

Digital Innovation & Efficiency Committee

Report title:	Digital Skills for Business
Date of meeting:	13 March 2019
Responsible Chief Officer:	Tom McCabe – Executive Director, Community & Environmental Services
Strategic impact The ICT Digital sector is recognised both nationally and regionally for its importance in delivering innovation and economic growth. It is identified in the Norfolk and Suffolk Economic Strategy (NSES) as one of the 3 priority sectors to enable the growth of higher value businesses and jobs.	

Executive summary

This report builds upon the Digital Economy – Business Development & Skills paper presented to this committee in January 2019 and provides further information on the work that the Council is engaged in to help Norfolk's businesses acquire the technological skills and capacity they need to grow and prosper.

The New Anglia Local Enterprise partnership (NALEP) commissioned a series of sector skills studies aiming to articulate the skills needs both now and in the future. The ICT Digital Plan was one of the first to be published in November 2017.

It recognised that digital skills are needed not just for the digital and technology industries, but also impact on all sectors within the economy. As technology continues to develop at a fast pace these skills will become even more important to economic growth and prosperity.

The paper provides a summary of a range of activities and interventions taking place to address the skills needs of the sector at various levels and demonstrates how they link to the key priorities within the sector skills plan

Recommendations:

Members are requested to

- **Note the progress to date with various skills initiatives and interventions**
- **Endorse the direction of travel to address the skills needs of the sector at various levels**

1. Background on Current & Planned Initiatives

- 1.1. A paper submitted to this committee in January 2019 entitled 'Digital Economy – Business Development & Skills' provided detail on the work that Norfolk County Council is doing on interacting and supporting the digital sector.
- 1.2. This paper provides more detail on a number of digital skills interventions in Norfolk and links them to the key priorities within the ICT Digital sector skills plan.
- 1.3. The skills system is complex with a myriad of skills providers and initiatives all of

which will have their own funding parameters and aims and objectives. Influencing the players to coalesce around a set of commonly agreed goals is challenging. In general, the development of sector skills plans, which have to be owned by the sector, has created a series of recommendations or priorities around which employers and skills providers can work together to create a system where the current and future skills needs are able to be met. In responding to the skills challenges for the ICT Digital sector highlighted in the sector skills plan a skills task force was formed by Tech East in January 2018. This group, chaired by Chris Sargisson, CEO Norfolk Chamber of Commerce, combines knowledge and expertise from business, education and public sector and aims to oversee the implementation of the plan developing distinctive local skills initiatives, activities and interventions to address the identified needs at various levels.

- 1.4. The plan identified the following three key priorities that will deliver a major contribution to the growth of the sector in the NALEP region:

Priority 1	Priority 2	Priority 3
Local Employer Skills Leadership	New and broader talent pipelines	In-career learning and development
What the goal is		
Develop closer collaboration between Digital tech sector business and skills providers to improve the responsiveness, accessibility and value of skills outcomes for local employers and residents	Stimulate the pipeline for talent for the sector to overcome skills shortages in higher technical and management skills, create alternative pathways for graduate-level talent and raise awareness in schools of sector career choices	Ensure existing sector employees and competent, enterprising, adaptable and able to apply leading edge solution in a rapidly changing industry through effective co-ordination of bespoke in-career technical and professional learning and development
What success looks like		
New Digital Skills Task Force to develop investment and excellence in the sector's skills offer, articulating and responding to employer needs and maximising opportunities for New Anglia residents	Sector has access to sufficient, diverse talent to fulfil employer business growth aspirations, attract talent from elsewhere and provide exciting opportunities for residents	A dynamic, local learning and enterprise development environment facilitating high quality continuing technical and general professional development for the specialist and wider business community
Where will it have impact		
Increasing Digital Tech Competitiveness Nationally Growing Digital Tech Economy Jobs, Business and Value	Increasing Digital Tech Competitiveness Nationally	Growing Digital Tech Economy Jobs, Business and Value

- 1.5. There are a range of skills interventions taking place and although they have not

been specifically designed to respond to the priorities within the plan they aim to increase skills at various levels and to increase awareness of the opportunities within the sector and the wider economy where digital skills are increasingly at a premium.

