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strategy and solutions in a changing world

Report to TEC Partnership:

Evaluation of Greater Lincolnshire Local Enterprise Partnership Strategic Development Fund 2 Programme (as funded by the Department for Education)

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Department
for Education


T:C Partnership
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Sixth Form College


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Institute


Inspire
Education Group


JLC
JOHN LEGGOTT
COLLEGE


Lincoln
College


RISEHOLME
College

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Executive Summary

In 2022, the Department for Education (DfE) launched the second round of its Strategic Development Fund (SDF2) to enable further education (FE) bodies to reshape teaching and training provision and to update facilities in preparation for the roll out of Local Skills Improvement Plans.

Nine FE providers[1] working together across the Greater Lincolnshire Local Enterprise Partnership (GLLEP) area and led by the TEC Partnership, successfully bid for just under £2.73m of funds. This was allocated to three 'projects' – low carbon, digital and the visitor economy – as key sectors in the geography's economy. It was delivered between August 2022 and 31 March 2023 (but with some activity taking place up to the end of May 2023.

Les Newby Associates and Nicky Denison at Wordfern Ltd were commissioned to evaluate the Greater Lincolnshire SDF2 programme, with work taking place between February and May 2023. Our evaluation has assessed how far the GLLEP SDF2 aims and objectives were met and sought to bring out good practice examples and lessons for future delivery.

Our conclusions are summarised below.

Rationale, programme design and management

Conclusion 1: Delivery model – the selected delivery model was sensible, with a central team housed in the TEC Partnership leading overall programme management and nine locally focused delivery institutions.

Conclusion 2: Topic rationale – a strong rationale underpinned selection of low carbon and digital as project areas, aligned to government policy, college priorities and local economic/business needs; and with digital technology used to underpin low carbon advances. Visitor economy was less core, but nonetheless important to the local economy in the areas where it was progressed.

Conclusion 3: Programme management – centralised programme management was a valuable resource in facilitating delivery and, after improvements made in the second half of the project, became an area of good practice to build on in the future. It added value through good expertise, governance and streamlined systems and supported achievement by delivery partners. This was further enhanced where delivery partners had their own internal lead project co-ordinator.

Conclusion 4: Timescale – the main challenge that emerged across the project was time and the requirement (nationally led) to design and deliver SDF2 in a short delivery window and in the two busiest terms (winter and spring) in the FE academic year. Time pressures were compounded by difficulties and delays in acquiring new equipment as part of SDF2.

[1] Boston College, DN College Group, Franklin 6th Form College, Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education, Grantham College, John Leggott College, Lincoln College, Riseholme College and Stamford College

Implications for future delivery

- Build on SDF2's good delivery model and central management approach and ensure it is properly resourced.
- Encourage delivery partners to have their own internal project manager who can oversee and coordinate activity and liaise with the central team and across the delivery partnership.
- Consider the selection of project topics and how this can support collaboration and effectiveness by focusing on fields in which most delivery partners are active.
- Push for more time and better timing, but plan ahead be prepared to start quickly.
- Use wider budget headings to reduce administration and delays arising from change requests.

Assessment of what was delivered

Conclusion 5: Business engagement – a good spread of meaningful employer engagement has taken place and delivered real benefits in tuning provision to local economic needs. Whilst the depth and range of business engagement varied by institution, there is now a strong foundation for ongoing business relationships into the future.

Conclusion 6: Equipment – an impressive selection of high quality, industry standard equipment has been procured thanks to SDF2's capital investment. Key challenges arose on procurement, change request bureaucracy, supply and installation delays, and time pressures. However, all partners are unequivocal that this new kit was much needed and would not have been acquired without SDF2. All agree that it raises profile and will aide recruitment, business engagement, future growth and a richer learning environment that will impact positively on outcomes.

Conclusion 7: Staff CPD – this important element of the programme supported its aims to drive up quality in the FE sector and ensured capability to lever maximum benefit from new equipment. A good range of CPD activities have been undertaken, many of which provide good practice to draw from, including in further connecting FE to businesses. Although CPD delivery has been more limited than expected, there is consensus that it has been much needed and beneficial to staff.

Conclusion 8: Courses and curriculum development – although in most cases, full delivery of new provision is yet to start, significant areas of new curricula have been developed due to SDF2. Curriculum and course development is backed up by the new high quality equipment/technology and provides new unique selling points that will open doors to learners and businesses.

Conclusion 9: Delivery package – whilst each type of deliverable/improvement was valuable in its own right, delivering them in combination brought synergies and added much value.

Implications for future delivery

- Systematically and strategically plan business engagement and build on relationships established through SDF2 to ensure provision aligns to local skill needs and opportunities.
- Continue to adopt packages of delivery combining these elements – equipment, CDP, curriculum development and business engagement – with flexibility about what these are and tailoring to meet college, employer and learner needs.

Critical success factors and EDI

Conclusion 10: Strategic focus – the programme has been exemplary in terms of its strategic focus and how that fits with current and future economic needs.

Conclusion 11: Efficiency – only a few colleges have achieved significant efficiencies to date, usually relating to new digital equipment reducing the need to travel or making teaching more efficient. However, it has positioned institutions to be able to achieve efficiencies in the future.

Conclusion 12: Collaboration – good progress has been made on partnership working, with a demonstrable spirit of collaboration running across the project, and mechanisms to share learning and discuss issues in place. Deeper collaboration in other ways has been limited but a good foundation is now in place.

Conclusion 13: EDI – partners generally applied existing Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) policies and practices that are already mainstreamed within colleges to the SDF2 provision, rather than develop something new. The importance of EDI was well understood and followed.

Implications for future delivery

- Maintain excellent approaches around strategic alignment and EDI and look to move to the next level in deepening collaboration between partners and jointly responding to the strategic imperatives and employer needs identified. Look for opportunities to realise efficiencies in doing so, and through making best use of new digital capabilities established through SDF2.

Performance on quantitative outputs

Conclusion 14: KPI outputs – based on the data up to May 2023, there has been mixed performance in hitting contracted key performance indicator (KPI) targets. Project 1 (low carbon) has performed very well, hitting and often well exceeding all but one of its seven targets. Project 2 (digital) and Project 3 (visitor economy) have performed much less well on KPIs, hitting one out of five, and three out of six targets respectively. That said, all three projects have delivered on other non-contracted outputs; the digital project has helped to underpin low carbon delivery; and more outputs are expected in the future.

Conclusion 15: Overall and non-contracted outputs – all three projects delivered significant additional non-contracted outputs, so benefits have gone beyond those originally anticipated. This was especially the case for Project 2 which delivered on five non-contracted output measures. If outputs performance was looked at in terms of overall delivery against overall targets for the three projects combined, performance against KPIs would have been stronger.

Conclusion 16: Forecasting and target setting – variable delivery on contracted targets and significant additional delivery on non-contracted KPIs suggests either misjudgements at the outset/proposal stage in setting targets, or potentially shifts in what projects decided needed to be delivered as circumstances and needs unfolded. Additionally, crossover between low carbon and digital projects meant that some potential digital outputs were attributed to low carbon. Quantitative performance on KPIs would have been judged to be stronger if the type of outputs delivered had been better predicted.

Implications for future delivery

- Continue to measure outputs as they accrue and update performance assessment once a fuller picture for the whole project duration is available.
- Learn from good practice and difficulties in delivering this time to enhance future delivery.
- Consider how future forecasting/target setting can be improved, backed by suitable project management, so that more targets are hit and due credit is gained for the full range of delivery.

Wider benefits, lessons and reflections

Conclusion 17: Challenges – whilst time was the biggest challenge, recruiting staff was also a frequent difficulty, especially for short term contracts. This affected a variety of roles including teaching, employer engagement and project management, and amplified timescale pressures.

Conclusion 18: Geography – there is potential for stronger links to, and learning exchange with, colleges and SDF2 programmes in neighbouring LEP areas. This would also benefit college groups with centres in more than one LEP area and may enable efficiencies and synergies.

Conclusion 19: Freedoms and their benefits – SDF2 has allowed colleges a good degree of freedom and flexibility to do what they judge to be most needed and to spend accordingly (whether capital or revenue), without excessive restriction, threat of clawback or outputs overload hanging over them. For the most part, this has paid dividends, and at its best the programme has been transformational in improving provision and serving employer needs.

Implications for future delivery

- Plan future programmes so that they are prepared for likely difficulties such as recruitment and timescale; and engage those who will be involved in delivery from the outset.
- Explore options for engaging with similar programmes in neighbouring areas.

Overall, the SDF2 programme has proved that a model combining some shared principles and areas of focus, an onus on collaboration, and freedom for colleges to invest and improve provision as they judge necessary can deliver well. Whilst inevitably this approach involves a degree of risk, our assessment is that this is outweighed by its benefits and that SDF2 has demonstrated an approach which can bring considerable benefits for colleges, the DFE, learners and employers.

1. Introduction to the Strategic Development Fund and this Evaluation

In 2022, the Department for Education (DfE) launched the second round of its Strategic Development Fund (SDF), allocating £92 million to the one-year project and building on an earlier pilot programme run in 2021-2022 in 18 trial areas. Its focus was to provide revenue and capital investment to enable further education (FE) bodies to reshape their teaching and training provision and to update their facilities in preparation for the planned roll out of Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIP). Specifically, the intended purpose was to:

- Enable colleges and other FE providers to build their capacity to meet local skills priorities, and to drive more effective and efficient use of funds through a more coordinated FE offer.
- Support design, development and delivery of new skills provision, and procurement of equipment to support skills in industries and sectors that are key to future jobs in local areas.
- Support ongoing FE provider quality improvement through workforce training, developing sector-led approaches to peer-to-peer support, and sharing good practice.
- Stimulate employer demand for and investment in skills leading to more sustainable provision, including by raising awareness and take-up of new technologies in businesses, especially SMEs.

Nine FE providers[2] working together across the Greater Lincolnshire Local Enterprise Partnership area and led by the TEC Partnership, successfully bid for just under £2.73m of funds. This was allocated across three focus areas of activity – low carbon, digital and the visitor economy – as sectors of key importance to the geography's economy (see section 2 for detail). It was to be delivered between August 2022 and 31 March 2023, although contracts were not in place until September 2022 and an accrual period was allowed by DfE to 30 June 2023 for expenditure and activities committed by 31 March 2023.

Les Newby Associates and Nicky Denison at Wordfern Ltd were commissioned to evaluate the Greater Lincolnshire SDF2 programme. The evaluation took place between February and May 2023 and was designed to provide a qualitative and quantitative assessment of how far the TEC Partnership and DfE's aims and objectives were met, and in particular to examine:

- Effectiveness, relevance and appropriateness of the overall project delivery model; individual project strand investments, activities and partner contributions; and joint activities.
- Collaboration across Greater Lincolnshire and how this is impacting on provider ability to better develop and deliver curriculum to meet current and future needs in the focus sectors.
- The extent that providers have facilitated meaningful engagement with employers as a result of SDF, thereby contributing to improved responsiveness to their skills needs.
- Impact on DfE's SDF Critical Success Factors of collaboration, strategic focus and efficiency.
- How providers are promoting equality and diversity via SDF2 activities.

