

# Doncaster Talent & Innovation Ecosystem

**H1 Report April 2024**

A report prepared for the Global Education Leaders Partnership Summit 2024



City of  
Doncaster  
Council



## VISION

Equitable and inclusive lifelong learning that empowers people to thrive in life and work.

Doncaster's **Education & Skills 2030 Strategy** is a partnership strategy, owned by Team Doncaster. It builds on the previous One Doncaster plan, which delivered on 30 recommendations made by an independent commission, as well as the Social Mobility Opportunity Area Programme. Importantly, it takes a long-term and holistic approach, spanning the entirety of the lifelong learning journey. Four priorities, each with three aims, cover different phases of the learning journey; the fifth is cross-cutting:



Best Start



Accelerating Achievement



A New Model of Post-16 Education



New Skills and Pathways to Fulfilling Life & Work

Equitable  
&  
Inclusive  
Learning

A '**Talent & Innovation Ecosystem**' (TIE) approach focusses on bringing the worlds of business and education closer together (through the power of problem-based learning), as well as supporting a diverse and inclusive borough-wide learning community approach catering to individual needs. The TIE simultaneously grows the talent pipeline and innovates products and services. It aims to serve all learners: from those in the formal education system, to those in jobs looking to update their skills, and those who need new skills to re-enter employment.

**Learning model** >> Bringing together learners of all ages, employers and community partners to collaborate on meeting real-world design and commercial challenges. By putting learners at the forefront of innovation, the TIE will provide learners with opportunities to develop both soft and hard skills, as well as conceptual and practical knowledge that will allow them to flourish in life and work.

**Strengths-based and demand-led** >> Aligning the local learning offer to areas of economic growth potential with existing skills gaps within Doncaster and the South Yorkshire Region will ensure the skills offer is demand-led. Building on our University City ambitions, the TIE will promote post-16 learning through five Centres of Excellence; Health & Care, Engineering, Creative & Digital, Green Technology, and Culture.

**Education to employment through hybrid learning >>** Making available informal and formal, traditional and non- traditional, academic and vocational learning opportunities to ensure that all residents can learn, train, re-skill and up-skill at all ages and stages, no matter what their learning style or ability. Within formal education, this will involve curriculum enrichment to ensure that skills and qualifications support local jobs. The informal learning offer will be enhanced through a digital learning platform that develops existing skills and often-unrecognised abilities through digital micro-credentials and makes local learning and employment opportunities available.

**Approach to orchestration >>**

- **Provision:** Co-designing and co-delivering learning experiences; and validating learning outcomes
- **Curation:** Creating a library of learning assets that combines local resources with other relevant learning content
- **Enablement:** Supporting learners' progress through new and existing pathways
- **Brokerage:** Building relationships between business, communities and education providers through networks

**Orchestration**

## **A PLACE-BASED, PARTNERSHIP-LED ECOSYSTEM**

**In 2016, Doncaster's education system was slowly starting to recover after some significant gaps to national standards.**

The system had been fragmented, and the Council had retreated from tackling these problems. It was clear a change in culture was needed – moving away from 'tinkering around the edges', towards a more robust, structured, collaborative approach. Consequently, the decision was taken to invite a team of national experts – in the form of an independent Commission – to provide a more objective assessment of what steps were needed to improve the system. They produced the [One Doncaster Report](#) in 2016, which included 30 recommendations, and Team Doncaster committed fully to every single one of them. When the Commission returned two years later, Doncaster was adjudged to have entered a 'virtuous circle of improvement'.

**Key to achieving this had been a commitment to two beliefs: first, that education is not a closed system, and second, that all action is socially situated and embedded.**

Whereas in the past, the Council had waited for central government to give a directive, One Doncaster had given a green light to take the lead. Since then, the Council has moved away from a centralised control model and scaffolded the system with a series of middle-tier organisations and forums to embed a partnership approach, building relational capital and agency. This included embedding the role of the youth voice, through structures such as the Youth Council, Young Advisors, and Young Commissioners. In addition, the Council secured a multi-million pound [Social Mobility Opportunity Area Programme](#), which provided a catalyst for important system-wide action

including the development of the [Doncaster Promise](#) – a compact between the local education and business sectors.

There has been positive progress as a result of a better engaged education system, embedded as part of the wider partnership. Demonstrated by a significant increase in Applied General qualifications at L3, student numbers have more than doubled on 2018/19 whilst A level numbers have been sustained. This is a significant shift given standards across all key stages having improved significantly (including achievement in AAB results have more than doubled from 8% to 17%).

Despite this progress, Doncaster still faces a series of education and skills related challenges, reflected by a low-wage, low-skill economy, a high proportion of working age adults with no formal qualifications, and an exodus of young people leaving the borough to access work and higher education.

