



Leveraging provider engagement in local skills

How meaningful events can align providers and partners on local skills priorities



A practical approach toolkit

Based on Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce Group's approach



The context	04
About the organisation	07
The approach	08
Building blocks	09
<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Planning and preparing■ Financing and investment■ Involving key stakeholders■ Governance and implementation■ Outcomes, impact and learning	
Recommendations	13



Introduction



Engaging adult social care providers in local skills planning remains a long standing challenge, often hindered by fragmented structures, inconsistent communication channels and limited provider capacity.

The Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) is a Department for Education programme designed to align post-16 technical education and training with local employer needs.

In Berkshire and Oxfordshire, the Thames Valley LSIP team has tackled engagement barriers through a co-ordinated, relationship-driven approach that brings employers, colleges and sector partners together with clear purpose. This has enabled adult social care – often under represented in skills planning processes – to shape priorities that reflect real workforce needs.

This toolkit shows how a single event, The Care Connection festival, has acted as a catalyst for meaningful provider engagement in LSIP activity, demonstrating how a well planned event can deepen relationships. It outlines how the Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce Group (TVCC) and their strategic partners designed the festival to meet provider needs and create the conditions for ongoing involvement.

It promotes step-by-step guidance on planning routines, stakeholder responsibilities, event design and sustainable engagement. This makes a framework that other colleges and care providers can adapt and copy.



The context



Engaging adult social care providers is crucial for the success of regional workforce initiatives, yet it is often overlooked or approached without the planning and co-ordination needed to make engagement truly effective.

While stakeholder organisations can help secure provider involvement, they are too often brought in late in the planning process, responding to initiatives they ‘hear about’ rather than being included from the outset. This reactive approach limits alignment and creates avoidable barriers for programmes such as LSIPs and Integrated Care Board (ICB) projects, which oversee NHS commissioning and local health system planning.

“The entire purpose of LSIPs is to fill skills gaps and recruitment challenges. If we’re not engaging with care providers, we can’t know what roles they struggle to recruit for or what skills they need. They’re at the heart of everything LSIPs aim to achieve.”

Siobhan May, Co-ordinator, Thames Valley Berkshire and Oxfordshire LSIPs



The context



Adult social care's fragmented structure, spanning thousands of independent providers with varied capacity and priorities, makes consistent engagement especially challenging. Unlike centrally-co-ordinated systems, this landscape requires proactive approaches to ensure providers can meaningfully contribute.

There are persistent skills gaps in dementia care, safeguarding, leadership and digital capability. This emphasises the importance of LSIP priorities that reflect what the sector genuinely needs, and of education providers being equipped to prepare the current and future workforce accordingly.

Although regional partnerships and training initiatives have attempted to address these issues, engagement remains inconsistent. Many independent providers struggle to participate due to limited time, administrative pressures and unclear benefits, which in turn restricts the uptake of valuable opportunities like apprenticeships or funded development pathways. Careers events are often positioned as a solution, but when they are poorly co-ordinated, they attract limited provider attendance and their impact is modest and short lived.

“I personally have always found job fairs utterly soulless. The people who genuinely want a job and are motivated to get a job don't necessarily go to job fairs.”

Eddy McDowall, Chief Executive, Oxfordshire Association of Care Providers



The context



Building a sustainable adult social care workforce therefore requires more than short term fixes. It demands a strategic, well-structured approach that acknowledges sector complexity, prioritises early co-ordination and offers practical support that lowers barriers to engagement. Without this, even well-intentioned initiatives risk failing to reach the providers who would benefit most.

“We need more people in the care industry – especially young people – because the sector is growing and the demand is increasing. For us, involving younger generations early helps build their understanding of care and ensures they can see the value and opportunities it offers.”

Lenny Balendra, Managing Director, Right at Home Oxford

This example illustrates how TVCC addressed these challenges by using a targeted and well-designed event to ignite provider participation. By positioning The Care Connection festival as a purposeful engagement mechanism within the Berkshire and Oxfordshire LSIPs, TVCC created a timely, meaningful opportunity for providers to connect with the wider workforce agenda and influence local skills priorities.



About the organisation

The Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce Group (TVCC) is a business membership organisation representing companies across Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Swindon. It provides services including international trade support, networking and policy engagement and acts as a regional voice for employers.

TVCC has been appointed as the Employer Representative Body (ERB) for LSIPs in Berkshire and Oxfordshire. This means they lead the local LSIP on behalf of employers and ensure provider voice is incorporated into planning.

