

Learning Strategy 2006-08



Swale Forward



Kim Williams

Swale Borough Council, Kent County Council, the Learning and Skills Council and Swale Forward have recognised that in seeking to build a more successful and sustainable future, the ability of local people to access the new opportunities arising from regeneration and economic development is key.

Swale is at an important juncture, with a massive programme of investment from both the public and private sector set to make some very real changes to the locality and its economy. Over £100 million of public investment will fund major regeneration and infrastructure projects over the next three years, coinciding with the Government's £90 million investment in the A249. These projects will not only directly facilitate new employment and housing development but will also significantly contribute to the ability of local companies to trade successfully and of the Borough to attract inward investment over many years to come.

The acquisition of not just skills, but the right skills, by local people is of vital importance to support the process of regeneration. Understanding the needs of both current and future employers, the ability of learning providers to respond to these needs requires much more effective communication and stronger co-ordination among local partners, employers and learning providers.

This Strategy helps to strengthen the relationship between learning and the employment opportunities that are, and will become, available to local people.

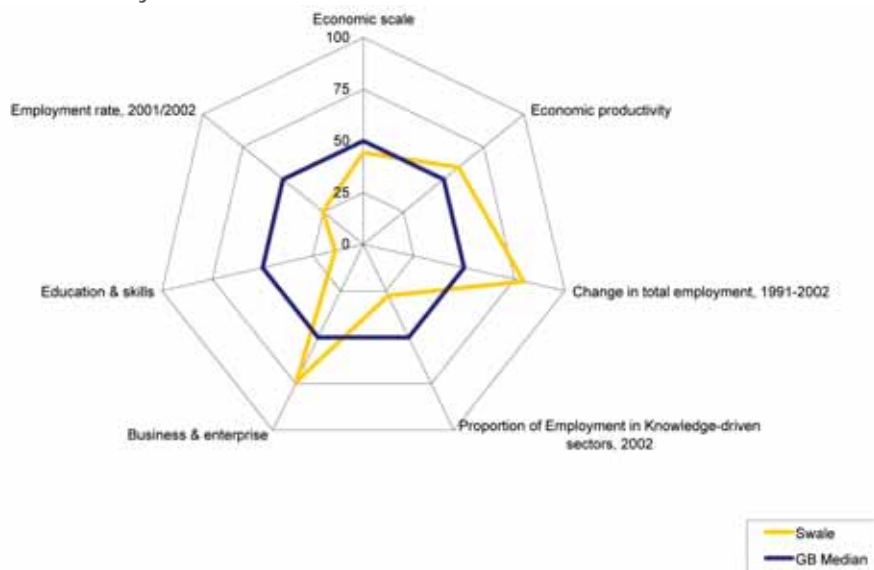


1. The Economic Context

- Around 44,000 people are employed in 4,200 Swale businesses, with a further 2,500 people working as self-employed
- 84% of businesses employ 10 or fewer people
- Manufacturing industries account for 20% of employment in Swale compared with 14% in North Kent and 12% in Kent and Medway as a whole
- Between 1998 and 2002, employment in the Borough grew by nearly 14%, representing an additional 5,200 employees in the Swale workforce
- The part-time workforce grew by more than a quarter (27%) over the period 1998-2002 and part-time workers now represent a third (32%) of the Swale workforce

The *State of the Borough 2004* report gives a mixed picture of the growth of Swale's economy.

Figure 1 The Swale Economy

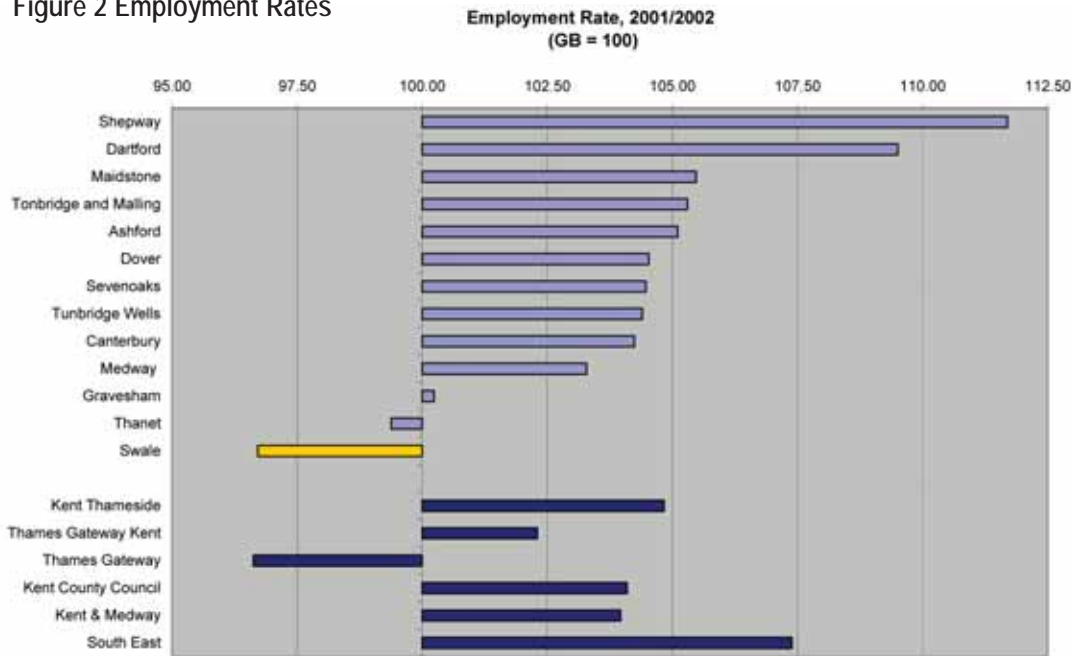


Source: *localknowledge*, Local Futures

Swale has been successful in encouraging the growth of local business and in increasing employment, and its productivity is above average. The total rate of employment, on the other hand, remains low in comparison with the rest of Kent and Medway.



