

theme 2

Skills

This theme area addresses the following critical success factors for Plymouth:

Skills & Learning

- A high quality, adaptable skills base
- High levels of attainment
- A positive and aspirational culture

INTRODUCTION & RATIONALE

Human capital is a key determinant of economic growth. Skilled workers add value to production, adapt more quickly to new technologies and are more likely to receive additional training, increasing their productive capacity even further. Plymouth, in keeping with the UK generally, exhibits much diversity within its skills base, with incidences of both high level and low level skills apparent within the City's workforce. Recent studies have shown that variations in the regional composition of the skills base lead, in turn, to variations in sub regional economic performance. With a clear correlation between high skills levels and highly competitive cities, it is imperative that the skills base in Plymouth improves overall and exhibits a high incidence of ongoing learning improvement and adaptability to changing economic circumstances. Otherwise, the City may lose out to other locations in terms of drawing in, embedding and benefiting from new investment.

To become more competitive, Plymouth's sub-regional economy must be supported by a dynamic and flexible labour market that can react and adapt to the changing demands of the economy. Competitiveness comes from a strong base of generic and widely applicable skills, a high level of qualifications and strong participation rates among the entire population. These factors will actively help the City in attracting new, high value added investment.

A particularly interesting aspect of the skills and learning environment in Plymouth is related to the actual **scale** of the education infrastructure within the City. Plymouth has an extensive learning network incorporating a large university and a college of higher education (both of these institutions growing and developing rapidly), a specialist medical teaching facility (one of the newest in the country), a successful research based science park, two FE colleges (one of which is a specialist in art and design), as well as a huge range of compulsory level education and community based learning.

There are few other cities of a similar size in the UK that have this scale and range of educational activity. As such, the learning infrastructure is one of Plymouth's major assets and must be utilised as fully and creatively as possible as a mechanism for generating significantly greater competitiveness and prosperity for the City. If the scale of the local learning infrastructure can be 'converted' into results 'on the ground' within and amongst residential communities, Plymouth stands an excellent chance of becoming a true 'learning city' that exhibits an enviable array of skills, qualifications and creative class characteristics.

Consultation with key stakeholders has suggested that there is a particular **imbalance in terms of provision of academic versus vocational learning routes** post 16. Many consultees felt that there is an over supply of sixth form units, tending to overemphasise academic post 16 routes and leading also to a lack of critical mass in the provision of post 16 learning. This results in a tendency for vocational learning routes to be under developed and to lack the quality of content and provision that is needed for the necessary uplift within the skills base. Overall, there is a feeling amongst

stakeholders across the City that the current learning infrastructure, despite its impressive scale, is not yet fit for purpose.

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COMPONENTS

Securing a significant and sustainable improvement in the quality of the Plymouth skills base is one of the fundamental challenges facing the City's public stakeholders and employers. Furthermore, key features of the City of Ideas concept are a knowledge creation infrastructure (world class university and technology transfer) and good skills levels throughout the workforce.

As an overarching principle, the City's public and private partners must ensure that the overall **impact of the educational infrastructure** is greater than the sum of its individual component parts; it must act as a joined-up, high value-adding infrastructure offering transparent and accessible skills development pathways. Secondly, the quality of the education structures and facilities within the City must itself be fully reflected within the local skills base. The quality of education and learning must directly mirror the availability of an abundance of high level, adaptable skills across the City's communities.

Plymouths' key learning and skills objectives:

- Increasing **the share of the residential population in possession of NVQ Level 4** (i.e. degree level) qualifications. The City must be able to demonstrate a high incidence of this level of qualification, and by implication associated skill capacity, if it is to successfully draw in and embed new investment as well as improve the productivity of the economy generally.
- Maximising learning and achievement related **aspirations** across all of the City's communities. Despite the significant scale of learning provision in Plymouth, there is still a degree of relative under-performance in terms of progression from compulsory level schooling to FE and HE level learning. There is a clear need to ensure that Plymouth's young people are focussed on the need to maintain a commitment to lifelong learning and ongoing skills upgrade. In this context, schools and colleges, as well as individual teaching professionals, must be supported fully in their attempts to raise motivation levels in the youth population and instil a strong local desire for learning and achievement. This will be done in part by building upon existing best practice already present within the educational infrastructure.

