



Evaluation of the Strategic Development Fund II

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The Strategic Development Fund 2 project was led by TEC Partnership and supported by Department for Education funding.

It was delivered by the partners shown below.

**HULL
COLLEGE**

Wyke
6TH FORM COLLEGE

BISHOP BURTON
College



WILBERFORCE
sixth form college



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This report presents the findings from an independent evaluation of the Hull and East Yorkshire Local Enterprise Partnership (HEY LEP) Strategic Development Fund 2 (SDF2) project, as commissioned by TEC Partnership. The evaluation was completed by researchers from York Consulting LLP (YCL) between February and May 2023.
2. The SDF2 project, funded by the Department for Education (DfE), was designed to help Further Education (FE) training providers in the area meet the growing skills needs linked to decarbonisation, whilst also supporting digital innovation. TEC Partnership led the consortium of six FE providers. The project aimed to support the low carbon and digital skills offer in the HEY LEP area through facilitating collaboration amongst providers and with employers, and investing in equipment, staff training and curriculum development.

Project delivery

3. Overall, project management was strong and effective. This was despite challenges around timescales and recruitment, as well as a change of project manager at the mid-point of the project. Project management staff and partners worked hard to keep underspend to a minimum, reprofiling where necessary to achieve this. Whilst the contract period ran until the end of March, DfE allowed the delivery of some activities up to May 26th, provided activities were committed by March 31st with clear accrual plans. This enabled the delivery of planned activities that, for various reasons, could not take place within the contract timescale. Without this allowance, project underspend would have likely been significantly higher.
4. The projects had various output targets related to the production and use of new resources, learners making use of new industry standard equipment, teaching staff undertaking Career and Professional Development (CPD) and employer engagement, amongst others. Based on final outputs data, the low carbon strand performed well, surpassing most of the 8 target outputs and achieving 4 additional outputs not specified in the initial bid. The digital project achieved or almost achieved most of its 10 target outputs.
5. Collaboration and resource sharing was facilitated by two subgroups – low carbon and digital. Other cross-partnership activities involved commissioning of LMI research and resource development as well as coordination of a showcase event and development of consistent SDF2 branding and marketing.
6. Partner activities across both the low carbon and digital projects focussed on investments in industry standard equipment, curriculum development and staff CPD. Investment in equipment has supported the development of new and upgraded courses, and staff training predominantly involved upskilling staff in using the newly purchased equipment and software.
7. The SDF2 projects were informed by and involved a variety of employer engagement activities, from employer forums gathering insight into training needs to showcase events and sector specific careers days.

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8. A key challenge cited by all delivery staff was the delivery timescales of the project. Short project timescales and the timing of contracting led to issues which in many cases limited project activity. Delays to equipment orders meant some training and events could either not take place or took place during the accrual period up to May 26th. The view amongst partners was that a longer project timeline, aligned with the academic year, would have supported more effective delivery of project activities.

Planned outcomes

9. The SDF2 project supported the development of a range of new courses and significant upgrades to existing courses linked to low carbon technologies and digital innovation. These are predominantly short courses at level 3 designed to be standalone or a module within a wider qualification.
10. Overall, feedback from partners suggests that SDF2 has added significant value to the development of low carbon and digital provision in the HEY LEP area.

Conclusions and recommendations

11. Overall, the SDF2 project has been successful in meeting its aims of building FE capacity to meet local skills needs, introducing digital innovation and new low carbon technologies and strengthening collaboration between FE, other providers and employers.
12. The delivery model has been effective and in particular helped with bidding, DfE communication and claims. Governance and project management arrangements worked well. Despite challenging timescales and a delayed start, partners have delivered most planned activities and completed capital expenditure.
13. The additionality of the project is high. Feedback from delivery staff indicated a high level of additionality for the project, with suggestions that limited or slower progress would have been made in enhancing low carbon and digital provision in its absence.
14. The project has also performed well against the SDF2 critical success factors regarding collaboration and strategic focus (as outlined by DfE), with progress also made in relation to efficiencies.

Recommendations

15. The delivery of future projects of a similar nature should consider the following recommendations:
 - **Collaboration:** Starting collaborative activities earlier in the project timeframe to maximise effectiveness.
 - **Claims and compliance:** Provision of clear guidance and support to partners around evidence requirements early on in the process.
 - **Governance:** Establishing an operational group below the strategic steering group to support collaboration.

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- **Employer engagement:** Establishing an employer reference group to gain strategic employer input.

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report details findings from an independent evaluation of the Hull and East Yorkshire Local Enterprise Partnership (HEY LEP) Strategic Development Fund 2 (SDF2) project, as commissioned by TEC Partnership. The evaluation was completed by researchers from York Consulting LLP (YCL) between February and May 2023.
- 1.2 The SDF2 project, funded by the Department for Education (DfE), was designed to help Further Education (FE) training providers in the area meet the growing skills needs linked to decarbonisation, whilst also supporting digital innovation. Involving six FE providers and led by TEC Partnership, the project aimed to support the low carbon and digital skills offer in the HEY LEP area through facilitating collaboration amongst providers and with employers, and investing in equipment, staff training and curriculum development. The six FE providers involved were:
- Bishop Burton College.
 - East Riding College.
 - Humberside Engineering Training Association (HETA).
 - Hull College.
 - Wilberforce Sixth Form College.
 - Wyke Sixth Form College.
- 1.3 The evaluators would like to thank everyone who agreed to be consulted for the purposes of the evaluation. Thanks are also due to the TEC Partnership project management team for their support and assistance throughout the work.

Methodology

- 1.4 The purpose of the evaluation was to assess the effectiveness and initial impact of the HEY LEP SDF2 project. Evaluation activity involved reviewing project documentation and management information (MI), as well as consulting with project management staff and delivery staff at each of the six partners (FE providers) involved in the project.

Document & MI review

- 1.5 Documents and MI reviewed for the evaluation included:
- The project bid document.
 - Service Level Agreements (SLA) and contract change requests for each partner.
 - Project level monitoring data.
 - Partner delivery plans for 3 years - the project year and two subsequent years.
 - Steering meeting minutes and board updates.
 - Low carbon and digital sub-group meeting minutes.