Figure 2 Employment Rates

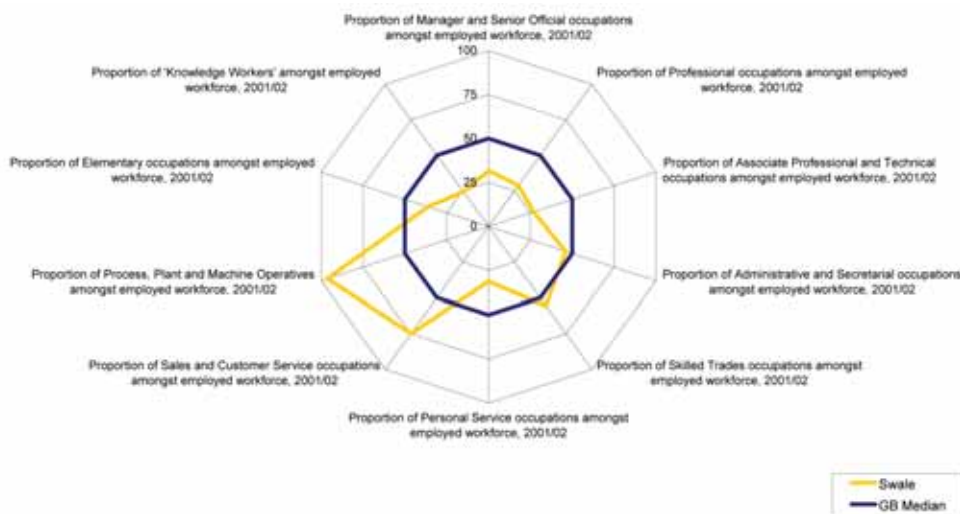


Source: Swale - State of the Borough Report 2004

The number of people who are inactive is a concern, and one of our priorities will be to explore the reasons for their inactivity and develop mechanisms that may help people to return to the workforce.

The overall structure of the Swale economy is a greater concern. As the occupational profile from the State of the Borough report shows, employment in Swale is heavily dependent on traditional manufacturing occupations such as plant and machine operating.

Figure 3 - Occupational Profile



Source: localknowledge, Local Futures⁵

A low proportion of businesses are knowledge based, and on Education and Skills, Swale ranks 350th out of 408 local authorities¹.

¹ James Binks, Knowledge Economy Audit for the Thames Gateway Directorate of the Learning and Skills Council London 2005



The Knowledge Economy

Knowledge based industries have been defined by the OECD as those that are "increasingly dependent on the effective creation, acquisition, distribution and use of knowledge". These industries are widely regarded as the mainstay of growth in the world's leading economies and the key to future development in the South East.

Economic Architecture analysis examines the economy by looking at the number of jobs in each sector which require degrees or equivalent qualifications.

Table 1 The Knowledge Economy

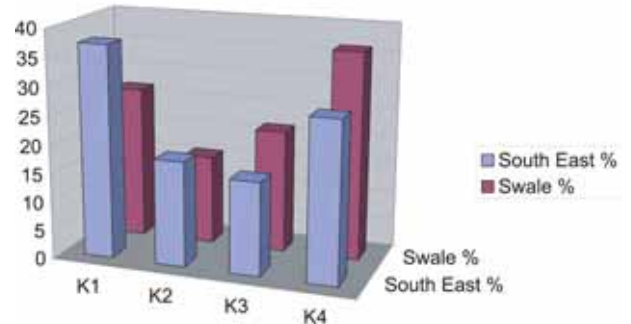
Sector	Proportion of workforce with degrees or equivalent	Industries (examples)
K1	More than 40%	Manufacturing - chemicals, office equipment, computers; Air Transport; Computing; Research & Development; Education; Health & Social Work.
K2	Between 25% & 40%	Manufacturing- food products, clothing machinery, other transport equipment; Gas & Electricity; Insurance, Financial Services; Public Administration.
K3	Between 15% & 25%	Manufacturing- vehicles, electrical equipment, metal products furniture; Wholesale Trade; Transport
K4	Less than 15%	Agriculture; Mining; Fishing; Construction; Manufacturing - paper, plastic, textiles; Transport; Hotels and Restaurants.

Source: LSC Knowledge Economy Audit

A low proportion of businesses in Swale are knowledge based. Swale compares unfavourably with other areas of the South East, with only 27% of employment in K1 sectors compared to 37% in the region as a whole. Similarly, Swale has a high concentration of jobs in the K4 sector - 36% - in comparison with 28% in the South East.

Figure 4 The Knowledge Economy

The Knowledge Economy -Swale and the South East



Source: LSC Knowledge Economy Audit

The Thames Gateway Learning and Skills Council have described the whole area as being in a *low skills equilibrium*, where jobs that require poor skills give rise to low aspirations. In Swale and Canterbury, only 66% of 16 year olds stay on in education, compared to 75% for the county as a whole, and the rates in parts of Sittingbourne and Sheppey are particularly low ². The LSC highlighted the fact that Swale, with Dover, is particularly weak in this area. The majority of Swale people who obtain higher-level qualifications have to move out of the area to find employment, while those who wish to stay recognise that opportunities will be limited. A substantial part of the population therefore fails to reach its full potential.

For this reason, Swale Forward partners do not wish to maintain the low skills equilibrium and want to make sure that opportunities, education and training are made available to everyone in the area. In any event, two factors are likely to destabilise the equilibrium in the near future:

1. The increasing migration of jobs with poor skill levels to low wage areas. Manufacturing jobs are already moving to the new accession states in Eastern Europe and to the Far East, and this is likely to continue.
2. The new Thames Gateway developments, which will concentrate on bringing new employment opportunities into the area which are likely to be knowledge based.

² LSC STAR review: Canterbury and Swale Young People, LSC, 2004.



The migration of employment & decline of manufacturing

Table 1 shows that Swale has a particularly high proportion of its employees in businesses that predominantly require low skills, with 45.6% of the workforce in these sectors compared to 28% in the South East. Many of these jobs are in poorly skilled manufacturing industries, and they are particularly vulnerable to competition from low wage countries in Eastern Europe and the Far East. The employment rate in Swale already lags behind that of every other district in the county, and it is likely that Swale will suffer from further loss of employment in the future. Similarly, while Sheppey still has a significant tourism sector, the tourists that it brings in have limited spending power.

Swale will face a challenge in managing the decline of manufacturing industry. Much of the evidence about the redeployment of labour from declining industries is not encouraging. To look at some of the major findings:

- There tend to be very few opportunities for training at the lower end of the labour market ³.
- As the number of firms in an industry declines, American research suggests that such training also becomes more firm and occupation specific. As a result, workers tend to lack skills that are transferable ⁴.
- Workers without qualifications frequently find it difficult to find stable employment after redundancy, although family support can be important.
- Transfer to self-employment is difficult without the right financial or human capital. People tend to be most successful if they made the transition within six months of leaving work ⁵.

