

# COMMUNITY LEARNING AND SKILLS

Annual Accountability Statement  
2026/27

## Purpose

The purpose of Kent County Council's (KCC) Community Learning and Skills Service (CLS) is to provide and secure learning opportunities for Kent's residents which will:

- engage and build confidence, preparing them for further learning and employment
- improve essential skills in areas such as English, ESOL, maths, digital skills
- equip parents/carers to support children's learning
- improve health and wellbeing to develop strong, integrated communities

This together with our strategic Aims are our 'Intent' as per the Ofsted Education Inspection Framework (EIF).

Community Learning and Skills contracts with the Department for Work and Pensions and the Department for Education to annually deliver learning opportunities to all parts of Kent, through our programmes for adults and young people.

We aim to serve five main groups of people:

1. Young people entering the world of work or progressing to further learning
2. Adults seeking skills for employment or for progressing to further learning
3. Organisations seeking to improve the skills and potential of their staff
4. Adults learning for personal development, health and wellbeing
5. Families, especially those in Kent's disadvantaged neighbourhoods

## Strategic Aims

Support  
the Kent  
economy

Support the most  
vulnerable children  
and families in our  
County

Promote healthy,  
creative, and  
active  
communities

Offer an  
inclusive  
curriculum which  
widens  
participation

To reflect these strategic aims, our curriculum provision is aligned under the delivery areas:

- Essential Skills
- 'Response'
- Family Learning
- Study Programmes for young people aged 16-19
- Sub-contracting of vocational courses in key sectors

Not all learners will be able to access priority programmes immediately, and CLS offers progression routes to upskill and prepare learners for their next steps. Within Kent's provider base, CLS positions itself very much as an 'anchor' service, re-engaging learners who are furthest from the labour market and building confidence, before progressing to further learning and higher-level courses, often through colleges.

This is a position we will continue to take, whilst year-on-year developing our offer of re-engagement, entry and first level courses, particularly in sectors identified as having local and national skills shortages. Where appropriate we will also extend our offer of higher-level courses.

We will continue to work closely with Medway Unitary Authority across Kent and Medway as the Strategic Functional Economic Area.

## Context and Place

Kent is divided into 12 local authority districts, with Medway Unitary Authority located within it.

Kent borders London boroughs, which has implications for workforce travelling to work in London, and is the Gateway to Europe.

## Deprivation in Kent

The table presents the average IMD 2025 rank by district, highlighting clear geographic patterns in deprivation across Kent and Medway.

West Kent contains the least deprived areas - Tonbridge and Malling, Tunbridge Wells and Sevenoaks. While the most deprived districts are Thanet, followed by Swale, Folkestone and Hythe, Dover and Medway.

Overall, Kent's average IMD 2025 rank of 16,488 out of 33,755 indicates that the county sits broadly around the national midpoint in terms of relative deprivation.

District	Average IMD Rank	Ranking
Thanet	11,065	1
Swale	13,127	2
Folkestone & Hythe	13,155	3
Dover	13,661	4
Medway	14,764	5
Gravesham	15,155	6
Ashford	16,669	7
Canterbury	17,389	8
Maidstone	18,169	9
Dartford	18,674	10
Sevenoaks	21,028	11
Tunbridge Wells	21,332	12
Tonbridge & Malling	22,639	13

The following table examines the average ranks for the four indicators most relevant to CLS: Income, Employment, Education, Skills and Training, and Health Deprivation and Disability.

A consistent pattern emerges:

- Thanet is the most deprived district across all indicators except Education, Skills and Training, where its greatest need is in employment.
- Swale is the most deprived district in Education, Skills and Training, showing a considerably lower ranking than other areas.
- The districts with the highest needs for Education, Skills and Training are: Swale, Thanet, Gravesham, Folkestone and Hythe, and Medway.

Across most districts, the Education, Skills and Training indicator ranks lower than Employment, suggesting a broader, systemic skills gap that extends beyond unemployed residents and into the existing workforce. This pattern indicates that:

- There is a pressing need to strengthen foundational skills among adults across Kent and Medway.
- Some areas may be experiencing skills shortages that impact productivity and progression, even where employment levels appear comparatively higher.
- Targeted CLS provision, particularly in skills development, retraining, and progression pathways will play a crucial role in addressing these structural challenges.