[2] Boston College, DN College Group, Franklin 6th Form College, Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education, Grantham College, John Leggott College, Lincoln College, Riseholme College and Stamford College

- Performance against targeted outputs and outcomes at overall, project strand and individual partner levels.
- Effectiveness of governance, the SDF2 Partnership Board, operational sub-groups and overall project management arrangements, including claims processing.
- Impact of the investment and activities on partners, employers and employees.

The evaluation was designed to consider the above in respect to what worked well and why; challenges faced during delivery; and any good practice, lessons learned or improvements to support future skills investment and curriculum development. There is also scope for it to inform work linked to the new LSIP. It also incorporated consideration of wider factors such as other benefits that may have been delivered as a result of SDF2 investment; and how far the ability of providers to respond to training demand in the low carbon and digital areas has improved.

The methodology for the evaluation comprised the following elements:

- Detailed interviews with all nine provider partners[3] and with the central programme management team based at the TEC Partnership
- Interviews with six businesses engaged through a spread of the nine provider partners to understand their experiences of engaging and any immediate or expected impact
- Identification of five case studies showcasing good practice in utilising SDF2 investment
- Analysis of project outputs data and triangulation with analysis of qualitative input
- Presentation of emerging findings to the SDF2 Partnership Board, followed by an interim and final report

The initial methodology also set out to garner learner experiences of participating in courses shaped by the SDF2 funding. However, in practice this was not possible as slippage in the overall timeframe for delivery meant that only a small number of learners had been through relevant courses at the time the evaluation was completed (see section 4). Similarly, it was not possible to garner perspectives from staff undertaking continuous professional development (CPD) via the investment, as the numbers receiving this by the time of the evaluation were insufficient to enable a formal survey. Instead, the impact on staff was considered during provider interviews and is reflected in section 4.

[3] Ibid

2. The Greater Lincolnshire SDF2 Approach

2.1 Greater Lincolnshire SDF2 rationale

In keeping with the overall aim of SDF2 to align skills provision with local employer demand, the three 'project' sectors in the Greater Lincolnshire bid were:

- Project 1: low carbon
- Project 2: digital
- Project 3: visitor economy

These were selected on the basis of their alignment with Greater Lincolnshire LEP (GLLEP) priorities (see section 5.1) and the shift to Industry 4.0 and as a *"fantastic opportunity"* to secure capital investment to improve the infrastructure of associated teaching delivery in FE. The ability to bolt on revenue support to allow for teacher capacity building was also intrinsic to the bid, ensuring that staff were *"confident and competent in using the wonderful new kit."*

In respect to low carbon and digital, a meeting with college Principals confirmed that low carbon was an obvious theme in which to bring together a strategic partnership approach aligned to the Humber's energy offer and agri-tech and renewables in Lincolnshire, as well as national priorities. This was also seen as an area where colleges needed to modernise their provision and upskill their staff if they are to successfully equip the local population with necessary skills. Similarly, digital was agreed as being key given its role as an enabling technology across sectors and provision, and with significant potential to support digitally enhanced learning on low carbon topics (i.e. virtual reality learning environments that can bring real world low carbon applications to the classroom). This meant that whilst low carbon and digital were presented as separate project areas, they were in fact intrinsically linked, particularly in terms of how colleges chose to spend their capital.

Visitor economy was a later entrant to the bid and emerged following input from Lincoln College. Whilst it is clearly a very different proposition, it was recognised as being a key sector for significant parts of Lincolnshire, and as such agreement was reached across the TEC Partnership for it to be included and for two colleges – Lincoln and Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education (GIFHE) – to include it in their approach.

2.2 The bid and initiation

The Greater Lincolnshire SDF2 bid was initiated by the consortium of FE providers in discussion with the GLLEP, local Chambers and FSB. The TEC Partnership was identified as the central mechanism for pulling the proposal together based on their experience of working through the earlier SDF pilot. They were also identified as the lead for the bid emerging from the Hull and East Yorkshire LEP (HEYLEP), and whilst the money and projects were entirely ringfenced for each area, there have been cost efficiencies from sharing a secretariat function. The consensus around the nature of the bid and focus areas was positive and allowed for a *"pretty quick process thanks to a fair amount of rapid agreement."* This also helped push back on initial suggestions of potentially widening the bid, with a shared view that doing so would dilute funds too far.

The initial bid was submitted to meet the deadline of 13 May 2022. Appraisal by DfE in May led to an iterative process of responding to questions and clarifications. This was specifically in respect to costings, with some partners presenting high level costs and others being much more detailed. This led to some delays but did allow for fine-tuning and ultimately the bid being approved with

very little removed. The letter of intent from DfE was received in August 2022, noting that delivery partners could confidently commit to 10-15% of costs in order to enable procurement to start. However, in practice most partners were wary of doing that, preferring to wait until formal contracts were received. That did not happen until September, along with DfE providing guidance. With all this taken into account, the SDF2 delivery window narrowed from eight to six/seven months. We look at the impact of the timeframe for delivery in later sections, but suffice to say here, the narrow window was a constant theme in feedback as to the challenges surrounding delivery of SDF2. This will not have been unique to Greater Lincolnshire.

2.3 Funding and delivery model

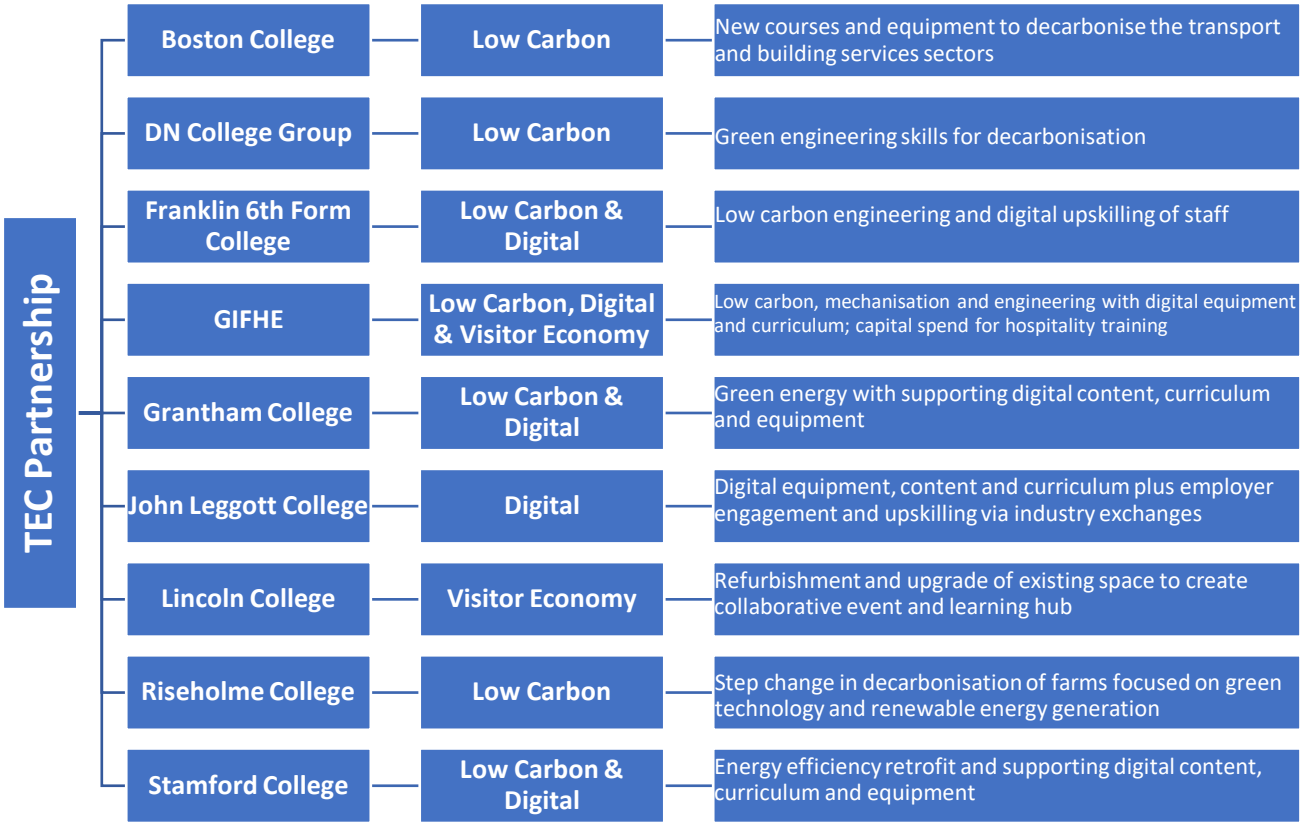
The table below shows how the funding is allocated across the three project areas and the split of revenue and capital.

Project 1 – Low Carbon	**Allocation**	**Total Spend**	**% Spend v Allocation**
Capital	£606,271.00	£605,817.24	99.93%
Revenue	£815,920.00	£795,859.46	97.54%
Project 2 – Digital			
Capital	£651,186.24	£649,312.66	99.71%
Revenue	£280,475.07	£280,475.07	100%
Project 3 – Visitor Economy			
Capital	£243,757.99	£242,622.65	99.53%
Revenue	£125,296.08	£125,028.30	99.79%
OVERALL TOTAL	**£2,722,906.38**	**£2,699,115.38**	**99.12%**

The figure below shows the model for delivering SDF2 in Greater Lincolnshire – with the TEC Partnership providing the central project management function and nine education institutions leading local delivery, each focusing in most cases on one or two of the three sectors, but in the case of Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education (GIFHE), on all three. The figure also shows the primary area of focus for each institution as set out in the initial bid.

Whilst the bid was centred on three project topics, the way different institutions focused on different topics, and on different specific fields within these, has meant that some have seen the model as in reality being about *"nine projects not three";* i.e. the projects are centred on the nine delivery partners and their priorities rather than being centred on the three project themes.

Figure 1: Greater Lincolnshire SDF2 Delivery Model and priorities by institution



5.1.1 Central project management

As already noted, this function was provided by the TEC Partnership housed within GIFHE.[4] It was serviced by one member of staff in the bid and initiation phases, but reconfigured following staff departures such that from December 2022 until close there was a core team of three (approximately 1.5 FTE) covering all aspects of overall project management including:

- Liaison with DfE
- Preparing progress and monitoring reports for governance structures including project boards, TEC Partnership Leadership Team and DfE
- Facilitating partnership activities that are not taken forward by specific partners
- Overseeing overall budget and spend
- Claims and contract compliance
- Coordination and communications

Additional central support on an ad-hoc basis was provided by a further four individuals in respect to processing claims, purchase orders and invoices; ensuring procurement is in line with GIFHE financial regulations; and senior leadership support. This central function supports both the GLLEP and HEYLEP SDF2 projects, which has enabled some economies of scale to be achieved. That said, the central team noted that it is key for any central function is well resourced (often it is not) and that additional capacity would have allowed the team to achieve greater impact on delivery.

[4] The TEC Partnership, formerly the Grimsby Institute Group, is one of England's largest providers of further and higher education, and comprises the Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education, University Centre Grimsby, Scarborough TEC, East Riding College, Skegness TEC, The Academy Grimsby and Modal Training. It is based in Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education.

