

**An assessment and analysis of the existing networks
operating across Oxfordshire, their remit, membership,
and interest in learning and skills.**

**As part of the Report into the
Feasibility of a Learning and Skills Forum for Oxfordshire**

**Submitted to
Oxfordshire Economic Partnership Ltd**

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1. Introduction

The Oxfordshire Economic Partnership has been commissioned by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to look into the feasibility of a Learning and Skills Forum for the County.

A critical part of this research is to identify existing networks operating across the county, establish their remit, membership and their interest in the learning agenda, and, specifically, its relationship with and impact on skills needs.

This report aims to provide an analysis of existing groups and networks and will inform the wider research as to the way forward in terms of a Learning and Skills Forum for Oxfordshire, the format it should take, its role, responsibilities and accountabilities, its positioning in the county structures and how arrangements for sustainability may be set up.

2. Terms of Reference

The aim of this sub-project is to research into existing networks and their ability to fulfil the remit of a Learning and Skills Forum.

Whilst the OEP has formed a Skills Working Group, it has also identified that there is a requirement for the entire learning and skills agenda to be taken forward for the County, possibly through a new learning and skills forum.

In turn all research outcomes will support and inform the Project Steering Group and the LSC in making decisions on the future direction and development of learning and skills issues and the mechanisms to progress them.

3. Methodology

Desk-top research was undertaken to identify existing networks/partnerships, and to examine the remit, membership and roles of these fora with a view to identifying gaps in interest in or responsibility for learning and skills.

Appropriate individuals in the relevant organizations and companies were approached in order to verify and expand the information gathered.

Meetings, telephone conversations and focus groups were held with various contacts as appropriate.

The data gathered was categorised and analysed to produce the findings and inform the conclusions outlined in this Report. This information will go forward to add to the intelligence in the Project Report and Executive Summary on the feasibility of a learning and skills forum, and its probable focus of activity, membership, communications, and links with existing fora.

Confidentiality

Specific comments have not been attributed to individuals or organisations in the Report.

Acknowledgements

It is appropriate to record appreciation to all those who have given freely of their time and views to make a contribution to the content of this Report.

4. Analysis of existing networks, membership, remit and learning and/or skills content

For ease of reference the various networks and partnerships have been clustered under a series of headings with a view to classifying the type of organisation, area of activity, position in progressing either skills needs or skills development and aims and objectives.

The groups could equally be divided up by geography; with some organisations having a national remit such as the Sector Skills Councils and others regional or sub-regional such as Regional Language Network South East or MOBNET (Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire network of work-based training providers) and some Countywide (e.g. Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action) or local such as many of the breakfast clubs.

This element of the report does not include information relating to those statutory organisations with a responsibility for education, training, learning or skills development, e.g. Local Authorities (Adult Education and Information, Advice and Guidance), Learning and Skills Council, South East England Development Agency, Job Centre Plus and Connexions, or other public or private providers such as Further Education Colleges, Universities, Adult Education Centres. However as part of the service some of these organisations offer, they may provide networking opportunities for their clients, e.g. Job Centre Plus ex-offenders groups.

Many of the groups listed below have been borne out of a need identified by their original members. Equally, some represent large numbers of members, e.g. Oxfordshire Towns Chamber Network or Federation of Small Businesses. Others have been formed to bring together similar organisations to share and develop issues and solutions relating to learning provision, e.g. MOBNET (the Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire network of work-placed training providers), COMBO (Colleges of Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire) and MOB EBLO Ltd (Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Education Business Link Organisations).

It is intended that this analysis will assist in determining the potential for links amongst the various organisations identified, and will inform the ultimate conclusions of the wider study into the feasibility of a learning and skills forum for the County.

Learning Partnerships:

The learning partnerships potentially occupy a strategic role various stakeholder representatives in the county and devising and setting out a framework with identified priorities for the development of formal education and training to harmonise with the perceived economic requirements of the county going forward.

There is a degree of cross membership of these bodies with the county council having a pivotal position as principal primary and secondary education, seeking to be better informed and more inclusive of other stakeholders in the strategic planning process.

Strategic Partnerships:

These bodies draw together representatives of the community to drive forward improvements in the area for the benefit of local residents, businesses and other organisations, often formalised in Local Area Agreements. These improvements typically take the form of enhancement of local services, environmental improvements, increased security but may indirectly influence education/skills provision where, for instance, progress involving better facilities for young people are installed or economic development is afforded a cleaner and safer community.

Training and Education Provider Networks:

These networks enable a degree of co-ordination and cross-fertilisation amongst the members of each with a view to providing greater strategic focus and addressing practical issues.

Principally, they cover the areas of college based further education and work-based learning for both young people and more mature students, with a vocational emphasis.

There is an emphasis, particularly in the Lifelong Learning Networks, on overcoming segmental barriers in education, especially between the vocational and academic spheres.

There are links between educators and business in the guise of workplace training providers, though collaboration with business as end-users of training and employers of skilled people is less formally evident. The emphasis appears to be mainly on the common interests of providers.

Education Business Organisations:

These bodies, of which five have been identified as operating in the county, and to which can be added the various student and alumni organisations attached to the two universities, all serve, with differing emphasis, the function of introducing young people to the world of work and developing partnerships with local schools and colleges. They encourage, through a wide variety of programmes, frequently conducted within a real work environment, students to consider technological, scientific and business careers by providing some direct experience. The objective is to develop an enthusiasm for technology and enterprise which will ultimately be of major benefit to the local and national economy.

Taken together the various organisations, have a very large membership base and are able to provide a wide variety of learning opportunities with a real-life background.

In addition, The Oxford Trust, also operates as a diversified business support body focused on the local technology-based enterprise community and the need to encourage young people into science education and careers.

Business Support Organisations:

There are many organisations which can be placed in this category. They vary considerably in size and geographical coverage and they can have a sector remit ranging from science-based enterprise with global potential to localised retail and tourism business.

These bodies all seek to offer a business advice service to their respective members. Each body also provides a network which enables contacts to be made, learning experiences exchanged and advice offered.

Invariably, each organisation will offer opportunities for the members to enhance their knowledge and skills, typically through events, courses and seminars but their involvement in the education of the wider public is less clear, with the exception of the Regional Language Network, although a significant function of these groups is lobbying of government at both local and national level on issue of relevance to them, of which workforce skills is a priority.

Professional institutes:

These national bodies are well represented in the county and surrounding areas. Their priority purpose is to establish and maintain proper standards of professional practice within their respective fields. The continuing education and training of their members is a key element in this, and they are significant designers of qualifications and providers of specialist training and support to their members.

Like the business support organisations the institutes also offer networking opportunities and constitute the principal conduit through which their respective professions can lobby government or influence other organisations.

Given their central role in British industry these institutes are inevitably going to be major contributors to any learning and skills debate at every level.

Voluntary and Community Organisations:

The Oxfordshire Network fulfils a role for the local voluntary sector similar to that which the business support organisations carry out for commercial enterprises. Advice, assistance, exchange of information and knowledge, lobbying and training are the key elements of the network's activities. Among these, the sector has a vital interest in securing a wide range of skills from both employees and volunteers, making it an important consideration in planning for appropriate development of the county's workforce.

Business Growth Partnerships:

These are essentially business support organisations, operating within specific areas or business communities providing networking opportunities and practical advice and assistance with everyday commercial issues. Whilst they do not have an express remit to involve themselves with education and skills matters, nevertheless having an appropriately skilled workforce to meet their various members' needs is an issues which these bodies will increasingly encounter periodically.

Business Networks:

The numerous chambers of commerce throughout the county essentially form part of the diversified business support structure, seen above, providing the usual range of services. Whilst the chambers and their umbrella body, The Oxfordshire Town Chambers Network, all have a concern for their members businesses that they should have/have access to appropriately skilled employees, some like the Banbury and Bicester chambers are more directly active than others in their support for local training/education initiatives, which may reflect the widely varying local economies.

Other organisations in this category have very specific business sector coverage like the Bioscience and ICT groups, or may have a target audience on a gender or geographical basis.

However all these organisations aim to provide a developmental experience for their members, which may contain some form of organised learning from time to time, and all have a general concern for the principle of the dissemination of superior skills.

