



# Get Worcestershire Working

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**Judy Gibbs – Head of Skills and Employability**  
**Version 4 – Final Draft – 9<sup>th</sup> September 2025**

We are proud to present Get Worcestershire Working, a bold, collaborative strategy that reflects our shared commitment to improving the lives of residents across Worcestershire through sustainable employment.

This plan is the result of strong partnership working, bringing together the NHS Herefordshire and Worcestershire Integrated Care Board, the Department for Work and Pensions, and Worcestershire County Council. It unites health, employment, education, and voluntary and community services to address the complex challenges of economic inactivity and barriers to participation in the labour market.

Worcestershire is a county full of opportunity. With a resilient economy, strong employment rates, and a well-qualified population, we have much to be proud of. Yet beneath these strengths lie areas where people are being left behind, with rising health-related inactivity and growing youth unemployment. These challenges require a joined-up response, one that recognises the vital connection between good health, meaningful work, and economic growth.

Through this strategy, we aim to:

- Embed employment as a health outcome, recognising that good work supports wellbeing.
- Support residents with health conditions and disabilities to access and sustain employment through integrated services and tailored support.
- Empower young people to move confidently from education into work, reducing NEET levels and building long-term resilience.
- Strengthen employer engagement, ensuring businesses are equipped to recruit effectively and invest in workforce development.
- Simplify access to services, creating a “no wrong door” approach that puts residents at the centre.

We are committed to delivering this strategy in partnership with employers, education and employment providers, voluntary and community organisations, and most importantly, the people of Worcestershire. Together, we will build a future where every resident has the opportunity to succeed in work, and every employer can access the talent they need to grow.

This is more than a plan, it’s a shared commitment. A commitment to working differently, thinking holistically, and acting together to help get Worcestershire working for everyone.

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Cabinet Member for Business and Skills, Worcestershire County Council

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Director of Strategy, NHS Herefordshire and Worcestershire Integrated Care Board

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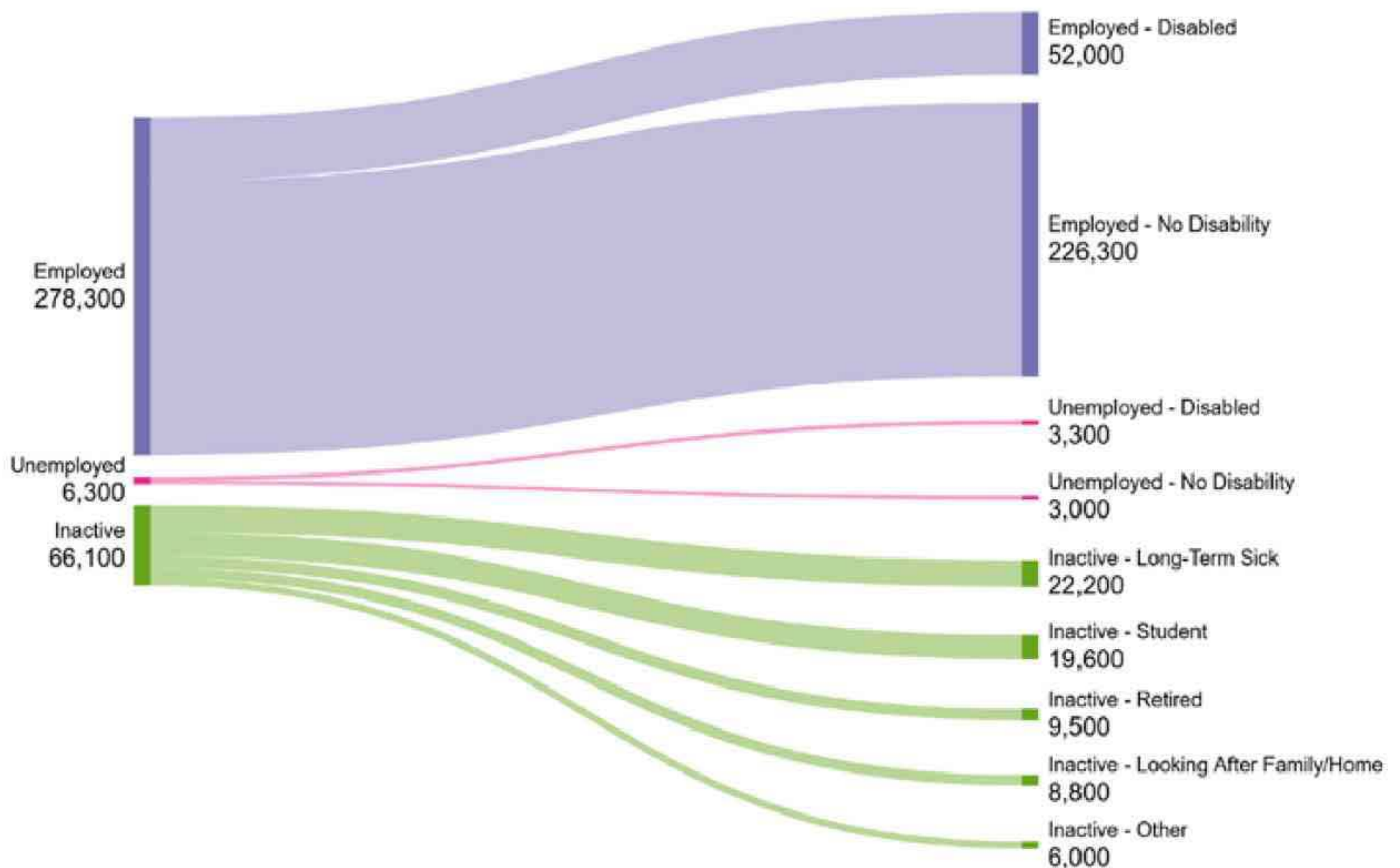
# Welcome to Worcestershire - Get Worcestershire Working

Worcestershire is a dynamic county in the West Midlands, home to over 600,000 residents and more than 28,000 businesses. Perfectly positioned between Birmingham and Bristol, the county combines outstanding connectivity with a thriving, forward-looking economy.

Made up of six distinctive districts: Bromsgrove, Malvern Hills, Redditch, Worcester City, Wychavon and Wyre Forest, Worcestershire blends urban opportunity with rural enterprise, making it a great place to live, work and invest. Worcestershire’s current two-tier local government system brings together six district councils and one county council, each playing a distinct role in supporting local communities, infrastructure, and economic growth.

Since 2015, Worcestershire has added over £2 billion to its economy, created 34,000 jobs, and delivered 17,000 new homes—clear evidence of a county investing in its future.

## The Labour Market – In Summary – At time of Guidance Publishing – May 2025



**Worcestershire’s working age population is around 350’700 people, which equates to 59.6% of the overall population. At time of publishing the Get Britain Working guidance, around 80.3% were in some form of employment, albeit that 3.1% are claiming benefits of some kind. Alongside this Worcestershire has an inactivity rate of 18.8% compared to WM at 22.5% and England at 21.1%**

Worcestershire presents a resilient and high-performing labour market, with employment rates consistently surpassing both regional and national averages, and relatively low levels of economic inactivity. The county benefits from a well-qualified population, strong representation in professional and managerial roles, and a diverse sectoral base. However, beneath these positive headline figures lies a complex landscape of disadvantage, inequality, and structural barriers. A significant proportion of employment remains concentrated in low-wage, low-skilled roles, which can constrain economic growth. Addressing these challenges through targeted and accessible, relevant interventions will be critical to ensuring sustainable development and equitable access to opportunities across the county.

### **Key Labour Market Strengths**

- High employment rate of working age population: 79.4%, outperforming West Midlands (74.1%) and England (75.7%).
- Low unemployment within working age population: 3.2%, significantly below regional and national levels.
- Strong female employment: In several districts, female employment exceeds male rates, albeit women overall employment in Worcestershire is 1 % less than their male counterparts and inactivity is 7.9% higher for females than males.
- Positive outcomes for veterans and disabled residents but more needs to be done.

### **Economic Inactivity**

- 18.8% of working-age residents are economically inactive (approx. 66,100 people)
- Health-related inactivity is the largest contributor (34%), with 22,600 residents affected.
- Early retirement and caring responsibilities also drive inactivity, especially in older and rural populations.
- Around 7,200 residents are inactive due to caring responsibilities.
- Residents from BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) communities have higher inactivity rates (up to 30%).

### **Health and Disability**

- Rising numbers on out-of-work benefits due to health (now 28,000, up 10,000 since 2020).
- Mental health is the leading cause of ESA claims (46.5%).
- Poor health strongly correlates with inactivity: 75% of those in bad/very bad health are not working.

## Youth Unemployment and NEETs

- Youth unemployment is rising (5.2%), with 2,190 young people affected.
- NEET levels among 16–18-year-olds are increasing, risking long-term disengagement.
- Redditch and Worcester show the highest youth unemployment rates.

## District-Level Inequalities

- Malvern Hills and Wychavon have the highest inactivity rates (25.5% and 23.8%), but it is important to understand drivers for those figures.
- Redditch and Worcester face elevated health and youth unemployment challenges.
- Wyre Forest has high health-related inactivity despite low overall inactivity.
- Each district has a distinct labour market cluster highlighting need for tailored approaches.
- Claimant levels vary significantly across the county, with certain areas showing higher concentrations and indicating a need for targeted, personalised support.

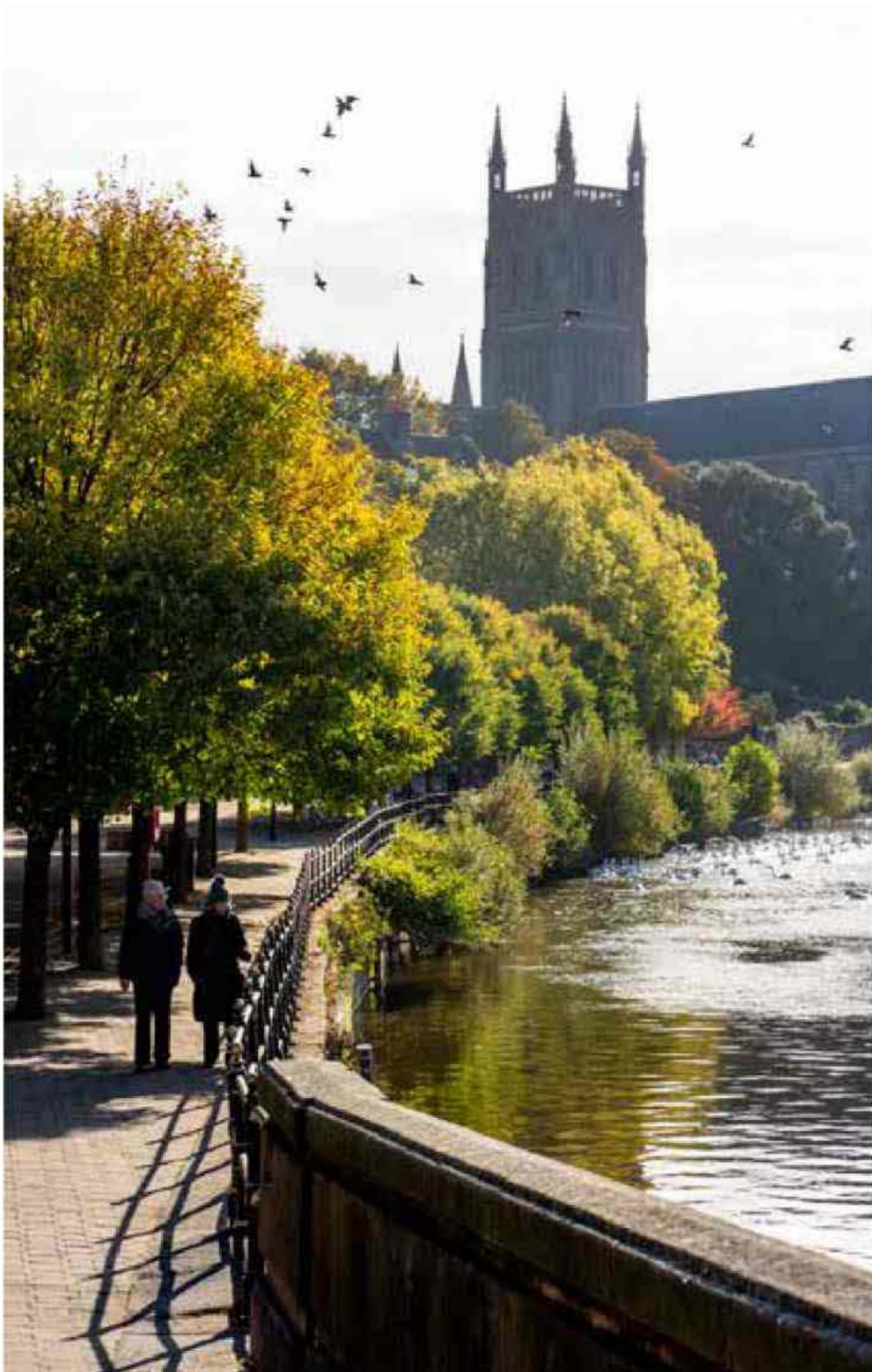
## Complex Needs Cohorts

- Recent arrivals and resettled communities face distinct employment challenges, with lower economic activity rates and limited access to support for varying reasons.
- Veterans in Worcestershire show strong employment outcomes
- Homeless residents and those at risk of homelessness experience significantly lower employment rates than peers.
- These groups face multiple barriers and require holistic thinking around integrated, wraparound, personalised support.

## Employment Focus

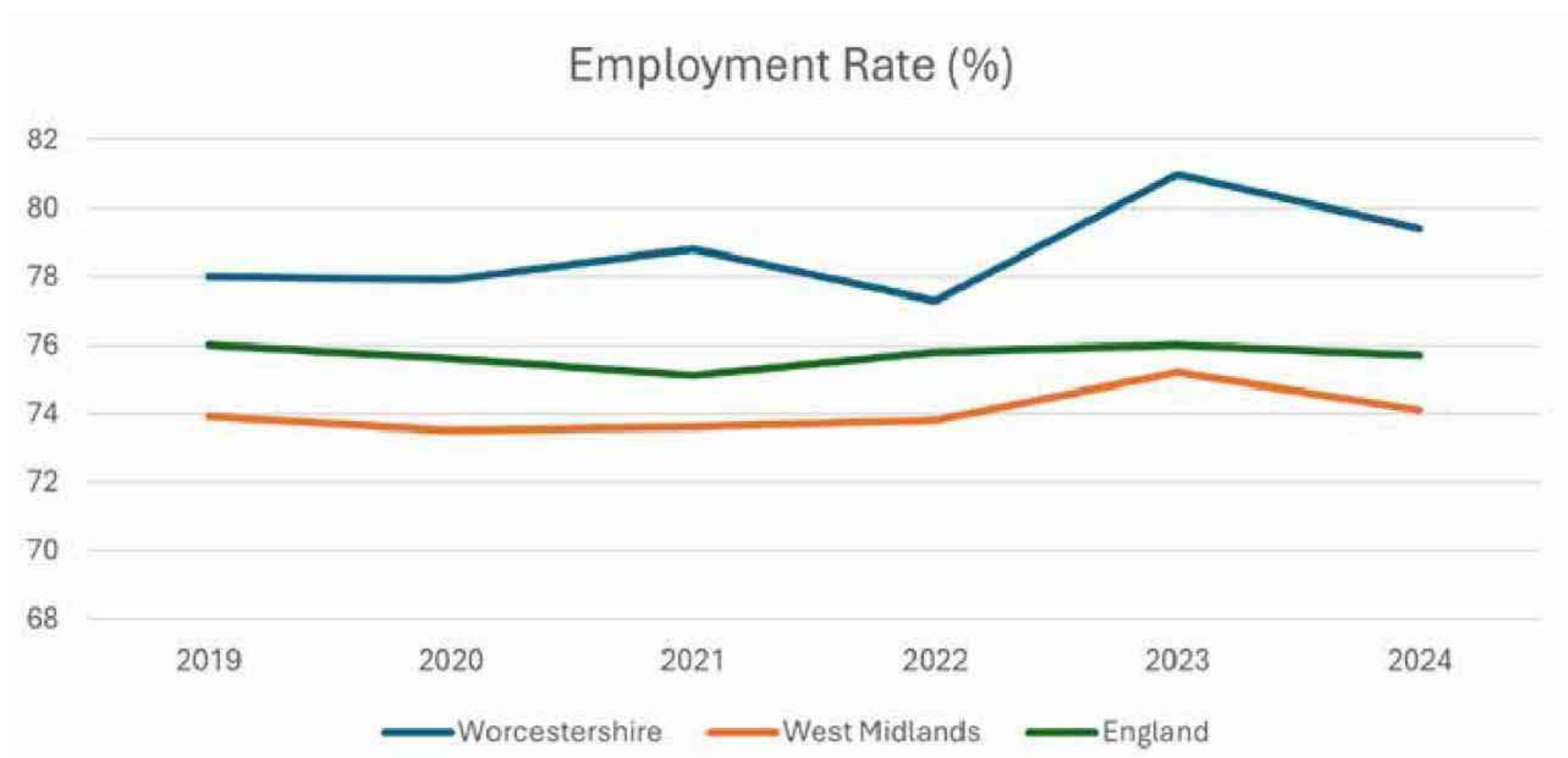
- Health and Engineering & Manufacturing are the largest employment sectors in the county, but the latter is in decline.
- Worcestershire has higher rates of employment in manufacturing and production compared to the national average.
- Worcestershire has an ageing population within our current working age population with over 37% being over 50 years old.
- Over 40% of workers in Worcestershire's Growth sectors are aged 50+, with need to continue focus on young entrants improving access to curriculum gaps and support capacity issues in further education.
- Growth is projected in Health, Professional Services, Construction, and Accommodation & Food.
- Occupational Shifts: Professional roles have grown significantly, while manual and operative roles have declined, particularly in Engineering and Manufacturing.

- 46% of residents hold Level 4+ qualifications, but those with Level 1 or below are disproportionately inactive.
- Job adverts dipped in late 2024 but are recovering in early 2025. Recruitment challenges persist, with employers currently citing replacement demand needs over workforce growth.
- Employers across Worcestershire face skills shortages but often lack long-term workforce strategies and invest little in training, limiting their ability to address the issue proactively.
- Employers report not being able to find the skills training they need in the current Worcestershire education footprint, which is likely driven by diversity of need.



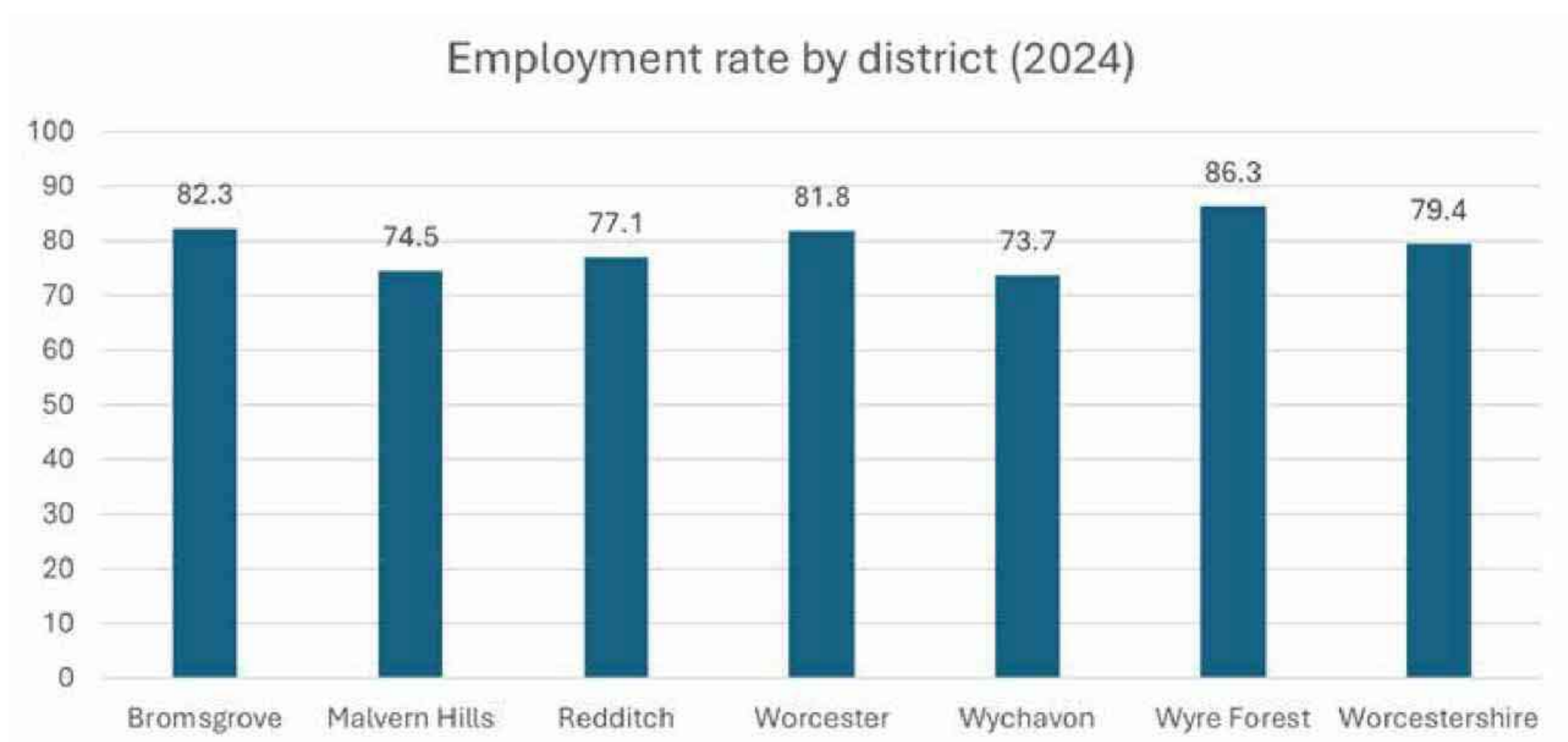
## The Labour Market – Employment Rates

The Labour Market in Worcestershire is strong exceeding both regional and national averages with high employment levels at 79.4% albeit this is a slight decrease on the level published in the Get Britain Working Paper guidance.



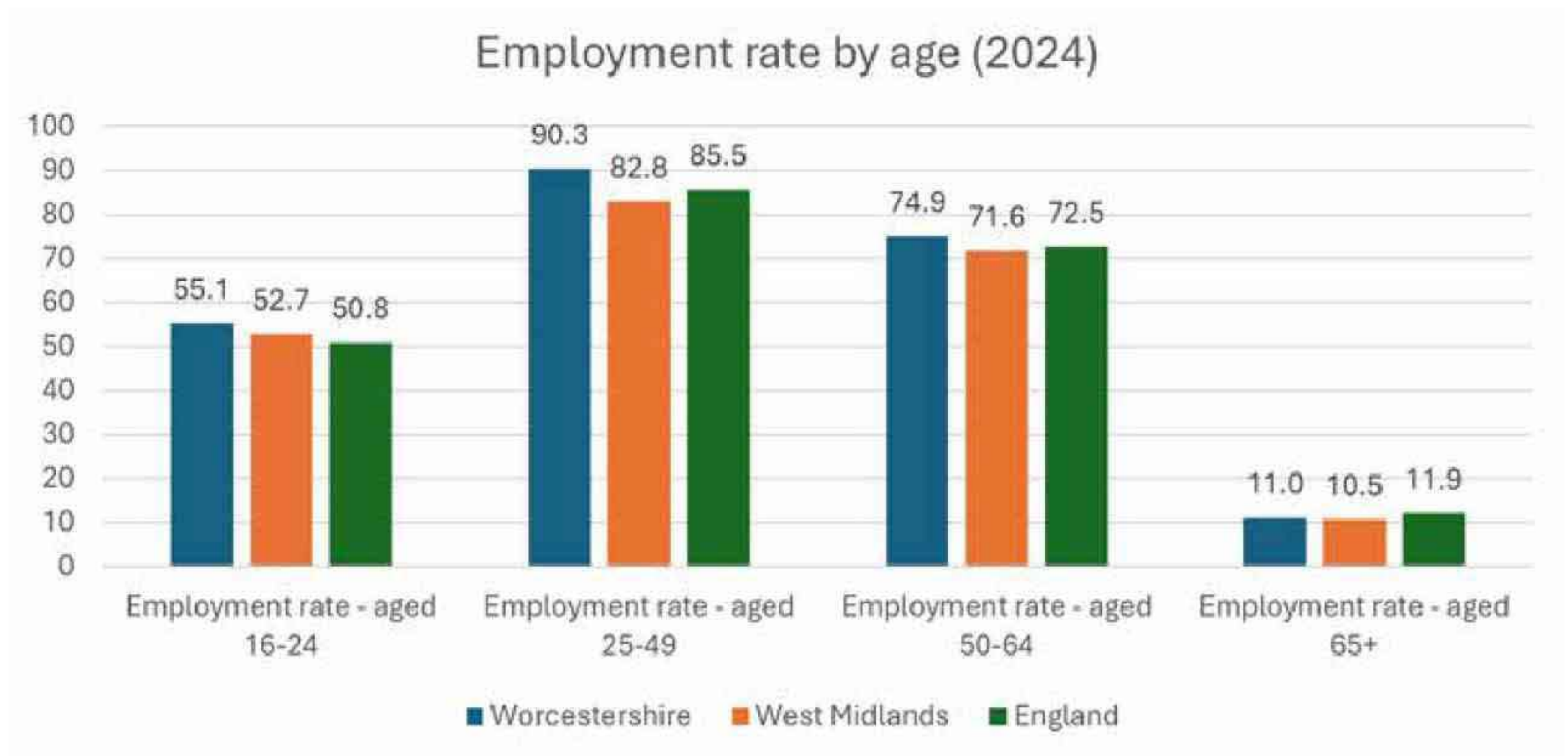
Source: Annual Population Survey (ONS)

Employment rates vary across districts in Worcestershire, with Wychavon and Malvern having lower employment rates than the districts of Worcester and Wyre Forest. However, it is important to consider the rationale behind inactivity before making conclusions about the data.