It is clear that the project and delivery partners have benefited from and appreciated having a central management function. This became more apparent in the period from January 2023 to the project's close when the new and additional resource brought in to the central team implemented a series of changes to streamline and formalise operations including:

- New systems for claims and compliance, albeit in something of a vacuum of guidance from DfE
- Implementing formalised governance structures including monthly board meetings, backed by Terms of Reference and papers, and which has improved interaction across the project
- Hands-on performance management, with monthly team reviews and monitoring reports covering finance and output performance and risks as well as narrative on work underway
- 'Hand holding' for delivery staff who were new to contact management, including through two claims workshops to guide people through the forms so that everyone knew what was expected
- Refreshed communications via Teams channels to ensure consistency of messaging

Delivery partners consistently told us that they felt these changes had been worthwhile and praised the team for the support that they had offered and the relationships that they had built across the partnership. This team was seen very positively and as a marked improvement from the position in the first half of the project. That was not withstanding some concerns about the time requirements associated with these processes when the focus needed to very much be on delivery given the tight window. There were also mixed views on using Teams Channels and mass communication over personalised emails or group emails just to those a message concerns. Some felt the former was hard to keep track of, and there is a balance to be struck between efficiency, consistency and direct conversations.

"There's been an awful lot of Teams messages and channels. I'm already in several different Teams channels so it hard to keep track. I understand the idea, but emails might have been easier."

On balance though, these were minor suggestions for improvements rather than criticism. The overall tone was highly positive and supportive of the direct and specific guidance provided, with clear timelines attached and backed by opportunities to ask questions and seek support. The extent that this came through from delivery partner interviews highlights it as an area of good practice for the project, with lessons for how to do this well in future investments.

"Support in the latter stages has been fantastic. Whenever there's an issue, they're there on a Teams call in minutes explaining it."

"Just too many meetings in a tight timetable...this project is eating into time like nothing else."

"It's been really slick and smooth…they have been able to guide, advise and support as well pull everybody together. The networking side has improved greatly, and they have cemented consortia through subgroups and the project board."

In terms of delivery partners, one observation was that those who had appointed a lead project co-ordinator were able to manage SDF2 projects more smoothly. Other colleges agreed:

"*It would have been good to have a sole person as project coordinator responsible for pulling the strands together and ensuring smooth delivery from beginning to end. It's a massive job*."

3. Employer engagement

Engaging with employers so that skills provision better meets their needs was central to the rationale for and delivery of the SDF2 programme. In addition to reporting on relevant output measures, we assessed how far this had been successful through the interviews with all of the delivery partners and a selection of the employers they had engaged with (we asked each partner to identify contact details for at least one employer who would be happy to take part in an interview to support the evaluation – a process which yielded six employer interviews in total).

From a delivery partner perspective, there was consensus that employer engagement had happened and led to benefits for employers and colleges. The types of engagement conducted were wide ranging, and it was telling that colleges talked about what they had been doing on this front at length, often citing a variety of different engagement practices – with this pointing to genuine and quite extensive employer connections and inputs.

The types of engagement completed (in many cases which will be ongoing into the future) include:

- **Using previous engagement and Training Needs Assessments (TNAs) to inform the focus and substance of SDF2 proposals**, such as which topics to focus on and what equipment to buy. One example is how Riseholme College used historic TNAs with 120 farmers to inform decisions about the tech needed for precision farming, the robotics needed for horticulture, and the role of anaerobic digestion in producing energy from food waste.

- Consulting with employers to **inform the design/creation of new courses**. For example, Boston College's employer engagement team consulted with local employers to identify their future training needs, which helped to source and create the most relevant short courses. In Franklin 6th Form College, a low carbon engineering course was designed with an industry professional who works with major local employers in the sector and knows their skills needs.

- Engaging with employers **to inform or revise curriculums**. For example, in GIFHE, curriculum development took place in relation to a unit on cobotic welding and qualifications for electricians on EV charger installation. In Lincoln College, conversations with the Theatre Royal influenced the shape of a Level 3 Event Management course.

- **Liaison with businesses on new equipment needed and its installation.** Employer input often shaped the type of new equipment ordered, and employers sometimes were also involved in helping to install it and in running training courses using the tech. One example is in Boston College, where a local company was extremely supportive of the project and installed their new air source heat pump at reduced rate and helped guide them on how to run it. At Riseholme, courses were created to enable staff to showcase new tech and equipment e.g. to show farm businesses the benefits of an anaerobic digestor or how off-grid solutions can offer new business opportunities.

- Getting involved in **events, networking and building long term relationships** that enable colleges to hear and understand the employer voice (and sometimes wider stakeholders too). The case study that follows illustrates how John Leggott College did this. Other examples include Grantham College, which ran employer breakfasts, and the DN Group, where having

regular open dialogue with a strong employer base, hosting events, and maintaining good links to the Chamber of Commerce gave them insight into market needs.

- **Bringing in employers to deliver guest lectures and masterclasses**. This happened widely, with a good example being John Leggott College, where 10 Master Classes were delivered by industry experts on a range of digital topics and in a range of formats from full days to 40 minute lectures. Franklin 6th Form College has a long list of employers that come in as guest speakers, and GIFHE always seeks employers to do a guest lecture in the first six weeks of courses to tell students the relevance of what they are learning.

- **Strengthening careers advice and guidance and helping students to meet employers and secure employment**. In-depth examples include Franklin 6th Form College, where there is now much more nuanced understanding of the different types of engineering and the different job roles available, enabling its careers advice and guidance to become better at communicating the diversity of career pathways for students in these areas, including on local market needs, job roles and rates of pay. Meanwhile, Stamford College is working with the Retrofit Academy to help students go straight into work from their studies as demand is so high for retrofit skills and courses have been specifically designed to provide these, informed by employer roundtables to spell out exactly what skills they need.

Wider examples include engaging schools and linking employers to them (GIFHE reached 500+ students this way); two way industry exchanges for staff (e.g. in John Leggott College); taster courses on awareness of new tech for employers (e.g. run by DN Group); and stronger collaboration between curriculum and commercial teams (at Lincoln College). Overall, whilst the depth, extent and mechanisms for employer engagement varied from college to college and there is scope for further strengthening and good practice exchange in the future, the SDF2 project has made a big difference to employer engagement and colleges see that this has paid dividends:

"Conversations with business as a result of SDF2 have opened our eyes to the size of the skills gap."

"*It's been great to be able to discuss priorities from the LEP directly with employers*."

"We're a lot more focused on local market needs after employer engagement."

The businesses we interviewed who had been involved in employer engagement shared the view that this had been a positive experience.

"The college have been very efficient in getting things done and have made things very easy to do."

"They've been very proactive and engaged and really focused on doing everything they can on this."

Case Study: John Leggott College (JLC) Employer Engagement and Networking

In the early planning stages of the project, engagement with employers and businesses was highlighted as key to success. JLC hosted a variety of types/styles of events in order to gain as much information as possible from local stakeholders (including many employers, as well as local authority representation, healthcare and other public agencies) and designed to benefit staff and students. The types of engagement and events include:

- Talks at/involvement in student masterclasses
- Industry exchange for staff
- Networking with local business groups
- Focus Groups
- Trips and visits
- Live talks
- Careers event support
- Employer activities in the curriculum

The college saw great benefit from the spread of employer engagement. In particular, the focus groups and networking events allowed for in depth conversations about local employer needs. Those engaged span a diverse cross-section of employers and stakeholders and this allowed JLC to hear first-hand of any current issues, new challenges or opportunities in the area. The focus group highlighted gaps in the market and allowed the college to make changes to its curriculum strategy and tutorial system. It also benefited employers, as they had the opportunity to talk to staff and students about local career prospects. Focus group meetings will continue into the future after the SDF2 project period.

A similar focus group arrangement is being rolled out into every curriculum area, with each now required to have a board of employers. This gives each subject area a pool of employers they can go to for a range of support such as live talks, Q&As, task setting, curriculum feedback, personal statement support, etc. A further example of changes made through employer feedback is the tutorial system. This has now been developed to focus on work readiness as a greater priority, with students supported to gain these skills through tutorial sessions every week.

Joining a local networking group (Business Hive) has also had huge benefits for the college. The diverse range of businesses that it has connected with has quickly resulted in many new collaborations. For example, one local business in the group is now supporting students to produce marketing material for other members of the Business Hive. This is a great opportunity for students, as they are experiencing real life work situations.

During the project delivery period, JLC also hosted the Business Hive monthly networking events. The January event saw approximately 50 businesses on site, which gave a large number of staff the chance to foster their own connections – as well raising the profile of the college in the local community.

Whilst the nature of the employer feedback (i.e. based on a modest number of businesses that had been identified by colleges) should be borne in mind, all the employers we interviewed pointed to specific instances of how they had been engaged and the benefits that had accrued or would do in the future. These included:

- Engagement with colleges about recruitment and/or apprenticeships
- Giving talks/masterclasses
- Being involved in careers events
- Work experience provision
- Collaboration around new equipment
- Reshaping an engineering course to make it practical rather than research based and better serve industry needs and inspire students
- Training teaching staff and helping them to gain new qualifications, and passing on information to tutors to help make courses industry relevant/improve what is taught
- Relationship building and networking

Some direct benefits for businesses have already been gained as a result – for example recruitment of apprentices, or contracts won. However, many benefits were more indirect and about the long term and positioning for the future. This is the case for in relation to the supply of future recruits with appropriate skills for the industry overall (one business noted that "*the big challenge for the carbon sector is people – it's skills, skills, skills*"); profile raising for businesses with potential recruits; and relationship building.

One example of engagement is the relationship developed between Stamford College and the Retrofit Academy – a private independent training provider specialising nationally in retrofit qualifications and training the volume of retrofit workers needed to meet retrofit/carbon targets. A case study is included in section 4.1, however in brief, as a result of SDF2 funding, a three year partnership agreement being signed that will see the Retrofit Academy support Stamford College to build its capability to deliver retrofit qualifications in their area. They have supported staff to achieve Level 5 Retrofit Coordinator (the highest level that currently exists) so that they have the knowledge to recruit and teach students, but also to train other trainers and to make a real difference in their local area through being able to assess housing stock, engage with social landlords, and understand local demand for retrofit and employer needs. Retrofit Academy have therefore been helping Stamford College to build a full retrofit offer and the understanding, confidence and capability to deliver a recognised qualification to new entrants and people looking to upskill.

4. Assessment of SDF2 Investment and Activity

4.1 New equipment and capital spend

Four colleges delivered activity across both the low carbon and digital sectors – Franklin 6th Form, GIFHE, Grantham and Stamford. The equipment purchased in these instances was typically digital in nature and designed to support delivery of low carbon courses, with those in the main being around electric vehicle maintenance and charging, renewable energy and retrofit technologies. Most commonly this involved purchasing virtual reality kit and equipment, such as headsets and immersive screens, because these allow low carbon situations to be brought into the classroom and hence training to occur with greater ease, efficiency, variety, realism and safety. GIFHE for example procured digital equipment to demonstrate and practice electric vehicle maintenance and charging; and to support cobotic welding training for Humber Energy Estuary CO2 pipeline welding. In a similar vein, Franklin created a digital skills lab and immersive space for upskilling staff and teaching students in aspects of renewable energy and in this way were able to *"bring the windfarm into the classroom."* The new Virtalis Wall at Stamford College is another example and is described in the case study below. Grantham also used their digital investment to upgrade wifi connections to support teaching delivery.

