

# From School to Work: Tackling Skills Mismatch and Building Pathways for Young People in East Anglia

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## Overview

Skills mismatch remains a persistent challenge in the UK labour market and a growing barrier to young people's transition from school to work. Employers report ongoing skills shortages, while many young people still struggle to access clear, high-quality routes into skilled employment. These pressures are shaped by technological change, uneven employer investment in training, and longstanding regional inequalities.

East Anglia reflects this national picture, but with sharper internal contrasts. While Cambridge and Norwich support dynamic, innovation-led economies, many parts of Norfolk, Suffolk and Peterborough face weaker educational progression, lower participation in further education, and limited technical pathways at Levels 3–5. Recruitment difficulties remain strong in key sectors, while transport and housing barriers further restrict access to opportunity.

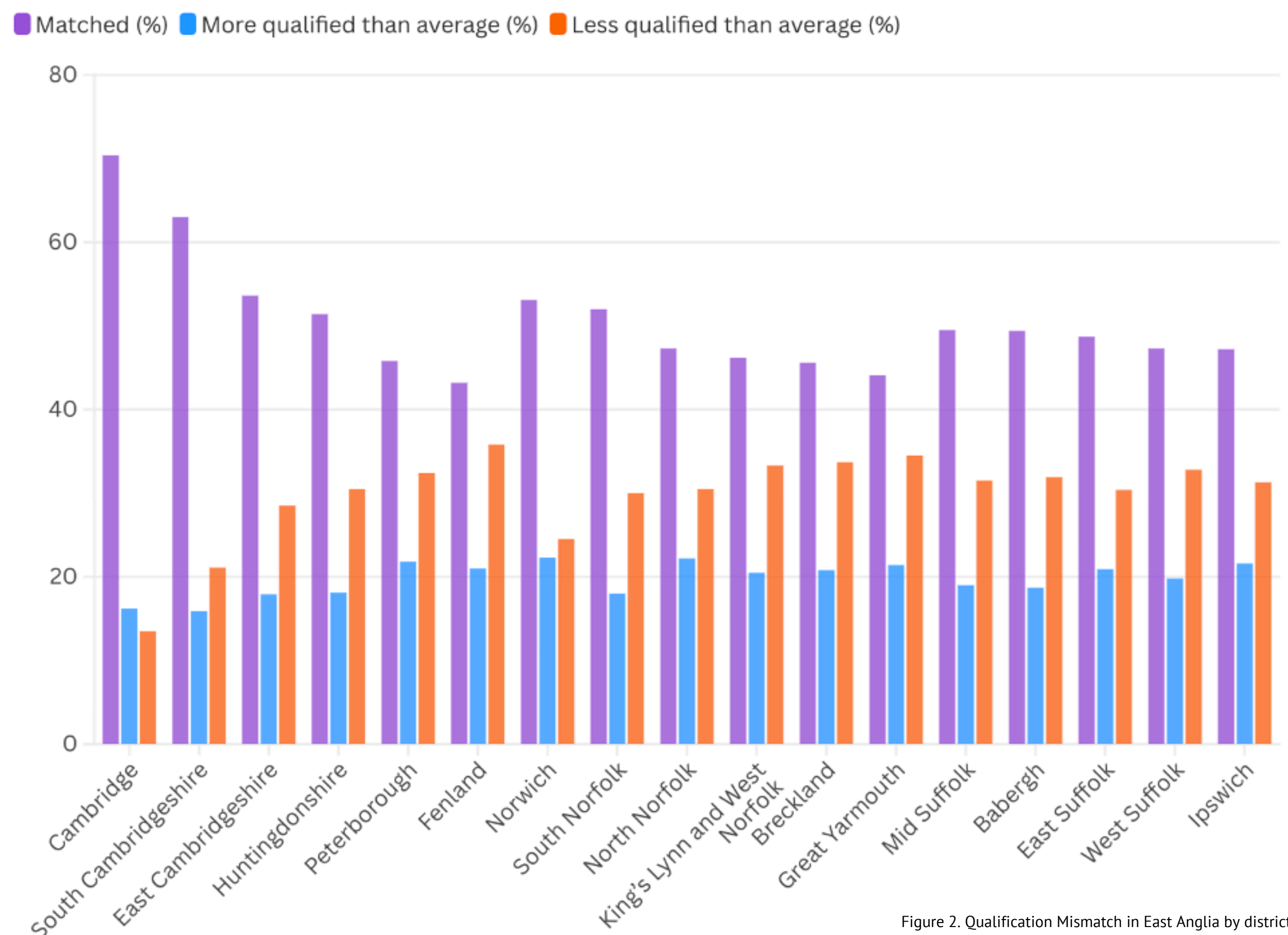


Figure 2. Qualification Mismatch in East Anglia by district

## Key Findings

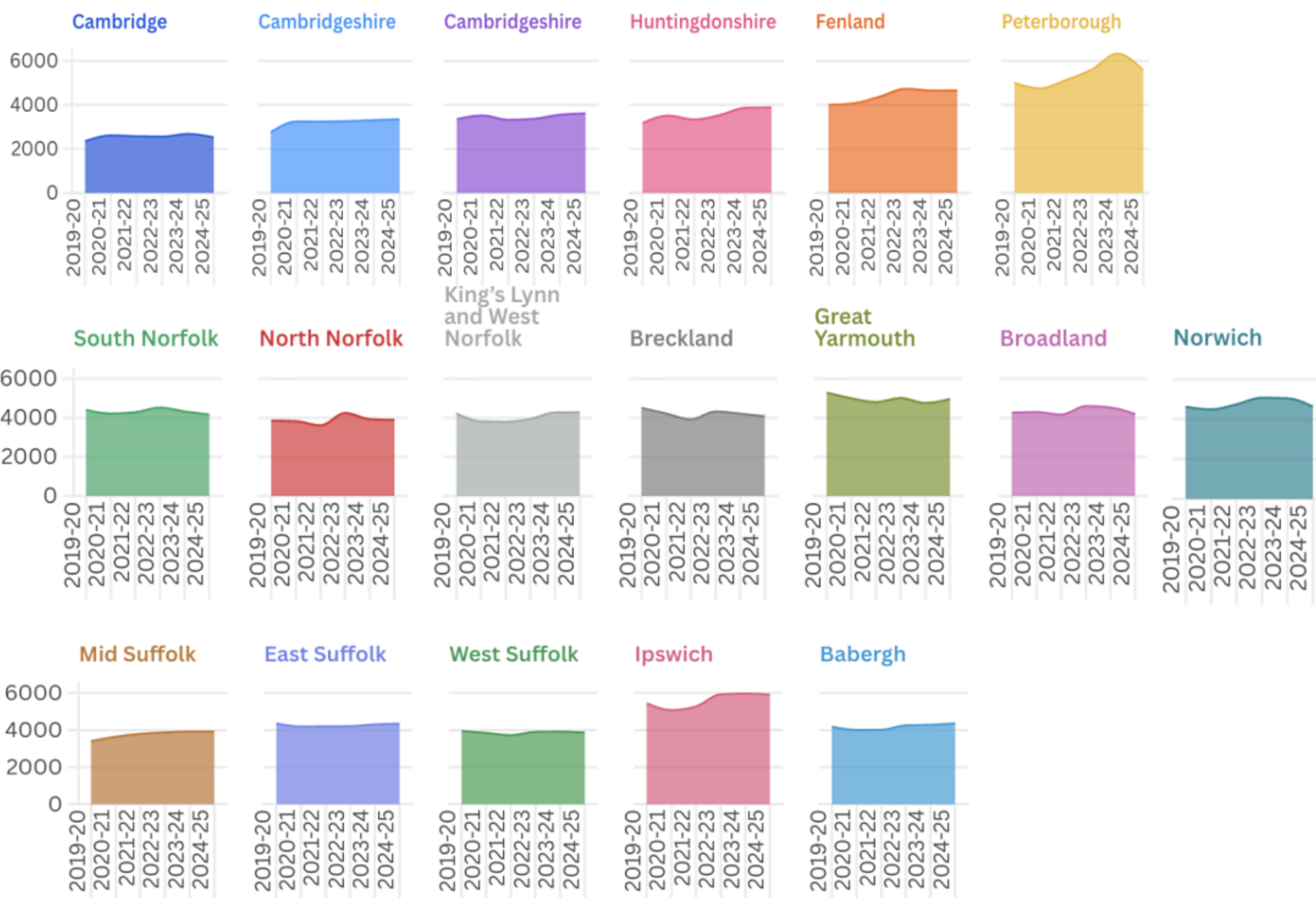


Figure 1. Further education and skills participation in East Anglia, per 100,000 people, 2019-20 to 2024-25

- **Skills mismatch continues to constrain productivity and widen inequalities in access to good work in the UK.** Employers report persistent skills shortages, while many young people still face uneven access to quality routes into growth sectors, with apprenticeship opportunities and employer training both under pressure.
- **East Anglia illustrates both opportunity and risk.** The region combines major economic strengths with weaker attainment, lower FE participation, and limited technical pathways in many areas, creating uneven access to progression.