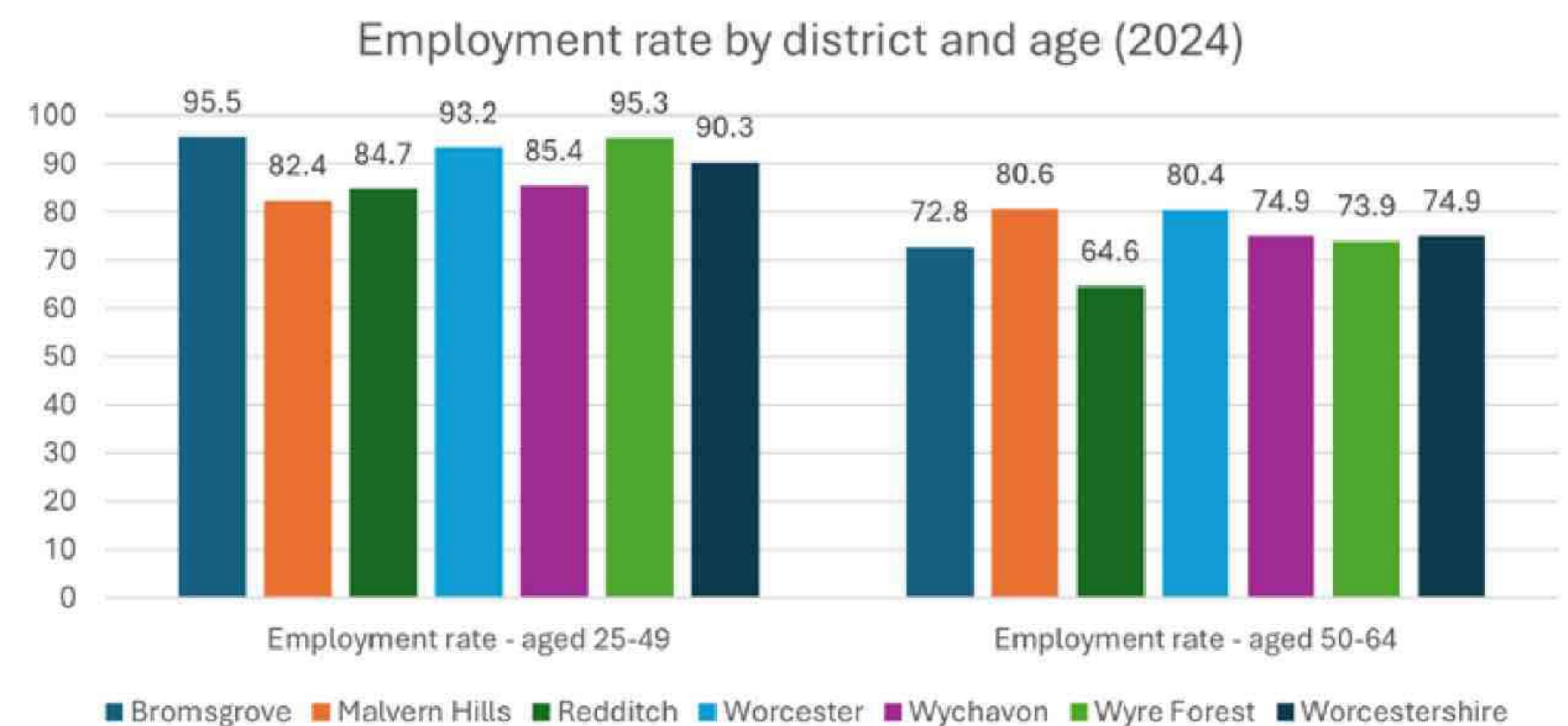
Source: Annual Population Survey (ONS)

Employment rates in Worcestershire also vary by age, with strong employment rates in the age group of 25–49-year-olds and lower rates in 16-24s and 50 – 64-year-olds, but similar to district level data it is important to add context to the data around students and retirees that will impact these numbers.



Source: Annual Population Survey (ONS)

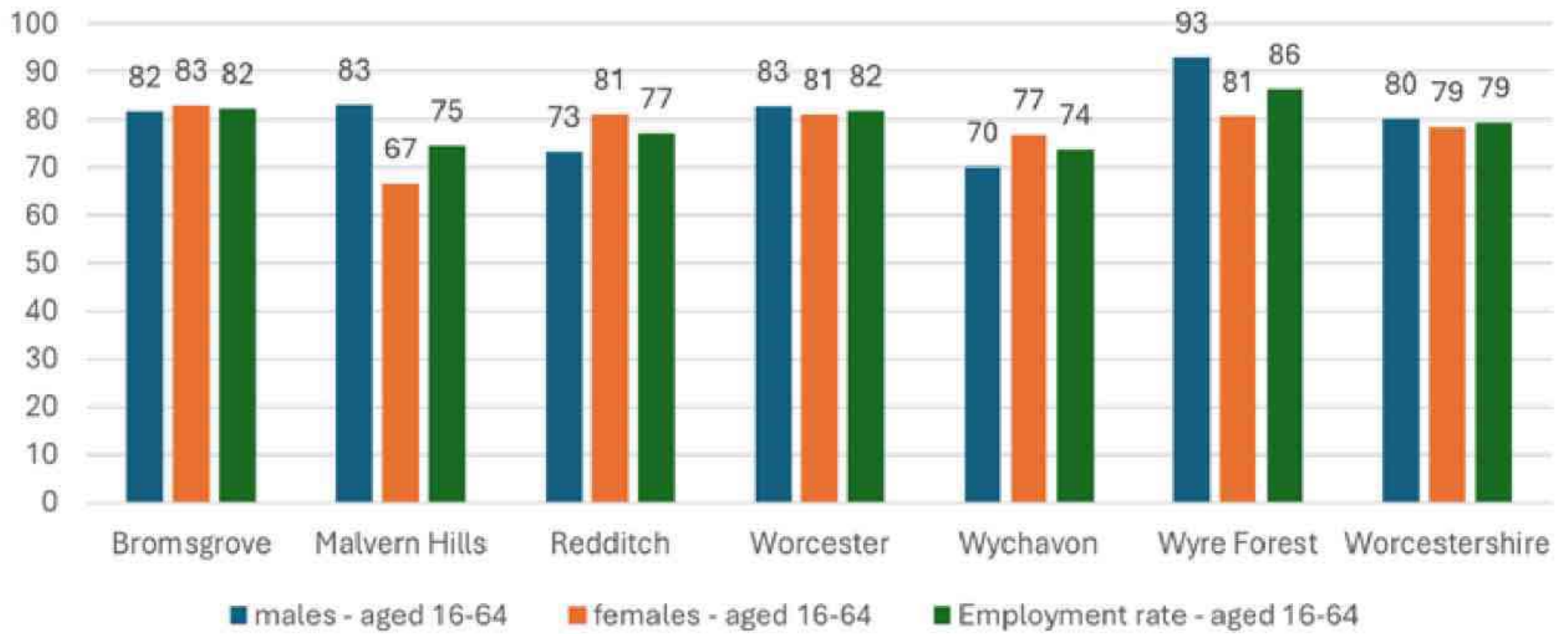
Variance then occurs at district level with all districts having employment levels over 80% within the age groups of 25-49 but only Malvern Hills and Worcester having employment levels over 80% in the over 50s age group with the Wyre Forest district lagging behind in over 50s employment which should be further explored against the background of inactivity.



Source: Annual Population Survey (ONS)

In comparison to national rates of working age population of male employment at 79.1% and females at 72.4%, Worcestershire has little variance between females and males in employment with rates of 80.2 and 78.5% respectively, but it should be noted that female employment is higher in Bromsgrove, Redditch and Wychavon than male employment rates.

Employment rate by district and gender (2024)

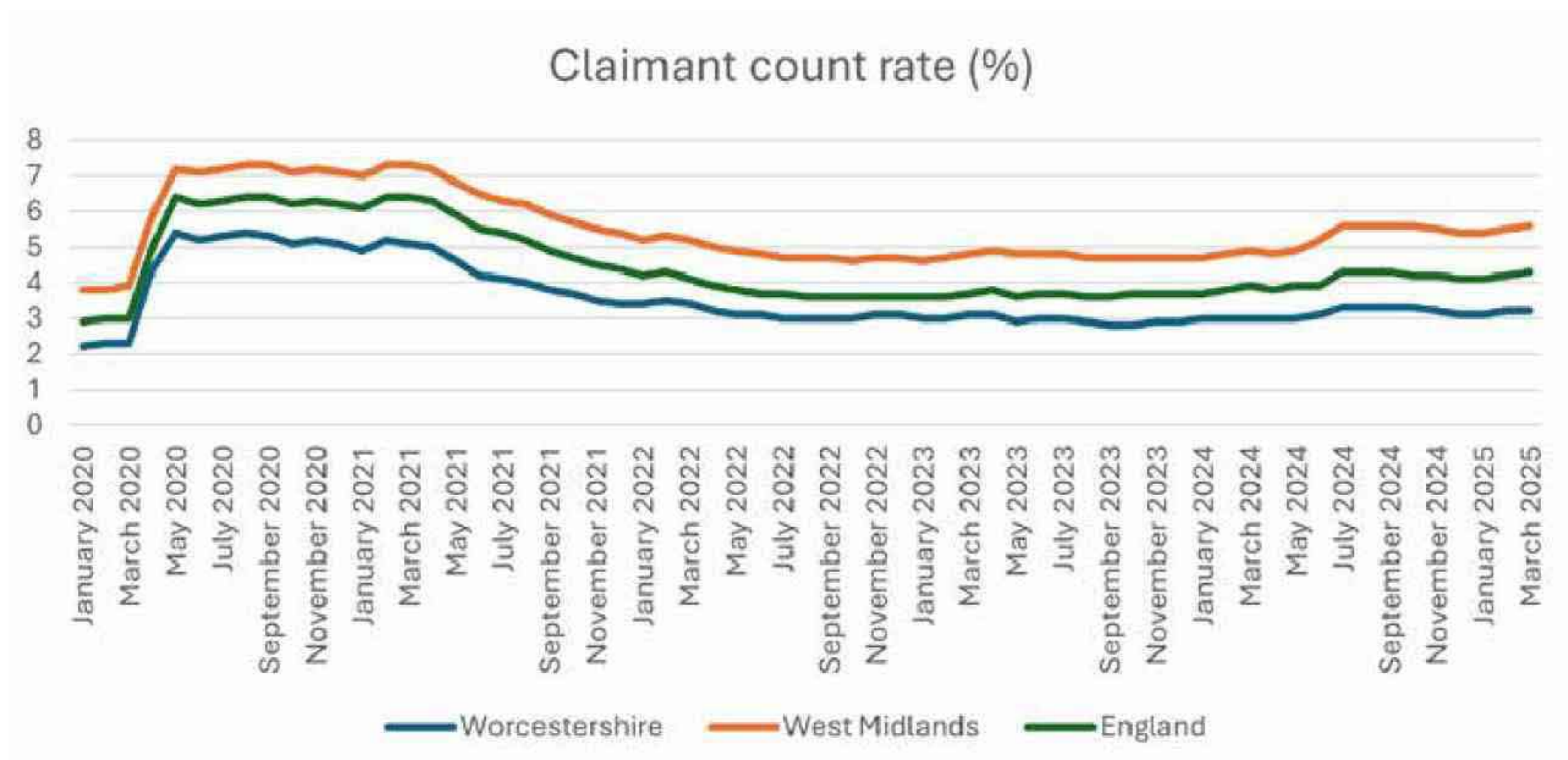


Source: Annual Population Survey (ONS)



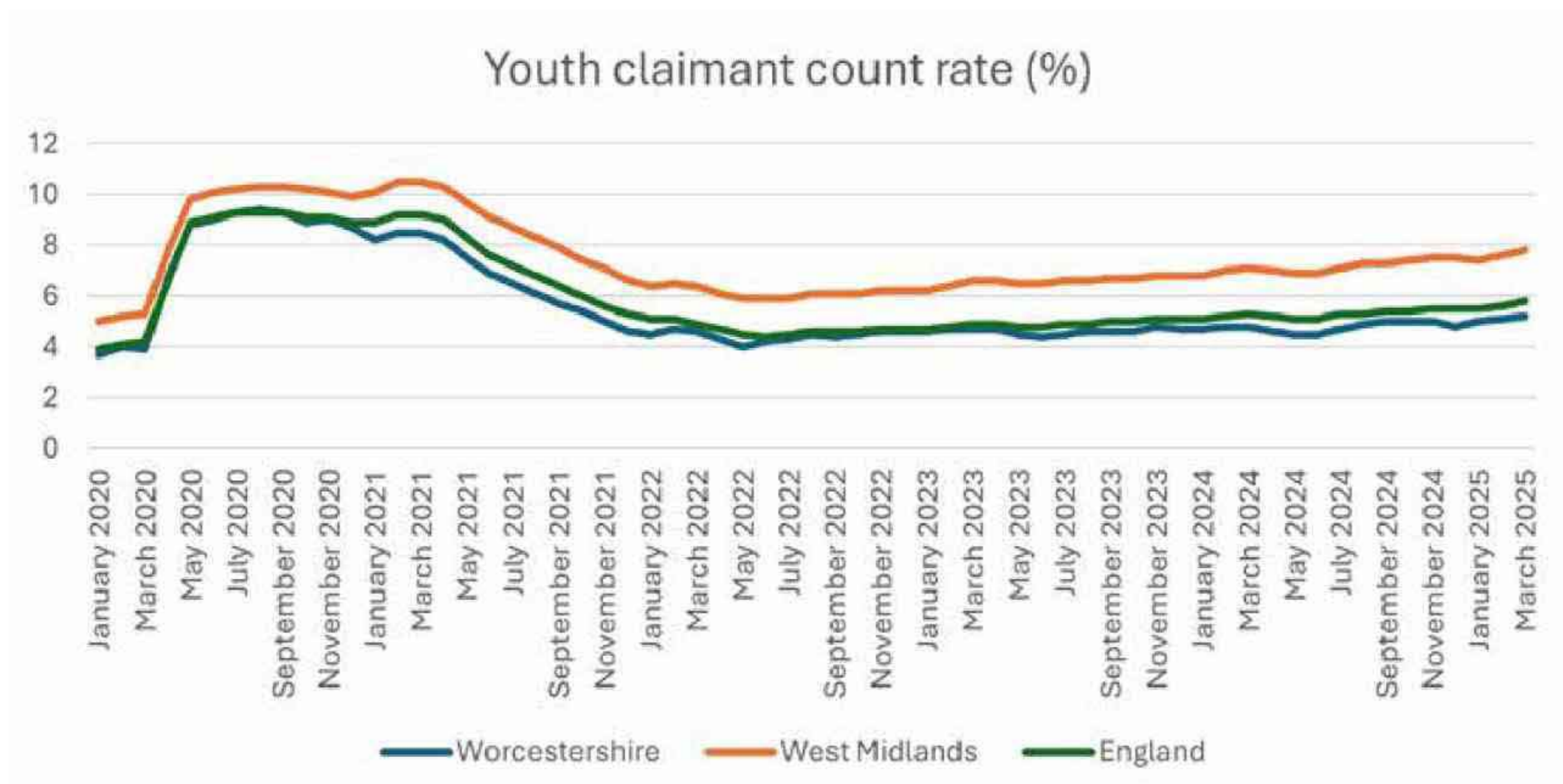
## The Labour Market – Unemployment Rates

Worcestershire’s unemployment rates in March 2025, sat at 3.2% , significantly below the region at 5.6% and England at 4.3%. This equates to 11860 residents who are currently actively seeking work in Worcestershire. The claimant count and youth claimant count have been increasing but over summer months of 2025 are slowing with more recent levels of 11275 at 3.1% .



Source: Claimant Count (ONS)

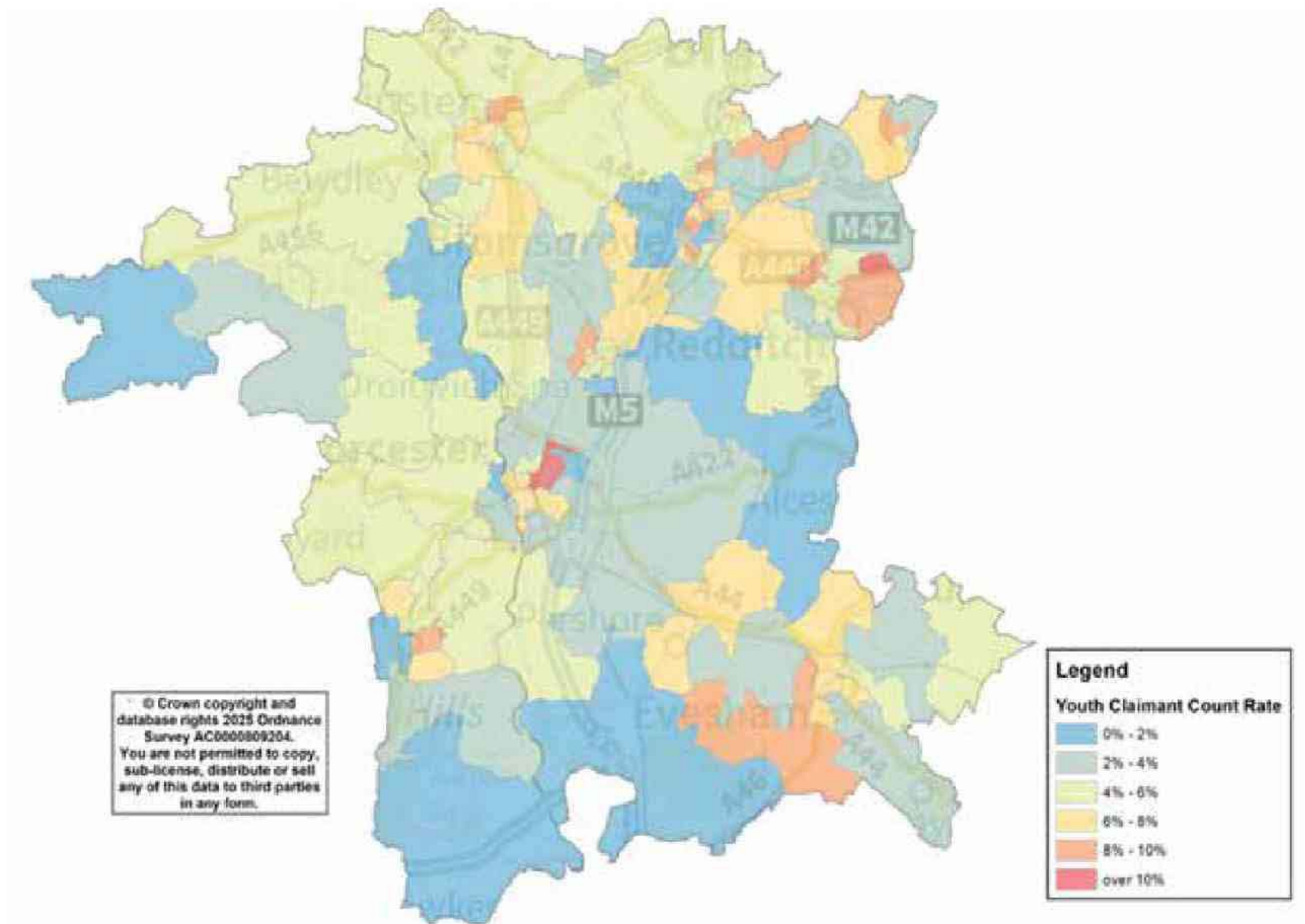
However, this figure above hides one of Worcestershire’s challenges the rate of youth unemployment which continues to rise despite local interventions and focus. The rate of unemployment amongst 16-24s sat at 5.2% in March 2025 representing 2190 young people.



Source: Claimant Count (ONS)

Across Worcestershire the rates of Youth Unemployment vary significantly with Northern districts exhibiting higher rates than their Southern colleagues, varying from 4% in Malvern to 7.1% in Redditch.

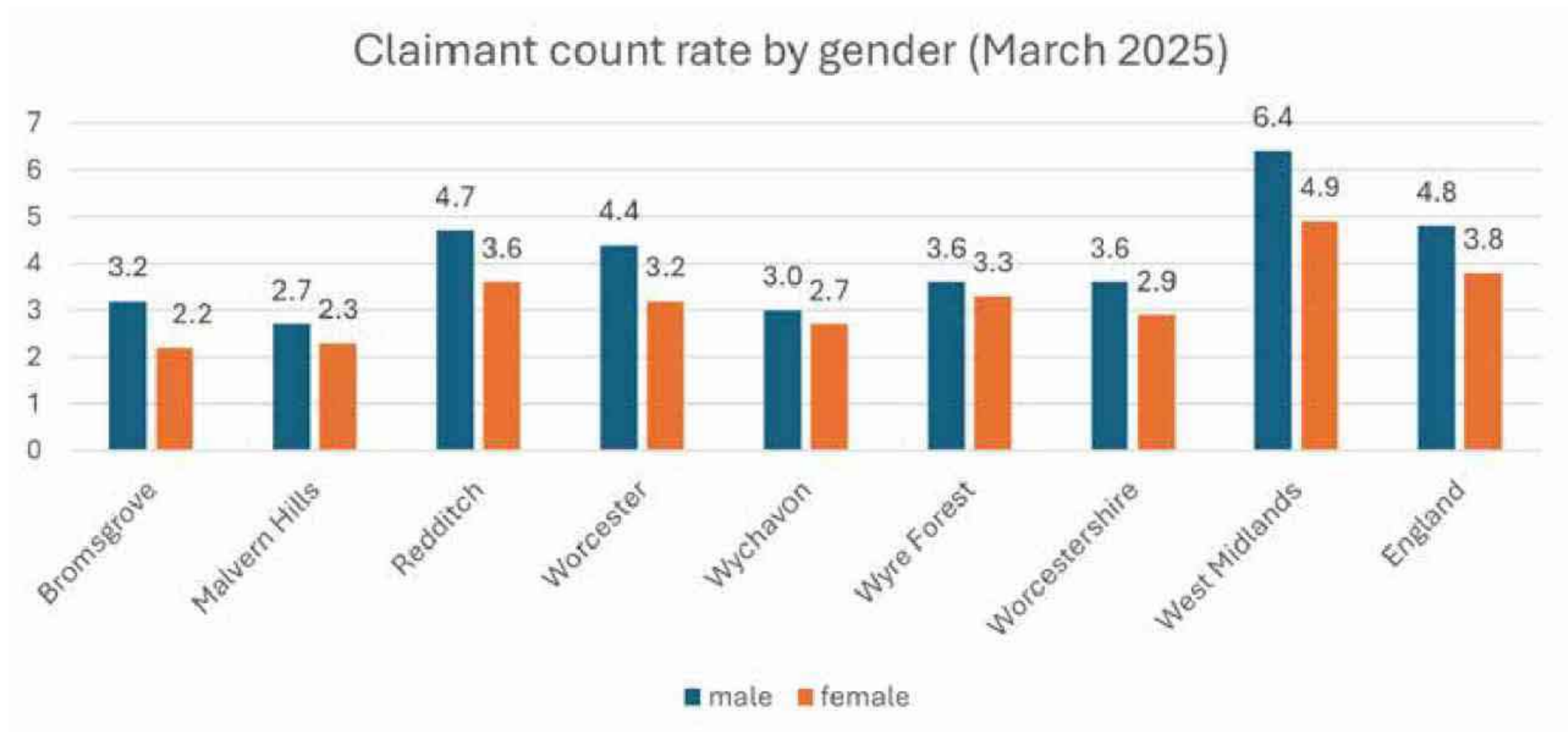
Claimant count rates for those aged 18-24 also tend to be higher in urban areas, although there are more rural areas with higher rates than for all age groups. Wards with the highest rates are Gorse Hill (14.7%) and Warndon (12.5%).



Source: Claimant Count (ONS)

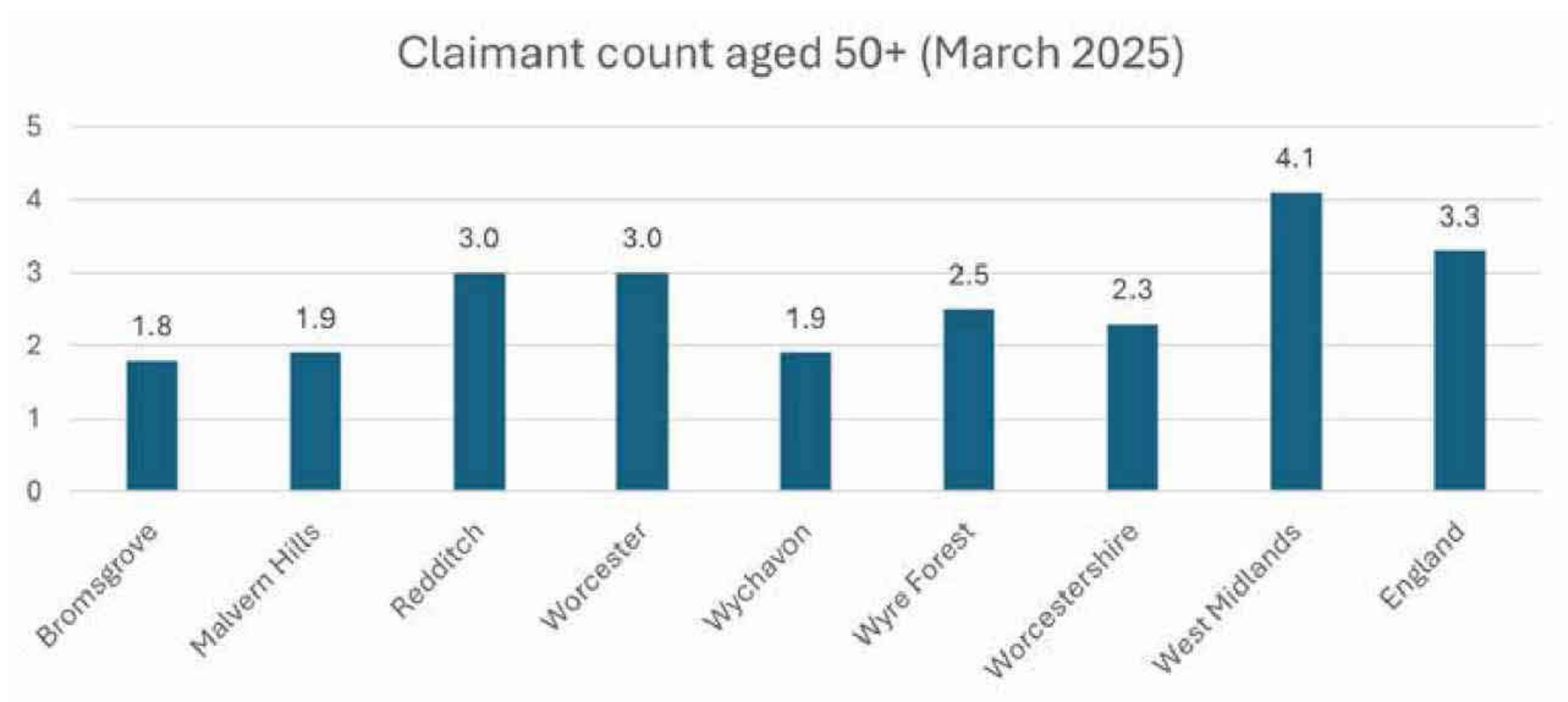


Reflecting employment rates that are higher for women in various districts, the claimant count rate is consistently higher for men across all areas. This may also be influenced by the fact that women are statistically (based on the 2021 Census - Source: Annual Population Survey (ONS)) more likely to take on unpaid caring responsibilities for children and/or adults with care needs, which can impact their participation in the labour market.



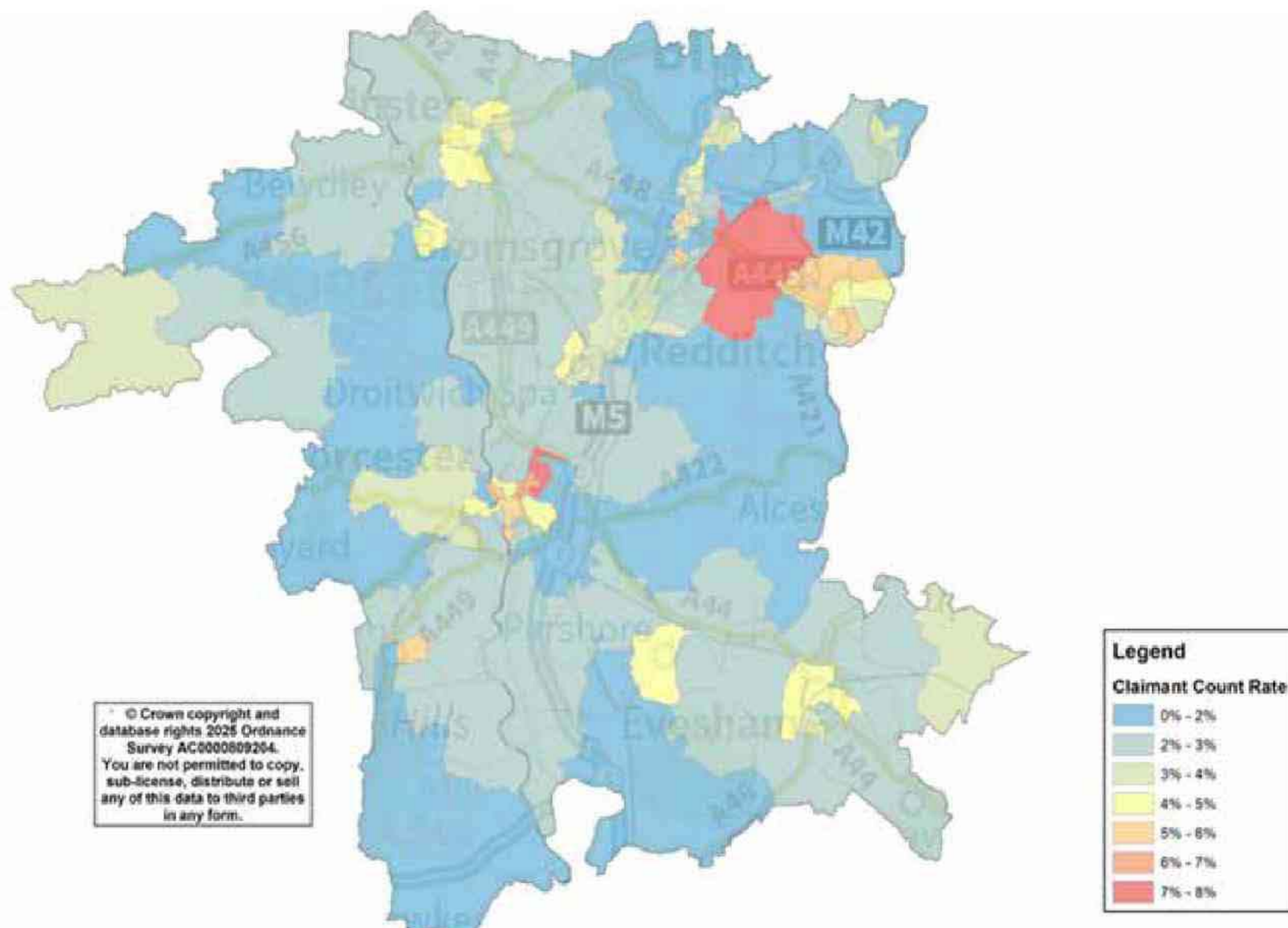
Source: Claimant Count (ONS)

Reflecting on Employment rates by age, the highest claimant rates for Over 50s can be found in Redditch and Worcester, with the claimant count in Worcester being the highest at 590 residents.