All of the findings suggest that workers leaving low-paid, low-skilled employment need a considerable amount of support if they are going to move on to new employment. In particular, they may need extensive training with appropriate study support and some continuing help once they have moved into work. In this context, it must be a concern that funding for learners over the age of 19 in Further Education is being cut back, and Swale will need to look for special funds to support work in this area.

³ Furlong & Cartmel, Vulnerable young men in fragile labour markets, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, March 2004

⁴ Groen, J Occupation Specific Capital and local labour markets, US Department of Labor, 2005

⁵ Cowling, M & Hayward, R, Out of Employment, University of Birmingham, 2000



The Thames Gateway- A Step Change for Swale

The other development is much more positive. The wider regeneration of the Thames Gateway, as proposed in plans outlined by the Government ⁶, represents an important opportunity to effect a *step change* in the economic fortunes of Swale. This Strategy seeks to support the broader economic vision for Swale, as set out in Swale Borough Council's draft Local Plan ⁷, the Economic Development Strategy and the Regeneration Framework. The Regeneration Framework and the Local Plan identify the west of the Borough, around Sittingbourne, Queenborough and Sheerness, for significant investment and employment growth. In the east of the Borough, around Faversham, the focus is on strengthening the skills of the workforce to regenerate the economy from within, improving the sustainability of traditional industries whilst supporting economic diversification.

The scale of employment growth and economic development envisaged for the Sittingbourne-Sheerness axis as part of the Thames Gateway plan is impressive. The Regeneration Framework envisages :

- 12,000 additional job opportunities by 2021;
- investment and support for Kent Science Park;
- the development of the Borough's tourism economy;
- the regeneration of Sittingbourne, Sheerness, Faversham and Queenborough and Rushenden;
- major highway and infrastructure improvements.

The Science Park is a particularly important element of the Vision, representing an important focus for the development of more knowledge intensive industries in Swale. The Framework identifies the Science Park as a key asset for North Kent and suggests there is scope for expanding the Park to become a site of regional and national significance.

⁶ Sustainable Communities Action Plan, July 2003.

⁷ Swale BC 2004. Local Plan, First Review (deposit Draft), March 2004.



Priority Sectors

Inward investment and employment growth in the Sittingbourne-Sheerness area is expected to be focused in the following sectors;

Transport and Logistics - Swale's main strength in this sector is derived from Sheerness Port. The port is the 4th largest in the UK for freight and is also a significant point of entry for imported cars, fruit and timber products. The Regeneration Framework identifies expansion opportunities for the port and the need for investment into supporting infrastructure.

The land transport sub-sector is both a significant employer in Swale and has a higher local concentration of employment than in Kent and Medway as a whole. However, the sector is only around half as likely to employ high skilled people (NVQ level 4 or above) than all industries across Kent and Medway.

High Technology Manufacturing - Within the Sittingbourne area, manufacturing is an important sector accounting for around 23% of the workforce. There are local strengths in areas such as advanced engineering, electronics, pharmaceuticals and biotechnology. Kent Science Park is highlighted as a key location for future high technology businesses and for research and development activity, following substantial expansion of the existing site.

Whilst high technology manufacturing is seen to be of strategic importance to the future growth of the Swale economy, employment in the sector is currently concentrated in low technology manufacturing. Encouraging these businesses to adopt effective workforce development strategies may help stem their decline, but more intense competition from low cost countries should be expected.

Business and Financial Services - Swale does not have a high relative concentration of employment in this sector and will face considerable competition from other areas to attract high-value added finance and business services. Swale is more likely to attract call centre type functions, where employment is predominantly low skilled. Across Kent and Medway, 58% of employment in this sector is still at intermediate (NVQ level 2 and 3) and low (level 1 or below) level.

Nevertheless, the sector is a major employer in the Borough and has experienced significant employment growth. It currently accounts for 13% of employment in Swale. The largest sub-sector is other business services (including accountancy practices and recruitment agencies), which employs over 3,000 people in the Borough.

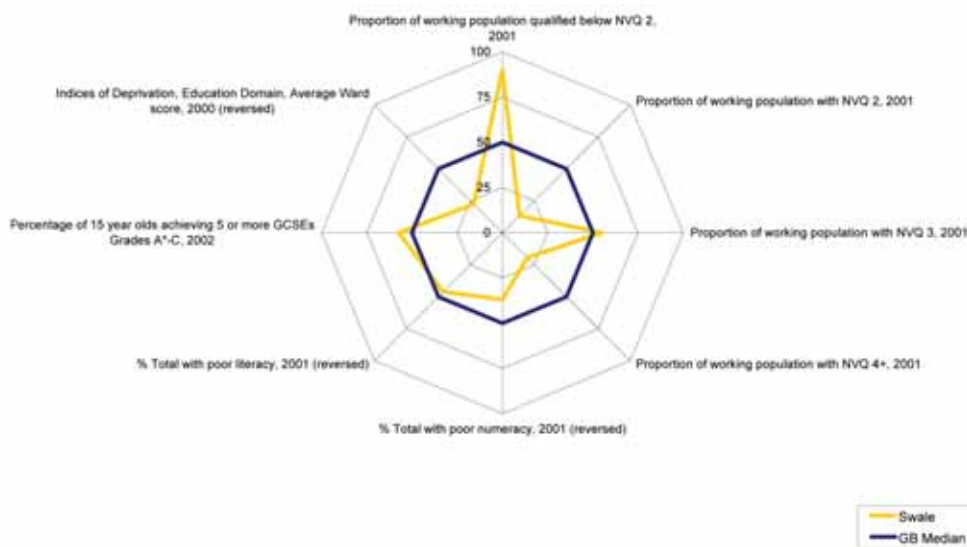
Leisure and Tourism - The skills profile of tourism and hospitality is broadly in line with that of both transport and logistics and retail. The hotels and restaurants sub-sector employs just over 3,400 people in Swale and was a key growth sector in the Borough between 1998 and 2002 both in terms of absolute and relative employment growth. The sector could also play an important role in supporting rural diversification in the Isle of Sheppey and around Faversham, particularly through ecological and heritage-based tourism.



