

# Sport and physical activity sector local skills plan

Black Country: 2026–2029

CREATED BY

Sport and Physical Activity Sector  
Local Skills Accountability Board –  
Black Country





# Contents

# Introduction and context

## The Sport and Physical Activity Sector Local Skills Accountability Board – Black Country

### About the board

**Chair:** Alex Howard , Co-founder and Chief Strategy Officer, The Inspire Group

### Board member organisations

- Active Black Country
- Activity Alliance
- Black Country Integrated Care Board
- British Blind Sport
- City of Wolverhampton College
- DB Leisure
- Dudley College
- Dudley CVS
- Fitness Studio 46
- Halesowen College
- Kore
- Lawn Tennis Association
- Ninja Warrior UK
- Places Leisure
- RB Gym and Sport
- Safety Training Awards
- Sandwell College
- Sport Structures
- Staffordshire Cricket
- StreetGames
- Swim England
- The Albion Foundation
- The Inspire Group
- Walsall College
- Walsall FC Foundation
- Walsall Leisure
- West Midlands Combined Authority
- Wolves Foundation
- WV Active
- University of Wolverhampton

## Black Country region – geographical area

The Black Country is a region in the West Midlands covering Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and the City of Wolverhampton. The Black Country's geographical boundaries are not formally defined, but it is generally accepted to include the four boroughs as part of the region.

The Black Country is united by one active partnership – Active Black Country – and one integrated care board.



## CIMSPA and local skills

The right training, delivered in the right place, at the right time.

**Our collaborative local skills project is bringing together employers, education providers and employability-focused organisations to effectively and efficiently match supply and demand.**

CIMSPA – the Chartered Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity – is the chartered professional body for the sport and physical activity sector workforce.

In 2023, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport published “Get Active: A strategy for the future of sport and physical activity”. This strategy explicitly backs CIMSPA’s rollout of local-based skills and training: “We will support CIMSPA in the development of local skills improvement plans with full national coverage.”

In line with its “Uniting the Movement” strategy, Sport England has commissioned CIMSPA to help accelerate local-focused skills improvements within the sport and physical activity workforce.

CIMSPA has already deployed a complete delivery team of multiple workforce development managers working at a local level across England, Wales and Scotland.

### Funding and support

Our local skills work to engage with employability-focused organisations and build a representative sport and physical activity sector workforce is funded and supported by Sport England and the National Lottery.



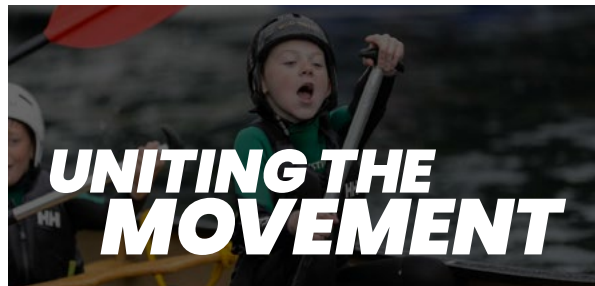
### Get involved

To learn more about this local skills plan or the work of your local skills accountability board please contact CIMSPA who will link you with their workforce development manager for the Black Country.

[partners@cimspa.co.uk](mailto:partners@cimspa.co.uk)

[LOCAL SKILLS ACCOUNTABILITY BOARD WEBSITE PAGE](#)

## National context



### DCMS strategy context

In August 2023, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport published “Get Active: A strategy for the future of sport and physical activity”. This strategy explicitly backs CIMSPA’s rollout of local-based skills and training: “We will support CIMSPA in the development of Local Skills Improvement Plans with full national coverage.”

### Sport England strategy context

In 2021, Sport England launched Uniting the Movement, a 10-year strategy outlining the importance of the workforce in driving change to transform lives and communities through sport and physical activity.

Uniting the Movement strategic priorities include:

- Unleashing the power of diversity
- Ensuring people have access to help from those who relate to their experiences
- Training and qualifications fit for the future
- Better career choices
- Organisations contributing more to the social fabric of their communities

With this, the sector’s workforce must be representative of the community it serves, creating sustainable careers, placing local employer and individual need at the heart of training and development. There is a collective responsibility to ensure the sport and physical activity sector is a valued and accessible career choice with progression for individuals.

### The Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022 context

The passing into law of the Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022 places employers at the heart of the skills system, making it easier for people to access the skills required to secure well paid jobs in industries with skills gaps.

