

Sussex Local Skills Improvement Plan

Skills Provider Survey Analysis

Annual update 2026

Data analysis notes

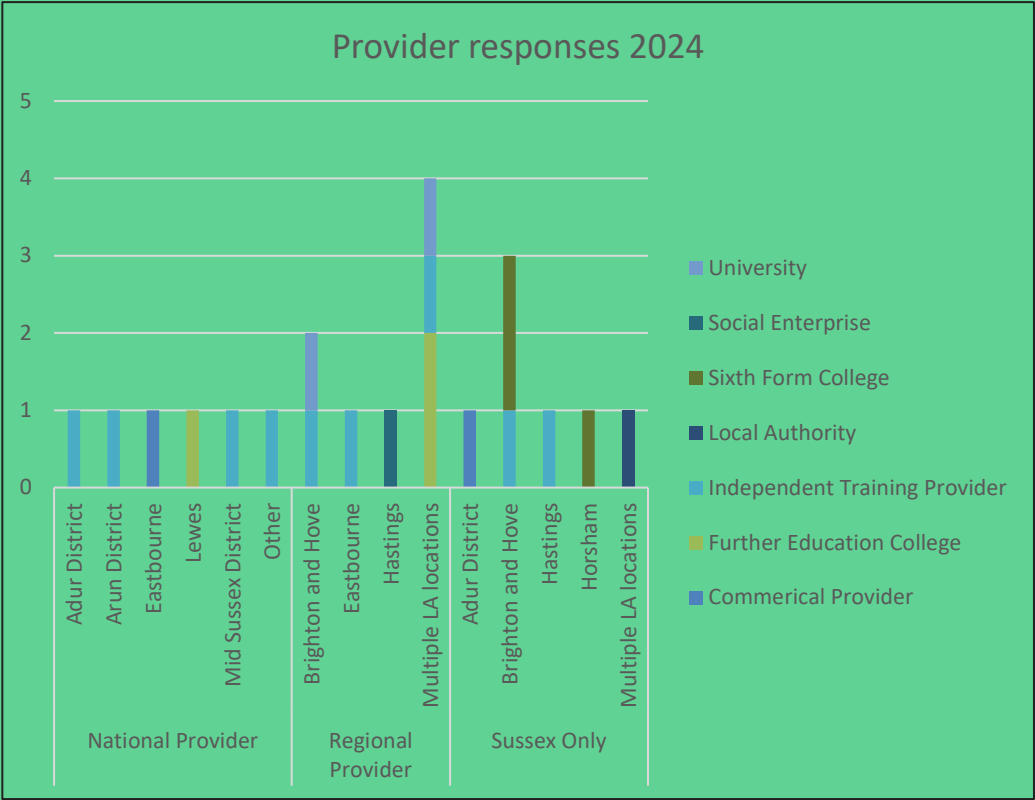
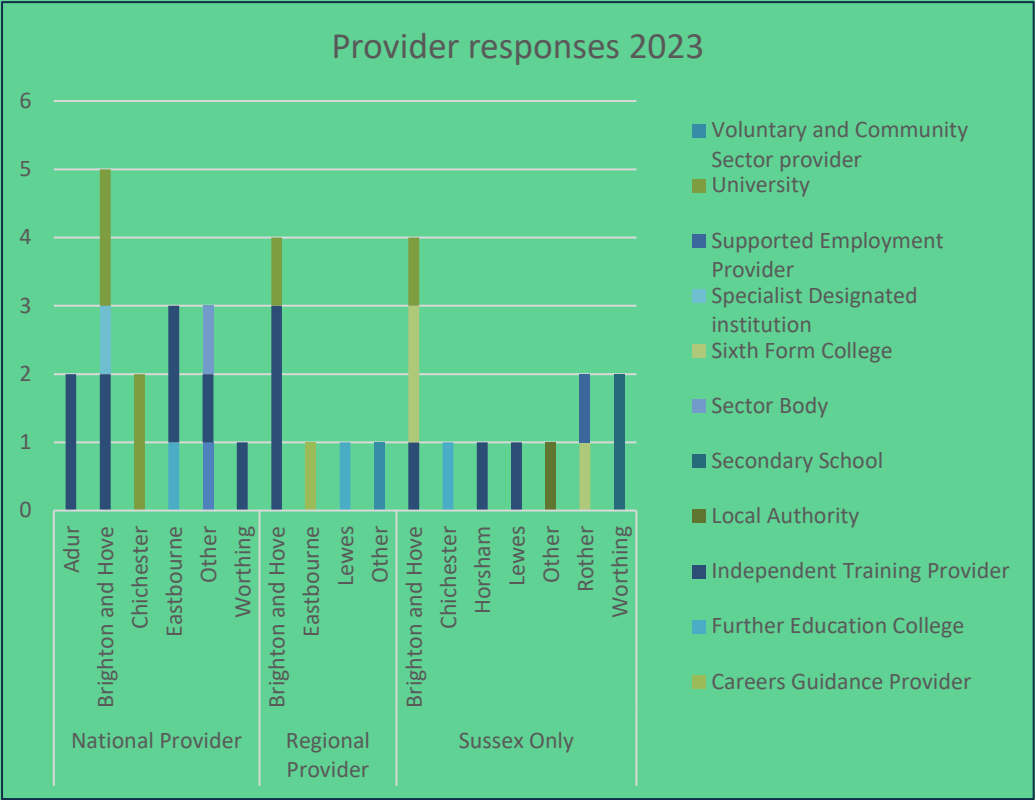
As part of the Sussex Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) annual evidence refresh, we undertook a provider survey to gather updated insight from education and training providers across Sussex. The survey explored provider engagement with employers, the types of provision delivered, geographic reach, and the challenges faced in meeting local workforce needs.

In 2026, 20 providers responded to the survey, compared to 35 in 2023, 21 in 2024 and 25 in 2025. While participation is slightly lower than last year, responses continue to reflect engagement from a broad cross-section of the Sussex skills system. Submissions represent a diverse mix of national, regional and Sussex-only organisations. Further Education Colleges and Independent Training Providers form a significant proportion of respondents, alongside contributions from Adult Education, Commercial, and Voluntary and Community Sector providers, with more limited input from Higher Education and Sixth Form institutions.

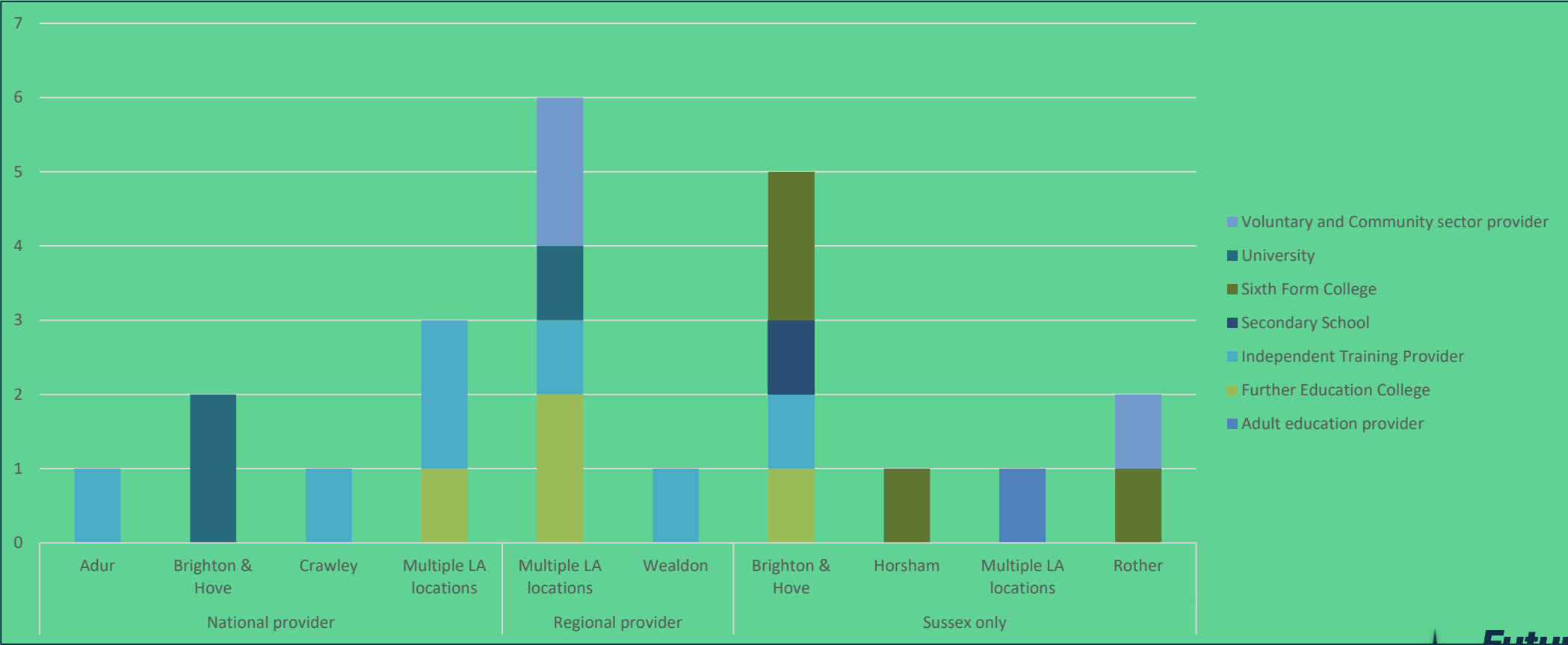
Providers reported delivery across multiple Sussex districts, including Brighton & Hove, Eastbourne, Hastings, Lewes, Arun, Crawley, Mid Sussex, Wealden and Worthing, providing a broad view of the county's skills landscape. Where multiple responses were received from a single organisation, these were consolidated into one submission for reporting purposes.

Comparisons with previous survey rounds highlight sustained priorities alongside emerging themes. The findings strengthen the evidence base for LSIP 2.0 (2026–2029) and support continued collaboration to ensure Sussex's skills system remains responsive to employer demand and regional workforce development needs.