District	Average IMD Rank	Average Income Rank	Average Employment Rank	Average Education, Skills & Training Rank	Average Health Deprivation & Disability Rank
<b>Thanet</b>	11,065	11,901	9,602	11,323	11,614
<b>Swale</b>	13,127	15,062	13,743	10,162	14,661
<b>Folkestone &amp; Hythe</b>	13,155	15,233	12,335	12,698	13,125
<b>Dover</b>	13,661	15,357	13,212	13,243	15,848
<b>Medway</b>	14,764	15,632	15,019	12,853	15,536
<b>Gravesham</b>	15,155	16,099	15,998	12,555	16,495
<b>Ashford</b>	16,669	17,493	17,299	15,419	19,914
<b>Canterbury</b>	17,389	17,988	16,526	17,240	18,839
<b>Maidstone</b>	18,169	18,950	19,219	16,459	20,806
<b>Dartford</b>	18,674	19,011	20,133	18,802	18,536
<b>Sevenoaks</b>	21,028	22,573	23,020	19,612	25,407
<b>Tunbridge Wells</b>	21,332	21,569	21,856	23,171	23,463
<b>Tonbridge &amp; Malling</b>	22,639	21,869	22,422	20,475	24,112

## Enterprises in Kent

In Kent the majority of enterprises (90.0%) are classed as micro businesses. Kent has a slightly higher proportion of enterprises which are classed as micro than in Great Britain (89.1%).

The Kent and Medway Local Skills Improvement Plan recognises the unique challenge SMEs face in driving skills development, given their limited capacity and confidence in navigating the system. With three major factors identified:

- Understanding the education landscape, which evolves fast whether through changes in definitions (levels for example) or qualification (T-Levels).
- Time required to identify and then release staff for training.
- Format of apprenticeships for certain professions, both in terms of timings and relating to the requirements of the standards being harder to meet for very small businesses.

## % of Kent Enterprises by Employment Size, 2025



### Enterprise Definition

Enterprise Size	Number of Employees
Micro	0 to 9
Small	10 to 49
Medium	50 to 249
Large	250+

