

Kent to be a Skills Trailblazer

Kent companies now have more opportunity than ever to influence the local skills agenda, after a Chamber and Further Education partnership has been appointed one of eight national trailblazers by the Government.

The news follows a successful joint bid by Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce with EKC Group, Mid Kent College and North Kent College, to help businesses across Kent and Medway to flourish as new skills are unlocked and skills gaps are filled.

The partnership bid secured £5.6m for Kent's further education colleges to implement a pilot Strategic Development Fund and bring forward new courses tailored to the needs of business. Under the Skills Accelerator Programme, the further education colleges will focus on three key sectors: agriculture, construction, and engineering, with a shared thread of decarbonisation.

The remaining funding will create a Local Skills Improvement Programme (LSIP) with the Chamber of Commerce by working with Kent companies and other business groups to identify immediate skills needs and solutions.

Jo James, Chief Executive of Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce, said: "The LSIP will help businesses shape the curriculum delivered by the local further education colleges. It will ensure the county's skills priorities are aligned and that the workforce has the skills needed to enable businesses here in Kent to grow.

"This partnership will strengthen the relationship between business and education, ensuring Kent's students learn the most appropriate skills for the county and increasing their employability."

The LSIP will build upon the longstanding work between the chamber and the further education colleges, including the Kickstart training programme for 16 to 24-year-olds.

Simon Cook, Principal and Chief Executive of Mid Kent College, which led the bid, said: "We're very fortunate to have a strong partnership of colleges here in Kent and Medway that can work effectively together to deliver positive outcomes for local people across the county.

"We're delighted that our bid was successful, and we're confident that the Government's investment here will help us support these three key sectors in transforming their operations to protect our environment while contributing to the local economy."

Graham Razey, Chief Executive Officer of EKC Group, said: "As a Group we are committed to working in partnership with employers across our area, and have done so very successfully in the past. This Skills Accelerator Project will ensure our colleges deliver increased innovation, productivity and resilience in the Kent and Medway economy, whilst also making a significant contribution to local and national sustainability goals for the future."

David Gleed, Chief Executive of North Kent College, said: "We are very pleased with the success of our joint Bid, demonstrating a real vote of confidence in Kent FE and reflecting the many years of the Colleges working in partnership across Kent. The investment will maintain the position of the three partner colleges as one of the leading innovators of skills within the County ensuring the residents and employers of Kent continue to benefit from the high-quality opportunities that we all provide year after year."

The focus on decarbonisation will ensure the colleges drive efforts to equip the workforce with the knowledge, skills, and technological innovation to reduce the environmental impact of industry and play a key role in the area's economic development.

As part of the LSIP programme, Kent Invicta will be hosting a series of skills workshops and events in conjunction with the further education colleges across the county.

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