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Fieldwork

- 1.6 Project management staff were consulted to gain an initial understanding of project progress and performance, as well as delivery challenges and facilitators. In total, the evaluation team spoke to seven members of the TEC Partnership project management team.
- 1.7 Feedback from project partners was also sought, including the delivery lead at each partner and other staff involved in project delivery. Table 1.1 shows numbers of staff interviewed at each partner.

Table 1.1: Partner delivery staff interviewed

Partner (FE providers)	Staff interviewed
Bishop Burton College	3
East Riding College	1
HETA	2
Hull College	4
Wilberforce College	2
Wyke College	4
Total	16

- 1.8 Due to project timescales and the need to prioritise delivery, partners were unable to share employer contact details for the evaluation.

2 PROJECT DESIGN

2.1 The project involved six FE providers in the HEY LEP area (Bishop Burton College, East Riding College, HETA, Hull College, Wilberforce Sixth Form College, and Wyke Sixth Form College), with TEC Partnership acting as the lead partner and bid applicant. The project was focussed on developing education and skills provision linked to two sectors, identified in the HEY LEP area as ‘emerging innovation and growth potential sectors’, namely, low carbon technologies and digital¹.

Context and aims

2.2 The wider Humber region was reported to be the UK’s most carbon intensive industrial region, with 23% of the Humber’s economy and 1 in 10 jobs depending on energy intensive industries, meaning the transition to net zero is a key priority². A considerable amount of work towards net zero is already underway or planned. For example:

- The Yorkshire and Humber Climate Action plan provides a detailed framework for change, outlining a widescale plan of how to ensure net zero is achieved in line with government ambitions. This set out several recommendations reaching into sectors such as energy and health³.
- HEYLEP operates at the centre of the campaign to drive down emissions, working through international ports to capitalise on renewable energy¹, as well as aspiring to become the world’s first net zero carbon cluster⁴.
- The Zero Carbon Humber Partnership recognises the need to develop low carbon skills within the region to ensure a sustainable transition to net zero⁵. Similarly, the East Coast Cluster initiatives aim to create and support an average of 25,000 jobs per year between 2023 and 2050, as decarbonisation projects are launched⁶.
- Within the East Coast Cluster, several diverse projects have been shortlisted as part of both the Net Zero Teesside and Zero Carbon Humber initiatives⁴. This includes industrial carbon capture, low-carbon hydrogen production, negative emissions power, and power with carbon capture.

2.3 The government’s Net Zero Review⁷ talks of a “huge challenge” in meeting the skill requirements needed to make the transfer to net zero possible. It adds that skill pools will need to “grow significantly to meet demand over the coming years.”

¹ HEY LEP (2021) Economic Growth and Workforce Wellbeing Strategy 2021- 2016. Available here: <https://heylep.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/FINAL-HEY-LEP-Economic-Growth-Workforce-Wellbeing-Strategy-2021-2026.pdf>

² HEY LEP (2021) Humber Estuary plan. Available here: <https://heylep.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Humber-Estuary-Plan-final-draft-Jan-2021.pdf>

³ <https://yorksandhumberclimate.org.uk/sites/default/files/Climate%20Action%20Plan.pdf>

⁴ [Humber Industrial Cluster Plan](#)

⁵ <https://www.zerocarbonhumber.co.uk/>

⁶ <https://eastcoastcluster.co.uk/#ecc>

⁷ [Review of Net Zero - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

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- 2.4 The SDF2 project aimed to address this challenge through:
- Building Further Education (FE) capacity to meet local skills priorities.
 - Introducing digital innovation and new low carbon engineering technologies.
 - Developing strong working relationships and collaboration between FE, other providers and employers in the planning and delivery of skills provision.

Key features

- 2.5 The SDF2 project was made up of two, interlinked project strands – low carbon and digital. Within each strand, capital and revenue funding were used to meet the above aims through the following activities:
- Staff training and Career and Professional Development (CPD), both internal and through external providers or employers.
 - Investment in industry standard equipment for use by learners.
 - Development of new courses and upgrades to existing courses, including joint curriculum development.
 - Employer engagement in curriculum development and supporting learners with career planning.
 - Collaborative intelligence gathering around Labour Market Information and employer needs.
- 2.6 Activities delivered at the partner level had different areas of focus depending on the priorities of the FE providers. Table 2.1 summarises these areas of focus across the six partners.

Table 2.1: Partner activities

Partner (FE provider)	Project	Focus
Bishop Burton	LC, D	Land-based electric vehicles & virtual reality
East Riding College	LC, D	Low carbon manufacturing technologies & virtual reality
HETA	LC, D	Low carbon manufacturing, hydrogen, carbon capture
Hull College	LC	Green technologies, electric vehicles, drones
Wilberforce College	LC, D	Low carbon engineering & net zero
Wyke College	LC, D	Digital skills

Source: SDF2 funding bid. Note: LC=low carbon, D=digital

- 2.7 The project had the following governance and project management arrangements:
- Project management and administration provided by TEC Partnership, comprising a project manager, project administrator and claims and compliance officers.
 - Delivery leads at each of the six partners.
 - A steering group, comprising partner delivery leads, project management staff, and representatives from Hull Chamber of Commerce and the HEY LEP. The steering group held monthly, online meetings chaired by the project manager.

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- 2.8 The budget for the project was £2,719,168, split across the two strands and comprising capital and revenue funding. As shown in Table 2.2, the budget was heavily weighted towards the low carbon project.

Table 2.2: Project funding

	Low carbon	Digital
Capital	£1,143,130	£353,136
Revenue	£1,071,841	£151,061
Total	£2,214,971	£504,197

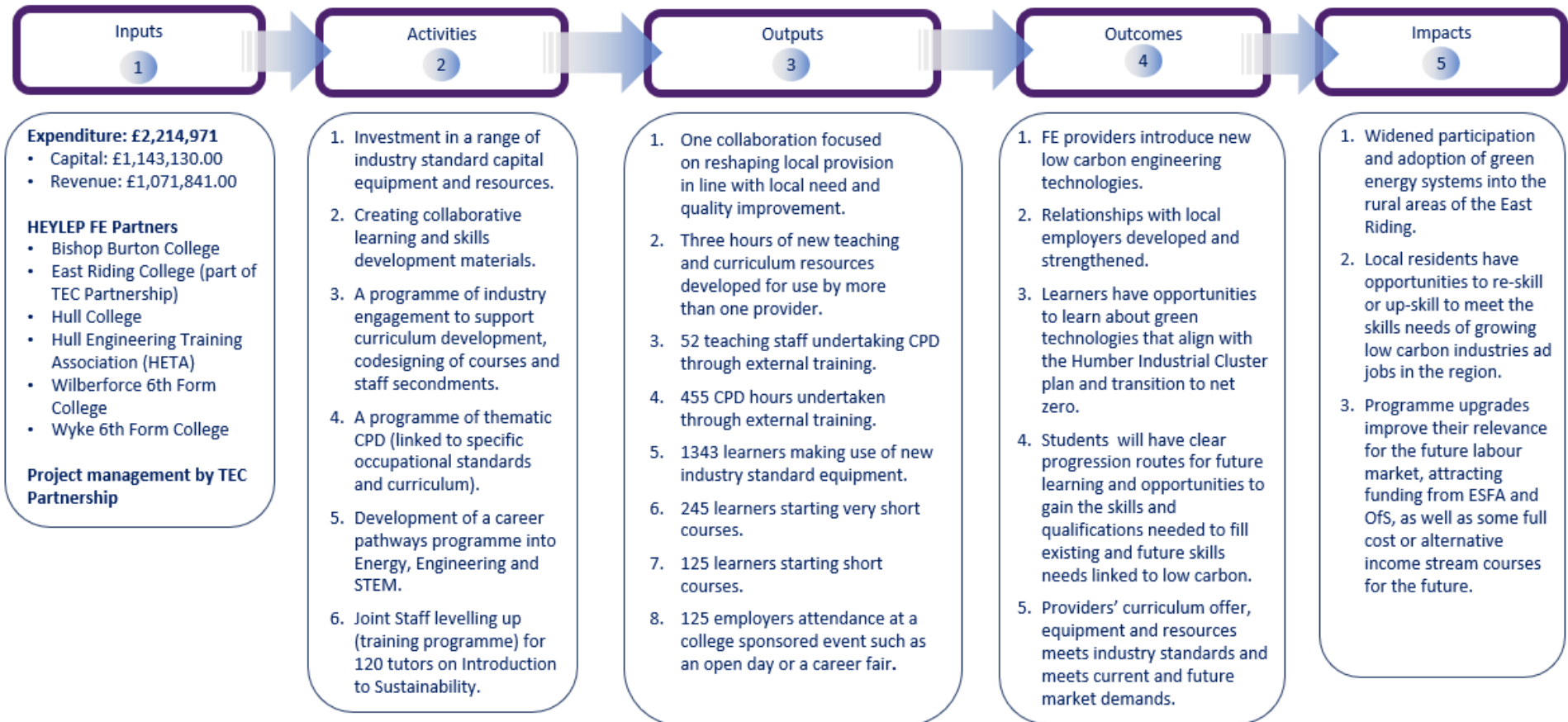
Source: SDF2 management information.

Theory of change

- 2.9 A Theory of Change for each project was developed, outlined in Figures 2.1 and 2.2. This helped evaluators to understand the project's intended mechanism to achieving the longer-term ambitions.

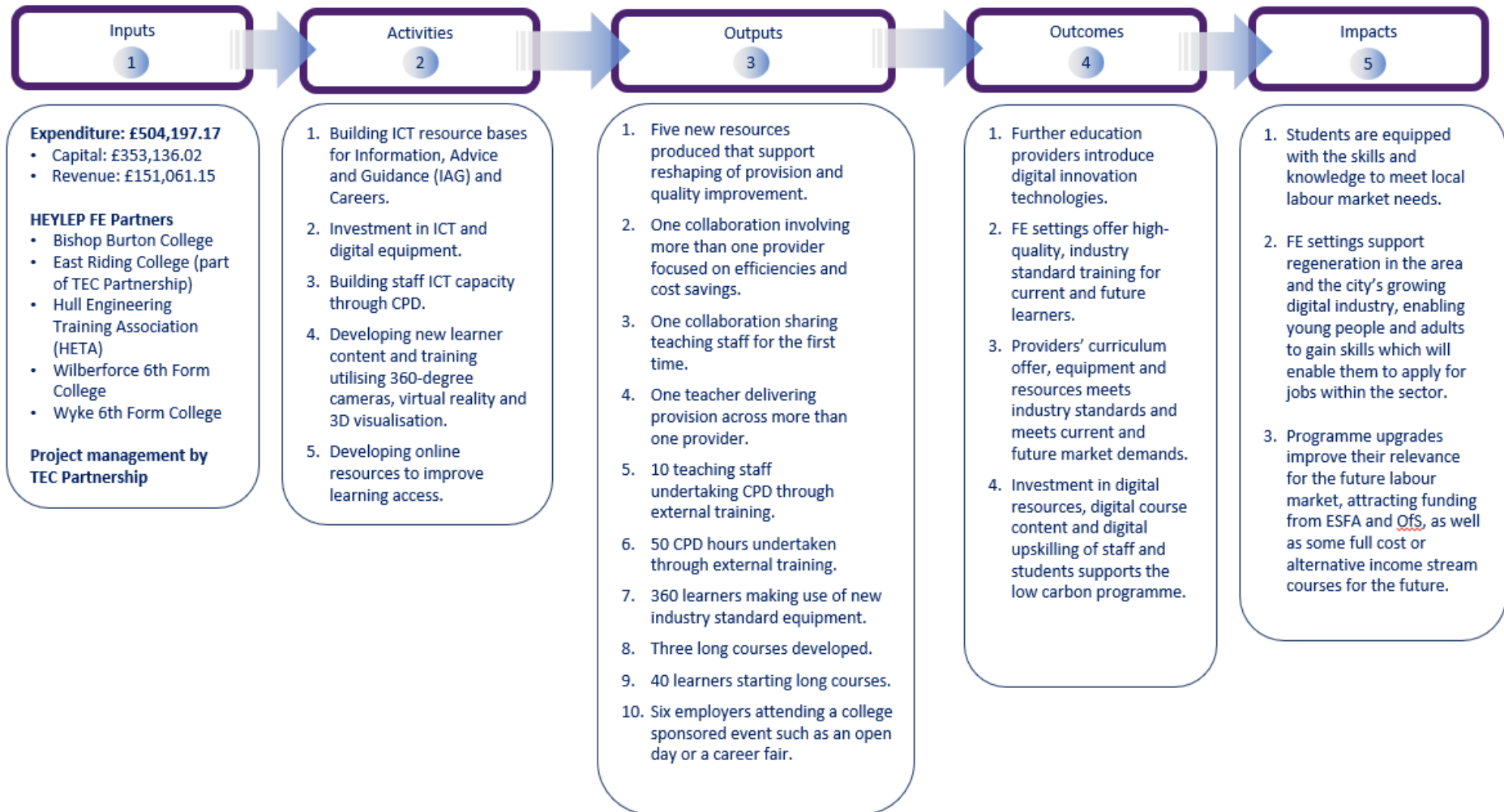
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Figure 2.1: Theory of Change – low carbon



