

# News story: New multi-million pound deal to boost skills across West Midlands

Businesses, young people and adults across the West Midlands are set to benefit from a new skills deal, which could unlock up to £69million, the Education Secretary has announced today (18 July).

The skills deal agreed with the West Midlands Combined Authority will boost digital and technical skills, job opportunities and productivity across the region – supporting more young people and adults into work as well as upskilling and retraining local people of all ages.

The Government will co-fund the new skills deal, alongside employer funding and the West Midlands Combined Authority will invest £20million into this area as set out in their Skills Plan.

The new deal includes:

- Creating hundreds of new apprenticeships at small and medium sized businesses in priority areas, including in construction, automotive and digital sectors – helping increasing job opportunities for all.
- A multi-million investment in local colleges – ensuring they have access to the latest equipment and facilities to teach the skills the region and the country need, including digital, and construction.
- Up to £5million to work with employers to develop a National Retraining Scheme (NRS) pilot to drive adult learning and retraining.
- £1million to boost Edtech and the way it supports adult learners in the West Midlands.
- £1million to improve careers advice for young people, including a new careers hub in the West Midlands.
- Piloting an innovative online portal for businesses to share work experience opportunities with schools.

Some of this country's most acute skills challenges are found within the West Midlands, which the skills deal will aim to address through the new funding and support for the West Midlands economy, driving local growth. This deal builds on the work already underway through the Government's modern Industrial Strategy, which aims to boost productivity and earning power across the country. This includes investing in maths, digital and technical education to help generate well-paid, highly skilled jobs across the country.

Education Secretary Damian Hinds said:

The West Midlands is the engine of our thriving economy, but we want to make sure even more local people have the skills they need to get on in life, while also boosting the region's productivity

and technical expertise.

This new skills deal will provide the right investment so that both young people and adults have the chance to learn, upskill, retrain and take advantage of the range of exciting jobs in areas such as construction, cyber security and digital technology.

By supporting apprenticeships in small and medium sized businesses, more people will be able to earn and learn and the focus on digital and technical skills, which are both in high demand, will help people to get the skills they need to get the jobs of tomorrow.

Mayor of the West Midlands Andy Street said:

Every time I speak to businesses in West Midlands, the number one issue that keeps getting fed back to me as the barrier for growth is skills. We know best the challenges facing West Midlands businesses and, among the colleges and educational institutions, we know how to tackle them.

This deal means more apprenticeships and more money for adult education, career advice and technical education which is brilliant news for both businesses and young people. But perhaps more importantly, this new way of working with Government means we have new powers and resource to help deliver the right outcomes for the West Midlands and for Government.

Secretary of State for Work and Pensions Esther McVey said:

As part of this investment we will be introducing new progression coaches so young people can get extra support to guide them when making choices about their future – whether that's choosing to go straight into work, an apprenticeship, further training or education. Enabling them to make the most of the opportunities on offer.

To help boost the region's digital and cyber skills Government will launch a new Local Digital Skills Partnership in the West Midlands bringing together regional businesses, local authorities and educational institutes to tackle the digital skills gap and support the growth of the local economy.

Digital Minister Margot James said:

There should be no digital divide. Every individual and business should have the skills and confidence to make the most of the huge opportunities modern technology brings.

These new schemes will give people from all ages and backgrounds in the West Midlands the chance to improve their digital and cyber skills and play a vital part in helping us build a Britain that is fit for the future.