Source: Claimant Count (ONS)

Claimant count data for April 2025 shows that unemployment in Worcestershire is not evenly distributed but concentrated in specific pockets, particularly in urban areas. While the countywide average stands at 3.1%, several wards report significantly higher rates. Gorse Hill and Warndon in Worcester both record claimant rates of 7.2%, while Cathedral ward reaches 5.9%. In Redditch and Wyre Forest, multiple wards also exceed 5%. Notably, Tardebigge near Bromsgrove—despite being less urban—stands out with a claimant rate of 7.3% (180 residents), highlighting that high unemployment is not solely an urban issue. In contrast, more rural or affluent areas such as Marlbrook, Bredon, and St Peter’s Parish report rates as low as 1%. This stark variation underscores the need for targeted, place-based interventions to tackle entrenched and systemic unemployment and promote economic growth across the county.

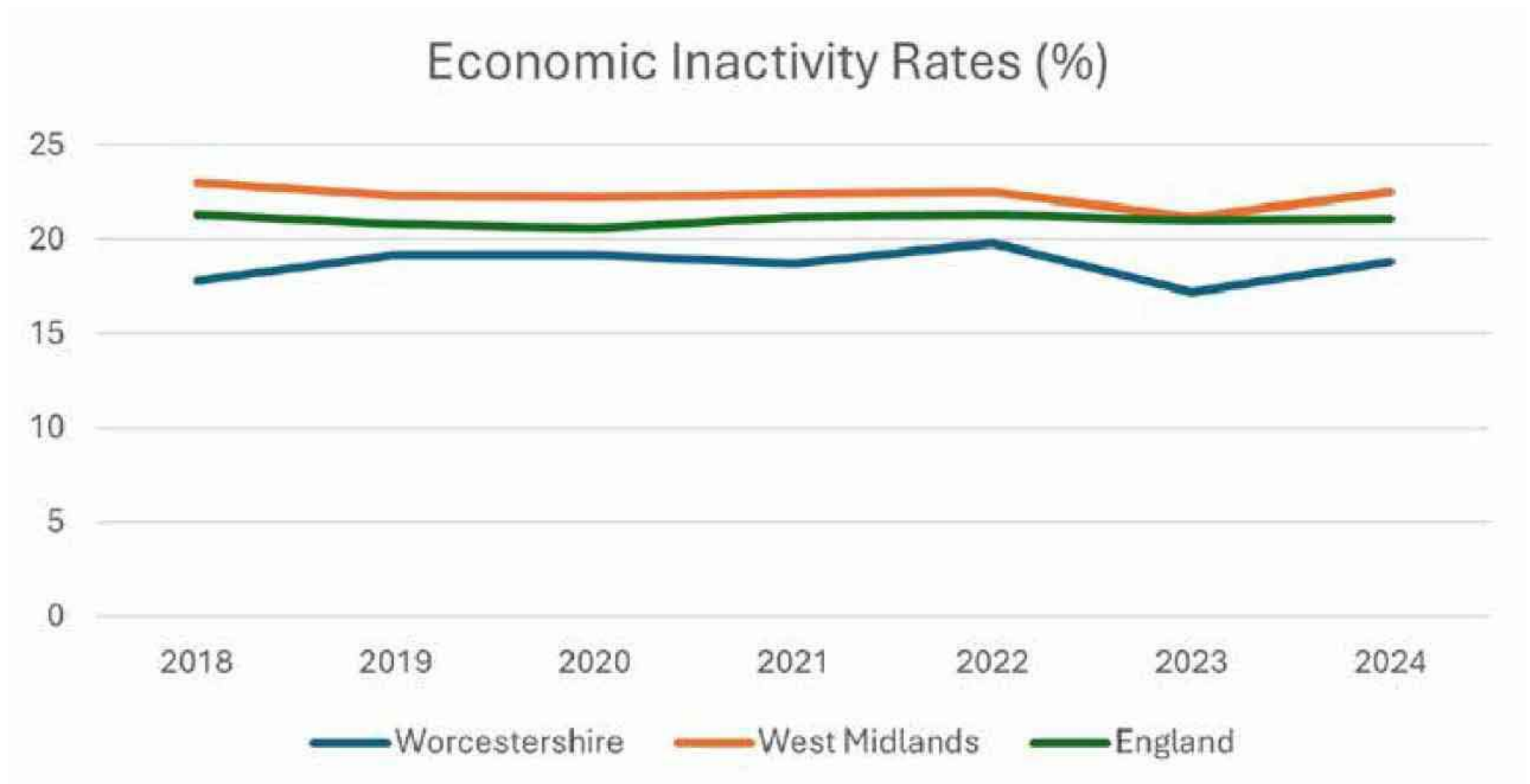


Claimant Count	Tardebigge	Gorse Hill	Warndon
<b>Total</b>	165	250	255
<b>18-24</b>	20	60	55
<b>50+</b>	30	45	60
<b>Male</b>	145	140	125
<b>Female</b>	20	110	125

Source: Claimant Count (ONS)

## The Labour Market – Inactivity in Worcestershire

The Get Worcestershire Working plan is clearly focused on reducing economic inactivity across the county. Currently, 18.8%, 66100 residents of Worcestershire’s working-age population are economically inactive, meaning they are not participating in the labour market for a range of reasons which needs greater focus and clarity around. Worcestershire’s rates of inactivity are below that of West Midlands (22.5%) and England (21.1%).

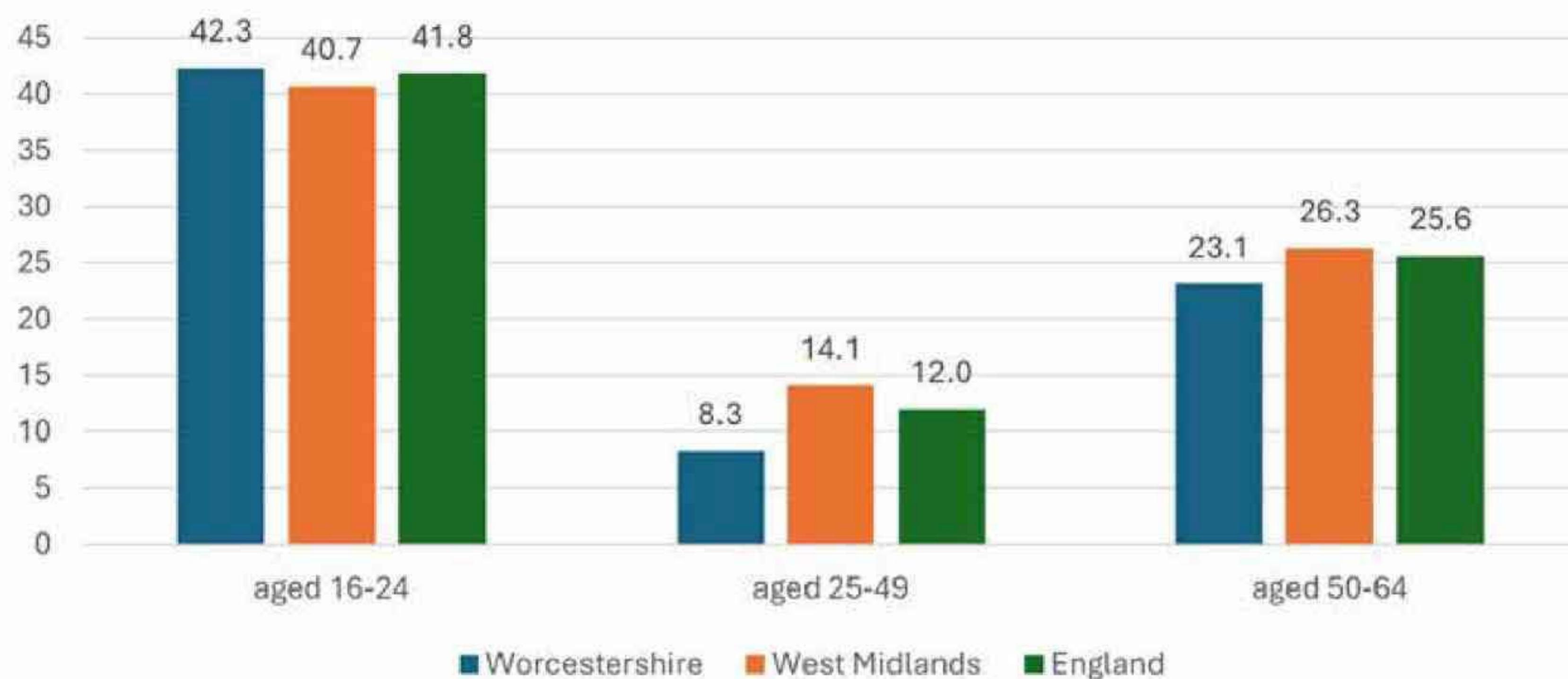


Source: Annual Population Survey (ONS)

Reasons for economic inactivity vary, and may include retirement from the labour market, caring responsibilities for children or adults, whether influenced by personal choice, financial circumstances, or the high cost of alternative care, health conditions or disabilities that limit or prevent work, and residents/young people choosing to pursue education before entering employment. Patterns of economic inactivity vary across districts, influenced by a range of external factors. For example, the presence of a university in Worcester contributes to different labour market dynamics, while more rural and affluent areas such as Malvern and Wychavon tend to have higher rates of retirement.

Age-related patterns in economic inactivity vary across Worcestershire. The highest rates are among those aged 16–24, influenced in part by the student population of approximately 14,400 residents. However, the largest number of economically inactive individuals is found in the 50–64 age group, totalling around 26,800 residents. This is shaped by multiple factors, including an estimated 11,000 individuals who have opted for early retirement.

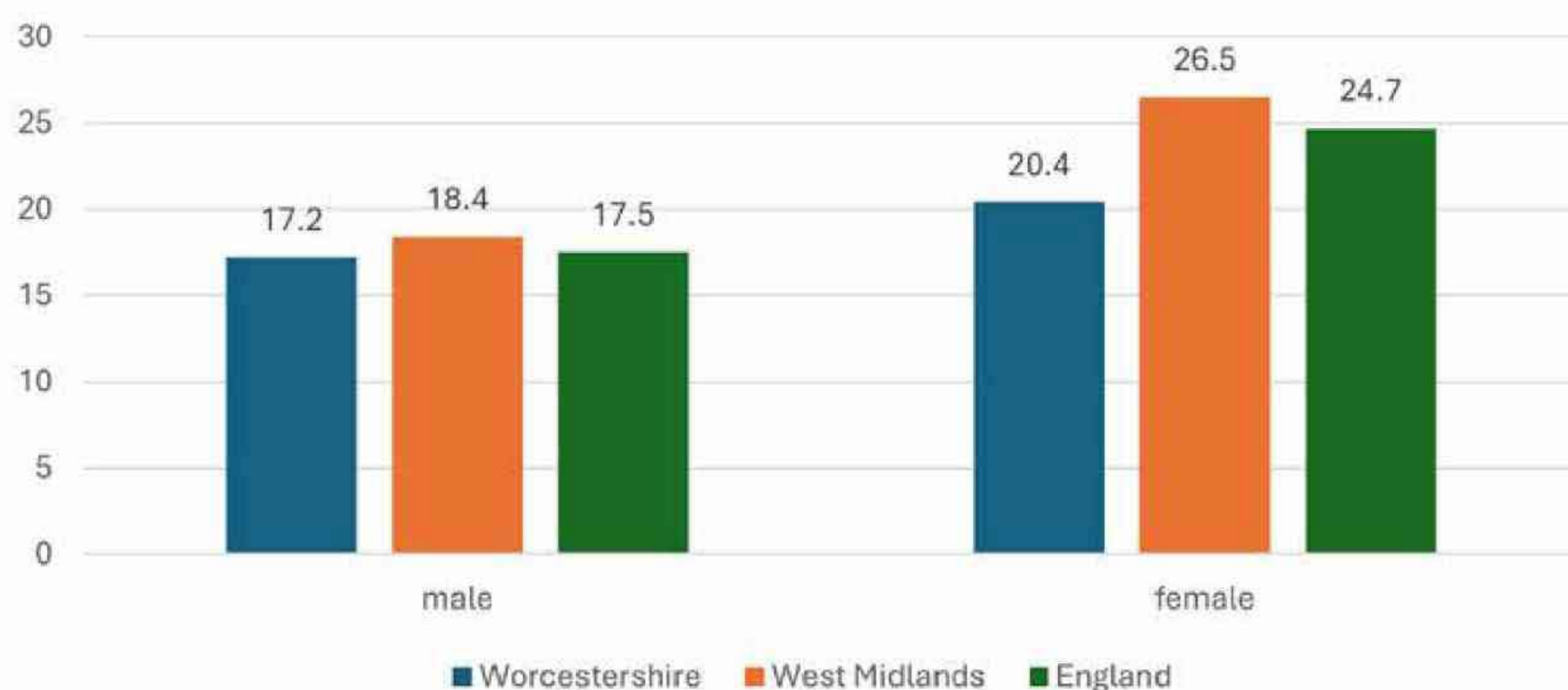
### Inactivity rates by age (2024)



Source: Annual Population Survey (ONS)

Evidence shows patterns of economic inactivity are also influenced by sex or gender. As previously noted, Worcestershire has strong female employment rates and low claimant levels. However, inactivity rates are higher among women, which may reflect the disproportionate impact of unpaid caring responsibilities, such as childcare or adult care, that continue to fall more heavily on women.

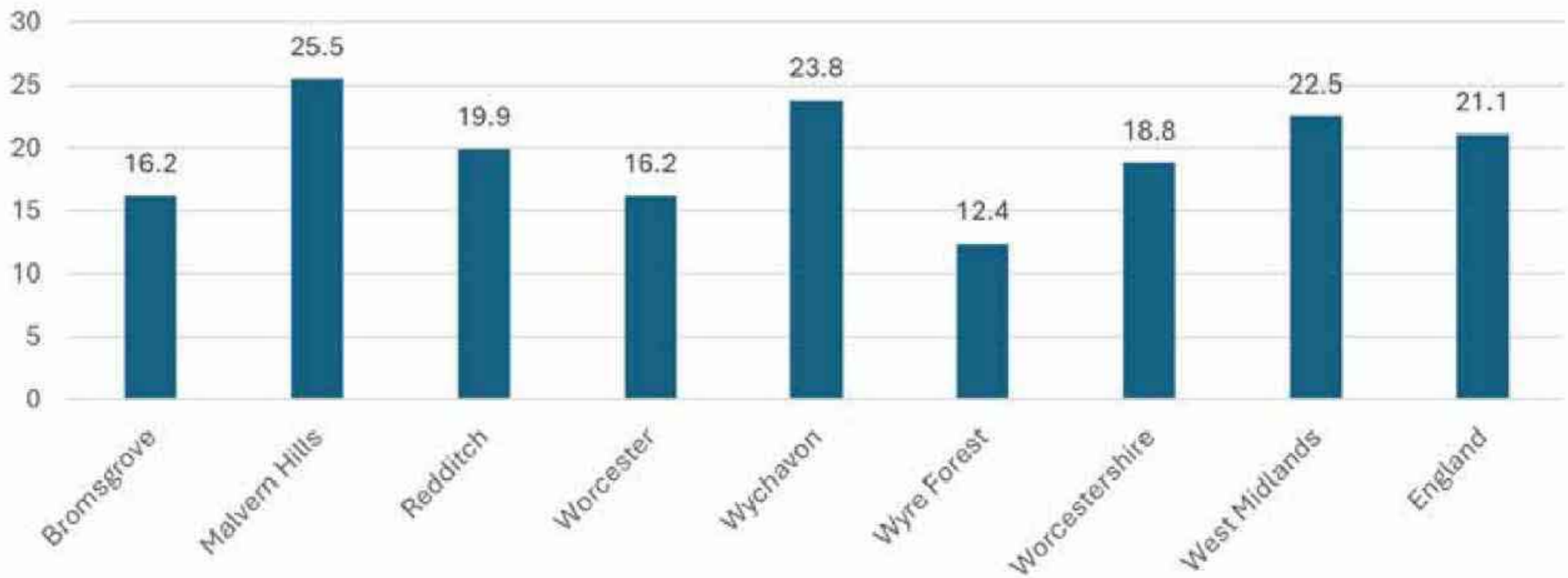
### Inactivity rate by gender/legal sex (2024)



Source: Annual Population Survey (ONS)

Inactivity rates across districts also present mixed reasons. Rates are highest in Malvern Hills and Wychavon and lowest in Wyre Forest albeit Wyre Forest has small sample sizes which affects data estimates.

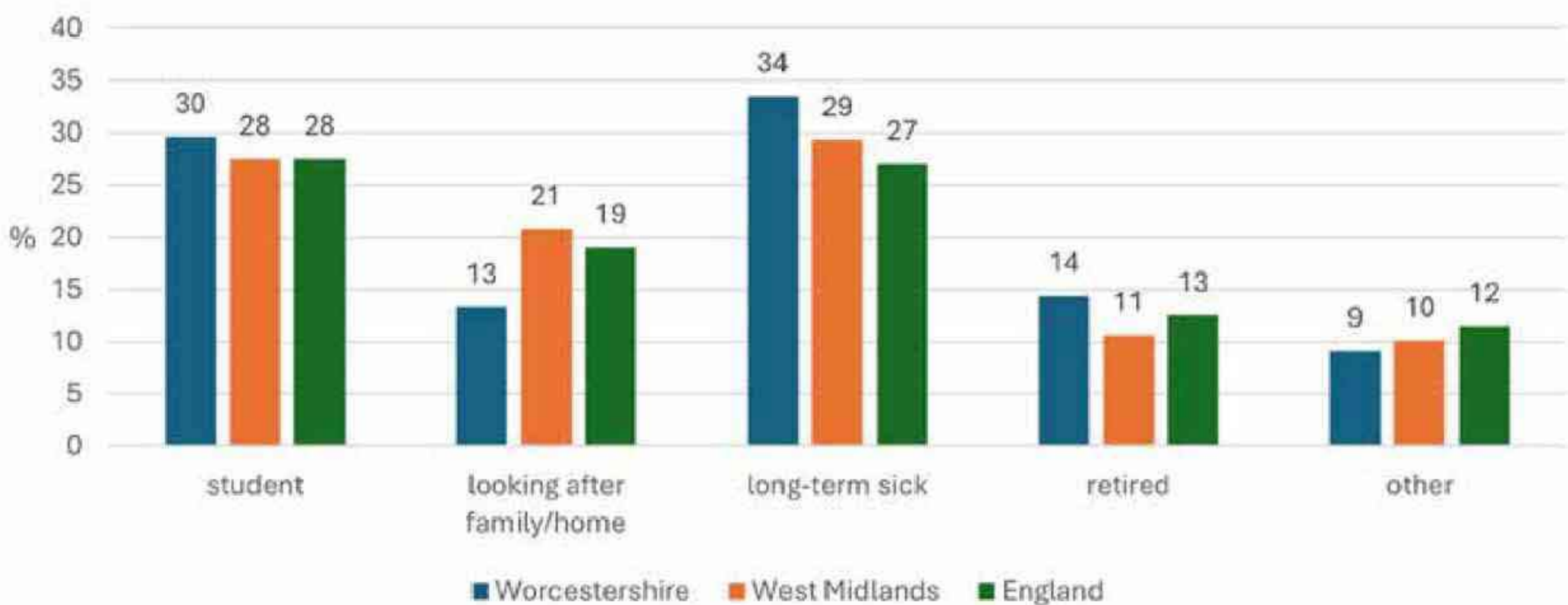
### Inactivity rates by district (2024)



Source: Annual Population Survey (ONS)

While Worcestershire’s overall economic inactivity may appear less challenging compared to other regions, a closer look reveals a more complex picture. One of the most significant contributing factors is long-term sickness, defined as health conditions lasting more than six months, which accounts for 34% of all economic inactivity. This equates to approximately 22,600 residents and highlights a key challenge that Worcestershire must address to improve employment outcomes.

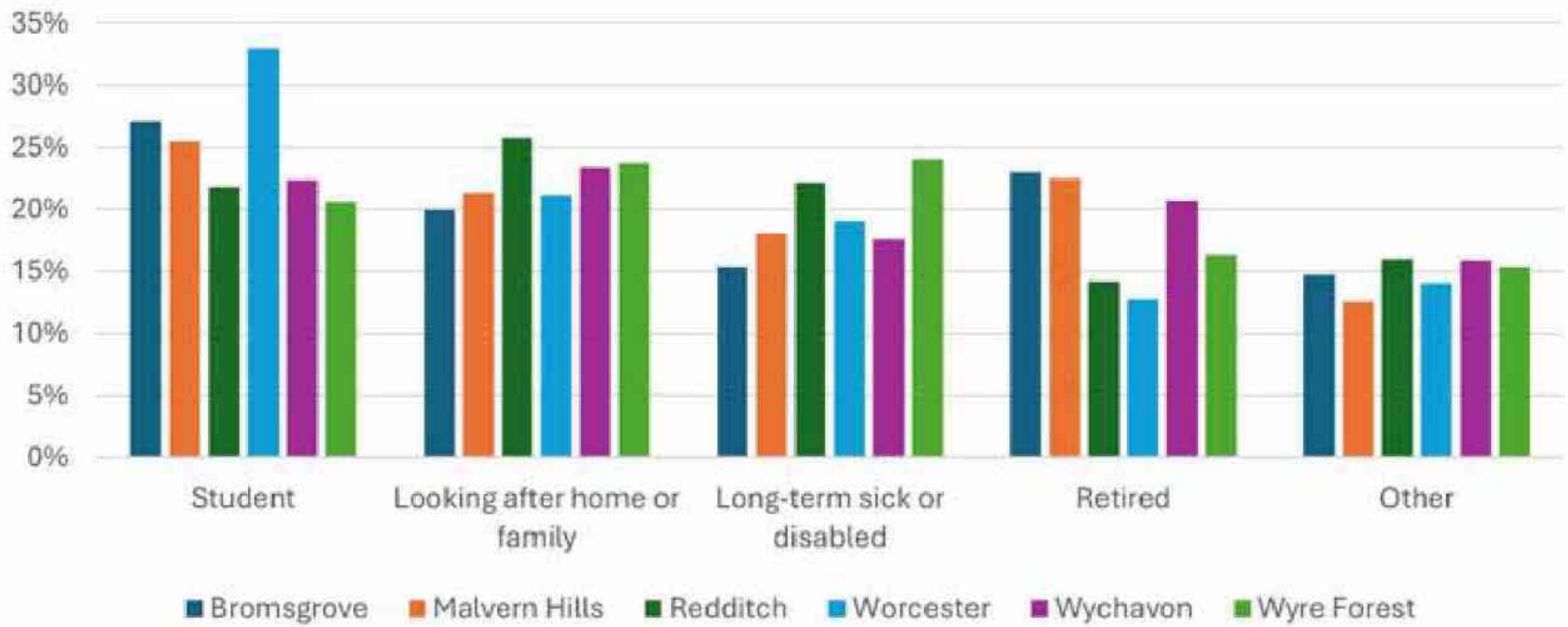
### Inactivity by reason (2024)



Source: Annual Population Survey (ONS)

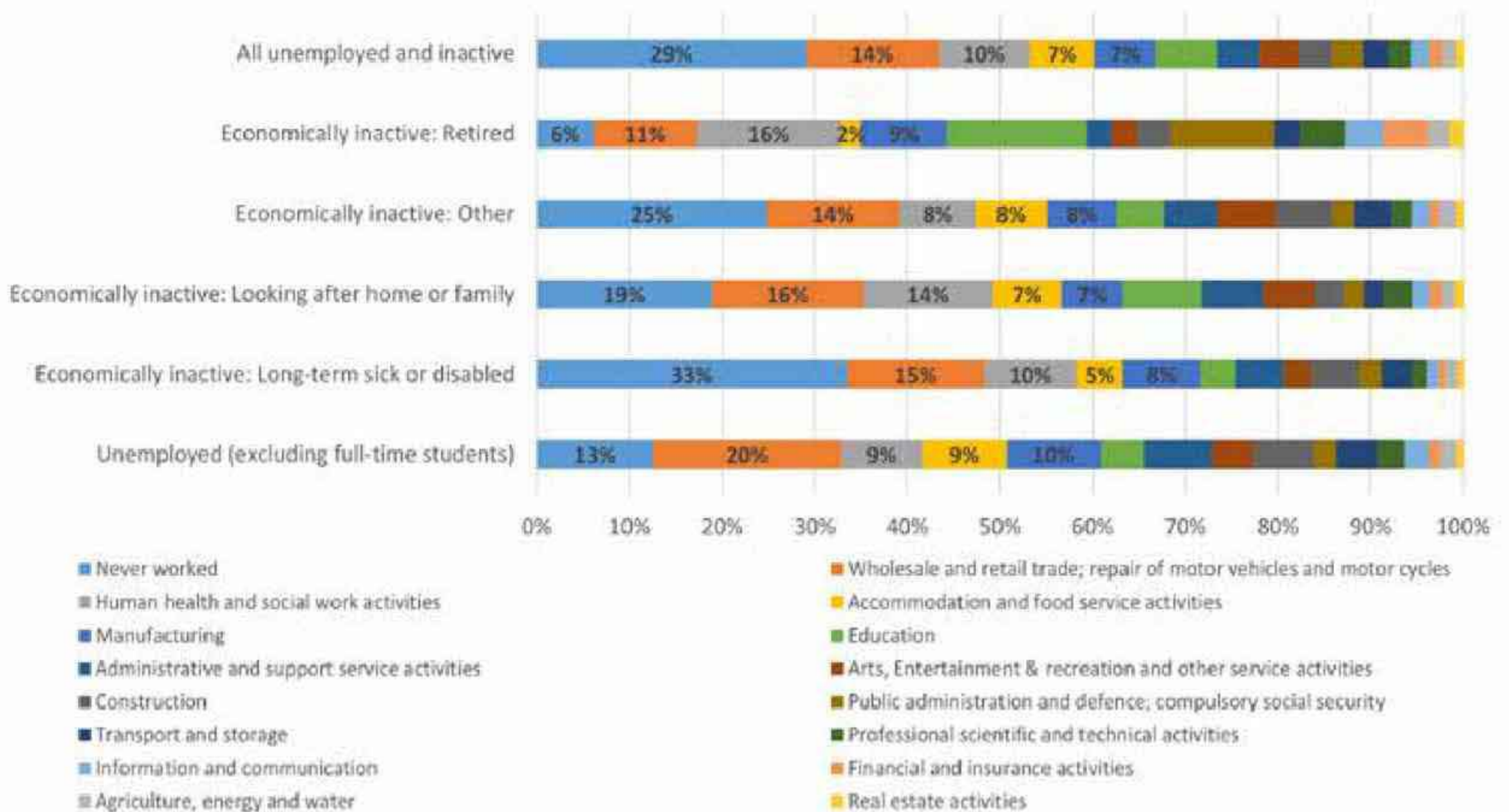
Reasons for economic inactivity vary across Worcestershire’s districts. Worcester shows higher levels of student-related inactivity, influenced by its university population. Wyre Forest has a notably high proportion of residents facing health-related barriers to employment. Retirement is a common reason in Malvern and Wychavon, reflecting their more affluent and older populations. Meanwhile, caring responsibilities—such as looking after children or family members—are more prevalent in Redditch and Wyre Forest.