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Figure 2.2: Theory of Change - digital



3 PROJECT DELIVERY

- 3.1 This section details how the SDF2 project was delivered, including fund management, collaborative partner activities and employer engagement, as well as a summary of key challenges faced. Despite there being separate carbon and digital strands, partners and delivery staff generally spoke about and viewed delivery as one project, so this is reflected in how project activities are described below.
- 3.2 The project timeframe was August 2022 to end of March 2023. However, DfE allowed the delivery of some activities up to May 26th 2023, provided activities were committed by March 31st with clear accrual plans. This enabled the delivery of planned activities that, for various reasons, could not take place within the contract timescale.

Fund management

- 3.3 The project was overseen by a project steering group comprising the project manager as chair, delivery leads from each of the six partners, members of the TEC partnership executive management team, and representatives from Hull and Humber Chamber of Commerce and HEY LEP. Operational management and support were provided by TEC Partnership staff and, in the latter half of the project, external consultants (further details on this change are outlined under ‘Project management’ below).
- 3.4 Overall, fund management was effective, with project management staff and partners motivated to keep underspend to a minimum and reprofiling where necessary to achieve this. As shown in Table 3.1, 98.43% of allocated funding was spent.

Table 3.1: SDF2 Financial Summary

Project and funding type	Allocation	Total spend	% spend against allocation
Low carbon: capital	£1,143,130.50	£1,143,130.50	100.00
Low carbon: revenue	£1,071,841.17	£1,032,378.19	96.32
Digital: capital	£353,136.02	£352,388.29	99.79
Digital: revenue	£151,061.15	£149,352.15	98.87
Total	£2,719,168.84	2,677,249.13	98.43

Source: SDF2 MI, June 2023.

Partnership bid process

- 3.5 Work with partners to develop the bid began in May 2022. Meetings between partners and the project team helped to identify the two areas of focus – low carbon and digital – which built on areas developed through SDF1 and were informed by the priority sectors highlighted through HEY LEP analysis.
- 3.6 Some partners noted that the relatively short bid timescales limited opportunities for them to consult with employers when preparing their contributions to the bid,

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meaning their plans were not as informed by insight into employer need as they otherwise might have been.

- 3.7 It was also felt by some that the level of detail required in the bid was overly burdensome and that the scrutiny of certain aspects during the clarification cycle was excessive, meaning this phase of the bid process took longer than anticipated. Some partner staff suggested that greater advice and guidance from DfE around bid requirements at this early stage could have resulted in a more streamlined process for the project management team and partners.
- 3.8 In part due to the clarification process taking longer than expected, contracts were not issued to partners until late September 2022, which further shortened the project delivery timescale. Whilst most partners had started some initial preparation work prior to this point, there was a limit to what planning and preparation work could be done without contracts in place. Most partners commented that formally starting the project during the summer would have better aligned with college planning cycles and facilitated more considered preparation.

Project management

- 3.9 Overall, partners viewed project management as effective. This is despite noted challenges around timescales and recruitment, as well as a change of project manager at the mid-point of the project.
- 3.10 It was intended that a claims and compliance officer would be recruited on a short-term contract to support project delivery. This post could not be filled after several recruitment rounds, meaning this area was under resourced at the start of the project. Whilst existing TEC Partnership staff temporarily made up the shortfall in capacity, in December 2022 an external consultant was contracted to fulfil the claims and compliance role. At the same time, a consultant project manager was also appointed due to the initial project manager moving to a different role.
- 3.11 Monthly project steering group meetings were well attended. However, a few steering group members noted that, whilst all partners tended to be represented at most meetings, attendance by senior staff was less consistent. This had some limited impact on strategic decision making and blurred operational and strategic issues. It was suggested that for future projects, a two tiered operational and strategic board may help to mitigate this issue.

Claims and compliance processes

- 3.12 Claims and compliance processes were identified as a challenge by stakeholders for varied reasons:
- Amongst partners, there were differing levels of experience and capabilities in completing returns and submitting the necessary evidence, alongside a shortage of relevant administrative staff in some instances.
 - Related to the above, stakeholders felt that there was initially a lack of clarity around claims and evidence requirements. It is likely that this was in part a result of under resourcing in this area due to the previously mentioned

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recruitment difficulties, as well as the inevitable learning curve of partners with less grant experience. By the latter half of the project, there appeared to be greater clarity amongst partners around what was required.

- Across all stakeholders, the level of detail required in claims forms was viewed as overly burdensome, taking up significant time and resource which it was felt could have been better spent planning and delivering project activities. However, project management staff welcomed the requirement to only submit 3 major returns to DfE as partially mitigating this challenge.

Change requests

3.13 Contract change requests were submitted around the mid-point of the project to reallocate predicted underspend or account for predicted overspend. These change requests were largely necessary due to:

- One partner not being able to deliver planned staff CPD within the project timescale.
- Changes to equipment costs compared to the initial bid.
- More staff time than initially anticipated being required for CPD and/or curriculum development.
- Recruitment challenges which meant that planned staff appointments did not take place.