Name	PURPOSE and MEMBERSHIP	LEARNING & SKILLS CONTENT/ SPECIFIC RESPONSIBILITIES
Learning Partnerships		
<i>These organisations potentially occupy a strategic role with various stakeholders in the County and devising and setting out a framework with identified priorities for the development of education and training to harmonise with the economic requirements of the County.</i>		
<i>There is a degree of cross membership of these bodies, with the County Council having a pivotal position in primary and secondary education, seeking to be better informed and more inclusive of other stakeholders in the strategic planning process.</i>		
Oxfordshire Learning Partnership (Dormant since Mar '06)	Forum for learning issues and needs countywide. Steering Group drawn from a range of stakeholders including public and private sector organisations.	Initially delivered an annual conference on learning and, more recently, delivered a number of projects focused on the formal phase of education
Oxfordshire Learning Forum	Currently operating as an internal task force for the County Council on	Bringing together the various parts of the County Council with an interest in learning and skills.
Children and Young Peoples Board	Tripartite partnership led by Oxfordshire County Council, LSC and Connexions and includes wide range of partners/stakeholders to oversee delivery of the Children and Young People's Plan.	Management and delivery of activity to meet the requirements as set down by national government guidelines and policies
Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Local Skills for Productivity Alliance	Focus on skills for employment. Group membership includes Economic Partnerships (x3), the LSC (SE Region), Business Link and Connexions.	The Regional Alliance leads on some actions to deliver the Regional Economic Strategy. Locally an action plan is being formulated to take forward specific skills projects.
Strategic Partnerships		
<i>These bodies draw together representatives of their respective local authorities with those of the community to drive forward improvements in the area for the benefit of local residents, businesses and other organisations, in the case of LSP's often formalised in Local Area Agreements. These improvements typically take the form of enhancement of local services, environmental improvements, increased security but may indirectly influence education/skills provision where, for instance, progress involving better facilities for young people are installed or economic development is afforded a cleaner and safer community.</i>		
Oxfordshire Partnership (Countywide local strategic partnership)	Single, non-statutory, multi-agency body bringing together different parts of the public, private, voluntary and community sectors, to	Development of a Countywide sustainable communities strategy, driving the delivery of the Local Area Agreements across 5 key targets: Children and Young People, Economic Development and Enterprise, Healthier

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	take forward a sustainable community strategy. Has a steering group of around 30 people from local authorities, police, health trusts, business, learning and voluntary and community sectors.	Communities and Older People, Safer Communities and Stronger Communities, with potential for pooled funding and shared performance management systems.
Oxford City Strategic Partnership	As above, but specific to local Districts, linking into Countywide, overarching strategy, and relevant to those delivery area responsibilities specific to District authorities.	
South Oxfordshire Partnership		
Vale Strategic Partnership		
West Oxfordshire Strategic Partnership		
Cherwell Community Planning Partnership		
Oxfordshire Economic Partnership	Addressing the economic potential of the county with ambitious targets to improve lives of those who live, work or invest in Oxfordshire, a forum for representatives from private and public organisations.	A network of public, academic and business organisations for the purpose of sharing and co-ordinating views, and preparing and implementing strategic economic plans for the County. Affords coherent representation of the County's economic interests with government and other national and international bodies.
Training and Education Provider Organisations and Networks		
<p><i>These networks enable a degree of co-ordination and cross-fertilisation amongst the members of each with a view to providing greater strategic focus and addressing practical issues. Principally, they cover the areas of college based further education and work-based learning for both young people and more mature students, with a vocational emphasis. There is an emphasis, particularly in the Lifelong Learning Networks, on overcoming segmental barriers in education, especially between the vocational and academic spheres. There are links between educators and business in the guise of workplace training providers, though collaboration with business as end-users of training and employers of skilled people is less formally evident. The emphasis appears to be mainly on the common interests of providers.</i></p>		
14-19 Strategic Partnership (Oversees activity of 7	Strategic Partnership led by OCC, LSC and Connexions to steer 14-19 developments and includes wide range of partners/stakeholders.	Manages, monitors and guides developments on the ground to meet the requirements of the 14-19 Implementation Plan set down by national government.

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<i>area 14-19 Partnerships of schools, colleges, training providers and other providers, e.g. Connexions.)</i>		Area collaborative partnerships for planning/delivery of wider vocational options in the 14-19 phase, including provision of more vocational/practical learning opportunities, and specifically Diplomas.
OSHTA <i>(Oxfordshire Secondary Head Teachers Association)</i>	Network for Head Teachers in Oxfordshire 11-19 schools.	Network for sharing knowledge, information, guidance relating to the implementation of national and local strategy and policy
COMBO <i>(Colleges of Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire)</i>	Oxfordshire representatives from: Oxford & Cherwell Valley College Abingdon & Witney College The Henley College	Network for the FE Colleges of MKOB to enable sharing of good practice, co-ordination of planning and delivery and resolution of learning and skills issues relating to provision and quality, both vocational and academic programmes.
MOBNET <i>(Network for Work-based Training Providers of Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire)</i>	Representatives from all those local and national organisations delivering work-based and apprenticeship programmes across a range of industry sectors in the county.	Forum to enable focus on all work-based learning planning, delivery and issues, primarily at age <25.
Regional Resource Centre Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biotechnology and Healthcare • Advanced Technology (Advanced Instrumentation, ICT & electronics) 	Focal point and co-ordination for education and training in these sectors for the South East. Established by SEEDA.
Flexible Futures (MOB-wide)	Network for Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire co-ordinators of Increased Flexibility vocational 14-16 provision plus Local Education Authorities.	The Increased Flexibility Programme (IFP) supports partnerships of schools, further education colleges and providers of work-based learning in efforts to improve opportunities for vocational learning for 14-16 year olds, and to extend participation in education and training post-16.
Centres of Vocational Excellence (COVEs)	The Henley College, Abingdon and Witney College, Oxford and Cherwell Valley College are approved partners participating in COVEs.	Collaborative partnerships between FE and other providers, having gained COVE status for excellence in specific provision: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ICT Systems & Support (Abingdon & Witney College and Henley College), ▪ Digital Technology in Creative Arts & Media (Amersham & Wycombe

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		College), <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Engineering Practice & Productivity (Aylesbury Training Group, ISIS Training Services LTD and Abingdon & Witney College), ▪ Cycle Engineering (Aylesbury Training Group), ▪ Logistics & Freight Transport CoVE (Milton Keynes College, Nortec Training Ltd), ▪ ICT Applications (Milton Keynes College, Amersham & Wycombe College) ▪ Business & Management (Nortec Training Ltd, Milton Keynes College) ▪ Construction & Building Services (Oxford & Cherwell Valley College, Amersham & Wycombe College, Milton Keynes College, MK Women Builders (informal partner) and Oxford Women's Training Service (OWTS) (informal partner)).
Lifelong Learning Networks (HE)	A partnership of institutions working towards common goals led by HEFCE (Higher Education Funding Council for England) and locally by Reading University, with Oxford Brookes University and its associate colleges as members.	The overall objective for Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs) is to improve the coherence, clarity and certainty of progression opportunities for vocational learners into and through higher education. www.hefce.ac.uk/widen/lln/
Lifelong Learning Network		Government-supported website for the encouragement, promotion and development of lifelong learning. www.lifelonglearning.co.uk/

Education Business Partnerships

These bodies, of which five have been identified as operating in the county and to which can be added the various student and alumni organisations attached to the two universities, all serve, with differing emphasis, the function of introducing young people to the world of work and developing partnerships with local schools and colleges. They encourage, through a wide variety of programmes, frequently conducted within a real work environment, students to consider technological, scientific and business careers by providing some direct experience. The objective is to develop an enthusiasm for technology and enterprise which will ultimately be of major benefit to the local and national economy.

Taken together the various organisations, some of which like the Industrial trust have near national coverage, have a very large membership base and are able to provide a wide variety of learning opportunities with a real-life background.

In addition, The Oxford Trust, also operates as a diversified business support body focused on the local technology-based enterprise community and the need to encourage young people into science education and careers.

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MOB EBLO Ltd <i>(Milton Keynes Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire Education Business Link Organisations)</i>	MKOB-wide consortium formed as the conduit for government funding for education business link activity in the county.	In Oxfordshire activities includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • delivery of work-experience placements for young people and teachers/tutors and work-related/based learning activity, supporting schools and individuals to identify and risk-assess placements and deliver some WRL activity by OEBP, • educational programmes designed to introduce young people to industry and enterprise on employers' premises, advisory services and a range of learning materials for teachers/tutors and students through The Industrial Trust and SETPOINT, sustaining links between science and education through The Oxford Trust and other activities. • a range of programmes based on "learning by doing", bringing volunteers from business into schools, working with students and teachers developing skills and capabilities of value in business, with programmes encouraging enterprise and business oriented skills by running real businesses, games, practical activities and role play, intended to fit with statutory curriculum requirements by YE.
Business Support Organisations offering Learning/Networking Opportunities		
<p><i>There are many organisations which can be placed in this category. They vary considerably in size and geographical coverage and they can have a sector remit ranging from science-based enterprise with global potential to localised retail and tourism business.</i></p> <p><i>These bodies all seek to offer a business advice service to their respective members. Each body also provides a network which enables contacts to be made, learning experiences exchanged and advice offered.</i></p> <p><i>Invariably, each organisation will offer opportunities for the members to enhance their knowledge and skills, typically through events, courses and seminars but their involvement in the education of the wider public is less clear, with the exception of the Regional Language Network, although a significant function of these groups is lobbying of government at both local and national level on issue of relevance to them, of which workforce skills is a priority.</i></p>		
The Oxford Trust	Provides access to a comprehensive and co-ordinated network offering information on the science and technology news, events and projects in Oxfordshire.	Provides information, advice and support specific to technology business management, start-up and development, fostering networking amongst businesses, academia and government.
Oxford Innovation Ltd	Works with entrepreneurs and innovators to	Runs a network of Innovation Centres with a community of some 400

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	provide the services they need.	companies (190 in Oxfordshire).
Culham Science Centre (Owned and operated by UKAEA)	Cluster of 20-30 science based companies and support services with mutual interests.	Provides networking/learning, business support programmes, specialised cluster formation and access to innovation centre specialist premises/services.
Business Link	Government funded organisation which provides access to relevant services and networks for businesses.	Offers access to business support through brokering and signposting a range of private, public and voluntary business support organisations. Covering all aspects of business support to companies with up to 250 employees.
Oxfordshire Business Enterprises	Business advice service for people looking for help starting a business, or in the early stages of running a business, in the Oxfordshire area.	Provides a free one-to-one new business advice service and a number of training and workshop courses, all designed to help starting a business. www.oxonbe.co.uk/
Oxfordshire Sustainable Business Partnership	Private and public partnership, set up to help business be more resource efficient and thus save money.	Provision of advice to organisations and businesses on sustainable practices. www.oxsbp.org.uk
Oxfordshire Broadband Partnership	Public and private sector steering group.	Promotes the effective use of high-speed internet access to county businesses, focuses on strength and experience of key players from private/public sectors, bringing a wealth of knowledge and expertise together to improve business effectiveness, efficiency and competitiveness of SMEs through learning opportunities, grants and advice, increasing tangible benefits by raising skill levels, improving work-life balance through flexibility. www.oxbroadband.co.uk/
Oxfordshire Enterprise Hub	Supports local entrepreneurs in growing and enhancing business. Is part of the SEEDA Enterprise Hub Network.	Assistance with identification of commercial opportunities, professional advice on finance and government funding, intellectual property advice, technology sector expertise, mentoring and peer networking opportunities and relationships with major banks and venture capital sources and offering learning networking and business incubation space. www.oxfordshirehub.co.uk/
Ethnic Minority Business Service	Community voluntary service for BME (Black Minority Ethnic) residents.	Offers training and language skills to improve employability through a partnership accountable to the local community.
Tourism South East	Support for tourism businesses and staff.	Support and development organisation for South East tourism businesses, delivering co-ordinated training and learning opportunities to support

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		sector businesses and employees.
Regional Language Network South East	National and regional language networks supported by CILT, the National Centre for Languages.	Promoting greater capability in language and cultural skills for employment by developing a plan for improving international communications for businesses and organisations, including a one-stop shop for language and cultural expertise, sign-posting and guidance to information and events.
Professional Institutions and Sector Organisations		
<p><i>These national bodies are well represented in the county and surrounding areas. Their priority purpose is to establish and maintain proper standards of professional practice within their respective fields. The continuing education and training of their members is a key element in this, and they are significant designers of qualifications and providers of specialist training and support to their members.</i></p> <p><i>Like the business support organisations the institutes also offer networking opportunities and constitute the principal conduit through which their respective professions can lobby government or influence other organisations.</i></p> <p><i>Given their central role in British industry these institutes are inevitably going to be major contributors to any learning and skills debate at every level.</i></p>		
Sector Skills Councils	<p>At the heart of the Skills for Business network are 25 Sector Skills Councils (SSCs). Each SSC is an employer-led, independent organisation that covers a specific sector across the UK. The four key goals are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to reduce skills gaps and shortages • improve productivity, business and public service performance • increase opportunities to boost the skills and productivity of everyone in the sector's workforce • improve learning supply including apprenticeships, higher education and National Occupational Standards. 	<p>Asset Skills: Property services, housing, cleaning services and facilities management</p> <p>Automotive Skills: Retail motor industry</p> <p>Cogent: Chemical, nuclear, oil and gas, petroleum and polymer industries</p> <p>ConstructionSkills: Construction</p> <p>Creative & Cultural Skills: Advertising, crafts, cultural heritage, design, The Arts and music</p> <p>Energy & Utility Skills: Electricity, gas, waste management and water industries</p> <p>e-skills UK: Information Technology and Telecommunications and the lead body for Contact Centres on behalf of the Skills for Business network</p> <p>Financial Services Skills Council: Financial services industry</p> <p>GoSkills: Passenger transport</p> <p>Government Skills: Central Government</p> <p>Improve Ltd: Food and drink manufacturing and processing</p> <p>Lantra: Environmental and land-based industries</p> <p>Lifelong Learning UK: Employers who deliver and/or support the delivery of lifelong learning</p> <p>People 1st: Hospitality, leisure, travel and tourism</p>