### Reason for inactivity by district (2021)



Source: [Census - Office for National Statistics](#)

### Economically Inactive and Unemployed by Former Industry



Source: [Census - Office for National Statistics](#)

Data on economic inactivity reveals that around 29% of inactive and unemployed residents in Worcestershire have never been employed. Among those who have worked, the most common previous sectors were Wholesale & Retail and Health & Social Care. While it's unclear whether the combination of sector and reason for inactivity holds specific significance, further analysis is needed. Nonetheless, this insight could be valuable in identifying which industries might benefit most from targeted wellbeing support for employers.

## The Labour Market – Universal Credit

Since its rollout in Worcestershire in 2019, Universal Credit has aimed to support residents by topping up low wages and making the transition from unemployment to employment smoother. Currently, around 57,176 people in the county receive Universal Credit. Of these, approximately 42% are not required to look for work – often due to health conditions, caring responsibilities, or other valid reasons. The breakdown of these work-related requirements, known as conditionality regimes, varies across the districts as follows:

Conditionality Regime	Bromsgrove	Malvern Hills	Redditch	Worcester	Wychavon	Wyre Forest	Total
Searching for work	1,462	1,086	2,077	2,422	2,111	1,948	11,101
Working - with requirements	665	781	1,204	1,467	1,417	1,216	6,752
No work requirements	2,818	3,004	4,257	4,453	4,672	5,172	24,373
Working - no requirements	1,296	1,166	2,011	2,133	2,447	1,942	11,000
Planning for work	98	72	168	168	156	126	773
Preparing for work	370	335	675	580	546	674	3,182
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,704</b>	<b>6,450</b>	<b>10,395</b>	<b>11,219</b>	<b>11,340</b>	<b>11,071</b>	<b>57,176</b>

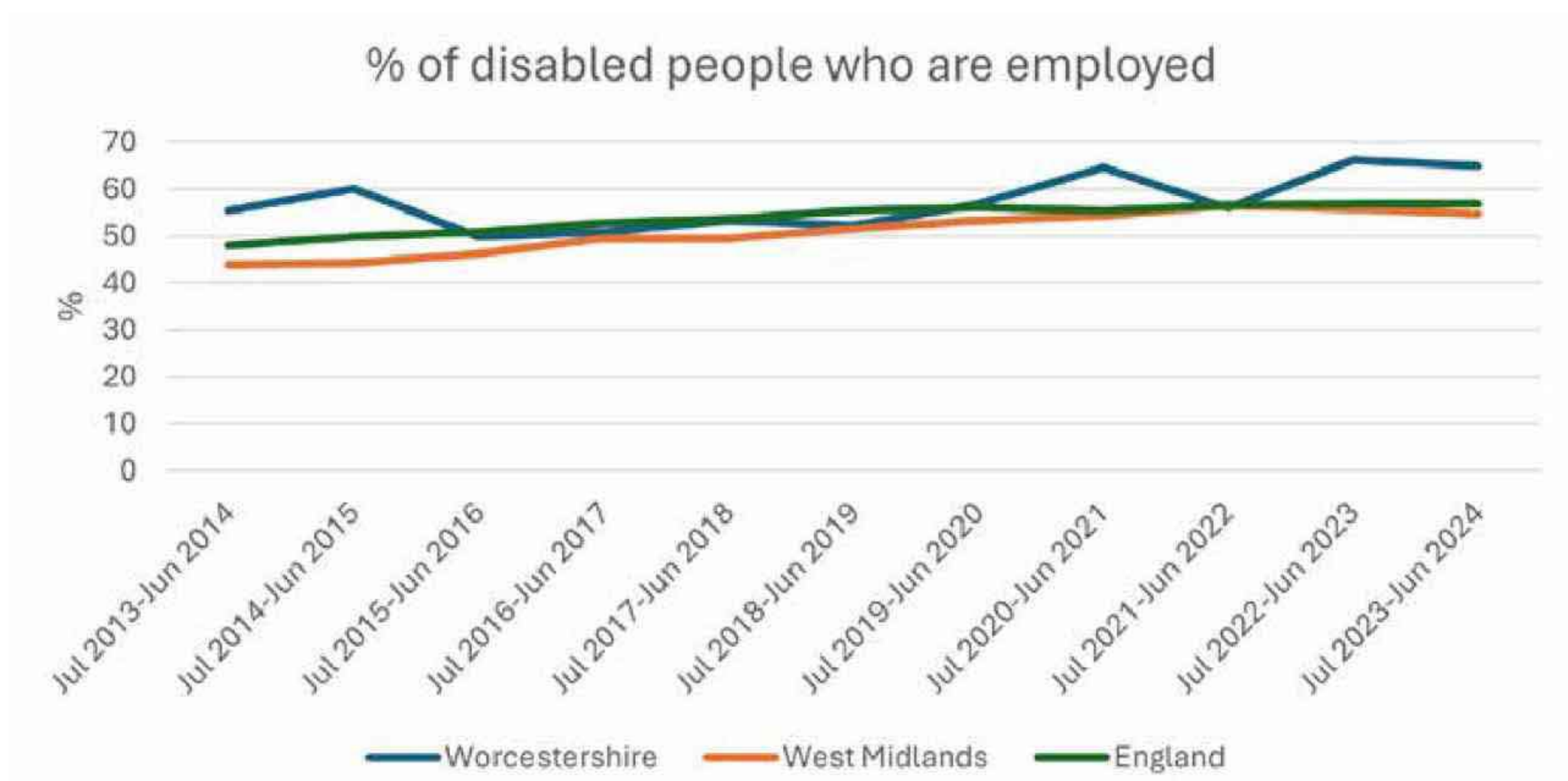
Source: [Stat-Xplore - Home](#)

The data shows that around 19% of Universal Credit claimants in Worcestershire are actively seeking work likely to be those in our unemployment claimants, while a similar proportion (19%) are working but not required to take further action to increase their hours which could be to do with personal circumstances around health or caring. About 12% are working with conditions to increase their earnings or hours. Smaller groups often seen in young people or those with health conditions are either preparing for work (5.6%) or planning for it (1.4%), often due to barriers or being in early stages of support and likely to be ready to receive support to move into work in future.

## The Labour Market – Focus on Disadvantage due to Health

In Worcestershire, 70.5% of people with a long-term health condition or disability are in employment, an encouraging figure that exceeds the national average. However, an 8% employment gap remains compared to those without health conditions, highlighting the ongoing need to ensure that individuals with health conditions and disabilities can access and sustain meaningful work. The NHS 10-Year Plan reinforces this priority through its focus on prevention, personalised care, and integrated community services. The Government’s broader vision for joined-up health and employment support building on existing services and expanding delivery through neighbourhood health centres and digital-first platforms closely aligns with Worcestershire’s ambition to embed health and work conversations across local systems and improve outcomes for all residents.

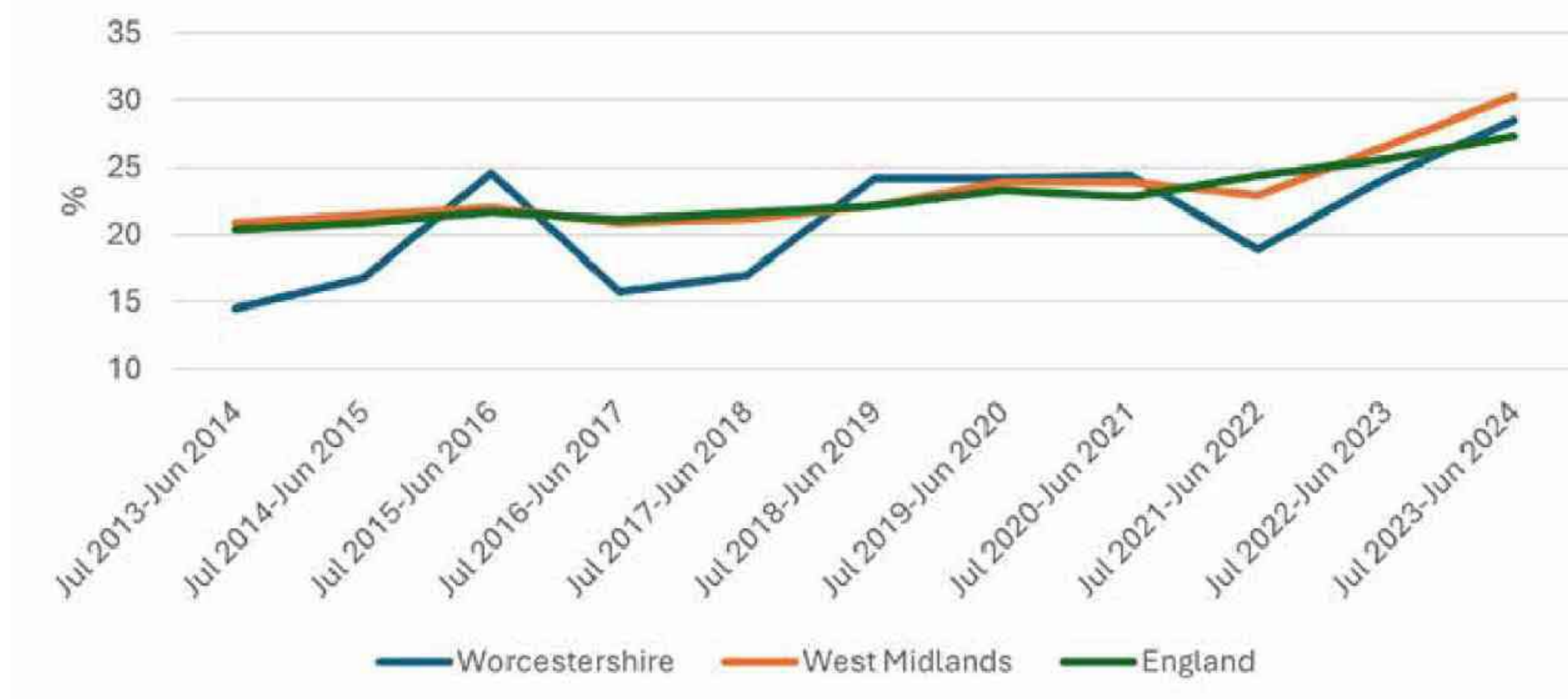
In addition, 65% of people with a disability are employed in Worcestershire, a figure that significantly outperforms both the national and regional averages, further demonstrating the county’s strong foundation and potential for inclusive growth.



Source- Annual Population Survey (ONS)

Health remains the most significant reason for economic inactivity in Worcestershire, with approximately 22,600 residents currently identifying health related issues as their primary barrier to participating in the labour market. While some individuals are unable to work due to severe health conditions, others face challenges that could be mitigated or overcome through targeted support. These may include reasonable adjustments such as changes to working hours or duties, provision of appropriate equipment, flexible workplace policies, or collaboration with the DWP and Access to Work scheme, or NHS to enhance healthcare services that enable residents to return to work.

## Economically inactive due to long-term sickness



Source – Annual Population (ONS)

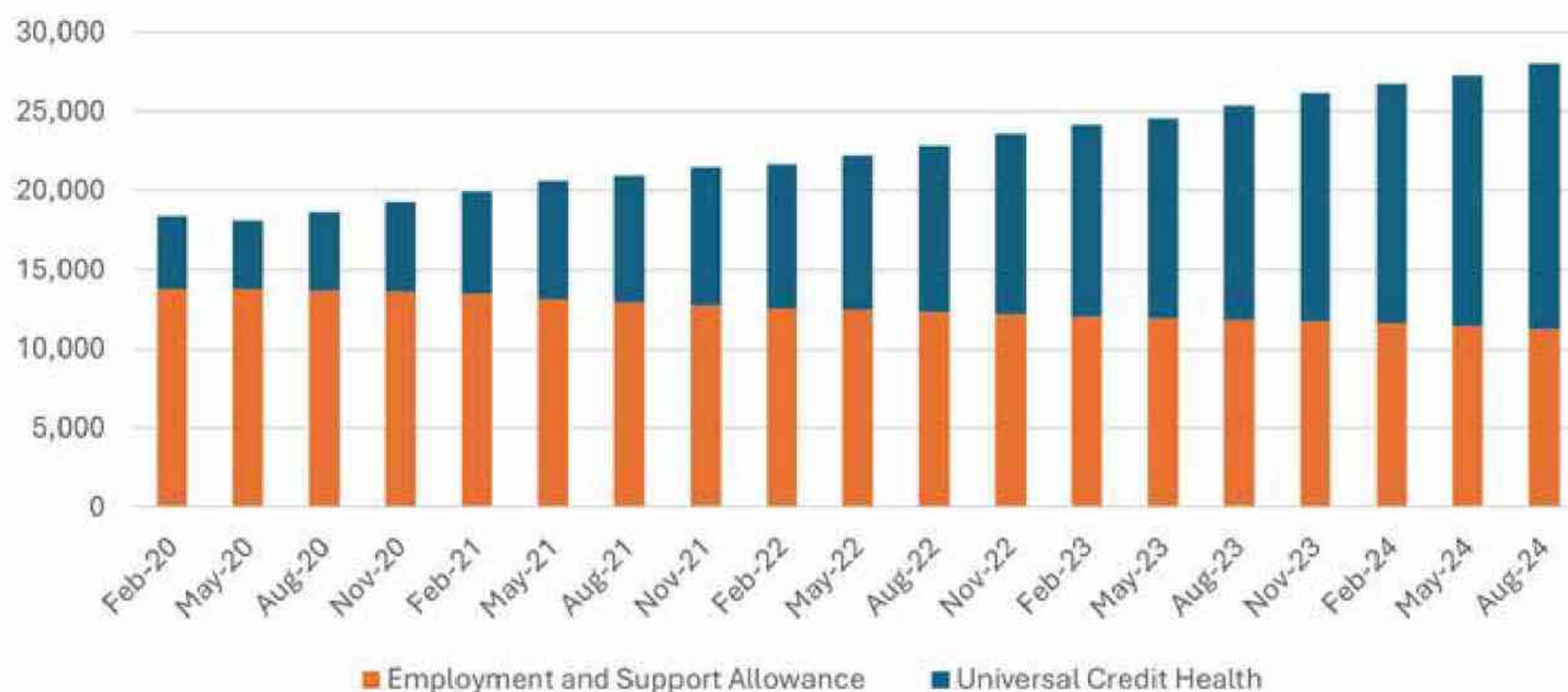
There is a clear link between health and economic activity, with residents in poor or very poor health more likely to be inactive. In 2021, around 10,700 people aged 16–64 in Worcestershire with bad or very bad health were economically inactive. Given the broader trends in inactivity since then, it is likely that this pattern has worsened, and it is possible that the Covid pandemic accelerated this trend albeit other factors are also likely such as levels of NHS Government spending etc.

General health	In employment	Unemployed	Inactive
<b>Bad or very bad health</b>	23%	2%	75%
<b>Fair health</b>	60%	5%	35%
<b>Very good or good health</b>	79%	4%	17%
<b>All aged 16-64</b>	75%	4%	21%

Source: [Census - Office for National Statistics](#)

This growth can then be seen in the numbers of people on out of work benefits due to disabilities or health conditions, which in Worcestershire has increased since the pandemic to 28,000 which is almost 10,000 more individuals than prior to 2020 and is continuing to grow at unsustainable levels.

## Out of work disability and health benefit claimants



Source: [Stat-Xplore - Home](#)

To effectively identify the support required by residents, it is essential to analyse the specific health conditions affecting both economically inactive and active individuals. This can be achieved by reviewing medical conditions recorded for ESA claimants and examining Fit Notes issued through Primary Care Networks.

Medical Condition	% ESA claimants
Mental and Behavioural conditions	46.5%
Disease of the Musculoskeletal System and Connective Tissue	12.3%
Diseases of the Nervous System	9.9%
Symptoms, signs and abnormal Clinical and Laboratory findings, not elsewhere classified	8.7%
Neoplasms	4.0%
Diseases of the Circulatory System	3.3%
Injury, poisoning and certain other consequences of external causes	2.7%
Factors influencing Health Status and contact with Health Services	2.4%
Diseases of the Respiratory System	2.0%
Congenital Malformations, Deformations and Chromosomal Abnormalities	1.9%
Diseases of the Digestive System	1.5%
Endocrine, Nutritional and Metabolic diseases	1.2%
Diseases of the Eye and Adnexa	0.9%
Diseases of the Genito-urinary System	0.5%
Diseases of the Ear and Mastoid Process	0.4%

Medical Condition	% ESA claimants
Diseases of the Skin and Subcutaneous System	0.4%
Codes for special purposes	0.4%
Certain Infectious and Parasitic diseases	0.3%
External causes of morbidity and mortality	0.2%
Diseases of the Blood and Blood forming organs and certain diseases involving the immune mechanism	0.2%
Pregnancy, Childbirth and the Puerperium	0.1%

Source: [Stat-Xplore - Home](#)

Mental and behavioural conditions are the leading cause of Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) claims in Worcestershire, currently affecting over 46.5%, around 5000 individuals. This broad category encompasses a range of conditions including depression, anxiety disorders, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), personality disorders, eating disorders, and other neurodivergent conditions such as autism. The severity and impact of these conditions vary widely, while some individuals are entirely unable to work, others may be supported back into employment through tailored interventions. These could include workplace adjustments, phased return-to-work plans, or access to specialist mental health services, highlighting the importance of personalised support strategies in addressing economic inactivity linked to mental health and or behavioural conditions.

To help further this picture from a health condition perspective, information on the diagnosis on electronic fit notes issued by GP practices is available for Herefordshire and Worcestershire. Fit notes are issued to show to an employer for sick pay purposes or to claim sickness related benefits from DWP and so will be issued to those both employed and out of work. Although a diagnosis was not provided for just over 50% of fit notes, the most common diagnosis was mental and behavioural disorders followed by diseases of the musculoskeletal system and connective tissue.



## Fit Notes Issued by GP Practices, Herefordshire and Worcestershire, December 2024



\*Diseases of the respiratory system; Diseases of the nervous system; Diseases of the circulatory system; Diseases of the digestive system; Diseases of the genitourinary system.

\*\*Certain infectious and parasitic diseases; Diseases of the skin and subcutaneous tissue; Diseases of the ear and mastoid process; Congenital malformations, deformations and chromosomal abnormalities; Endocrine, nutritional and metabolic diseases; Diseases of the eye and adnexa; Diseases of the blood and blood-forming organs and certain disorders involving the immune mechanism; External causes of morbidity and mortality.

Source: [Fit Notes Issued by GP Practices, England, December 2024 - NHS England Digital](#)

Gaining a clear understanding of the health-related barriers to employment in Worcestershire is crucial. Current analysis reveals that many health conditions are recorded with multiple health conditions and therefore register as 'unknown' within the system, limiting ability to identify the right interventions to support residents effectively. Since the launch of the Get Worcestershire Working initiative, collaborative efforts between the Local Authority, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), and the NHS Integrated Care Board have begun to address this issue. A pilot programme involving several Primary Care Networks is now underway to improve the quality and accuracy of Fit Note data.

One area where residents are actively engaging with support services is in relation to drug and alcohol treatment. According to the latest figures from 2022/23, of approximately 700 residents receiving treatment, 43% were in employment while 57% were unemployed or economically inactive. This highlights both the scale of the challenge and the potential for targeted interventions to support recovery and reintegration into the workforce.

## The Labour Market – Impact of Ethnicity

Worcestershire residents from ethnic minorities (defined as not identifying as White: English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British) are more likely to be inactive than white residents (defined as White English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British) with inactivity rates highest for Asian and mixed ethnicities. There were around 6,800 inactive people from ethnic minorities in Worcestershire in 2021.

Ethnicity	In Employment	Unemployed	Inactive
Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh Defined as <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bangladeshi</li> <li>Chinese</li> <li>Indian</li> <li>Pakistani</li> <li>Any other Asian background</li> </ul>	66%	4%	30%
Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African	68%	7%	25%
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups Defined as <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>White and Asian</li> <li>White and Black African</li> <li>White and Black Caribbean</li> <li>Any other Mixed or Multiple background</li> </ul>	65%	6%	29%
Other ethnic group	70%	4%	26%
White Defined as <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British</li> <li>Irish</li> <li>Gypsy or Irish Traveller</li> <li>Roma</li> <li>Any other White background</li> </ul>	76%	4%	21%
All aged 16-64	75%	4%	21%

Source: [Census - Office for National Statistics](#)

Analysis of economic inactivity by ethnicity in Worcestershire reveals some important trends. Residents from minority ethnic backgrounds are more likely to be economically inactive due to being in full-time education, which may reflect a younger age profile compared to White residents. Additionally, individuals identifying as Asian or from Other ethnic groups are more frequently recorded as being inactive due to caring responsibilities at home. In contrast, White residents are more likely to report long-term illness, disability, or retirement as their main reasons for inactivity. These patterns highlight the need for culturally informed and context-specific approaches when designing employment support interventions. While this data offers a useful overview, further analysis is needed to understand the broader impacts and challenges faced by different ethnic groups.

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Student</b>	<b>Looking after home or family</b>	<b>Long-term sick or disabled</b>	<b>Retired</b>	<b>Other</b>
Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh Defined as <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bangladeshi</li> <li>• Chinese</li> <li>• Indian</li> <li>• Pakistani</li> <li>• Any other Asian background</li> </ul>	35%	36%	8%	5%	16%
Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African	40%	16%	11%	8%	25%
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups Defined as <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• White and Asian</li> <li>• White and Black African</li> <li>• White and Black Caribbean</li> <li>• Any other Mixed or Multiple background</li> </ul>	47%	17%	15%	5%	16%
Other ethnic group	32%	28%	10%	5%	25%
White Defined as <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British</li> <li>• Irish</li> <li>• Gypsy or Irish Traveller</li> <li>• Roma</li> <li>• Any other White background</li> </ul>	24%	22%	20%	19%	15%
All aged 16-64	25%	23%	19%	18%	15%

Source: [Census - Office for National Statistics](#)

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Student</b>	<b>Looking after home or family</b>	<b>Long-term sick or disabled</b>	<b>Retired</b>	<b>Other</b>
Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh Defined as <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bangladeshi</li> <li>• Chinese</li> <li>• Indian</li> <li>• Pakistani</li> <li>• Any other Asian background</li> </ul>	1,292	1,348	304	203	595
Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African	308	124	81	63	190
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups Defined as <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• White and Asian</li> <li>• White and Black African</li> <li>• White and Black Caribbean</li> <li>• Any other Mixed or Multiple background</li> </ul>	775	283	240	80	272
Other ethnic group	205	177	61	34	155
White Defined as <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British</li> <li>• Irish</li> <li>• Gypsy or Irish Traveller</li> <li>• Roma</li> <li>• Any other White background</li> </ul>	16,749	15,415	14,211	13,521	10,189
All aged 16-64	19,329	17,347	14,897	13,901	11,401

Source: [Census - Office for National Statistics](#)

## The Labour Market – Focus on Disadvantage – Carers and Lone Parents

Data from the 2021 Census provides insight into lone parents in Worcestershire, though it lacks clarity. It indicates that approximately 19% of lone parents are economically inactive, around 13,000 residents. However, this figure may be misleading, as it reflects household-level data rather than individual circumstances. For example, it may include young lone parents who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET), as well as other household members over 16, whose status influences the household classification.

Further investigation is needed to accurately interpret this data and better understand the lone parent demographic. Additionally, more clarity is required around the factors contributing to economic inactivity. These may include limited access to suitable jobs, childcare availability and affordability, wage levels, or personal choice, none of which are currently well understood.

However other data sets allow understanding of the dynamic of care with the majority of Worcestershire residents with caring responsibilities in employment, with over 75% currently working. However, employment rates decline as the amount of unpaid care increases. Those providing 20 or more hours of unpaid care per week are significantly less likely to be employed. In 2022, approximately 7,200 people in Worcestershire were economically inactive while providing this level of care, according to the latest data on economic inactivity.

<b>Unpaid Care</b>	<b>In employment</b>	<b>Unemployed</b>	<b>Inactive</b>
<b>Provides no unpaid care</b>	76%	4%	20%
<b>Provides 19 or less hours unpaid care a week</b>	78%	3%	19%
<b>Provides 20 to 49 hours unpaid care a week</b>	61%	4%	35%
<b>Provides 50 or more hours unpaid care a week</b>	46%	2%	51%
<b>All aged 16-64</b>	75%	4%	21%

Source: [Census - Office for National Statistics](#)

## **The Labour Market – Cohorts experiencing Complex Barriers**

### **Employment and Economic Activity of Recent Arrivals**

Individuals who have lived in the UK for less than two years show different patterns of economic activity compared to the wider Worcestershire population aged 16–64. In 2021, their employment rate was 63%, with unemployment at 8% and economic inactivity at 29%. Approximately 1,100 people in this group were economically inactive in Worcestershire.

### **Resettled Communities**

The Homes for Ukraine and Afghan Resettlement programmes have supported the arrival of approximately 2,000 individuals in Worcestershire. This population includes children and young people, meaning not all are of working age. As such, assessing the full scope of service needs, particularly employment support, requires careful consideration of age and eligibility.

### **Asylum Seekers**

Worcestershire currently hosts a supported asylum population of several hundred individuals. Under current UK policy, asylum seekers do not have the right to work while their claims are being processed, which may affect their access to employment-related services.

### **Veterans**

Worcestershire is home to approximately 21,000 individuals who have previously served in the UK's regular or reserve armed forces. Among those of working age, employment outcomes are notably strong: the employment rate stands at 82%, with 3% unemployment and 15% economic inactivity—all more favourable than the averages for the wider Worcestershire population aged 16–64. In 2021, there were an estimated 1,400 economically inactive veterans.

### **Homeless Residents**

Among individuals assessed as eligible for a homelessness prevention or relief duty in Worcestershire during 2023–24, employment levels were notably lower than the general population. Only 38% were in employment, while 27% were unemployed and 35% were economically inactive. This reflects the significant barriers to work faced by people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Approximately 1,000 applicants in this group were classified as economically inactive during the period.

