of the data guys, they're just lovely and they're wonderful. They have my total support, and I love working with them"

**Jo Houghton, Vice Principal – HE and Skills, Newbury College (West Berkshire)**

"A heartfelt thank you to the Berkshire Skills Bootcamps team for trusting Matt and I to deliver the data analytics and digital marketing programmes which allow us to work with some amazing people."

**Louise Clarke, Co-owner, The Curious Academy (Reading)**

## Employer Testimonials

"The skills bootcamps provided by Newbury college have been invaluable in filling a skills gap identified in our graduate community as it is uncommon for them to have gained 'hands on' experience during their degrees. The quality of the course in all aspects has been exceptional and enabled these early careers staff to work more efficiently across the business by understanding the design to manufacture process in its entirety. We have also taken the opportunity to roll this boot camp out to established staff to upskill them as a part of career development."

**Julie Symonds, Future Talent Manager, AWE (West Berkshire)**

"The Skills Bootcamps have created a pipeline of local people with the right skills to help us thrive in the future. This initiative has really boosted our company's ability to stay relevant and competitive in the fast-changing construction industry."

**Cara Beeby, CEO, BuildTech (Wokingham)**



# The Skills and Business Hub



## Funding Escalator Testimonials



### Reading

*"At the time we received debt funding from FSE, it was the only reasonable option we had to get our **project off the ground** – a project that would have been abandoned without this support. As a result, we are now working with leading pharmaceutical companies and are currently raising £3m equity to **power our growth**. Thanks FSE!"*

Dan Hydes Co-founder & Managing Director



### Slough

*Borrowing money of any sorts is a daunting prospect and in business terms there always follows an arduous process. In the case of FSE we felt **very much supported** through the application process and help was on hand whenever we needed it from the team; indeed as a client we asked a lot of questions and these were all dealt with in a detailed and respectful way. Communication from the team at FSE has been clear and concise, and we have found a **genuine interest** in our business, its plans and its developments."*

Nicola Bell – Motion Simulation



### West Berkshire

*"Our relationship with FSE has been **crucial** not only to our growth but to our survival. In 2017, with sales around £0.5million, our Investment Manager took the time to understand our business and was able to provide funding when conventional banking could not. Seeing the possibilities rather than the problems, FSE continued to stand by us through the significant challenges brought about by the pandemic and a further loan helped to keep the business going. With FSE's support we have **increased employee numbers**, we continue to trade internationally and, with our loans now repaid, we are on track to reach **£5million** turnover this year. We are so grateful that we found in FSE a true funding partner that enabled this unique technology to survive and thrive."* Andrew Bride / Group Finance Director, Torftech



### Bracknell Forest

*"As a relatively early-stage business there are limited options to raise funding from mainstream finance providers, but The FSE Group **fills this gap** with their funding for newer companies that are looking to expand. We're delighted to be working with them as we enter the next phase of our growth journey; their support will be **instrumental** in helping us reach new customers and continue to promote the incredible work of independent UK roasters."*

Fiona Jones, Co-Founder at Beans Coffee Club



### Wokingham

*"The support we've received from the FSE Group over the years has been **instrumental** in Quintex's growth and success. From the early stages of our development to where we are today, their funding has enabled us to innovate, expand, and stay ahead in a competitive market. **More than just financial backing**, the FSE Group brought a deep understanding of our vision and offered strategic insight that proved invaluable along the way. We're truly grateful for their belief in our potential and their commitment to helping UK businesses thrive."*

Emma Brooks, Managing Director at Quintex



### Windsor and Maidenhead

*"At a time when the bank wasn't interested and just told me 'don't even bother filling out the forms', my FSE fund manager was **very responsive, professional, friendly and helpful**. But at the same time he was straight, honest and challenging – something I hadn't experienced with any other finance house but which made me feel he was **genuinely interested**. I have been used to a complete lack of communication, being kept at arm's length by a faceless entity. I believe FSE **saved my business**; had it not been for this organisation I would have gone bust in year one."*

Austin Bailey - Lacka Foods

## Contact us:

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## Connect with us:

