

Hampshire & Solent LSIP

Local Skills Improvement Plan

Maritime Sector Skills Needs & Workforce Development

A Sector Report | March 2026

Produced by Hampshire Chamber of Commerce in conjunction with Maritime Solent

~20,000

FTE jobs in Solent
maritime sector
Lichfields, 2023

£1.7bn

GVA contribution
(direct)
Solent region

42%

Above-average
productivity
vs UK average

~10,000

Projected new jobs to
2040
Bottom-up estimate

1. Executive Summary

The maritime sector supports approximately 20,000 full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs across around 2,700 enterprises in the Solent region, contributing an estimated £1.7 billion in direct GVA annually — with productivity around 42% above the UK average. The sector spans commercial shipping, ports and logistics, defence and shipbuilding, leisure marine, superyachts, offshore energy and maritime business services, and is central to the Hampshire and Solent economy. A refresh of the sector's economic impact assessment, extending coverage to the full LSIP geography including land-based organisations across the wider county, is expected in April 2026 and is likely to revise these figures upward.

This report presents the findings of the Hampshire and Solent LSIP maritime sector workstream, drawing on desk research, two Maritime Solent steering group meetings, an indicative employer survey (23 responses), and engagement through Maritime Solent's Careers Partners Group.

The evidence points to a sector with real momentum. Careers awareness and industry-education engagement have improved markedly since the 2023 Maritime Deep Dive. Apprenticeships at two participating major employers are reported as significantly oversubscribed. The Careers Partners Group set up by Maritime Solent, now with over 70 members, is working strategically and influencing their business planning. The South Coast Institute of Technology — building on decades of maritime education at Southampton Solent University, and now strengthened with new technology investment and formal college partnerships — adds important capacity to the training infrastructure.

Yet significant challenges remain. Electrotechnical skills gaps are deepening. SME access to apprenticeships is challenging. The leisure marine sub-sector — which represents a substantial share of Solent maritime employment and output, and is home to a world-class cluster of boatyards, marinas and specialist manufacturers — has been underserved by skills planning to date.

2. Priorities

The Hampshire and Solent maritime sector faces skills challenges that are interconnected and urgent. The transition to net zero is reshaping skills demand across every sub-sector — from alternative propulsion and future fuels in commercial shipping to sustainable drop-in fuels and electric systems in leisure marine.

Against this backdrop, the most acute current gaps are structural: electrotechnical skills in crisis, naval architecture and engineering hand skills in long-term decline, and traditional craft expertise at risk of permanent erosion. These technical shortages cannot be resolved through the existing pipeline alone — the apprenticeship system is increasingly inaccessible to the SMEs that form the backbone of the sector, adult upskilling is low, and the traditional school-leaver route is too narrow to meet projected demand.

Widening the talent pool is therefore not a secondary concern but an essential part of the response: adult career changers, service leavers and underrepresented groups represent significant untapped potential, and the leisure marine sub-sector — economically vital and home to a world-class Solent cluster — needs to be far more visible in careers provision and must be embedded far more effectively in skills planning going forward.

Actions:

- Work with Maritime Solent, British Marine, the South Coast IoT, FE and independent providers to develop a green maritime and environmental skills framework, reflecting the distinct needs of commercial maritime (future fuels, alternative propulsion) and leisure marine (HVO transition, electric and hybrid systems).

- Launch the Hampshire and Solent Electrotechnical Training and Careers Alliance (ETCA) with ECA in Q2 2026, addressing the shortage in electrotechnical apprenticeship starts and low adult upskilling. The BMTA Marine Electrical Skills Bootcamp — a proven model for rapid employer-led short provision — should be brought to the ETCA for consideration of how it might be developed in partnership with FE and independent providers.
- Support Maritime Solent's embedding of adult and career-change content in major existing events (Portsmouth Port Community Day, June 2026; MTCP Southampton, November 2026), and development of clear maritime career-change pathways accessible through the White Ensign Association and DWP Armed Forces Champions networks.
- Prioritise the 2026 Inspiring the Future ambassador recruitment campaign, using the LSIP's convening role to mobilise employer participation; and ensure leisure marine is consistently represented alongside commercial maritime across all careers provision, using the Southampton International Boat Show, Seawork and NOC Jobs and Careers Festival as high-profile platforms.
- Commission a structured deeper dive into the sub-sectors and emerging skills areas identified in Section 10 but insufficiently evidenced in this report — including autonomous systems, subsea operations, sustainable port operations, maritime-digital hybrid roles and offshore wind engineering — engaging the South Coast IoT, Maritime Solent, and defence and aerospace partners to build the evidence base for the next LSIP cycle.

2. Methodology

This report has been produced by Hampshire Chamber of Commerce as part of the Hampshire & Solent LSIP. Evidence was gathered through four main strands: desk research drawing on the Solent Maritime Sector Deep Dive (Lichfields, June 2023), the Economic Impact of the Solent's Maritime Sector (WPI Economics, January 2025), and the British Marine Industry Priorities 2024-2029; two Maritime Solent facilitated steering group meetings in January and February 2026 (attended by industry representatives, education and training providers); a Maritime Solent employer survey open January to February 2026 (23 responses); and qualitative intelligence from Maritime Solent's Careers Partners Group.

The employer survey is treated throughout as indicative and corroborating evidence rather than statistically representative data. The sub-sector categories offered were insufficiently broad to capture the full range of respondents — 43% selected 'Other', a group that included amongst others, leisure marine businesses, recruitment agencies and training providers who had no appropriate category available. This should be borne in mind when interpreting the sub-sector breakdown. Survey findings are presented with appropriate caveats and interpreted in the context of the broader qualitative evidence.

3. Sector Overview

The Hampshire & Solent maritime sector is diverse and economically significant, spanning commercial shipping and cruise operations at Southampton — one of the UK's most important passenger and freight gateways — defence and shipbuilding at Portsmouth, a world-class leisure marine and superyacht cluster along the south coast, ports and logistics, offshore energy, and a wide range of maritime business services. Using the Maritime UK definition, the sector supports around 20,000 FTE jobs across approximately 2,700 enterprises, with major employment clusters in Southampton (5,800 FTE), Portsmouth (5,300), the New Forest (2,500) and Eastleigh (2,150).

The leisure marine sub-sector deserves particular emphasis. The Solent is one of the UK's most important centres for this industry, home to the Southampton International Boat Show — which attracts around 100,000 visitors annually and generates an estimated £1.6bn in customer spend — as well as Seawork, and a dense cluster of boatyards, marinas, specialist manufacturers and superyacht refit businesses. Nationally, British Marine represents around 6,300 businesses in the leisure, superyacht and small commercial marine industry, supporting over 38,000 direct FTE jobs and generating £1.68bn in direct GVA in 2022-23, with a 23% increase in apprenticeship starts that year. The Solent cluster sits at the heart of this national picture, with 40% of British Marine's membership being Hampshire based.

