**Innovate UK:
Further Education Innovation Fund**

Further Education Innovation Conference

AFTERNOON SESSION

Welcome

Rosie Peacock

Innovate UK

Innovate UK:
The wider landscape and future priorities

Dave Wilkes

Innovate UK

UK RI Innovate UK

Greater Manchester FE Innovation

Coral Grainger
and
Richard Caulfield

GM Colleges

UKRI Innovate UK

Glasgow CLIC Programme

Stuart McDowall
City of Glasgow College

Alastair McGhee
Glasgow Kelvin College

UKRI Innovate UK

Black Country Innovation Programme

Harold Mutata

Walsall College

UKRI Innovate UK

Break

UKRI Innovate UK

Innovation in Norther Ireland FE Colleges

Patrick McKeowen

North West Regional College

UKRI Innovate UK

East Kent College Group

Suzanna Gamwell
East Kent College Group

Coleg Cambria - Net Zero Farm

Nigel Holloway

Coleg Cambria

UK RI Innovate UK

Myra

Nicola Murgatroyd

Myra

Lunch

Innovate UK

Introduction to Afternoon Session

Rosie Peacock

Innovate UK

UKRI Innovate UK

Innovate UK Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTP) & Accelerated Knowledge Transfer (AKT) Schemes

Geraint Jones
Innovate UK Business Connect

Mick Card
Innovate UK Business Connect

Tables 1 & 2

Main Room

UKRI Innovate UK

Developing your college strategy

Bethany Procter

Innovate UK

Steve Caunter

South Devon College

Table 3
Main Room

IUK Business Growth

Marc Rambaud

Innovate UK

Table 4
Main Room

UKRI Innovate UK

No Limits

Luke Crook

Innovate UK

Table 5
Main Room

UKRI Innovate UK

Innovation Skills Framework

Abi Stocker

Innovate UK

Table 7
Reception

UKRI Innovate UK

Intellectual Property Office

Lisa Redman
Intellectual Property Office

Stephanie Hitchman
Intellectual Property Office

UK RI Innovate UK

Table 8
Lunch Room

Compound Semiconductor Applications Catapult & Catapult Network

Alex Leadley

CSA Catapult

Table 9
Lunch Room

Innovate UK

Workforce Foresighting Hub

Denise Moon
Innovate UK

Charlotte Holt
National Composites Centre

Emily Brennan
MTC - Manufacturing Technology Centre

UKRI Innovate UK

Table 10
Lunch Room

Break

Welcome Back

Rosie Peacock
Innovate UK

Skills England

Mel Collins

Skills England

Skills England update

Dr Melanie Collins
Head of Local Skills Improvement Plans

May 2025

Skills England will:

- work to form a coherent national picture of where skills gaps exist and how they can be addressed, working closely with the Industrial Strategy Council and the Migration Advisory Committee

- unify the skills landscape to ensure that the workforce is equipped with the skills needed to power economic growth, by bringing together Mayoral Combined Authorities and other key local partners, large and small businesses, training providers and unions

- shape technical education to respond to skills needs, including identifying the training accessible via the Growth and Skills Levy

- advise on the highly trained workforce needed to deliver a clear, long-term plan for the future economy

Phil Smith CBE, SE Chair

Sir David Bell, Vice Chair

Tessa Griffiths & Sarah Maclean, Chief Executive

In Skills England we will have a single organisation responsible for:

- identifying skills needs in the economy,

- designing training which reflects employers' skills needs,

- working with partners across the country to ensure regional skills needs

  are met and aligned with national priorities, and

- feeding back insight across Government to inform joined-up decision

  making on skills.

- Skills gaps are holding back growth and opportunity. A third of vacancies are due to skills shortages. And by 2035 we expect 1.4 million new jobs in the economy, with a different composition driven by technological change.

- Though the workforce is ageing, it is still projected that over 71% of jobs in 2035 are expected to be filled by someone already in the workforce

- We need to make it easier for people to get new skills and better jobs. Skills England will grow the highly-skilled workforce we need.

- Skills are central to the Government's Missions and Plan for Change – growth and opportunity, but also for the other missions: we need more construction workers to hit the target of 1.5 million new homes; we need people skilled in battery technology to power the clean energy mission.

- The skills system is fragmented and complex, limiting our efforts to identify and plug skills gaps, and contributing to a reliance on migrant labour.

Skills England: The Journey So Far

- IfATE Bill cleared Parliament on 30th April 2025: following Royal Assent and commencement, IfATE's functions will be exercised through Skills England