Employers and training providers must work together to identify the skills needed locally and address the skills gaps. For further education colleges and training providers who access funding to deliver their training, it is now a legal requirement to work with employers to develop skills plans. Adult skills funding is being developed, and funding must align to the employer-identified priorities.

## Local context

### West Midlands and Warwickshire Local Skills Improvement Plan

As the region's employer representative body, the Coventry and Warwickshire Chambers of Commerce manages the region's local skills improvement plan (LSIP). The plan spans across seven local authorities, including those situated within the Black Country, and focuses on three priorities:

#### Confirming sector skills needs

This priority aims to make sure that training providers know what employers are currently asking for as well as emerging needs. It also focuses on making it easier for people to understand what training options exist and filling any gaps in what's currently offered.

#### Leadership and management skills

Businesses across the region report needing stronger leadership and people-management skills within the workforce to support them in adapting to new technology, digitalisation and the move towards net zero. The key skills in demand are strategic, performance, project and change management. This priority is all about

helping organisations to grow by improving leadership skills and addressing gaps in how this training is delivered and promoted.

#### Essential skills for employment

Professionals who are adaptable and confident with core skills like maths, communication, critical thinking and digital abilities (including digital marketing) are needed for a well-rounded workforce. This priority focuses on improving both soft skills and basic digital skills for both young people still in education and adults who need accessible ways to upskill.

The Black Country Sport and Physical Activity Local Skills Accountability Board has considered the LSIP priorities when creating the recommendations of this plan. By doing so, the LSAB is ensuring that our sector contributes to organisation and employee development, economic growth and skill sustainability across the region.

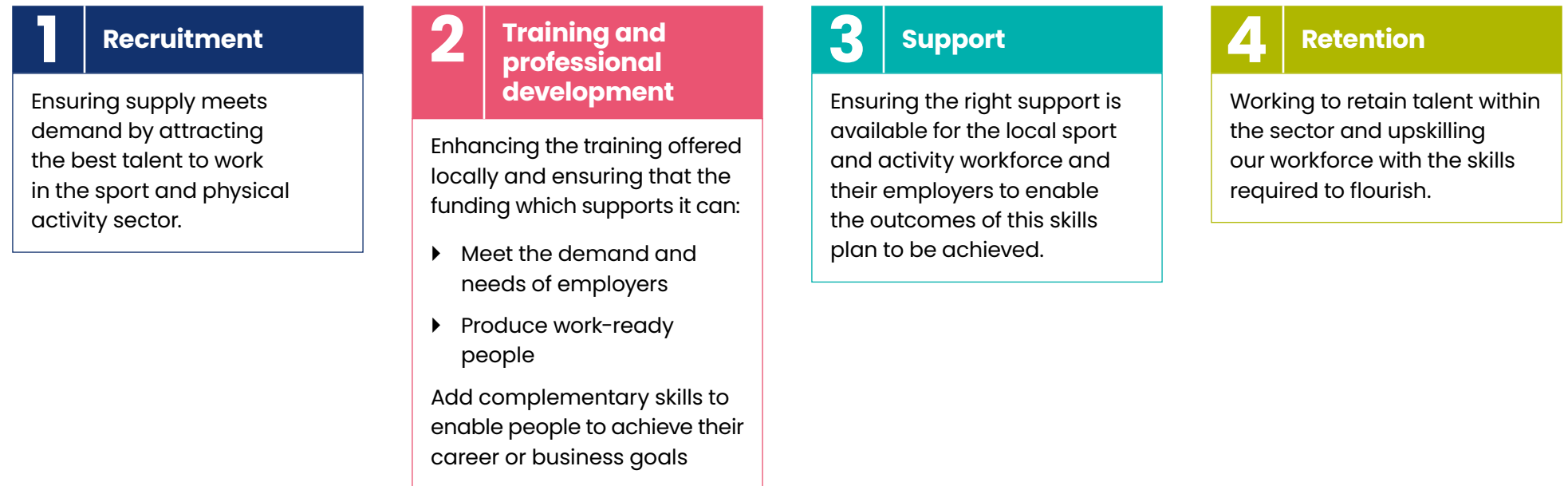
WEST MIDLANDS AND WARWICKSHIRE LOCAL SKILLS IMPROVEMENT PLAN [↗](#)



# Themes, recommendations, partners and stakeholders

## Themes

This plan has four themes.



## Recommendations

This plan has three headline recommendations:

### 1 Improve recruitment and retention

Support employers in building strategies that provide diverse recruitment pathways and increase retention through prioritising professional development.

### 2 Raise awareness of career pathways

Use sector career guidance and local stories to inspire and educate career explorers about the opportunities available in the region.

### 3 Connect with other sectors

Develop and strengthen local partnerships between sector organisations and external stakeholders to create alignment on shared economic challenges and health priorities.

## Partners and stakeholders

CIMSPA will work collaboratively with a range of partners and stakeholders to deliver on the actions that underpin this plan's recommendations.

These include:

### Education and training providers

Those delivering accredited training – both sector/occupation-specific training and training around basic skills, knowledge and behaviours – for example, further education colleges and higher education institutes.

### Skills and sector partners

Those with knowledge and understanding of the sport and physical activity sector, with expertise to support both employers and training providers, Active Partnerships, national governing bodies of sport and other system partners.

### Employers and deployers

For example, leisure providers, coaching companies and gym owners.

# Recommendations and actions

## RECOMMENDATION 1

**Improve recruitment and retention:** Support employers in building strategies that provide diverse recruitment pathways and increase retention through prioritising professional development.

| Theme(s)   | No. | 2026–2029 actions   | What does success look like?   | How will it be measured?*  |
|--|-----|---|--|--|
| <b>RECRUIT</b><br><b>SUPPORT</b><br><b>TRAIN</b> | 1a  | Ensure that employers have access to a work-ready talent pipeline.                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Established connections between education providers and employers</li> <li>▶ Education providers engaging with employers to shape curricula and work placements that meet skills needs</li> <li>▶ Work placements being embedded in non-work-based qualifications, for example T-levels and degrees</li> <li>▶ Employers offering work placement, apprenticeship and volunteering opportunities to learners</li> <li>▶ Employers advertising work placement opportunities via the CIMSPA sector jobs board</li> <li>▶ Employers understanding what work-ready skills and knowledge local training equips learners with</li> <li>▶ Learners leaving education with appropriate sector experience and work-ready skills and knowledge</li> <li>▶ Increased number of education leavers finding sector employment</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Workforce Development Tool data</li> <li>▶ Education provider course destination and work placement data</li> <li>▶ CIMSPA Careers Hub data</li> <li>▶ Local documentation and reporting</li> <li>▶ Qualitative data</li> </ul> |
| <b>TRAIN</b><br><b>RETAIN</b>                    | 1b  | Support employers to share knowledge and promote good staff development practice. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Best practice and retention initiatives being shared between established employer networks</li> <li>▶ Employers engaging with the CIMSPA Workforce Development Tool to identify skills gaps</li> <li>▶ Employers offering staff training aligned with skills needs</li> <li>▶ Employers using CIMSPA-endorsed qualifications and CPD to ensure that staff training is high quality</li> <li>▶ Increased job satisfaction amongst the workforce with regard to development opportunities</li> <li>▶ Improved staff retention</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Workforce Development Tool data</li> <li>▶ Employer staff satisfaction data</li> <li>▶ Qualitative data</li> </ul>  |

\*See glossary below for more information on specific terms.

# Recommendations and actions

## RECOMMENDATION 1 continued

**Improve recruitment and retention:** Support employers in building strategies that provide diverse recruitment pathways and increase retention through prioritising professional development.

| Theme(s)  | No. | 2026–2029 actions   | What does success look like?   | How will it be measured?*   |
|---|-----|---|--|---|
| <b>RECRUIT</b><br><b>SUPPORT</b><br><b>RETAIN</b> | 1c  | Support employers to develop and sustain a representative workforce.  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Employers are aware of the importance of workforce diversity</li> <li>▶ More employers are aware of and completing inclusive recruitment training</li> <li>▶ Sector organisations agreeing on and consistently adopting equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) procedures and best practice principles</li> <li>▶ The local sector workforce is more representative of the Black Country’s diverse population</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Workforce Development Tool data (increase in workforce diversity)</li> <li>▶ Employer diversity data</li> <li>▶ Qualitative data</li> <li>▶ Local documentation and reporting</li> </ul> |
| <b>RECRUIT</b><br><b>SUPPORT</b><br><b>TRAIN</b>  | 1d  | Engage employers in employment schemes such as the DWP Employability Academy and SWAPs to increase positive outcomes for both learners and employers. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Employers are aware of and engaging in employment schemes across the Black Country</li> <li>▶ More employers providing work experience within employment schemes</li> <li>▶ More initiative graduates being employed by involved employers</li> <li>▶ Local sector employers contributing to decreasing the number of NEET individuals</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Number of employability initiatives in the region</li> <li>▶ CIMSPA professional status data</li> <li>▶ Employment scheme success/impact reports</li> <li>▶ Qualitative data</li> </ul>  |

To achieve recommendation 1, we must prioritise developing the relationship between employers and other sector stakeholders, co-designing interventions based on employer needs and workforce demands.

\*See glossary below for more information on specific terms.

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTIONS

### RECOMMENDATION 2

**Raise awareness of career pathways:** Use sector career guidance and local stories to inspire and educate career explorers about the opportunities available in the region.

| Theme(s)   | No. | 2026–2029 actions   | What does success look like?  | How will it be measured?*  |
|--|-----|---|---|--|
| <b>RECRUIT</b><br><b>SUPPORT</b>                 | 2a  | Embed sector careers guidance within education networks.  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Education providers using CIMSPA partnership to develop their sector-related careers provision</li> <li>▶ Schools, colleges and universities using CIMSPA careers guidance resources including the CIMSPA Careers Hub</li> <li>▶ Learners and graduates understanding the career pathways and opportunities available to them in the sector</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ CIMSPA careers guidance course data</li> <li>▶ CIMSPA Careers Hub data</li> <li>▶ CIMSPA Education Partner data</li> <li>▶ Local documentation and reporting</li> <li>▶ Qualitative data</li> </ul>   |
| <b>RECRUIT</b><br><b>SUPPORT</b><br><b>TRAIN</b> | 2b  | Increase awareness of the full range of sector entry routes, including apprenticeships, entry-level qualifications, sport governing body pathways and employability programmes. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Education providers, employers and other sector stakeholders that offer diverse sector entry routes attending careers events</li> <li>▶ Local case studies are used to highlight pathways and opportunities to career explorers</li> <li>▶ Career explorers are aware of multiple sector entry routes</li> <li>▶ Career explorers, education providers and employers find careers events valuable</li> <li>▶ Increased engagement with career-entry opportunities</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Careers event data</li> <li>▶ CIMSPA Workforce Development Tool data</li> <li>▶ Education provider applicant data</li> <li>▶ Local documentation and reporting</li> <li>▶ Qualitative data</li> </ul> |

To achieve recommendation 2, we must promote both sector-specific careers guidance and the stories of our local workforce to ensure that pathways feel inspiring, quintessentially Black Country and achievable.

\*See glossary below for more information on specific terms.

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTIONS

### RECOMMENDATION 3

**Connect with other sectors:** Develop and strengthen local partnerships between sector organisations and external stakeholders to create alignment on shared economic challenges and health priorities.

| Theme(s)       | No.       | 2026–2029 actions  | What does success look like?  | How will it be measured?*   |
|----------------|-----------|--|---|---|
| <b>SUPPORT</b> | <b>3a</b> | Drive cross-sector collaboration by championing the impact of sport and physical activity and developing opportunities to align with priority sectors. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Partners from other sectors attending sport and physical activity networking events</li> <li>▶ Increased awareness and understanding across LSIP priority sectors of the widespread benefits of collaborating with the sport and physical activity sector</li> <li>▶ Partners from other sectors accessing physical activity services to support their workforce</li> <li>▶ Partners from other sectors understanding professional status and using it to identify skilled sector professional to collaborate with, for example for exercise referral</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Local event data (number of attendees from other sectors)</li> <li>▶ Workforce Development Tool data</li> <li>▶ CIMSPA professional status data</li> <li>▶ Qualitative data</li> </ul> |

To achieve recommendation 3, we must raise awareness of how the sport and physical activity workforce can support other sectors in our shared regional priorities.

\*See glossary below for more information on specific terms.

# Data and insight that have informed this work

## Population of the Black Country

The population of the Black Country is made up of almost 1.5 million people and comprises slightly above the national average proportion of working-age adults (aged 16–64). It is also a very diverse area: the West Midlands, including the Black Country, is the most diverse region of the UK outside of London, with one in five residents being of non-White ethnicity.

Despite having a large working-age population, the Black Country faces major economic challenges. Three of the region's four boroughs are among the 20 local authorities with the highest income deprivation in the UK.

The population demographics have been an important influencer when developing the skills plan. They have led the LSAB to focus on supporting young people to enter the sport and physical activity sector, enabling sustainable income and careers.

### Population data sources

Labour Market Profile – Black Country, nomis, Office for National Statistics, 2024

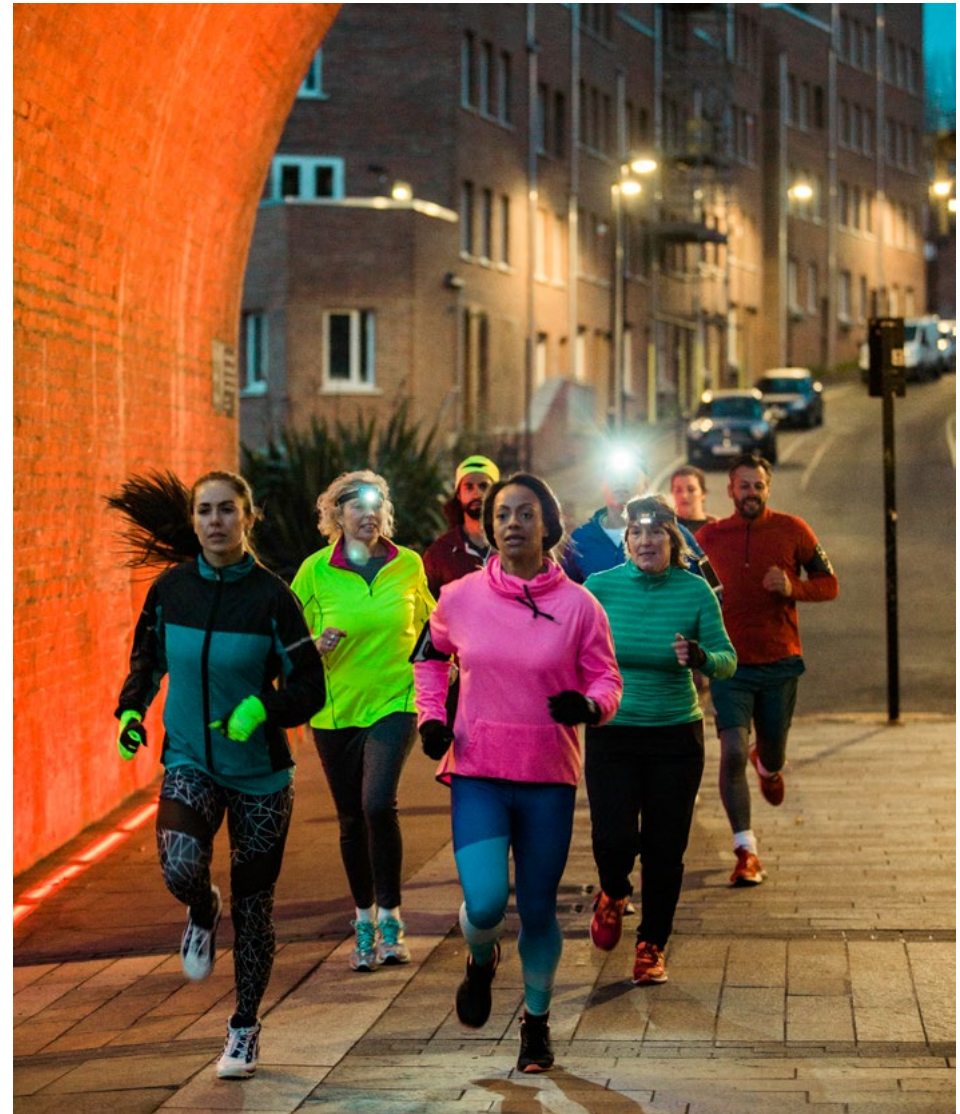
[LABOUR MARKET PROFILE](#)

Regional ethnic diversity, GOV.UK, 2022

[REGIONAL ETHNIC DIVERSITY](#)

English indices of deprivation 2025: statistical release, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2025

[ENGLISH INDICES OF DEPRIVATION 2025](#)



## CIMSPA Black Country 2026 Extended Datapack

The regional data pack for The Black Country, collated by CIMSPA, highlights a range of significant data about the sport and physical activity sector in the region.

It also includes external factors that influence the workforce's impact to offer a rounded insight into the environment in which this skills plan will be delivered.

The LSAB has used this data to shape the recommendations of this plan and ensure that they are targeted and relevant to The Black Country's needs.