Maritime sector productivity is approximately 42% above the UK average at around £85,500 GVA per worker (WPI Economics, 2025). Employment has grown by an estimated 5.1% since 2015, and demand for maritime jobs has consistently outperformed the wider Solent economy since 2019. Growth has been driven particularly by engineering and technical roles. The Solent Freeport — designated in 2022, with tax sites at Southampton Water, Navigator Quarter and Dunsbury Park — represents the most significant near-term growth opportunity, with potential for up to 15,000 direct jobs, approximately 7,000 of which fall within the Maritime UK sector definition.

The strength of the Solent's maritime training ecosystem has itself become an economic asset. The promotional document *The Solent: A Global Centre for Maritime Training and Skills*, launched at London International Shipping Week in 2025, has contributed to inward investment decisions: Silverstream Technologies and Foreship UK have both chosen to establish Solent sites specifically because of the quality of the local skills infrastructure, demonstrating the direct link between skills investment and economic growth.

4. Skills Needs Analysis

4.1 Current and emerging demand

Analysis of job postings data from the DfE Local Skills Dashboard shows that demand in the Solent maritime sector is broad and predominantly technical. In 2022, the top five most-posted roles were freight and HGV drivers (6,020), electrical engineers, designers and technicians (4,390), mechanical engineers (3,620), business administration and engineering specialists (2,500), and industrial machinery mechanics (2,005). Electrical engineering roles showed the strongest growth trend, with 1,985 additional annual postings between 2017 and 2022. LinkedIn data identifies engineering manager, naval architect, electrical engineer and mechanical engineer as the highest-demand roles, with naval architect demand growing by 6.8% in share of hiring over the period 2017-2021.

Survey respondents identified advanced engineering and technical skills (26% of respondents) and digital technologies including AI, automation and data analytics (22%) as the most widely anticipated emerging skills needs for 2026-2029. Green and clean energy skills were cited by 13% and cyber security by 9%.

4.2 Skills gaps by theme

Engineering and electrotechnical skills

Electrotechnical skills represent the most acute current gap across the sector. Vacancies vastly exceed qualified applicants and the gap has been widening for several years. Employers expressed a clear preference for broad general engineering capability over narrow specialisation at entry level, with practical hand skills and dexterity particularly valued. Several employers noted that GCSE engineering is insufficiently available in schools and that hand skills are systematically undervalued within the education system — a concern echoed by the City of Portsmouth College group's current work with Maritime Solent to develop broader engineering courses emphasising these skills.

Naval architecture

Naval architects and structural designers are consistently hard to recruit, with a specific shortage of those with offshore design experience. The challenge is structural: enrolments on Yacht Design and Maritime Engineering degree courses at local universities have been falling, and a degree-level apprenticeship standard — though in development — is estimated to be approximately four years from availability, partly due to insufficient SME representation on the trailblazer group. The Naval Architecture Skills Working Group, established by Maritime Solent in January 2025 with over 65 industry representatives meeting twice yearly, represents a significant and proactive industry-led response to this pipeline challenge.

Green and future fuels

Around 57% of survey respondents reported some or significant skills needs linked to net zero goals. The nature of those needs differs by sub-sector. For commercial maritime, the priority is skills for alternative propulsion and future fuels. However, the capital cost of installing practical training equipment for hydrogen, methanol and similar technologies is a significant barrier for providers, who are understandably cautious about committing to expensive infrastructure without employer commitment to use it — and given genuine uncertainty about which fuel technologies will prevail. For leisure marine, the most practical near-term pathway is transition to sustainable drop-in fuels such as HVO, requiring different skills around fuel characteristics, safe handling and maintenance implications. Training provision needs to reflect this distinction rather than treating green skills as a single agenda.

Digital, cyber and autonomous systems

Digital transformation is reshaping roles across all sub-sectors. Cyber security was identified as both a current hard-to-fill vacancy and a future priority, with growing relevance as port infrastructure and vessel systems become more connected. Autonomous and remotely operated systems are generating new requirements — USV (Unmanned Surface Vehicle) operators were specifically identified as a hard-to-fill role — and human-machine teaming and data analytics skills are increasingly embedded across commercial and defence operations.

Traditional craft and leisure marine skills

The erosion of traditional craft skills — sail making, rigging, composite technicians, welders and yacht spraying specialists — is a genuine concern, particularly for the leisure marine and superyacht sector. These roles do not require degree-level qualifications but depend on skills that are not well served by the current training landscape. The superyacht refit sector faces an additional challenge: tender specifications often require specialist sub-contractors from overseas for specific aspects of projects, and the current visa and immigration framework makes bringing in such specialists on a short-term basis more difficult than it should be, risking the loss of high-value contracts to European competitors.

Employability and work-readiness

Work-readiness skills remain a cross-cutting concern. The 2023 Lichfields deep dive found that 75% of employers struggled to find candidates with the right employability or interpersonal skills — a finding that persists in the 2026 evidence. Leadership and management capability at supervisory and mid-level is also an identified gap across the sector. British Marine's training community

identifies attracting new talent and young people into the sector as its single most pressing challenge — a concern that cuts across all of the above and underlines the urgency of the talent pool priority set out in Section 8.

5. Skills Supply

The Solent is well served by FE and HE providers. Southampton Solent University, the University of Southampton and the University of Portsmouth offer a wide range of qualifications in marine engineering, maritime business and law, ship science, nautical science, yacht design and related fields. Several FE colleges — notably the South Hants College Group, Fareham College, St Vincent College, HSDC and UTC Portsmouth — offer both Apprenticeships and T Levels in engineering, manufacturing and management with direct maritime relevance. DfE data for 2021-22 shows 6,540 new FE learners enrolled in maritime-related subject areas across the Solent, with a positive destination rate of 88% — above comparable LEP areas and the national average.

The South Coast Institute of Technology (IoT) represents a significant strengthening of the regional skills infrastructure. Maritime education has been delivered at Southampton Solent University for decades; the IoT formalises and significantly upgrades that offer, bringing new technology investment — including state-of-the-art welding facilities, 3D printing labs and advanced simulation equipment — and formal partnerships with South Hants College Group, Fareham College and Portsmouth University to widen access. The IoT's curriculum spans maritime engineering, yacht design, ship science, shipping operations, logistics and nautical science, making it a broad resource for both commercial and leisure marine employers. It opened in its current form in September 2025 with an official launch in February 2026, and is a key long-term partner for LSIP skills development — though it is too recently established to have demonstrated outcomes yet.

The Marine Electrical Skills Bootcamp, developed by British Maritime Training and Assessment (BMTA) and now in its third cohort, demonstrates that shorter employer-led provision can respond to acute gaps faster than the formal qualifications system. Employer survey respondents strongly favour work-based learning (70%), short modular courses (48%) and online learning (48%) as preferred formats — consistent with the operational pressures of a sector in which releasing staff for extended training is a significant practical challenge. Notably, the absence of suitable local provision was identified as a specific barrier by leisure marine respondents — a distinct concern from the cost and time pressures more commonly cited by larger commercial maritime employers, and one that points to a gap in the current FE offer for this sub-sector.