Skills in Swale

The *State of the Borough* report highlighted the low level of skills in Swale:

Figure 5 Skills in Swale

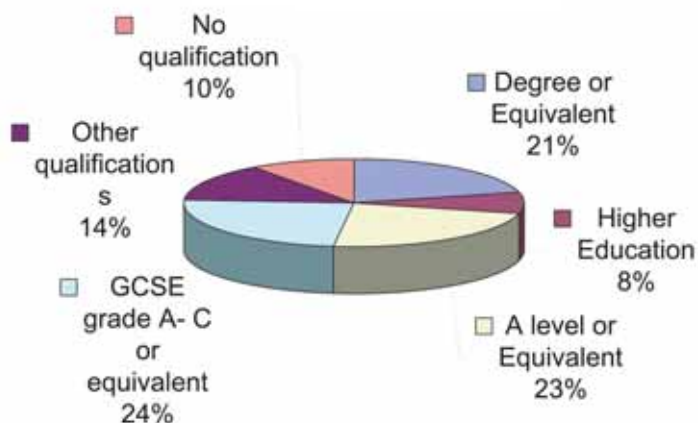


While Swale is slightly above the median in GCSE scores and the proportion of the population at NVQ 3 level, almost all of the other indicators are poor. Most particularly, Swale scores very badly in terms of the proportion of the population with low qualifications. This reflects a population that has traditionally found employment in occupations that do not demand high levels of skill, a position that will need to change to meet the economic challenges of economic restructuring. This picture is reinforced by evidence from the LSC's work on the knowledge economy in the Thames Gateway.

The new occupational structure predicted for the Thames Gateway will provide a particular challenge to Swale. As figure 6 suggests, the qualification structure of the new jobs which are planned for the Thames Gateway will not resemble the current profile.

Figure 6 Expected qualification level of new employment

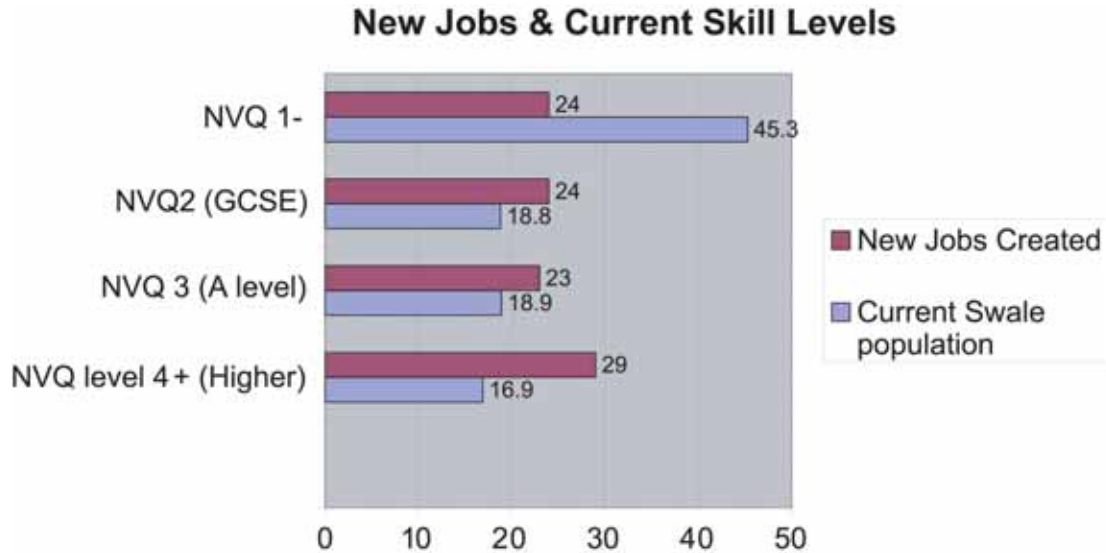
Proportion of Jobs by Qualification Level, Swale



It is possible to put these figures against the skill profile of the existing population to show the growing skills gap:



Figure 7 Current qualifications against new jobs



Source: *Knowledge Economy/Skills Audit*

This highlights the biggest single issue for Swale, the low skills capacity of the existing workforce. No other issue is as pressing for the area.

The Need for a Learning Hub

Because of the cycle of low aspiration and achievement, poor academic performance in schools could perpetuate the gap between Swale and its neighbours or even widen the divide. Performance at all key stages lags behind other areas of Kent, and needs to be raised if the Borough is to stand a fighting chance of providing the skills required for sustainable economic growth in the future. Clearly the significant pockets of socio-economic deprivation in the Borough need to be addressed through economic and community development, but it will only be possible to attract investment in new, knowledge based industries if the education system in the Borough contributes to the breaking of the cycle.

It will be particularly important to increase the staying on rate post 16. Swale Forward, working with the LSC and Gateway Knowledge Alliance, have already been able to commission a feasibility study into the creation of a Learning Hub for Sittingbourne to:

- provide new Further Education opportunities for the area;
- co-ordinate the post-16 vocational offer being developed in schools and the new opportunities available in the Science Park;
- give a new impetus to post-16 learning in the area by physically locating educational development in the heart of the town.

This project will be critical to the longer-term success of the learning strategy and the regeneration framework.

Skills required

Projections of the kind of skills that will be required over the next fifteen years are more difficult to make than predictions about the level of skills that will be required, largely because it is impossible to predict the nature of the businesses that will be attracted to the area. We can be reasonably confident that there will be jobs in construction, the public services and general office administration, and it seems likely that jobs in areas such as logistics will expand.



The Learning and Skills Context

The Swale Learning Strategy cannot exist in isolation from national and local policies that inform our partners in improving the educational performance of the area. This section will look at the relationship of these policies to the particular needs of Swale.

The general direction of national policy in the recent past can be characterised by two tendencies:

1. A general movement to devolve authority from bodies such as county councils towards individual institutions such as schools and colleges. Colleges and universities are now independent institutions, and a great deal of authority has been devolved to individual schools.
2. Increasing efforts to ensure that activities in schools, colleges and universities are governed by national policy through the imposition of national curriculum targets, funding regulations and the establishment of semi-autonomous national bodies.

Central Government's approach to the underachievement by children regards it as primarily a consequence of poverty and disadvantage. Their Green Paper *Every Child Matters*, states that its aim is:

*".....to ensure that every child has the chance to fulfil their potential by reducing levels of educational failure, ill health, substance misuse, teenage pregnancy, abuse and neglect, crime and anti-social behaviour among children and young people."*⁸

Given the level of disadvantage in Swale, it is not surprising that the area suffers disproportionately from all of the problems listed. The rate of teenage pregnancy, for example, is the third highest in Kent.