Key highlights from the data pack that have influenced this plan:

### Economy

#### Business size

194 companies operate in the sector across the Black Country, employing over 2,000 professionals. 74% of the sector is made up of microenterprises of 1–9 employees. As small businesses are more likely to be isolated, fostering networks and collaboration is essential to ensuring they can access the system support critical to their resilience.

#### Growth

According to Companies House, 45% of the companies operating in the local sector are stable, 10% are shrinking and 16% are growing.

In general, the sector in Black Country is made up of healthy, stable businesses. However, there has been a decrease in workforce size since 2020 (-700).

Figures from 2025 record an 82% or £2.3 billion increase in sector turnover since 2020, growing the total turnover to just shy of £5 billion.

Therefore, we can safely say the sport and physical activity sector is an economic contributor in the region. As the sector grows, it's essential that workforce planning is embedded to enable sustainable development from recruitment to retention of skilled professionals.

#### Inactivity

Black Country's economic inactivity sits above the UK average, with 23.4% of 16–64 years olds not involved in the labour market. This indicates the need for more employment initiatives to support those who are economically inactive across the region with gaining access to education and experience that will support them into work.

## Health

When assessing The Black Country health data against UK averages, we can see that more people across all age groups are experiencing health issues:

- 9.7% of people (16 yrs+) are pre-diabetic or have diagnosed type 2 diabetes (national average 7.8%).
- 8.1% of year 6 children are severely obese (national average 5.6%).

With physical activity being a major component of improving health outcomes, the sector workforce will be a key resource for health partners when addressing these statistics.

## Education

Across the Black Country, there are a wide variety of CIMSPA Education Partners. These 11 partners contribute to creating a foundation of relevant, endorsed education.

## Appendices

CIMSPA Black Country 2026 Extended Datapack



# The scope of the sport and physical activity sector

## Sector and industries definitions

The sport and physical activity sector:

**“Everyone working in the sport and physical activity workforce in the industries and occupations detailed below and overleaf.”**

## Sector industries

Industry definitions from CIMSPA for the purpose of this strategy are shown in the table (right).

## Paid/voluntary workforce

This sport and physical activity sector local skills plan aims to be broad enough in its outcomes to not need to be separated by employment/deployment status.

| Industry             | Definition   |
|----------------------|--|
| Exercise and fitness | Services, activities and venues that predominantly improve participant physical fitness.   |
| Community sport      | Sport/skill-based services, activities and venues that increase participation and develop skill, sometimes targeting under-represented groups and inequalities.  |
| Leisure operations   | Services, activities and venues that predominantly improve participation in physical activity.   |
| Health and wellbeing | Holistic services and activities that promote improvements across all aspects of health, sometimes involving health care and other non-sector professionals.     |
| Adventure sport      | Activities, services and venues both indoor and outdoor improving participation in sport perceived as having a high level of risk.                               |
| Performance sport    | Competitive sport and activities including those in which athletes receive payment for their performance; professional, semi-professional and grass roots sport. |

# Occupations

## Introduction

“Occupations” are a standardised set of job roles that cover the whole of the sport and physical activity sector. For example, what some operators might call a “leisure attendant” is considered to be part of the “recreation assistant” occupation.

## Definitions

- Frontline – occupations in sport and physical activity directly servicing the needs of the participant.
- Support chain – occupations in sport and physical activity servicing the needs of the front line and/or the facilities.
- Extended workforce – enablers and influencers of sport and physical activity who are not part of the sector workforce.

### Frontline occupations

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Sector workforce</b><br>Occupations aligned with CIMSPA professional standards | Gym Instructor, core group exercise instructor, coach, coaching assistant, personal trainer, strength and conditioning trainer, pilates based matwork instructor, yoga instructor, aspiring manager, entry manager, health navigator, swimming teacher, lifeguard, recreation assistant, assistant swimming teacher, sports therapist*, nutritionist*, sport nutritionist*, physiotherapist*.<br><br>*Occupations supported directly by other professional bodies |
| <b>Broader workforce</b>  | Receptionist, bar staff, kitchen and catering assistant, waiting staff, cleaning assistant, domestic assistant, sales and retail assistant, chef.   |