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		<p>Proskills UK: Process and manufacturing industries SEMTA: Science, engineering and manufacturing technologies Skillfast-UK: Apparel, footwear and textiles and related businesses industry Skills for Care and Development: Social care, children and young people Skills for Health: The health sector across the UK Skills for Justice: Custodial care, community justice, court and prosecution services, policing and law enforcement. Skills for Logistics: Freight logistics industry SkillsActive: Active leisure and learning Skillset: Audio visual industries Skillsmart Retail: Retail SummitSkills: Building services engineering</p>
<p>The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. (CIPD) <i>(Access to membership by qualification only.)</i></p>	<p>Professional body for practitioners of people management and development with 4,000 practising members locally.</p>	<p>Leads development and promotion of good practice, serves the professional interests of members and upholds the highest ideals in practice, through learning programmes and qualifications, networks, e.g. Special Interest Groups for consultants and trainers, publications, seminars and meetings to continuously improve practice in the discipline and represents members and employers views to government on skills, learning and development issues.</p>
<p>Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM) <i>(Local group as part of Thames Valley Area Branch)</i></p>	<p>Organisation for marketing professionals</p>	<p>Dedicated to the continuous development of marketing skills to improve business competitiveness and profitability and the performance of not-for-profit and public sector organisations through the delivery of training through courses, seminars and company specific events, consultancy and problem-solving, awarding body for sector qualifications, including customer service, provision of market intelligence and publications.</p>
<p>The Institute of Management</p>	<p>Organisation for management professionals</p>	<p>Promoting the development, exercise and recognition of professional business management, providing local networking opportunities and training programmes leading to nationally accredited management qualifications, offering career counselling and a management information centre.</p>
<p>British Computer Society</p>	<p>Professional body for ICT professionals and</p>	<p>Promotes the study and practice of computing and advancing knowledge</p>

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	the qualifying body for Chartered IT Professionals (CITP). Oxfordshire Committee and membership comprised individuals from a wide range of companies and organisations in the IT and Engineering sectors	of and education in IT.
Institute of Engineering and Technology	Professional body representing: Communications, Computing and Control, Electronic Systems and Software, Information Professionals, Management, Manufacturing, Power, Transport	Global and European professional engineering society, representing professionals in electrical, electronic, manufacturing and systems engineering and related sciences
Various Student and Alumni organisations	Alumni for business, organisations and education representatives	Led by both universities, these groups enable student voice and development of new/additional education and training programmes, e.g. University of Oxford Continuing Education offer, Oxford Brookes Business School programmes and Enterprise Centre activity.
Voluntary and Community Organisations		
<i>Advice, assistance, exchange of information and knowledge, lobbying and training are the key elements of the network's activities. Among these, the sector has a vital interest in securing a wide range of skills from both employees and volunteers, making it an important consideration in planning for appropriate development of the county's workforce.</i>		
Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action	Focal point for approx. 750 voluntary and community organisations across Oxfordshire.	Acts as the focal point for information on training for those working in the voluntary and community sectors. Runs Oxnet.org, an online community for information sharing.
Oxford Inspires	Cultural development agency with key stakeholders are the Universities, the City/County Councils and the Arts Council, with Board comprising the Lord Lieutenant, prominent business people, men and women holding public appointments, involved in the arts and other business networks, academics, scientists, clerics, musicians, and diversity specialists.	Formed to take the bid to the final round of the competition to become European Capital of Culture 2008, earning Oxford the title of Centre of Culture and now working to develop cultural life to benefit of all who live, work, study or visit