Every Child Matters suggests an integration between educational approaches to poor achievement and approaches to child support through Social Services. As a consequence, county councils are increasingly aiming to integrate these services. In Swale, the policy will also be felt in the near future through:

- the extension of Sure Start Centres to new areas;
- the continuing development of the children's consortium;
- the development of an Adolescent Resource Centre (ARC);
- KCC's Community School policy, which aims to extend the use of schools and make them accessible to local communities;
- the School Cluster policy, which brings groups of schools together to share resources;
- Local Area Agreements that relate to children and young people such as the extension of cultural and artistic activities among young people.

Support for these initiatives will be of critical importance in ensuring their success.

⁸ Every Child Matters, (summary) DFES 2003



The Kent Secondary Strategy - Nurturing Autonomous and Creative Learners ⁹

Looks at the development of the Secondary school system in Kent. In particular, it looks at ways of dealing with what it describes as the "excellence but not equity" system in the County, in which many schools do well but a high proportion underachieve. The proposals are:

- **The individualisation of learning**, so that each pupil is offered a tailored package of learning suited to their individual needs. This will be achieved by increasing the use of ICT and combining a range of teaching and learning methods including group work, individual mentoring and larger master classes.
- **Improving collaboration between schools**, and encouraging them to move from School Clusters to Educational Improvement Partnerships which will deliver a joint curriculum, agree admissions arrangements and establish a variety of support services. At the same time, large schools may be divided into smaller "school within a school" units (similar to old school houses) to provide organisation at a more human scale.
- **Increasing links between the school and the community**, continuing the community school programme by bringing other services into schools, extending the use of school facilities by pupils and the wider community, and engaging parents with the school.
- **Improving the learning infrastructure** through enhanced ICT support but also through the development of staff at all levels to enable them to deliver the enhanced curriculum.

These new initiatives, with their emphasis on increasing the equity of the education system, will go some way towards addressing the underperformance of Swale schools at all Key Stages.

Levels of deprivation and low aspirations are major contributing factors that require a multi-agency approach. A particular issue identified by KCC Education in the area is the recruitment and retention of staff in schools. Partners should, therefore, act to encourage trained and skilled staff to move to Swale and stay in the area. Possible actions would include:

- the development of a Teachers' Centre, supporting staff development and providing a bank for learning resources;
- incentives for young teachers moving into the area, such as access to housing;
- any actions that would make Swale a more attractive place to live in, such as an increase in the number and quality of cultural and leisure activities available in the area.

⁹ The Kent Secondary Strategy - Nurturing Autonomous and Creative Learners, KCC (pre publication)



Joint Kent 14-19 Strategy ¹⁰

Is designed to meet the challenge of low levels of progression and achievement by older teenagers in Kent, while addressing the relevance of the curriculum at the same time. It follows the Tomlinson report by suggesting that young people become disengaged from the education system because they regard it as irrelevant to their needs or future prospects, and therefore proposes that a relevant curriculum with clear progression routes is the key to improvement. In practice, the measures it suggests include:

- broadening the curriculum offer for 14-16 year olds, particularly in the area of Vocational Education; the development of new National Vocational Diplomas in schools
- increasing collaboration between schools and FE colleges;
- providing impartial Information, Advice and Guidance for young people and their parents.

In Swale, areas where the 14- 19 strategy is being implemented include:

- the support given by KCC to the development of the Learning Hub, which will provide particularly strong links with schools;
- the development of vocational centres for schools. £1.2m has already been invested in Centres at Westlands and Sittingbourne Community College;
- joint planning between Sheppey College and Minster School;

Swale Forward has taken the initiative to develop the concept of the Learning Hub. It will establish an investment strategy to support the establishment of vocational centres in schools.

The LSC Strategic Area Reviews

The LSC was recently charged with reviewing post 16 education in order to identify gaps and areas of duplication through the Strategic Area Review. Two local documents were produced covering Swale, the Young Peoples Learning & Skills Assessment for Swale & Canterbury ¹¹ and the Adult Learning and Skills Assessment for Thames Gateway ¹². Both of these documents stressed a number of themes:

- the need to improve the skills of young people and adults in ways that meet the needs of employers;
- the improvement of choice for learners, particularly in vocational learning;
- the need to raise the standard of provision and the level of participation;
- the development of strong provider partnerships to give greater responsiveness;
- the importance of improving progression post-16 and into higher education;

As we have already seen, these themes are integral to the Swale Learning Strategy. In particular, partners are committed to:

- improving the communication between existing employers and education providers;
- anticipating the needs of employers coming into the Gateway;
- establishing a range of vocational workshops;
- supporting the improvement plans of educational providers;
- encouraging partnership through projects such as the Learning Hub;
- supporting progression arrangements including an HE Learning Compact.

Progression, participation and support for raising standards are central to the approach of our strategy and those of our partners, and Swale Forward will embrace the need to establish a unity of purpose in tackling the challenge of educational need in the Borough.

¹⁰ KCC 14-19 Learner Strategy KCC, 2004

¹¹ Op cit.

¹² LSC Kent & Medway Adult Learning and Skills Assessment for Thames Gateway LSC, 2005



Pride in Swale- the Learning Strategy in the Context of Regeneration

Swale has identified learning and skills as its main priority because of the immediate need for the area to meet the challenge of regeneration. In particular, it focuses on the need to equip Swale residents with the skills that they will require to participate in the new businesses that will be attracted to the area. Without the growth of new employment opportunities, it is unlikely that the learning strategy will be effective as it is the lack of prospects that inhibits aspiration at the moment.

The Learning Strategy must support the full suite of policies outlined in the Regeneration Framework as well as supporting the policies of our partners. Swale Forward's overall vision is:

*"To achieve a transformation in Swale's economic social and environmental profile, so that it is one of the best places in Britain in which to live, work, learn and invest."*¹³

The area must be able to market itself to the skilled, graduate population created by the Learning Strategy, as well as for those coming from the outside, as an attractive area in which to live and work. In addition to fostering vocational skills, the Learning Strategy needs to help to create the social and community skills that will underpin the social and community strategy and encourage local people to appreciate and take pride in the environment, heritage and culture of the area. The strategy will:

- support educational activities that contribute to a sense of place, such as courses in local history and ecology;
- encourage local and national institutions, such as universities, to undertake research in Swale;

- promote community education, particularly in relation to redevelopment;
- promote cultural and artistic activities in Swale. Swale Forward will work with colleagues in adult, community and continuing education to promote these activities.