(Source: Tables on Homelessness – GOV.UK)

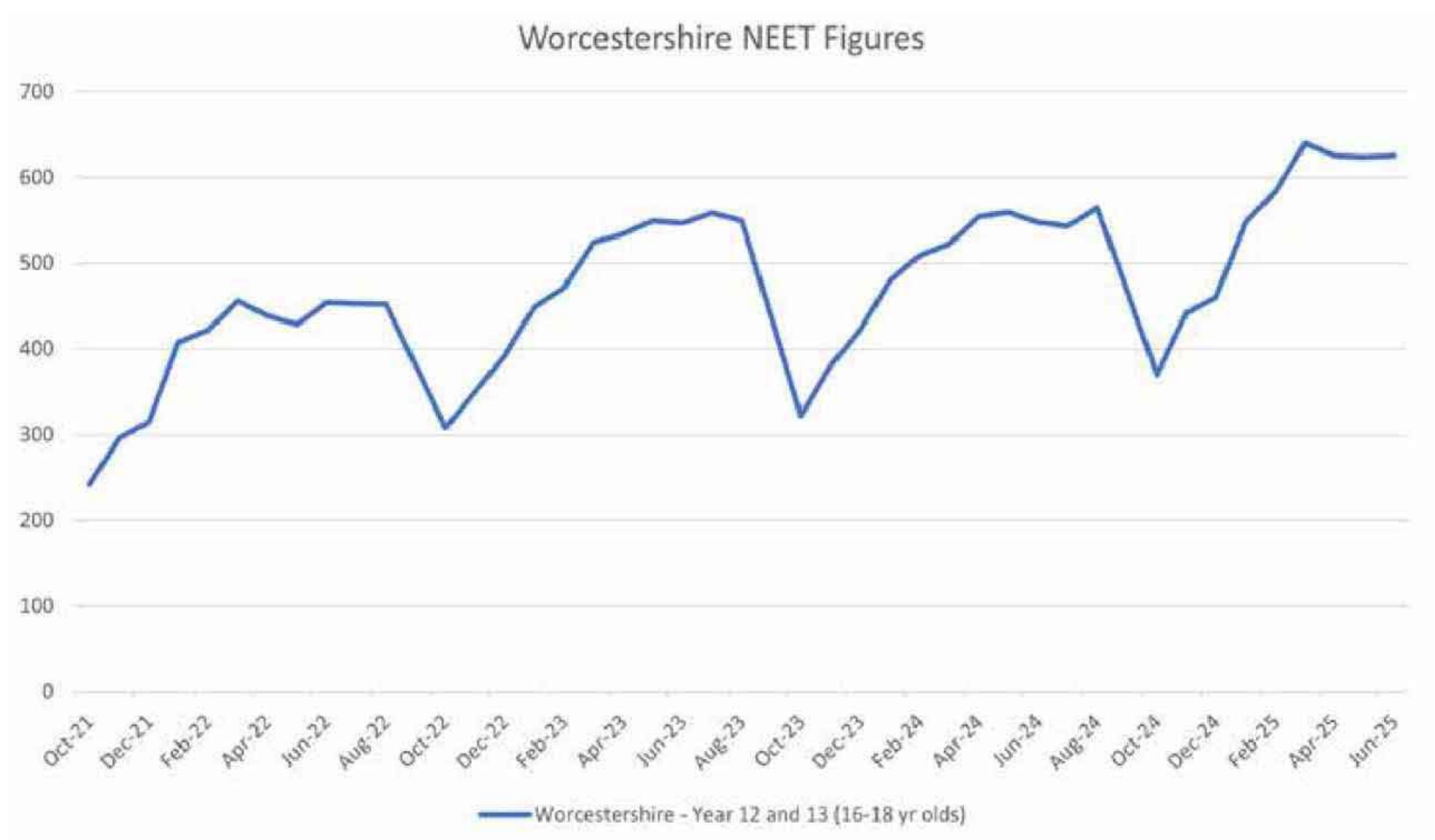
**NB The groups identified above are likely to face multiple challenges in accessing employment, with several barriers requiring targeted support to help them enter the workforce. The data surrounding these issues is complex and not yet sufficiently analysed at the county level.**

## The Labour Market – Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)

Prevention is as essential as intervention and in Worcestershire NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) levels are growing. Being NEET like being unemployed can be due to a number of factors from health, education availability, transport accessibility, disadvantage and vulnerabilities alongside experience of prior careers support and education. Without targeted action, this trend risks evolving into long-term youth unemployment. It is therefore vital that this issue is considered within the strategic framework of the Get Worcestershire Working programme.

Worcestershire has recently refreshed its approach to preventing and addressing NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) through the publication of its NEET Strategy. The 'Get Worcestershire Working' initiative will be closely aligned with this strategy, helping to extend support for residents beyond its current scope and continue their journey into sustained employment or education. That strategy can be accessed here:

[NEET Reduction and Prevention Strategy 2025 - 2030](#)



Source – Local Authority Dataset May 2025

## The Employment Landscape – Businesses in Worcestershire

Worcestershire's business landscape is shaped by a dynamic mix of cornerstone and opportunity sectors that underpin the county's employment and economic resilience. With over 26,900 businesses operating across the region, the economy is both diverse and challenging. Notably, 89% of these businesses are micro-enterprises, highlighting the county's entrepreneurial spirit and the importance of small business growth. In 2021, Worcestershire's Gross Value Added (GVA) stood at £14.3 billion, reflecting its significant contribution to the wider regional economy.

A substantial portion of Worcestershire's business activity, over 18,000 businesses is concentrated within six key sectors: Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering, Agri-Tech, Business and Professional Services, Construction, Cyber, IT and Defence, and Health and Care. These sectors are strategically important, not only for their economic output but also for their role in driving innovation and employment.

The cornerstone sectors form the backbone of Worcestershire's economy. The Health and Social Care sector employs more than 38,000 people, with major employers such as the NHS and Sanctuary Care playing pivotal roles. The Construction sector contributes approximately £335 million annually, supported by firms like Speller Metcalfe and Healy's Civil Engineering. Meanwhile, Business and Professional Services employs around 37,000 people, with strong hubs in Bromsgrove and Worcester.

In contrast, the opportunity sectors are fast-growing, and innovation led. Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering (AME) accounts for 10.5% of employment, with many medium sized companies in the automotive, aerospace and defence sectors supply chains. These companies are constantly having to focus on competitive factors and driving technological advancement. The Cyber Security, IT and Defence sector is particularly notable, with Worcestershire hosting the second-largest cyber cluster in the UK outside London, featuring firms like QinetiQ and Deep Secure. Agri-Tech and Horticulture build on the county's agricultural heritage, with businesses like ValeFresco and Charles Faram leading the way. Additionally, the Low Carbon and Environmental Technologies sector is expanding rapidly, growing at 5.7% annually, supported by local initiatives.

The county is strategically divided into five economic zones, each with distinct strengths:

- **North Worcestershire:** Focused on advanced manufacturing and business services.
- **Worcester City:** A centre for health, care, and professional services.
- **Malvern Hills:** Known for cyber and tech innovation.
- **Vale of Evesham:** Specialising in horticulture and agri-tech.
- **Rural Heartlands:** Characterised by micro-businesses and remote working hubs.

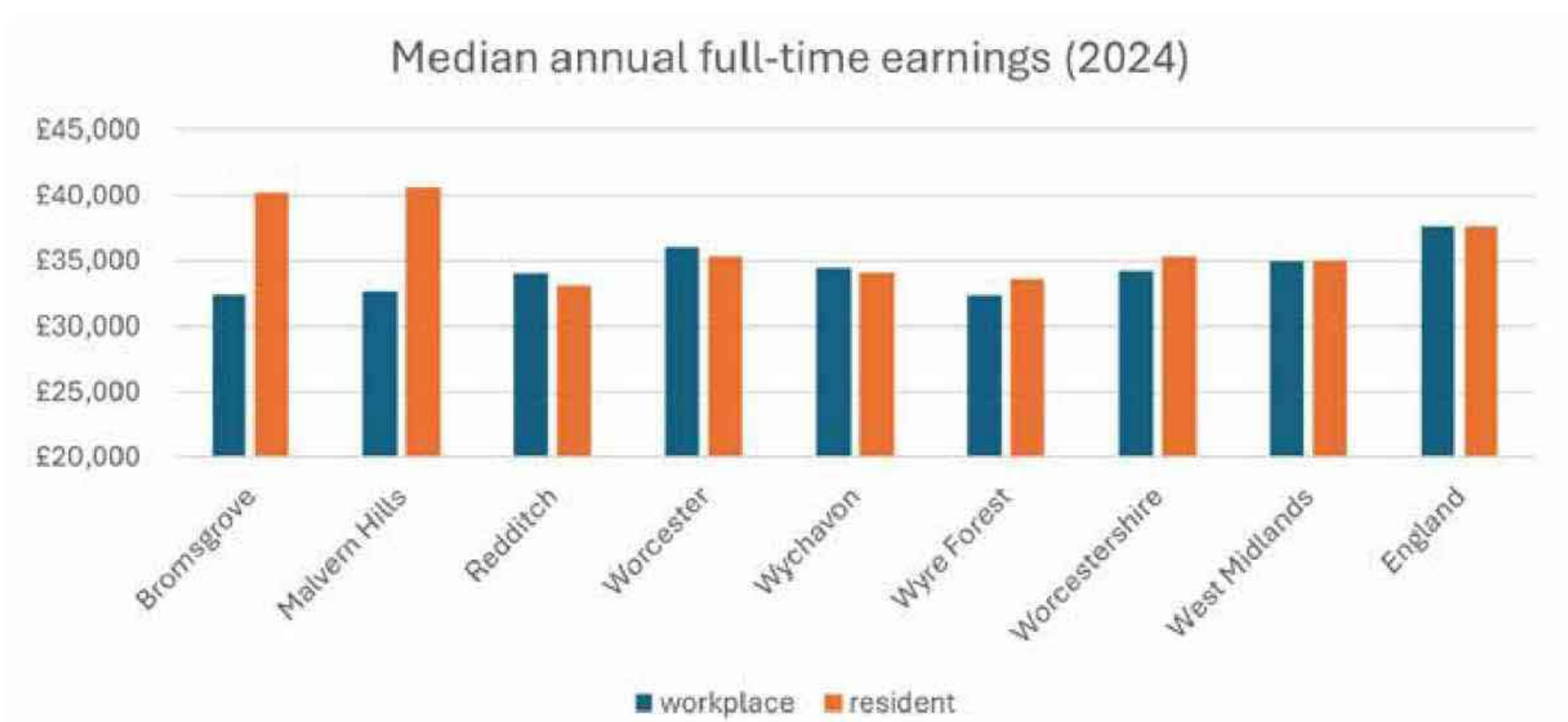
## Earnings in Worcestershire

The average monthly pay for employees working in Worcestershire businesses (workplace earnings) is £2,402. This figure is slightly above the West Midlands regional average but falls just below the national average for England. Notably, Bromsgrove's higher earnings are contributing around £50 to the overall county average, highlighting pay disparities across districts and the proximity to the high wage opportunities in the West Midlands conurbation.

Worcestershire's data shows a notably high female employment rate of 79%, which exceeds both regional and national averages. However, this higher level of participation may also influence the county's median pay levels. Women in Worcestershire typically earn 14.5% less than men, meaning that for every £1 earned by a male employee, a female earns approximately £0.855.



Source: [Earnings and employment from Pay As You Earn Real Time Information, UK: April 2025 - Office for National Statistics](#)



Source: Annual survey of hours and earnings (ONS)

Analysis of commuting patterns reveals that Worcestershire is a net exporter of workers, with more residents travelling outside the county for employment than working locally. This trend varies by district, with Wyre Forest showing the highest level of out-commuting. The impact of this is evident in income data, residents earn a median annual salary of £35,346, which is higher than the median earnings within Worcestershire workplaces.

This discrepancy highlights a broader issue when comparing the skills of local residents to the needs of employers. While businesses often report difficulties in finding the right skills, the data suggests this may not be a shortage of high-level skills, but rather a mismatch in availability. The skills required by employers may exist locally and within the wider labour market but are not easily accessible. This warrants further investigation to better understand the alignment of local workforce capabilities with employer demand and local skills available within residents. It also highlights the needs of local employers to consider new talent pools and improved workplace practices.

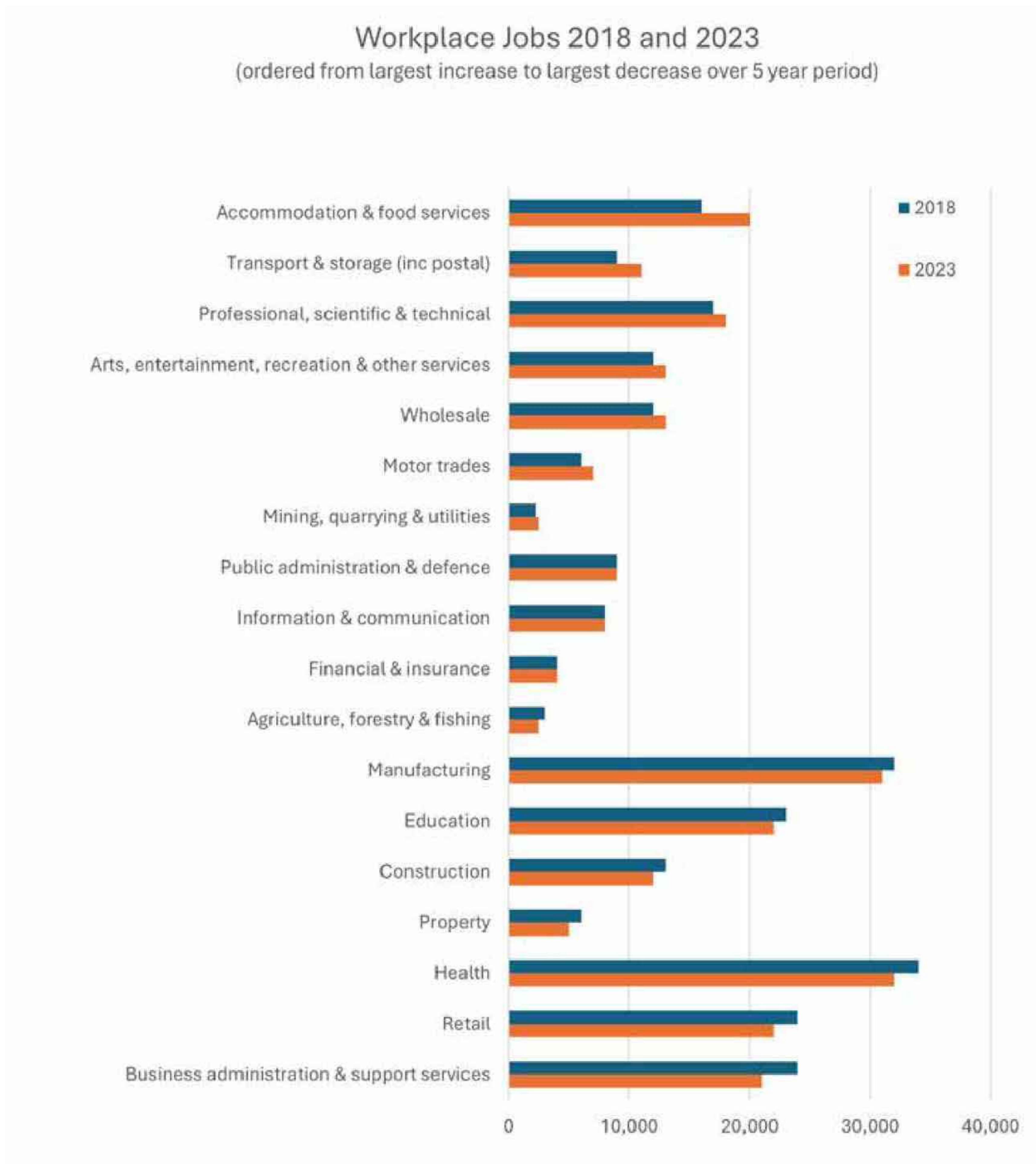
In addition, Worcestershire's district councils highlight a shortage of business premises suitable for companies employing between 50 and 250 people. As a result, growing businesses are often compelled to relocate outside the county, which not only risks the loss of local talent but also represents a missed opportunity for future employment growth within the region, factors which will affect in and out commuting in the region.

Area	In-commuting	Out-commuting	Net commuting
Bromsgrove	15,705	16,828	-1,123
Malvern Hills	8,543	9,931	-1,388
Redditch	10,081	12,308	-2,227
Worcester	14,341	13,715	626
Wychavon	16,737	18,334	-1,597
Wyre Forest	7,107	13,246	-6,139
Worcestershire	72,514	84,362	-11,848

Source: [Census - Office for National Statistics](#)

## The Employment Landscape - Employment Sectors in Worcestershire

Worcestershire does not have a single dominant employment sector, which presents a diverse range of opportunities for residents. In 2023, the largest industries were Health and Engineering & Manufacturing, collectively employing over 60,000 people. However, employment in both sectors has declined since 2020. While healthcare is expected to grow in response to an aging population, Engineering and Manufacturing are projected to continue declining within the county, as reflected in the data below:



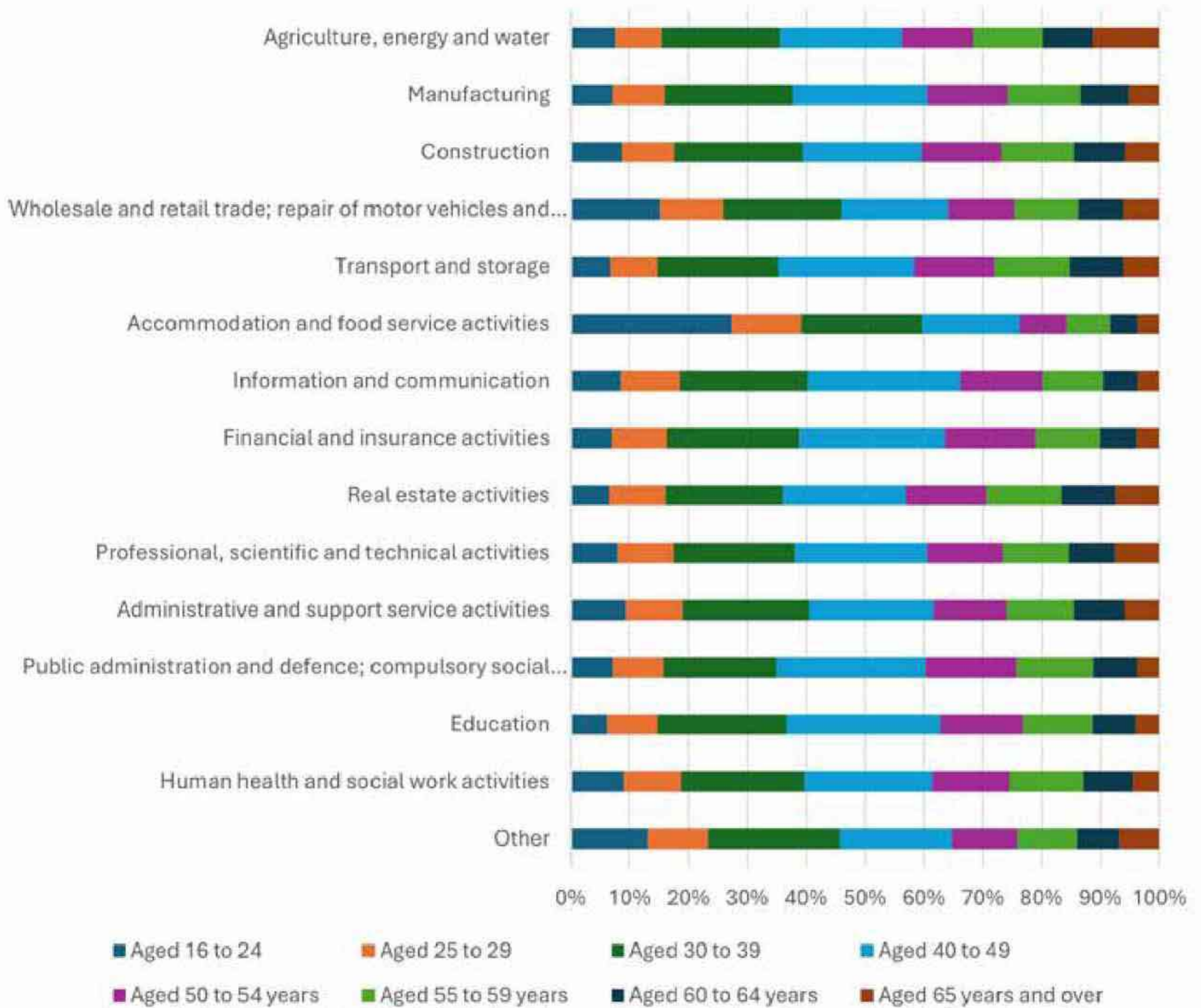
Source: Business Register and Employment Survey (ONS)

Sector	Change in employment 2025-2030
A: Agriculture	50
B: Mining & quarrying	-10
C: Manufacturing	-2,790
D: Utilities	0
E: Water supply	-20
F: Construction	1,200
G: Wholesale & retail trade	1,170
H: Transportation & storage	290
I: Accommodation & food services	1,060
J: Information & communication	500
K: Financial & insurance activities	40
L: Real estate activities	140
M: Professional, scientific & technical	1,770
N: Administrative & support services	1,730
O: Public administration & defence	-90
P: Education	460
Q: Human health & social work	2,490
R: Arts, entertainment & recreation	650
S: Other service activities	570
Total	9,190

Source: Oxford Economics and the Midlands Engine Observatory

Looking at these figures in isolation does not provide a full picture of skills needs or industry demand. The data on growth overlooks the impact of workforce replacement driven by retirement and succession, which becomes clearer when considering demographic trends within industry sectors.

## Current industry employed in by age



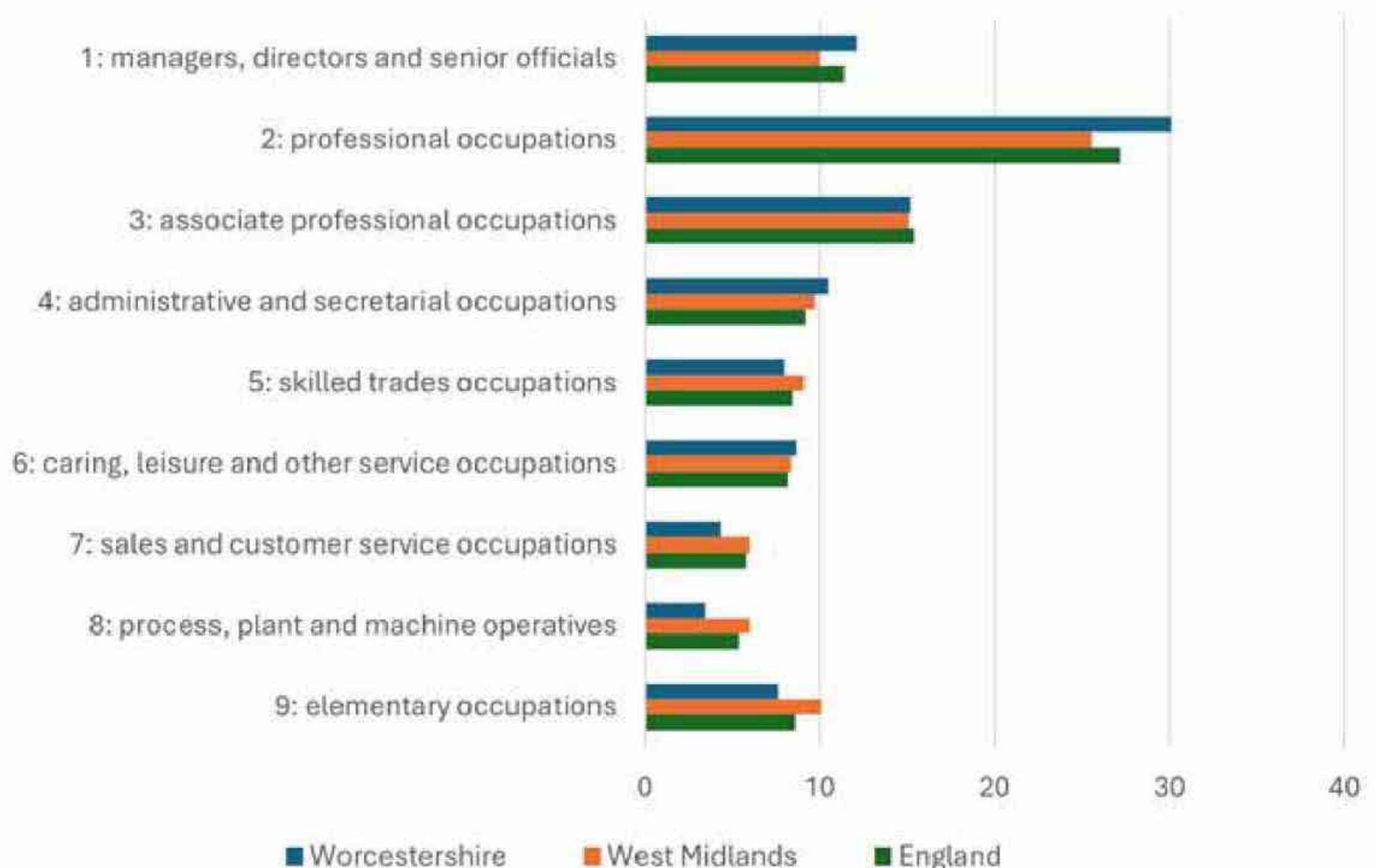
Source: [Census - Office for National Statistics](#)

Worcestershire’s ageing workforce has been a recognised concern since 2019, when one in three workers were aged over 50. This issue remains particularly pressing in Engineering and Manufacturing, Construction, and Transport & Logistics—sectors where over 40% of the workforce is aged 50 or above. These industries have seen lower levels of young entrants, influenced by the county’s complex SME landscape, limited further education curriculum availability, and capacity constraints such as insufficient teaching staff and facilities. Addressing these challenges is essential to meet future workforce demands in Worcestershire.

## The Employment Landscape – Occupations of Residents

Worcestershire has a higher proportion of residents employed in professional, associate professional, and managerial roles compared to the national average, over 50% versus England’s 42%. This trend also reflects the county’s qualification profile, with a greater share of residents holding Level 4 qualifications or higher than the national average.