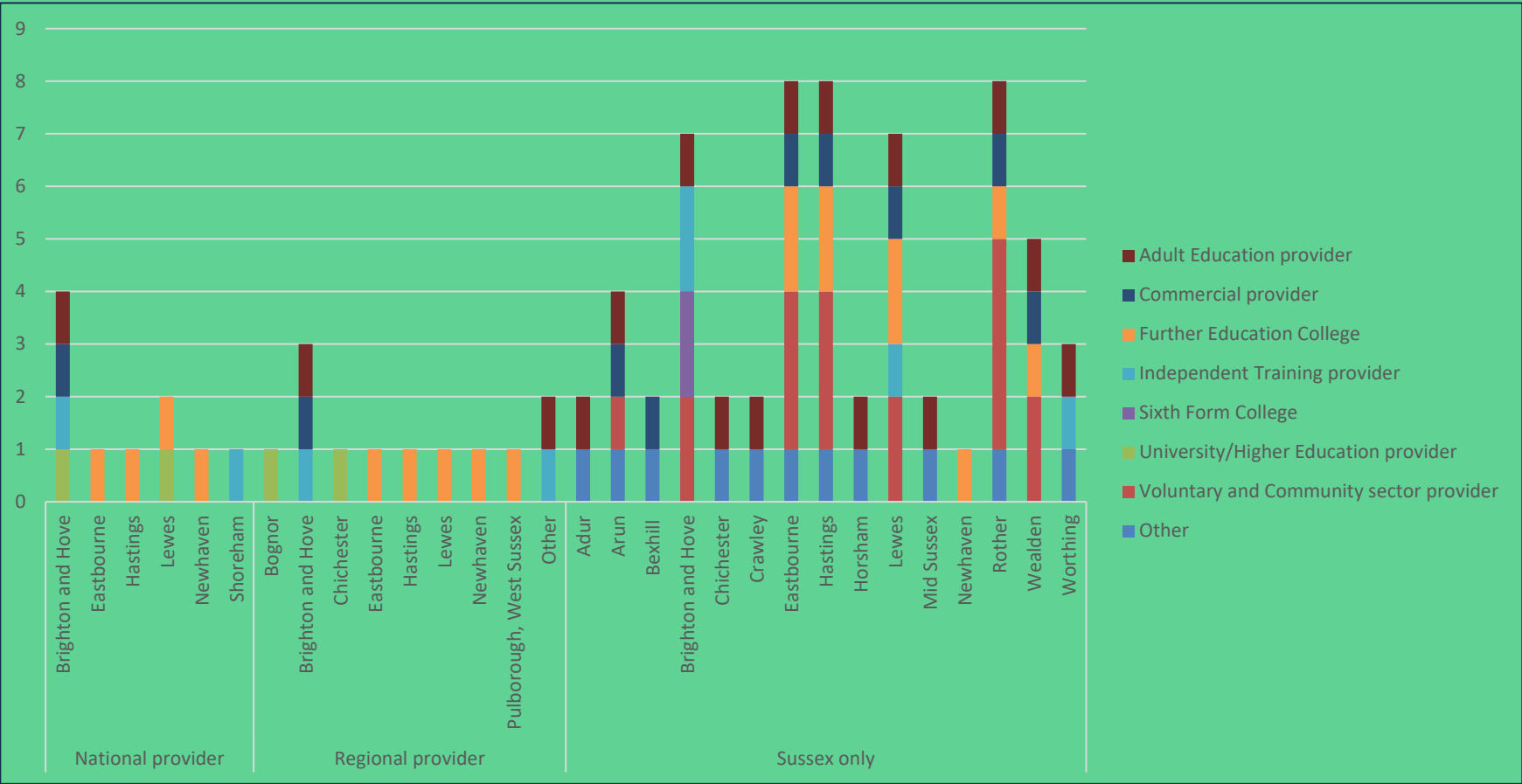
Survey respondent demographics 23-24



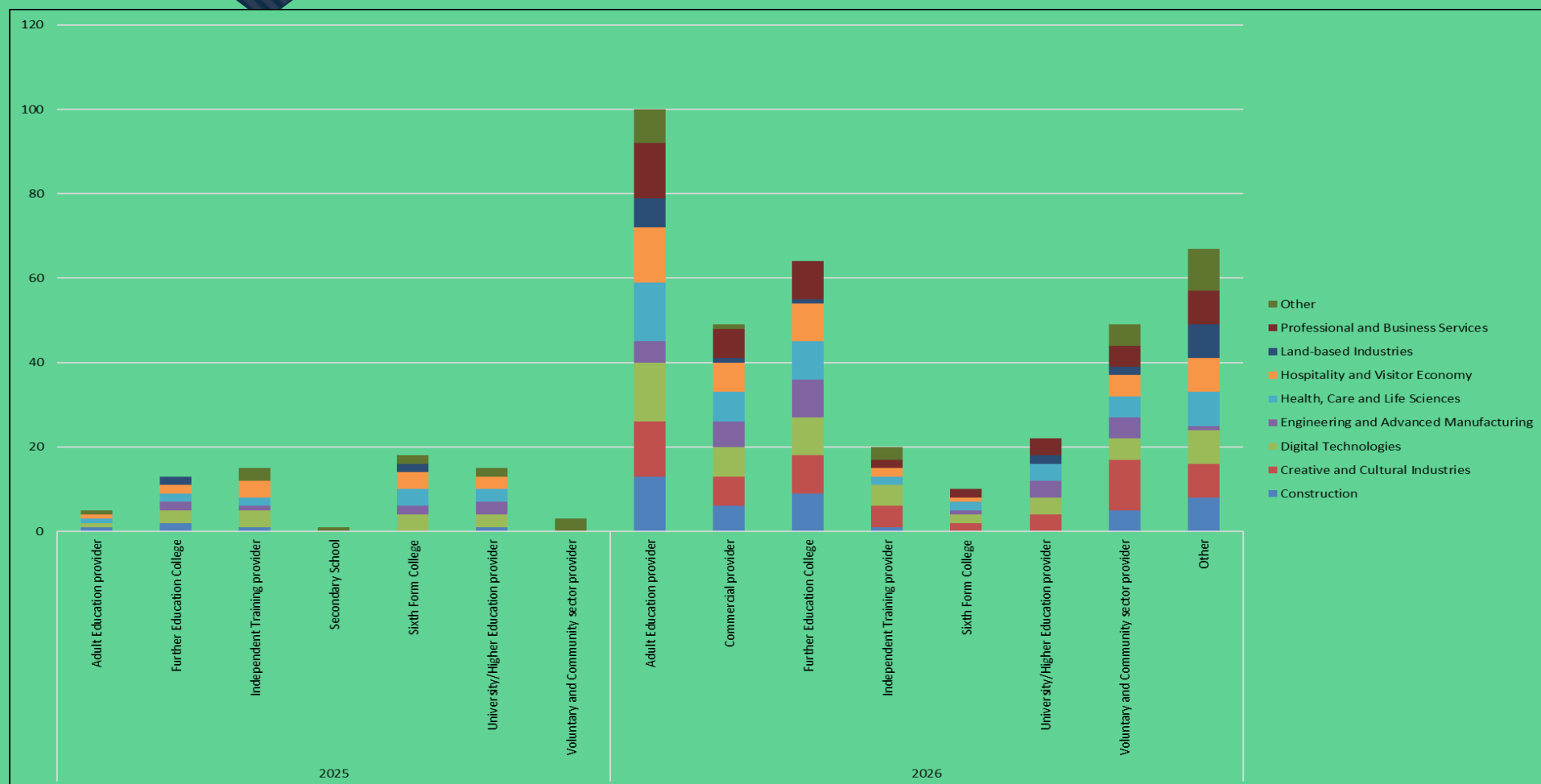
Survey respondent demographics 2025



Survey respondent demographics 2026



Providers provision coverage of the LSIP Key Sectors 2025 & 2026



Providers provision coverage of the LSIP Key Sectors 2026

The 2026 data shows sector provision distributed across all Sussex districts, with strongest overall representation in Eastbourne, Hastings and Lewes, where provision spans multiple LSIP priority sectors.

Further Education Colleges continue to demonstrate the broadest sector coverage across districts, particularly in **Engineering & Advanced Manufacturing, Digital Technologies, and Health & Care**.

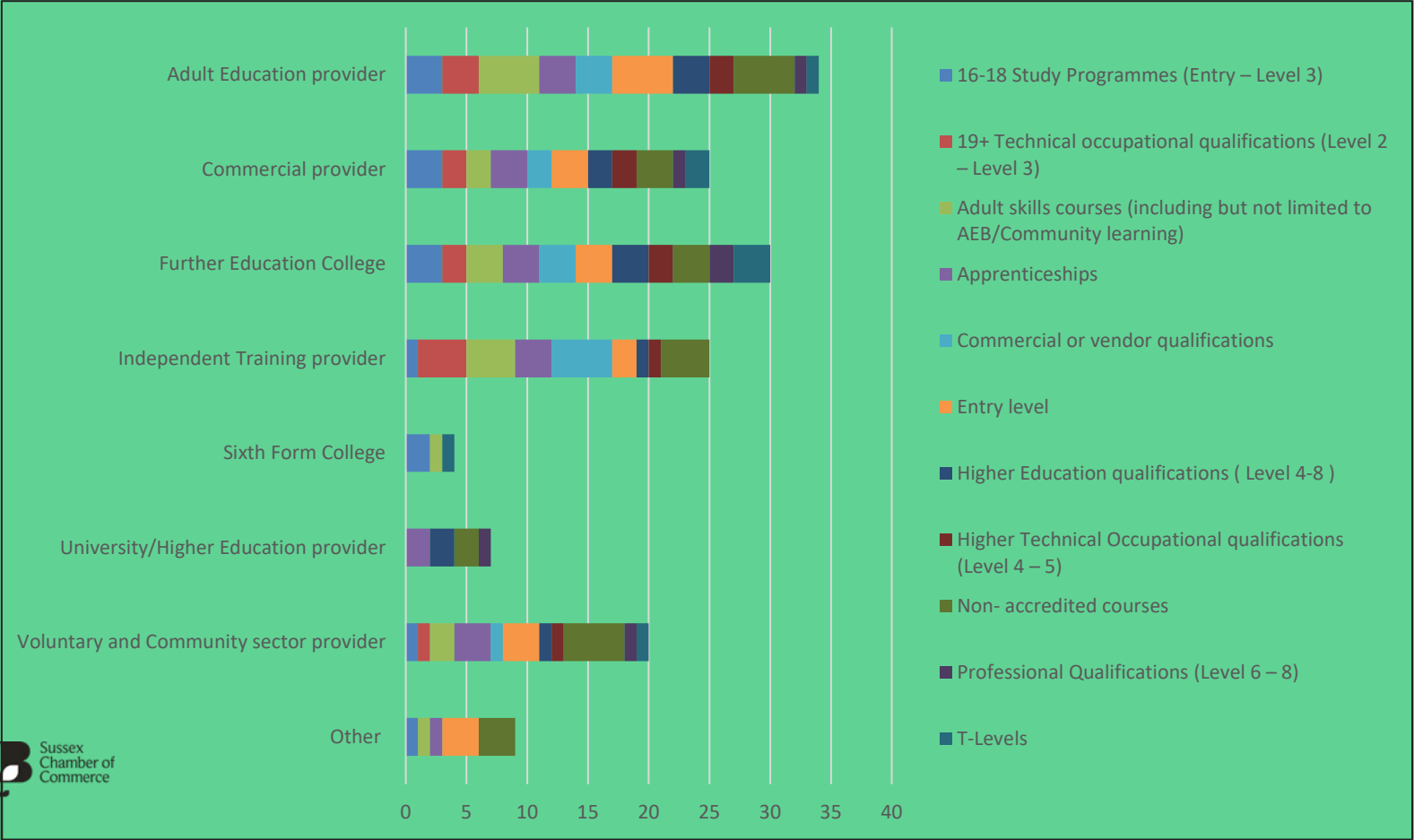
Independent Training Providers and Adult Education providers also contribute significantly across priority areas, supporting sector breadth at a local level.