- Chair, vice-Chair and CEOs announced in February 2025

- Under Shadow Skills England…
  - first report published in September 2024
  - regional engagement to connect national planning to regional skills action
  - Engagement with over 700 stakeholders to gain insight and support the setting of priorities
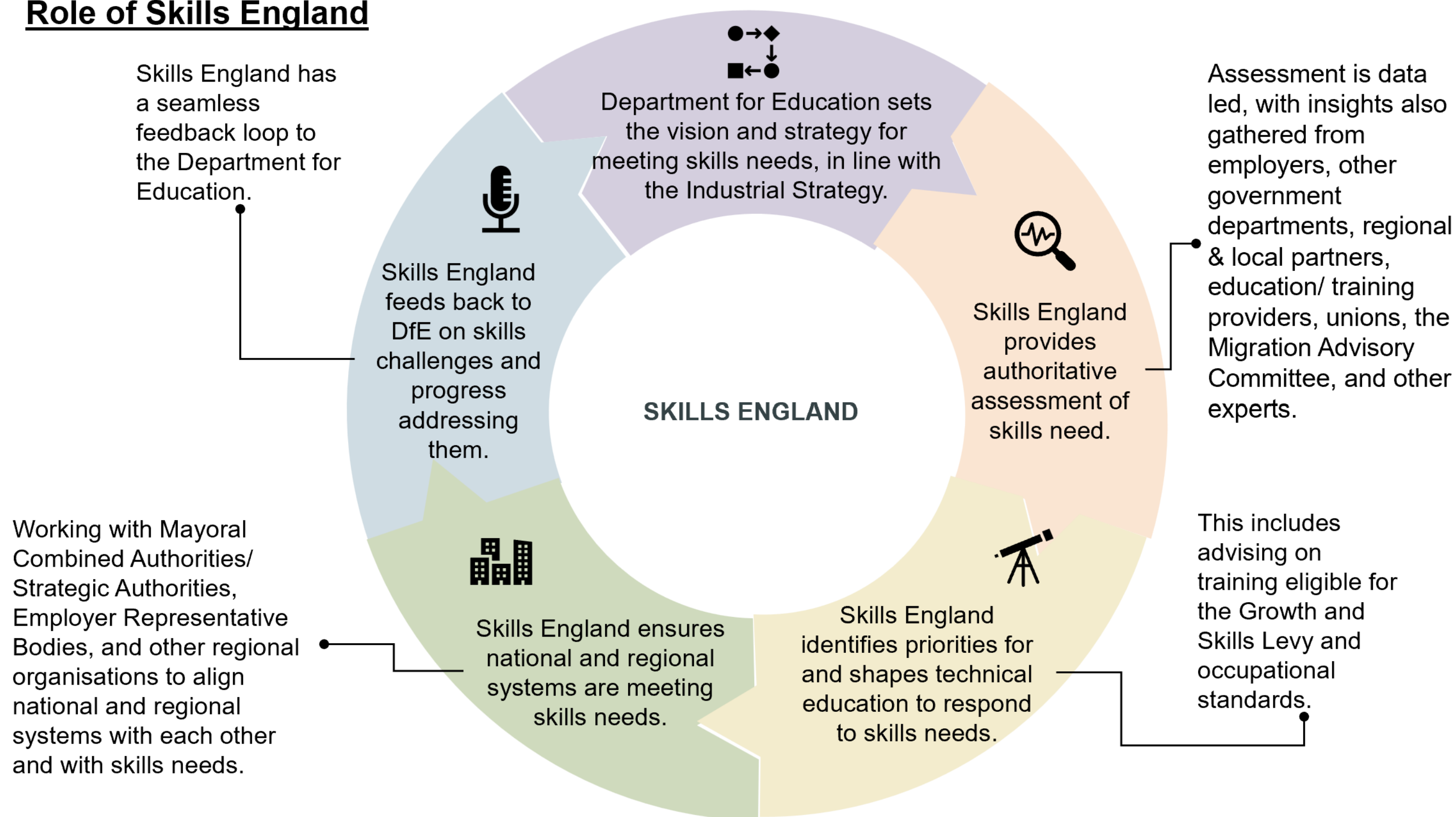
Skills England: Overview

Role of Skills England

Skills England has a seamless feedback loop to the Department for Education.

Department for Education sets the vision and strategy for meeting skills needs, in line with the Industrial Strategy.

Skills England feeds back to DfE on skills challenges and progress addressing them.

Assessment is data led, with insights also gathered from employers, other government departments, regional & local partners, education/ training providers, unions, the Migration Advisory Committee, and other experts.

SKILLS ENGLAND

Skills England provides authoritative assessment of skills need.

Working with Mayoral Combined Authorities/ Strategic Authorities, Employer Representative Bodies, and other regional organisations to align national and regional systems with each other and with skills needs.

Skills England ensures national and regional systems are meeting skills needs.

Skills England identifies priorities for and shapes technical education to respond to skills needs.

This includes advising on training eligible for the Growth and Skills Levy and occupational standards.

- **We will be data driven**
  - Support the work of the Industrial Strategy by understanding where the skills gaps exist in the sectors that will drive growth
  - Publish analysis setting out the skills gaps in key occupations which are critical for growth

- **We will use this data to drive improvements and simplify the system**
  - Scrutinise the pathways for young people starting out in careers, as well as adults who need to reskill
  - Remove duplication and clarify occupational routes
  - Develop new products where needed, such as foundation apprenticeships
  - Increase opportunities for young people
  - Increase flexibility for employers

- **We will convene partners to co-design solutions to skills gaps**
  - Early success: Skills England analysis has led to partnership with the construction industry (£600m of Government and industry investment) to build a pipeline of skilled workers into this key sector.

What does the English Devolution White Paper mean for LSIPs?

The Devo White Paper (published Dec '24) introduced joint ownership of the LSIP model, which will see Strategic Authorities (SAs) work alongside Employer Representative Bodies (ERBs) to set out the strategic direction for skills provision in an area.

