



## INTRODUCTION

The Department for Communities (DfC) makes funding available for the delivery of Labour Market Partnerships (LMPs) in each Council area in NI. Each LMP is accountable to Regional LMP. The lead partner on the Regional LMP is DfC. LMPs aim to improve local employability outcomes and labour market conditions through coordinated, collaborative, multi-agency partnerships, delivering programmes aligned with regional policy and objectives whilst being flexible to meet the needs resented by localised conditions and helping to connect employers with employees.

The AND LMP was established in August 2021 based on guidance issued by DfC titled 'Code of Practice for the Exercise of Functions by Labour Market Partnerships' and the Council's former Employability and Skills Subgroup (ESSG). The LMP has representation from external organisations and stakeholders, as well as Council Officers from Community Planning, Economic Development, and Community, Wellbeing, and Health.

## BUILDING ON SUCCESS

The AND LMP has delivered Action Plans for 2022/2023, 2023/2024 AND 2024/2025 based on the findings of a Strategic Assessment of the Ards and North Down area labour market and priority employment needs, which was undertaken in 2021 and updated in 2023.

Whilst there have been, and continue to be, challenges in AND's labour market, previous Actions Plans delivered by the LMP have achieved positive outcomes. The 2025/2026 Action Plan seeks to build on this success, having been informed by a comprehensive Strategic Assessment undertaken in February 2024 to ensure it reflects current employability and labour market issues in the area.

The 2025/2026 Action Plan has been developed using an Outcomes Based Accountability (OBA) approach, which includes the use of Baselines, Population Indicators, and Performance Measurement, to measure success based on the impact programmes have on people's lives. LMPs are required to use the OBA approach, including 'Turning the Curve' exercises, to develop and monitor their Action Plan/s, to better measure the impact their actions have in their area and to help with the evaluation of programmes and interventions. 'Turning The Curve' exercises were undertaken with LMP members during a facilitated workshop, which have been used to inform the 2025/2026 Action Plan.

## PRIORITY THEMES

DfC sets high level themes that the LMP Action Plan must address. For 2025/2026, these are:

### **PRIORITY THEME 1 - ECONOMIC INACTIVITY**

People not in employment, who have not been seeking employment within the last four weeks and/or are unable to start work in the next two weeks.

### **PRIORITY THEME 2 - UNEMPLOYMENT (ALL AGES)**

People who are without a job, currently available to work, and have been actively looking for work within the previous four weeks.

### **PRIORITY THEME 3 - DISABILITY**

People who report a physical or mental health condition(s) or illnesses, lasting or expected to last 12 months or more, where this reduces their ability to carry out day-to-day activities.

### **PRIORITY THEME 4 - SKILLED LABOUR SUPPLY**

DfE's 2021 Skills Barometer utilises the National Qualification Framework (NQF) Skills Classification.

In addition, the Regional LMP has indicated the following priorities that should be considered when developing the 2025/2026 Action Plan.

- Supporting action on climate change by enabling green jobs.
- Addressing the disability employment gap.
- Utilising opportunities arising from City & Growth deals.
- Supporting the aims and implementation of the Skills Strategy.
- Promoting diversity and inclusion.

## 2025/2026 ACTION PLAN

The findings of the Strategic Assessment were used in conjunction with the experience of LMP members to develop an Action Plan. The Action Plan seeks to build on local experience, knowledge of providers and expertise, and marry this with opportunities to address key areas of need within the AND Council area. It also builds on the success of last year's Action Plan, and the lessons learned.