Digital Technologies, Health & Care, and Professional & Business Services appear consistently represented across most districts, while **Construction and Land-based Industries** show more geographically concentrated delivery.

Overall, the data reflects a broadly distributed but locally varied skills landscape, with sector strengths differing by district and provider type.

Types of courses and qualifications by Provider

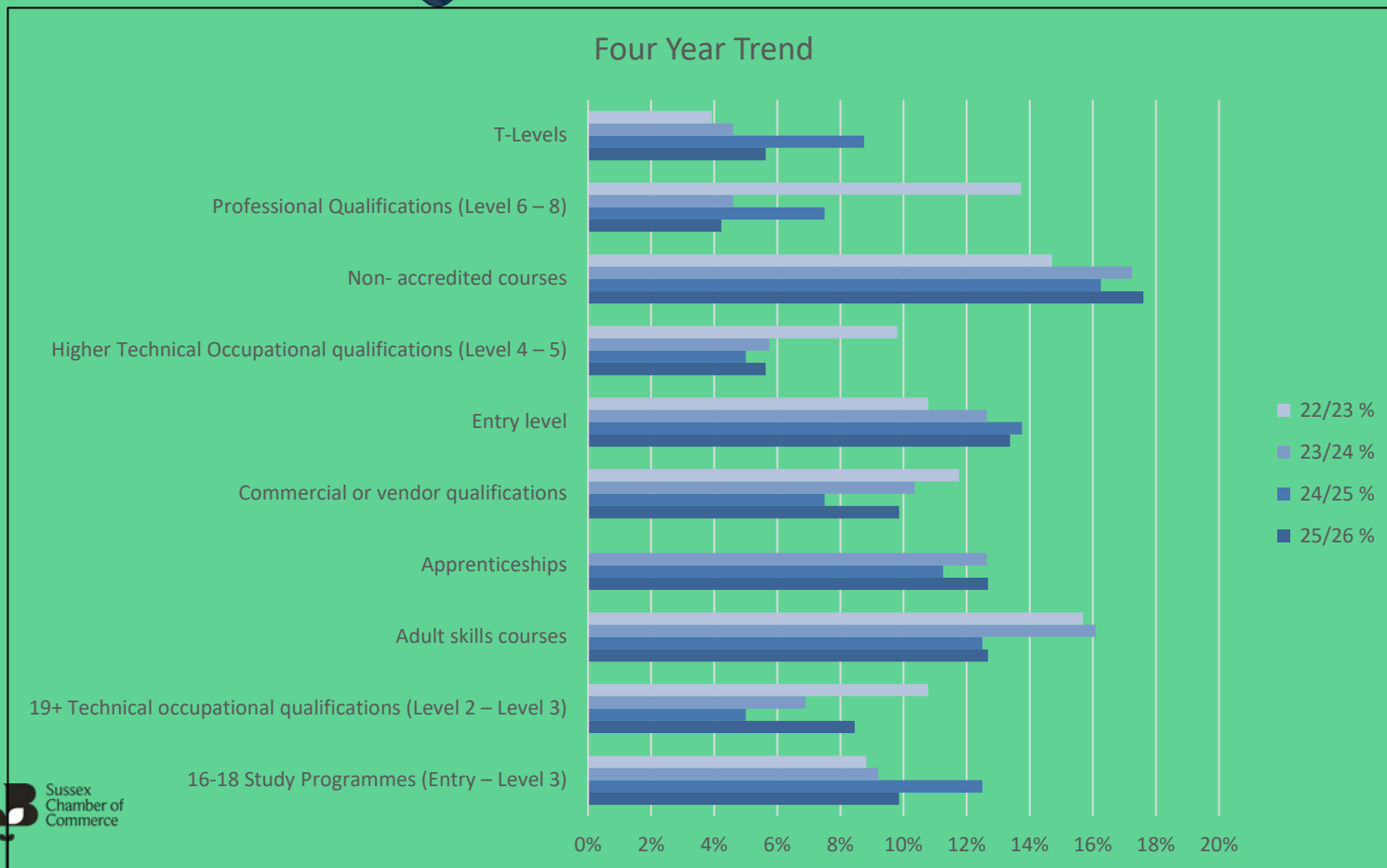
2026



Responses identified that there continues to be a good coverage of all types of provision in Sussex.

Course/qualification	Provider numbers
Commercial or vendor qualifications	14
Non- accredited courses	25
Entry level	19
Adult skills courses	18
Apprenticeships	18
16-18 Study Programmes (Entry – Level 3)	14
T-Levels	8
19+ Technical occupational qualifications (Level 2 – Level 3)	12
Higher Education qualifications (Level 4-8)	12
Higher Technical Occupational qualifications (Level 4 – 5)	8
Professional Qualifications (Levels 6 – 8)	6

Types of courses and qualifications by Provider – 4-year trend



Apprenticeships have declined gradually since 2022/23, with signs of stabilisation in 2025/26.

Non-accredited provision remains consistently strong across all four years, while entry-level delivery has stayed broadly stable.

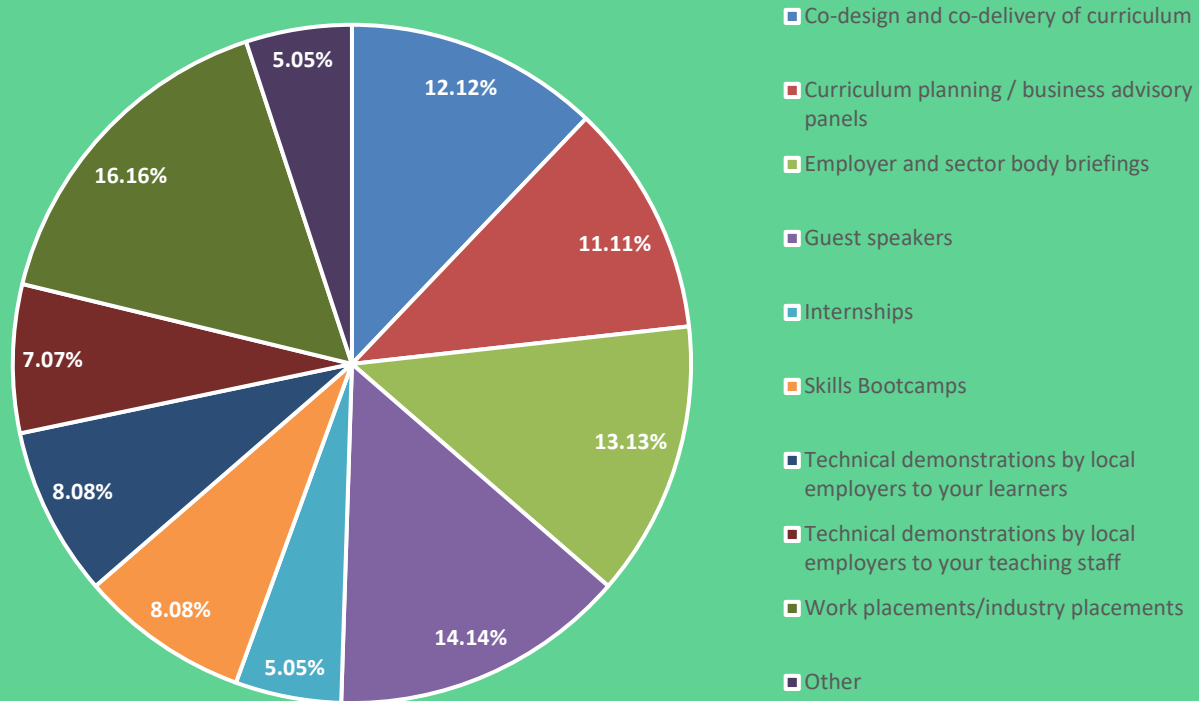
Adult skills courses peaked in 2023/24 and 2024/25 before easing slightly in 2025/26, though levels remain above 2022/23.

16–18 Study Programmes and T-Levels show sustained growth overall, reflecting continued focus on technical pathways for younger learners.

Higher-level and professional qualifications fluctuate year on year but show signs of recovery in 2025/26.

Overall, the trend highlights steady demand for technical and pre-employment routes, alongside more variable patterns in adult and apprenticeship provision.