3.14 Across most partners, the threshold for expenditure changes requiring DfE approval was viewed as too low (£5,000). Partners felt that this limited their autonomy for decision making and caused unnecessary delays to project delivery, particularly as approval of change requests in many cases took 6 – 7 weeks. Stakeholders suggested that a higher threshold, such as those set for European Social Fund (ESF) contracts, would better reflect the fluidity of the process and changes that are often made during project delivery.

Outputs

Low carbon

3.15 As shown in Table 3.2, the low carbon project met or surpassed most of its target outputs and achieved a number of additional outputs not specific in the initial bid.

3.16 Significantly more hours of CPD were undertaken through external training than initially anticipated (879 against a target of 455). However, these hours were spread across slightly fewer members of staff than originally intended (47 staff against a target of 52). The target for learners making use of new industry standard equipment was surpassed by some margin (1,527 against a target of 1,343), as was the target for learners starting very short courses (965 against a target of 245). These outputs were achieved despite challenging circumstances, with many partners reporting delays to equipment delivery and difficulties in planning for staff CPD and learner courses to take place within the short project timeframe.

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- 3.17 No new teaching and curriculum resources were developed for use by more than one provider, despite a target of 3. However, 6 collaborations were established focussed on developing curriculum resources for use by more than one provider. This was an additional output not outlined in the initial project bid, and indicates that, whilst these shared curriculum resources were not completed within the project timeframe, collaborative work towards this aim has begun.
- 3.18 The output target for number of employers attending a college sponsored event was not achieved (0 against a target of 125). However, 90 employers were consulted on their training needs to inform curriculum and course development, which was an additional output not specified in the initial bid.
- 3.19 Another additional output achieved through the low carbon project was the production of 5 new resources that support researching of provision and quality improvement.

Table 3.2: Low carbon project target and achieved outputs.

Output	Target	Achieved
Number of collaborations focused on reshaping local provision in line with local need and quality improvement.	1	2
Number of new resources produced that support reshaping of provision and quality improvement.*	0	5
Number of hours of new teaching and curriculum resources developed for use by more than one provider.	3	0
Number of collaborations focused on developing curriculum for use by more than one provider.*	0	6
Number of teaching staff undertaking CPD through external training.	52	47
Number of CPD hours undertaken through external training.	455	879
Number of teaching staff delivering cascade training or providing peer-to-peer support to colleagues.	0	3
Number of learners that made use of new industry standard equipment.	1,343	1,527
Number of very short courses developed.	0	9
Number of learners starting very short courses.	245	965
Number of learners starting short courses.	125	149
Employer engagement- number of employers attendance at a college sponsored event such as an open day or a career fair.	125	0
Employer engagement- number of employers consulted on their training needs to inform curriculum/ course development.*	0	90

Source: SDF2 claims data, April 2023. Note: * not specified as a KPI in contract.

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Digital

- 3.20 The digital project achieved or almost achieved most of its target outputs. As with the low carbon project, partners faced challenges related to equipment delays and short delivery timescales, which impacted course development and staff CPD. For example, one partner had an ambition of provide digital skills training for all staff. Whilst they were not able to deliver this within the project timeframe due to staff industrial action, the training is still expected to take place during the second half of the summer term.
- 3.21 Several output targets were surpassed, including the number of learners starting long courses (51 against a target of 40), number of teacher staff undertaking CPD through external training (20 against a target of 10) and number of learners making use of new industry standard equipment (1106 against a target of 360). Other output targets were almost met, with 4 new resources produced that support reshaping of provision and quality improvement, against a target of 5.
- 3.22 Only 1 long course was developed against a target of 3. However, it is anticipated that this output will be achieved in the medium term as 2 additional long courses (foundation degrees) have been developed for launch in September 2023.
- 3.23 The activities captured in these output figures are detailed further in the sections below.

Table 3.3: Digital project target and achieved outputs

Output	Target	Achieved
Number of new resources produced that support reshaping of provision and quality improvement.	5	4
Number of collaborations involving more than one provider focused on efficiencies and cost savings (non-provision)	1	1
Number of collaborations sharing teaching staff for the first time.	1	1
Number of teaching staff (full time or part time) delivering provision across more than one provider.	1	1
Number of teaching staff undertaking CPD through external training.	10	20
Number of CPD hours undertaken through external training.	50	80
Number of learners that made use of new industry standard equipment.	360	1106
Number of long courses developed.	3	1
Number of learners starting long courses.	40	51
Employer engagement- number of employers attendance at a college sponsored event such as an open day or a career fair.	6	0

Source: SDF2 claims data, April 2023.

Collaborative activities

3.24 Collaboration and resource sharing was facilitated by two subgroups – low carbon and digital. Other cross-partnership activities involved commissioning of LMI research and resource development as well as coordination of a showcase event and development of consistent SDF2 branding and marketing. Delivery staff commented that the use of Microsoft Teams had been a key facilitator of collaboration and partnership working, as well as project management.

Subgroups

3.25 To facilitate collaboration, subgroups were established for each of the projects made up of delivery leads and other staff from the six partners. Virtual meetings were held monthly from January 2023 and each subgroup had a dedicated Teams channel for sharing information and resources. Partners spoke positively about the subgroups, recognising their value as mechanisms for raising awareness of what courses other providers were developing and for sharing resources and practice. Subgroup meetings were also used to plan the SDF2 collaborative showcase event (further details below).

3.26 Some sharing of resources amongst partners has already taken place, for example, sharing learning materials related to electric vehicles and information about virtual reality software packages. It is intended that all resources developed through the project will be shared amongst the partners upon completion, with this work ongoing at the time of writing.

Commissioned work

- 3.27 HEY LEP also commissioned LMI research to support partners in understanding low carbon labour market and training needs and the landscape regarding digital provision. Commissioned work comprised:
- **A green jobs and skills analysis report:** an analysis of labour market supply and demand and the types of training both being delivered and needed in the future, including training forecasts from Level 2 to Higher Education.
 - **A digital prospectus:** designed for public consumption by employers and residents, detailing all publicly funded local digital education, learning and skills provision.
 - **Digital curriculum intelligence:** linked to the digital prospectus, a separate output providing comprehensive details of provision to be used by publicly funded education, learning and skills providers to help them identify gaps and opportunities.
 - **Training Needs Analysis:** with 60 businesses, focussing on progress towards low carbon and digitisation. Partners provided input to this analysis through suggesting question areas and businesses to involve.
- 3.28 TEC Partnership also worked with an external contractor to develop virtual reality and app-based health and safety training packages, linked to renewable technologies, to be shared amongst all partners.