### **This is why Doncaster is now seeking to transform the system itself.**

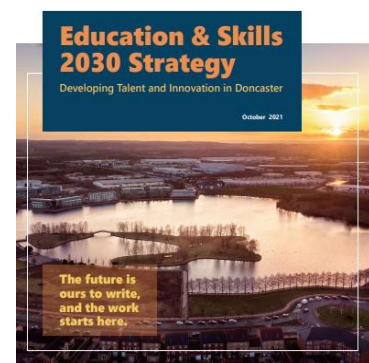
Following a lengthy system-wide consultation process including ‘Doncaster Talks’ public engagement exercise, the place based partnership Team Doncaster has fully committed to building a lifelong learning ecosystem with a joined up network of local learning assets – from Family Hubs, and community-based learning offers to more bespoke formal provision such as the UK’s first [Big Picture Learning school](#), Vega College, [two University Technical Colleges](#) and one of the country’s first [Institutes of Technology](#) – and a more balanced approach to skills development and accreditation.

**This paradigm shift is infecting the development of local policy across the board** – with the [Doncaster Delivering Together](#) borough strategy and [Economic](#) and [Culture](#) strategies both having taken inspiration from the Education & Skills plan, and all advancing the same cohesive policy agenda which sees economic and skills development as two sides of the same coin. The wider South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority is likewise now investing in key transformational programmes which have been spearheaded by the ecosystem model.

**Doncaster has drawn and built on the assets and expertise within the place** to develop this crucial agenda – investing, in all senses of the word, distributed leadership by establishing an engine room which drives transformational ideas and projects.

### **It has also looked outward, to the international community:**

Hosting the UK’s first ever convening of GELP, developing a deep strategic partnership with Pittsburgh, and drawing on the expertise of the OECD to ensure the ecosystem is one fit for the future.



## TRANSFORMATIONAL ACTIVITY



### Supercharging Learning Across the City (with Remake Learning)

Existing learning opportunities are too narrow. Residents should have opportunities to engage in a variety of exciting and relevant learning experiences in a range of settings across their life course. Working with Remake Learning, Pittsburgh USA, we will develop a culture to ensure learning happens everywhere. In 2023 we became the first place in the UK to host the Remake Learning Days Festival, and we are now extending this activity with a wider festival and termly locality-based pop-up activity.

- **Reaching out to the whole community** – through a City-wide learning festival and other events
  - **Powerful and authentic learning experiences** – the development of partnerships will provide new kinds of learning experiences that allow residents opportunities to develop an array of skills
  - **Innovative learning environments** – the creation of new kinds of learning spaces will encourage creativity, innovation, collaboration and communication.
- We delivered a pilot in Stainforth March 23 with 20+ activities; engaging 183 adults and 750 children
  - **Hosted an inaugural 10-day Remake Learning Days Festival in May 2023, which: delivered 260+ events/activities, engaged over 10,000 people, included over 80 different event hosts, and distributed c.£18,000 in grant funding**
  - We have begun delivering smaller-scale termly festivals, with the first of these having taken place on Mexborough in February halfterm (12<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup>). This was a great success, with over 60 different events on offer, and an average satisfaction rating of 4.5/5.
  - The next city-wide festival will take place 22<sup>nd</sup> – 31<sup>st</sup> May. There are numerous planned events in the pipeline already and a number of grant applications awarded and being processed. The big event 'a Night at the Museum 2' will take place on the 23rd May.
  - We now have a dedicated (Remake) Learning manager in post, and are beginning to work up a grant scheme to encourage learning providers and employers to reimagine their learning spaces.

Our success thus far has been showcased by [WISE](#)

## Evolving Doncaster's Higher Education (HE) Offer

A new proposition will develop higher-level knowledge, skills and attitudes to drive prosperity in Doncaster, creating pathways from education into rewarding local employment, retaining talent, attracting employers and inward investment; enhancing the skills of adults already in work; retraining adults for a change in career; and creating opportunities for those out of work to return into employment.

This will be a **place-based** offer, linked to **priority economic sectors and linked specialisms**, with courses shaped in **partnership with employers**, delivery **dispersed across the City**, co-located with industry, with opportunities for innovation, business incubation, and research.

Together with partners including a University within the region, we have completed an initial visioning and scoping exercise, including modelling of potential future demand across key areas of focus, and exploration of different delivery models.