Source: ONS  
Presented by: Kent Analytics, Kent County Council

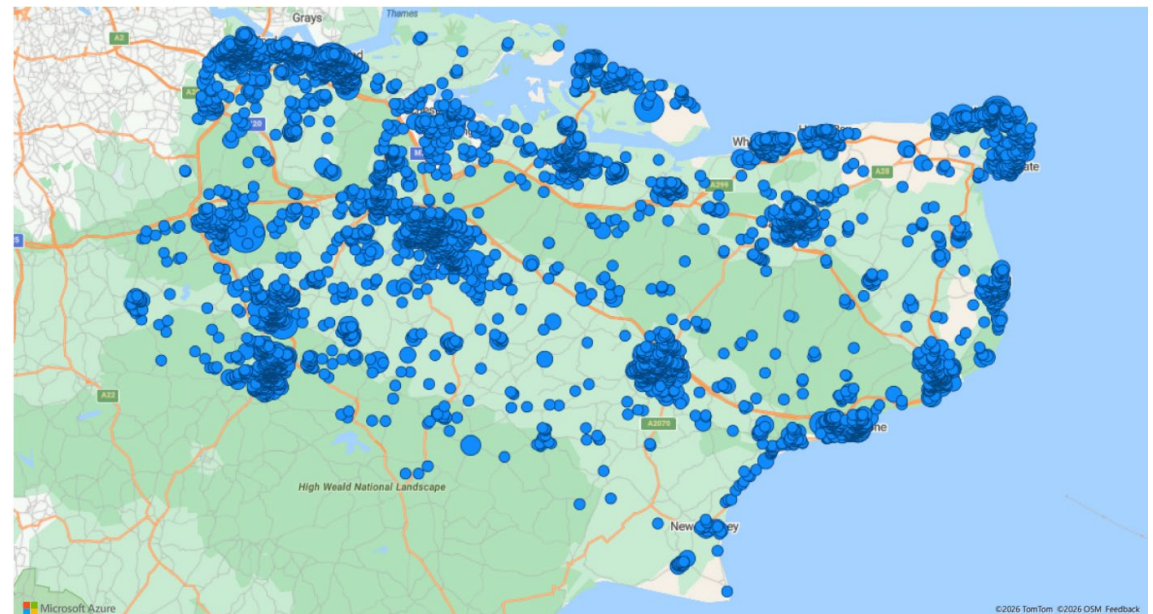
## Centres and Learners

CLS delivers courses in all 12 local authority districts in the County, from large Adult Education Centres to delivering from community venues close to the point of need such as Family Hubs, schools and faith centres, working with a range of partners who have trusted relationships with Kent residents.

In 25/26 academic year it is expected we will have delivered 1,609 courses across 218 venues and we will continue to grow this community-based delivery model over academic year 26/27.

Learners travel from across the County and neighbouring authorities to access our services.

### Map of CLS Learner Postcodes 25/26



## Local, Regional and National Needs

The Government's white paper 'Get Britain Working' set out an ambition to achieve 80% employment rate and build an inclusive and thriving labour market where everyone has the opportunity of good work, and the chance to get on at work. It outlined 3 pillars to achieve this:

- A modern Industrial Strategy and Local Growth Plans – to create more good jobs in every part of the country.
- Improving the quality and security of work through the Plan to Make Work Pay.
- The biggest reforms to employment support for a generation, bringing together skills and health to get more people into work and to get on in work.

At a local level, the Get Kent and Medway Working Plan highlights several priority groups in need of targeted support:

- **Young people** – particularly in Medway, where NEET levels are high, as well as parts of Folkestone, Gravesend, Maidstone and Thanet, based on insight from Job Centre Plus. Key barriers include low educational attainment, limited opportunities and health-related challenges.
- **Women who are unemployed**, including those with caring responsibilities who may face additional constraints in accessing work or training.
- **People with long-term health conditions** – with an emphasis on providing or enabling access to employment support at the point of diagnosis. A coastal-periphery focus is important given the concentration of health and care needs in those areas.
- **Individuals with experience of the criminal justice system**, who require more coordinated support, particularly given the number of prisons in the region and the localised hotspot around Chatham.

The Kent and Medway Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) identifies the following sectors key to Kent & Medway skills needs:



CLS is subcontracting delivery across many priority sectors identified in the Kent and Medway LSIP. These sector aligned pathways offer flexible, intensive training that enables adults to upskill, retrain and progress into higher level opportunities, supporting strong transitions into sustainable employment.

## 2024-25 Outcomes

In the 2024/25 academic year, a total of **10,226 learners** participated across various programmes, generating **18,372 enrolments**.

The largest areas by learner volume were **Family Learning (3,184 learners)** and **Skills (2,553 learners)**, with **587** and **429 courses** respectively.

Of the **6,227 learners** with recorded intended destinations, **85% progressed positively**, including transitions to employment, further education, or internal progression.

Study Programmes in particular also showed encouraging outcomes, with **Supported Internships achieving 91.23% positive progression**.

## Approach to Developing the Annual Accountability Statement

The aims, objectives and targets identified in this statement are the result of a high degree of engagement and interaction between KCC CLS and key stakeholders across the County.

It complements and underpins the priorities identified in local, regional and national reports including the Kent and Medway Local Skills Improvement Plan, as well as those of Kent County Council's constituent directorates for Adult Social Care and Health; Children, Young People and Education; Growth, Environment and Transport as well as Chief and Deputy Chief Executive's Departments.

Through joint membership of various partnership groups such as KCC's Employment Task Force, the Kent and Medway Employment and Skills Group and Kent Association of Training Organisations (KATO), it has also actively engaged and interacted with a wide range of stakeholders external to the Council. These include local schools and colleges, Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce, third sector agencies operating in the County and agencies such as HOLEX and the Department for Work and Pensions.

Furthermore, it is also the product of wide-scale engagement with Kent's residents, as employers and employees, trainees, apprentices, parents, volunteers and its past, present and future learners.