Joint ownership of the LSIP model will help to ensure Strategic Authorities and Employer Representative Bodies work together on all stages of the LSIP and its governance, with local discretion on the arrangements to deliver this.

This new model will give Strategic Authorities a clear mechanism to help inform the skills offer locally and will help to ensure LSIPs continue to facilitate opportunities for 16–19-year-olds to undertake apprenticeships, education and training that leads to good quality employment outcomes.

What are the next steps? DfE will be working with Strategic Authorities, ERBs and Skills England on implementing the following:

ERB Designation: When designating a new ERB, Strategic Authorities will be involved in the process, with their comments informing the Secretary of State (SoS) for Education's decision to designate. The SoS will not designate (without good reason) an ERB unless the Strategic Authorities is satisfied in the choice.

LSIP Development: In Strategic Authority areas, LSIP development will commence with the Strategic Authority establishing the sector skills priorities and sharing relevant data with the designated ERB. These will inform the development of the plan and provide the framework within which it exists, alongside Local Growth Plans, the Industrial Strategy, Skills England's assessment of skills needs, and employer input.

LSIP Approval: Strategic Authorities and ERBs will be required to confirm they are both content with the plan before it is sent to the SoS for Education (through Skills England) for approval. In the rare instances where there is disagreement, it may be escalated to SoS.

Geography Alignment: To ensure the policy is implemented effectively, LSIP geographies will be aligned with SA geographies, wherever possible.

- There will be a two-way flow of information between LSIPs and other relevant national, cross-government, regional and local strategies and plans, including a) the Industrial Strategy, b) Local Growth Plans and c) Get Britain Working Plans*. These strategies and plans will have their specific purpose but should inform and complement one another.

- **The Industrial Strategy** (and its associated sector plans) will inform the development of LSIPs. This will also inform the sectors important for driving growth in an area and, in Mayoral Strategic Authority areas, the development of Local Growth Plans.

- **Local Growth Plans -** developed by Mayoral Strategic Authorities, they will set out a 10-year economic vision for the area outlining the key strengths, challenges and priorities for local economic growth. They will both draw on evidence from the current LSIPs published in 2023 and inform the development of the next 3-year LSIPs.

- **Local Get Britain Working Plans** - focused primarily on tackling unemployment and underlying issues in the labour market around ill-health and low skill levels, linked to the [White Paper](#) target of having 80% of people in work. GBWPs will be informed by the current LSIPs and feed into the development of the next 3-year LSIPs.

*In most circumstances, Local Growth Plans, Local Skills Improvement Plans and Local Get Britain Working Plans will be developed and implemented over the same geographies to facilitate alignment and join up.

LSIP: Next Steps and timescales

- Development of LSIPs begins October 2025, for approval and publication Summer 2026

- LSIP statutory guidance to be updated to set out expectations on working arrangements and governance. Draft produced in June / July for circulation / comment. To be issued by October 2025 to inform the development of the next cycle of LSIPs.

- Engagement with Legal Advisors Office: Winter 2024 – Summer 2025

- Legislation – bid submitted to Parliamentary Business and Legislation Committee (PBL) for second session (possible introduction Nov 25)

- Engagement with Parliamentary Council on possible legislative measures - Summer 2025

Employer use of mechatronics lab at North Kent College
- Automated factory systems – employers accessed college facilities
- Access to facilities led to employer engagement with learners
- Has sparked ideas and supported skills development
- Has improved college's understanding on how equipment is used to support delivery
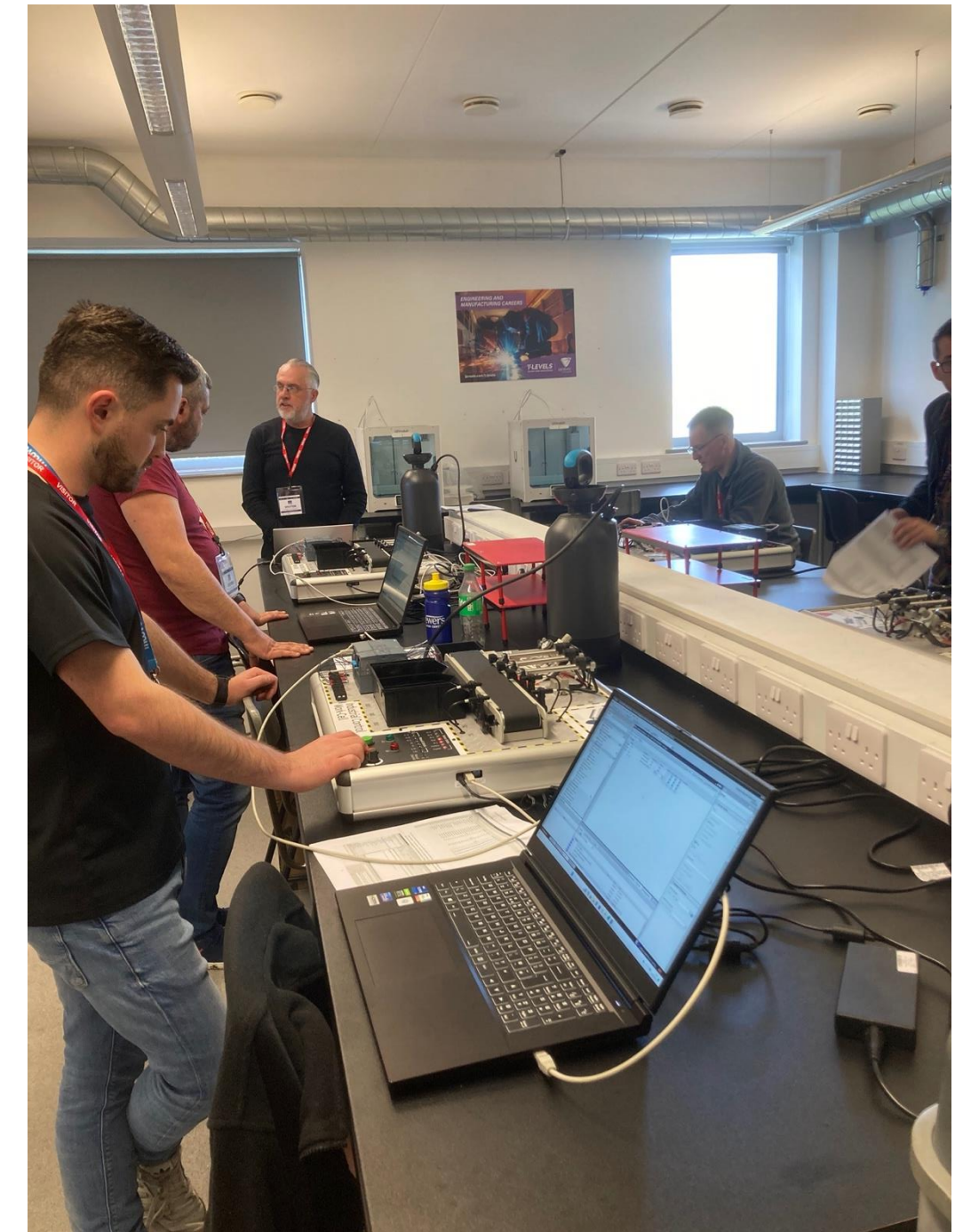
Association of Colleges: Reference Group on Innovation