Motivation and aspiration for learning are not only important for young people, these are prerequisites for all individuals irrespective of age and personal circumstance if communities and therefore the City as whole are to achieve their full economic potential.

- Develop **robust and transparent learning pathways** easily accessible to all of Plymouth's residents. Support the establishment of a range of learning opportunities that can be easily taken advantage of by all residents irrespective of their current personal or socio-economic circumstances.

In order to maximise its competitive position, Plymouth requires a learning infrastructure that is appropriate for a growing, dynamic economy. This in turn requires learning provision that effectively balances vocational and non-vocational pathways. In addition, there is a need for high quality advice and guidance in order that communities and employers can maximise their personal and collective benefit from learning structures. Local partners must ensure that all elements of the overall learning pathway are designed to compliment each other, to establish the most appropriate range and quality of educational opportunities for the City's residents and employers.

- Enhance **workforce development** opportunities. There is a need for all of the City's employers – private, public and voluntary – to increase the skills capacity of their workforces and in so doing improve the overall productive capacity of the City.
- Ensure that there is a high quality skills base available that directly matches the evolving **needs of target growth sectors**. The City's learning stakeholders must make sure that the development of new employment opportunities around key target growth sectors – especially high value added

sectors – is fully driven and supported by the availability of the requisite skills and learning opportunities.

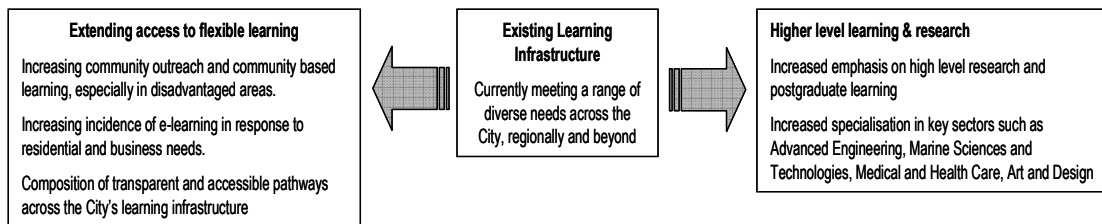
- Increase the rate of **knowledge transfer** from HE level and related institutions – both within and outside of Plymouth – into the local business base. There is a need to ensure that all employers within the City are able to adapt to new technological developments and take advantage of ongoing R&D activity.

Skills & Learning

ACTIONS

A key component in developing the economy of Plymouth rests in enhancing and effectively ‘stretching’ the existing learning infrastructure in the City.

There are two aspects to this process, as illustrated below:



The first aspect to this ‘stretching’ process is to enhance opportunities for **flexible, accessible learning**, at various levels and especially within the City’s more disadvantaged communities. This will require greater levels of learning outreach into these communities, alongside encouraging and enabling greater take up of learning opportunities. In addition, a more intensive approach to developing flexible e-learning opportunities is required. These learning opportunities must both fulfil the needs of individual learners, while also being fully cognisant of the need of the City’s diverse business base.

The second aspect of the learning infrastructure ‘stretch’ operates at the **higher, research led** end of the structure. Considerable effort needs to be expended in ensuring that Plymouth exhibits core and identifiable research and postgraduate learning strengths in key and niche sectors. These sectors should build upon existing strengths and include Advanced Engineering, Medical related specialisms, Marine specialisms, as well as Art and Design activities.

In addition to the two aspects outlined above, overall, the learning infrastructure must form a **logical pathway** (or series of alternative pathways) leading from basic skills and compulsory level learning right through to opportunities for bespoke, original research in key areas. The infrastructure should be designed and should evolve in a manner that allows individuals and businesses to effectively ‘come into the system’ at a point that is most appropriate for them and to access learning opportunities that enhance personal wellbeing as fully as possible and consequently, in the aggregate, maximise the value and prosperity of the City’s economy.