¹³ Op cit, p. 7



2. The role of Swale Forward & local partners

Our overall Strategic Objective for learning and skills is;

*"To deliver a step change in Swale's learning and skills performance to ensure a skills base sufficient to support business and attract new investment in high value added sectors and to enable people in Swale to realise their full potential and access the opportunities presented by growth."*¹⁴

Our colleagues in the learning and skills sector have identified a range of activities connected with progression, quality, responsiveness and guidance that need to be addressed in the area. The Swale Learning Strategy will support them in many of the actions that have been suggested. At a local level, Swale Forward can add value to the activities of its partners through:

- Focussing on the integration of learning and skills in the Borough
- Drawing down funds to support new developments
- Linking learning with the needs of existing and emerging employers
- Promoting co-operation between educational providers
- Integrating learning and skills with community development

Focussing on the integration of learning and skills: Developing a strategy

Swale shares many of the problems and issues of development that characterise Kent as a whole, including declining manufacturing, a changing tourism economy, a dependence on small businesses and a low-skills profile. It is part of North Kent but sits on the junction with East Kent although it rarely attracts as much attention within the County as some of the deprived areas further East. In terms of Further and Higher Education, the only facility in the area is Sheppey College, while Sittingbourne is the largest town in the County without a Further Education facility. Similarly, while both Medway and Canterbury host four Higher Education Institutions, Swale does not have a single Higher Education course offered within its boundaries. While there are major disparities between the different areas of Swale, there is a poor performance in education and skills across the area.

One advantage of the absence of facilities in the Borough is that Swale is well placed to establish new initiatives that depend upon co-operation, and this is already evident on Sheppey and in Sittingbourne. The growth of a Swale Strategy will further this process.

¹⁴ Ibid, p15



Prioritising Investment

The development of the Thames Gateway will make funds available for the development of sustainable communities in the area, including educational projects. Swale Forward, together with partners in the Gateway Knowledge Alliance, KCC, the LSC and local institutions, have already had some success in bringing new investment into the area in 2005 including:

- £1.4 m for the development of Vocational Centres
- £150,000 for a feasibility study on the Sittingbourne Learning Hub
- £155,000 for a learning centre at Kent Science Park

The Learning Strategy must also aim to facilitate other funding bids made within Swale to ensure that the area gains its full entitlement to discretionary funding.

Linking Learning with the Needs of Existing and Emerging Employers

The regeneration framework and the economic development strategy of Swale Borough Council will also help to shape the changes in employment within Swale. Many of the traditional, low-skilled manufacturing businesses in the area are likely to move their operations abroad in the near future, and this decline will need to be managed through retraining the workforce. At the same time, Swale will aim to attract new, knowledge-based businesses into the area. The shape of the employment sector will be moulded through the development of a skills strategy as well as through attracting investment into the area.

While it is clear that inward investment could play a key role in raising the demand for high-level skills, it should be remembered that competition for high value-added functions within knowledge-based sectors such as finance and business services and high-technology manufacturing is intense. Swale will need to offer more than office and laboratory space if it is to attract such inward investment. Clearly, developments such as the Kent Science Park at Sittingbourne have an important role to play in supporting the development of a community of high value-added businesses. However, there will continue to be significant commercial pressures to let land and property across the Borough to low and intermediate skill functions. The Swale Learning Strategy needs to maintain contact with all of the employers in the area as well as acting on projections of future activity, but it will offer the possibility of improving the links between educational institutions and employers.

Improving the responsiveness of education and learning providers to meet the skills needs of employers is a central aspect of the Government's competitiveness agenda. A clearer articulation of local employer needs could be used to encourage local learners to make more informed choices.



Promoting co-operation between Educational Providers

The quality of school provision is already monitored by OFSTED as well as by our colleagues in KCC, the Learning and Skills Council and individual schools. All of these institutions deserve our support. The Swale Learning Strategy should not seek to add another level of control to the curriculum or to teaching standards, but it can contribute to developing partnerships between institutions and educational sectors. The work that has already taken place on the Learning Hub has demonstrated the gains to be made through establishing a joint approach to solving educational problems. Our priority in this area is therefore to support and facilitate productive relationships between schools, colleges, work-based training providers, employers and universities. Where necessary, we will seek out capital funding to support joint ventures. Swale Forward must also play a role in the formulation of a coherent policy on vocational education which will align it with the occupational structure that is likely to emerge from the regeneration of the area.

Swale Forward, the Borough Council and SEEDA have already taken a lead through their provision for Community Enterprise Hubs as well as their support for community development and neighbourhood renewal. We want to work with our partners to help to build capacity in local communities as well as tackling the challenges of poor basic skills and a lack of qualifications among a significant sector of the population. Community activity harnesses enthusiasm and provides a context for adults and families to learn new skills.

The strategy will also support educational activities designed to broaden learning and engage learners at any level, particularly when these activities help people to make the most of the local environment or enhance it through artistic activities.

Integrating Learning and Skills with Community Development

As discussed above, underlying the priorities is the issue of low aspirations and poor self image. This Strategy must seek to give local people and businesses the confidence that they can shape their own futures and engage effectively with them.



3. The Priorities

1. The strategic development of learning policy in Swale and its integration with the regeneration agenda
2. Making learning relevant to the needs of existing and emergent employers
3. Improving educational performance and progression
4. Creating a learning culture

Priority 1 Strategic development of Learning Policy

1.1 Co-ordinate Learning and Skills in Swale
<p>Rationale Swale Forward will support Kent County Council, the Learning and Skills Council and other organisations in their efforts to improve and reform education in Swale. It also recognises the need for local planning and co-ordination to ensure that learning objectives are integrated with plans for regeneration and economic development.</p>
<p>Aspirations</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Co-ordinated system of learning & skills provision in Swale 2. The integration of projects in Learning and Skills, Economic Development and Regeneration.
<p>Areas for Action</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Support the Local Strategic Group being established by the Learning and Skills Council. ii. Establish a small strategy group to link the learning agenda in Swale to regeneration & infrastructure.
<p>Lead Agencies LSC and Swale Forward.</p>
1.2 Map and extend existing initiatives
<p>Rationale Swale needs to ensure that it is effectively served by the many initiatives intended to improve learning and skills and draws down any funding appropriate to its strategic aims.</p>
<p>Aspiration</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop a pro-active, needs-led approach to funding for Learning and Skills. 2. Increased access to national, regional and/or county wide resources/mainstream funding to secure Swale's strategic objectives. 3. Higher levels of employer participation in such initiatives/programmes
<p>Areas for Action</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Learning & Skills Co-ordinator to map key initiatives and programmes ii. To promote these key initiatives and programmes to local organisations, businesses and individuals
<p>Lead Agencies SBC - Learning & Skills Co-ordinator</p>



Priority 2 Making Learning Relevant to the needs of existing and emergent employers

2.1 Local Sector Frameworks

Rationale

A number of key sectors have been identified as important for the development of Swale, including

- Logistics/road transport,
- Manufacturing,
- Construction,
- Retail
- Tourism/hospitality,
- Bio-Sciences.