"The new kit teaches learners in an interactive environment that they cannot get elsewhere. Our new VR kit is an immersive environment that allows students to take part in learning in high risk environments to gain the skills businesses need but without potential lethal consequences."

Case Study: Stamford College Virtalis Wall and Retrofit Academy

Inspire Education Group (IEG – Stamford College) delivered activity on low carbon and digital in a holistic approach designed to meet the strategic priorities of central and local government on the low carbon agenda. SDF2 capital funding enabled the purchase of a Virtalis Wall to create an immersive classroom to transform delivery and develop digital content to share within curriculum as well as VR headsets. The new equipment and the consultancy/training package purchased enables staff to create digital content within wider curriculum sectors as well as the construction sector. The technology will enable the college to share collaboratively the new curriculum that sits within the retrofit agenda. Using immersive rooms and virtual walls to develop state of the art resources which can be viewed through the VR headsets and enhanced technologies that have been part of this project is exciting students, employers and staff alike, who will be able to access this learning through a range of delivery methodologies – face to face, blended, hybrid, online. Using digitalisation to demonstrate how modern methods of construction are changing within the industry to enhance delivery and address sustainability is also fundamental to training the construction workforce of the future.

The revenue elements of the project enabled Stamford College to join forces with the Retrofit Academy and employ an industry expert to deliver a suite of qualifications to employers, students and staff to galvanise the training of future "retrofitters" and galvanise the retrofit revolution required to meet the Government's 2050 Net Zero targets.

Developing the project focusing on low carbon and retrofit delivered through innovative and technologically advanced kit enables Stamford College to train 25 of their own staff on retrofit courses as part of their Continued Professional Development, train 6 staff in the development of and creation of

digital content for the curriculum and courses, as well as accessing training on air source heat pumps and hydrogen energy which is being offered by other consortia partners.

Opportunities to work with a progressive LEP, support Local Industrial Strategy priorities and fill skills gaps to improve energy efficiencies and living standards has been stimulating and innovative for IEG and Stamford College. Being part of the solution enables IEG to train the retrofitters of the future and deploy this knowledge and expertise across not only Lincolnshire but the UK. SDF2 has given IEG the springboard to mobilise this initiative. The 2-year delivery plan which is attached to the SDF2 funding will seek to meet all of the projected outputs as well as training employees, students and staff using a truly immersive/digitised approach. Without SDF2 funding this would not have been a reality. Sharing good practice and building on relationships formed as part of the consortia will also be key to ensuring that the Lincolnshire region Is at the forefront of emerging green skills technologies and focused on making a real difference to the climate change agenda.

For the colleges that focused just on low carbon – Boston, Riseholme and the DN Group – capital spend on equipment covered purchase of:

- Electric vehicles, including a robotic EV used for fully autonomous agriculture vehicles, associated charging points, and training rig
- Air and ground source heat pumps
- Electronic hydraulic equipment used for example in wind turbines
- Equipment linked to hydrogen as a fuel source
- An anaerobic digestor to demonstrate how farms can convert food waste to energy
- Solar panels, battery storage and erection of buildings to house these systems
- Mobile off grid system (i.e. a small generator) used in agriculture to charge tools without the need for petrol, noise or vibration

John Leggott College was the only college to solely focus on digital. Their capital was deployed to deliver a significant update in facilities to better meet the needs of the local economy and to provide students with the opportunity to use high-end machines that they may not ordinarily have access to, such as industry-level CAD equipment and devices to render images, videos, etc. The college recognised the equipment as *"a significant investment and a large step as JLC moves toward the forefront of IT experiences within our local area, positioning the college for future growth."*

In terms of new equipment and capital spend in the visitor economy, the two colleges involved in this aspect took quite diverse approaches. GIFHE used its investment to refurbish its kitchens and replace equipment, some of which dated from 1986. It recognised that this upgrade would position them well and *"give us something really good to shout about when recruiting learners"* and form the basis of an improved offer around NVQ Level 3 kitchen management skills and a focus on seafood and its preparation. Lincoln College on the other hand carried out a full refurbishment of a large space in The Drill Hall – a case study of which is shown below.

Case Study: Refurbishment of The Drill Hall by Lincoln College

The Drill Hall in the centre of Lincoln is around 150 years old, originally used as a military building in which soldiers could practice their drills. It has had many uses over the years, including periods of being vacant. In the early 2000s, it was taken over by Lincoln Arts Trust as a venue, however, despite support from the local council, it failed to become self-sustaining and went out of business just before the pandemic. Lincoln College took over the running of the building in 2021, with a focus on making it viable in three areas – commercially, for the community, and for the curriculum offering primarily across catering, hospitality and performing arts. The College secured £1m Town Deal funds, to which it added £0.5m, to kick-start refurbishment. In such an old building, this quickly got absorbed, hence it was used to focus on customer facing areas – the auditorium, bar, entrance etc. This left no budget to refurbish a further two rooms that could be used for community, curriculum and commercial purposes but which left as they were, were completely inappropriate. SDF2 money was hence used to refurbish one of these rooms.

Due to SDF2 – which it *"100% would not have happened without"* – this room is now a very high quality, self-contained space with a kitchen and toilet, and is accessible for daily use by a wide range of users without interruption. Students now have a dedicated, specially designed learning space, equipped with laptops and technical equipment, e.g. a mini-lighting rig to practice on and room for a stage to be set up to rehearse. Previously they used the Drill Hall once a week. From September 2023, this will increase to three times. For learners who learn by doing, this practical environment is key, giving them a setting that is safe, engaging and helps build confidence. From a community perspective, local people (especially older residents) now feel more comfortable coming into The Drill Hall as large groups of students are not congregating in the foyer space; and from September 2023 the space will be used by the College to provide adult education. The newly created space, away from campus and highly accessible will help attract people, and boost engagement, retention and achievement. It can also be used as a wedding venue now that a license has been secured.

This element of the SDF2 project about capital investments was not without challenges. The key issue was around the process of procuring new equipment and this being more protracted than envisaged. The initial period between receiving contracts in September and November 2022 created a huge rush to place orders for equipment, raise purchase orders and secure approval for spend which put *"extreme pressure on us to order capital equipment quickly."* Colleges reported DfE as being very slow to approve any spend changes linked to this noting that:

"The split across budget lines was too detailed; fewer more general lines would have avoided a change request and we could have ordered around 4-6 weeks earlier and avoided delays."

Other issues linked to this included quotes for buying equipment received earlier in the summer having expired; issues with global supply chains creating lengthy lead times (e.g. for solar panels); and issues with importing goods into the country from overseas. Interestingly, one college also observed that SDF2 had prompted demand from colleges across the country to buy similar equipment at the same time, creating supply difficulties. All of this led to delays in a) installing equipment; b) training staff to use the equipment; c) embedding the equipment into course delivery; and d) getting learners started on using it in their studies. The knock-on impact of this combined is that typically delivery will often now not happen until the new academic year starts in September 2023.

Notwithstanding the above challenges, our view is that the capital investment facilitated through SDF2 has been wholeheartedly welcomed across the board. Regardless of sector focus, it is clear from our conversations with colleges that new equipment was selected based on its ability to enhance what can be delivered, its quality, and perceptions of provision in respect to recruiting learners and engaging with employers. In this respect, some colleges noted how having new equipment helps to bring employers in because *"looking like a quality outfit with top of the range equipment impresses employers who are more likely to then engage."* Moreover, it has created a far richer learning and teaching experience and that this in turn will lead to better outcomes in respect to achievement, engagement, retention and onward progression for students and upskilling staff to new industry standards and technology expectations.

"Our aim was to use capital investment to update kit and equipment to ensure we have cutting edge 3D interactive teaching and learning resources that are not available elsewhere and that meet needs of local businesses."

4.2 Teacher continuous professional development

Teacher Continuous Professional Development (CPD) has been an important element of the project in Greater Lincolnshire, aiming to support ongoing FE provider quality improvement through workforce training. This was delivered through SDF2 helpfully having a revenue strand that complemented the capital spend. All bar one college (Lincoln) were contracted to deliver activity in this area and there has been a good range of interventions including:

- staff attending upskilling courses e.g. motor vehicle, electrical test inspections/regulations, hydraulics and pneumatics, domestic retrofit, business development, and Microsoft 365
- staff training on new equipment, both on and off-site via external training companies and via the businesses providing the equipment (e.g. on solar and heat pumps)
- industry exchanges
- participation in masterclasses
- linking to nationally recognised experts
- staff cascading learning to colleagues, either informally or through organised events

The CPD element has been key to ensuring that investment in state-of-the-art capital equipment is translated into maximum impact on teaching delivery, learner recruitment and retention and collaboration across FE. As one college put it:

"Often FE is guilty of buying equipment and software without time to train people on how to use it, so it sits in a cupboard unused. We are really keen on making sure staff can get maximum benefit from our new Virtalis Wall. We are making resources available to the partnership too if others want to see it, and as such see this as a key collaborative project across the group."

CPD has also provided further opportunities for colleges to extend their relationships with businesses. GIFHE for example linked its new cobotic equipment to a local welding firm who were able to give factory tours to welding instructors. The college also worked hard to source specialist

expertise in the *"dying art"* of seafood filleting, thereby strengthening its links to the sector and helping to tackle a significant skills gap.

The view across colleges is that this element has been very beneficial and worthwhile for staff, and that training and bringing staff up to date was much needed. For example, at Franklin 6th Form College, skills had fallen behind on Microsoft and Google Classrooms at the same time as new digital systems were being brought in for data capture and cloud storage. Full training has meant staff are now up to speed, which supports delivery of the college's new digital strategy.

"The project has brought the importance of staff development to the forefront of our minds. The opportunity to attend external training courses to upskill has been greatly welcomed by teaching and support staff. This training has then been cascaded through the college for maximum benefit."

"The CPD has really opened the minds of our robotics team – they are now reassured that it will enhance their skills and teaching and won't take their jobs away."

There have been challenges, however. Key to this has been logistics and timing, with the delivery period for CPD falling in the spring term – a point in the academic calendar when staff are heavily involved in teaching and with less time therefore to be out of the classroom. May and onwards into the summer term was widely agreed to be a far better time for CPD. As an example, John Leggott's plans for 10 staff to carry out fully immersed industry training for two weeks (equating to 700 hours) needed to be adjusted so that the target was still hit but via more staff doing fewer hours and with more of the training being done on-site. Had the period been later in the academic year, the initial intention would have been achieved. Delays in equipment arriving (e.g. the anaerobic digestor at Riseholme College) and being installed also impacted on CPD delivery.

Another challenge was the need to persuade teaching staff of the benefits of bringing in new equipment, with some viewing it as either creating more work or putting their roles at risk of being side-lined, i.e. by automation of learning delivery. This initial reluctance took some persuading by college project management staff to overcome. However, once this had happened staff were enthused, keen to participate and open to the benefits that could be accrued from upskilling to new industry standards. One college cited an example of a staff member who was sceptical at first but after being upskilled on enhanced filming on a mobile phone felt they had really benefited and were now fully up to date and able to support students to be ready for current workplace expectations on technology. At Boston College, enthusiasm for CPD increased significantly as the project went on, especially once new equipment arrived, and staff spotted opportunities for additional CPD. This was in good part thanks to the hard work and positivity of the project manager. As a result, the college went on to significantly over-achieve on its CPD target – delivering 400 hours over the 100 hour target.