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East Oxford Action Group	A social enterprise in partnership with other Oxford organisations e.g. Oxford Brookes University, Oxford City and Oxfordshire County Councils.	Works with communities to produce regeneration solutions, now focussed on activities for regeneration of East Oxford, especially equipping local residents with skills for active citizenship, offering training, advice and mentoring. Offers transformative planning strategies to enable psychological, economic and physical change, plus affordable training courses for individuals, including trainer training to support sustainability.
Every Action Counts: Federation of Community Development Learning	DEFRA Consortia of community and voluntary sector organisations	Identifies and develops community actions on sustainable development and offers free courses, sample training materials and taster packs for community groups and for downloading.
Business Growth Partnerships		
<i>Business Growth Partnerships are business support organisations, operating within specific areas or business communities providing networking opportunities and practical advice and assistance with everyday commercial issues. Whilst they do not have an express remit to involve themselves with education and skills matters, nevertheless having an appropriately skilled workforce to meet their various members' needs is issues which these bodies will encounter.</i>		
Oxfordshire BioScience Network	Promotes the Oxfordshire biotechnology sector with in excess of 100 science, corporate services and education provider organisations.	A unique public - private partnership, hosted by Oxford Brookes University, promoting biotechnology business and research enterprise across Oxfordshire.
Support for Women in Science, Engineering and Technology (SET)		Online Resource centre for women offering groups and organisations support for girls and women entering or working in SET and incorporating mentoring schemes.
Diagnox	Organisation to improve the commercialisation of diagnostics research in the UK.	Offers services to meet the needs of researchers, businesses and professionals with interests in the diagnostics sector, including the identification and protection of intellectual property, sourcing research and development funding, assisting with business start up, sourcing staff and facilities, partnering and networking, consultancy, conferencing and provision of training courses.
Oxit	Local network for members engaged in software and IT activities.	Provides opportunities for meeting, identifying new business and learning opportunities, finding solutions and encourages collaboration between businesses, public sector and research establishments to increase the competitiveness of the county ICT sector.

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Business Networks		
<p><i>The numerous chambers of commerce throughout the county essentially form part of the diversified business support structure, seen above, providing the usual range of services. Whilst the chambers all have a concern for their members businesses that they should have/have access to appropriately skilled employees, some like the Banbury and Bicester chambers are more directly active than others in their support for local training/education initiatives, which may reflect the widely varying local economies.</i></p>		
<p><i>Other organisations in this category have very specific business sector coverage like the Bioscience and ICT groups, or may have a target audience on a gender or geographical basis.</i></p>		
<p><i>However all these organisations aim to provide a developmental experience for their members which may contain some form of organised learning from time to time, and all have a general concern for the principle of the dissemination of superior skills.</i></p>		
Confederation of British Industry (CBI)	Independent employers' organisation.	<p>Lobbying organisation for UK business on national and international issues. Work with the UK government, international legislators and policy-makers to help UK businesses compete effectively.</p> <p>CBI policy is decided by members – senior professionals from all sectors and sizes of business are directly involved in the policy-making process. www.cbi.org.uk</p>
Institute of Directors (Access by subscription)	Organisation for company directors.	Provides networking opportunities as well as a conduit for views on local issues to be communicated at local, regional and national levels by delivery of seminars and events. www.iod.com
Federation of Small Businesses	Lobby group for 2300 small business owner members in Oxfordshire	Offers a range of member services, as well as acting as a campaigning pressure group to promote and protect the interests of small businesses, delivering a series of member learning events. www.fsb.org.uk/
Oxfordshire Chamber of Commerce	County member of Thames Valley Chambers.	Provides practical, interactive business training delivered by business people for business people, promotes business through networking events, delivering workforce development training, acting as an independent voice for the region, providing business intelligence, and offering time-saving and cost-cutting advice. www.thamesvalleychamber.co.uk/contact/oxford.asp
Bicester Chamber of Commerce	Independent chamber for Bicester area comprising 500+ members	www.bicesterbusiness.org.uk/