Occupation of those in employment (2024)



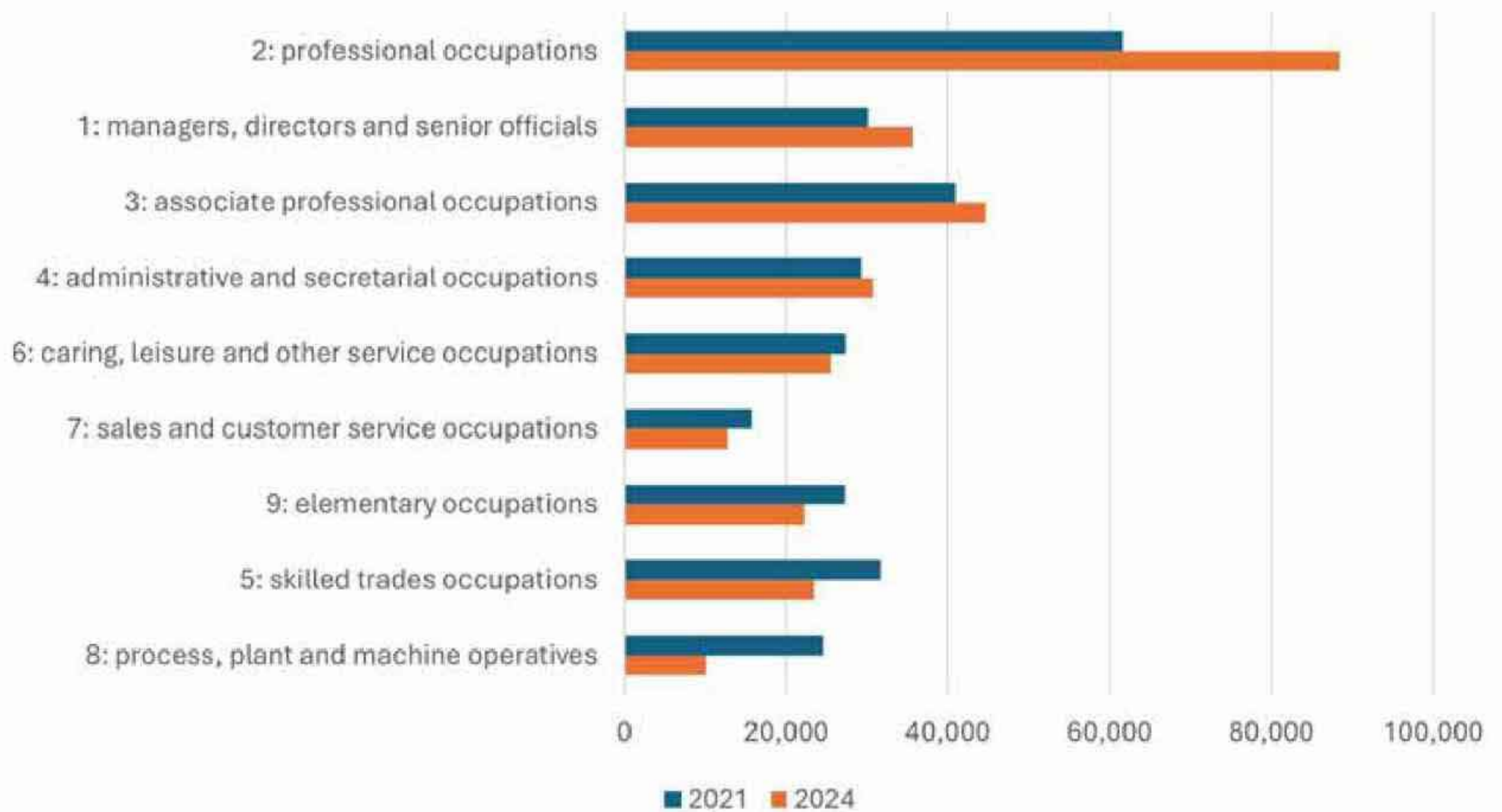
Source: Annual Population Survey (ONS)

Between 2021 and 2024, Worcestershire experienced strong growth in professional occupations, while roles in process, plant, and machine operations declined—particularly affecting the Engineering and Manufacturing sector. This shift has created recruitment challenges for employers, who are often seeking specific skill sets that are not necessarily at higher qualification levels but are increasingly difficult to source locally.

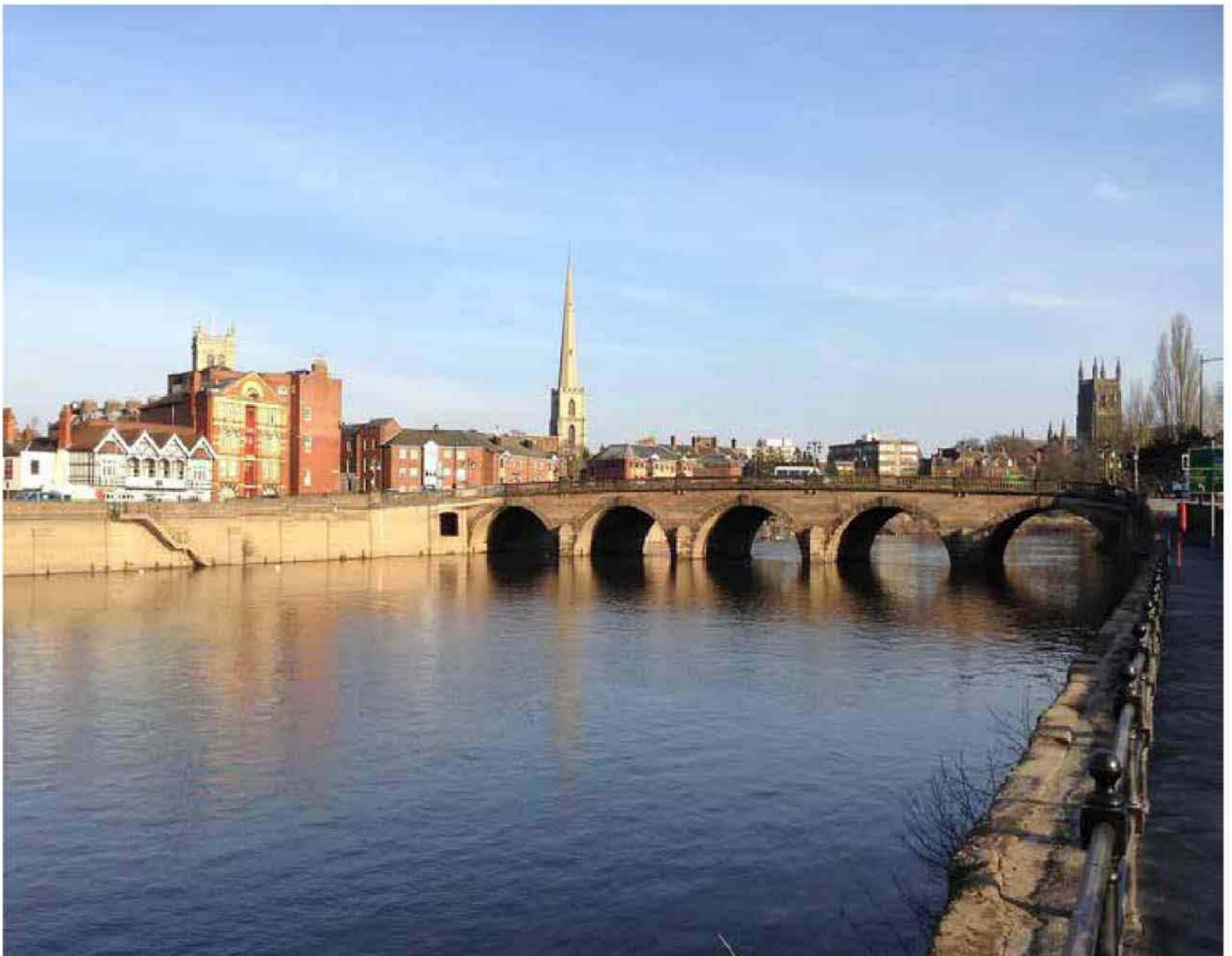
The county now faces two key challenges: firstly, to continue upskilling individuals with lower level or no qualifications to better align with local employment needs; and secondly, to engage businesses more effectively in efforts to boost productivity.

## Occupation of those in employment 2021 & 2024

(ordered from largest increase to largest decrease over period)

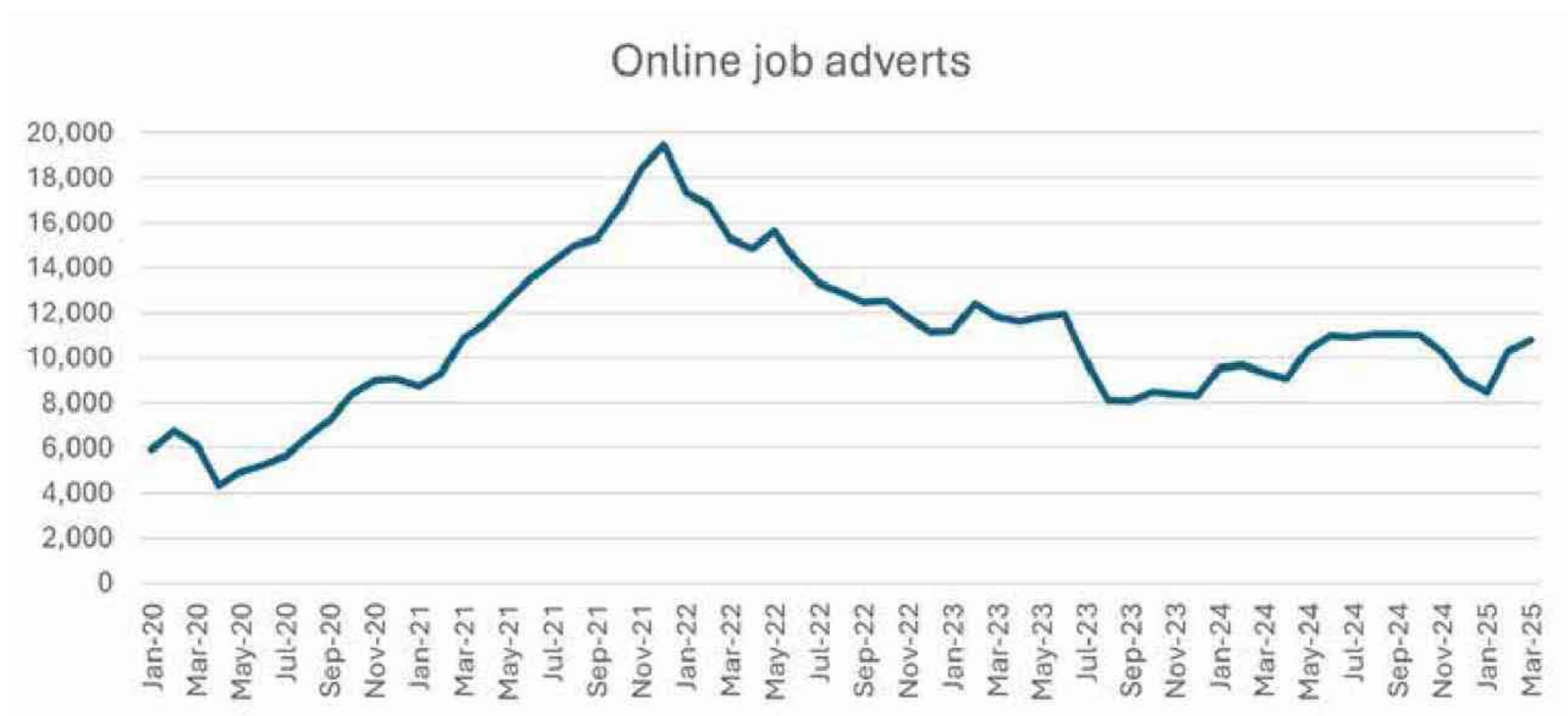


Source: Annual Population Survey (ONS)



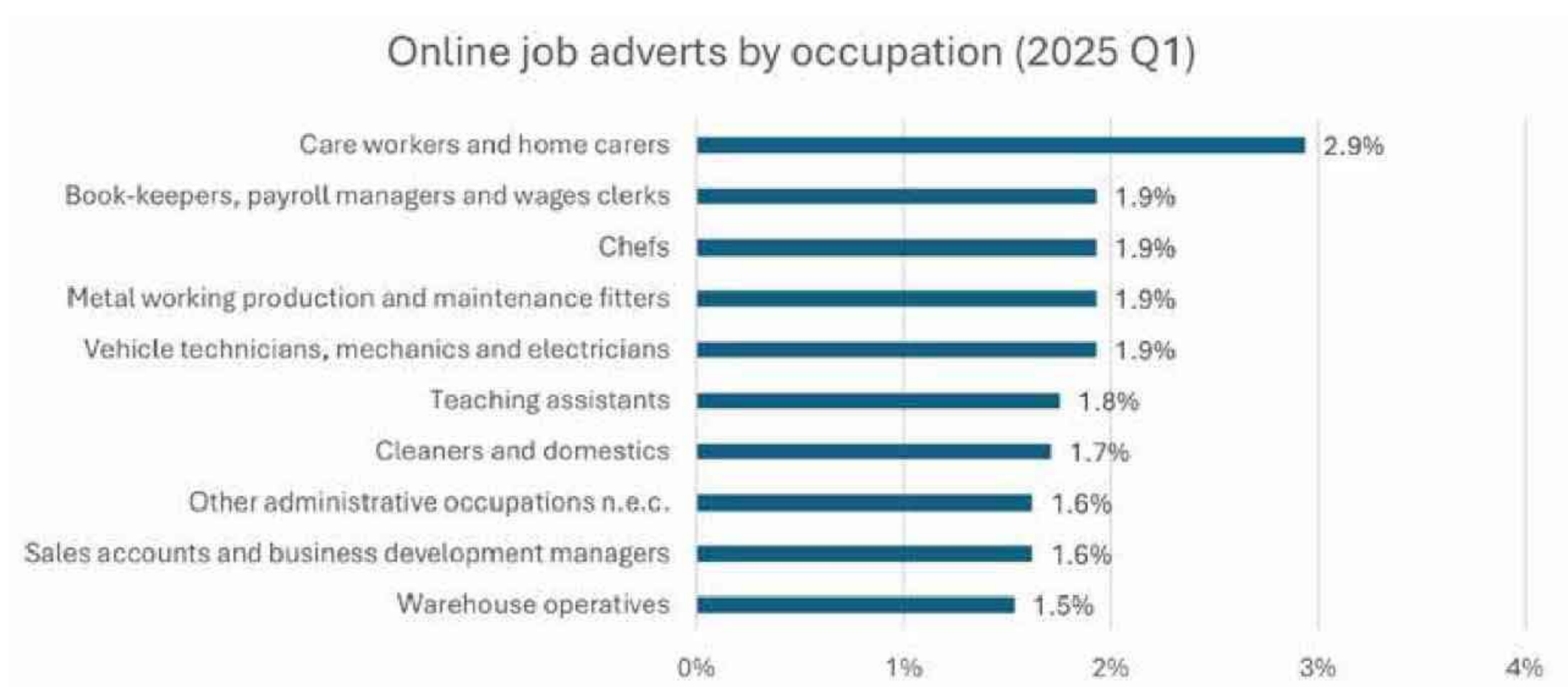
## The Employment Landscape – Vacancies

While the number of online job adverts in Worcestershire dipped at the end of 2024, early 2025 has shown encouraging signs of recovery, indicating renewed momentum in the local labour market.



Source: [Labour demand volumes by Standard Occupation Classification \(SOC 2020\), UK - Office for National Statistics](#)

A local employment agency director noted that the labour market had softened in recent months, with most vacancies arising from replacement demand rather than business growth. Employers reported challenging trading conditions and difficulties in recruitment, although sentiment has improved compared to the start of 2025. Concerns were also raised about the need to modernise recruitment processes, which are often not aligned with the current dynamics of the vacancy market.



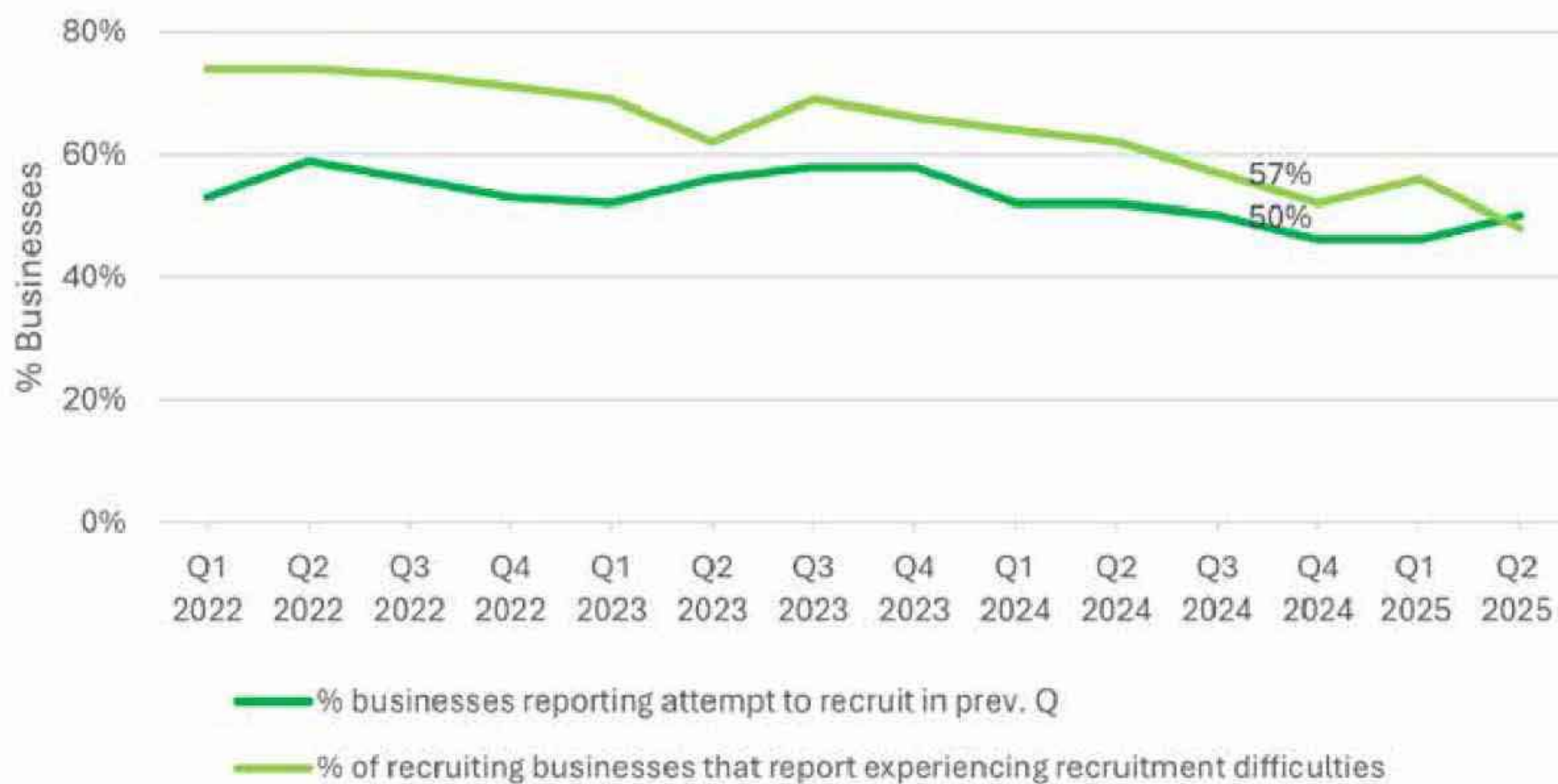
Source: [Labour demand volumes by Standard Occupation Classification \(SOC 2020\), UK - Office for National Statistics](#)

Healthcare remains the dominant industry in recruitment terms with vacancy needs driven by older population and turnover of staff.

Worcestershire County Council, in collaboration with the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce, monitors employer feedback on recruitment challenges through the Quarterly Economic Survey. These insights are shared nationally via the Chamber network to inform Government. The survey results indicate that recruitment remains a challenge, although fewer businesses have been actively hiring.

Further insights from the Chamber’s 2024/25 Salary and Benefits report highlight the need for businesses to strengthen inclusive recruitment practices across the county. While over 52% of organisations are actively addressing unconscious bias, a vital step toward fostering inclusive workplace cultures. There is still room for improvement. For instance, only 18% of businesses have recruitment strategies specifically aimed at underrepresented groups. This presents an opportunity for Worcestershire employers to enhance their recruitment processes, aligning them more closely with broader inclusion goals. Doing so could help address ongoing recruitment challenges and better meet workforce needs.

Recruitment Difficulties (QES) Herefordshire & Worcestershire



Source : Economic Research and Reports - Herefordshire & Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce ([hwchamber.co.uk](http://hwchamber.co.uk))

Qualitative insights from the 2024/25 UK Shared Prosperity Programme, SkillsBoost, which delivered £1.2 million in training investment across Worcestershire including £640,000 in grant funding, have deepened local understanding of employer behaviours and workforce development needs. Notably, around 50% of participating businesses reported having no training or succession plans beyond the next 12 months, highlighting a significant gap in long-term workforce planning.

Of the 1,564 employees who took part in training, 728 courses were delivered locally within Worcestershire. Employers frequently cited difficulties in finding suitable local training options. However, the programme also helped raise awareness of existing provision, offering valuable intelligence to better inform businesses about the local training landscape.

Worcestershire now needs to undertake a review of the curriculum offered by its education partners to assess how effectively it supports adult upskilling. Particular attention should be given to the availability of entry-level courses for individuals with lower qualifications, enabling both access to the workforce and progression while in employment. Alongside this, continued promotion of ongoing professional development remains essential.

This review should also seek to fully understand the barriers adults face in accessing training and support a rebalancing of priorities within DfE-funded organisations, placing greater emphasis on adult skills provision to meet local workforce needs.



## The Employment Landscape – Qualifications



Source: Annual Population Survey (ONS)

Worcestershire has a well-qualified population, with over 46% of residents holding Level 4 qualifications or higher. A further 41% are qualified at Levels 2 and 3, while around 12% hold qualifications below Level 1. This profile broadly aligns with national labour market expectations, where Level 2 is typically considered the minimum entry point. Notably, more than half of job vacancies advertised in England require degree-level or equivalent qualifications, underscoring the importance of higher-level skills in accessing employment opportunities.

However, in Worcestershire, there is a need to strike a balance. While well qualified residents are less likely to be economically inactive, both vacancy and sector data indicate a growing demand for manual and trade professions alongside professional roles.

Individuals with no qualifications or only Level 1 or 2 qualifications are more likely to be economically inactive compared to the wider working-age population. In 2021, Worcestershire had approximately 18,300 inactive residents with no qualifications and 26,100 with Level 1 or 2 qualifications. These figures reinforce the importance of lifelong learning and the need to promote continued education and skills development within the workplace. They also highlight the necessity of ensuring accessible adult skills training to create an education landscape that supports entry into employment and progression within it.

Highest qualification	In employment	Unemployed	Inactive
No qualifications	51%	5%	44%
Level 1	68%	5%	27%
Level 2	68%	5%	27%
Level 3	80%	3%	16%
Level 4	85%	2%	13%
Other	77%	3%	19%
All aged 16-64	75%	4%	21%

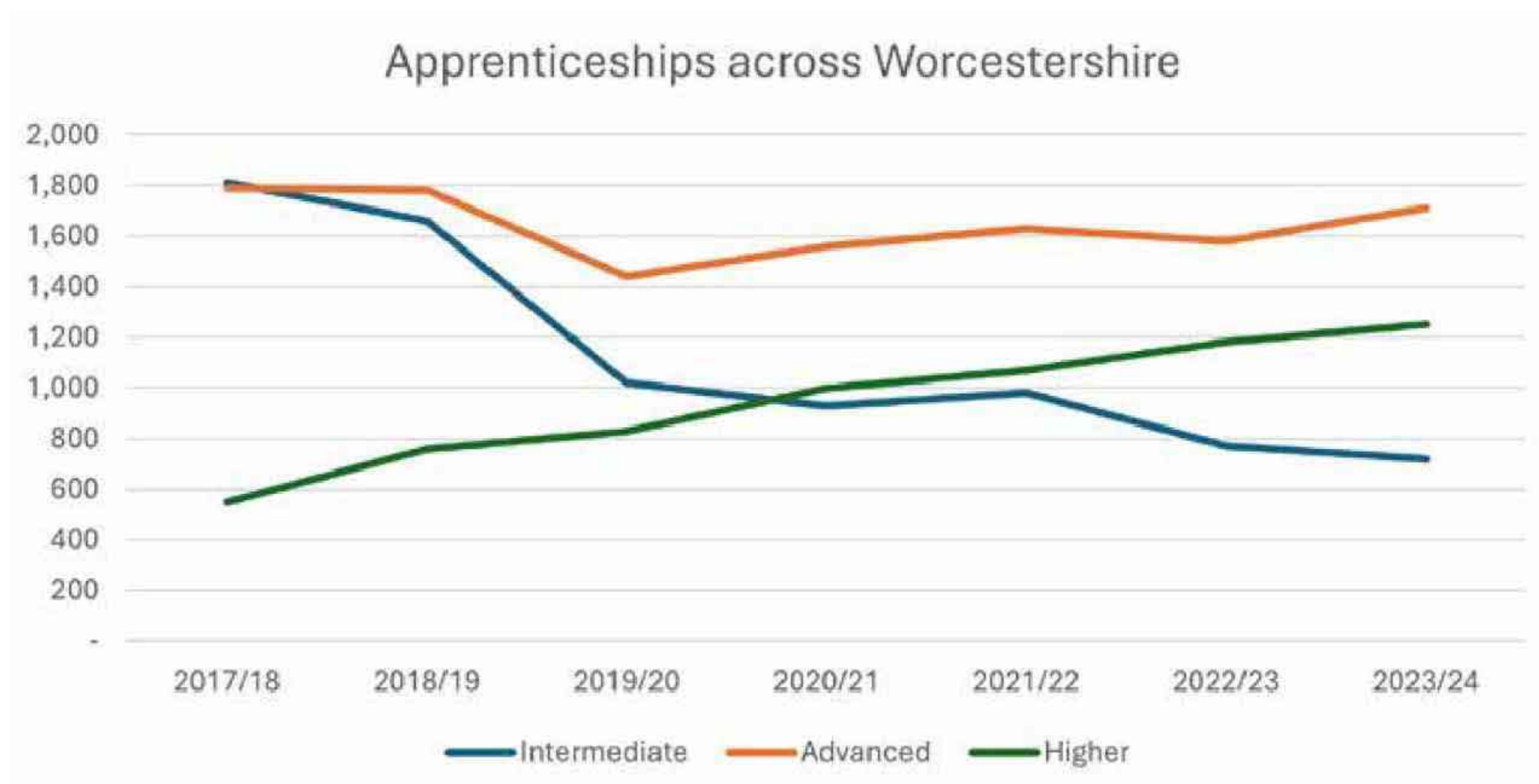
Source: [Census - Office for National Statistics](#)



## The Employment Landscape – Apprenticeships

Worcestershire has a strong track record in apprenticeships, driven by a commitment to retaining young talent within the county and supporting long-term workforce development through succession planning. The county actively promotes apprenticeship opportunities via the Worcestershire Apprenticeships brand, which aims to raise awareness and encourage participation among young people and businesses.

While the introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy and new Standards initially disrupted the system, Worcestershire has seen a recovery in apprenticeship starts during 2023/24 and into 2024/25, returning to levels seen prior to these changes. However, the composition of those starts has shifted significantly. There has been a 20% decline in young people entering apprenticeships, as many employers have redirected their focus toward upskilling existing staff aged 25 and over, rather than prioritising new, younger entrants into the workforce.

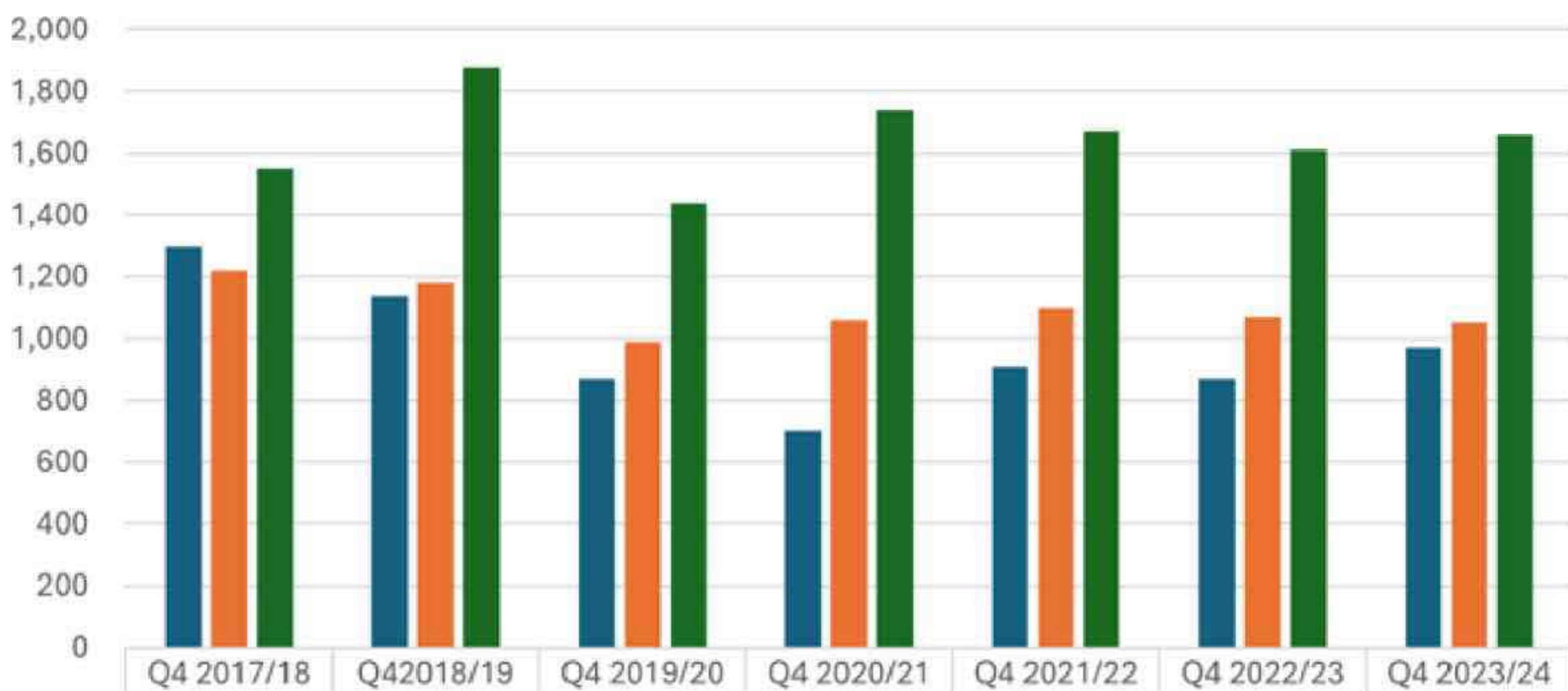


Source – Explore Education [statistics.gov.uk](https://www.statistics.gov.uk)

The introduction of apprenticeship standards has also led to a shift in qualification levels, with a noticeable increase in higher-level apprenticeships and a decline in intermediate options. This change has affected the employer landscape, particularly for smaller businesses. Many of these employers struggle to support apprentices through the broader and more demanding curriculum required by the new standards, which has, in some cases, limited their ability to continue offering apprenticeship opportunities.