Collaborative showcase event

A collaborative event was held in May 2023 for partners to showcase the work done through SDF2 to key stakeholders, including employers. The event involved partners presenting equipment purchased through the project (either physically or through images and videos) and highlighting new and/or upgraded areas of curriculum. The event also provided networking opportunities for partner staff, further supporting research and practice sharing within the partnership.

In addition, findings from the commissioned LMI research were shared during the event and a session on the Local Skills Improvement Fund facilitated discussion around next steps for the partnership.

Dedicated SDF2 branding was designed for promoting the event, with presentation and social media templates produced for marketing the event and promoting the project in the future. The HEY LEP marketing team also produced a film of the event to further showcase the project.

- 3.29 Overall, partners recognised the value of collaboration and saw the benefits of further partnership work in the future. However, some also felt that there were limits to the extent of collaboration possible within the current competitive FE model and in light of provider specialisms.
- 3.30 There was recognition amongst the project team that collaborative activities, in terms of establishing the subgroups and commissioning research, could have started earlier. In addition, some planned activities did not happen, such as the joint levelling up training in sustainability. The intention was to use existing TEC Partnership resources to deliver this training to staff across the partnership, however, during the project it became apparent that the resources were not translatable to other partners. The underspend against this activity was used to support other activities, such as Hull College developing low carbon related materials for cross partnership training and CPD for staff who attended the showcase event.

Partner activities

- 3.31 Partner activities across both the low carbon and digital projects focussed on investments in industry standard equipment, curriculum development and staff CPD. Depending on the size of the provider, activities were coordinated by a team of between 2 – 5 staff, including strategic and operational managers.

Capital investment

- 3.32 Ordering of equipment was organised early, with most equipment delivered within the project timeframe. This was a success and happened despite reported delays to delivery caused by global supply chain issues.
- 3.33 Capital investments across both the digital and low carbon projects included:
- Renewable energy technologies: wind, solar, hydrogen, and heat pumps.

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- Electric vehicles and charging stations, including land-based electric vehicles.
- Drones.
- Virtual reality (VR) equipment and 360 cameras.
- Precision manufacturing and machine tooling equipment.
- Equipment to support employer engagement.
- IT equipment for learners (PCs and laptops).

Curriculum development

- 3.34 The above equipment supported the development of new and upgraded courses, which are detailed further in the next chapter: Planned outcomes. For most partners, a mixture of external consultants and internal staff contributed to developing the courses and producing the necessary resources and materials. Where external consultants were used, contracting arrangements and relationships appear to have worked well.
- 3.35 For some partners, course development took longer than anticipated, either because of delays to equipment delivery, difficulties in finding additional staff time to dedicate to curriculum development or an initial underestimation of the amount of work involved.

Drone technology course development: Hull College

Employer focus groups conducted by Hull College revealed significant use of drone technology within the construction industry, for example, monitoring of construction sites, site security, and surveying.

The college worked with a third party – Drone Pilot Academy – who offered advice on capital purchases and course development. This collaboration helped to identify that there was a gap in the market for Level 3 drone qualifications incorporating the license certificates that are a requirement for drone use.

Following recommendations from Drone Pilot Academy, the college purchased: three small drones, two intermediate drones and one, large (over 25kg) drone.

Staff training in drone use was delivered, with 11 staff now qualified to fly drones up to 25kg, including support staff who have had additional training in drone maintenance and repair. Two staff have also gained licenses to fly drones over 25kg.

Equipment purchases and staff training have supported the development of a 10-hour, Level 3 introductory course in drone surveying, which can be delivered as a standalone course or as a bolt-on to existing courses at the college's Institute of Building Technologies. Drone use has wide ranging applications linked to renewable energy technologies, for example, their use in surveying buildings using thermal imaging devices.

College staff commented that without SDF2, the scope of activities would have been much more limited, and the college would have only purchased the smaller drones. It

was felt that the funding had enabled the college to keep pace with rapid technological changes in the construction and engineering industries.

“We’re now running parallel with industry rather than lagging behind.”

Staff training

- 3.36 Staff training has predominantly involved upskilling staff in using the newly purchased equipment and software. Most partners delivered planned staff CPD. However, similar to the challenges faced around curriculum development, some training took place later than planned due to delays in receiving equipment.
- 3.37 At one partner, planned digital skills training for all staff was not able to happen during the project timeframe. This followed a decision by the college to prioritise learner contact time over staff development activities, to make up for lost learning hours due to industrial action.

Virtual reality (VR) platform development: Bishop Burton College

Bishop Burton College has started developing a virtual reality platform through which it is envisioned that learning will be delivered across a range of subject areas. Through SDF2, the college purchased the necessary equipment and software licences and trained staff and learners.

The college worked with an external company to develop the VR platform, with certain packages like induction materials bought ‘off the shelf’ whilst others were developed as bespoke learning environments, for example, creating a VR environment for learning about land-based electric vehicles.

Twelve ‘Digital Champions’ were trained in the software and cascaded learning to other staff, helping departments consider how VR can be used in their courses. These staff have also delivered VR training packages to 900 learners, which include:

- An introduction to the platform.
- Creation of an avatar.
- Using the headset.
- Accessing the platform from home.
- Taster experiences, such as standing on top of a wind turbine.

College staff reported that students have given positive feedback on the platform and suggested ideas for how it could be used to support learning on their courses.

“Other students are seeing it being used, there’s quite a buzz about it around the college.”

The VR platform was viewed as having wide ranging potential, particularly for making curriculum delivery more engaging and inclusive for students with different learning styles.