Ways providers engage with local employers 2026



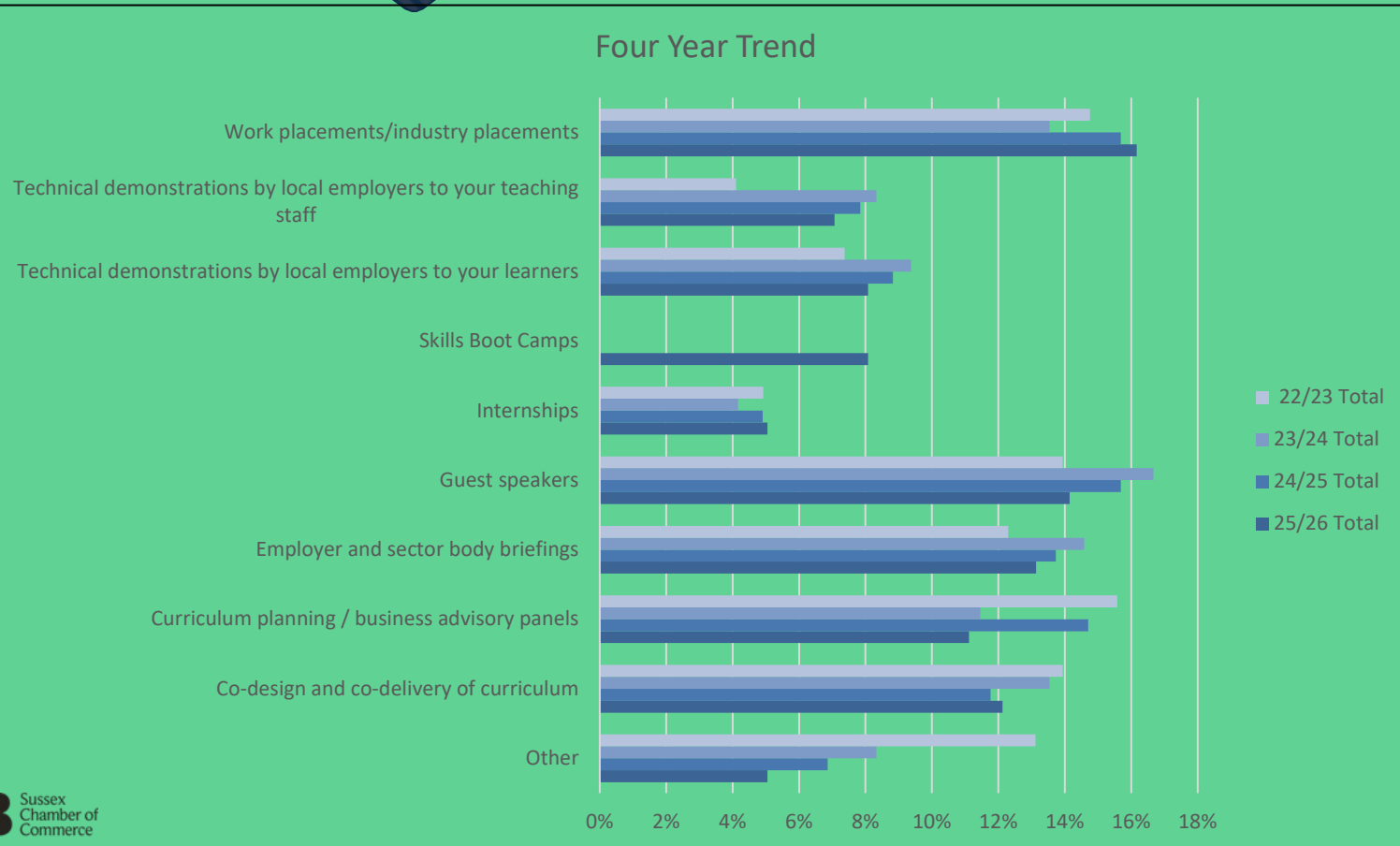
Providers engage with employers in a variety of ways, reflecting a broad and embedded approach to collaboration.

The most common forms of engagement are work/industry placements (16%) and guest speakers (14%), followed by employer/sector briefings (13%) and co-design and co-delivery of curriculum (12%). This highlights a strong focus on practical experience and employer-informed curriculum development.

Other engagement includes advisory panels, technical demonstrations, internships and skills bootcamps.

Additional activity reported by providers includes partnership working through LSIP and DWP networks, careers fairs, apprenticeship recruitment and preparation-for-work support.

Ways providers engage with local employers – 4-year trend



Work placements and guest speakers continue to represent the strongest and most consistent forms of employer engagement, with levels remaining high across the four-year period and increasing overall in 2025/26.

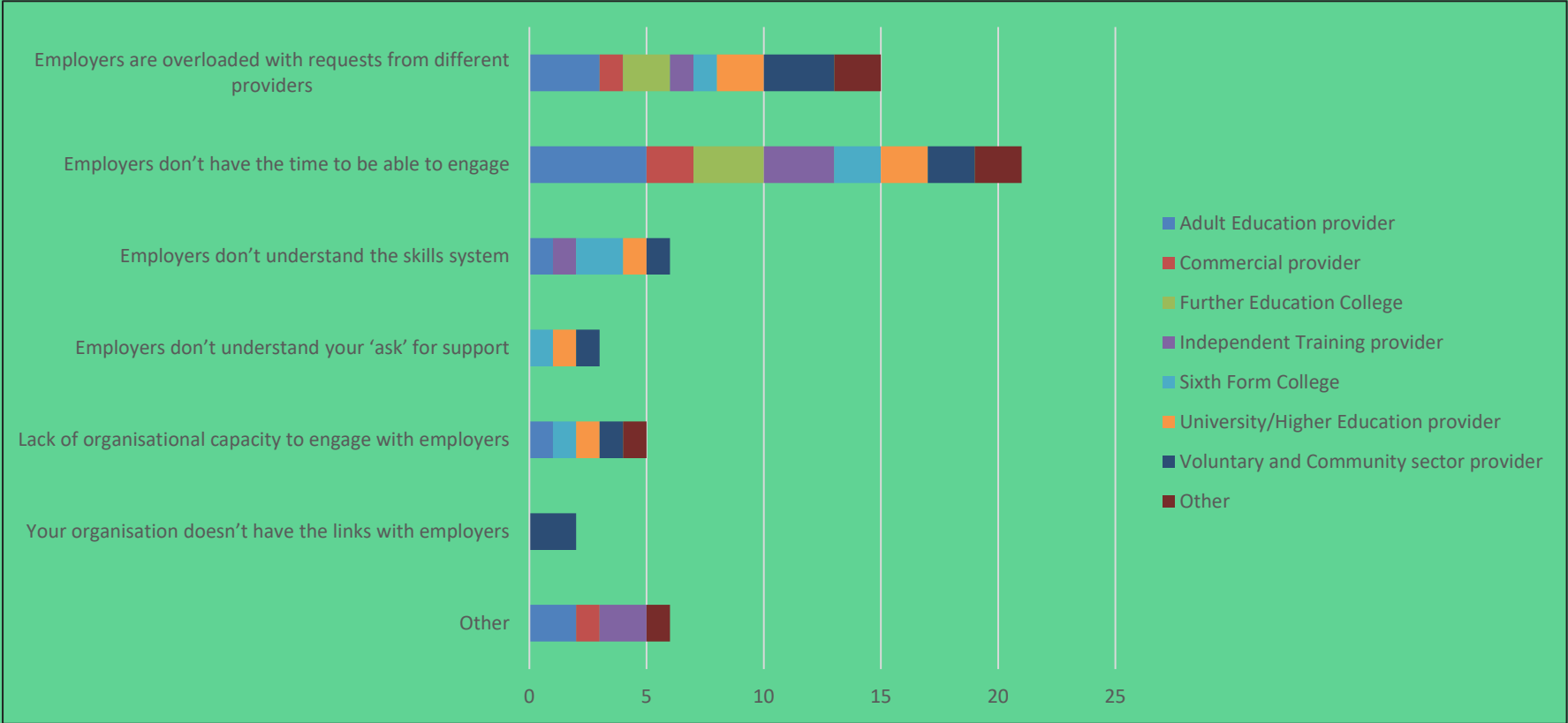
Employer and sector briefings, along with curriculum planning / advisory panels, show some year-on-year fluctuation but remain embedded features of engagement activity.

Technical demonstrations (to both learners and teaching staff) have generally strengthened over time, indicating sustained employer involvement in technical delivery.

Skills Bootcamps are included in the survey for the first time in 2025/26, reflecting the evolving delivery landscape. While currently representing a smaller proportion of engagement activity, they form an emerging part of structured employer collaboration.

Overall, the trend reflects continued emphasis on direct and structured engagement with employers - particularly through placements, guest input, curriculum collaboration and increasingly targeted skills interventions.

Challenges providers face in engaging with employers 2026



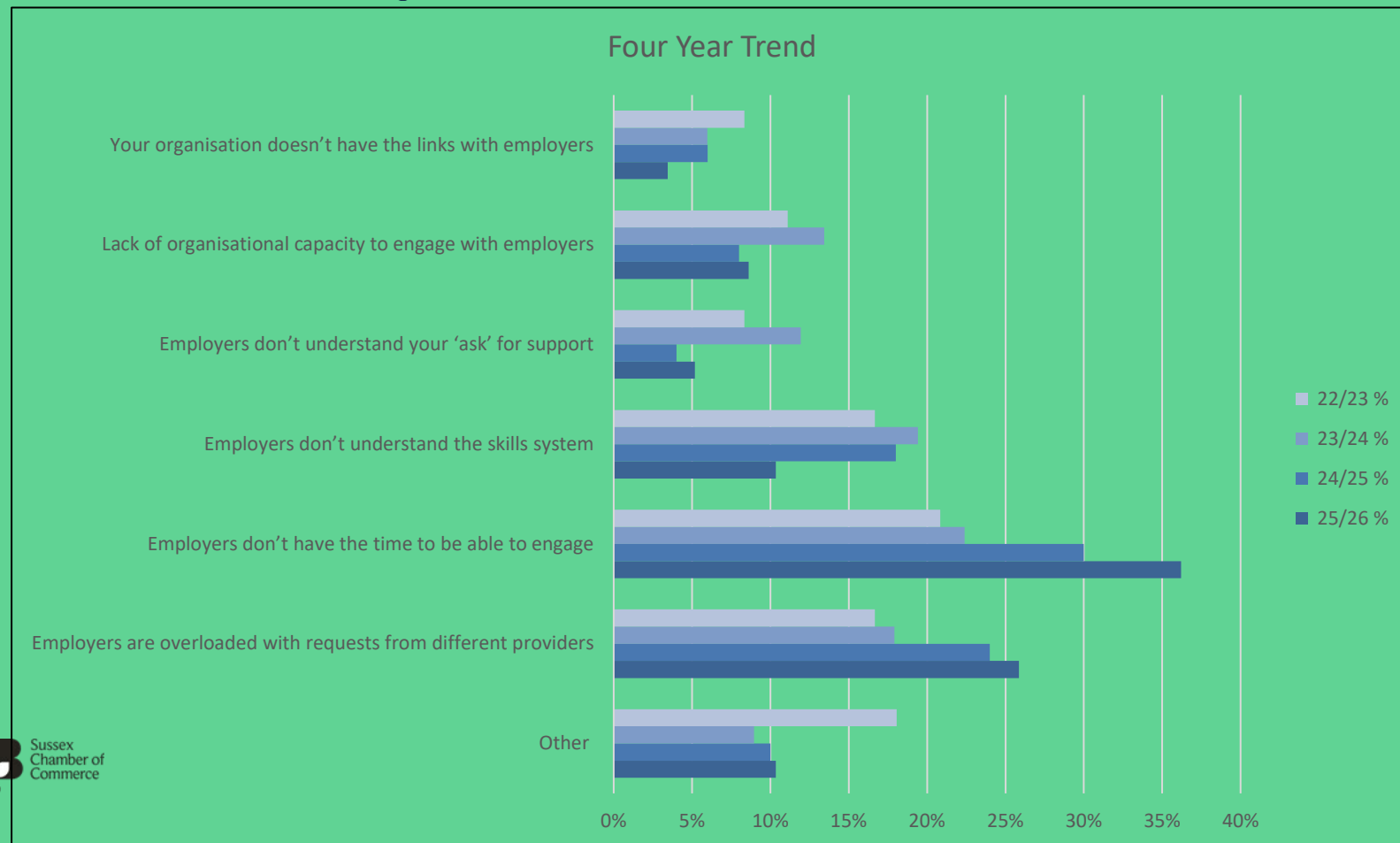
The primary challenges facing providers remain consistent, with the most significant issues being employers not having the time to engage and employers feeling overloaded with requests from multiple providers. These pressures are reported across most provider types.