Marguerite Hogg
Association of Colleges

UK RI Innovate UK

FE Innovation survey

- Last carried out similar survey in 2020

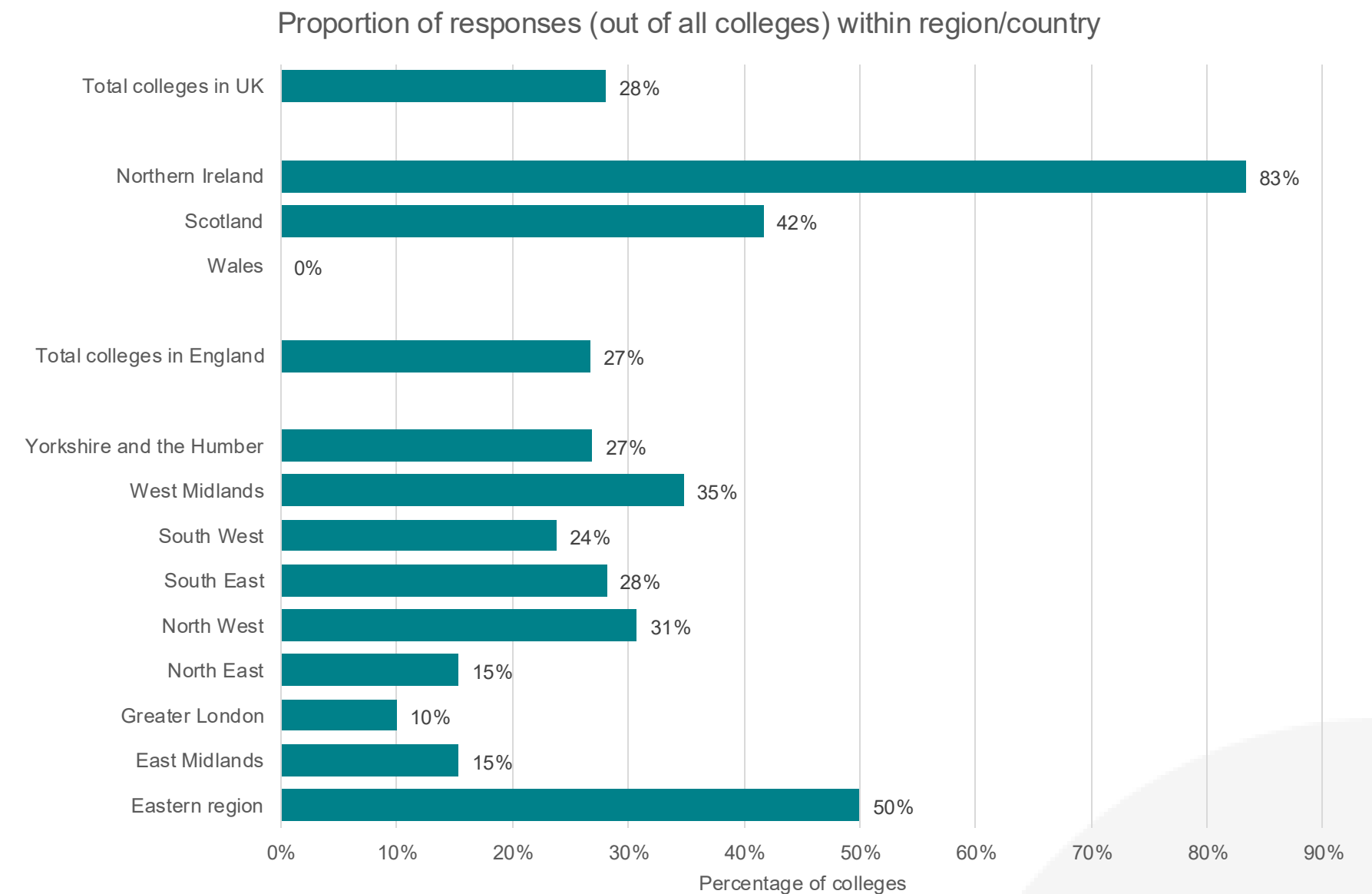- Since then we've undertaken some project activities and study visits and we've also had the FE Innovation Fund (FEIF) pilots

