Skills Boost – One year on (a reflection) and progress to date on year 2

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1.1 Background

Skills Boost Worcestershire is a match-funded grant programme to help organisations with the costs of upskilling and training their Worcestershire-based employees*. Organised and administered by the Service Skills and Employability section within the People Directorate of Worcestershire County Council, along with the Worcestershire Growth Hub, it was launched on 1st April 2024 and ran until 31st March 2025 (year 1) and running from 1st April 2025 until 31st March 2026 (year 2) with the addition of Herefordshire resident employees.

The programme is funded via investment from the six Borough, City and District Councils of Worcestershire, utilising the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF). These investments were pooled into a centrally administered grant fund. Each business can receive up to £6,000 with a £12,000 training spend (maximum grant claim per individual is £1,500).

This programme has been designed to address the skills and recruitment challenges identified within both the Local Skills Report in 2022 and the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) of 2023 as part of the HM Government strategies around Skills within the UK Economy.

The programme is aimed at businesses in all sectors working with training providers from across the county and beyond to meet the needs of Worcestershire businesses. The programme has been developed to support individual business needs and deliver training solutions with a grant programme designed to support costs of implementing the recommendations.

The funding could be used for both accredited and non-accredited courses, including bespoke training tailored to specific business needs. However, it could not be applied to mandatory courses that were required for employment e.g. health and safety.

*Malvern Hills District Council and Wychavon District Council accept employees that live outside of the county.

	Year 1	Year 2
Dates	01/04/24 – 31/03/25	01/04/25 – 31/03/26
Districts	All Worcestershire Districts	All Worcestershire Districts and Herefordshire
Grant Pot (Worcestershire)	£639,500	£321,222
Grant Pot (Herefordshire)	n/a	£80,000

Table 1 - Comparison between 2 years

Table *1* shows both years side by side. Worcestershire districts invested less money in the 2nd year, however this must be considered against a national context of a circa 50% reduction in UKSPF allocation in 2025/26 compared to 2024/25. Worcester City Council invested the lowest amount when compared to other Worcestershire local authorities, however demand was high, and the Worcester City geography utilised its allocation the quickest in year 1. This trend continued in Year 2. The first Worcester City based employee was booked in on 22nd May 2025 in Year 2, and by 17th June 2025, the Skills Boost allocation for Worcester City had been fully allocated.