Challenges relating to employers not understanding the skills system and clarity around providers' 'ask' for support appear less prominent overall, suggesting some improvement in communication and alignment.

Internal barriers such as lack of organisational capacity and limited employer links are reported but at lower levels compared to time and overload constraints.

Overall, the findings indicate that while structural pressures on employers remain the dominant challenge, other barriers to engagement may be easing, reflecting gradual progress in coordination and communication across the system.

Challenges providers face in engaging with employers – 4 year trend



Employers not having time to engage and employers being overloaded with requests from different providers have continued to increase over the four-year period, remaining the most significant and persistent challenges. The 2025/26 data shows the highest levels recorded, reflecting growing pressure on employer capacity and attention.

Challenges relating to employers not understanding the skills system and lack of organisational capacity peaked in 2023/24 and have since declined, suggesting some improvement in communication and internal capability.

Similarly, lack of links with employers and clarity around the 'ask' for support have reduced over time, indicating stronger relationships and clearer engagement approaches.

"Other" challenges have also decreased overall.

Overall, while structural pressures on employer time continue to intensify, providers appear to be making progress in addressing internal and communication-related barriers to engagement.

Barriers providers face in providing a skills offer to employers 2026

Difficulty in recruiting tutors/lecturers with the right vocational skills to meet needs of employers

Find it hard to market your offer to employers

Having the flexibilities within the existing funding system to meet employer's skills needs

Qualifications are out of date or don't meet employers needs

Understanding what local employer's skills wants and needs are

You've provided the programmes employers have asked for in the past but there hasn't been a good take up of the offer

Other



The most significant barrier remains having sufficient flexibility within the existing funding system to meet employers' skills needs, with this continuing to be the most commonly cited challenge across provider types.

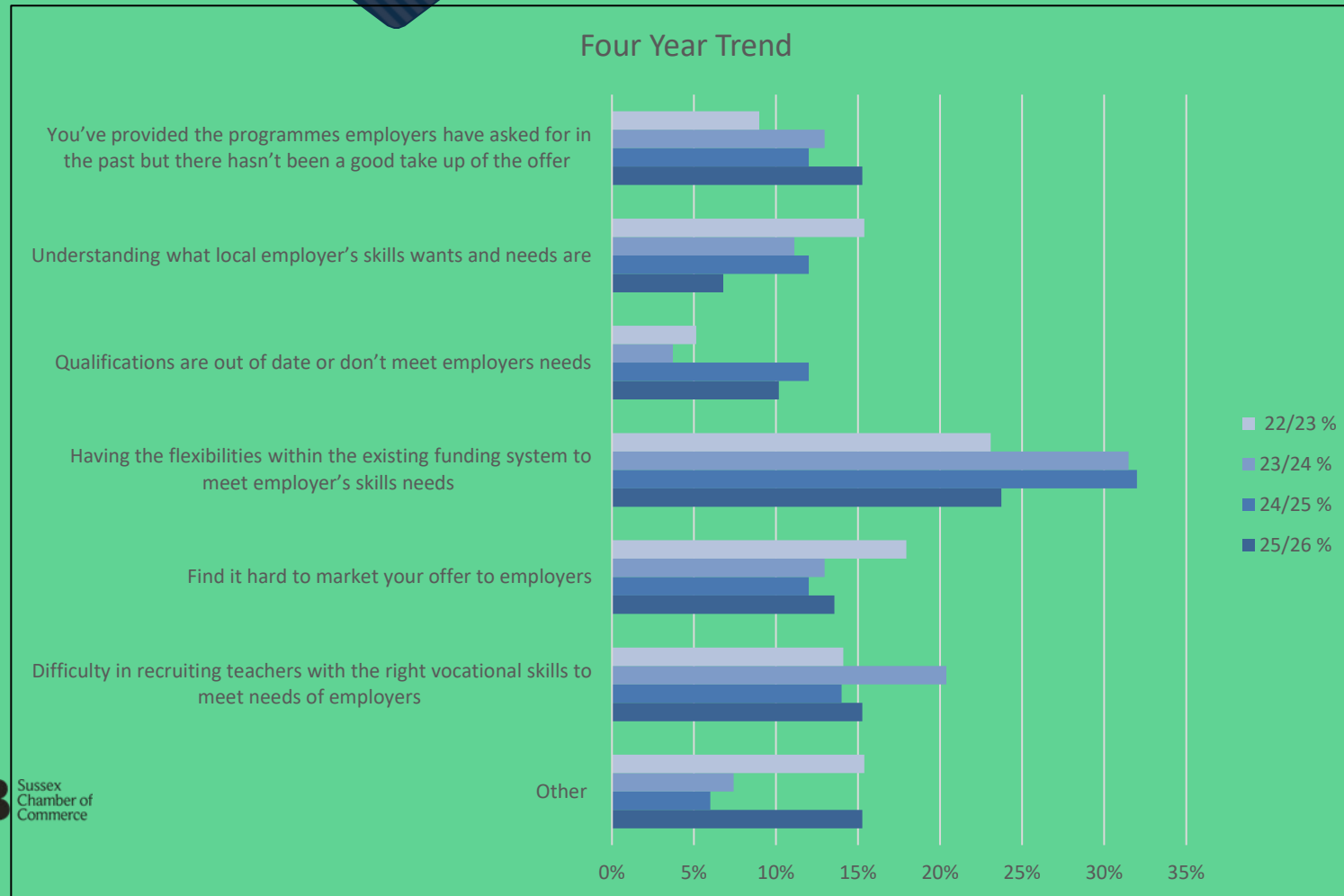
Concerns relating to qualifications being out of date or not fully aligned with employer needs remain evident, reinforcing the importance of keeping provision responsive and current.

Challenges such as difficulty recruiting tutors with the right vocational skills and marketing the offer to employers are present but less dominant, suggesting some progress in these areas.

Issues around understanding employer skills needs and low take-up of previously requested programmes also feature, indicating ongoing challenges in aligning demand with delivery.

Overall, while funding flexibility continues to be a structural constraint, the findings highlight the need for continued curriculum responsiveness and closer alignment between qualifications, workforce needs and employer expectations.

Barriers providers face in providing a skills offer to employers – 4-year trend



Funding flexibility remains the most significant and persistent barrier, increasing overall across the four-year period and reaching its highest level in 2025/26. This continues to highlight structural challenges in aligning funding systems with employer needs.

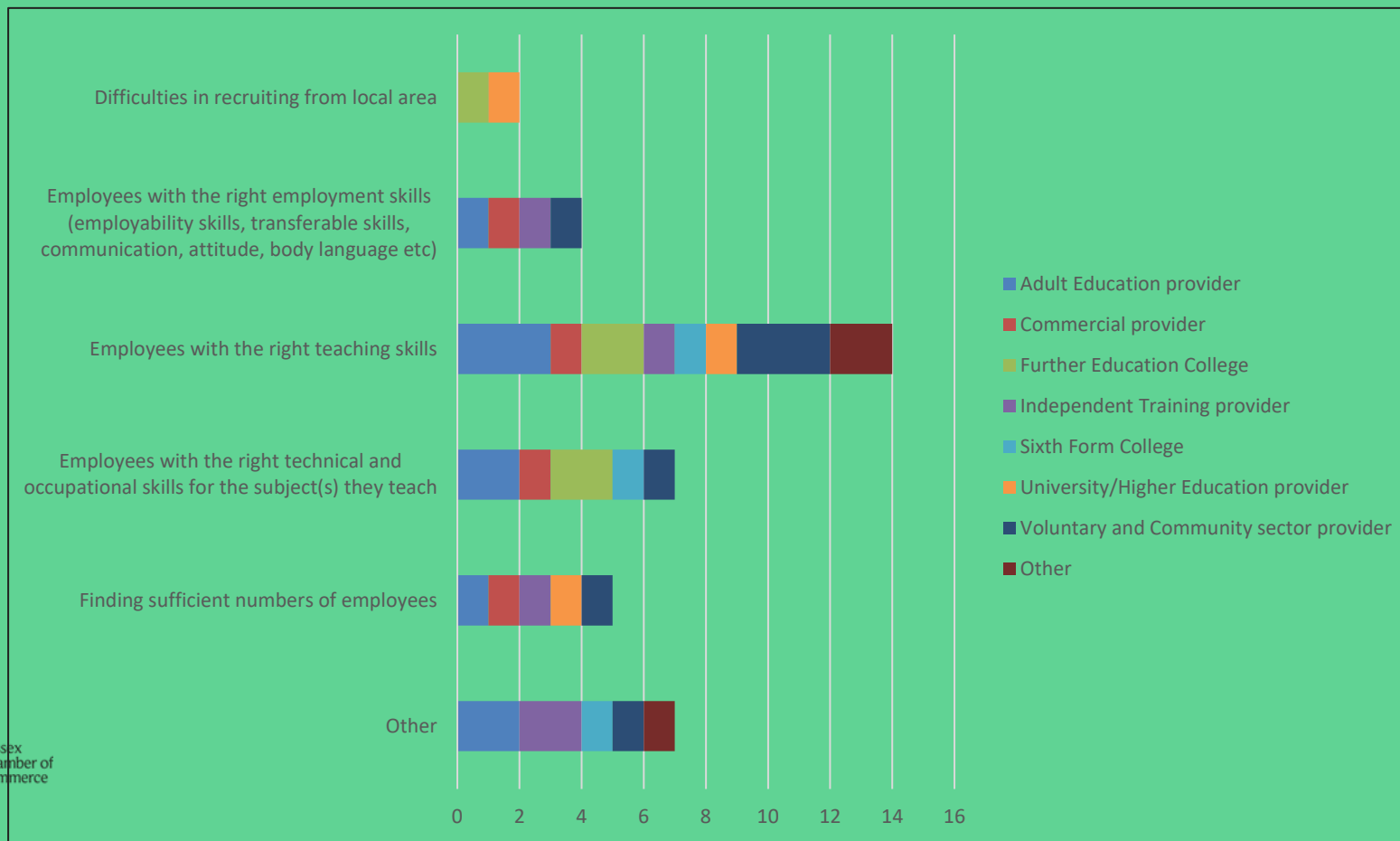
Challenges related to understanding employer skills needs and marketing the offer have generally declined since earlier peaks, suggesting improved alignment and engagement approaches.