Employer engagement

- 3.38 The SDF2 projects have been informed by and involved a variety of employer engagement activities. These have included:
- Employer partnerships developed around GPS controlled land-based electric vehicle innovations, through joint-procurement with other colleges (outside of the HEY LEP SDF2 partnership).
 - Developing a more strategic approach to employer engagement, leading to new partnerships.
 - Hosting employer forums and focus groups to gather insight into training needs.
 - A college employer engagement event to showcase the equipment purchased and courses developed, to help employers understand the facilities and provision on offer.
 - Sector specific careers days in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) and green energy, involving employer talks and lunchtime careers fair.
 - Employer involvement in curriculum design.
- 3.39 Whilst some partners commented that the short bid timeframe limited how much employer input there could be into initial project planning, partners' existing relationships and ongoing dialogue with employers appears to have mitigated this challenge and enabled partners to align project activities with employer needs. Some partners reported a high level of interest from employers for the new and upgraded courses developed through SDF2.

Developing a more strategic approach to employer engagement: Wyke College

Wyke College used SDF2 revenue funding to increase capacity within their careers team, enabling the Head of Careers and Skills to take a more strategic, rather than operational, approach to employer engagement. This involved developing new and stronger links with industry through outreach work with employers, with the aim of developing bespoke relationships and projects. A database of the college's employer network was also built, detailing the nature of the relationships they have with each employer.

New relationships built as a result of this work have included:

- A local manufacturing company that is currently developing a research and development site in Hull, with the potential for students to engage in live data analysis projects, work placements and site visits.
- A life sciences company offering summer work placements exclusively to students at Wyke College.

College staff commented that this employer outreach work would not have been possible without the additional revenue funding provided through SDF2.

STEM and green energy careers days: Wilberforce College

After holding a zero-carbon employer event as part of SDF1, Wilberforce College is trialling a new approach to employer events whereby instead of one, large careers fair, a series of smaller, sector specific careers days are held throughout the year. All employer events at the college now also have a low carbon focus. For example, employers are asked to speak about what they are doing for net zero and carbon reduction, regardless of their sector.

Two careers days were organised as part of SDF2 focussed on zero carbon and STEM. The days featured employer talks for students studying subjects relevant to the employer's sector as well as a sector specific mini careers fair at lunchtime, with employers, education and apprenticeship providers involved. These lunchtime stalls provide an opportunity for all teachers and students to engage with the visiting employers.

This approach has served as a catalyst for further engagement between the college and employers. For example, a conversation between a local static caravan manufacturer and an engineering teacher at the STEM careers day led to the company supporting curriculum design through the sharing of live briefs for students to work on, as well as organising a student workplace visit.

Delivery staff commented that this new approach gives students multiple opportunities for engaging with employers throughout the year, helping to build their confidence in these interactions and therefore making them more meaningful than a one-off careers fair. SDF2 has helped to build relationships with new employers, particularly larger employers in the Hull area. In addition, it was thought that the SDF 'badge' had facilitated conversations with employers that may not otherwise have been possible.

Challenges

- 3.40 A key challenge cited by all delivery staff was the delivery timescales of the project. Short project timescales and the timing of contracting led to issues which in many cases limited project activity:
- Difficulties recruiting project staff for short-term contracts (e.g., business development officers), resulting in the use of agency staff at a higher cost or posts not being filled.
 - Insufficient time to place orders and install equipment before planned staff CPD and employer engagement events, with limited flexibility to account for delays caused by multiple global supply chain issues. These delays meant some training and events either could not happen or took place during the accrual period.

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- A project period of September to March not aligning well with provider staff development calendars, with delivery of staff CPD and planning for the year ahead typically taking place in the summer term.
- 3.41 The accrual period up to May 26th greatly mitigated the impact of these challenges on the project. Without this, significant underspend would have been likely. Nonetheless, a longer project timescale that aligned with the academic year would have supported more effective delivery of project activities and further mitigated the above challenges.
- 3.42 Other challenges included the varied experience levels across partners regarding fund management and what were viewed as overly burdensome claims and compliance requirements.

4 PLANNED OUTCOMES

- 4.1 The partnership produced a delivery plan which outlined how the SDF2 investment would be sustained beyond the contracted period. This comprised course delivery plans from each partner, including estimated numbers of starts on courses for the project year plus the subsequent two years. It is intended that partners will monitor the volume of learners on courses developed through SDF2 over the next two years, to demonstrate outcomes from the project. The partnership delivery plan also outlined planned collaborative activities intended to deliver service efficiencies.

Course delivery

- 4.2 Tables 4.1 and 4.2 outline the numbers of new and upgraded courses developed across the low carbon and digital projects, by qualification level. These mostly comprise new courses at level 3, with a smaller number of upgraded level 3 courses and new courses at level 4 and above.

Table 4.1: Planned course delivery – low carbon

	New	Upgraded
Level 3	9	3
Level 4	1	
Level 4/5	2	

Source: HEY LEP SDF2 Delivery Plan.

Table 4.2: Planned course delivery – digital

	New	Upgraded
Level 3	9	2
Level 4	1	

Source: HEY LEP SDF2 Delivery Plan.

- 4.3 Table 4.3 details the nature of the courses developed through SDF2 and the number of anticipated starts over the project year and subsequent two years. These mostly comprise short course provision, designed to be delivered as a standalone course or a module within a wider qualification.
- 4.4 It is anticipated that over the project year and subsequent 2 years, there will be 8511 starts on new courses and 481 starts on upgraded courses developed through SDF2. There is variation in expected volumes of starts across the courses over the next 3 years, which may be related to the nature of the courses or the size of the provider. At the time of writing, learning engagement figures for Year 0 have not been reported. However, output figures (Tables 3.1 and 3.2) showing 965 learners starting very short courses, 149 starting short courses and 51 starting long courses during the project year are encouraging.

Table 4.3: Planned course delivery (estimated starts over three years)

	Low carbon	Digital
Short courses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to land based electric vehicles (180) • Health & safety of land based electric vehicles (180) • Maintenance of land based electric vehicles (180) • Engineering professional updating (130) • Electric vehicle fault diagnosis, repair and replacement (36) • Award in diagnosis and rectification of faults in electric vehicles (150) • Hydrogen energy (560) • Flood management (560) • Industrial Recycling (560) • Sustainability (560) • Introduction to carbon capture* (185) • The production and deployment of hydrogen and other low carbon energy sources* (180) • Industry introduction to low energy welding equipment techniques* (44) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to 3D content creation in Blender (55) • 360 degree camera resources to aid training (40) • Virtual reality programming and rendering (80) • Fibre networks (840) • Drone surveying (840) • Computer Aided Design (CAD) (840) • LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) technology (840) • Artificial intelligence (840) • Digital skills (840) • Introduction to CAD and CAM using CNC machine tooling* (36) • Advanced CAD and CAM using CNC machine tooling* (36)
Long courses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foundation degree in sustainable development (20) • Foundation degree in renewable energy and technology (20) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A-Level computer science (160)

Source: SDF2 course delivery plans. Note: * upgraded provision.