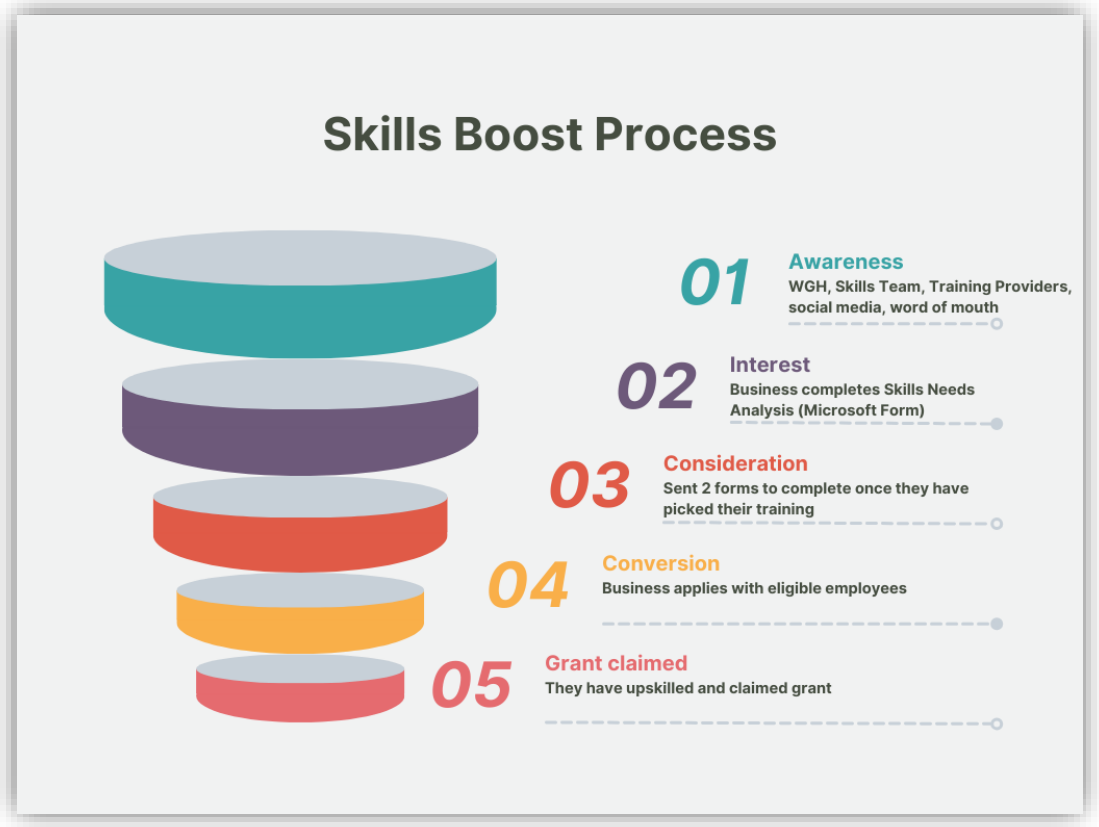

Figure 1 - Skills Boost Funnel

1.2 Skills Boost Review of 2024/2025

The project was a huge success, with all targets excluding Green Skills/Net Zero training courses, exceeded. Such was the appetite of local employers that when we announced the looming Year 1 deadline in February 2025 the number of applications rose even quicker.

The scheme was advertised by the Worcestershire Growth Hub in various ways (newsletters, LinkedIn, newspaper wraps, radio, leaflets), discussed at events and expos

and through conversations had with businesses by the WGH account managers and the Skills Boost Project Manager.

We also had a network of local training providers which served two clear purposes; firstly, to spread the word to their clients for us and it benefited them as it encouraged their course uptake. Secondly it provided us with a list of local training providers who we could signpost businesses to if they weren't sure who could offer the training in the local area.

The total figures for the first year are shown in ***Table 2***:

Category	Total
Approved Training Providers	78
Employers who filled out our 37 initial questions known as the Skills Needs Analysis (SNA)	298
Unique employers who went onto claim the grant	308
The number of unique employees that were claimed for	1,230
The number of employees who completed more than one course	201
The total number of training courses completed	1,564

Table 2 - Total figures for first year

Figure 2 and ***Figure 3*** show the progression each month. Of particular note is the number of employees training; at the end of Dec 2024 we had 660 people registered in the system, and by the end of the programme 3 months later we were up to 1,230.

April was therefore spent collating a list of businesses that wanted to claim but had either missed the deadline or wanted to complete courses beyond 31st March 2025.