- 2025 survey was expanded to include the whole of the UK – unfortunately we didn't get the reach in Wales.

The survey questions were grouped into three key sections:

- Innovation

- Staff CPD and research

- Business incubation

Innovation

- Responses: 58 English colleges, 10 Scottish colleges, 5 Northern Irish colleges

- 86% of respondents said that supporting business innovation was strategically important

- 85% had employer engagement strategies,
with 79% of those embedding innovation and
business support within them

Proportion of responses (out of all colleges) within region/country

Region/Country	Percentage
Total colleges in UK	28%
Northern Ireland	83%
Scotland	42%
Wales	0%
Total colleges in England	27%
Yorkshire and the Humber	27%
West Midlands	35%
South West	24%
South East	28%
North West	31%
North East	15%
Greater London	10%
East Midlands	15%
Eastern region	50%

Percentage of colleges

Support needed and what colleges want to be able to do

- Investment – capital and revenue funding to provide high quality resources and expert staff that reflect industry strategies.
- There is some flexibility in the Adult Skills Fund in England to use 3% of allocation for innovative provision but for those with a smaller budget this can be too low to make any significant impact.
- Funding for development of innovation centres – could offer incubation space, space for join research, dedicated staff offering support and advice to employer partners on investment opportunities and funding channels.
- Support to build applied research capabilities enabling engagement in KPTs.
- Where colleges are funding innovation support roles from core funding, this can stretch college finances – some pump priming funding would be welcomed to get activity off the ground.
- One college specifically wanted to create Learning Factory Models that allow students to conduct R&D in collaboration – very similar to what happens in the Netherlands.
- Northern Irish colleges were particularly impressive in their approach. One had invested in five innovation centres with staff employed to assist businesses to develop new products and services.

Has FEIF helped?

- Those in receipt of FEIF pilot funding feel 'immersed' in innovation support for business.
- One college commented that 'colleges are now seen as a partner for innovation in the city'.
- Innovation support working well where colleges have developed productive partnerships with businesses to develop and deliver innovative processes and products having lasting impact on the economy.
- The 'by-product' of these strong partnerships is that these initiatives will also benefit the development of students and staff. Moves the employer-college partnership away from the purely transactional.

Shifting mindset

- Some colleges still see this work as purely transactional and haven't had the mindset shift that many of those who've been fully immersed and supported either through FEIF funding or by other organisations and agencies i.e. Gatsby Foundation, AoC, Innovate UK, Invest Northern Ireland and others.

- The model for this type of engagement is very much sitting with businesses and looking at their whole operation and identifying ways that they can improve and increase productivity through innovation of products, services or processes. Any other benefits (increased work placement opportunities, student recruitment etc) are a bonus.

College support to businesses

If your college 'provides dedicated staff to work with/offer growth support to specific local businesses/SMEs' – what type of support do they offer?

Support type	Percentage
Information dissemination/knowledge transfer	86%
Advice on local workforce gaps and training needs	83%
Specific industry sector technical level support	66%
Support with recruiting new staff	63%
Advice on business planning	26%
Other (please specify)	20%
Advice on applying for business loans and/or external business grants	14%

Percentage of colleges

Provision of workshops in how to incorporate generative AI into business processes, carrying out organisational needs analyses, niche training on use of robotics, industry standard software, podcasting, 3D printing, EV training, CCAD and product testing.

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Funding for staff roles

- This was one of the standout barriers to developing this area of work in the 2020 survey.
- Those in receipt of FEIF pilot funding have been able to recruit staff.
- Others are looking at alternative routes.
- In Northern Ireland, colleges have sought funding through Department for Economy funded grants.
- Some English colleges are using the 3% innovative provision part of the Adult Skills Fund – East Kent College Group have done some fantastic things with theirs.
- Other colleges are using core budget, but this means that staff have income generating targets to meet.
- Some have used LEP, SDF and LSIF in England – although these are now ended.
- A couple said they were using UKSPF – interested to know how they've used this.

Technology and equipment access offered by colleges

- 95% of respondents are investing in new and emerging technology and equipment as part of main college provision.
- Of those, 81% offer access to and training for state-of-the-art technical equipment to local businesses and SMEs.

Some examples are:

- Construction and engineering (CNC and agricultural, mechatronics, air source heat pumps and electrical systems)
- Agricultural technology (robotic diary, fish trials, vertical farming, digital innovation and agricultural vehicle simulators)
- Digital (including AI)
- Health and social care (simulated wards, new patient care and assistive technologies
- Professional cookery (including use of commercial production kitchen and access to food innovation specialists)
- Media and creative industries (access to production facilities for television, film and music.