Theme	Title of Activity Aims & Description	Key Activities
<b>SP1.1 LMP Delivery</b>	<b>LMP Delivery</b> Effective delivery of the LMP through appropriate structures, mechanisms, and regular meetings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meetings of whole LMP</li> <li>• Implementation of (2025/26) LMP Action Plan</li> <li>• Promote LMP and recruit additional members as required</li> <li>• Members feel they are contributing positively to the work of the LMP.</li> </ul>
<b>SP1.2 LMP Sub-Committees</b>	<b>LMP Subcommittees</b> Establish working groups/ subcommittees in appropriate areas. Two Groups identified.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Subcommittee meetings</li> <li>• Planning and Delivery of (2025/2026) LMP Action Plan</li> <li>• Members feel they are contributing positively to the work of the LMP.</li> </ul>
<b>SP1.3 Capacity Building</b>	<b>Capacity Building</b> Support LMP members in their role through training and development opportunities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support LMP members in their role through, for example, training and development, case study visits, guest speakers, attendance at events and awareness raising of LMP activities.</li> <li>• Members feel they are supported by the LMP in their role.</li> </ul>

<b>SP1.4</b> <b>Increased Awareness</b>	<b>Increased Awareness</b> A need has been identified to increase awareness of the LMP and its activities, to expand LMP membership to include more private sector representation, encourage employers to support Programmes by providing employment opportunities and encourage individuals to participate in relevant Programmes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increasing awareness of the LMP and its activities through improved visibility on Council's website and social media.</li> <li>• Improve awareness and visibility of the LMP/its activities through targeted communication / PR Campaigns, re: Success stories, case studies, etc.</li> <li>• Increase participation of employers / private sectors as LMP members.</li> </ul>
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STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2: TO IMPROVE EMPLOYABILITY OUTCOMES AND/OR LABOUR MARKET CONDITIONS LOCALLY		
<b>Indicators</b>		<u>% Economic Inactivity Rate for Working Age Population in ANDBC (NISRA Labour Force Survey)</u> <u>% Claimant Count Annual Averages for ANDBC (Economic &amp; Labour Market Statistics, NISRA)</u> <u>% AND Employment Rate by Disability Status, Aged 16-64 (Labour Market Information Dashboard)</u> <u>% Working Age Population with L2+ Qualifications (Labour Market Information Dashboard)</u> <u>% Working Age Population no Qualifications (Labour Market Information Dashboard)</u>
<b>Theme</b>	<b>Title of Activity Aims &amp; Description</b>	<b>Key Activities</b>
<b>SP2.1 Economic Inactivity</b>	<b>Classroom Assistant Employability Academy</b> Supporting people to gain work-relevant skills specifically related to the role of a Classroom Assistant and support to enter employment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provision of training for individuals who are economically inactive and/or unemployed to help them gain employment as a Classroom Assistant.</li> </ul>
<b>SP2.2 Economic Inactivity</b>	<b>Catering Academy</b> Supporting people to gain work-relevant skills specifically related to roles as Catering Assistants, for example in schools, or for food-related roles in hospitality.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provision of training for individuals who are economically inactive and/or unemployed to help them gain employment as a Catering Assistant or similar.</li> </ul>
<b>SP2.3 Unemployment (All Ages)</b>	<b>Health &amp; Social Care Academy</b> Supporting people to gain work relevant skills specifically related to Healthcare Assistant roles or Domiciliary Care roles, with the aim	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provision of training for individuals who are unemployed to help them gain employment in a range of entry level healthcare related roles.</li> </ul>

	of individuals gaining employment in entry level roles.	
<b>SP2.4 Disability</b>	<b>Academy for People with Disabilities</b> Supporting individuals with a disability to gain work relevant skills and wrap around support to progress into employment. Potential for two cohort Academy, with one cohort for new entrants to employment, and one cohort to support development and progression based on need identified in Strategic Assessment	Provision of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training and skill development for individuals with a disability who are unemployed or underemployed to help them gain employment in sectors such as hospitality, retail, customer service, etc.</li> <li>• Training and skill development for individuals with a disability who are in employment or underemployed to support upskilling and progression.</li> <li>• The Academy will be designed around sector needs and available opportunities and will offer relevant qualifications.</li> </ul>
<b>SP2.5 Skilled Labour Supply</b>	<b>Transport Academy</b> Supporting people into employment and employment enhancement.	Provision of training for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• unemployed</li> <li>• economically inactive</li> <li>• underemployed</li> <li>• or those seeking to reskill to gain employment in the transport sector and/or in roles with a driving element.</li> </ul> Academy will include a medical assessment (where applicable), provision of training, and provision of licence/s.  Academy anticipated to run for 6-9 months
<b>SP2.6 Skilled Labour Supply</b>	<b>GreenTech Academy</b> Supporting increased and in-demand skills and employment enhancement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision of training courses in solar, electric vehicle charger installation, or battery installation to support the upskilling of qualified electrical workers for in-demand skills.</li> </ul>
<b>SP2.7 Skilled Labour Supply</b>	<b>Employer-Led Upskilling Programme</b>	Two open calls for applications by employers for <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• up to £500 per employee to contribute to the costs of an accredited qualification, or</li> </ul>