Case Study: Boston College CPD

The college identified one of its Business Development Advisers, with a background in teaching physics, to become their Hydrogen Expert. He completed the Renewable Energy Institute Hydrogen Expert & Hydrogen Master courses, and the University of Birmingham Level 5 KnowHy Train the Trainer course. He used this knowledge to write a bespoke one day Hydrogen Awareness course which will be used going forward to educate learners and external businesses.

The college is also investigating online teaching opportunities. An external training company was commissioned to create a bespoke 1-day Air Source Heat Pump course, based on the 3-day BPEC Air and Ground Source Heat Pump course. The full BPEC course must be completed in conjunction with Water Regs certificate, so this short one day course provides an introduction for learners and external employers, who may then wish to proceed to the full BPEC course. The college also purchased the City & Guilds 2919-01 Level 3 Award in Domestic, Commercial & Industrial EV Charging Equipment Installation course, equipping three lecturers within the electrical department to deliver this course to learners and external businesses.

4.3 New curricula, courses and learner uptake

It is clear that significant areas of new curricula have been developed across partner colleges thanks to the SDF2 project in the fields of low carbon and digital. Whilst some of this might have happened anyway, where that is the case, it has been enhanced, accelerated and more strategically planned thanks to SDF2, and critically backed up by vast steps forward in respect to presence of new high quality equipment and technology. Together this has underpinned new offers for colleges and allowed them to develop unique selling points that then open doors to learners and businesses, and hence supporting achievement of SDF2 objectives.

Unfortunately, at the time of carrying out the evaluation research, only a small number of learners had started full new courses established via SDF2 or been able to use new equipment (due to delays in receiving and installing it). Franklin 6th Form College for example had successfully enrolled close to 40 students in their new Low Carbon Engineering course, and on the new Essential Digital Skills course aimed at adults; Stamford College was underway with their new retrofit course; and learners were undertaking Riseholme College's Green Energy course. In addition, a number of taster courses had been run, around which feedback was positive. This included for example, Boston College's tasters in electric vehicle charging and air source heat pumps.

Although actual curriculum delivery has been limited, a good deal of school engagement has been undertaken to promote the courses and equipment on offer to prospective students. As noted in section 5, some of this was specifically targeted at schools in less advantaged areas and to under-represented cohorts as part of EDI goals. Boston College provides an excellent example of this, working with the GLLEP Enterprise Co-ordinator to visit local primary schools to ensure SEND learners participated in their Primary School Engagement Day that included a range of activities that were inclusive and rewarding for all ability levels. Through these activities, the college exceeded the target number of primary and secondary school students participating in FE led activity to raise awareness of career opportunities in locally agreed skills areas (target 450 versus actual 1,038).

5. Assessment Against Critical Success Factors and EDI

5.1 Critical success factors

In addition to its quantitative output measures, the SDF2 programme was required to report against three qualitative critical success factors – strategic focus, efficiency and collaboration. An assessment of progress made against of each of these is set out below.

Strategic focus

It is clear that the rationale for the project focus areas was rooted in strategic economic needs and opportunities in Lincolnshire. This was discussed at an initial meeting of college principals to consider alignment with GLLEP priority sectors and themes and inform the design and priorities of the SDF2 programme. It was observed that "*low carbon was an obvious area for strategic partnership for them all*" given both national imperatives on this agenda, and specific local needs and opportunities. Most notably those related to the scale and rapid growth of the offshore wind industry on the east coast and in the Humber, but also to wider decarbonisation and energy opportunities and activity such as in agriculture, housing retrofit and the hydrogen economy. The digital economy was seen both as an important economic priority in its own right, and as an enabling technology for low carbon. Visitor economy was less interconnected and universal as a strategic focus than the other project areas but was identified as a priority in two areas where tourism is a pronounced local sector in Greater Lincolnshire – in Lincoln and on the coast.

The strategic thinking that informed the project was followed through in delivery and individual colleges were clear that the projects they were delivering were strategically important for the local economy and businesses. They often also fitted with identified college strategic priorities.

"*The core of the project hit our strategic plan spot on from the word go*."

The theoretical strong strategic fit of the project in its choice of focus areas followed through into the specialisms within low carbon that individual colleges identified (e.g. offshore wind, hydrogen, EV maintenance, heat pumps and retrofit). These were informed by employer engagement and wider intelligence and fed into choices around the new equipment purchased. This was also seen as strategically important as it enabled college offers to become relevant and valuable to businesses by updating the technology available to industry standard, or sometimes ahead of it.

"*What we're doing will have a direct impact on the economy. FE tends to be behind industry, this puts us ahead of the curve; we're training students for things employers don't even realise they need at the moment."*

In overview, our assessment is that the project has been exemplary in terms of its strategic focus and how that fits with current and future economic needs, both in terms of programme design and the detail of how that has been implemented in practice.

Efficiency

The extent to which SDF2 has led to efficiencies to date is less clear cut, with more of a mixed position across institutions and with time frames for achieving efficiencies a key factor. As of late March 2023, only a small number of colleges said they had achieved significant efficiencies, with these relating to:

- New digital equipment in the college reducing the need to travel (at all or as much) to other venues for certain aspects of learning – saving time and money
- Access to new digital equipment for staff and students making teaching and systems more efficient because there is no longer reliance on people bringing their own tech in (e.g. laptops) and teachers can stream to more than one venue

In practice, it was more common for colleges to identify that the changes made through SDF2 – usually new digital equipment – would or could lead to future efficiencies. These were often about the potential for streaming and immersive technology to allow one tutor to deliver teaching to students at multiple venues, within the same college group or across providers. Similar potential was identified for CPD to be delivered more efficiently across institutions.

"One tutor could deliver virtually to students at several institutions using digital technologies. That will be really advantageous from an efficiency perspective and will help with staff vacancy issues."

At a more fundamental level, the project has not brought about efficiencies in terms of rationalisation of which colleges offer which courses (see 'collaboration' below). However, improvements were noted in terms of upskilled tutors and better equipment meaning higher quality and more effective teaching, which is more efficient in its own right, and could have wider benefits in terms of more able students then going into industry.

Collaboration

One of the goals of SDF2 was to 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. For example, this could include co-ordination and learning across providers, or institutions agreeing to share a resource or to each specialise in different things to avoid duplication. How far this happened in practice is discussed below.

At headline level, there has been clear progress made in terms of partnership working and relationships. All the institutions were positive about working together and the spirit of sharing and collaboration running across the project, and some noted that this was an improvement on the previous, more competitive, position. It was also observed that the SDF2 programme (and the Institute of Technology) has acted as an exemplar programme that provided focus for, and in the process strengthened, a long-established Principals Partnership, and that good mutual support networks had been developed.

"It's a quite a turnaround from previously having worked in a competitive environment. Great to work on something collaboratively without concern that you will lose students to others."

"The project has acted to build trust and relationships that were not previously there, notably with 6th form colleges."

Beyond the overall spirit of partnership, two mechanisms were brought in to encourage and facilitate collaboration:

- Monthly collaborative Teams meeting
- Sub-groups focused on low carbon and on digital

The monthly meeting was viewed positively by participants and seen mainly as a vehicle for sharing best practice in individual institutions and for sharing and discussing any concerns or issues. Likewise, the sub-groups were valued and seen as helpful in building specialisms. Whilst there was not a sub-group or equivalent between the two colleges working on the Visitor Economy, consideration of establishing one in the future was evident. More widely, there were a few examples of specific collaborations, for example Boston College identified links with GIFHE as a way of informing a digital project, as well as links it could make with Stamford College on equipment and courses in the future. Elsewhere, John Leggott College had shared a bespoke employability course that others could use, and courses on low carbon and transport.

Whilst there has been a good degree of general collaboration, a positive partnership spirit and sharing of challenges and good practice, deeper collaboration in other ways has been limited. For example, one institution noted that collaboration was fuller and planned proactively in a different SDF2 programme they were aware of – with colleges there having a shared offer website that they had all contributed to and doing a shared event. That did not happen in the GLLEP SDF2 programme (although there is discussion of joint showcasing), nor did collaboration or rationalisation around similar course offers occur.

"There is not a total plan of what we are collaborating on."

"Wider collaboration hasn't really been there…there's scope to deepen it and do a lot more with more time."

Three main factors appear to have limited the depth of collaboration. Inevitably, time is prominent amongst these, with the pressure to deliver in a short time period leading to a heads down focus on implementation rather than spending time planning what could be done jointly. This was especially so during the first half of the programme when concentration on "*getting the KPIs done did not enable much wider discussion.*" This was compounded by delays in securing new equipment, which could have facilitated collaborative use or joint CPD based around it. A second factor has been variation in what each institution has done and delivered, spanning employer engagement, CPD, new equipment, and curriculum and course offers across the three project areas. This is positive in that there is no apparent duplication, however, a more singular focus on one area (e.g. curriculum) or topic would have made deeper collaboration easier. Finally, different providers had different contracts, all focused on what they would deliver individually not together. This also removed a potential driver for deeper collaboration.

"Because of the timescale, everybody is focused on getting everything done."

"We began with a utopian dream [on collaboration], but the practicalities are different."

Whilst in-depth collaboration has not gone as far as might have been hoped during the SDF2 programme, there is a very positive attitude to future collaboration across partners, especially when new equipment is in place – which could enable joint delivery of teaching or CPD across multiple sites and audiences. This positive culture built around partnership and openness to joint working in the future is perhaps the programme's most important collaboration achievement.

5.2 Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI)

Discussions with delivery partners covered how they had approached EDI considerations within their delivery of SDF2 funded actions. This revealed a common approach across virtually all partners, which was to apply existing college policies and practices on EDI that are already mainstreamed, ingrained and prominent to the SDF2 funded provision and build on that, rather than develop something new and bespoke.

Providers were able to talk through what this meant, and gave confidence that EDI considerations were a priority and well delivered as part of what institutions recognise they need to do well as part of their core provision.

"*It's just how we normally operate*."

"*This is bread and butter stuff – we know the communities we serve and go out of our way to engage with them.*"

"*The college is inclusive – this is just what we do anyway.*"

"*We live sleep and breathe this in all of our provision*."

A range of examples of ways in which mainstream EDI principles had been applied to SDF2 funded work were cited. These included:

- Doing hybrid or sometimes face to face rather than purely online learning to make it make it more inclusive (see also the case study that follows on digital inclusion)
- Outreach via school liaison into schools serving the most deprived local areas (mainly secondaries, but also some primary schools)
- Engaging with local mosques to use them as a communication route to show what is on offer at the college in trades and technical education
- Having an EDI champion in the college
- Work to challenge gender stereotypes around courses, e.g. females in construction and engineering, and to enthuse female school pupils about STEM subjects
- Tailoring specific sessions for different groups to ensure that the information covered is relevant, e.g. for international students
- Advertising all project job roles with part-time and flexible working hours to enable the widest range of prospective candidates to apply
- Working with partners to ensure that schools engagement includes SEND learners

- Selecting venues for training and events to ensure access for disabled people

Hence, although there were few specific EDI approaches developed for SDF2, the importance of this agenda was well understood. From the information received, we are confident that it would have been appropriately followed through in practice.