Concerns around qualifications being out of date have fluctuated year on year, remaining an ongoing issue rather than a consistently rising trend.

Recruiting tutors with the right vocational skills peaked in 2023/24 but has eased slightly since, indicating some progress in workforce capacity.

Overall, while funding constraints remain the dominant systemic barrier, there are signs of gradual improvement in employer alignment, communication and staffing capacity.

Provider recruitment challenges 2026



Providers continue to report that the most significant recruitment challenge is finding employees with the right teaching skills, alongside individuals with the technical and occupational expertise required for the subjects they deliver. This highlights the ongoing difficulty of attracting professionals with industry experience into teaching roles.

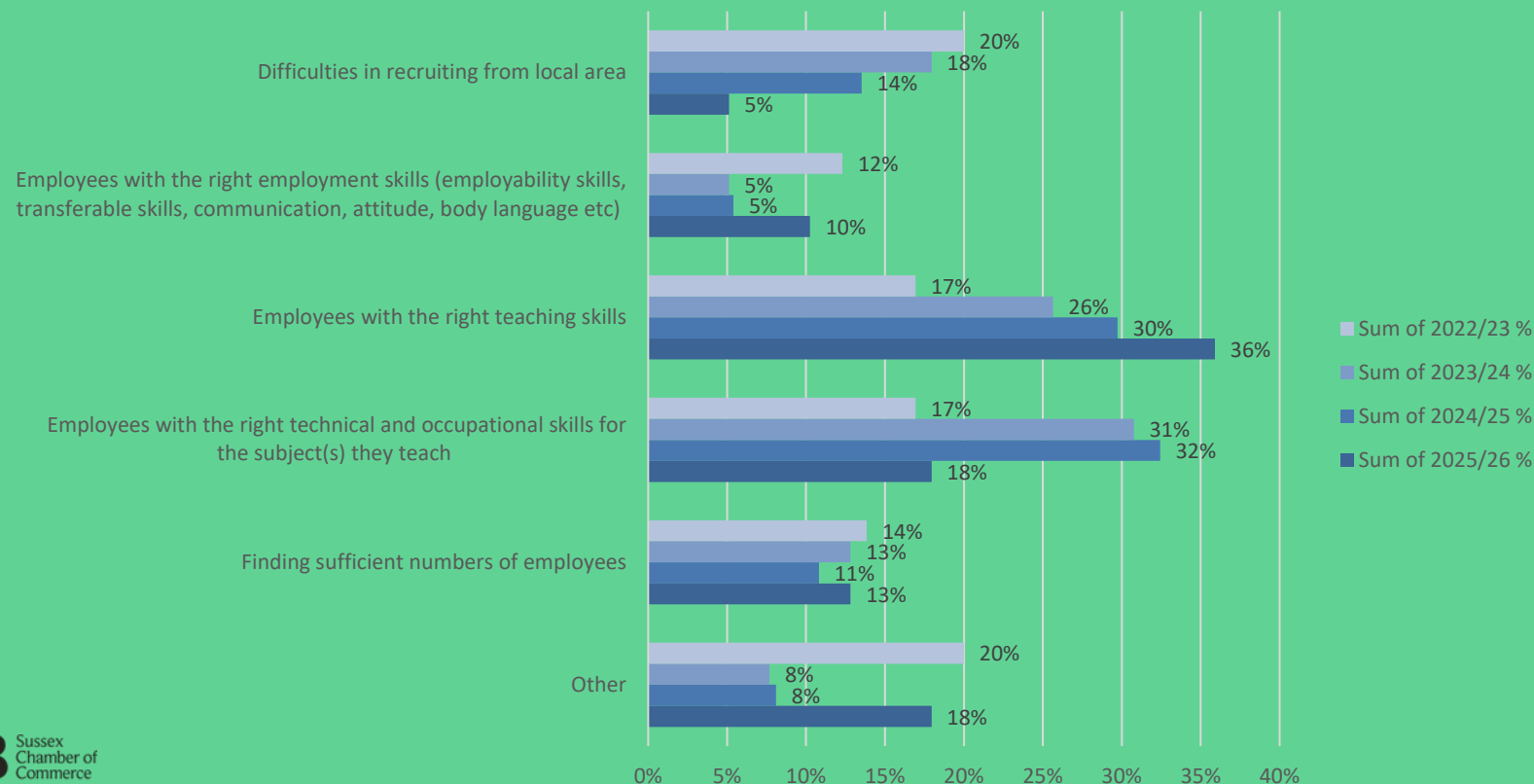
Some providers also identified challenges in recruiting staff with the right employability and transferable skills, including communication and workplace behaviours, although this was less widely reported.

While fewer responses highlighted difficulties in recruiting from the local area, this remains an issue for some providers, particularly where specialist subject expertise is required.

Overall, the findings reinforce the ongoing challenge for providers in securing staff who combine sector-specific expertise with the teaching capability needed to deliver high-quality training.

Provider recruitment challenges – 4 year trend

Four Year Trend



The four-year trend shows that the most significant recruitment challenge for providers continues to be finding employees with the right teaching skills. This issue has increased steadily over time, rising from 17% in 2022/23 to 36% in 2025/26, indicating growing difficulty in recruiting individuals who combine subject expertise with the ability to teach.

Recruiting staff with the right technical and occupational skills for the subjects they deliver has also remained a key challenge, peaking in 2023/24 and 2024/25 before declining in the most recent year. This may suggest some improvement in accessing industry expertise, although it remains a significant concern.

Challenges related to finding sufficient numbers of employees have remained relatively stable over the four-year period, while difficulties in recruiting staff with the right employability and transferable skills have fluctuated but remain less frequently reported.

The proportion of providers reporting difficulties recruiting from the local area has declined over time, suggesting some improvement in local labour market availability.

Overall, the data highlights the continuing challenge for providers in recruiting staff who possess both subject expertise and effective teaching capability, with this issue becoming increasingly pronounced over the past four years.

How providers are training and upskilling their staff 2026



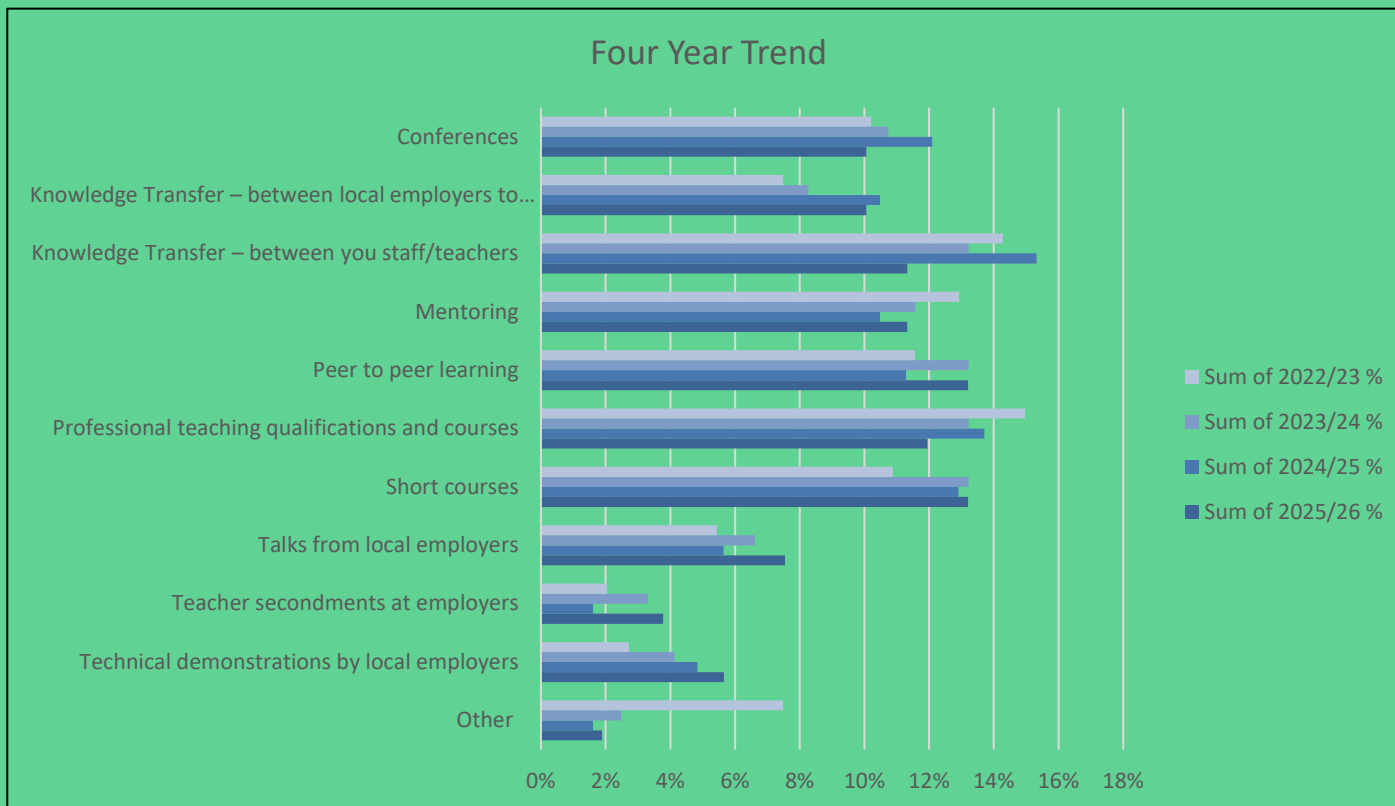
Providers reported using a range of approaches to support staff development and strengthen links with employers. The most commonly identified activities included short courses, peer-to-peer learning, mentoring, and professional teaching qualifications or courses, reflecting the importance placed on continuous professional development within the sector.

Many providers also highlighted the value of knowledge transfer between staff and with local employers, demonstrating ongoing collaboration to ensure teaching staff remain up to date with industry practices and emerging skills needs.

Employer engagement activities, such as talks from local employers, conferences, and technical demonstrations, were also reported as useful ways to support staff understanding of industry developments.