Apprenticeship outcomes in maritime-related areas are strong, with positive destination rates of 95-100% across manufacturing technologies, ICT and legal services. However, there is a growing tension between apprenticeship quality and accessibility. Programmes at major employers including BAE Systems and Berthon are significantly oversubscribed — Berthon received around 200 applications for eight positions — while many smaller employers struggle to access the system at all. The barriers are structural: National Living Wage cost pressures, the 20% off-the-job training requirement, and a levy system that is poorly understood and lacks transparency. Government has announced national measures to address apprenticeship access; the regional challenge is to ensure maritime and leisure marine SMEs are positioned to benefit, and that surplus applicants from oversubscribed programmes are connected to employers unable to fill vacancies.

6. Key Skills Gaps and Priorities

The following table summarises the consolidated skills gaps and priorities identified through the evidence base.

Skills Area	Priority and Detail
Electrotechnical engineering	Critical current gap across commercial sector. Vacancies vastly exceed applicants. Worsening without targeted pipeline intervention.
General engineering (hand skills)	Sustained entry-level gap. Industry preference for broad engineering over narrow specialisation. GCSE engineering availability in schools inadequate.
Naval architecture	Structural pipeline problem. Falling university enrolments, stalled degree apprenticeship. Working Group active since Jan 2025.
Green / future fuels	Different needs by sub-sector. Commercial: future fuels & propulsion. Leisure: HVO transition & sustainable drop-in fuels. Provider capital cost barrier significant.
Cyber security	Current vacancy and growing future priority as port and vessel systems become more connected.
Digital, AI & data analytics	Most widely anticipated future need (2026-2029). Spans all sub-sectors.
Autonomous systems	Emerging requirement. USV operators identified as hard-to-fill. Limited current provision.
Traditional craft / leisure marine	Sail making, rigging, composites, welders, yacht spraying. Risk of permanent skills base erosion in leisure marine and superyacht sectors.
Boatbuilding foundation skills	Acute gap among SME boatbuilders. British Marine Training Academy model proposed. Solent well placed as pilot location.
Leadership, management & employability	Cross-cutting concern. Work-readiness, interpersonal skills and mid-level management capacity all identified.

7. Careers Awareness and Workforce Pipeline

The picture on careers awareness has changed significantly since the 2023 Maritime Deep Dive identified limited industry-education engagement as a pressing challenge. The most tangible evidence of improvement is the oversubscription of apprenticeship programmes at two participating major employers representing a positive shift in sector perception. However, there is still a significant ongoing piece of work in promoting the sector and wide ranging opportunities to feed the FE/HE education pipeline.

7.1 The Careers Partners Group

Maritime Solent established the Careers Partners Group in 2023, holding its first in-person meeting at the Southampton International Boat Show. The Group now has over 70 members, meets primarily online three to four times a year, and operates as a genuine strategic forum — agreeing activity plans that shape Maritime Solent's business planning, sharing best practice, and hearing from external speakers including the Gatsby Foundation on careers framework developments. Its evidence-based approach has led to the recognition that traditional careers fairs alone are insufficient, and a more varied, targeted strategy has been developed.

A significant development is the Group's recent decision to extend its reach to adult career changers, embedding jobs areas and adult-focused content into existing high-footfall events rather than creating standalone provision: the Portsmouth International Port Community Day on 13 June 2026 will feature a dedicated jobs area, with the MTCP event in Southampton on 19 November 2026 planned to follow suit. Maritime Solent is also working with the White Ensign Association and DWP Armed Forces Champions locally to reach service leavers — a talent pool with highly transferable skills and a natural affinity with the sector.

7.2 Careers ecosystem

A rich set of activities now operates across the region: the MTCP Careers Day (November, Southampton); Seawork Careers Day (June); the Southampton International Boat Show schools programme; the Portsmouth International Port Community Day; and STEM activity delivered by the 1851 Trust and UKSA. The NOC Innovations Jobs and Careers Festival on 8 September 2026 introduces a genuinely new approach, including School and College Governors in maritime CPD and labour market intelligence sessions — directly strengthening the link between industry need and institutional decision-making. On the Isle of Wight, a STEM and robotics competition involving all secondary schools, delivered in partnership with BAE Systems, the Solent Careers Hub, UKSA and FIRST UK, is a notable example of engagement where maritime industry participation has otherwise been limited.

The Inspiring the Future maritime ambassador network has the highest volunteer numbers of any regional cluster nationally — yet currently meets only around 20% of requests from schools and colleges. A campaign to significantly increase the ambassador bank is planned for 2026 and should be treated as a priority. Warsash Maritime's Navigate Like a Pro programme and the South Coast IoT's Shipwright Lecture Series provide further industry-education connection points.

7.3 Remaining challenges

Despite real progress, 39% of survey respondents had not worked with a local college or university in the past year despite wishing to. The leisure marine sub-sector remains underrepresented in careers activity relative to its economic contribution. One FE college respondent noted particular difficulty recruiting industry practitioners as teaching staff — a constraint that directly limits the quality and relevance of practical provision. The COPC employer connections group is actively working with Maritime Solent to address this, exploring how industry premises, equipment and expertise can be made available for staff CPD and student site visits.

8. Recommendations

The following recommendations are addressed to education and training providers, employers, Maritime Solent and the wider Hampshire and Solent skills ecosystem. The role of the LSIP — led by Hampshire Chamber of Commerce as the designated Employer Representative Body — is to identify what skills, capabilities and expertise are missing now and in the future, and to catalyse action by the right actors. These recommendations reflect three priorities where that catalytic role is most likely to make a measurable difference. They are informed by employer views gathered through stakeholder engagement and survey, the Maritime Solent economic impact assessment, and the British Marine Industry Priorities 2024-2029.

Progress since 2023

Before setting out the forward priorities it is important to acknowledge what has changed since the 2023 Maritime Deep Dive. The Careers Partners Group has grown to over 70 members and now operates as a genuine strategic forum. The Marine Electrical Skills Bootcamp has completed three cohorts, demonstrating that targeted short provision can respond to acute gaps faster than the formal qualifications system. The Naval Architecture Skills Working Group has brought together 65-plus industry representatives around a clearly defined pipeline challenge. And the South Coast IoT — building on decades of established maritime education at Southampton Solent University and now significantly upgraded with new technology investment and formal college partnerships — has launched with a curriculum that spans a wide breadth of sector need. The Solent's reputation as a global centre for maritime training and skills has also contributed directly to inward investment decisions by Silverstream Technologies and Foreship UK. These are genuine achievements that the LSIP should build on.

Priority 1: Sustainability and Environmental Skills

The maritime sector is directly and substantially exposed to the UK's net zero transition — from alternative propulsion and future fuels in commercial shipping to sustainable drop-in fuels, electric systems and green infrastructure across leisure marine and ports. Around 57% of survey respondents reported skills needs linked to net zero goals, yet provision is lagging significantly behind demand. The LSIP should work with Maritime Solent, British Marine, HE and FE providers to develop a coherent green maritime skills framework that reflects the different needs of commercial and leisure sub-sectors, rather than treating decarbonisation as a single agenda.