Swale Borough Council, with Swale Forward, Swale Local Strategic Partnership and local employers, should review and agree the priority sectors for Swale. The Sector Frameworks will examine available labour market information, highlighting employer skill needs and any gaps in provision.

Aspirations

Agreed view of growth sectors for Learning and skills partners to act upon as part of co-ordinated plan

Areas for Action

- i. Swale Borough Council, Swale Forward and Swale LSP agree on the Priority Sectors for Swale and work with other agencies to ensure that employer skills need are met
- ii. Plan to be regularly revised & updated.
- iii. Forecast the number and type of jobs (and skills needed) for each main regeneration site, based on a number of scenarios
- iv. Develop and implement the Sector Frameworks for 2005/06
- v. Disseminate this information to careers/IAG advisers, local planning group etc.
- vi. Develop local labour/learning initiatives as appropriate

Lead Agencies

SBC, SF and Swale LSP



2.2 Employer Voice

Rationale

Stakeholders, including schools and colleges, need to understand the skills needs of employers. There is no single employer voice and no easy route to obtain a representative view of employer needs. This is also the case with the Priority Sectors. If we are to build a more responsive learning system, we need to strengthen links with employers.

Aspirations

Effective communication with employers established

Areas for Action

- i. Identify and establish needs of existing employers, wherever possible using existing networks and meetings
- ii. Examine the need for local incentives to encourage more employers to join representative bodies
- iii. Encourage existing employer representative bodies to work together more effectively and review the role of Sector Skills Councils within local areas such as Swale
- iv. Ensure that information on Learning and Skills developments is fed back to employers on a regular basis

Lead Agencies

SBC, SF, and employer representative bodies

2.3 Work Experience, youth development programmes and Education-Business Links

Rationale

Local schools are keen to develop links with employers, both in terms of work placements and careers advice. Schools currently adopt their own policies towards placing students on work placements, with some working with Kent Works, so that in some cases employers receive multiple requests.

Aspirations

Firm links between local employers and schools, regular careers events, employer engagement in compact agreements.

Areas for Action

- i. Regular careers events to support interaction between employers and students
- ii. Establish a single point of contact between schools and employers
- iii. Clearer explanations of requirements and processes involved in managing work experience from employers' perspective
- iv. Establish youth development and work experience programmes within public sector employers to act as exemplar projects

Lead Agencies

Kent Works, Swale Secondary Schools and LSC



2.4 Focus on the unemployed and inactive

Rationale

The link between poor qualifications and employability is well known. In addition to those individuals who are unemployed and actively seeking work (i.e. claiming Job Seekers Allowance), a larger pool of adults is inactive, claiming non-JSA benefits (as a result of ill health and/or disability, being a single parent and/or helping to care for someone else in the family). Across the country, the number of non-JSA benefit recipients has increased significantly in the last 10 years.

Aspirations

The number of benefit claimants in Swale should be reduced as far as possible.

Areas for Action

- i. Research needs of incapacity claimants
- ii. Target long term unemployed and economically inactive - link this potential pool of new employees to the new jobs to be created on the main regeneration sites, with appropriate training support provided
- iii. Work with Jobcentre Plus to 'fit' contracts to local need and priority

Lead Agencies

Island Partnership, Jobcentre Plus

2.5 TUC Learning Champions

Rationale

The Trade Union Learning Fund recognises the important role that can be played by trade unions in engaging employees in learning, including those with negative experiences of learning and/or those with basic skills needs. There is a need to map and co-ordinate their roles within Swale.

Aspirations

Network of TU Learning Champions to be in place where required in Swale

Areas for Action

- i. Map the work of TULCs in Swale and align with priority sectors
- ii. Enhance their roles to address learning needs in Swale

Lead Agencies

South East Region TUC, WEA, LSC and the Basic Skills Consortium



Priority 3 Improving Educational Performance and Progression

3.1 Professional Development Centre

Rationale

Swale young people under perform, against the Kent average, on most measures of educational attainment. Parts of Swale have difficulty in recruiting and retaining teachers. A professional development centre would help to attract and retain staff as well as providing resources and support for existing teachers in the area.

Aspirations

Swale to attract and retain well qualified teaching staff

Areas for Action

Ensure that new developments include a Professional Development Centre

Lead Agencies

Swale Forward, KCC

3.2 Learning Compact

Rationale

Indicators suggest that Swale sends a smaller proportion of young people to university than other parts of Kent. The proportion of graduates in the population is low.

Aspirations

Progression to university in Swale to exceed Kent average.

Areas for Action

- i. Work with Aimhigher and KCC to develop a Swale Learning Compact, similar to the Medway Compact, that will allow young people to gain extra UCAS points for local universities
- ii. Support the development of a Plus scheme as part of the Compact
- iii. Encourage the development of other school/university links, such as mentoring schemes, designed to increase progression to university.

Lead Agencies

Aimhigher, KCC Education, Universities, Gateway Knowledge Alliance



3.3 Pre-16 Vocational Offer

Rationale

By seeking to equalise the value/status placed on vocational qualifications and providing an alternative progression route for students, the Government has emphasised in the 14-19 White Paper the importance of the pre-16 vocational curriculum. Within Swale, there is a need to encourage and develop this initiative further, possibly by making stronger links with local employers and priority sectors. If undertaken correctly, the provision of pre-16 vocational courses provides a good basis to develop more effective relationships with local employers (see Area for Action 2.3).

Aspirations

An overall strategy among the schools to ensure that a broad vocational offer is available to students

Areas for Action

- i. Need an overall strategy for secondary schools to provide a broad vocational offer
- ii. Target the needs of the priority sectors

Lead Agencies

KCC, LSC and Secondary Schools

3.4 IAG/Careers Advice

Rationale

Effective careers/learning information, advice and guidance services are essential to raising the aspirations of both young people and adults, especially those currently marginalised from the labour market. These services need to be supported with up to-date and accurate labour market information to help to inform decisions, with advisers trained to use LMI and to receive regular labour market briefings.