Additionally, more niche provision, e.g. marine technology, marine simulation suites, photonics and rail technology.

Other services and support offered

Most commonly requested areas that businesses ask colleges for help with are:

- New product or service development.
- Businesses processes such as advice on PAYE, employment law, skills gaps analysis. services, leadership and management, workforce development and staff recruitment.
- Advice on funding and project collaboration opportunities.
- Digital transformation and the use of AI.
- Use of college meeting spaces.

Who are colleges collaborating with

Which organisations does your college work with locally/regionally regarding support to local business growth and innovation?

Organisation	Percentage
Local Chamber of Commerce	93%
Local Authority	90%
Other FE colleges	90%
Universities	84%
Local economic growth organisations	63%
Local Institutes of Technology	49%
Mayoral Combined Authority	45%
Other (please specify)	16%
Catapult	15%

Percentage of colleges
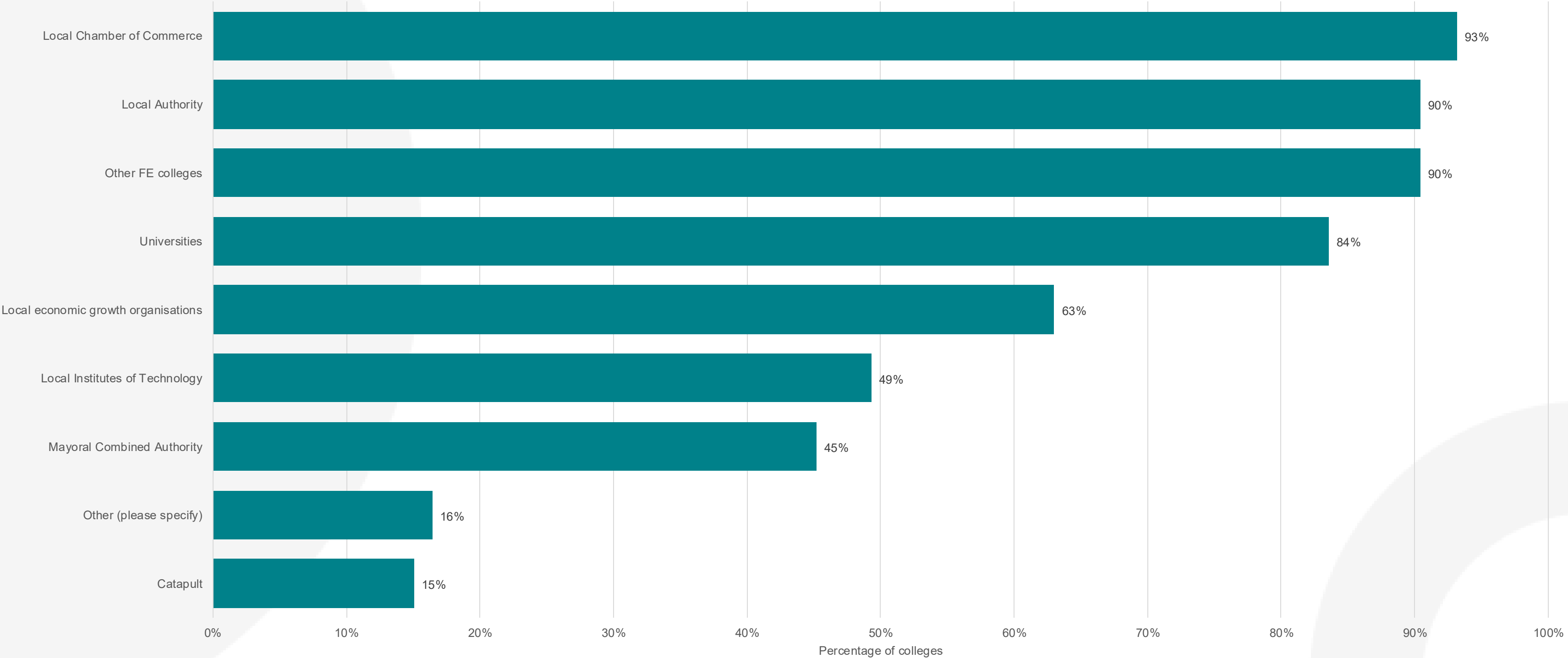
Measuring impact

- Lots of tried and tested approaches – employer feedback, repeat collaboration patterns, well-developed employer engagement strategies with objectives and KPIs.
- Some take this further looking at and measuring growth of local SMEs, growth of higher skilled jobs locally and investment and demand by SMEs in training and development for new technologies.
- One specific example where a college has co-created a new 'entry course with local NHS partner and are measuring the recruitment and retention of NHS employees graduating from the training.
- Another is measuring the level of tangible outcomes of new products, processes and CPD that they have successfully supported businesses with.
- Some of those in receipt of FEIF have engaged external evaluators.
- Some acknowledge that they are not currently measuring impact or not in any robust or meaningful way and that this is something they would like to improve and develop.

- There was an ask of funding to support evaluation of activity and impact as this is often an additional responsibility for already busy staff.