For commercial maritime, the priority is building flexible, transferable capability in alternative propulsion and future fuels — hydrogen, ammonia, LNG, methanol — without prematurely committing to specific technologies whose adoption timelines remain uncertain. Providers should be supported to develop modular provision that upskills existing workers and prepares new entrants, with the South Coast IoT a natural focal point for higher-level technical development in this area as it matures.

For leisure marine, the most practical near-term pathway is transition to sustainable drop-in fuels such as HVO, and the growing adoption of electric and hybrid systems including solar power and lithium battery storage. The skills required — fuel characteristics, safe handling, maintenance of electric propulsion and high-voltage systems — are different from commercial maritime but equally unmet. British Marine's position, as set out in its Industry Priorities 2024-2029, that the Ofqual accreditation process is too slow to keep pace with market need in this area is well-founded and deserves regional support.

Critically, the green skills challenge extends beyond the maritime sector itself. Electrotechnical capability is foundational to the UK's entire net zero infrastructure — EV charging, solar PV, battery storage, heat pumps — and a regulatory change in October 2026 will require certified electricians for all such installations. In Hampshire and Solent, ECA data indicates that the ratio of electricians to population is already below the England average, apprenticeship starts in the area declined sharply in the most recent year for which data is available, and in 2024-25 there were effectively no enrolments for the Electrician Plus qualifications in solar, EV and battery storage that will shortly become a regulatory requirement. This is a systemic failure with direct implications for maritime

decarbonisation alongside construction, defence and aerospace. Hampshire Chamber of Commerce is responding by establishing an Electrotechnical Training and Careers Alliance (ETCA) with the Electrical Contractors' Association — a partnership model that has already launched in seven regions nationally. The Hampshire and Solent ETCA, planned for launch in Q2 2026, will bring together industry, training providers, local authorities and sector bodies to address apprenticeship pipeline collapse, near-zero adult upskilling take-up, and the broken progression from classroom-based study into employment. This is a concrete, measurable LSIP deliverable with outcomes that will be reported in the next annual review.

Priority 2: Technical Skills Pipeline

Electrotechnical skills represent the most acute current gap across the sector and are addressed directly through the ETCA above. Alongside this, the LSIP should work with BMTA, FE colleges and independent providers to assess whether the Marine Electrical Skills Bootcamp model can be developed into a more permanent provision pathway, ensuring the marine-specific electrotechnical pipeline benefits from both the ETCA's cross-sector reach and the sector's own targeted bootcamp model.

The naval architecture pipeline requires coordinated action at multiple levels. This LSIP calls for stronger SME representation on the degree-level apprenticeship trailblazer group, and suggests support via a coordinated marketing effort — involving universities, the South Coast IoT and employers — to reverse declining enrolments in Yacht Design and Maritime Engineering courses. Both levers are needed: the apprenticeship standard addresses long-term structural supply, while improved enrolments address the near-term gap.

For the leisure marine sector specifically, the British Marine Training Academy — a proposed 16-week foundation skills programme for 18 to 24 year olds in boatbuilding, recommended by the UK Shipbuilding Skills Taskforce in September 2023 — represents the most promising response to skills shortages among smaller boatbuilding companies. The Solent's density of boatyards, marinas and specialist manufacturers makes it a natural pilot location. Traditional craft skills — sail making, rigging, composites, specialist finishing — should be addressed alongside foundation skills, given the risk of permanent erosion of expertise in these areas within the superyacht and leisure marine cluster.

Across the technical pipeline, the LSIP should support the Careers Partners Group's planned SME engagement sessions with training providers, with the specific aim of reducing the information and access barriers that put the apprenticeship system out of reach for smaller employers. The case for more transparent redistribution of expired apprenticeship levy funds towards SME-heavy sectors and clusters — including the Solent maritime cluster — should be made consistently to government as part of the LSIP's wider advocacy role.

Priority 3: Widening the Talent Pool

The sector cannot meet its future workforce needs from the traditional school-leaver pipeline alone, and careers provision must become significantly broader in its reach and approach. Three areas require priority attention.

Adult career changers and service leavers represent the most immediately actionable opportunity. Maritime Solent's decision to embed dedicated jobs areas and adult career-change content into the Portsmouth International Port Community Day (June 2026) and the MTCP event (November 2026) is the right model — using existing high-footfall events rather than creating standalone provision. The LSIP should support this approach and ensure it is sustained, promoted effectively in advance of each event, and progressively extended. Maritime Solent's partnerships with the White Ensign Association and DWP Armed Forces Champions locally could be developed as a systematic channel into the service leaver community, with clear information on both commercial and leisure marine career pathways made available through these networks.

Inspiring the Future's maritime ambassador network is the largest regional cluster nationally, yet meets only around 20% of requests from schools and colleges. The ambassador recruitment campaign planned for 2026 must be treated as a collective priority — not just for Maritime Solent's

partners but for all employers in the sector, and the LSIP should use its convening role to mobilise employer engagement actively. The NOC Jobs and Careers Festival in September 2026, with its innovative inclusion of School and College Governors in maritime CPD and labour market intelligence sessions, offers a further high-leverage opportunity to connect industry need with institutional decision-making.

The leisure marine sub-sector requires specific and sustained attention in careers provision. The Southampton International Boat Show and Seawork provide natural high-profile platforms for showcasing the range of careers available — not only in boatbuilding and engineering but in design, logistics, management and digital roles. The LSIP should work with Maritime Solent and British Marine to ensure leisure marine careers are consistently and visibly represented alongside commercial maritime in all schools, college and careers hub engagement, and that the sub-sector's employers are supported and encouraged to participate in Inspiring the Future and similar programmes.

9. Conclusion

The Hampshire & Solent maritime sector is high-productivity, growth-oriented and strategically important — spanning commercial shipping, defence, leisure marine, offshore energy and maritime services, with a skills ecosystem whose quality is itself now attracting inward investment. The evidence assembled here shows a sector that has made genuine progress since 2023 on careers awareness, industry-education engagement and strategic coordination, and that has significant new and upgraded infrastructure — the South Coast IoT, the Naval Architecture Skills Working Group, the Careers Partners Group — to build on.

Yet the structural challenges are real and in some areas worsening. The electrotechnical skills pipeline is in serious difficulty — not only within maritime but across every sector dependent on green infrastructure, and the regulatory clock is running. Naval architecture faces a long-term pipeline problem that requires action at multiple levels simultaneously. The leisure marine sub-sector, economically vital and home to a world-class cluster, needs to be embedded far more effectively in skills planning going forward. And the talent pool serving the sector — too narrow, too dependent on traditional routes — needs to be widened deliberately and systematically.

The three priorities set out in this report — sustainability and environmental skills, the technical pipeline, and widening the talent pool — are grounded in employer evidence, focused on gaps where action will make a measurable difference, and aligned to the LSIP's role as a catalyst for change rather than a delivery body. The establishment of the Hampshire and Solent ETCA in Q2 2026 provides an immediate and tangible deliverable against which progress can be measured. The next review of this workstream should assess outcomes against all three priorities and update the evidence base in light of the April 2026 WPI Economics refresh, the emerging track record of the South Coast IoT, and the findings of the deeper dive into under-evidenced sub-sectors recommended in Section 10.