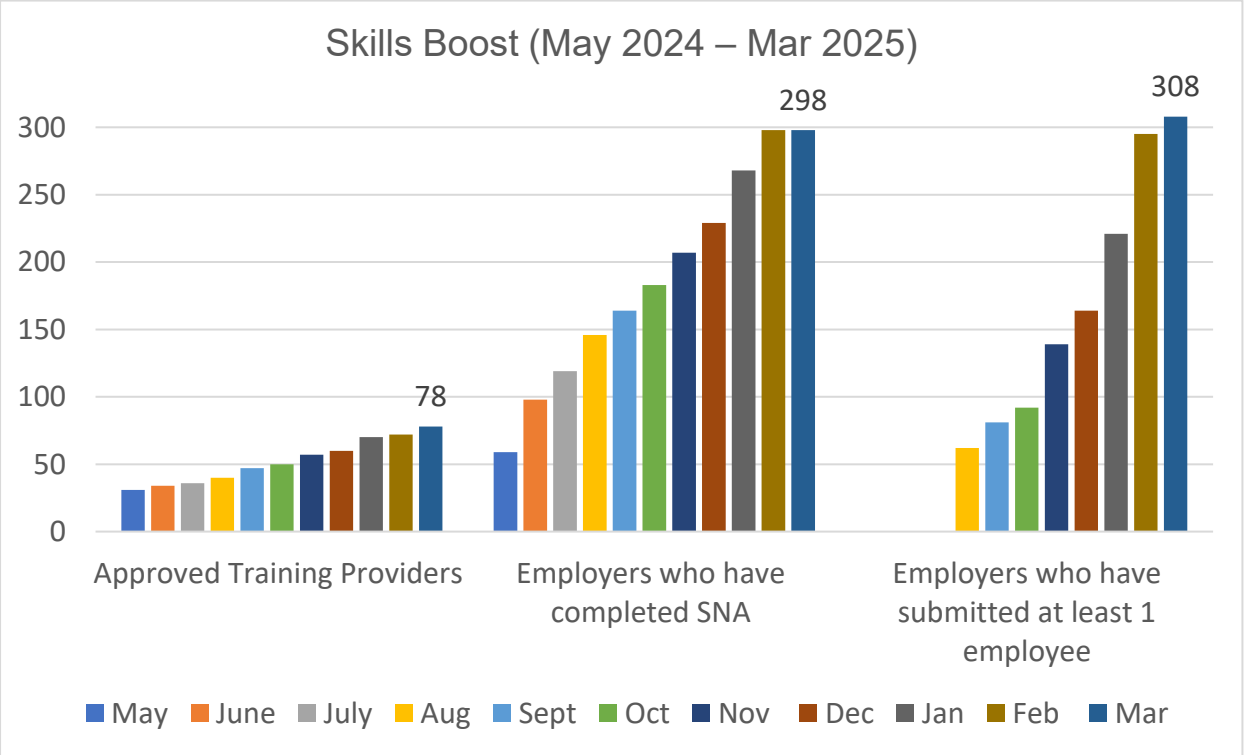

Figure 2 - Analysis of the first year

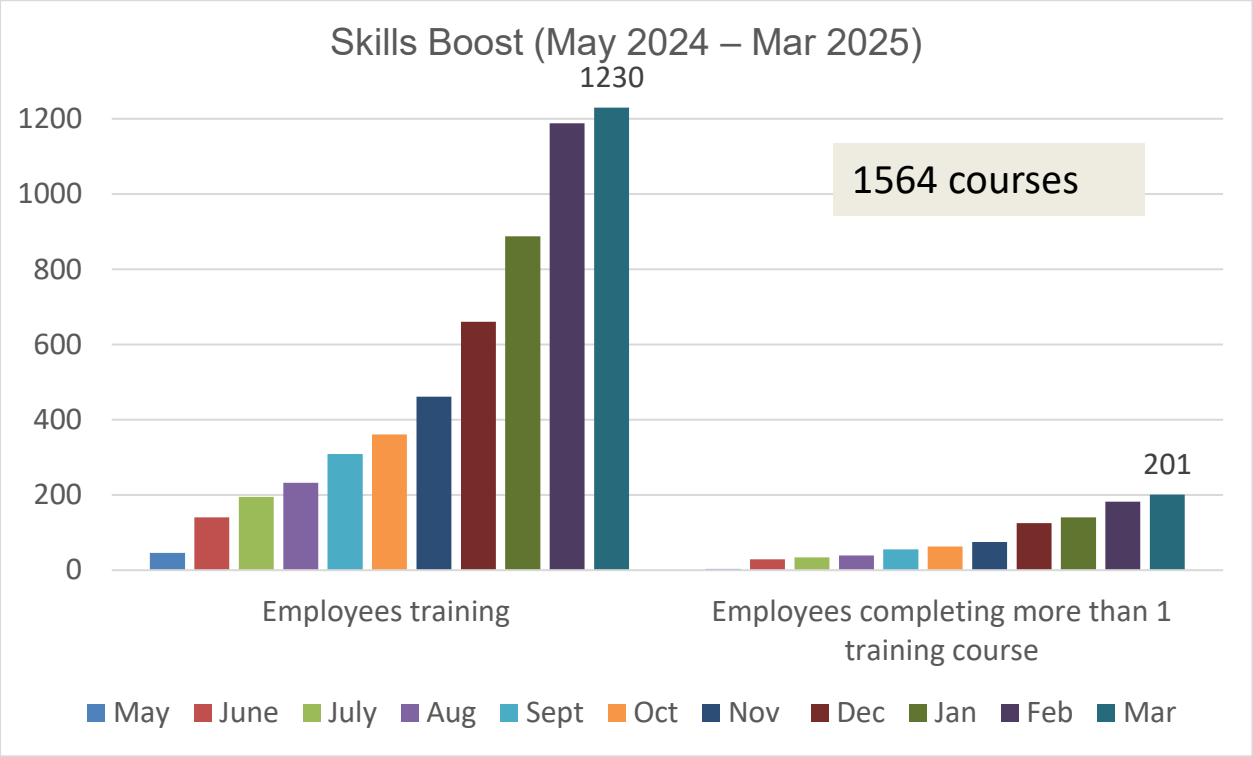

Figure 3 - Total number of applicants in year 1

Figure 4 shows the spend per district. The blue represents the allocated spend on training for each district.