4.6 Other planned outcomes include the development of a new sector-based employer partnership model at one college, building on a new approach to employer engagement work trialled through SDF2.

Service efficiencies

- 4.8 As mentioned previously, some sharing of resources and learning materials has already taken place. It is intended that all materials developed through SDF2 will be shared amongst partners in the near future, with the aim that this will create service efficiencies. Consultations with partners undertaken for this evaluation have highlighted electric vehicles and virtual reality as areas of provision where there appears to be strong potential for sharing of curriculum materials and resources and therefore generating efficiencies.

Added value

- 4.9 Overall, feedback from partners suggests that SDF2 has added significant value to the development of low carbon and digital provision in the HEY LEP area. Partners commented that the funding had:
- De-risked investment in course development and new approaches to employer engagement, particularly as there was no requirement for co-investment and because both capital and revenue funding was available.
 - Enabled faster course development than would otherwise have been possible without the funding.
 - Enabled purchase of industry standard equipment, meaning learners will be better prepared for world of work.
 - Improved their blended learning offer, creating efficiencies for learners and supporting accessibility and widening participation.
 - Supported the modernisation of teaching approaches, particularly around VR and the metaverse.
 - Strengthened collaboration between partners whilst also enabling providers to meet demand in their locality.

“SDF2 has placed us at the heart of the decarbonisation agenda in the Humber. It means we’re part of that conversation and can help to drive that change.”

Summary

- 4.10 The course delivery and service efficiency plans detailed above represent the main outcomes of the project and address the overall project aims, which were:
- **Build FE capacity to meet local skills priorities:** the project addresses local skills priorities as identified by the HEY LEP. Courses developed through the project are understood by stakeholders and providers as addressing local employer need.
 - **Introduce digital innovation and new low carbon engineering technologies:** planned course delivery outlined in Table 4.3 demonstrates that the project has enabled the development of new curriculum focussed on digital innovation and low carbon engineering technologies.

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- **Develop strong working relationships and collaboration between FE, other providers and employers in the planning and delivery of skills provision:** partners reported developing new digital and low carbon provision in dialogue with employers and that employers have expressed interest in staff engaging with the new and upgraded courses. There is also evidence of collaboration between partners in terms of sharing of resources, and a strong potential for collaboration in the future, particularly around virtual reality technology.

5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMENDATIONS

Conclusions

- 5.1 Overall, the SDF2 project has been successful in meeting its aims of building FE capacity to meet local skills needs, introducing digital innovation and new low carbon technologies and strengthening collaboration between FE, other providers and employers.
- 5.2 The delivery model was effective and helped with bidding, communication with DfE and claims. Oversight and management of SDF2 was strong and effective, despite noted challenges around timescales and staffing. Partners have delivered most planned activities and completed capital expenditure, and total underspend was just 1.57%. These are significant achievements given the short timescales and delayed start.
- 5.3 The additionality of the project is high. Feedback from delivery staff suggests that the enhancements to provision made through the project would not have otherwise been possible without the SDF2 project, or that some enhancements may have been made but at a smaller scale and slower pace. Given the wider Humber region's target to reach net zero by 2040 and the scale of work necessary to meet that goal, the SDF2 project has added significant value to the education and skills landscape of the HEY LEP area.
- 5.4 Performance of the project against the SDF2 critical success factors (as outlined by DfE) is summarised below.

Collaboration: achieve strong working relationships between all FE colleges and other providers of FE in the local area, and with employers, in the planning and delivery of skills provision.

- 5.5 This critical success factor has been achieved. Whilst delivery of partner level activities was prioritised in the early stages of the project, regular subgroup meetings (once up and running) have strengthened working relationships between FE providers. Activities such as the employer showcase event and development of Humber HEY Skills Partnership branding have served to formalise this collaboration. There is motivation amongst partners for future collaborative activities, particularly regarding virtual reality technology and electric vehicles.

Strategic focus: ensure a shift in focus to key strategic priorities to address the specific skills and economic challenges and future opportunities for the area, and a commitment to shift the pattern of provision to better meet identified needs and drive knowledge transfer activities and the adoption of innovation.

- 5.6 This has been achieved as well as could be expected within the constraints of the project. Capital and revenue investment provided by SDF2 has enabled FE providers to develop their provision in line with local skills priorities linked to low carbon technologies and digital innovation. The extent to which purchasing decisions could be made strategically based on employer insight was somewhat compromised by the short bid and delivery timescales. However, where this did happen, for example

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with purchases of drone technology or electric vehicles, collaboration with employers was strong and effective.

- 5.7 There is potential for the project to further shape strategic decision making around digital and low carbon skills provision in the area. It is anticipated that the commissioned LMI research, including identifying gaps in digital provision and the low carbon and digital training needs of employers, will inform decision making across the partnership regarding these priority areas.

Efficiency: strive for stronger and more efficient delivery infrastructure across FE providers in the local area.

- 5.8 Progress towards this critical success factor has been made. Strengthened collaboration between FE providers within the HEY LEP area has facilitated resource sharing, which has the potential to generate efficiencies and reduce duplication. There also appears to be strong potential for further resource sharing and joint staff development in the future, particularly in areas such as electric vehicles and virtual reality.

Recommendations

- 5.9 When considering delivery of future projects of a similar nature, particularly the Local Skills Improvement Fund/SDF3, the partnership is advised to consider the following:
- **Collaboration:** Starting collaborative activities earlier in the project timeframe to maximise effectiveness.
 - **Claims and compliance:** Provision of clear guidance and support to partners around evidence requirements early on in the process.
 - **Governance:** Establishing an operational group below the strategic steering group, to support collaboration.
 - **Employer engagement:** Establishing an employer reference group to gain strategic employer input.