- **The policy framework is improving but remains incomplete.** Although national reforms have strengthened the overall system, gaps remain in SME engagement, funding stability, and recognition of mobility and housing as part of skills policy.

## Call for Action

To unlock the region's economic potential and support inclusive growth, East Anglia will require sustained investment in technical education, stronger employer participation, and more coherent connections between skills, transport and housing strategies. Our research has identified a number of key themes.

- **Make retention and mobility part of the skills agenda:** Skills policy should address not only how to attract people, but also the transport, housing, and opportunity conditions that shape whether they stay in the region.
- **Plan beyond Level 3 and take a more joined-up regional view:** East Anglia needs a stronger shared regional approach so higher-level technical and professional skills do not fall through fragmented local and funding arrangements.
- **Make it easier for employers to engage and focus on future needs:** Simpler engagement, more flexible funding, and clearer incentives could help employers, especially SMEs, invest more in future skills needs.
- **Pay more attention to 'invisible skills':** Local plans should better recognise transferable skills such as communication, problem-solving, and leadership, and how these are developed across sectors.
- **Strengthen pathways and guidance, especially around age 16:** Young people need clearer progression routes, better access to work experience, and stronger trusted support at an important transition point.
- **Take a longer-term approach:** Skills policy should take a longer-term and more preventative view, linking skills investment to wider wellbeing, resilience, and social outcomes.