If your college has engaged in collaborative research in the past five years, who have been your research partners?
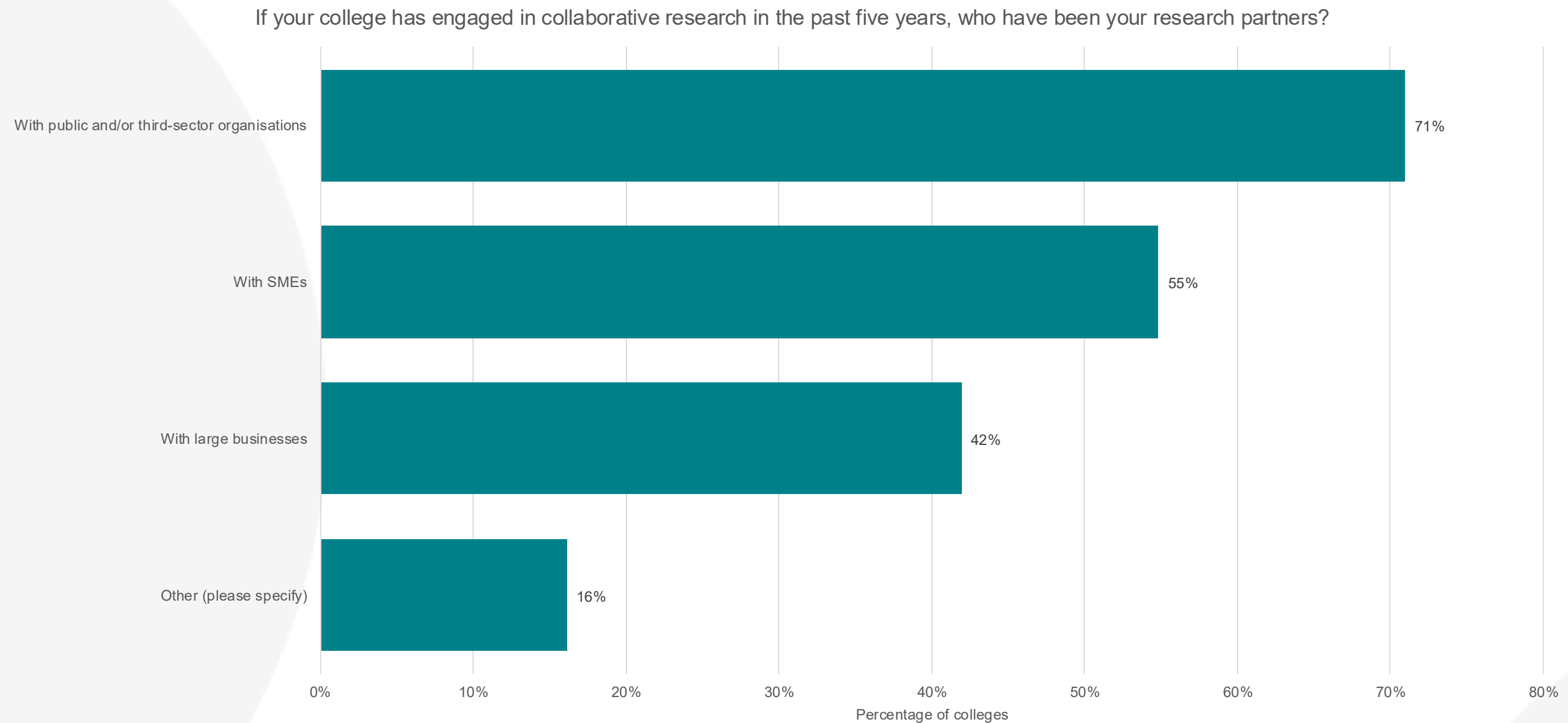
Other research partners include:
- Government departments
- Other development agencies e.g. Invest Northern Ireland, Skills Development Scotland
- Local community and voluntary sector organisations
- Nesta's Innovation Growth Lab

Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTPs)

Are you aware of Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTPs)?