1.6. Skills provision and interventions delivering against **Priority 1, Local Employer Skills Leadership:**

- UEA Internships – supporting local businesses to engage UEA students / graduates for 3 – 12 months on tangible projects. The interns bring skills and energy and the host employer helps develop the student / graduate.
- NUA is innovating to meet regional skills deficits, and in 2017 launched 3 new BSc awards in Creative Sciences.
- NCC, through an ICT Digital Employer Engagement project will undertake an analysis of vacancies across the ICT Digital sector to create a detailed understanding of the skills and qualifications that employers typically seek

1.7. Skills provision and interventions delivering against **Priority 2, New and Broader Talent Pipelines:**

- UEA Award – for more information visit <https://www.uea.ac.uk/business/talent/uea-award> - Based on a Duke of Edinburgh model it provides a framework for students to develop their skills / attributes across both curricular and extra-curricular activities. The framework is based around graduate attributes which includes Digital Literacy and IT. There are currently 1,200 students registered.
- UEA Digital Voyager – four week on-line digital literacy programme available to UEA students
- UEA Sync the City – 54 hour hackathon. >150 people involved includes computing / business students, tech sector – programmes, designers, business mentors. <https://synthecity.com/> organised this in conjunction with SyncNorwich for the past 5 years.
- NUA also continues to innovate in their approach to employment readiness, through an in-house gamified programme, NUA Profile aimed at building the top 10 skills identified by businesses as desirable in a new graduate team member. Its success as a game in engaging students is evident in that 2 years ago, before the start of the programme, only 30% of NUA students used Careers resources during their degree, and that has now risen to 78%. Currently NUA are bidding to Digital Catapult for monies to develop a new AR based Escape Game based on resilience skills. The Profile project has been shared with other regional educators and businesses, both within the creative sector and the wider regional economy
- Step into Tech (SiT) runs the Norwich Tech Club, a fortnightly meet up where young people discover a range of technology, skills and potential careers, as well as building relationships with other like-minded members. Club sessions help them develop both digital and soft skills, build confidence and identify clearer pathways to higher education and careers.
- SiT has also arranged two 'Techathons', two-day events where young people aged 8-18 come together to use tech to work on ideas for solving a problem. Teams of kids invent, design, code and have fun. It is a fantastic way for young people excited by technology to develop skills, receive mentoring and make links with potential employers.
- Norfolk County Council has sponsored a SiT event via social value

funding from large contracts by:

- Funding equipment for the event
- Setting a challenge to monitor air pollution

1.8. Skills provision and interventions delivering against **Priority 3, In-Career Learning & Development:**

- The ICT Digital Employer Engagement project will undertake research to understand in greater detail the skills gaps within SME's, identify barriers to training the existing workforce and identify specific courses which are not currently being delivered in Norfolk and the scale of demand for those courses
- Apprenticeships are a less well recognised route to in-work progression within the ICT sector than in many other sectors. This tends to be because an apprenticeship will last for at least a year and often between 18-24 months which does not always meet the skills requirements of the sector that requires shorter more specific interventions in developing skills. A line of enquiry within the ICT Digital Employer Engagement Project will be to establish from an employer perspective the role of apprenticeships within the sector and how we might work with providers to make the approach more employer friendly.

2. Evidence

- 2.1 The NALEP Digital Tech Sector Skills Plan <https://newanglia.co.uk/sector-skills-plans/> identified the need for the Digital tech sector to respond to replacement demands of approximately 6,000 vacancies by 2024 plus the TechEast sector growth aspiration to create an additional 4,000 jobs in New Anglia by 2024.
- 2.2 Nationally, the 2018 TechNation Report <https://technation.io/insights/report-2018/key-findings/> highlights that the digital sector is continuing to grow twice as fast as the economy as a whole making it clear that technology is a critical component of UK growth, both now and in the future.
- 2.3 The report goes on to state that the number of jobs is increasing and that between 2014 and 2017 employment in the digital tech sector increased by 13.2% with workers being more productive by an average of £10,000 per person per annum than those in non-digital sectors. Jobs requiring digital tech skills command higher salaries at an average of £42,578 compared to £32,477 for those that do not.
- 2.4 Additionally, employer demand is increasing with non-digital tech companies becoming more reliant on digital tech workers as the use of technology continues to grow.

3. Financial Implications

- 3.1. There are no financial implications currently.

4. Issues, risks and innovation

- 4.1. There is a risk that the skills provision and interventions detailed above are either the wrong interventions that will not deliver the skills required or that the interventions are insufficient to deliver the volume of skills required to enable businesses to grow and thrive in Norfolk.

Officer Contact

If you have any questions about matters contained in this paper or want to see copies of any assessments, eg equality impact assessment, please get in touch with:

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