

Solent Local Skills Improvement Plan

Maritime Sector Deep Dive

Introduction

The maritime sector encompasses a range of industries and sub-sectors which include the shipping and port industries, leisure marine, engineering and marine scientific industries, and maritime business services. The sector is supported by a broad supply chain and is increasingly influenced by advancements in technology and regulatory demands.

Industry trends point to an increasing demand for sustainability and digitalisation within the sector, especially in the wake of Covid-19 and legally mandated obligations (including the Climate Change Act 2008). Within the Solent, the sector supports approximately 20,000 jobs across an estimated 2,700 enterprises and contributes £1.7 billion to the economy.



Demand for skills

Data on skills in the sector shows that the demand for roles across the region has declined steadily since 2017. Having peaked at around 47,900 postings in 2021, the demand for roles in maritime settled in the region of 33,200 job postings in 2022. Key roles in demand include drivers, electrical and mechanical engineers, business administration and engineering experts, as well as industrial machinery mechanics.

Analysis of medium-term trends suggests that the recent shift to skills with an engineering background is likely to persist, whilst the demand for roles in manufacturing is likely to decline over the coming years. Demand data shows that the majority of hiring relates to operational services (e.g. port activities), in addition to highly specialised and technical services (e.g. naval architect roles).

The skills supply

The Solent is home to 3 higher education institutions, and 7 further education providers, in addition to the South Coast Institute of Technology, which offer a wide range of college and degree-level qualifications in the maritime sector.

Data on FE registrations shows that there were over 6,500 learners enrolled in maritime-related courses in 2021/22. Key areas of study include ICT, business administration, engineering and manufacturing. The majority (i.e. 88%) of Solent learners have sustained employment and/or learning in the year following completion of their studies.

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Challenges and opportunities

The scale of opportunity

The maritime sector has potential for significant growth across the Solent. Trend-based projections show that total employment in the Solent will grow by an additional 60,800 jobs by 2040. This will be driven by growth in hospitality, health and the professional services.

Delving deeper, it is anticipated that the demand for roles in maritime is likely to be driven by a number of opportunities. By far, the single-largest opportunity in the region is the Solent Freeport which will support an estimated 7,000 jobs in advanced manufacturing and engineering, R&D technology, port activities and logistics. Green maritime technologies and decarbonisation efforts also present growth opportunities, particularly in low carbon fuels. Whilst leisure marine was greatly impacted by the pandemic, the sector is expected to see strong growth, as will the demand for marine business services.

In total, it is anticipated that growth in the sector will be in the order of 10,000 jobs. Based on a current estimate of 20,000 existing jobs, this represents a significant growth in the maritime sector. The demand for skills is likely to be wide ranging, and will incorporate low-level, manual skills, and higher-level skills.

Skills gaps and challenges

Whilst the Solent has a strong skills base and labour market to draw upon, the level of opportunity in the sector will require targeted intervention to upskill and reskill people to take advantage of the job opportunities created. Engagement with local stakeholders has identified several gaps and challenges which the sector, and wider economy, will need to overcome.

The single, biggest challenge faced by employers is finding candidates with the specialist and/or technical skills required, a challenge which has been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic and Brexit. The region's labour market is also influenced by challenges associated with graduate retention linked to which is a sector awareness problem where traditionally negative perceptions do not reflect the level of opportunity within it. Employers acknowledge that more must be done to present a more positive picture of the potential for successful and fulfilling careers in the sector.

However, employers have also identified several specific key skills gaps within the industry, such as stevedores, experienced cargo handlers, HGV drivers, data analysts, and pilots of ocean-going vessels. Employers have also identified the need for skills related to green technologies, interpersonal skills, as well as IT and digital skills.

Relevant Solent LSIP priorities for the Maritime Sector

The Solent LSIP identifies 6 priorities to take forward. Designed to be crosscutting and applicable to a full range of sectors, these priorities seek to address the skills gaps and challenges identified. The relevant LSIP priorities are:

LSIP Priority 1: Awareness and aspiration

We will help employers raise awareness of the different career opportunities in maritime, especially amongst children and young learners. We will also continue to work employers to raise awareness of opportunities within the sector and its supply chain across the Solent.

LSIP Priority 5: Pathway to skills

We will work with education and training providers in the Solent to identify, and simplify career pathways (including entry points) into the maritime sector. This will build on initiatives such as TECH:TRUCK and online resources.

LSIP Priority 3: Proactive employer engagement

We will continue to promote engagement between businesses in maritime, sector bodies (e.g. Maritime UK Solent) and learning providers to ensure that the Solent's skills offer aligns with current and future need.

LSIP Priority 6: Managing the skills transition

We will support learning providers investigate and make the case for procuring new technology that can be used to enhance learners' experience and overall skills development in the maritime sector.