One exception to relying purely on mainstreaming was in Franklin 6th Form College, which went further than existing approaches in the college and undertook additional activity to promote inclusion within its digital initiatives and provision (see case study). This demonstrates potential to move from good practice across the board to best practice in specific areas of need and opportunity.

Case Study: Franklin Sixth Form College Digital Inclusion

Part of Franklin`s Digital Strategy is equity (rather than equality) and differentiating students' digital needs. Student digital access has previously been an issue, as not all students have a laptop and a room to work from, and hence are not adequately catered for digitally. Being part of SDF2 has meant that Franklin has been able to solve the digital gaps that some students might have faced.

Improvements made to achieve this include:

- Replacement of desktops with industry standard equipment and hardware.
- High spec hardware which has enabled the latest software to be installed on laptops and desktops to allow independent study for all courses.
- Purchase of some laptops with software and dongles (in case there is no wifi at home) that students can take home.
- A student training programme so that students have at least the basic Digital Skills needed for HE and employment.
- A Student Digital Academy for students who want to upskill and earn industry recognised digital qualifications.
- Investment in an Immersive Space to provide students with industry experience at Franklin. For example, whilst Franklin cannot take the student to an offshore windfarm, it can now take the windfarm to them.
- Starting to run an essential digital skills course to help with the digital skills gap in the area. This works closely with employers to digitally upskill staff.

Franklin's integrated approach allows it to easily identify what training is needed and when, and next year it will be building students and staff digital upskilling into its calendar from the start of the year. Its approach is enabling all students, no matter what course they are on, to study digitally. This was part of Franklin's digital strategy but would not have happened without SDF2.

6. Quantitative Outputs, Results and Analysis

This section shows details of all measures against which outputs have been recorded. Some of these were measures with contracted outputs, whilst others were achieved against and recorded despite not having a contractual requirement to do so. The tables that follow indicate which measures are contracted KPIs and show the percentage as well as the total achieved for these.

The tables present grouped sets of measures, and for each measure show outputs splits for the three projects. The data includes outputs delivered by the end of March 2023, plus any additional outputs from activity in the accruals period captured in data supplied to us in early June 2023. Annex 1 shows outputs achieved at the end of contract position as of 31 March 2023 and the institutions who had delivered against them at that point.

In all of the analysis, Project 1 refers to Low Carbon, Project 2 is Digital and Project 3 is Visitor Economy. Key points from the analysis are highlighted in bullet points after each table.

Table 1: Reshaping local provision in line with local need and quality improvement

	1a. Collaborations focused on reshaping provision			1b. Leaders or governors engaged in reshaping			1d. New resources that support reshaping		
	Achieved	Target	%	Achieved	Target	%	Achieved	Target	%
Project 1	12	2	600	3			6		
Project 2	1						0	2	0
Project 3	2	1	200	1					
All projects total	15			4			6		

Collaborations focused on reshaping local provision in line with local need and quality improvement

- Projects 1 and 3 achieved targets on this measure, exceeding it by some way for project 1.
- Project 2 also achieved an uncontracted output.
- Outputs were mostly delivered by Stamford and Grantham, as well as GIFHE and Lincoln.

Number of leaders or governors engaged in reshaping provision and quality improvement

- No contracted targets were set on this measure, but GIFHE achieved 4 uncontracted outputs, mostly on project 1 but with one on project 2 as well.

Number of new resources produced that support reshaping of provision and quality improvement

- Project 2 set a target on this measure but did not achieve against it.
- In contrast, project 1 did not set a target, but achieved outputs on this measure (via Stamford) that exceeded the target set for project 2. To a significant extent, this is because much digital activity underpinned low carbon - so there was mixing of how outputs were reported.

Table 2: Collaborations on sharing teaching staff and on curriculum development

	4a. Collaborations sharing teaching staff for the first time			5a. Collaborations focused on developing curriculum for use by more than one provider		
	Achieved	**Target**	**%**	**Achieved**	**Target**	**%**
Project 1	1			11	8	138
Project 2	0	1	0	0	1	0
Project 3				3		
All projects total	1			14		

Number of collaborations sharing teaching staff for the first time

- No targets were set on this measure but one institution (Stamford, project 1) delivered an output.

Number of collaborations focused on developing curriculum for use by more than one provider

- Project 1 exceeded its target for shared curriculum development, with GIFHE and Stamford the main partners delivering on this.
- Project 2 did not achieve its target on this measure.
- Overall, total delivery by SDF2 exceeded the total targets set, but not with the contracted mix by project.

Table 3: Workforce Industry Exchange and Employer Engagement

	6c. CPD hours undertaken through industry placements			15b. Employers consulted on training needs to inform curriculum/course development		
	Achieved	**Target**	**%**	**Achieved**	**Target**	**%**
Project 1				160		
Project 2	700			18		
Project 3	200	200	100	0	30	0
All projects total	900			178		

Number of CPD hours undertaken through industry placements

- Project 3 exactly hit its target on this measure, with delivery on this by Lincoln.
- Project 2 also delivered many outputs (via John Leggott) but these were not contracted.

Number of employers consulted on their training needs to inform curriculum/course development

- Project 3 did not achieve anything against its contracted output on this measure – whilst the two projects without targets delivered significant outputs that well exceed the project 3 target.
- Nearly all partners delivered something on this measure – reflecting good employer engagement – and delivery was particularly pronounced by DN group on Project 1 and by John Leggott on Project 2.

Table 4: CPD and teaching staff delivering cascade training or peer-to-peer support

	7a. Teaching staff undertaking CPD through external training			7b. CPD hours undertaken through external training			8a. Teaching staff delivering cascade training or peer-to-peer support		
	Achieved	Target	%	Achieved	Target	%	Achieved	Target	%
Project 1	57	43	133%	930.5	560	166			
Project 2	13						260	100	260
Project 3									
All projects total	70			930.5			260		

Number of teaching staff undertaking CPD through external training

- Project 1 achieved its target, with significant contributions by seven institutions to enable this.
- Project 2 also achieved outputs on this measure although these were not contracted.

Number of CPD hours undertaken through external training

- Project 1 exceeded its outputs target on this measure, with large scale outputs delivered by Boston, as well as by Franklin, GIFHE, Grantham and DN Group.

Number of teaching staff delivering cascade training or providing peer-to-peer support to colleagues

- Project 2 achieved well over double its contracted outputs, with the lion's share of these delivered by Franklin.

Table 5: Skills provision (short courses and very short courses)

	12a. Number of very short courses developed			12b. Learners starting very short courses			13b. Learners starting short courses		
	Achieved	Target	%	Achieved	Target	%	Achieved	Target	%
Project 1	20	13	154	44			251	90	279
Project 2				6					
Project 3				0	20	0			
All projects total	20			50			251	90	

Number of very short courses developed

- Project 1 exceeded its contracted outputs by 54%, with delivery spread across six partners.

Number of learners starting very short courses and learners starting short courses

- Project 3 had not yet delivered learners starting very short courses.
- Project 1 considerably exceeded its target for learners starting short courses, with a very large number of starts at Bishop Burton, as well as sizeable numbers at Franklin.

Table 6: Facilities and equipment and careers advice and guidance / school engagement

	10b. Learners that made use of new industry standard equipment			17a. Primary/secondary students participating in FE led activity to raise awareness of career opportunities and pathways		
	Achieved	**Target**	**%**	**Achieved**	**Target**	**%**
Project 1	710	1400	51	3025		
Project 2	360			0	1	0
Project 3	50	64	78	3300	60	5410
All projects total	1120			6325		

Number of learners that made use of new industry standard equipment

- Projects 1 and 3 fell short of targets on this measure due mainly to equipment procurement delays, although significant outputs were still achieved and more will be in the future.
- Project 2 delivered a significant volume of outputs although these were not contracted.
- This was a core programme element with eight colleges delivering against it.

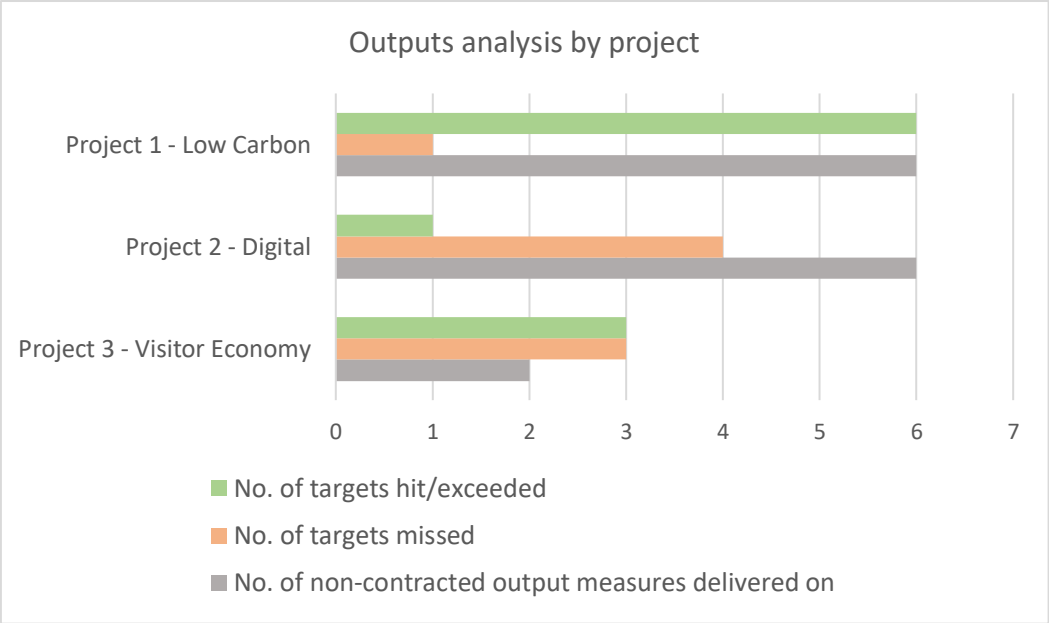
Number of primary and secondary students participating in FE led activity to raise awareness of career opportunities and pathways in locally agreed priority skills areas

- Project 1 reached a very large number of students, although these were not contracted outputs. Six colleges contributed, with numbers at Boston especially high.
- Projects 2 did not deliver any outputs against its target, although the target of one student reached was minimal and hence only just missed.
- Project 3 considerably overperformed against its targeted outputs

Overall analysis by Project

Figure 1 shows the number of targets hit/exceeded and missed by each of the three projects based on the data presented in tables 1-6, and also the number of other non-contracted output measures that they contributed to.

Figure 1: Contracted outputs targets hit and missed and additional outputs delivered by project



Project 1 – this project delivered, and often well exceeded, all but one of its contracted output targets. In addition, it made often sizeable contributions to six other measures it was not contracted to deliver against.

Project 2 – this project missed the majority of its contracted output targets but delivered 257% of its target for teaching staff delivering cascade training or peer-to-peer support. It also contributed to six other non-contracted output measures – more than the number of measures that it did not deliver against fully or at all.

Project 3 – this project hit three targets but also missed three. It delivered on two additional non-contracted outputs.