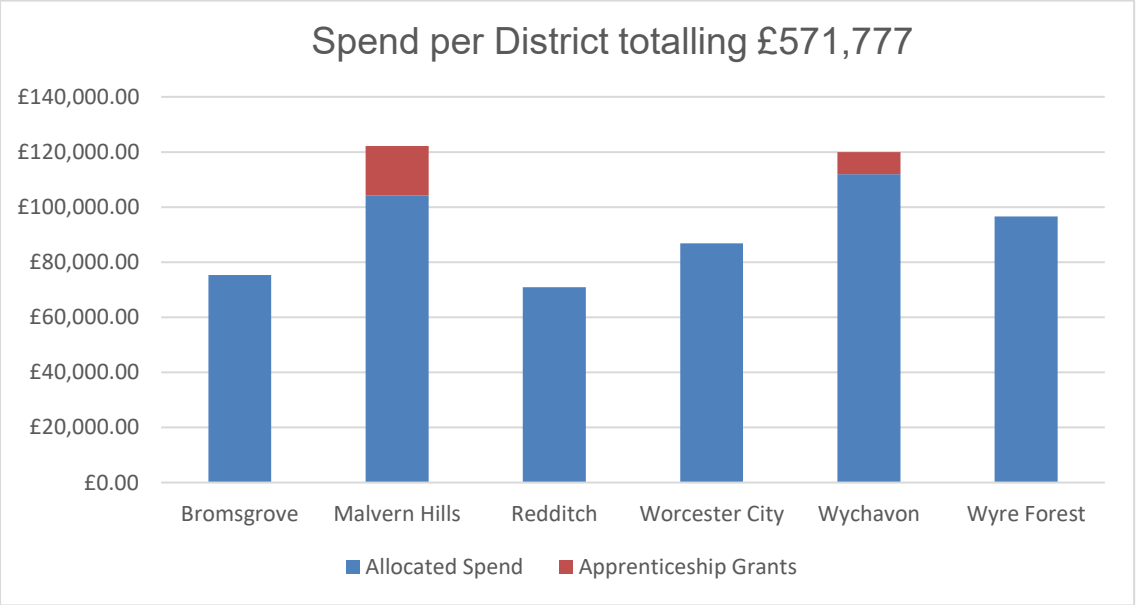

Figure 4 - Spend per district (Yr1)

For Bromsgrove and Redditch the initial uptake was slower than the other districts. We recognised this and created targeted marketing campaigns for those 2 areas. By the end of the programme we had a lot of uptake from those 2 geographies, however we didn't spend as much as we were initially allocated.

Conversely, the Worcester City figure is capped at £87,500 because that figure represents the UKSPF investment allocated by Worcester City Council. We could have sold out in

Worcester over and over again. We had to stop accepting Worcester City resident applications 3 months before the end of the programme because all the money had been allocated.

The red shading in Figure 4 represents Apprenticeship Grants. Towards the end of 2024/25 (Yr 1) we had money remaining in Wychavon and Malvern Hills. It was agreed with the Economic Development Managers of those districts that we could use it to allocate £2,000 grants to businesses based in those geographies to encourage recruitment of apprentices.

Wychavon District Council had already allocated £100,000 (50 x £2,000 grants) for employers in their district who took on an apprentice. This remaining Skills Boost money allocated another 4 x £2,000 grants for Wychavon businesses and 9 x £2,000 grants for Malvern Hills businesses.

1.3 Performance against Outcomes

Outcomes measure the long-term effects of a process, task or activity. The outcomes for the Skills Boost programme are directly linked to those within the UKSPF programme.

Each district had their own targets; for the purposes of this paper all targets have been combined. ***Table 3*** shows that out of the 11 outcomes adopted, 9 'over' achieved. The remaining outcomes 'under' achieved at 0% for both against original targets. These outcomes are those specifically related to the E39 UKSPF strand that focused on Green skills training and were selected and targeted only by Bromsgrove District Council and Redditch Borough Councils. There was a lack of clarity around what Green skills meant and which courses would fit that category.