Name	PURPOSE and MEMBERSHIP	LEARNING & SKILLS CONTENT/ SPECIFIC RESPONSIBILITIES
Banbury Chamber of Commerce	Independent chamber for Banbury area comprising 129 members	www.banburychamber.com/
Oxfordshire Town Chambers Network	Overarching membership network for 20 town Chamber groups, representing 1400 members.	Promotes business in Oxfordshire towns, supporting the work of its member organisations, strengthening links between them, sharing ideas and best practice, discussing issues, lobbying on behalf of members where appropriate and providing training and learning opportunities to meet business needs, encourages inward investment. www.otcn.co.uk/
Prowess	A network of organisations and individuals supporting the growth of women's business ownership, with 200 members give support to 100,000 women annually, covering 10,000 business start ups.	Provides advocacy, lobbying and promotion of women's business to government and private bodies.
Business Networks International	A business to business contact framework with international coverage, with 16 chapters in Oxon. N. Bucks and Berks with 40 members each approx.	Functions through networking, and passing on business leads as a referral exchange with a standardised format, aimed primarily at small businesses, organised centrally, providing some internally generated business training literature.
Tackley Village Business Network	Self-help group for local businesses and organisations.	Promotes the sharing of knowledge and diverse business skills through monthly events on themed topics around business, with opportunities to access advice on issues and problems.
Wallingford Tuesday Business Club	Monthly networking group	Offers networking, making business contacts and participating in learning and training sessions.
Be Your Own Boss Club	Club for potential start-ups and new businesses	Offers networking, expert advice from other small business owners, best practice, expert opinion, access to training and support
Oxford Young Professionals Society	Young professionals in Oxford	The society's aim is to provide a forum for young professionals to meet & network on a regular social basis to develop contacts and working relationships in Oxford
Business Breakfast and Lunch Clubs		
Witney Abingdon Wantage Oxford x 3	Monthly networking group	Offers networking, making business contacts and participating in learning and training sessions.

Name	PURPOSE and MEMBERSHIP	LEARNING & SKILLS CONTENT/ SPECIFIC RESPONSIBILITIES
Chipping Norton Bicester Banbury Faringdon	40+ 100+	
Womens Networks		
Oxfordshire Women's Forum	Development, networking and support forum for women. 350 members from business, professional, voluntary and public sectors.	Delivers an annual programme of networking events contextualised in learning, developmental and social activities and runs the One Step Ahead Award offering financial bursaries for training or development to women.
Athena Networks: Abingdon, Henley, Bicester, Thame and Oxford	Monthly networking groups	Offers networking, making business contacts and participating in learning and training sessions
She Plc (Oxfordshire Chamber of Commerce)	Monthly networking groups	The female network of the Chamber of Commerce
Faringdon Businesswomen Networking Club	Monthly networking groups	
Chippy Lippys	Monthly networking groups	
Ladies that Lunch and Men too	Monthly networking groups	

5. Conclusions

The research revealed a large number of organisations operating in Oxfordshire with some remit for learning and skills. There appeared to be little evidence of clear channels of communication amongst them. Many of the organisations identified were evidently created to meet special sector or geographical needs, and were not necessarily co-ordinated or strategic. There appeared to be no identifiable route to bring them together, linking their interests in learning/education, or enabling them to identify readily other interested parties to talk to on any particular issue.

Many organisations have a direct input to skills development, but are sector-specific e.g. Oxfordshire BioScience Network. Others, like many of the business support organisations, tend to be less active in the general provision of training and learning, attending principally to the assistance of member businesses with such matters as statutory regulation or marketing, although they may be inclined to lobby government over perceived workforce development needs.

Some of the organisations under both Skills and Learning Partnerships were operating at a more strategic level and appeared most strongly focused on bringing skills and learning issues to the fore, driven both by government policy and local economic needs. Several have the broad based composition to enable them to take an overview of the economy of the County, and produce an appropriate plan to meet current and future requirements for the development of the workforce. For example, Oxfordshire Economic Partnership stands out as being capable of engaging most stakeholders, with a primary focus on up-skilling the workforce, and dovetailing training provision with business needs. They could, if structured appropriately, enable the convergence of strategic planning, provision, business and individual learners.

There was significant workforce development input by many other organisations, e.g. The Oxford Trust, Oxfordshire Bioscience Network, but, whilst having a major influence on developing the skills base, this often has a technology bias. Indeed, some evidently key sectors, such as retail and construction, appear to be noticeably lacking in specialist representation although many of the Chambers are almost exclusively focussed on this. Whereas many others, e.g. the Chambers, have a largely indirect input to skills needs and development, although they are capable of lobbying government at national, regional and local levels on policy issues.