10. Areas for Further Research

This report has focused on the skills gaps and priorities most strongly evidenced through the 2026 engagement process. However, stakeholder input — including from the South Coast Institute of Technology — has identified a number of significant sub-sectors and emerging skill areas that are insufficiently evidenced here to support robust recommendations. Importantly, several of these areas are cross-sector in nature, with direct relevance to defence, aerospace and advanced manufacturing as well as maritime. A structured deeper dive, engaging the South Coast IoT, Maritime Solent, defence and aerospace partners, and relevant employers, is recommended as a priority for the 2026-27 workstream.

The areas identified for further research include: autonomous systems, drone technology and remotely operated vehicles — where the Solent has active manufacturers of unmanned surface vessels and ROVs, and where skills needs are shared with defence and aerospace; subsea cable

and pipeline operations, a substantial employment sector absent from the current evidence base; sustainable port operations and environmental compliance, where changing regulatory requirements are creating new roles for marine and environmental operatives; maritime-digital hybrid roles, cited by the South Coast IoT as among the hardest to fill — combining deep maritime sector knowledge with digital data processing and analytical capability, with parallel demand in defence intelligence and aerospace systems; offshore wind and subsea engineering, where the IoT is actively developing new provision pathways; and land-based ports, logistics and freight management roles, which support the maritime supply chain but fall outside the Maritime UK sector definition used in this report.

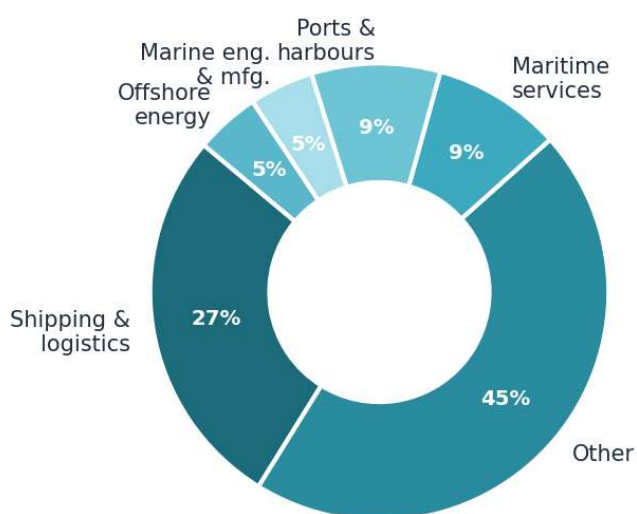
In parallel, there is a case for expanding the scope of the next maritime LSIP workstream to encompass Maritime and Logistics as a combined sector. The Solent Freeport — with its three tax sites and potential for up to 15,000 direct jobs — creates a direct and growing interdependency between maritime activity and the logistics, freight and inland distribution network. Hampshire Chamber of Commerce will explore this scope extension, and the cross-sector skills themes identified above, with Maritime Solent, the South Coast IoT and defence and aerospace partners as part of the next LSIP planning cycle.

Appendix A: Survey Results

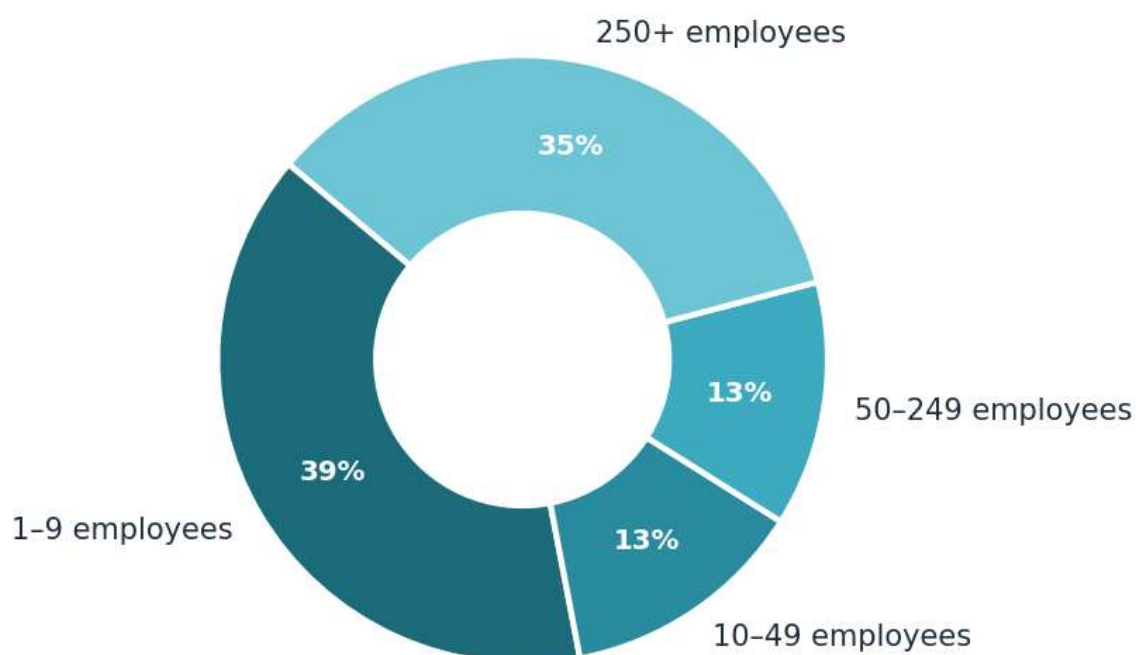
The employer survey was open from January to February 2026 and received 23 responses. Given the limited sample size and skew towards commercial maritime sub-sectors, results are treated as indicative and corroborating evidence rather than statistically representative data. Not all respondents answered every question. Open-text responses to Q3 have been grouped thematically by the report authors. Questions 5, 7, 9, 13 and 16 were free-text follow-up questions and are summarised in the main body of this report.

Q1 & Q2: Respondent profile

Q1: Which part of the maritime sector best describes your organisation? (n=23)

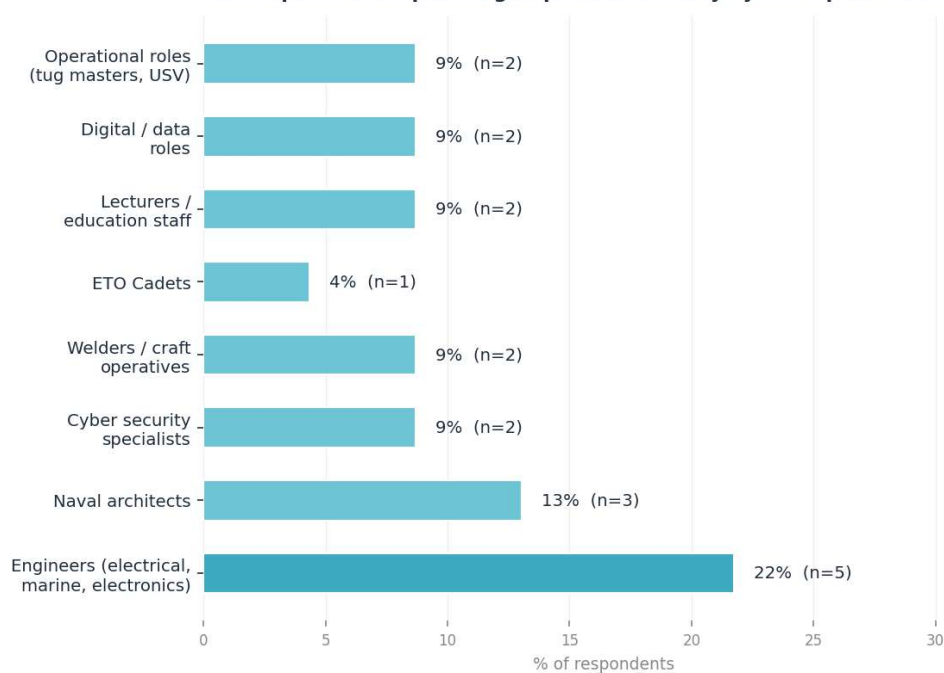


Q2: How many people do you employ locally? (n=23)