OUTCOMES	TARGET	ACTUAL
E37 Number of people supported to participate in education	40	198
E37 Number of people in employment engaging with the skills system	40	198
E37 Number of people receiving support to gain a vocational licence	70	471
E37 Number of people retraining	115	380
E 37 Number of people gaining qualifications, licences and skills	138	1230
E39 Number of people gaining qualifications, licences and skills	6	0
E37 Number of economically active individuals engaged in mainstream skills education and training	239	929
E39 Number of economically active individuals engaged in mainstream skills education and training	30	0
E37 Number of people in employment, including self-employment, following support	4	304
E38 Number of people in employment, including self-employment, following support	4	304
E38 Number of people in education/training	4	304

Table 3 - Outcomes target vs actual

1.4 Performance against Outputs

Outputs are the tangible or direct results of a process, task or activity. Outputs can be directly measured and as in this programme, include deliverables that can be measured in terms of quality and quantity.

Table 4 shows that of the 10 outputs measured, 7 considerably 'over' performed.

It is important to note the correlation between those 3 outputs with 0 actuals with those outcomes also ‘achieving’ 0, which is the E39 UKSPF strand focusing on Green skills.

OUTPUTS	TARGET	ACTUAL
E37 Number of people supported onto a course through provision of financial support	195	427
E39 Number of people supported onto a course through provision of financial support	30	0
E37 Number of people supported to participate in education	164	535
E39 Number of people supported to participate in education	30	0
E37 Number of people in employment engaging with the skills system	114	731
E37 Number of people receiving support to gain a vocational licence	29	713
E37 Number of people supported to gain a qualification	24	40
E39 Number of people supported to gain a qualification	6	0
E37 Number of people retraining	64	373
E38 Number of people receiving support to gain a vocational licence	4	295

Table 4 - Outputs target vs actual

1.5 Course Categories

When compiling quarterly reports for the districts, rather than list all the courses, of which there were hundreds of different ones, we categorised them. This is an area for improvement for year 2 as some categories ended up being huge and could be broken down further to give clearer data. Also, because the category was filled in at the point of the person applying, depending on who categorised it or what they interpreted the course to be determined which category it was added to. E.g. we didn’t clearly define the difference between ‘Business Improvement’, ‘Winning New Business’ and ‘Starting own Business’.

Table 5 shows the most money was spent on Leadership and Management courses followed by Developing People/Performance Management, Sales and Customer Care and Business Improvement. In terms of volume, there were a lot of developing people type courses (the softer skills) followed by mental health first aid.

Course category	Number of courses	%	Grant £	%	Average Grant £ per course
BLANK	35	2.2%	£16,897	3.0%	£483
Developing People / People and	329	20.8%	£72,183	13.0%	£219
Mental Health, Wellbeing,	229	14.5%	£18,857	3.4%	£82
Leadership and Management	161	10.2%	£84,224	15.2%	£523
Construction, Manual Labour, Machinery	111	7.0%	£18,010	3.2%	£162
Education and Training	101	6.4%	£32,297	5.8%	£320
Business Improvement	91	5.7%	£57,258	10.3%	£629
Sales and Customer Care	90	5.7%	£59,834	10.8%	£665
Legislation and Regulation	85	5.4%	£18,564	3.3%	£218
Software, Office Products	73	4.6%	£22,353	4.0%	£306
Engineering	46	2.9%	£30,362	5.5%	£660
Digital Skills	33	2.1%	£21,987	4.0%	£666
PR and Marketing	33	2.1%	£17,966	3.2%	£544
Coaching	30	1.9%	£19,993	3.6%	£666
Accounting, Finance and Bookkeeping	29	1.8%	£15,823	2.8%	£546
IT, Cybersecurity	28	1.8%	£20,535	3.7%	£733
Other	26	1.6%	£10,835	2.0%	£417
Project Management	19	1.2%	£1,594	0.3%	£84
HR	11	0.7%	£7,597	1.4%	£691
Winning New Business	7	0.4%	£1,993	0.4%	£285
AI	4	0.3%	£307	0.1%	£77
Communications	4	0.3%	£857	0.2%	£214
UX Design, Creative Skills	3	0.2%	£570	0.1%	£190
Exec MBA / Modules	2	0.1%	£3,000	0.5%	£1,500
Bootcamp	1	0.1%	£300	0.1%	£300
ISO standards and Accreditation	1	0.1%	£998	0.2%	£998
Starting own business	1	0.1%	£100	0.0%	£100

Table 5 - Courses by Category

1.6 Other Observations

- The majority of the courses were between a few hours up to a week long. There were very few courses undertaken that lasted longer than a week.

- The average grant claim per district varied significantly as shown in ***Table 6***. Bromsgrove, Redditch and Malvern Hills employee postcodes accounted for more expensive courses for less people than Wychavon and Wyre Forest where the number of people on the courses was higher, but the cost lower.