To deliver these ambitions, TVCC set up the Thames Valley Skills Unit with senior-level expertise from the skills sector, married with deep expertise in business engagement. This plays a pivotal role in shaping LSIP strategy and implementation, leading research, drafting plans and supporting the development of action road maps. Its leadership ensures credibility with education and training providers and strengthens engagement with employers across priority sectors.

TVCC and the Skills Unit have co-ordinated extensive employer engagement activities – consultations, workshops, surveys and deep-dive interviews – to capture sector-specific skills needs. They have established sector-focused partnerships that unite employers, training providers and other stakeholders to co-develop solutions for identified gaps.

The Thames Valley Skills Unit co-ordinates data analysis, employer feedback and partnership networks to address skills gaps and ensure alignment with local economic priorities. The Unit provides labour-market insight, strengthens connections between business and education and leads Workforce Development Partnerships to co-develop practical solutions, while providing expertise to ensure employer insights are translated into credible curriculum adaptations and new training provision.

Adult social care is one of the priority sectors identified in the LSIPs. TVCC has worked with care providers and training organisations to address workforce shortages and improve recruitment and retention. This includes supporting the development of training pathways and qualifications aligned with the needs of local employers in the care sector, as well as innovative initiatives such as regional care careers events to attract new entrants and raise awareness of progression opportunities.



The approach



Creating a high energy event to bring students and care providers together, opening up future opportunities for adult social care and delivering the skills needed to meet provider needs.

What was the challenge?

Adult social care providers had been under represented in local skills planning, despite facing mounting recruitment pressures, growing clinical skill requirements and rapid structural change.

- **Limited awareness of care careers** – Students often saw social care as a secondary option compared to NHS roles, making it vital to offer engaging, early experiences that revealed the breadth and value of the sector.
- **Disconnect between curricula and employer needs** – Colleges delivered content misaligned with provider expectations, with essential practical skills missing, and less relevant topics emphasised.
- **Need for a unifying, momentum-building intervention** – A single, high-impact event was required to bring stakeholders together, shift perceptions and create momentum.

“We’ve been trying to build connections over a period of years, meeting regularly with colleges and providers so everyone understands each other better. When we work in partnership, it brings the whole care market together in a really constructive way.”

Eddy McDowall, Chief Executive, Oxfordshire Association of Care Providers



“Employers told us colleges teach hoist training, which the employer covers anyway, but not food texture modification. That’s a wasted learning journey. We need courses that reflect what providers actually need.”

Siobhan May, Co-ordinator, Thames Valley Berkshire and Oxfordshire LSIPs

The engagement opportunity

The concept of a regional Care Connection festival emerged from partnership discussions and was shaped by learning from a similar national care careers event. You can view The Care Connection festival [website](#) and [film](#) for more information and to hear from festival participants.

Partners recognised that a high-energy, interactive festival could overcome traditional engagement limitations by bringing learners and providers into the same space, creating meaningful conversations and reducing the distance between education and workforce realities. A regional version would be more accessible for local providers, especially home care services, and could attract organisations that had never previously engaged in LSIP activity.

- **Building on a proven national model** – A national careers festival demonstrated that dynamic, youth-centred experiences could shift student perceptions and be adapted into a practical regional format.
- **Creating a shared platform for providers and students** – The festival allowed providers to showcase real roles and progression routes, while giving students hands-on insight into tasks, expectations and workplace culture.
- **Extending reach beyond existing networks** – The event attracted providers who were unfamiliar with LSIP work, strengthening representation and opening new channels for ongoing collaboration.



“We wanted it to feel like a festival rather than a conference because that would be more attractive to young people. It’s about inspiring and engaging them, not just handing out leaflets. We want them to walk in and immediately feel excited, involved and open to discovering something new about the sector.”

Rachel Reid, Locality Manager, Skills for Care

“Too many young people start in care without proper training; they’re shown a few videos and then sent out, which leaves them feeling unprepared and incompetent. That first bad experience can put them off care for life. We wanted to be at the event because we want young people to have a proper, positive experience in care. If they later decide the sector isn’t for them, that’s fine – but it shouldn’t be because their introduction was negative.”

Lenny Balendra, Managing Director, Right at Home Oxford



Key decisions that secured success

Delivering The Care Connection festival required deliberate, strategic choices that shifted the event from a standard careers fair into a high-impact engagement mechanism for the whole system. These decisions shaped the energy of the day, secured commitment from adult social care providers and colleges, and created the conditions for meaningful dialogue that extended far beyond the event itself.