For all the projects, it is likely that further contributions to output measures will be delivered in the future, especially those most impact by delays in new equipment arriving, such as CPD that is based on the equipment, the number of learners using that equipment and starting courses that employ it. Hence, the position on the proportion of targets hit or exceeded would improve if a longer time frame is considered. That said, it is clear that project 1 has performed particularly well despite project delays and challenges and has been especially effective in delivering against the outputs targeted.

Projects 2 and 3 have also delivered significantly and across a good spread of measures. The issue is that that delivery has often been stronger on non-contracted measures than contracted ones,

especially for project 2. This suggests either misjudgements at the outset/proposal stage in setting targets, or potentially shifts in what projects decided needed to be delivered as circumstances and needs unfolded. That said, some of the underperformance against targets by project 2 is likely to be due to the interconnectivity between the digital and low carbon projects, with some outputs having the potential to have been attributed to either project 1 or 2, but more of them being allocated to low carbon in practice. There would be value in internal consideration of issues around target setting and outputs management and whether there are lessons to learn for future programmes.

It is also the case that some projects delivered non-contracted outputs on measures where another project did not meet its contracted output target. In some instances, if the total outputs for the three projects had been combined and set against the total contracted outputs, the target would have been met. That points to further success at programme level that is not reflected in looking at individual project targets.

It was beyond the scope of this evaluation to look into the detail of performance by individual colleges. However, at a general level it can be said that most had mixed performance against output measures, if with a few hitting nearly all of their low carbon output targets. This mixed position in most colleges backs up the messages received from virtually all consultees that time pressures and delays affected their outputs performance.

One detail noted was that in at least one instance a college had exactly met several targets, without exceeding any by a single unit, even on ones with big numbers where some variability might be expected. This could be by chance, or it might be that outputs delivered beyond the target were not recorded, or that delivery was immediately halted once an output target was hit. In either case, that would have prevented some additional delivered (or easily deliverable) outputs contributing to overall GLLEP SDF2 performance and helping to make up for shortfalls elsewhere.

Finally, it important to restress both that delay-impacted outputs may well increase in the future given the programme's accrual period up to 30 June 2023, and that the number of quantitative outputs was not the be all and end all for the programme. Other factors such as employer engagement and the critical success factors already discussed are also crucial in appraising overall success.

7. Wider Strategic Reflections on Greater Lincolnshire's SDF2 Programme

Beyond specific analysis and input around the topics already covered in this evaluation, partners made a number of wider and often strategic observations about the SDF2 approach and process. These are grouped below under strengths, challenges, and wider reflections and lessons.

Strengths of the approach

One major positive identified around the SDF2 approach related to the **funding** it brought in and what that has facilitated. This was partly about having a meaningful sum of money to invest, especially after years when colleges have faced tight finances that have restricted investment. But it was also about the *type* of finance and its relatively unconstrained nature (give or take frustrations about bureaucracy within budgets once set). The freedom to spend as needed, with ability to invest in capital equipment as well as revenue was welcomed and refreshing, whilst the lack of heavy-handed clawback mechanisms and too detailed a focus on outputs was seen to de-risk activity. This enabled creative and strategic approaches that may deliver less in short term numeric terms, but more in long term strategic added value and local economic benefit.

"These investments are transformational and valued beyond the money. They allow FE to de-risk innovation and experiment without a clawback risk."

Other strengths and positives identified (excepting collaboration, employer engagement, and project management, which are covered elsewhere) included:

- Good alignment with existing college priorities
- Good preparation ahead of LSIPs and proposals/bids to deliver on related priorities
- Building on things that were already in place, e.g. existing relationships

It was also clear that SDF2 had made a difference and facilitated new activity and approaches. As one partner put it, *"this absolutely would not have happened without SDF2."*

Challenges

Issues and frustrations around change request bureaucracy and delays; freeing up staff time for CPD; and delays and difficulties in getting new equipment have already been covered. But over and above these, **the main issue and challenge that emerged was time**. Every partner flagged this as a major challenge ("*absolutely unrealistic!*", "*ridiculous*") and it manifested itself and was compounded in a range of ways. At the basic level this was about the short duration to mobilise and deliver even if everything had gone smoothly. But this difficulty was amplified by the timing of delivery starting in September (*"the worst time for FE"*), with delivery then spanning two busy terms but missing out summer term which partners identified as usually the best time for having some flexibility and processes such as CPD. The difficulties of the short project duration were heightened further by delays in procuring equipment, and the way in which this impacted on other project activities that depended on the new equipment – such as running CPD and new courses.

"The challenge is time! Seven months for the total project, in term time, is far too small to do anything meaningful. That really impacted on the quality of what we could do."

The other major challenge not covered elsewhere was **staff recruitment**, especially on short term contracts. This affected a variety of roles whether in a teaching, employer engagement or project management capacity, and the capacity gaps this resulted in made the timescale pressures even more challenging.

"It's been pretty impossible to recruit new staff where they have been needed."

One response, specifically around securing staff for business engagement, was to use an agency outsourcing route. Whilst this may have cost implications or initially reduce internal capacity building, one college found that outsourcing not only secured the people it needed but led to two of them going on to become college employees – helping to tackle longer term staffing challenges.

Wider lessons and reflections

A range of more general points around what partners may have done differently with hindsight, or good practice to apply in the future, also emerged.

The most prominent of these was about **early and inclusive planning**. This was partly about the advantages of preparing early and having a delivery plan ready to swiftly click into action as soon as funding is confirmed, and with flexibility to adapt if that date is later than expected, or if there are changes in the context or detail. It was also about *how* the project is planned – in particular the benefits of involving those who will help to make it happen from the outset (i.e. at proposal development stage) – including staff on the curriculum side, those involved in payroll, finance and procurement, and thinking ahead to project management.

"Have a mobilisation plan ready in case things start at 11th hour – have a plan ready to press go."

A second area of discussion was around the **project focus areas**. In this respect the benefits of low carbon and digital as priority areas for government, the local economy across Lincolnshire, and for colleges was noted. Good connections between the two areas were also made, with digital technology often underpinning low carbon solutions. However, the importance of not neglecting other key subjects/sectors in future funding rounds was also noted – such as healthcare, engineering and construction, all of which have major vacancies/skills shortage challenges. In the case of engineering and construction, these also provide core skills that themselves are central to net zero transition. Likewise, one consultee stressed the importance of having feeder routes from Level 2 upwards, not just a focus on Level 3-5 provision.

Finally, the **complexities of geography and potential for links** to areas beyond Lincolnshire were noted. The large size of the county and its low population density means there are long journey times between many of the colleges within it. At one level, this amplifies the benefits of digital solutions that mean collaboration and learning is possible without travel. However, some stressed that richer relationships and insights can be gained from visiting colleges in person to see what each is doing. More widely, some noted that college groups with multiple centres and footprints spanning more than one LEP (and LSIP) area faced complexities in having different SDF2 projects running simultaneously in different parts of their group – with potential efficiencies and synergies if these were joined up or better connected. Likewise, the potential for stronger links to, and learning exchange with, colleges and SDF2 programmes in neighbouring LEP areas was highlighted.

8. Conclusions, Lessons and Implications for Future Activity

Several key conclusions have emerged across our review, sometimes intertwined with lessons about good practice or pitfalls to avoid. These are set out below (with lessons integrated into relevant conclusions) together with the implications that follow on from these about similar activity in the future.

Rationale, programme design and management

Conclusion 1: Delivery model – the selected delivery model for Greater Lincolnshire's SDF2 project was sensible. Having a central team housed in the TEC Partnership who dealt with overall programme management, allowed each of the nine delivery institutions to focus on the task of delivering the investment in their local areas – especially important in such a tight delivery window. Whilst the bid was centred on three project topics, the focus varied across institutions, meaning that the model was in reality *"nine projects not three."*

Conclusion 2: Topic rationale – there was a strong rationale for the selection of low carbon and digital as project strands that aligned with the government agenda, college priorities and local economic/business needs. Additionally, there were strong interlinkages between the areas and colleges often used digital technology to underpin low carbon advances. Visitor economy was less core to the programme and could appear somewhat bolted on. However, the two colleges active in this field are based in areas with a strong tourism sector so there was fit to local economies.

Conclusion 3: Programme management – the presence of a centralised programme management function transpired to be an important resource in facilitating delivery of SDF2 and an area of good practice to apply in the future. This resource was bolstered in the second half of the programme, and this added expertise, established governance and streamlined systems to good effect that was valued by all delivery partners. There are some areas where this could be improved further in future to save administration time, but these are tweaks rather than major criticisms. Linked to that, an often noted issue on the programme management side was on bureaucracy required for making change requests and of this slowing progress down. An improvement would be to have wider budget headings to allow some flexibility around minor changes. In terms of delivery partners, one observation was that those who had appointed their own internal lead project co-ordinator were able to manage SDF2 projects more smoothly.

Conclusion 4: Timescale – the main challenge that emerged across the project was time. Whilst some initial delays at bid stage contributed to this pressure, the more fundamental problem was the (nationally led) design of SDF2 design and its short delivery window. Difficulty was amplified by the timing of the project starting in September (the worst time for FE) but missing out the summer term, which is the best for processes such as CPD, and further compounded by delays in acquiring equipment on which CPD and new courses depended.

Implications for future delivery

- Build on SDF2's good delivery model and central management approach and ensure it is properly resourced.

- Encourage delivery partners to have their own internal project manager who can oversee and coordinate activity and liaise with the central team and across the delivery partnership.
- Consider the selection of project topics and how this can support collaboration and effectiveness by cutting across fields in which most delivery partners are active in.
- Push for more time and better timing, but plan ahead be prepared to start quickly.
- Use wider budget headings to reduce administration and delays arising from change requests.

Assessment of what was delivered

Conclusion 5: Business engagement – a good spread of meaningful employer engagement has taken place using a variety of methods and this has delivered real benefits in tuning provision to local economic needs. That has included businesses informing equipment purchase, guest lectures/masterclasses, curriculum design inputs, networking, careers events, etc. Whilst the depth and range of business engagement varied by institution, with probable scope to widen and deepen it in some institutions, there is now a strong foundation for ongoing business relationships into the future.

Conclusion 6: Equipment – an impressive selection of high quality, industry standard equipment has been procured thanks to SDF2's capital investment. Digital equipment has often gone hand in hand with low carbon delivery, with an 'immersive' nature allowing training to occur with greater ease, efficiency, variety, realism and safety. Visitor economy capital upgrades have been equally welcomed and impactful. Key challenges arose on procurement, change request bureaucracy, supply and installation delays, and time pressures. However, all partners are unequivocal that this new kit was much needed and would not have been acquired without SDF2. All agree that it raises profile and will aide recruitment, business engagement and future growth. Furthermore, it provides a far richer experience that will lead to better outcomes in respect to achievement, retention and progression for students and upskilling for staff.

Conclusion 7: Staff CPD – this formed an important element of the programme and its wider aims to drive up quality in the FE sector, with SDF2's revenue strand helpfully complimenting the capital and ensuring capability to lever maximum benefit from new equipment. A good range of CPD activities have been undertaken, many of which provide good practice to draw from, including in further connecting FE to local businesses. Although CPD delivery has been more limited than expected thanks again to delays in equipment arriving and being installed and to difficulty scheduling CPD outside of the summer term when staff have more time, there is consensus that it has been much needed and very beneficial staff. In particular, it has helped raise awareness of new industry standard technology and quashed concerns amongst those who were sceptical at first about bringing the kit on board.