Aspirations

All post-16 students and adults to receive unbiased guidance based upon sound labour market information

Areas for Action

- i. Annual Labour Market Fact Sheets produced for the priority sectors, as well as for the Swale economy as a whole.
- ii. Careers staff and IAG advisers to receive regular briefings on labour market trends and training on how best to use and present LMI
- iii. Develop a single post-16 learning prospectus/website for all schools in Swale
- iv. Ensure that all post-16 students receive unbiased advice to recognised standards

Lead Agencies

Connexions, Careers Management Ltd and Kent Guidance Consortium



3.5 Widening Further Education provision

Rationale

Provision of Further Education in Swale is currently very limited, with most students having to travel outside the Borough. There is a need to expand the opportunities available, either through the provision of new physical facilities or the expansion of outreach and partnership services. Widening the FE offer for Swale should target the priority sectors (see 1.2).

Aspirations

Short term development of new opportunities through collegiate approach by the school, college and work-based training sectors and employers. Longer-term development of integrated Learning Hub

Areas for Action

- i. To expand the range of FE opportunities available in Swale, particularly focusing on vocational opportunities and priority sectors

Lead Agencies

LSC, Gateway Knowledge Alliance, Swale Forward

3.6 Support Higher Education

Rationale

Swale has the opportunity and a track record in developing and attracting high growth businesses. Building on the successes achieved to date will be key to the Boroughs future. However, there is a mismatch in the potential skill needs of employers in high growth sectors and those available from the local workforce. While competition for specific high skilled jobs created will be at the national/international level, other jobs are more likely to be sourced locally. To encourage inward investment, local people will need to be able to fill these jobs (for instance associate professional and technician workers, IT, and those with business management, financial skills). Currently, 12% of people in Swale have degree level qualifications (level 4) compared with 16% for Kent and Medway

Aspirations

Proportion of graduates in Swale to equal or exceed Kent and Medway Average

Areas for Action

- i. Identify and support the management skills and workforce development needs of Swale's growth companies
- ii. Undertake an employment and skills projection for key, high growth sectors establishing within Swale
- iii. Promote the current and potential opportunities that local high growth companies and sectors offer to local schools and colleges, fostering greater links (including work experience, job talks, etc)
- iv. Continue to develop stronger links between HE / FE providers, high growth companies and Kent Science Park

Lead Agencies

SBC, Kent Science Park, Universities



Priority 4 Creating a Learning Culture

4.1 Support Early Years, Family Learning

Rationale

Research shows that schemes such as Surestart significantly improve the early performance of children in school and also have an impact on adult learning. Surestart needs support in increasing the number of Children's centres in Swale and cementing links with other agencies.

Aspirations

Surestart has effective links to other learning organisations in Swale and has funding for family and adult learning.

Areas for Action

- i. Find funding source for adult learning within Surestart
- ii. Enhance links with other agencies

Lead Agencies

Surestart, KAES, Sheppey College

4.2. Reduce the number of people without qualifications

Rationale

All surveys show that the section of the population with the lowest qualifications is the least likely to engage in further education and training. One third (34%) of the Swale adult population (16-74) have no formal qualifications, compared with 24% for the South East. The evidence suggests that any engagement with learning will improve people's attitudes towards education and training.

Aspirations

Reduce the number of unqualified adults to below the regional average.

Areas for Action

- i. Encourage all forms of community education, particularly in wards where qualification levels are low.
- ii. Support the accreditation of all forms of adult learning so that adults see that their achievements are being recognised.
- iii. Accrediting the prior learning of adults where appropriate and possible.

Lead Agencies

LSC, Basic Skills Consortium, Learning Partnership, KAES, Sheppey College, Island Partnership, Amicus



4.3 Support for action on Basic Skills

Rationale

The level of illiteracy is above the average for Kent and Medway 24% have poor literacy compared to 22.7% for Kent and Medway. If Swale is to prosper, educational performance needs to be raised across the board.

Aspirations

The proportion of adults with poor basic skills in Swale achieves the average for Kent and Medway as a whole (22.7% for literacy and 22.5% for numeracy)

Areas for Action

- i. Work with the Basic Skills Consortium to agree a target for Swale, targeting Priority Sectors
- ii. Support and help develop existing Community Learning Centres and secure future revenue funding
- iii. Ensure that provision is evenly spread across communities
- iv. Support the development of work based strategies to improve basic skills.
- v. Make sure that there is progression from basic skills programmes

Lead Agencies

LSC, Basic Skills Consortium, Learning Partnership, KAES , Sheppey College, Island Partnership, Amicus

4.4 Support for Community Projects

Rationale

The "top down" imposition of educational goals often fails to capture the imagination of the groups that it targets, whereas projects that emerge from the community often have greater success. Swale also needs to increase its sense of pride in its people, its heritage, its environment and its creativity.

Aspirations

Thriving community led projects that will support learning and develop a pride in Swale and an enthusiasm for regeneration projects.

Areas for Action

- i. Work with Queenborough and Rushenden project on learning programmes that support their regeneration plan
- ii. Identify and work with community projects such as Sea Sheppey.

Lead Agencies

LSC, Basic Skills Consortium, Learning Partnership, KAES , Sheppey College, Island Partnership, Amicus

Implementing the Strategy

Using funding from SEEDA, KCC, the LSC and the Gateway Knowledge Alliance, Swale forward have appointed a *Learning and Skills Co-ordinator* to oversee the development and implementation of this Strategy. The Learning and Skills Co-ordinator:

- Coordinates the activities of key stakeholders and initiatives/programmes to ensure maximum value for Swale
- Monitors the implementation of the Strategy and Action Plans, reporting back to the funding partners, the Swale Economy and Learning Group, and through this, to the Local Strategic Partnership.
- Acts as a single contact point for individuals, communities and employers seeking an update on the delivery of the Strategy, and to proactively engage with stakeholders concerned with Learning in Swale.

The Learning & Skills Co-ordinator is responsible for the day-to-day delivery of the Strategy, and reports to Swale Forward Board and a range of project-specific task groups.

To succeed, this Strategy must engage with all principal stakeholders working across the Borough, including local people, communities and businesses. If you would like any further information, please contact Leon Jenkins, the Learning and Skills Co-ordinator at:

Next Steps

Write to: Swale Forward
Swale House
East Street
Sittingbourne
Kent. ME10 3HT

E-mail leonjenkins@swale.gov.uk
Fax 01795 417400