- **Positioning the festival as a system-wide intervention** – Partners consciously framed the event as a strategic LSIP tool, not a one-off careers fair, ensuring adult social care providers, colleges and sector bodies treated it as a shared responsibility rather than optional outreach.
- **Designing the event to feel exciting and youth-friendly** – The team used an energising opening session, hands-on activities and a guided route through the event to help students feel confident, challenge misconceptions about adult social care and leave with a more positive understanding of the sector.
- **Inviting providers through trusted contacts to ensure strong participation** – Instead of sending out blanket invitations, organisers approached providers through existing relationships held by Skills for Care, local care associations and colleges, helping attract committed organisations and avoid last-minute dropouts or low-quality

“Using Skills for Care and Oxfordshire Association of Care Providers’ contacts meant we weren’t going in cold to providers. They already had relationships with a lot of the care organisations, which just eased everything and made the engagement much easier from the start. It meant the providers knew who we were, why we were approaching them, and that this was something supported by people they trusted.”

Siobhan May, Co-ordinator, Thames Valley Berkshire and Oxfordshire LSIPs



Key learning

The Care Connection festival shows that meaningful engagement with adult social care providers happens when system leads take a co-ordinated, relationship-driven approach. Practical learning from the festival included:

- **Secure college commitment early to create confidence across the system** – Confirming student numbers first gave providers certainty and helped the whole system align around a shared purpose, enabling stronger buy-in and better planning.
- **Purposeful event design transforms attitudes, not just attendance** – The youth-centred festival format – which included interactive stands, engaging youth-focused speakers, and pre-prepared questions for students informed by their course lecturers – created a more impactful experience than traditional careers fairs, shifting perceptions of adult social care.
- **Use evidence and insights from The Care Connection festival to inform future activity and inspire wider adoption of similar approaches** – The festival's [website](#) and [film](#) enables partners to learn directly from its design, energy and impact. These resources help others understand what worked, replicate proven approaches, and build confidence in adopting similar engagement models across their own local skills systems.

“It felt really refreshing to be there at The Care Connection, giving students genuine choices about their future. It was nice to be in an environment where students could actually ask their own questions and understand what care really is and see that it’s so much more than the stereotypes or what the media shows.”

Lenny Balendra, Managing Director, Right at Home Oxford



Recommendations

The recommendations provide practical, evidence based steps for planning, delivering and sustaining a high impact engagement event. It guides partners through everything from securing college participation and co-ordinating adult social care providers, to designing an interactive programme, embedding strong governance and capturing meaningful evaluation data.

Each recommendation is supported by actionable ideas drawn from The Care Connection experience – covering multi agency planning, effective communication, marketing approaches, and on the day delivery.

Use the recommendations to adopt and adapt this model to strengthen provider engagement, improve student awareness and confidence, and build a consistent, partnership led approach that supports long term workforce development and sector

“The organisation was the best I’ve ever seen. Clear communication, pre-event webinars, and encouragement to make stands interactive showed they really wanted this to be amazing.”

Robyn Taylor, Head of People Experience, Home Instead
(Oxford, Swindon and Thornbury)



Timeline

Year	Key activity
2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ National care careers event sparked idea for a regional version.■ Concept discussed within the Workforce Development Partnerships (WDPs).■ Agreement reached to explore an Oxfordshire-focused Care Connection-style event.
2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Multi agency planning group established.■ Colleges approached first to secure student attendance numbers.■ Employers targeted using co-ordinated communications.■ Oxfordshire Care Connection festival delivered successfully in November.■ Post event activities completed: surveys, film production and early follow up with adult social care providers.
2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Intention to establish The Care Connection as an annual regional engagement event, including expanding to Berkshire.



“In health and social care, there are so many paths – occupational therapy, equipment services, clinical tasks, community roles. Talking to young people early helps them understand the breadth of opportunities, because it can be overwhelming when they realise how many different areas fall under the care sector.”

Lorna McAleavey, Deputy Manager, Right at Home Oxford

“It’s not about instant hires; it’s about planting seeds. Students left knowing home care exists and that progression is possible. That awareness is invaluable for future recruitment.”

Robyn Taylor, Head of People Experience, Home Instead (Oxford, Swindon and Thornbury)