Phase 2 is now underway; with a view to developing a business case for a new offer. As a partnership we are currently exploring a model which focusses on:

- An offer aligned to the needs of the Health and Care sector with a digital tech element
- Flexible, responsive, modular provision which maximises the opportunities presented by the forthcoming Lifelong Learning Entitlement
- Co-location and co-delivery with local employers
- Increasing access to existing HE provision

In addition, we have been working to secure a new offer at the former National College for Advanced Transport and Infrastructure, which will soon house a new a rail focussed centre of excellence for training.



## Recognising & Showcasing Learner Skills (with Rethinking Assessment)

Existing exams and assessments are too narrow. Instead, everything people learn, in different settings and at each stage of life, should be fully recognised and showcased. Therefore, working with Rethinking Assessment we are developing:

- >> A new digital learner profile to present a comprehensive picture of each person's skills, talents and abilities;
- >> New forms of accreditation (microcredentials) developed with local educators and employers;
- >> New forms of learning and pedagogy, with employers bringing real-world challenges to classrooms.



To date we have engaged employer representatives from across three of our priority economic sectors to map current and future skills needs, and are currently delivering a CPD programme for education leaders which is:

- Supporting leaders to develop a prototype digital Skills profile.
- Exploring key generic and sector specific skills young people need to thrive in Doncaster, mapping them to each setting's curriculum.
- Deepening understanding of curriculum design, problem-based learning and a range of assessment processes.
- Developing a series of School/Learning Provider Actions Plan for 2024-2025. Each provider will commit to attending and developing a unique action plan and prototype digital learner profile.

We have developed a series of prototype profiles and are now currently exploring what digital technology needs to be put in place to host the individual learner profiles and to develop and issue microcredentials.

## Establishing Integrated Pathways for All

The current Careers Information Advice and Guidance, and employment pathways landscape is confusing, fragmented and unclear. An ecosystem must provide continued opportunities to up-skill, re-skill and progress. A programme of work to develop a comprehensive all-age careers hub offer will bring together existing services such as Advance, Youth Employment Hub and Schools Careers Hub into a coherent offer.



To date work has focussed on:

- Creating a **Special Educational Needs (SEN) Employer Forum**.
- Delivering a **teacher externships programme**.
- Delivering a government funded **Multiply numeracy programme** for adults.
- Launching a **locality-based Youth Employment Hub**.
- The **Zero Gravity Programme** – offering state school students support through the UCAS application process with award-winning mentoring and masterclasses.
- Investing in a **Supported Internships Programme** – enabling partners to establish opportunities for people with SEND to access sustained, paid employment.
- Taking ownership of the **Apprenticeships Support and Knowledge (ASK) Programme** – increasing awareness of apprenticeships, traineeships and T-Levels amongst students, parents, and teachers.

## Leveraging New Funding

We submitted a proposal to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund for a **Skills Innovation Accelerator Programme** and have been awarded funds to deliver:

- **Employer-led skills challenges** – offering grants to local employers to create (either independently or in collaboration with educators)



UK Shared Prosperity Fund

new learning opportunities that enable residents to engage with real-world scenarios and issues affecting industry, and in turn to develop industry-related skills as well as gaining a better understanding of employers' expectations (including standards of behaviour in the workplace).

- **Remake Learning** – accelerating and expanding delivery of Doncaster's nascent Remake Learning programme by offering grants to local voluntary, community, faith, education, and employer organisations to provide fun and engaging 'hands-on' community-based informal learning opportunities. These learning experiences will aim to attract and engage those people who feel traditional education is not for them and reignite a passion for learning and ambitions to access further life opportunities.
- **Reimagining learning spaces** – grants to help education providers, museums, libraries, community spaces, and employer organisations reimagine, redesign, and remake their physical and digital spaces in a way that enables different forms of learning to take place. These spaces will make learning accessible, engaging, and relevant, and will drive up engagement with the local skills offer.
- **Digital Skills Profile & Microcredentialling** – developing small, bite-sized units of learning and associated micro-badging, showcased on personal digital skills profiles, in order to bridge the needs of employers and employees, tailored to the local level. These will offer a more accessible and affordable route to continued learning and employment opportunities.

## FROM H1 TO H3

Looking ahead, our vision is to shift the model away from **learning for employment, to learning for human flourishing** – and to do this through establishing **Doncaster as a learning city**.

Doing so will involve bringing into sharper focus those capabilities and competencies which enable residents to fulfil their potential, including adaptive problem-solving, ethical reasoning and aesthetic perception/meaning making, connected through moral imagination.

It will mean moving towards a **networked university model**, engaging researchers, businesses and residents in collaborative action research and governance design across a citywide '**lab of labs**'.

And it will also mean scaffolding the system with distributed leadership model and policy interdependencies across the city's institutions, actors and communities – to help develop the leadership mindset that is itself critical to realising human flourishing.