Overall, the findings suggest that providers are drawing on a mix of formal training, peer learning and employer engagement to support staff development and maintain strong connections between education and industry.

How providers are training and upskilling their staff – 4-year trend

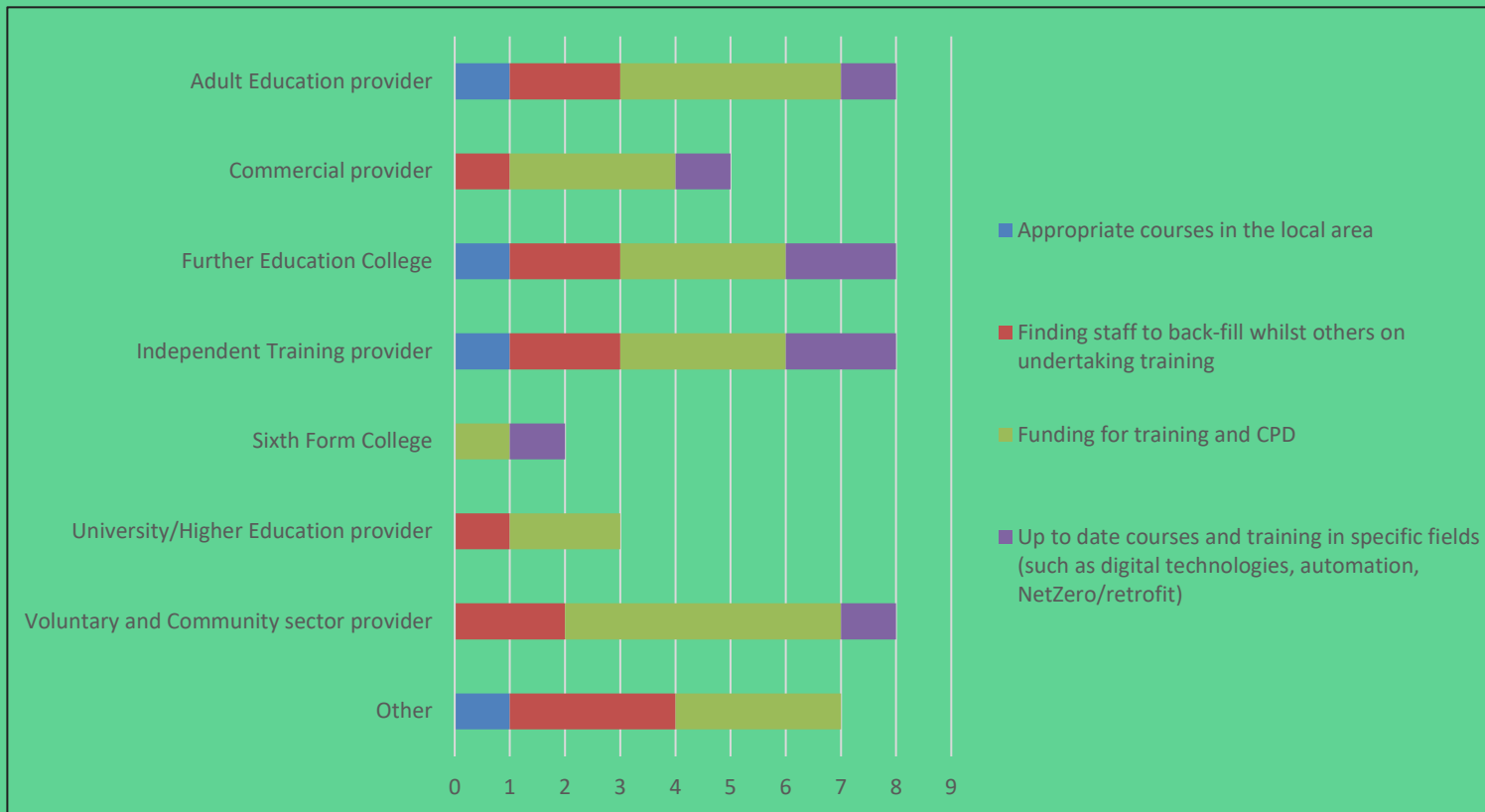


Over the past four years, providers have continued to make use of a range of approaches to support staff development and maintain links with employers. Professional teaching qualifications and courses, mentoring, peer-to-peer learning and short courses remain among the most commonly used activities, reflecting the continued emphasis on structured professional development and knowledge sharing within organisations.

Activities that strengthen connections with employers, such as knowledge transfer between staff and local employers, talks from local employers and technical demonstrations, have also remained a consistent feature of staff development approaches. In particular, knowledge transfer between staff and teaching colleagues has shown a noticeable increase over time, suggesting a growing focus on sharing expertise within institutions.

While some approaches, such as teacher secondments with employers, remain less commonly used, the overall trend highlights a continued commitment by providers to combine formal training, collaborative learning and employer engagement to support staff development and ensure teaching remains aligned with industry needs.

Staff training challenges faced by providers 2026



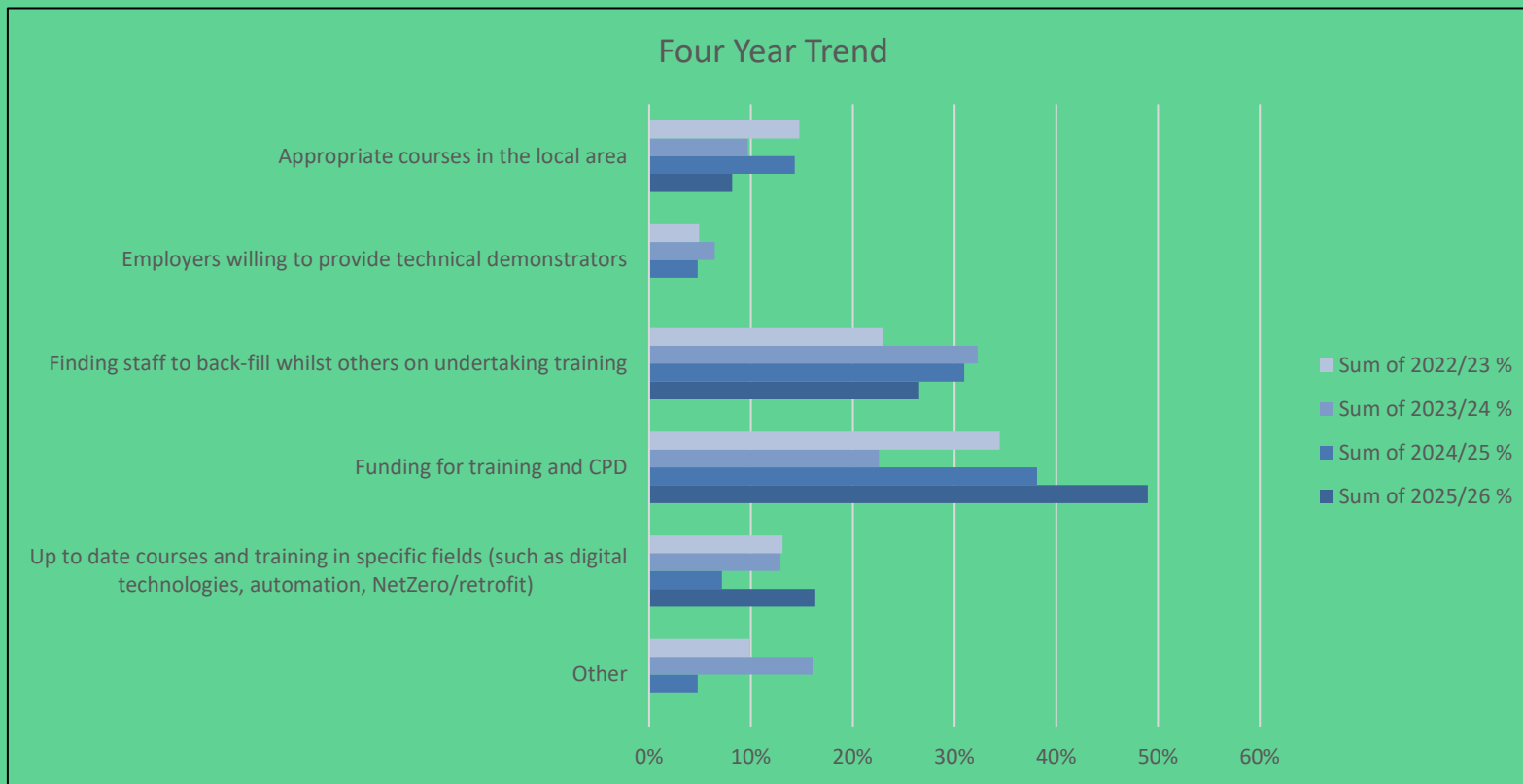
Providers identified a number of challenges when supporting staff to access training and professional development. The most commonly reported issue was funding for training and continuing professional development (CPD), highlighted across several provider types. This suggests that financial constraints remain a key barrier to maintaining and developing staff skills.

Another significant challenge is finding staff to back-fill roles while colleagues undertake training, which can make it difficult for organisations to release staff for professional development, particularly where teams are small or already operating at capacity.

Some providers also highlighted challenges relating to access to appropriate courses in the local area, as well as the availability of up-to-date training in emerging or specialist fields, including areas such as digital technologies and Net Zero-related skills.

Overall, the findings indicate that while providers recognise the importance of staff development, funding, workforce capacity and access to relevant training provision continue to present practical challenges.