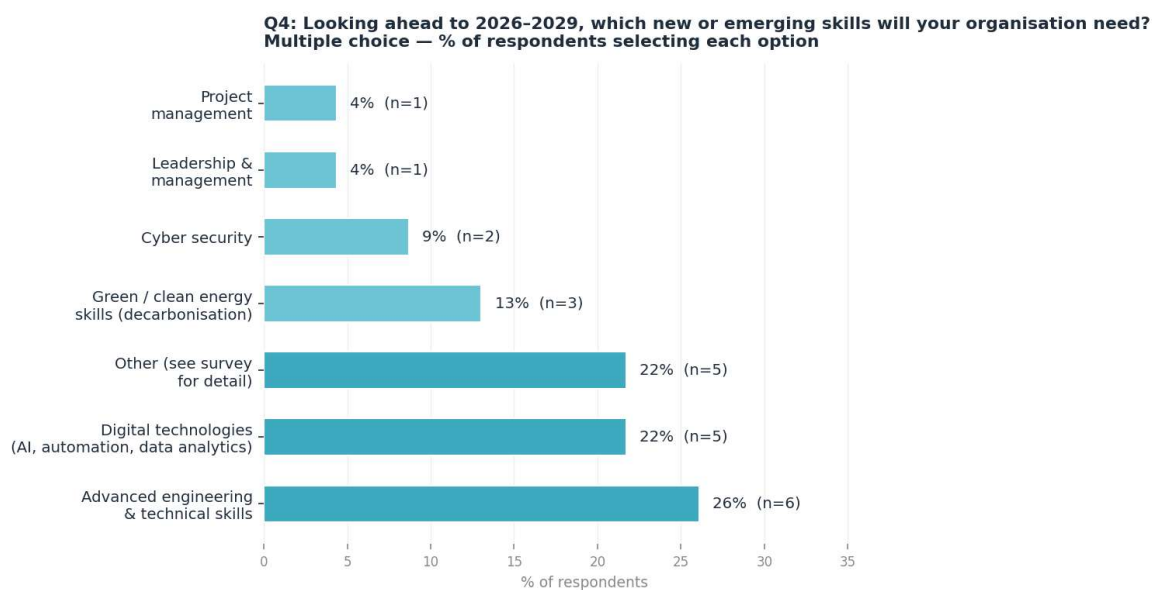


Q3: Hardest roles to recruit

Q3: Which roles are currently hardest to recruit? (n=23, open text – grouped by theme)
Note: open-text responses grouped thematically by the report authors