Finally, it supports the overall direction of travel identified by the Department for Work and Pensions, Ofsted (in its Education Inspection Framework) and national governmental priorities, including the Get Kent and Medway Working plan.

# CLS 2026-27 Target Outcomes

CLS will continue to deliver its core offer, including Essential Skills courses and programmes designed to address skills gaps across Kent and Medway, supported through both direct and subcontracted provisions, alongside a substantial Study Programme for NEET young people.

In the 2026/27 academic year, CLS will concentrate on the priorities outlined below. A key area of growth will be our RESPONSE provision, delivering locally targeted courses developed in close partnership with community groups and national organisations to ensure that learning is flexible, place-based and responsive to local need.

Strategic Priority and Aims	Measurable Outcomes	Contribution towards National, Regional and Local Priorities
<p><b>Strategic Priority 1a: Support the Kent Economy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Delivery of large Study Programmes for Young People across Kent, including those with EHCPs and Care Leavers, to reduce NEETs and provide positive progression into FE or employment. Offer high quality sub-contracted delivery where appropriate.</li> </ul>	<p><b>300</b> NEET learners complete Study Programmes which include employability skills, English, Maths and a work experience placement. Positive outcomes include employment, Connect to Work, an apprenticeship or a college placement.</p> <p><b>50</b> learners with EHCPs will complete Supported Internships or other appropriate programmes, including appropriate work experience.</p> <p><b>100</b> Care Leavers, including UASC, will complete ESOL study programmes which support language development to progress to further learning and/or other positive outcomes.</p>	<p><b>Reforming Kent</b></p> <p><b>Get Kent and Medway Working Plan</b> priority:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Young people - particularly in Medway, where NEET levels are high and in parts of Folkestone, Gravesend, Maidstone and Thanet, based on insight from Jobcentre Plus. Barriers faced include educational attainment, opportunity and health.</li> </ul> <p><b>Kent &amp; Medway Integrated Care Strategy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support and grow our workforce.</li> </ul> <p><b>Pathways for All</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Make a concerted effort to improve the outcomes for young people from our post-16 provision.</li> <li>Enable a wider range of provision to be locally accessible.</li> <li>Improve provision below Level 2 and provide good pathways into further learning at higher levels.</li> <li>Support young people's mental health.</li> </ul>

### **Strategic Priority 1b: Support the Kent Economy**

- Using funding, including Tailored Learning, work with local partners including DWP, Chamber of Commerce, NCS, providers, Housing Associations and third party sectors to increase delivery to those furthest from the labour market. To support positive steps towards employment and other positive outcomes, with particular focus on LSIP priorities. Offer high quality sub-contracted delivery where appropriate.

**1,800** learners will complete RESPONSE courses as a step towards improving their lives and life chances, including employability programmes which move them closer to, into or up in work.

**2,500** unique learners (5,250 aims) will complete Essential Skills courses.

**50** adult learners with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND) will complete bespoke Independent Living courses to develop independence, skills and confidence.

**400** learners will develop Essential Digital Skills and attend other IT courses to help them access services, develop skills for work and stay safe.

**45** learners will complete qualifications in British Sign Language to develop and improve their communication skills with Deaf people in a range of everyday situations including family members, work colleagues and customers.

**200** learners will complete courses to develop and improve their sector-specific skills for roles in key sectors with vacancies in Kent, including construction, agri-food and early years.

### **Reforming Kent**

#### **Get Kent and Medway Working Plan** priority:

- Women who are unemployed, including those with caring responsibilities.

#### **Kent & Medway Integrated Care Strategy**

- Support and grow our workforce.

#### **Kent & Medway Local Skills Improvement Plan**

### Strategic Priority 2: Family Learning

- Utilising Tailored Learning funding, in conjunction with other KCC departments, schools and Family Hubs, deliver a programme of family learning to increase parents/carers' skills, their understanding of how their children are educated and appropriate parenting. Increase the number of courses which support understanding of particular Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND). Increase the number of men accessing courses.

**2,250** parents, guardians, children and other family members from schools and other community partners, focusing on identified areas of deprivation, benefit from family learning programmes.