Staff training challenges faced by providers – 4-year trend



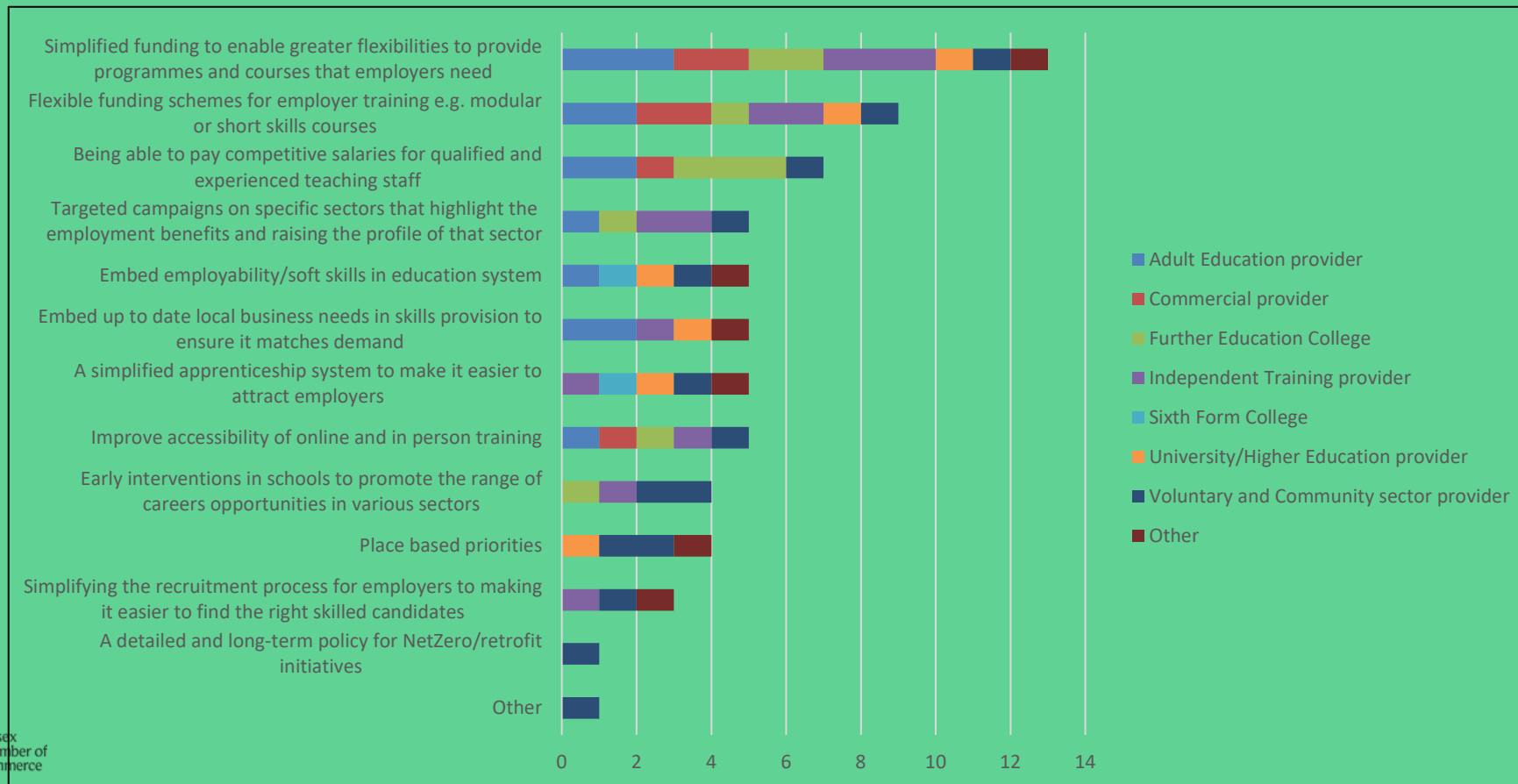
The four-year trend highlights funding for training and continuing professional development (CPD) as the most significant and growing challenge for providers. The proportion of respondents identifying this issue has increased steadily over time, indicating increasing financial pressures on organisations seeking to support staff development.

Another key challenge is finding staff to back-fill roles while colleagues undertake training, which has also remained relatively high across the period. This suggests that workforce capacity continues to limit providers' ability to release staff for training.

Other factors, such as access to appropriate courses in the local area and the availability of up-to-date training in emerging fields, have fluctuated over time but remain notable challenges for some providers. Meanwhile, reliance on employers to provide technical demonstrations remains relatively low.

Overall, the trend indicates that while the need for staff development remains strong, financial constraints and operational pressures continue to present significant barriers to training participation.

Providers top 3 priorities for the LSIP and local skills system 2026



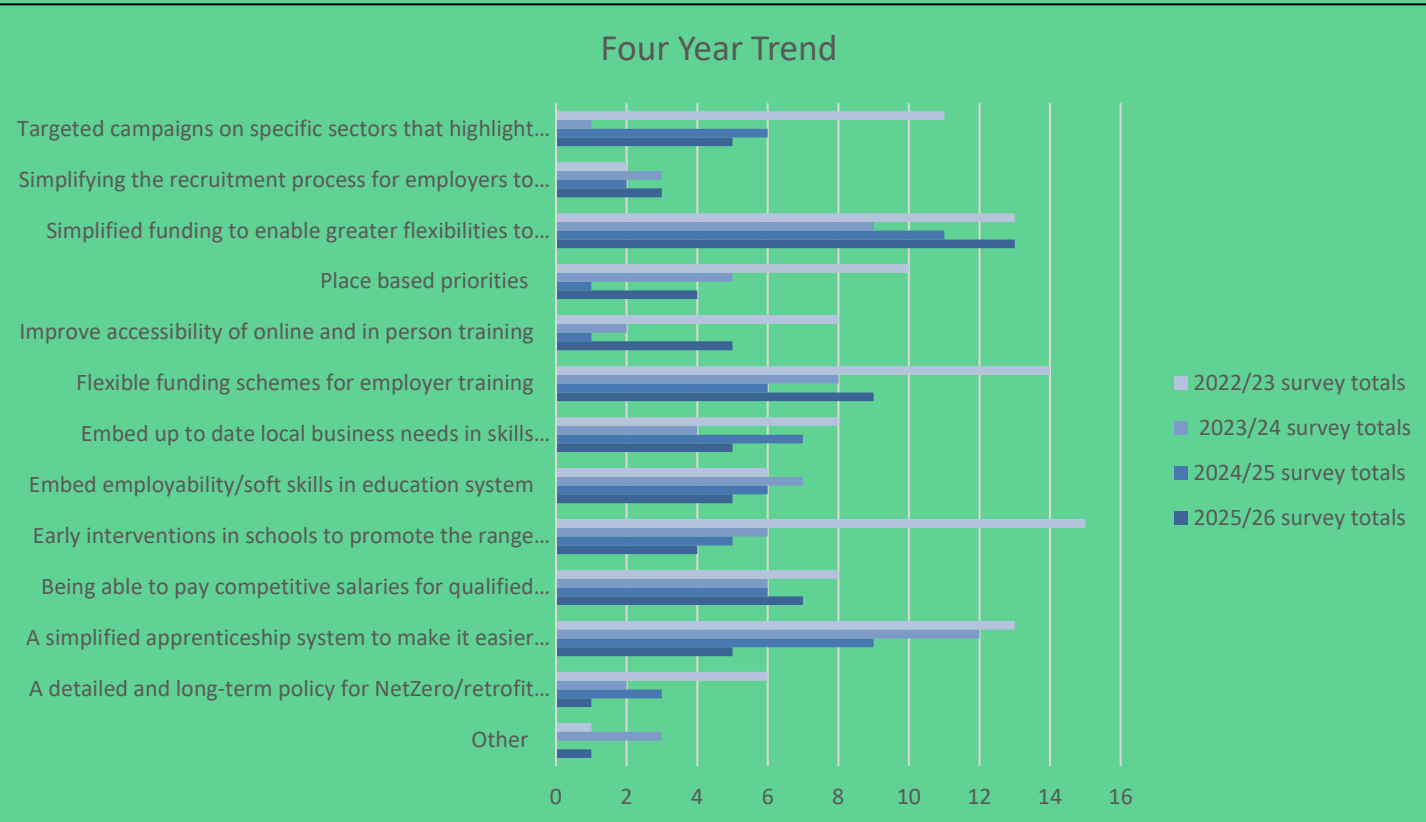
Providers highlighted simplified and more flexible funding as the most important priority for the LSIP and local skills system, enabling them to deliver programmes that better respond to employer needs. This included support for flexible funding models for employer training, such as modular and short skills courses.

Another key priority was the ability to offer competitive salaries for qualified teaching staff, reflecting ongoing recruitment and retention challenges.

Providers also emphasised the importance of aligning skills provision with local business needs, embedding employability skills within education, and promoting career opportunities across sectors through targeted campaigns and early engagement with schools.

Overall, providers highlighted the need for greater funding flexibility, stronger employer alignment and clearer pathways into key sectors to strengthen the local skills system.

Providers top 3 priorities for the LSIP and local skills system – 4 year trend



Over the past four years, providers have consistently highlighted the importance of simplified and more flexible funding arrangements to enable training provision that better meets employer needs. Flexible funding for employer training, including modular and short courses, remains a prominent priority across the period.

There has also been sustained emphasis on strengthening pathways into employment, including early interventions in schools, promoting sector opportunities, and embedding employability skills within the education system. These priorities reflect the ongoing need to build stronger talent pipelines into key sectors.

Other recurring themes include the need to align skills provision more closely with local business needs, improve access to training opportunities, and address workforce challenges such as the ability to offer competitive salaries for qualified teaching staff.

Overall, the trend shows a consistent focus on funding flexibility, stronger employer alignment, and improved pathways into skills and employment, highlighting the areas providers see as most critical to strengthening the local skills system.

We asked providers if they had any other comments or intelligence that they would like to share....

A small number of providers shared additional insights relating to careers promotion, employer engagement and the operation of the local skills system.

Key points raised included:

- Careers promotion and sector awareness – One provider highlighted the positive impact of working with primary and secondary schools to promote careers in horticulture, reporting an increase in learner applications as a result.
- Improving pathways into employment – A suggestion was made to develop a local job hub linked to sector partners and employers, providing learners with access to live job vacancies and supporting local recruitment.
- Support for apprenticeships – One response emphasised the need for greater financial support for employers taking on apprentices. Perceptions of the LSIP/Chamber role – One provider noted concerns from some employers regarding the perceived neutrality of the LSIP process and the importance of ensuring it reflects the needs of a broad range of employers and providers.
- Relevance of survey questions – A Sixth Form College commented that some survey questions were less applicable to organisations primarily delivering academic pathways.

Closing Summary

The findings from the provider survey offer valuable insight into the challenges and priorities facing the skills system across Sussex. Providers continue to report ongoing difficulties in recruiting staff with the right teaching and industry-specific expertise, highlighting the importance of attracting experienced professionals into teaching and training roles.

Alongside recruitment challenges, providers emphasised the importance of ongoing workforce development, supported through a combination of formal training, peer learning and engagement with employers to ensure teaching remains aligned with industry needs. However, barriers such as funding constraints and the difficulty of back-filling staff roles while colleagues undertake training continue to limit the ability of some providers to support staff development.

Looking ahead, providers identified a number of priorities for the LSIP and the wider local skills system. These include the need for greater flexibility in funding arrangements, stronger alignment between skills provision and local employer demand, and improved pathways into employment through early engagement with schools and clearer career routes across sectors.

Overall, the survey highlights the continued importance of collaboration between providers, employers and the wider skills system to ensure training provision responds effectively to workforce needs and supports sustainable economic growth across Sussex.

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