No
32%

Yes
68%
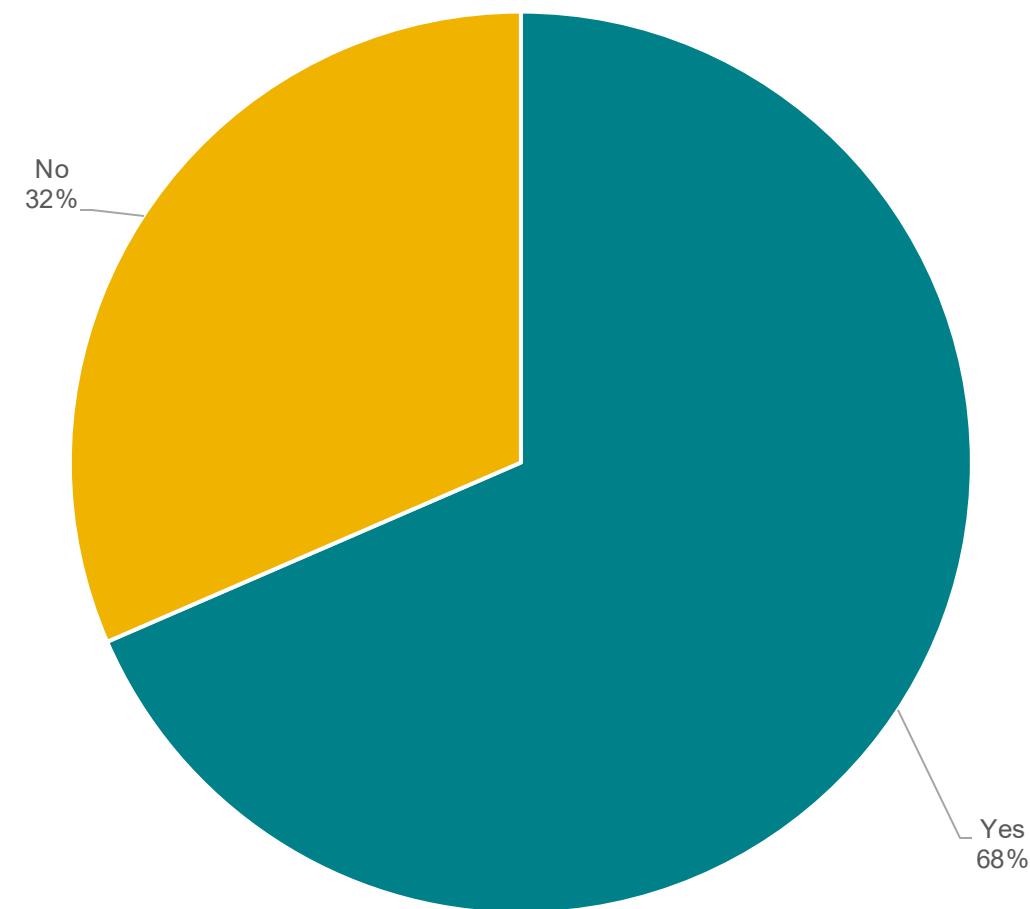
Of those that are aware of KTPs, just over half would consider applying for funding.

Potentially an area that colleges would appreciate support for/with??

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Other CPD

- Industrial updating entitlement
- Staff participation in employer advisory boards
- Co-creation and co-delivery of specialist provision with employers
- Membership of key professional bodies and sector-based associations

Staff CPD asks

- Funding to back-fill when staff are on secondment or engaging in industrial upskilling (including funding for travel and accommodation where necessary).

- Central database so that businesses are not contacted lots of different colleges at the same time.

- Central register of industry connections willing to support/provide upskilling (local authorities used to have these but colleges now have to buy sometimes unreliable data from data companies.

- Suggestion of an online programme with guest speakers from different industries providing briefing session workshops to staff on key challenges, trends and opportunities in different sectors.

- National level sectoral skills networks – some exist regionally e.g. South West colleges have a network with NHS employers for health workforce and training planning.

Research collaboration

- 43% of respondents said their college had engaged in collaborative research in the past five years.

- Majority collaborated with public or third-sector organisations. 55% undertook research with SMEs and 42% with larger companies.

- Some great examples such as the land-based college creating a Sustainable Farmer Network which supports farms to become net zero, or City of Glasgow College's research into Oxygen Depletion in Enclosed Spaces which won a Queen's Anniversary Prize for Further and Higher Education.

Business incubation

- Potential area for development and some support?

- Only 9 colleges responding said that they formally supported business incubation as a strategic objective.

- Some colleges are offering start-up and incubation spaces for students but only a few are offering this to local SMEs and start-ups

If your college were to look at increasing support for innovation for local businesses and SMEs, please indicate the level to which the potential barriers listed below could pose an issue for the college?

Barrier	Not an issue at all	Minor issue	Moderate issue	Major issue	Don't know
Lack of capital funding to develop innovation spaces/buildings	1%	6%	6%	88%	
Lack of funded support for high-spec, state of the art equipment	4%	7%	12%	77%	
Allowing FE teaching staff time alleviation to develop research activity	3%	6%	15%	75%	1%
Lack of financial support to fund specific business innovation account managers		7%	21%	72%	
Lack of staff time to engage	1%	7%	21%	71%	
Difficulty in recruiting teaching staff for HE programmes with research profile	3%	7%	30%	52%	8%
Lack of freedom to change curricula to meet business needs	4%	25%	41%	30%	
Other (please specify)	50%			25%	25%
Lack of in-house knowledge/expertise	3%	35%	44%	18%	
Unable to financially support staff CPD for degree/post-grad/professional qualifications	17%	29%	38%	17%	
Lack of knowledge in how to access innovation/research funding grants	10%	27%	48%	15%	
Lack of demand from businesses for college services	24%	32%	36%	6%	3%
Lack of interest from staff in undertaking further higher qualifications and/or developing research	21%	45%	27%	5%	1%
Lack of understanding of local business need or of national and international innovation trends	32%	42%	22%	3%	1%
Poorly developed relationship with local stakeholder organisations (LEP, Local Authority, Chambers of Commerce etc)	74%	22%	1%	3%	

Percentage of colleges

■ Not an issue at all ■ Minor issue ■ Moderate issue ■ Major issue ■ Don't know

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AoC's FE innovation network group

- First meeting earlier this year.

- UK wide – would welcome Welsh representation.

- Aim: to provide networking opportunities for collaboration and to share practice and update on initiatives.

Thank you

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Please complete this short survey ...

Innovate UK

Summary & Next Steps

Rosie Peacock

Innovate UK

UKRI Innovate UK