### Support chain occupations

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Sector workforce</b><br>Occupations aligned with CIMSPA professional standards | Entry manager, general manager, senior manager, tutor, assessor, coach developer, health navigator, pool plant operative.   |
| <b>Broader workforce</b>  | Sport development officer, researcher, teacher, administrative occupations, finance occupations, health and safety, quality manager, environmental manager, auditor, sports media and reporters, general assistant, maintenance operative (examples). |

### Extended workforce

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Enablers</b><br>Enablers of sport and physical activity who don't necessarily hold a CIMSPA-recognised professional qualification     | Primary school teachers, teaching assistants, PE teachers, childcare workers, carers, sport event staff/volunteers, activity group leaders (e.g. scouts, guides etc), officiating. |
| <b>Influencers</b><br>Influencers of sport and physical activity who don't necessarily hold a sector-specific professional qualification | Parents, sport role models, sport and fitness models, sport and fitness social media influencers.  |

# Glossary

## Business skills diagnostic

CIMSPA has developed and launched a business diagnostic process through its workforce development team.

Sole traders and micro-enterprises of fewer than 10 employees make up 89% percent of the businesses in our sector, including over 73,000 freelancers and sole traders.

The diagnostic focuses in particular on this business type – building an understanding of their business needs and exploring how we can position our product offer and partner support to meet these.

In 2026, the Workforce Development Tool replaced the local workforce skills diagnostic and business diagnostic surveys.

## CIMSPA Data Lens

The CIMSPA Data Lens is a real-time intelligence dashboard for the UK's sport and physical activity sector.

The Data Lens system uses web-scraping APIs to open access data and machine learning, all segmented through real-world definitions specific to the sport and physical activity sector.

It can be interrogated specifically in niche areas such as exercise and fitness or community sport, or even specific geographies at a county or town level.

[DATA LENS](#)

## Local documentation and reporting

Throughout the lifespan of this local skills plan, CIMSPA and the local skills accountability board will look to incorporate any new sector-specific data created by local stakeholders that helps us understand the impact of our actions.

For example – employability and skills reports, survey results and impact reports.

## Local skills accountability board (LSAB)

A group of local education and training, skills/employability, health and employer stakeholders across a region and within the sport and physical activity sector.

LSABs are co-ordinated and managed by CIMSPA, enabled by Sport England and National Lottery funding.

## Local skills improvement plan

Local skills improvement plans (LSIPs) provide an agreed set of actionable priorities that stakeholders in a local area can get behind to drive change.

LSIPs:

- place employers at the heart of local skills systems
- facilitate direct and dynamic working arrangements between employers, providers and local stakeholders
- help learners gain the skills they need to get good jobs and increase their prospects.

Each LSIP has a designated Employer Representative Body (ERB), appointed by the Department for Education.

This document is **NOT** an LSIP.

### Local workforce skills diagnostic data

CIMSPA has a team of local workforce development managers working across England, Scotland and Wales.

These workforce development managers are engaged in collecting workforce skills intelligence directly from employers in their local area, through a detailed and standardised workforce skills diagnostic survey.

This data can then be segmented at the level of the local skills accountability board for use in better understanding local workforce needs and in monitoring the success of workforce improvement initiatives.

In 2026, the Workforce Development Tool replaced the local workforce skills diagnostic and business diagnostic surveys.

### Professional status

Professional status is a defined understanding of the level at which an individual can apply their skills, knowledge and experience to working in the sport and physical activity sector. Professional statuses are issued by CIMSPA as a chartered professional body and recognised regulator.

### Qualitative data

Qualitative data is non-numeric, descriptive information that gathers experiences and perceptions. It includes case studies, feedback via surveys and forms, and interviews.

### Sport and physical activity sector local skills plan

This document is a sport and physical activity sector local skills plan. It is a local skills plan specific to the sport and physical activity sector in a specific region.

The plan has been created by the local skills accountability board (see above), coordinated and managed by CIMSPA.

### Workforce Development Tool

The Workforce Development Tool, based on the sector's employer-led professional standards which are managed by CIMSPA, is an employer-focused online suite of surveys.

The tool has been developed by CIMSPA to capture workforce insights from organisations operating in the sport and physical activity sector. It explores and supports recruitment, retention, training and workforce planning by gathering data on current workforce structure; skills gaps; recruitment practices; training and development needs; diversity and inclusion; and volunteer engagement.

Local workforce development managers use the Workforce Development Tool to collect data from sport and physical employers across each region of the UK.

This data will help inform each region's local skills plan, identifying current skills within the workforce and gaps that need to be filled based on demand in the area.



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