**1,250** adults benefit from Parenting Courses in particular, courses to support children and young people with additional needs.

### KCC Priority: New models of care and support

- To support the most vulnerable children and families in our county, ensuring our social work practice supports manageable caseloads, reflective learning, joined up safeguarding and effective corporate parenting arrangements.

### Kent & Medway Integrated Care Strategy

- Give children and young people the best start in life.

### Reforming Kent

### Strategic Priority 3: Health and Wellbeing

- Utilising Tailored Learning funding, work with Public Health and other relevant local partners to increase health, wellbeing and resilience outcomes for Kent's residents.

This provision focuses on 6 key outcomes:

- Supporting learners who are not in work due to health and/or wellbeing needs.
- Reducing employee absenteeism due to health and wellbeing needs.
- Extending working lives e.g. knowledge and exercise for construction workers to ensure back strength.
- Health and wellbeing support during times of change.
- Understanding how to maintain healthy lifestyles.
- Supporting employability for older workers age 50+ including supporting employers to engage.

**1,300** learners benefit from programmes designed to improve resilience, mental and physical health and/or wellbeing, including to support the ability to work.

### Reforming Kent

### Get Kent and Medway Working Plan priority:

- Support for people with long-term health conditions. Aiming to provide / facilitate access to employment support at the point of diagnosis would be a good initial focus for actions under the person-centric support theme. A coastal periphery focus will be important given the coalescence of health and care needs.

### Kent & Medway Integrated Care Strategy

- Tackle the wider determinants to prevent ill health.
- Support and grow our workforce.
- Grow our skills and workforce.

### Public Health Framework ambitions:

- Starting well, living well, aging well.
- 5 ways to wellbeing.

## Annual Accountability Statement

On behalf of Kent County Council, it is hereby confirmed that the plan as set out above reflects an agreed statement of purpose, aims and objectives as approved by the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills and the Corporate Director for Children, Young People and Education on 19th June 2026.

The plan will be published on the Council's website within three months of the start of the new academic year and can be accessed from the following link: [www.communitylearningandskills.co.uk](http://www.communitylearningandskills.co.uk)

## Supporting Documents

Kent & Medway Local Skills Improvement Plan: <https://kentemployerskillsplan.org/>

Reforming Kent: <https://letstalk.kent.gov.uk/kent-strategic-statement>

Kent & Medway Integrated Care Strategy: <https://www.kmhealthandcare.uk/about-us/vision-and-priorities/kent-and-medway-integrated-care-strategy>

Get Kent and Medway Working Plan: [https://www.kent.gov.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0016/220381/Get-Kent-and-Medway-Working-Plan.pdf](https://www.kent.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0016/220381/Get-Kent-and-Medway-Working-Plan.pdf)

CLS Ofsted Report 2024: <https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/42/52836>

Kent & Medway Economic Framework: <https://www.kmep.org.uk/app/uploads/2024/03/Kent-Medway-Economic-Framework-Web-Version-March-2024.pdf>

Education Inspection Framework: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/education-inspection-framework>

Pathways for All: <https://www.kent.gov.uk/education-and-children/post-16-options/kent-16-to-19-review-pathways-for-all>

Public Health Framework: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/public-health-outcomes-framework>

Get Britain Working White Paper: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/get-britain-working-white-paper/get-britain-working-white-paper>

KCC Priorities: <https://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/strategies-and-policies>

IMD Data 2025 - Indices of Deprivation: <https://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/information-and-data/facts-and-figures-about-kent/deprivation-and-poverty-data>

UK Business Counts (ONS – Kent Analytics): [https://www.kent.gov.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/205924/UK-business-counts-statistics.pdf](https://www.kent.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/205924/UK-business-counts-statistics.pdf)

Kent County Council Business Plans 2026-27: <https://kentcountycouncil.sharepoint.com/sites/KCCKNet/Shared%20Documents/Forms/AllItems.aspx?id=%2Fsites%2FKCCKNet%2FShared%20Documents%2FPolicy%20and%20Strategy%2FKCC%20Business%20Plan%2Epdf&parent=%2Fsites%2FKCCKNet%2FShared%20Documents%2FPolicy%20and%20Strategy>

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