Conclusion 8: Courses and curriculum development – although in most cases, full delivery of new provision is yet to start, significant areas of new curricula have been developed thanks to SDF2. Whilst some of this might have happened anyway, where that is the case, it has been enhanced, accelerated and more strategically planned thanks to SDF2, and critically backed up by vast steps forward on new high quality equipment and technology. This underpins new unique selling points that will open doors to learners and businesses, supporting achievement of SDF2 objectives.

Conclusion 9: Delivery package – whilst each type of deliverable/improvement was valuable in its own right, delivering them in combination brought synergies and added much value. For example, employer engagement helped to inform equipment choices, which then underpins CPD, course/curriculum development and further employer engagement.

Implications for future delivery

- Systematically and strategically plan business engagement and build on relationships established through SDF2 to ensure provision aligns to local skill needs and opportunities.
- Continue to adopt packages of delivery combining these elements – equipment, CDP, curriculum development and business engagement – with flexibility about what these are and tailoring to meet college, employer and learner needs.

Critical success factors and EDI

Conclusion 10: Strategic Focus - the project has been exemplary in terms of its strategic focus and how that fits with current and future economic needs, both in terms of programme design and the detail of how that has been implemented in practice.

Conclusion 11: Efficiencies - only a few colleges have achieved significant efficiencies to date, with these usually relating to new digital equipment reducing the need to travel, or making teaching more efficient. The project has not brought about efficiencies in terms of rationalisation of which colleges offer which courses. However, it has positioned institutions to be able to achieve efficiencies in the future, for example through one tutor delivering teaching to students at multiple venues.

Conclusion 12: Collaboration – good progress has been made on partnership working and relationships, with a demonstrable spirit of sharing and collaboration running across the project, and mechanisms to share learning and discuss issues. This is an improvement on the previous, more competitive, position. Deeper collaboration in other ways has been limited (e.g. efficiencies in course provision across colleges, joint websites or events), with factors behind this including time pressures, absence of contract requirements and variation in the focus of each partner's projects. Nevertheless, a good foundation is now in place for deeper future collaboration.

Conclusion 13: EDI – partners generally applied existing Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) policies and practices (that are already mainstreamed and prominent within colleges) to the SDF2 provision and built on those, rather than develop something new. Examples of how that manifested include outreach with schools in disadvantaged areas, engagement with faith groups, action on gender stereotypes around subject areas, digital inclusion and accessible venues. The importance of this agenda was well understood and followed through in practice.

Implications for future delivery

- Maintain excellent approaches around strategic alignment and EDI and look to move to the next level in deepening collaboration between partners and jointly responding to the strategic imperatives and employer needs identified. Look for opportunities to realise efficiencies in doing so, and through making best use of new digital capabilities established through SDF2.

Performance on quantitative outputs

Conclusion 14: KPI outputs – based on the data up to May 2023, there has been mixed performance in hitting contracted key performance indicator targets. Project 1 (low carbon) has performed very well, hitting and often well exceeding all but one of its seven targets. Project 2 (digital) and Project 3 (visitor economy) have performed much less well on KPIs, hitting one out of five, and three out of six targets respectively. That said, all three projects have delivered on other non-contracted outputs; the digital project has helped to underpin low carbon delivery; and more outputs are expected to accrue in the future given delays, such as in equipment that delivery of some outputs depends upon.

Conclusion 15: Overall and non-contracted outputs – all three projects delivered significant volumes of additional non-contracted outputs, often against measures that other projects were contracted on. Benefits have thus gone beyond those originally anticipated. This was especially the case for project 2 which delivered on six non-contracted output measures, despite only hitting one of the targets it was itself contracted on. If outputs performance was looked at in terms of overall delivery against overall targets for the three projects combined, performance against KPIs would have been stronger.

Conclude 16: Forecasting and target setting – the combination of variable delivery on contracted targets and quite widespread additional delivery on non-contracted KPIs suggests either misjudgements at the outset/proposal stage in setting targets, or potentially shifts in what projects decided needed to be delivered as circumstances and needs unfolded. Additionally, crossover between low carbon and digital projects meant that some outputs that involved both had to be attributed to one or other (and probably more often to low carbon). Whilst time pressures and overlaps may have made forecasting difficult, quantitative performance on KPIs would have been judged to be stronger if the type of outputs delivered had been better predicted.

Implications for future delivery

- Continue to measure outputs as they accrue and update performance assessment once a full picture for the whole project duration is available.
- Learn from good practice and difficulties in delivering this time to enhance future delivery.
- Consider how future forecasting/target setting can be improved, backed by suitable project management, so that more targets are hit and due credit is gained for the full range of delivery.

Wider benefits, lessons and reflections

Conclusion 17: Challenges – whilst time was the project's main pressure point, recruiting staff was also a frequent difficulty, especially for short term contracts. This affected a variety of roles including teaching, employer engagement and project management, and the capacity gaps this led to made the timescale pressures even more challenging.

Conclusion 18: Geography - there is potential for stronger links to, and learning exchange with, colleges and SDF2 programmes in neighbouring LEP areas. This would also benefit college groups with centres in more than one LEP area and may enable efficiencies and synergies.

Conclusion 19: Freedoms and their benefits – SDF2 has allowed colleges a good degree of freedom and flexibility to do what they judge to be most needed and to spend accordingly (whether capital or revenue), without excessive restriction, threat of clawback or outputs overload hanging over them. For the most part, this has paid dividends. Whilst inevitably not every single investment will have delivered maximum economic value, the overall impact has been impressive, and at its best the programme has been transformational in improving provision and serving employer needs.

Implications for future delivery

- Plan future programmes so that they are prepared for likely difficulties such as recruitment and timescale; and engage those who will be involved in delivery from the outset.
- Explore options for engaging with similar programmes in neighbouring areas.

Overall, the SDF2 programme has proved that a model combing some shared principles and areas of focus, an onus on collaboration, and freedom for colleges to invest and improve provision as they judge necessary can deliver well. Whilst inevitably this approach involves a degree of risk, our assessment is that this is outweighed by its benefits and that SDF2 has demonstrated an approach which can bring considerable benefits for colleges, the DFE, learners and employers.

Annex 1 – outputs and provider contributions as of the end of March 2023

The tables below show outputs delivered as reported to DfE at the final monitoring point (i.e. up to the end of March 2023). These do not include further activity and outputs delivered during the accruals period and hence some of the figures are lower than the full outputs analysis presented in section 6. In all of the analysis, Project 1 refers to Low Carbon, Project 2 is Digital and Project 3 is Visitor Economy.

Reshaping local provision in line with local need and quality improvement

	1a. Collaborations focused on reshaping provision			1b. Leaders or governors engaged in reshaping			1d. New resources that support reshaping		
	Achieved	**Target**	**%**	**Achieved**	**Target**	**%**	**Achieved**	**Target**	**%**
Project 1	10	2	500	3			4		
Project 2	1						0	2	0
Project 3	2	1	200	1					
All projects total	13			4			4		
Institution	**Achieved**	**Split by project**		**Achieved**	**Split by project**		**Achieved**	**Split by project**	
Stamford	4	P1-4,					4	P1-4	
Grantham	5	P1-5							
GIFHE	3	P1-1, P2-1, P3-1		4	P1-3, P3-1				
Lincoln	1	P3-1							

Collaborations on sharing teaching staff and on curriculum development

	4a. Collaborations sharing teaching staff for the first time			5a. Collaborations focused on developing curriculum for use by more than one provider		
	Achieved	**Target**	**%**	**Achieved**	**Target**	**%**
Project 1	1			8	8	100
Project 2	0	1	0	0	1	
Project 3				3		
All projects total	1			11		
Institution	**Achieved**	**Split by project**		**Achieved**	**Split by project**	
Bishop Burton				1	P1-1	
Stamford	1	P1-1		4	P1-4	
GIFHE				6	P1-3, P3-3	

Workforce Industry Exchange and Employer Engagement

	6c. CPD hours undertaken through industry placements			15b. Employers consulted on training needs to inform curriculum/course development		
	Achieved	**Target**	**%**	**Achieved**	**Target**	**%**
Project 1				138		
Project 2	410			18		
Project 3	200	200	100	0	30	0
All projects total	610			156		
Institution	**Achieved**	**Split by project**		**Achieved**	**Split by project**	
Boston				10	P1-10	
Bishop Burton				20	P1-20	
Stamford				13	P1-13	
GIFHE				3	P1-3	
Franklin				6	P1-6	
John Leggott	410	P2-410		18	P2-18	
DN Group				86	P1-86	
Lincoln	200	P3-200				

CPD and teaching staff delivering cascade training or peer-to-peer support

	7a. Teaching staff undertaking CPD through external training			7b. CPD hours undertaken through external training			8a. Teaching staff delivering cascade training or peer-to-peer support		
	Achieved	**Target**	**%**	**Achieved**	**Target**	**%**	**Achieved**	**Target**	**%**
Project 1	44	43	102%	596	560	106			
Project 2	13						257	100	257
Project 3									
All projects total	57			596			257		
	Achieved	**Split by project**		**Achieved**	**Split by project**		**Achieved**	**Split by project**	
Boston	16	P1-16		P1-502	P1-502				
Bishop Burton	12	P1-12							
GIFHE	7	P1-7		P1-54	P1-54				
Franklin	9	P1-9		P1-40	P1-40		250	P2-250	
John Leggott	13	P2-13					7	P2-7	

Skills provision (short courses and very short courses)

	12a. Number of very short courses developed			12b. Learners starting very short courses			13b. Learners starting short courses		
	Achieved	**Target**	**%**	**Achieved**	**Target**	**%**	**Achieved**	**Target**	**%**
Project 1	17	13	131				238	90	264
Project 2									
Project 3				0	20	0			
All projects total	17			0			238	90	
	Achieved	**Split by project**		**Achieved**	**Split by project**		**Achieved**	**Split by project**	
Boston	3	P1-3							
Bishop Burton	3	P1-3					192	P1-192	
Stamford	1	P1-1							
Grantham	4	P1-4							
GIFHE	3	P1-3							
Franklin							46	P1-46	
DN Group	3	P1-3							

Facilities and equipment and careers advice and guidance / school engagement

	10b. Learners that made use of new industry standard equipment			17a. Primary/secondary students participating in FE led activity to raise awareness of career opportunities and pathways		
	Achieved	**Target**	**%**	**Achieved**	**Target**	**%**
Project 1	590	1400	42	2270		
Project 2	360			0	1	0
Project 3	50	64	78	0	60	0
All projects total	1060			2270		
Institution	**Achieved**	**Split by project**		**Achieved**	**Split by project**	
Boston	189	P1-189		1038	P1-1038	
Bishop Burton	192	P1-192				
Stamford				152	P1-152	
Grantham				650	P1-650	
GIFHE	20	P1-20		180	P1-180	
Franklin	60	P1-60		250	P1-250	
John Leggott	360	P2-360				
DN Group	129	P1-129				
Lincoln	50	P3-50				