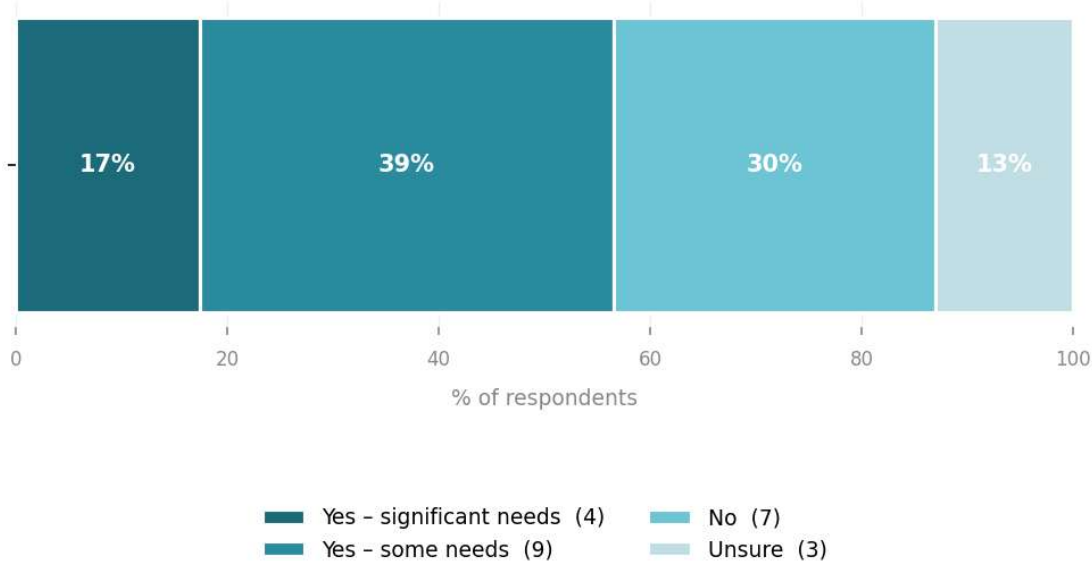


Q4: Emerging skills needs 2026–2029

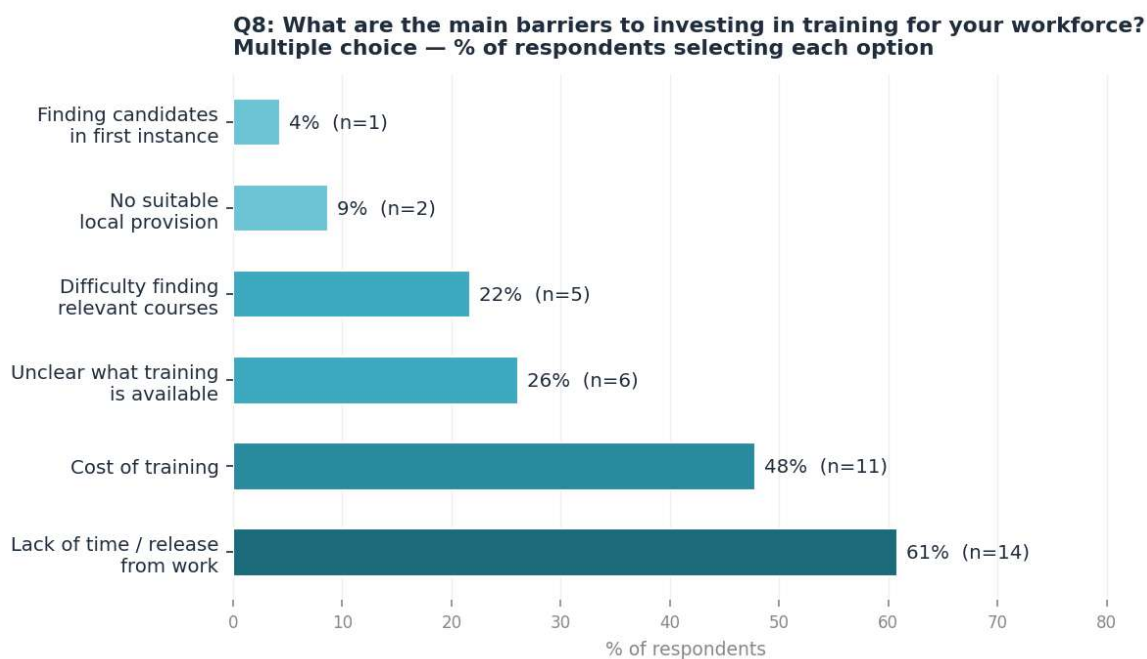


Q6: Net Zero and environmental skills needs

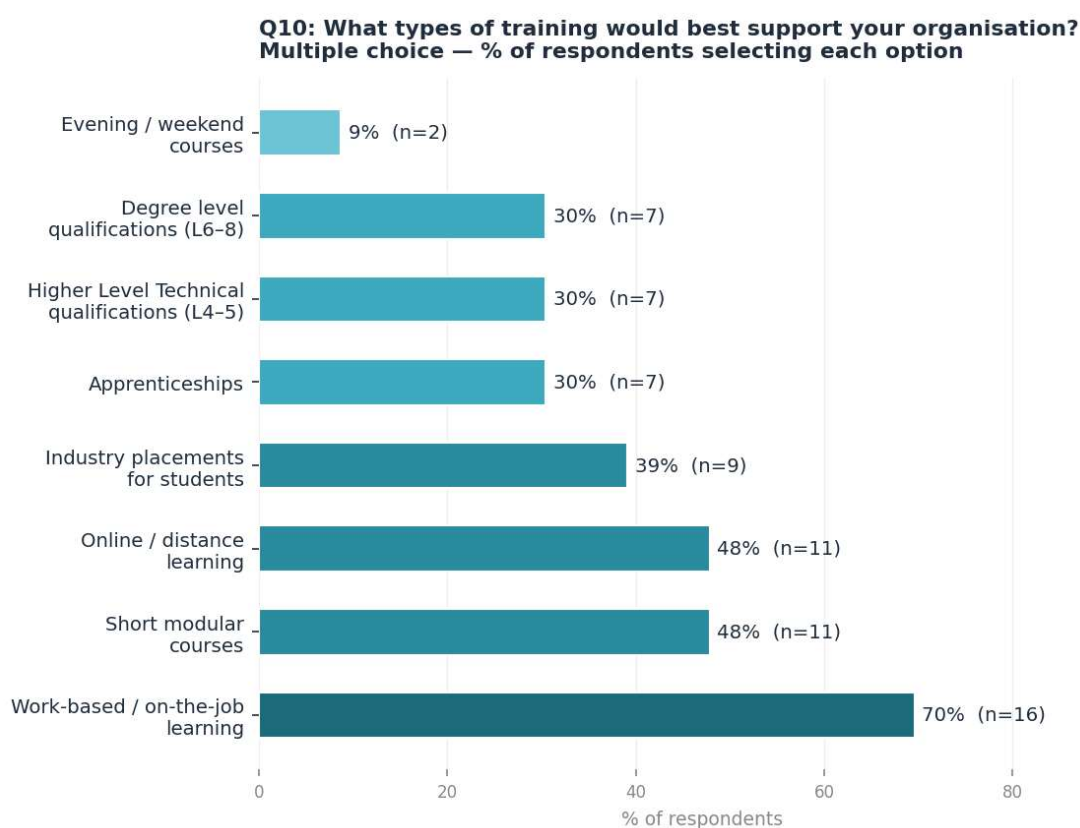
Q6: Do you have skills needs linked to Net Zero or environmental goals? (n=23)



Q8: Barriers to training investment

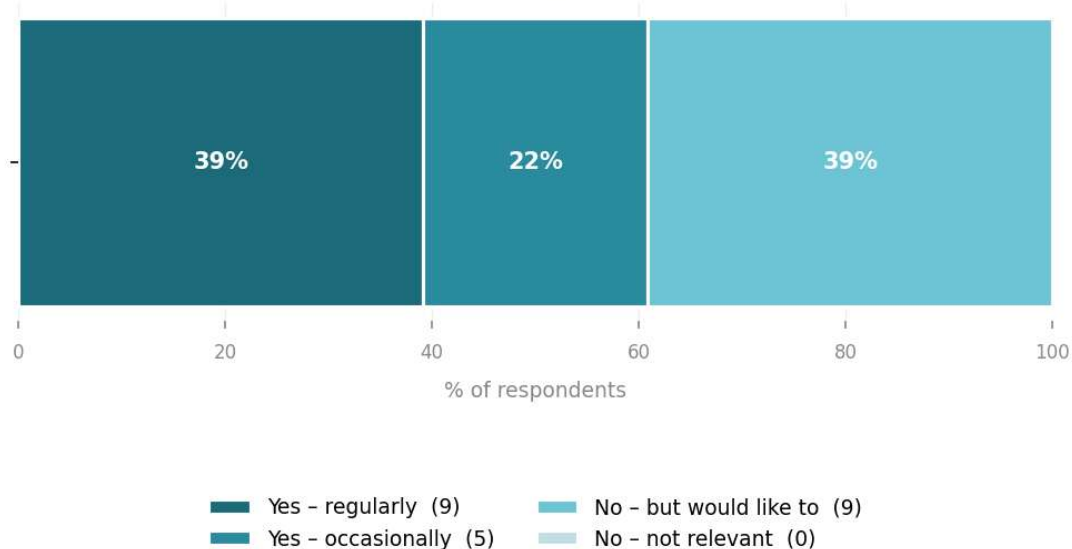


Q10: Preferred training formats



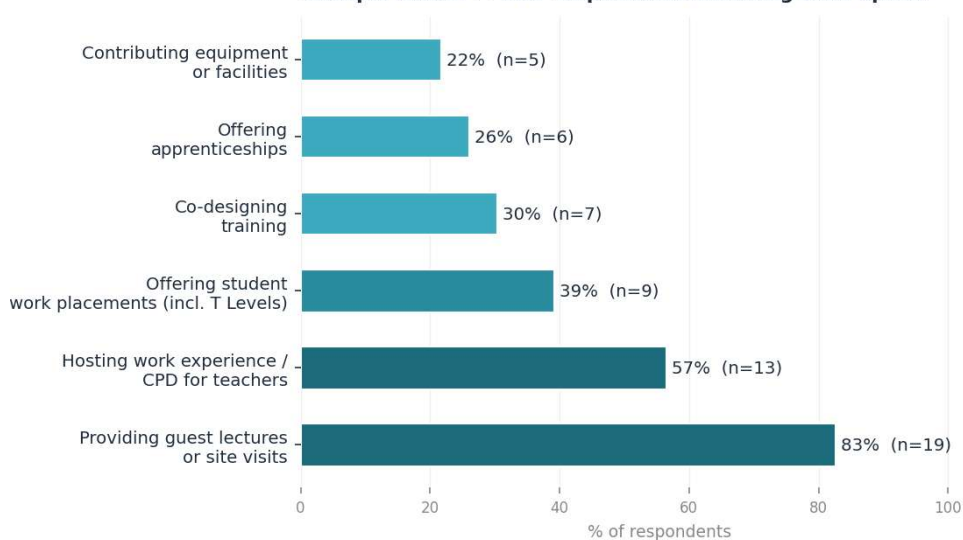
Q11: Engagement with local colleges and universities