The Worcestershire Apprenticeship team reports that the majority of enquiries to the employer support line relate to understanding how to use the apprenticeship levy and navigating the system’s mechanics. This suggests a need for simplification to ensure that systemic barriers do not hinder employer engagement.

All Apprenticeship Levels Starts



	Q4 2017/18	Q4 2018/19	Q4 2019/20	Q4 2020/21	Q4 2021/22	Q4 2022/23	Q4 2023/24
Under 19	1,300	1,140	870	700	910	870	970
19-24	1,220	1,180	990	1,060	1,100	1,070	1,050
25+	1,550	1,880	1,440	1,740	1,670	1,610	1,660



## DWP Analysis – Labour Market Types

Cluster analysis has been used by DWP to categorise local authorities into different labour market types based on key labour market variables. This is intended to create coherent groups of Local Authorities that are distinct from each other. The RAG ratings in the table below reflect DWP's definition for each district where variables were rated as below average, average or above average based on 2022/23 data. It should be noted that current analysis may disagree with this picture for instance Redditch has a challenging claimant count and therefore this does not reflect the latest position of a particular district in the cluster.

Each district in Worcestershire has been categorised as a different labour market type as follows:

District	Labour Market Type	Claimant Count	Employment Rate	Work-limiting disability rate	Level 4+ qualification	Musculoskeletal condition rate	Mental health condition
Worcester	Small cities & large towns	R	A	A	A	G	R
Redditch	Rural industrial legacy	G	G	R	R	R	A
Wychavon	Representative agent	A	A	A	A	A	G
Malvern Hills	Traditional affluent	G	A	G	A	G	G
Bromsgrove	Affluent commuter belt	G	G	G	G	G	G
Wyre Forest	Trade towns	A	A	R	G	A	A

**Key: R=Red, A=Amber, G=Green.**

Source: [Get Britain Working White Paper: Analytical Annex - GOV.UK](#)

### **Worcester – Small cities & large towns.**

This cluster tends to be urban areas with young populations that do not have as high levels of high skilled jobs as compared to other major cities. The claimant count is high as is the rate of mental health conditions.

### **Redditch – Rural industrial legacy.**

These areas tend to be more remote rural areas with healthy economies, but with a lack of connectivity to major employment centres and/or high skilled industry. They tend to have high employment rates, but lower skill levels and higher rates of MSK conditions. They are likely to have an older than average population.

### **Wyche – Representative agent.**

Areas in this cluster score in the middle of the range on most measures. The cluster is a mix mainly of rural areas and smaller towns.

### **Malvern Hills – Traditional affluent.**

These areas have a highly skilled workforce, with low rates of health conditions, unemployment is low. These areas tend to be semi-rural or towns on the fringes of urban centres with strong economies.

### **Bromsgrove – Affluent commuter belt.**

This cluster is made up of areas that have strong indicators of labour demand, skills and health – these tend to be areas that are mainly rural but with good connectivity to strong economic centres, particularly London.

### **Wyre Forest – Trade towns.**

Areas in this cluster have lower levels of skills in the workforce, with average levels of unemployment, MSK and mental health conditions with low rates of disability. These areas tend to be towns or areas on the periphery of big cities with medium skill economies.

This data is a crucial part of the broader challenge facing Worcestershire: a diverse population and economy where standardised employment programmes often fall short. To effectively address local needs, more flexible, place-based funding approaches are required—even when national programmes are in place.

## What data needs to be explored further to inform future planning

Analysis of data across Worcestershire has highlighted several challenges in understanding the county's socio-economic landscape. One of the key issues is the limited scale and granularity of available data, which often prevents meaningful conclusions from being drawn. In some cases, the data may underrepresent existing challenges, giving the impression that issues are less significant than they truly are. Additionally, the ability to address these challenges is constrained by economies of scale, making it difficult to implement effective solutions without a clearer evidence base.

Several areas require deeper exploration to better understand the scale and impact of these challenges:

**Housing:** Discussions with providers have underscored the pressing need for more affordable transitional housing and the impact of supported housing. A particular concern is the cliff edge created by Universal Credit in relation to housing, which affects many residents. However, there is currently no comprehensive data to quantify the extent of this issue within the local population.

**Fit Notes:** NHS Herefordshire and Worcestershire is currently working to secure funding for a Fit Note pilot project. The initiative aims to assess the quality of Fit Notes and gather insights into health conditions affecting the workforce. The data collected will help identify appropriate interventions to support individuals in returning to work and managing their health conditions in the workplace. Additionally, the findings will contribute to a broader understanding of how the health system influences economic productivity.

**Residents on release from custodial sentences:** Worcestershire hosts HMP Hewell and works to support residents on release from prison. Further work needs to be undertaken to understand the numbers of inactive residents which could be caused by their criminal records. National statistics provide a useful benchmark where only 19.3% of offenders were in employment six weeks after release from custody, rising to 31.1% after six months. Those given community sentences had a higher employment rate of 46.4% at the six-month mark. These figures highlight the significant challenges offenders face in securing work, particularly following custodial sentences. Worcestershire needs to understand this better and look to expand the support available.

**Transport:** Initial work has begun to assess residents' access to employment sites across Worcestershire. While anecdotal evidence suggests significant barriers, there is a lack of robust data to accurately reflect the scale and nature of these transport challenges.

**Job Quality and Progression:** There is a need for more detailed insights into the quality of jobs available in Worcestershire, including aspects such as job security, progression opportunities, and flexibility. This understanding is crucial for shaping future employment strategies.

**Childcare:** Further data is needed to explore how childcare availability and affordability affect employment decisions. The rising cost of living adds complexity to this issue, and better evidence is required to inform policy and support services.

**Multiple Deprivation and Economic Activity:** Data suggests that around 60% of economically inactive individuals may be experiencing multiple forms of deprivation such as low educational attainment, poor health, disability, or housing challenges. However, the data lacks sufficient detail to confirm these associations, making it difficult to draw meaningful or actionable conclusions at this stage.

**Clinical Effectiveness and its relationship with Workplace attendance:** Across the partnership, there is a shared understanding of the link between good work and health. Within the NHS, there is increasing recognition of the need to explore how healthcare system processes, particularly clinical discharge affect workforce absence and economic inactivity. The NHS 10-Year Plan highlights the importance of working with employers to address these issues and improve effectiveness of services. However, further data around discharge impact is needed to fully understand the challenge, especially in terms of how healthcare systems can support individuals in returning to work. For instance, knowing whether a patient is able to resume employment following treatment at the point of discharge can help shape improvements that promote employee wellbeing and sustained economic participation.



# Working with Partners – Harnessing Local Strengths to Tackle Employment and Skills Challenges

To address the employment and skills challenges identified across Worcestershire, the county will need to draw on the collective strengths and influence of key stakeholders from the public, private, and voluntary sectors.

## The Role of Local Authorities – Worcestershire County Council and District Councils

Worcestershire County Council and the six district councils play a vital role in shaping employment opportunities and supporting residents into sustainable work.

The County Council's Employment and Skills team delivers a range of government-funded programmes, including Youth Hubs, Adult Learning, and the Connect to Work programme. These initiatives are designed to help individuals build the skills, confidence, and networks needed to enter or progress in the labour market. The team also works across council departments and with external partners to drive improved employment outcomes countywide.

In addition, several other County Council services significantly influence residents' ability to access and sustain employment:

**Economic Development** – Drives inward investment and business growth, creating job opportunities and supporting a thriving local economy.

**Passenger Transport** – Plans and coordinates public transport to align with employer needs, improving access to workplaces.

**Children's Services** – Supports young people leaving care and those with SEND to transition into education, training, or employment.

**Adult Services** – Helps adults with SEND live independently and access meaningful employment.

**Public Health** – Delivers initiatives that promote physical and mental wellbeing, supporting individuals to remain healthy and work-ready.

While district councils are not the lead authority for employment and skills, they play a critical enabling role. Their contributions are often place-based, practical, and community-focused, complementing the strategic work of the County Council. They support access to services, engage with local employers, and work closely with voluntary and community organisations to address barriers to employment.

Together, Worcestershire's local authorities demonstrate how councils can shape the wider conditions that enable residents to participate in the workforce and thrive in employment.

## **Enhancing Employment Support Collaboration – Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)**

Since 2020, Worcestershire has developed a strong partnership model to better integrate employment support services. This approach has helped the area remain agile in response to changes in the DWP landscape and maximise the impact of local delivery.

Close collaboration with Jobcentre Plus has fostered a strong working relationship between local DWP teams and the County Council. This includes regular engagement with the Shires District Partnership Leader, annual strategic meetings with local Jobcentre managers, and a rolling programme of events to connect local provision with jobseekers.

Worcestershire also hosts a Quarterly Connecting Worcestershire – Employment Support Provider Network, co-led with DWP, which brings together over 60 employability and voluntary sector organisations. The forum provides a platform to share updates, promote programmes, and strengthen collaboration across the employment support ecosystem.

## **Integrating Health and Employment – NHS Herefordshire and Worcestershire ICB and the wider NHS**

Herefordshire and Worcestershire Integrated Care Board (ICB) and the wider NHS organisations within Worcestershire play a strategic role in shaping the employment and skills landscape by embedding inclusive recruitment, workforce development, and the integration of health and employment services into their core strategies. In alignment with the NHS's fourth purpose supporting broader social and economic development, the ICB is delivering targeted initiatives such as the Workwell Vanguard, Individual Placement Support in Secondary Care, and Talking Therapies in Primary Care to help individuals with mental health challenges access and sustain employment.

Working in partnership with Worcestershire County Council and the LEP, the ICB is driving forward efforts to promote healthier workplaces, increase the number of Disability Confident employers, and create more accessible job opportunities. This collaboration has been further strengthened through the secondment of the Head of Skills and Employability into the ICB, supporting the development of a county-wide Health and Work Strategy.

These efforts are directly aligned with the NHS 10-Year Plan, which prioritises reducing health inequalities, improving population health, and contributing to local economic growth through a skilled and inclusive workforce. The Plan's emphasis on prevention, personalised care, and joined-up community services reinforces Worcestershire's ambition to embed health and work conversations across systems and sectors.

Health services offer vital touchpoints within communities that could be more effectively leveraged to support employment outcomes. Currently, these opportunities are underutilised, with limited integration of messaging around the role of good work in promoting better health. The NHS 10-Year Plan emphasises the importance of prevention and personalised care, recognising employment as a key social determinant of health. By embedding health and work conversations into routine interactions whether through primary care, community services, or digital platforms, there is significant potential to improve awareness, empower residents, and support healthier, more economically active lives. Strengthening this integration will be essential to realising the Plan's ambition for joined-up, community-based support that reduces inequalities and enhances wellbeing.

Looking ahead, the launch of a Health and Work Forum in September will help coordinate programmes across health, employment, and the voluntary sector—ensuring a seamless journey for participants and maximising employment outcomes through truly integrated support.

Alongside this, the NHS is the largest employer across Worcestershire including in areas with the least economic opportunity through its wide network of organisations. This makes it a key partner employer in the Get Worcestershire Working strategy. By collaborating with stakeholders across the plan, including local job centres, education providers, and voluntary and community organisations, the NHS is committed to ensuring that people from all backgrounds can access meaningful careers within its institutions. This includes exploring innovative recruitment approaches, embedding social value commitments, and strengthening internal practices around staff health and wellbeing. These targeted actions position the NHS as a major driver of social mobility and economic prosperity across the county.

## **Driving Employer Engagement – Worcestershire Growth Hub**

The Worcestershire Growth Hub, part of the Worcestershire LEP, plays a key role in engaging employers around workforce development. Through its Talent and Skills programme, the Growth Hub has launched the Skills and Talent Pledge, offering businesses a platform to explore topics such as employee wellbeing, inclusive recruitment practices, and local employment pathways.

This initiative is strengthening employer engagement with local programmes and fostering collaboration across the employment and skills landscape. It brings together local authorities, DWP, health services, and training providers to ensure support is aligned with the evolving needs of Worcestershire's business community.

## **Creating the Skills Strategy – Herefordshire and Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce**

The Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP), developed by the Chamber of Commerce, sets the strategic direction for aligning post-16 technical education and training with employer needs.

The plan highlights the need for deeper employer engagement to better understand current and future skills gaps. Employers emphasised the importance of workplace behaviours and attitudes, alongside technical skills. The LSIP also calls for a cultural shift—encouraging more training within businesses and helping employers plan for future workforce needs.

### **The Role of Education and Employability Providers in meeting Workforce Needs**

Schools, colleges, independent training and employability providers and the University in Worcestershire are central to the success of the Get Worcestershire Working strategy. These organisations play a vital role in preparing residents for the world of work by equipping them with the skills, knowledge, and behaviours needed to succeed in a changing labour market.

Schools support early career awareness and aspiration through their roles in the Careers and Enterprise Programme, raising awareness through employer encounters, careers guidance, and work experience.

Colleges deliver technical and vocational training aligned with local employer needs, offering clear pathways into apprenticeships, further study, or employment and ensuring their students are equipped ready for employment.

The University of Worcester contributes by developing higher-level skills, supporting graduate employability, and working with employers to address future workforce needs.

The Independent and Voluntary, Community sector in Worcestershire hosts a collaboration of apprenticeship, private training and employability providers who work alongside the council, DWP and health to support and deliver resident focused services all parts of the puzzle that support residents into employment and to upskill within Worcestershire.

Across all levels, these institutions are key partners in aligning education and training with the priorities identified in the Local Skills Improvement Plan and in supporting residents, whether young people or adults to access meaningful, sustainable employment opportunities.

## **What levers are available to stakeholders across Worcestershire?**

All stakeholders within Worcestershire as individual organisations have the ability to better integrate their wider agendas with that of employment and supporting residents across Worcestershire. All partners can contribute through improved collaboration and through improved planning. Often this means understanding the needs of the wider geography, the current delivery and considering how as stakeholders we interact with that provision to make the whole system more accessible and effective.

On an individual level, commitment will be made at board level to ensure a change in practice moving forward.

### **Local Authorities – Worcestershire County Council and the District Councils**

- Joint Commissioning and aligning local employment and skills provision in collaboration with DWP and NHS Integrated Care Board.
- Play a central role in convening partners and integrating services through local governance structures.
- Using our current planning, economic development, and public health levers to support inclusive employment.
- Use our Procurement to challenge social value of suppliers to engage in recruitment and employment locally and develop employees.

### **Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)**

- Deploying Jobcentre Plus resources to support targeted cohorts where possible in line with locally agreed priorities
- Use flexibilities to align where possible national programmes (e.g. Restart, Health and Work) with local priorities.
- Work collaboratively with Local Authorities and ICB to share data and insights to inform local delivery.

### **Integrated Care Boards (ICBs)**

- Embed the Health and Work Strategy across the two counties with Get Worcestershire working
- Drive localised campaign which celebrates the impact of employment and health – Embedding employment as a health outcome.
- Consider the role of the ICB in supporting individuals with health-related barriers to work.
- Co-commissioning services that address health and employment needs.
- Use the power of NHS Procurement to challenge social value of suppliers to engage in recruitment and employment locally and develop employees.

## **Employers and Business Networks – Worcestershire Growth Hub and HW Chamber of Commerce**

- Work with Chamber members and businesses to champion offering work placements, apprenticeships, and job opportunities to local people.
- Support routeways between education and business for co-designing training to meet local labour market needs.
- Championing inclusive recruitment practices to business.

## **Education and Employability Providers Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS)**

- Acting as connectors between residents and formal services.
- Improved planning of education/services through regular conversation with DWP, Local Authorities and NHS ICB to discuss collaborative approaches and removal of duplication and silo practices.
- Continue to provide trusted, community-based support to priority groups as part of Worcestershire's overall offer, consider opportunities to copromote and work collaboratively.
- Communicate offer using Local Community Directory , keeping offer up to date and visible to referrers and for residents to use.



## **Mechanisms for Collaboration and Alignment to be used to support the delivery of Get Worcestershire Working**

### **Local Employment and Skills Board / ICB Health and Work Strategy Board**

Worcestershire's multi-agency board established in 2012 and the ICB's Health and Work Strategy group, will integrate to oversee the delivery of the Get Worcestershire Working strategy, seeking to ensure alignment of provision across Health and Employment, and monitor progress against shared outcomes.

### **A shared Monitoring and Evaluation Framework**

Worcestershire will seek to create a shared set of Key Performance Indicators and an Evaluation Framework to consider the effectiveness of collaborative mechanisms, measure progress against agreed employment and skills outcomes on a local level to inform continuous improvement. This framework alongside national outcome metrics will enable partners to track engagement levels, service alignment, and employment outcomes across priority cohorts, while also identifying gaps and opportunities for future investment or funding realignment.

### **Integrated Front Door Model**

Worcestershire will seek to strengthen and market single points of access for residents and employers focused on employment support programmes, supported by shared triage, information and referral protocols across partners to better support residents and employers seeking help and support to improve employment prospects and information for businesses seeking support on employment practices.

### **Shared Intelligence and Commissioning**

Partners will contribute to developing a shared approach for commissioning across health and employment programmes, where new initiatives landing in Worcestershire will be discussed for fit and role, agreeing outcomes, and identify gaps. Aligning future devolved funding around employment support, DWP, and health funding to support integrated employment pathways. Where appropriate this approach will be widened to bring in expertise such as FE College, University of Worcester and local DWP providers as needed.

Partners will explore where funding streams could be pooled or aligned to reduce duplication and improve value for money.

### **Collaboration Through Co-Location & Training**

Co-Location of Services will be explored to strengthening multi-agency collaboration and referral pathways across the county, ensuring a joined-up approach across employability provider offices, community centres, and healthcare facilities.

Ongoing and consistent Training will be available for Delivery Partners of programmes, to ensure that standardised training brings high-quality and consistent delivery across partners, covering topics such as Supported Employment models, IPS fidelity, in-work support strategies, and employer engagement best practices.

# Current System and Offer

## 1. Overview of Existing Approach to Collaboration

Worcestershire has been working to develop a collaborative and integrated approach to employment support, involving key partners such as the DWP Jobcentre Plus, local government, NHS and voluntary and community sector organisations. The approach is designed to address complex barriers to employment through joined-up services and person-centred delivery.

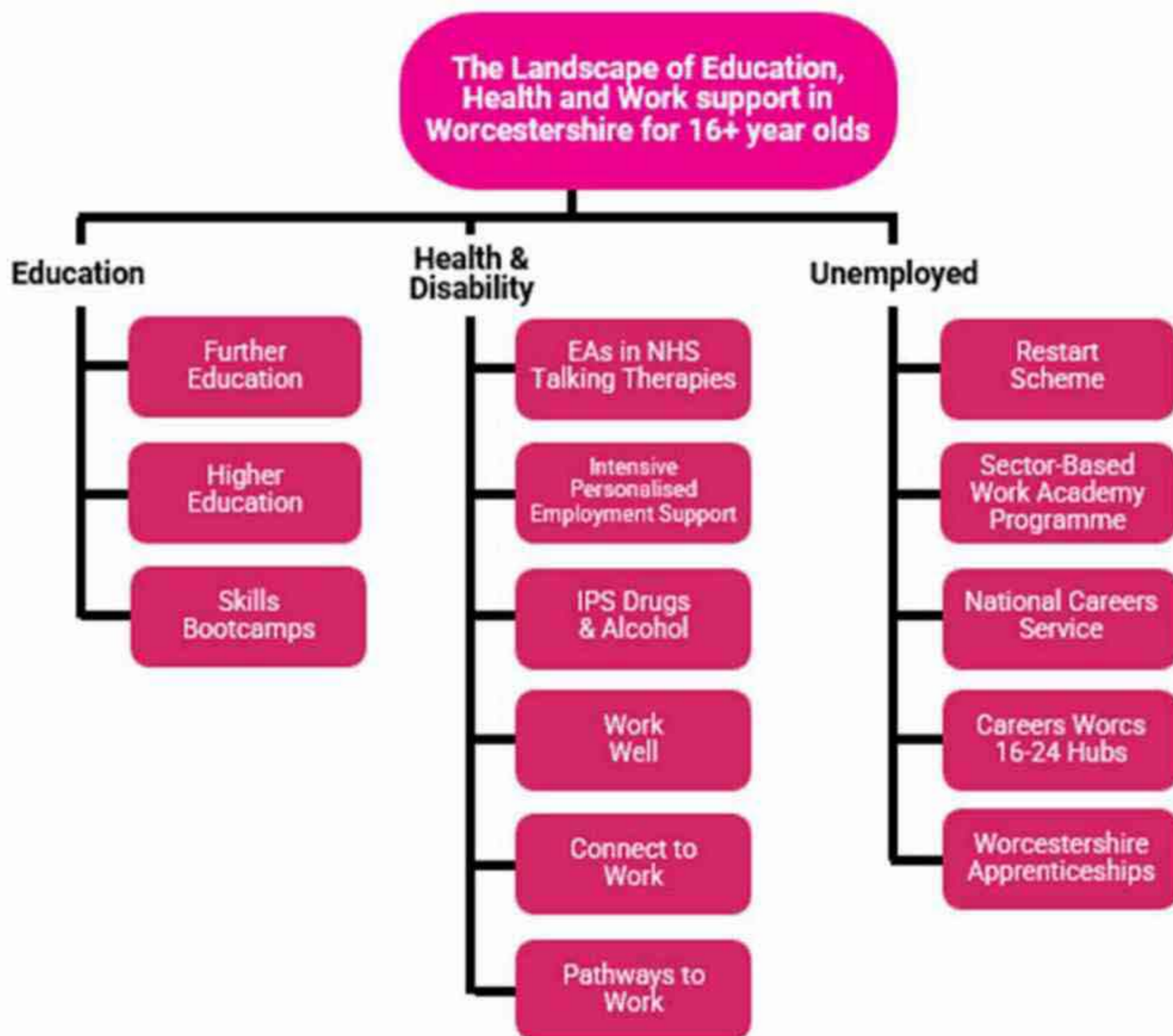
To further this integrated approach Worcestershire's County Council leading this collaboration, implemented working with DWP and the NHS as follows:

- Connecting Worcestershire, Employability Partners Network – Since 2021, Worcestershire County Council working with DWP launched the network, designed to be a cross-sector forum of 45+ organisations from Education, Employability providers, stakeholders and Voluntary Community organisations. The network focused on improving employment outcomes through collaboration and shared learning across Worcestershire, including Prime contractors and local delivery bodies. The Network meets quarterly, hosts updates on the latest situation across the county, hosts an update from DWP Job Centre Plus, discusses the landscape of existing and new programmes keeping providers up to date with developments.
- Leveraging existing forums – Since 2014, Worcestershire County Council has collaborated with the Training Providers Association to advance the skills and apprenticeship agenda, working together to boost apprenticeship numbers across the county. This partnership has further evolved since 2023, with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) joining the sessions to share updates on employability initiatives and strengthen connections between local and national providers.
- Joint staffing on projects – Since 2024, Worcestershire County Council and the Herefordshire and Worcestershire NHS Integrated Care Board have established a strategic secondment for the Head of Service for Employability and Skills. This initiative has strengthened alignment between health and employment priorities, resulting in the development of a joint Health and Work Strategy for both counties. It has also facilitated the successful integration of the Workwell Vanguard programme across the region. In parallel, the DWP has seconded an Employment Support Adviser to Worcestershire County Council to enhance service integration between the two organisations. This collaboration is supporting the rollout of Connect to Work and driving improvements in the number of Disability Confident employers, with a focus on increasing the programme's impact on local businesses.

- Annual DWP Local Office Roadshows – For the second consecutive year, Worcestershire has hosted an event bringing together all Jobcentre Plus managers to discuss local needs, share updates on current programmes, and outline delivery plans for the year ahead. The event supports managers in guiding claimants effectively and informs commissioners about regional priorities. Following this, a series of roadshows are held across the Jobcentre Plus network to brief work coaches on the local offer and referral pathways into available programmes.
- Introducing Connecting Worcestershire, Health and Disability Employability Network – Evolving from the Supported Internship Forum, this newly focused network launching in September 2025, aligns more closely with the outcomes of the Health and Work Strategy. It incorporates key initiatives such as the DWP Connect to Work programme and the Workwell Vanguard in Worcestershire. The forum brings together providers with expertise in both health and employment to strengthen programme delivery, support smoother transitions from education to employment for individuals with health conditions, and promote Disability Confident and inclusive employment practices.

## 2. Landscape of Existing Provision across Worcestershire

Worcestershire presents a relatively straightforward landscape, with limited large-scale provision to support claimants and young people aged 16+ in entering and progressing within employment. While there are several smaller initiatives in place, the more substantial programmes operating at scale include the following:



## **Education Programmes**

### **1. Further education**

Worcestershire is home to three further education colleges, each with a presence across the county. Most districts host a college facility, though some sites are specialist, such as those dedicated to construction. In areas without direct provision, good transport links ensure that young people can easily access colleges in neighbouring districts.

The colleges offer a well-distributed mix of full-time post-16 education, higher education opportunities, and a broad range of apprenticeships. While adult learning is available, it is generally limited to higher-level courses in subjects like education, management, computing, accounting, marketing, human resources, and engineering, alongside some entry-level options in construction, health and beauty, horticulture, English and maths, and health and social care.

The county benefits from excellent facilities, including a specialist horticulture and Agri tech campus in Pershore, a Green Technology Centre in Stourport, an AI Innovation Hub in Redditch, and advanced engineering facilities in multiple locations.

Colleges also play a key role in supporting vulnerable learners and are committed to helping young people transition successfully into employment.

### **2. Higher education**

Worcestershire is served by a single university, the University of Worcester which has a strong focus on public services, reflecting the county's significant employment in this cornerstone sector. The University has expanded its provision in recent years, particularly within the health economy, supporting this vital area through co-designed programmes with NHS Trusts and local schools.

While it offers a range of courses aligned with some priority sectors, it does not provide degrees in Engineering, Manufacturing, or Construction where the county sees demand for skills. Nevertheless, the University graduates over 1,000 health professionals and more than 500 teachers annually, many of whom are quickly employed within Worcestershire and neighbouring areas. Its health and education programmes including Medicine, Nursing, Midwifery, Paramedic Science, Physiotherapy, Occupational Therapy, Social Work, and PGCE are designed to equip students with the practical skills needed for employment success. The University's new School of Medicine will also support to impact the local health sector, feeding qualified students into Worcestershire's local NHS to meet the needs of the sector.

