

Berwick Skills Centre (BSC) Briefing Questions and Answers

A) What is proposed?

Our aim is to equip Berwick with a leading edge, state-of-the-art skills facility which can offer learning and skills provision to support and enable the economic and community development of Berwick Market Town and its surrounding communities.

B) What will the Skills Centre do?

The Berwick Skills Centre will increase the range and quality of locally available skills provision so that more young people, more adults, more employers and more employees can get easy local access to developing the vocational skills and higher education they want.

Our vision is for a Centre, acting as the hub of a network of skills provision, geared to meeting the needs of learners of all ages: We plan to include:

- Specialist education and training facilities (training labs/workshops) providing local access to a range of vocational skills, apprenticeships, work based learning, skills for life and higher education to meet the learning and skills needs of Berwick area and beyond
- Meeting spaces and business solutions to support the learning and skills needs of businesses and business sectors particularly information technology, retail, hospitality and tourism, construction and manufacturing, creative and design.
- Access to a range of higher education brokered through Northumberland College's extensive partnerships with Universities and through its own directly funded higher education provision
- Public and commercial spaces where learning can really be put into practice
- Appropriately equipped ICT provision offering online and blended learning solutions and supporting the wider learning network. Being well connected is important factor for Berwick's regeneration.
- Flexible learning spaces which encourage easy access for the community to use for a range of learning programmes
- Dedicated Independent Advice and Guidance spaces both for people and businesses

C) How will it work?

Berwick Skills Centre will be a partnership solution to learning and skills in Berwick led by Northumberland College with Northumberland Adult Learning Service and Berwick High School as co-delivery partners working with other key partners including Berwick Family Learning Centre, Connexions, Northumberland Business Services, and Business Link.

Through the Skills Centre partners will design, develop and delivery a range of learning and skills programmes for people and businesses in Berwick particularly vocational skills and higher education. Services delivered by partners through the centre will be jointly branded and will include all the current programmes on offer together with some new ones.

BSC will act as a hub for a wider network learning and skills support available locally across the area. It will also provide skills solutions to the Borders and beyond.

D) Why is the Berwick Skills Centre needed?

The 20 year vision is for Berwick to become 'a competitive, distinctive and well-connected Border town that is enterprising, ambitious and inclusive', step change in economic performance. Investment in skills and higher education is critically needed if this vision is to be achieved. Priorities for the future include:

- Promoting education and increasing access to learning by:
 - Working with educational providers in Northumberland and in the Eastern Borders to develop the best learning solutions for all local residents
 - encouraging more people to enter higher education
 - ensuring isolated communities' have better access to learning opportunities locally
- Increasing local opportunities for work-based learning and apprenticeships, by promoting stronger links between schools, training providers, funders and local businesses.
- Providing practical support in terms of information, advice and guidance for all learners, creating equal access for all.
- Supporting the development of vocational skills training provision in the Borough, and seeking to become a 'Centre of Excellence' in, for instance, conservation and/or food preparation.
- Working with partners in neighbouring districts and in Scotland to develop the best possible learning opportunities

In addition, there are real opportunities for funding an investment now and a strong business case for the Berwick Skills Centre:

- We know there is opportunity to involve more people and businesses locally in learning and skills programmes if the market can be built
- A lot of learners leave Berwick to learn elsewhere and we know many learners would prefer to stay in Berwick to learn
- There is a lot of adult and community learning going on already but progression to employment and further learning could be stronger
- Being able to offer a wide range of learning opportunities locally is a real challenge, the Berwick Skills Centre would assist greatly in this.
- The age for compulsory participation in learning and training is set to rise to 18 by 2013.

E) How are plans for the Centre progressing?

Northumberland College is leading a funding application to the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) for the Berwick Skills Centre on behalf of its partners. Support from ONE NorthEast is also being sought with respect to land and infrastructure, although this is not confirmed as yet.

F) Where will the Skills Centre be located?

LSC funding requires the centre to be on one site. Although a number of different site options have been considered at present the former Kwik Save site on Walkergate is the most attractive, it offers a town centre location with easy travel and access for learners and scope for a building of suitable size.