Q11: Have you worked with local colleges or universities in the past year? (n=23)



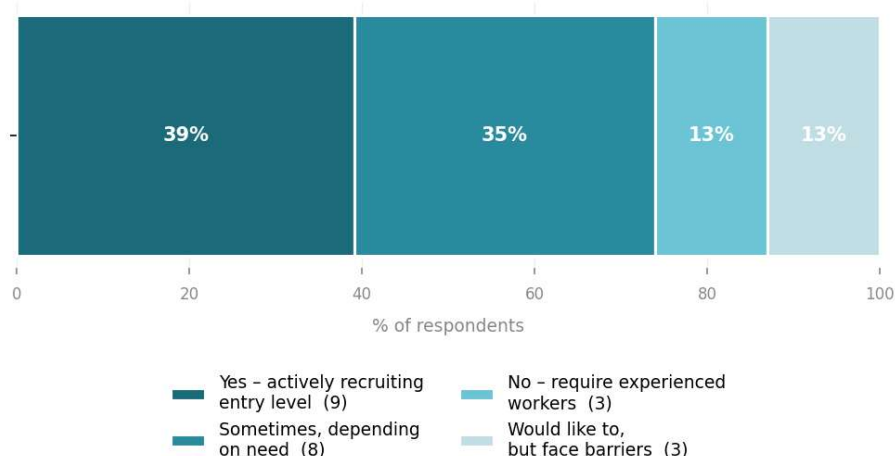
Q12: Types of education collaboration of interest

Q12: Which types of collaboration with education would you be interested in?
Multiple choice — % of respondents selecting each option



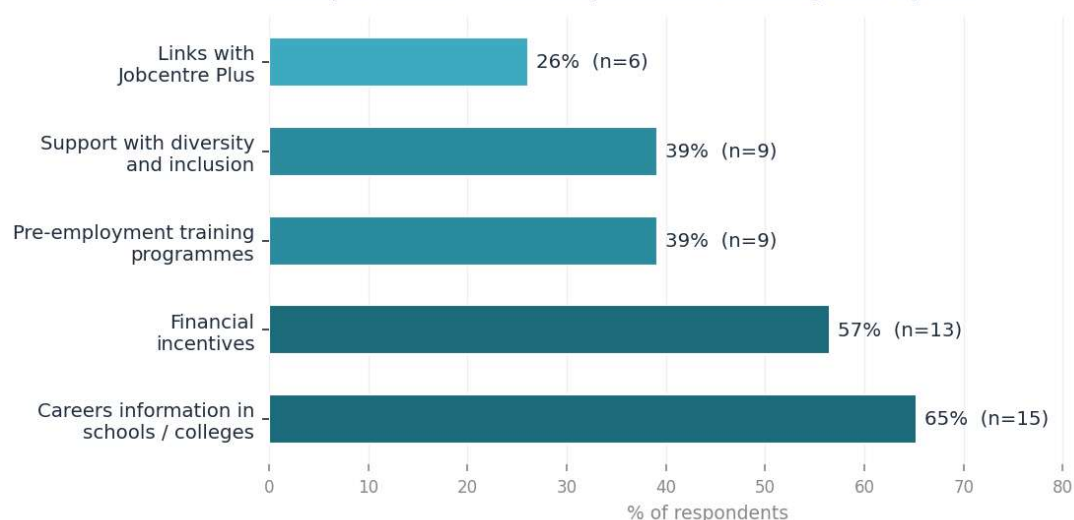
Q14: Entry-level recruitment

Q14: Do you offer opportunities for people with little or no experience to enter the sector? (n=23)



Q15: Support needed to recruit from a wider talent pool

**Q15: What support would help you recruit from a wider talent pool?
Multiple choice — % of respondents selecting each option**



Appendix B: Evidence Sources

Source	Detail
Lichfields (June 2023)	Solent Maritime Sector Deep Dive Evidence Base Report. Commissioned by Maritime UK Solent and the Solent Skills Advisory Panel.
WPI Economics (January 2025)	Economic impact assessment of the Solent maritime sector. Covers direct, indirect and induced employment and GVA.
DfE Local Skills Dashboard	Job postings data, FE enrolment and achievement data, apprenticeship outcomes. 2017-2022.
LinkedIn (via DfE)	In-demand jobs dataset. Solent region, 2017-2021.
Gemserv (April 2023)	Solent Local Enterprise Partnership Low Carbon Skills Report.
CEBR (May 2022)	The economic contribution of the UK Leisure Marine industry.
British Marine (2022)	Key Performance Indicators for the Leisure, Superyacht and Small Commercial Marine Industry, 2020-21.
British Marine Industry Priorities 2024-2029	British Marine. Sets out skills, decarbonisation and trade priorities for the UK leisure, superyacht and small commercial marine industry for the current parliamentary term.
Hampshire and Solent ETCA Proposal	Electrical Contractors' Association (ECA). Electrotechnical Training and Careers Alliance proposal for Hampshire and Solent, prepared for Hampshire Chamber of Commerce. Sources: ONS, JTL, DfE.
Steering Group Meeting 1	January 2026. Six industry representatives. Facilitated by Hampshire Chamber of Commerce.
Steering Group Meeting 2	February 2026. Eight industry representatives, three education and training providers.
Employer Survey	January-February 2026. 23 responses via Google Forms. Indicative sample.
Maritime Solent Careers Partners Group	Follow-up notes from meeting, February 2026. Qualitative intelligence on careers and pipeline activity.
Nav Arc Skills Working Group	Established January 2025. 65+ industry representatives. Intelligence on naval architecture skills pipeline and degree-level apprenticeship development.
Maritime Solent partner briefing (2026)	Intelligence on careers ecosystem, inward investment, COPC employer connections, and apprenticeship clearing pilot.
The Solent: A Global Centre for Maritime Training and Skills	Promotional document launched at London International Shipping Week, 2025.

Note: A refresh of the WPI Economics sector impact report, extending coverage to the full Hampshire and Solent LSIP geography, is expected in April 2026 and will provide updated baseline figures. ECA data on workforce size, apprenticeship starts and training enrolments is sourced from ONS, JTL and DfE as cited in the Hampshire and Solent ETCA proposal, and is indicative of trends rather than current-year confirmed figures. The Hampshire and Solent ETCA document will be appended to the main LSIP report as a supporting sector annex.