District	Average grant claim per course per district
Bromsgrove	£423.10
Malvern Hills	£453.96
Redditch	£525.11
Worcester City	£371.19
Wychavon	£293.68
Wyre Forest	£249.01

Table 6 - Average claim per course

- It was surprising the amount of training that was happening away from Worcestershire, particularly for training that could be sourced locally. For example, Mental Health First Aid Courses sourced from London.

2.1 Year 2 - Progress to date

Category	Year 1	Year 2 to date (with less funds)	Notes
Approved Training Providers	78	51	These numbers are unique for both years so a total of 129
Employers who filled out our initial questions known as the Skills Needs Analysis (SNA)	298	415	415 unique completions in year 2, some of the year 1 figure also completed in year 2
Unique employers who went onto claim the grant	308	241	Of the 241 businesses – 76 claimed in both years, 165 only claimed in year 2. Of those 47 are Herefordshire businesses.
The number of unique employees that were claimed for	1,230	704	
The number of employees who completed more than one course	201	121	
The total number of training courses completed	1,564	886	

Table 7 - Comparison between years

As can be seen in ***Table 7*** we have over 100 more businesses register their interest to date than the whole of the first year.

Further analysis and evaluation will be undertaken once delivery of the programme has been completed.

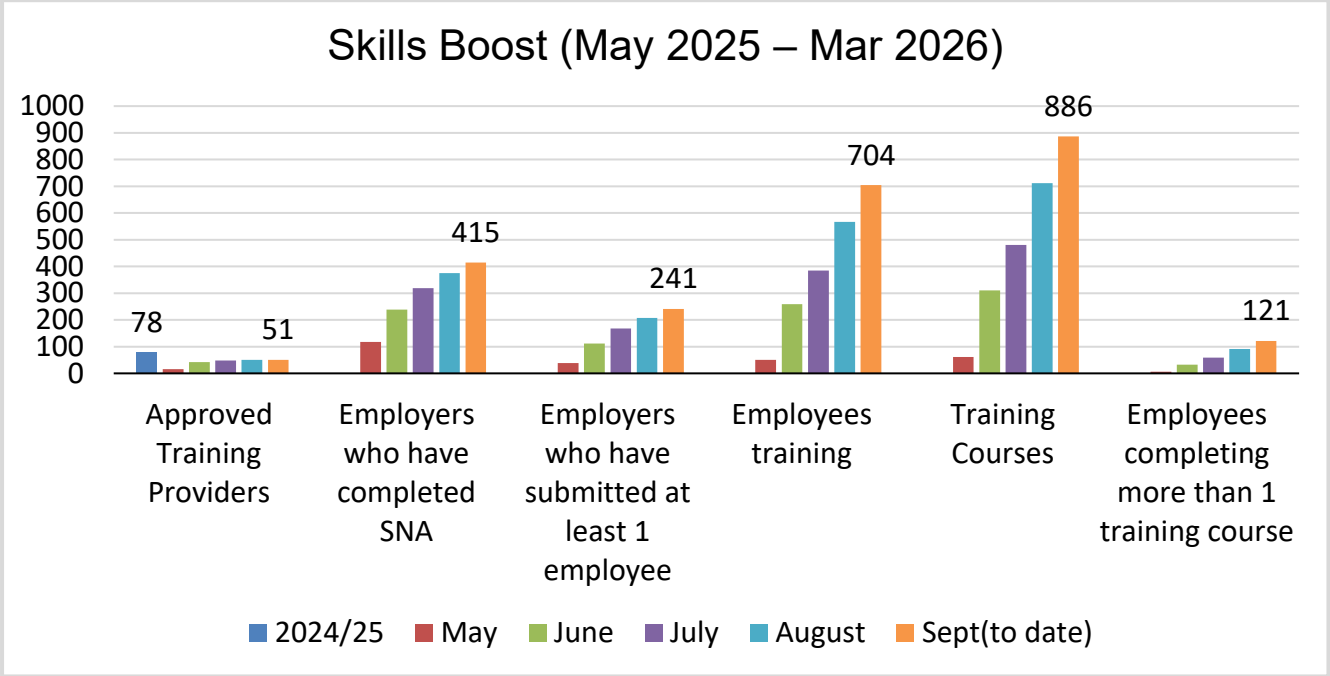

Figure 5 - Progress to date in year 2

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