	Employer-led upskilling Programme to support the development of in demand skills and qualification attainment in the local workforce.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>up to £200 per employee to contribute to the costs of a recognised certification, e.g., First Aid, CSR Card, Hygiene Certificates, Forklift Licence, etc.</li> </ul> <p>Applications must be submitted by employers to retrospectively fund externally provided training and/or accredited qualifications. Capped at four employees per application.</p>
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STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3: TO PROMOTE AND SUPPORT DELIVERY OF EXISTING EMPLOYABILITY OR SKILLS PROVISION		
Indicators		# LMP referrals to existing regional/local employability/skills provision (LMP)
Theme	Title of Activity Aims & Description	Key Activities
<b>SP3.1 Signpost / Promote Existing Support</b>	<b>Job Fairs</b> Deliver two events with local employers and support agencies in the ANDBC area that raises awareness of job opportunities, skills development and training opportunities, and LMP activities. Events to be held in two locations for geographical reach, e.g., Newtownards and Bangor.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Delivery of one event in partnership with DfC e.g., Job Fair, to support promotion and increased awareness of job opportunities.</li> <li>Delivery of a second event, for employers and support agencies to promote and signpost to employment, opportunities, training opportunities,</li> <li>e.g., Apprenticeships, and other support available in relation to skills and</li> <li>employment.</li> <li>Interviews may be facilitated and undertaken on the day.</li> </ul>
<b>SP3.2 Signpost / Promote Existing Support</b>	<b>Skills and Employment Support Clinics</b> Based in the areas highest in employment and/or education deprivation, localised Support Clinics will be delivered with a smaller number of localised employers with entry level roles available and appointments available with local support agencies/LMP partners to explore an individual's skill and/or employment needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Delivery of two localised Skills &amp; Employment Support Clinics, offering more personalised support and signposting to individuals.</li> <li>Clinics based in the areas identified in the Strategic Assessment as having higher levels of education and/or employment deprivation.</li> </ul>



<b>SP3.3</b> <b>Signpost/Promote</b> <b>Existing Support</b>	<b>Update Employability and Skills Register</b> Updating of 'master' document PDF for both employers and individuals showcasing the range of skills and employment support available in AND. Could also be hosted digitally via Council's/LMP website.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Updating of digital resource and/or PDF document; One for employers and one for individuals.</li> </ul>
<b>SP3.4</b> <b>Signpost /</b> <b>Promote</b> <b>Existing</b> <b>Support</b>	<b>Disability Employment and Support Day</b> An intervention / event targeted to employers, individuals with a disability and their parent / carer to provide signposting to LMP activities and other supporting organisations for individual development, skills development and employment supports.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Host two interventions/events targeted to employers, individuals with a disability and the parents / carers of individuals with a disability to offer signposting to supporting organisations and / or skills / employment opportunities to support development, recruitment and positive working cultures.</li> </ul>
<b>SP3.5</b> <b>Signpost/promote</b> <b>Existing Support</b>	<b>Employer Info Sessions</b> Providing an information session to employers to promote and signpost a wide range of skills and employment related supports available in AND, including LMP programmes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Delivery of Information sessions for employers on topics that may include employee attraction and retention, LMP activities, the structuring of work to support employment e.g., flexible working hours, and the development of positive workplace cultures e.g., to support the employment of persons with disabilities.</li> </ul>

The Action Plan has been developed for one year as a result of the budget parameters set by DfC. However, it is acknowledged the preference of the LMP would be to avail of multi-year budgets as this would bring about efficiencies in relation to delivery, procurement, and administration.