Although local further education colleges offer degree-level courses in Engineering and other subjects, capacity is limited, and many choose to study outside the county. While most graduates from local institutions remain in the region, fewer than half of Worcestershire residents who leave for higher education return after completing their studies.

### **3. Department for Education – Skills Bootcamps – led by Worcestershire LEP**

Skills Bootcamps are flexible, employer-led training programmes designed to help adults aged 19 and over gain in-demand skills that lead to employment or career progression. Delivered flexibly in up to 16 weeks, they are free to unemployed learners and at small cost to those in employment. Bootcamps are tailored to meet local labour market needs. Developed in partnership with employers, Skills Bootcamps in Worcestershire focus on priority sectors such as digital, construction, engineering, green skills, health and social care, leadership and most recently based on employer feedback Early years work. They support unemployed individuals into work offering guaranteed interviews and help those already in employment to upskill and advance. By aligning training with real job opportunities, Skills Bootcamps are playing a vital role in addressing skills gaps and strengthening the workforce. Worcestershire last year delivered to 365 residents and is on track in 2025/26 to deliver 500 residents.

## **Health and Disability Programmes**

### **1. Employment Advisors in NHS Talking Therapies**

Employment Advisors within NHS Talking Therapies play a key role in supporting individuals with common mental health conditions by helping them overcome employment-related challenges. Working alongside therapists, they provide tailored, practical support to help people find work, stay in work, or return to work after periods of absence. This includes assistance with job searching, CV writing, interview preparation, workplace adjustments, and managing stress at work. Their integrated approach helps improve mental health outcomes by addressing the link between employment and wellbeing, making it easier for individuals to achieve both therapeutic and vocational goals. The Talking Therapies programme over the last 12 months saw around 1140 residents, supporting them to remain in or return to work.

### **2. Intensive Personalised Employment Support – Mental Health, and Drugs and Alcohol**

Individual Placement and Support (IPS) is a proven employment support model designed to help people with severe mental health conditions, and those with drugs and/or alcohol addiction find and sustain paid work. Delivered through NHS secondary health mental health services and Cranston Drugs and Alcohol Rehabilitation programmes, IPS integrates employment specialists into clinical teams to provide personalised, rapid job search support based on the individual's preferences. The service focuses on competitive employment, offers ongoing support to both the employee and employer to enable sustained employment outcomes. IPS has demonstrated strong outcomes in improving employment rates, mental health recovery, and reducing hospital admissions across Worcestershire. The current programme aims to support around 700 residents across this financial year.

### **3. DWP Workwell Vanguard**

A joint NHS and DWP initiative supporting individuals at risk of leaving work due to ill health introduced across Worcestershire in October 2024 offering coaching and access to wider health and wellbeing services to participants. Over 400 individuals have been seen to date through the wider programme.

### **4. Connect to Work**

Connect to Work is a voluntary employment support programme funded by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), launching in Worcestershire in October 2025. Over the course of the programme, which runs until 2030, it aims to support around 2,000 residents who face significant barriers to employment—including those with disabilities, health conditions, or challenges such as homelessness, caring responsibilities, being a veteran, or a care leaver. The programme is delivered through a collaborative model involving Worcestershire County Council's internal team, the NHS, employment providers, and voluntary and community sector organisations. It is underpinned by a high-fidelity Supported Employment approach, drawing on both the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model and the Supported Employment Quality Framework (SEQF). This “place, train, and maintain” methodology integrates work, health, and skills support, offering tailored vocational profiling, job matching, employer engagement, and ongoing in-work support. Worcestershire County Council has led the development of the service, with consultation from DWP and the NHS informing the programme design.

### **5. Pathways to Work**

Pathways to Work is a major reform initiative led by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), aimed at reshaping the UK's health and disability benefits system and employment support. The programme focuses on reducing long-term economic inactivity by providing tailored, proactive support to help individuals with health conditions or disabilities on certain benefits to move into meaningful employment. It introduces streamlined processes, raises expectations for engagement with employment services, and invests in personalised, one-to-one support that integrates health, skills, and job services within Jobcentre Plus teams. In Worcestershire, the rollout of this initiative aims to deliver a premium service for claimants, shifting the focus toward individuals' capabilities and potential, rather than limitations caused by health conditions.

## **6. Workwell Live Better – Public Health**

“Work Well Live Better” is Worcestershire’s county-wide workplace health initiative, commissioned by Worcestershire County Council Public Health. It aims to enhance physical and mental wellbeing by supporting businesses to create healthier, more productive workplaces through a preventative approach. Since its launch, 235 businesses have joined the network, gaining access to virtual sessions, networking events, and expert-led showcases. The initiative focuses on reducing health inequalities by targeting workplaces with greater needs.

Overall, “Work Well Live Better” is positioned as a strategic tool to improve workforce wellbeing, retention, and productivity across Worcestershire.

## **Employment Support Programmes**

### **1. Restart**

The Restart Scheme, run by Seetec Pluss is a large-scale employment support programme launched by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in June 2021 as part of the government’s Plan for Jobs. It is designed to help long-term unemployed individuals particularly those claiming Universal Credit re-enter the workforce by offering up to 12 months of intensive, tailored support. Seetec are a key part of the provider local landscape, having embedded themselves into the geography and worked to bring relationships and greater levels of holistic support including wellbeing into the programme. Over the last 12 month they have worked with 1545 clients and supported 593 into work.

### **2. Sector Based Work Academy Programmes**

Sector-Based Work Academy Programmes (SWAPs) are short, targeted training schemes designed to help unemployed individuals gain the skills and experience needed to enter specific industries. SWAPs typically last up to six weeks and include pre-employment training, and a guaranteed job interview. Programmes are developed in partnership with local colleges and training providers aligned to employer need driven by real job opportunities. Worcestershire has seen success in SWAPs were aligned to new store openings or growth in industries, but based on the county’s base of SME’s, they often struggle to gain traction with employers and recruitment has been challenging.

### **3. National Careers Service**

The National Careers Service provides valuable support to residents in exploring their next career steps, whether they are unemployed or in work. It offers guidance on education, skills development, and future employment opportunities. However, engagement across Worcestershire has historically been limited, with challenges reported around reaching the intended audience. Factors such as recruitment difficulties, the county's rural geography, and low public awareness due to limited marketing have contributed to this. Worcestershire currently receives 6.8% of the total allocation within the West Midlands contract, equating to around 1,400 sessions annually. While these targets are under exceeded locally, delivery across the wider West Midlands conurbation tends to exceed expectations.

### **4. Careers Worcestershire and DWP Youth Hubs**

DWP Youth Hubs and Careers Worcestershire work in tandem to support young people aged 16–24 across the county in overcoming barriers to employment. Located in Worcester, Redditch, and Kidderminster, the DWP Youth Hubs are a collaborative effort between DWP, Worcestershire County Council, and the local further education colleges NCG Group Kidderminster College and Heart of Worcestershire College's Peakman Campus in Redditch. The hubs offer physical spaces and combine DWP benefit conversations with employment specialist support targeting support for young people to enter or return to the workplace. Over the past year, 638 young people have been supported through the hubs, with 260 progressing into employment. Building on this foundation, Careers Worcestershire serves as the county-wide community-based offer of the Youth Hub model, providing holistic support that integrates health, housing, education, and employability services. Funded through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and delivered in partnership with all six district councils and a range of education, employability, and voluntary sector partners, Careers Worcestershire engaged over 1,000 young people last year, helping 350 into employment.

### **5. Worcestershire Apprenticeships**

Worcestershire Apprenticeships role in employment support is to offer 1:1 support to residents to understand and apply for apprenticeship opportunities in the county whilst working with employers to open up apprenticeship employment vacancies. Over the last 12 months Worcestershire County Council has funded a bursary to support over 200 residents with initial apprenticeship costs. This programme is supported by the Worcestershire Training Providers Association and works in collaboration with around 30 different organisations from Further and Higher Education locally to Independent Training Providers delivering apprenticeships.

## Overview of Employment Programme Capacity in Worcestershire for 2025/26

<b>Programme</b>	<b>25/26 Expected participant numbers</b>	<b>Age Groups</b>	<b>Approximate Cohort sizes at any point in time</b>	<b>Employment Status</b>	<b>Target Groups</b>
National Careers Service	1500	16- 65 year olds	365000	Unemployed and Employed	Any resident of working age
Restart	2751	19-65 year olds	11145	Unemployed	Any resident
IPS Mental Health	683	19-65 year olds	5285	Unemployed/ Employed	Those in secondary health services
IPS Drugs and Alcohol	40	19-65 year olds	400	Unemployed/ Employed	In Secondary Mental Health Services
Work Well	1650	19- 65 year olds	10000	Unemployed/ Employed	Health conditions affecting work
Connect to Work	75	18-65 year olds	22600	Unemployed/ Employed	Health Conditions and Disabilities
Youth Hubs	600	16-24 year olds	35000	Unemployed/ In Education	Young People
Careers Worcestershire	600	16-24 year olds	35000	Unemployed/ In Education	Young People

# Where are the Gaps in Provision?

Worcestershire has a good mix of provision and providers with the capabilities of delivery but there are gaps in provision that if available would improve the employment rates in Worcestershire.

## Support for Residents

**Re-engagement Provision for Young people aged 16-19** – A key challenge in Worcestershire is the limited provision available for young people who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET). Many short-term education programmes that could support re-engagement are currently unaffordable under existing funding streams and a new strategy is required.

Additionally, there is a need for more flexible, relationship-based approaches that move beyond traditional education models and instead focus on gradually building trust, confidence, and positive behaviours to help young people reconnect with mainstream opportunities. From bedroom dwellers to non-attenders support is needed. Without targeted support, these individuals risk becoming part of the county's future economically inactive population. Since the loss of European Social Fund (ESF) funding, which previously supported such provision, there has been a noticeable gap in services tailored to this group.

**More Localised and Contextualised Support** – Evidence shows that Worcestershire has pockets of disadvantage challenges, inactivity and unemployment across different wards, programmes that enable different local approaches, from the use of voluntary and community sector providers to support local residents using their expertise such as veteran charities, homeless community providers etc helping residents to move closer to or into the labour market would support Worcestershire to address some of these in a constructive way alongside other larger scale programmes.

**Adult Skills at Level 2 and 3** – Whilst Worcestershire benefits from programmes delivered through its Further Education landscape and existing employability schemes, there remains a clear need to address the skills levels of residents with low or no formal qualifications. For many, qualifications at Level 3 and above can feel out of reach and are often not required for the types of roles they aspire to. There is potential to explore a model similar to Skills Bootcamps, delivered during the day and designed at a lower level—offering greater flexibility in funding, supporting smaller cohort sizes, and better aligning with employer needs. This should also include consideration of alternative funding approaches to ensure accessibility and sustainability.

**Self-Employment Support** – Many residents in Worcestershire aspire to start small scale businesses but often lack the confidence and feel that traditional business support programmes aren't designed with their needs in mind, particularly those with inclusive or additional support requirements. There is a clear opportunity to develop a tailored service that works in partnership with DWP and the benefits system, enabling individuals to explore, launch, and grow their business ideas while maintaining the security of Universal Credit. Such a service would provide practical guidance, reassurance, and a pathway to sustainable self-employment for those who might otherwise be excluded.

**Support for Young People (16–24)** – Worcestershire currently benefits from UK Shared Prosperity funding, which helps match DWP's contribution to the Youth Hub initiative. However, this support is at risk beyond April 2026 due to the absence of confirmed future funding. Given the positive impact Youth Hubs are already having in the districts where they are active, Worcestershire aims to expand this model to every district. Yet, without sustained investment, delivery may be scaled back, potentially increasing youth unemployment and the number of young people not in education, employment, or training (NEET). While national discussions around a Youth Guarantee are ongoing, they may come too late for areas like Worcestershire, where immediate action is needed to maintain momentum and outcomes.

**All-Age Careers Services** – Worcestershire currently delivers early careers support through the Careers and Enterprise Company, but schools continue to face challenges in meeting Gatsby Benchmarks, particularly around personalised careers advice. Limited resources often lead to group-based approaches that don't meet the needs of all students. Additionally, keeping careers advisors up to date with Labour Market Information and evolving education pathways is difficult across a wide geographic area. The county is also served by the National Careers Service, which struggles to provide the depth of support required, facing challenges in reaching residents and effectively promoting its offer. Worcestershire would benefit from trialling a new, centralised careers service model—supporting individuals from age 12 through to 65. This would provide tailored guidance at key transition points, including education choices, post-16 and post-18 pathways, entry into employment, upskilling, reskilling, redundancy support, and career changes later in life. This single, centralised careers service would offer significant benefits to residents by providing a consistent point of access—regardless of their age or stage in life. It would simplify navigation through education and employment pathways, ensure careers advisors are well-informed and up to date with labour market trends, and improve understanding of available education and training options. A unified marketing approach would also help drive engagement and ensure that demand is met effectively across the county.

**Work Experience and Volunteering Placement Schemes** – Individuals who have never worked especially those facing disadvantage or with inclusive needs can gain significant value from work experience and volunteering placements. These opportunities help build confidence, skills, and pathways into employment. However, accessing such placements can be challenging, both in identifying suitable roles and managing the financial implications for participants and host organisations.

Worcestershire has a proud tradition of volunteering. Many voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations rely on volunteers to deliver vital services and support residents. The County Council alone engages around 1,100 volunteers across a wide range of service areas. A 2024 desktop mapping exercise by the Worcestershire VCSE Alliance identified 2,717 organisations within the county's VCSE landscape, highlighting the substantial number of residents actively involved in governance and service delivery.

Given that most businesses in Worcestershire are small, the volume of placement requests can be overwhelming, potentially discouraging employer participation and placing strain on their resources. To address this, Worcestershire would welcome enhancements to existing schemes such as the Education Business Partnership model, or the development of a new offer introducing incentives for both individuals and businesses to engage and widen support to all age ranges that require opportunities. This would help create a more inclusive and sustainable model of support for the county.

To further strengthen access, Worcestershire is preparing to launch a Volunteer Portal by 2025/26. This online platform will serve as a central hub for organisations to advertise volunteering opportunities and for residents to find roles that match their interests and skills. Effective marketing and promotion will be key to ensuring its success and impact.

**Community Support** – Social Prescribing Focused on Employment – In Worcestershire, employment support is generally effective for individuals who are proactive and motivated. However, young people, those with inclusive needs, and individuals facing disadvantage often struggle with low self-belief, which can prevent them from engaging with mainstream services. Programmes like Building Better Opportunities have previously provided personalised support to help these individuals move closer to the labour market, bridging the gap between community disengagement and formal provision. Social prescribing through primary care offers a similar person-centred approach, but greater emphasis is needed on improving residents' economic circumstances and join up of services. Worcestershire would benefit from renewed investment and emphasis in outreach-led schemes that actively identify economically inactive individuals, engage them in meaningful conversations about their personal situations, and empower them to take steps toward improving their economic future.

## **Support for Business**

Worcestershire has a fantastic array of organisations supporting business, offering grants and services to support business growth such as the Worcestershire Growth Hub, County Council Economic Development team and Herefordshire and Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce, but typically these schemes are not focused on employment and skills where there are significant gaps in provision:

**Boosting Skills in Worcestershire** – Over the past two years, Worcestershire has partnered with its district councils to deliver a highly successful skills initiative using UK Shared Prosperity Funding. This programme offered 50% grant contributions to businesses investing in workforce training. In 2024/25 alone, it supported over £1.2 million worth of training, benefitting 1,500 residents and around 400 businesses, making it one of the most impactful business interventions the county has seen over a 12-month period.

In the first three months of 2025/26, the scheme has already guaranteed over £0.5 million in training investment, continuing to drive forward workforce development and spark valuable conversations around recruitment and skills needs. However, with UKSPF funding at risk, the future of this programme is uncertain. Worcestershire urges Government to consider alternatives including using the Growth and Skills Levy to bridge this gap. By allowing similar flexibility on the skills side, businesses could invest in training that directly aligns with their workforce plans.

Worcestershire also proposes that a percentage of a business's Levy be allocated to developing 3–5-year workforce plan made publicly available to guide strategic investment for skills providers. This would ensure funding is used proactively to meet future skills needs, rather than reactively and help to aid the understanding of skills needs within a geography.

**Business Support for Enhancing People Practices** – Worcestershire recognises that many SMEs lack the capacity to focus on improving employment practices, which in turn affects the success of employment programmes and overall economic productivity. A lack of understanding and implementation of inclusive recruitment, effective induction, and strong management practices is holding back progress.

To address this, SMEs would benefit from increased access to grant funding and centrally developed resources. The creation of practical toolkits and policy templates covering areas such as absence management, performance management, induction, and recruitment would support small employers in embedding key people practices.

This kind of support would help drive the cultural change needed to align with the Government's ambition to bring inactive residents back into the workforce, ensuring that businesses are equipped to create inclusive and supportive working environments.

## Support for Education

**Addressing Gaps in Vocational Education in Worcestershire** - One of the most significant challenges in Worcestershire is the ability to respond to the evolving vocational education landscape, whether through capital investment in facilities and equipment or through curriculum development aligned with employer needs.

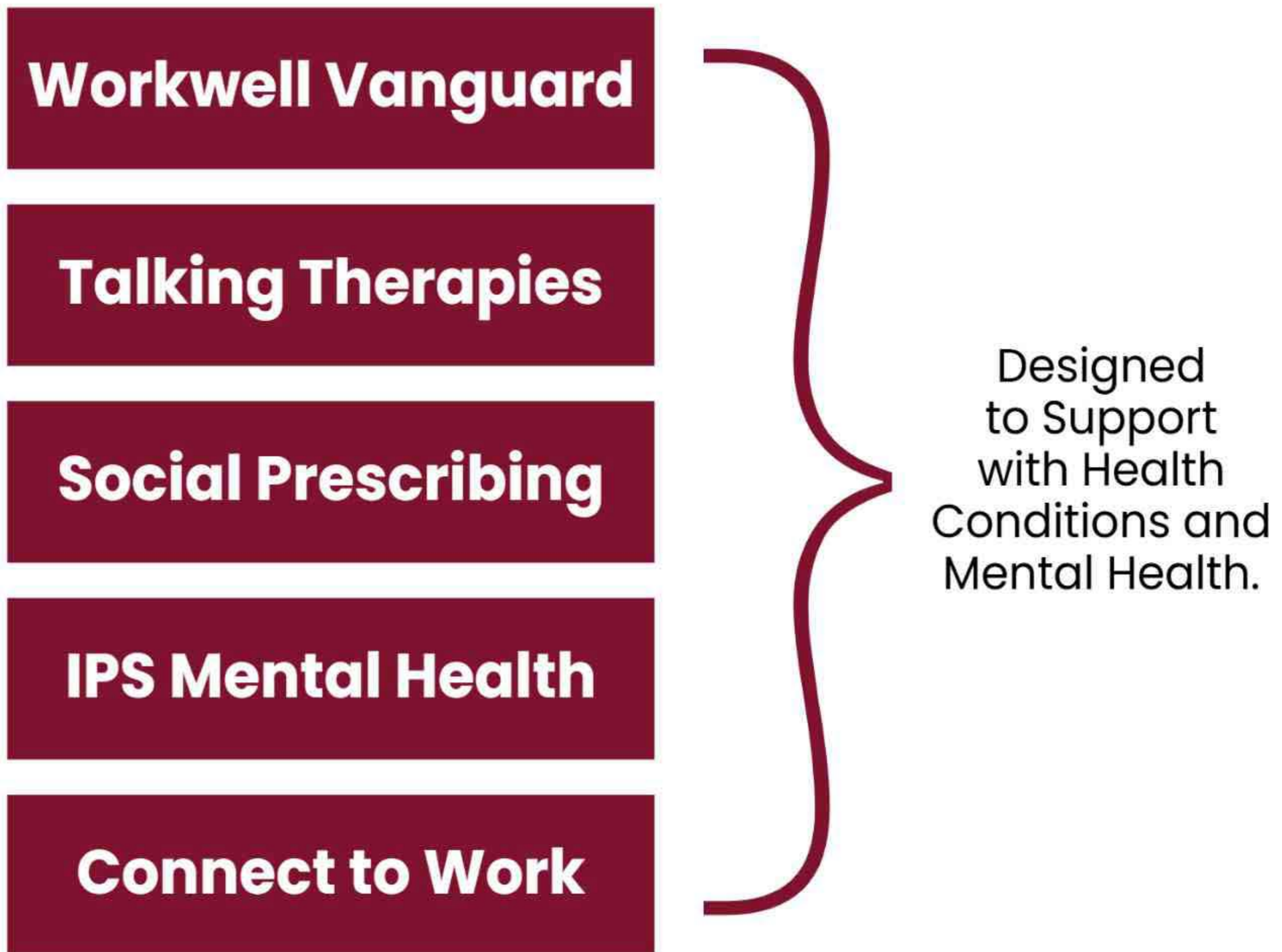
While national programmes, such as the recent Construction Excellence Colleges, are well-defined, areas like Worcestershire often struggle to compete as lead bidders. This is largely due to programme expectations around scale and volume, which are difficult to meet in a geography like Worcestershire. As a result, Worcestershire is frequently overlooked, despite having clear and pressing local demand.

To effectively serve its employers, Worcestershire's independent training providers, further education colleges, and higher education institutions must be empowered to invest in capital infrastructure. The county needs greater flexibility to direct funding toward educational capital, enhancing facilities, updating curriculum, and creating the physical space required to meet current and future skills needs.

A recent example highlights this issue: two independent training providers sought to expand its facilities to support ICT and engineering training. However, due to a lack of available funding, the expansion could only proceed on a small scale limiting the potential impact and holding back Worcestershire's progress.

However, many gaps in service are systemic in nature that impact the ability of Worcestershire to deliver better outcomes from the current programme mix but the most prevalent is **Funding Levels**. Worcestershire faces a significant challenge in the scale of employment support provision available. For example, while the Connect to Work programme will support around 2,000 residents, current estimates suggest that over 50,000 people in the county could meet the eligibility criteria. This gap highlights the need for greater investment in high-intensity, personalised support. Additionally, funding formulas often result in a lower per resident allocation for Worcestershire, without fully accounting for the county's unique mix of rural and urban communities and the concentrated pockets of unemployment that require more resource-intensive interventions. National programmes also come with complex rules and compliance requirements, such as quality assurance frameworks, that demand specialist roles. These roles are essential regardless of whether a programme supports 50 or 1,000 participants, creating challenges in achieving economies of scale and placing further strain on local delivery capacity.

## The Confusing Landscape – Example of Mental Health Support



### **Worcestershire residents experience of finding support and services**

Most services in Worcestershire are typically accessed through the following touchpoints

- Job Centre Plus offices
- Primary Care – GP Surgeries
- Community level organisations – VCS and Libraries
- Schools and Education settings
- Local Authorities
- Multiple Marketing strands

The current landscape is not only complex, but also deeply layered and often difficult to navigate. Programme eligibility criteria and operational rules add to this complexity, making it challenging for even experienced employability professionals and DWP Work Coaches to fully grasp, let alone for residents seeking support.

To address this, Worcestershire is developing a “no wrong door” approach, supported by a triage model that ensures individuals are either directly assisted or smoothly referred to the most appropriate service.

This does not mean a single-entry system is the only solution. Multiple access points are both necessary and valuable, reflecting the varied needs and priorities across the system. However, it is vital that organisations engaging with residents take ownership of guiding them toward the right support whether by delivering it themselves or referring them on. This commitment to helping every resident find their path should be embedded through both commissioning arrangements and programme design.

Despite this ambition, significant challenges persist. Many organisations continue to operate in fragmented, duplicated, competitive, and siloed ways, which undermines collaboration and shared understanding.

Nonetheless, Worcestershire recognises the need for systemic change and is working closely with DWP, the ICB, and other local partners to assess new programmes entering the area and co-design a more centralised, coordinated model of support.

**Tools designed to help** – Worcestershire County Council has developed the Community Services Directory Community Services Directory to help residents access support more easily. However, further work is needed to ensure all relevant services are consistently captured and updated within the tool. In parallel, the NHS uses the Joy App The Joy App for social prescribing and the Workwell programme, due to its ability to integrate effectively at the primary care level.

While both platforms serve important functions, having two separate systems can create confusion for frontline staff and service providers regarding which tool to update. As part of the broader effort to integrate services, Worcestershire should explore opportunities to streamline these systems and assess whether economies of scale or improved interoperability could be achieved.



# Systematic Changes

To help Worcestershire transition toward a more effective employment and skills system, it is important to address a number of current systemic challenges. These issues stem from both national policy constraints and local structural factors, and can be summarised as follows:

## **1. Understanding of the needs of employers within the county and the effective communication of these to the wider system**

While recent programmes have made some progress in identifying employer needs, current mechanisms fall short of driving meaningful, timely change. They lack the depth required to embed a forward-looking understanding of employment demand and evolving skills needs across the county.

Since its launch, Worcestershire's Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) has engaged with around 500 employers, a small fraction of the county's 26,000 businesses, which is not sufficient to build a truly representative picture.

Insights from the Growth Hub and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund's 'Skills Boost' programme highlight a broader issue: workforce and business planning are not priorities for many local employers. A Skills Needs Analysis conducted with 300 businesses between April 2024 and March 2025 revealed that:

- 15% had no business plan,
- 39% lacked a workforce development plan, and
- 27% had no succession plan in place.

These gaps present a significant barrier to building a resilient, future-ready workforce in Worcestershire

## **2. Multiple entry points to services**

The current skills marketplace can be confusing for employers seeking guidance on upskilling, recruitment, and apprenticeships, and for residents looking to improve their employment prospects or re-enter the workforce. It is populated by a wide range of providers, including further education institutions, apprenticeship and employment support services, and government-commissioned organisations.

While this diversity brings valuable expertise and solutions to the county, it also creates complexity. No employer or resident should encounter a 'wrong door' when seeking support, yet many do, and some find no viable support at all. A more coordinated and accessible system is essential to ensure that everyone can navigate the landscape effectively and receive the help they need.

### **3. Funding cuts to Adult Skills Budget in Non-Devolved Areas**

In 2024/25, Worcestershire faced reductions in Adult Skills Funding allocations, impacting provider budgets across the county. This comes on top of an already disproportionate funding landscape, where neighbouring local authorities – Warwickshire, Herefordshire, and Gloucestershire, receive a significantly higher allocation per capita, without clear justification. (Warwickshire – 496'000 Over 19s , £3.35 per resident, Herefordshire – Over 19s , 156'490 £2.93 per resident, Gloucestershire – 528'872 Over 19s , £5.41 per resident). Worcestershire is currently £1.54 per resident with 494,000 Over 19s. Despite ongoing dialogue with local DfE teams, Worcestershire has had limited influence over this imbalance, which continues to hinder progress in raising local skill levels. This situation must change.

Compounding this challenge is the county's qualifications marketplace, which is shaped by the behaviour of Further Education providers, often driven by other external policies such as the Apprenticeship Levy . Since 2020, many have prioritised 16–19 funding streams and upskilling through apprenticeships which offers greater financial stability and growth opportunities. This shift, while understandable given budget pressures and the lack of long-term strategic funding, has left adult learners and skills development under supported, not through local fault, but as a consequence of national funding structures.

### **4. A short-term approach to funding**

Following the end of European Social Funding and the UK's departure from the EU, the UK Shared Prosperity Fund has become a crucial source of support for Worcestershire. Delivered through its district councils, the fund has enabled a range of Skills and Employment initiatives for both businesses and residents. These have included programmes targeting 16–24-year-olds, apprenticeships, support for economically inactive individuals, NEET interventions, and employer-focused skills grants.

However, managing short-term, one-year funding cycles has posed significant challenges. The fragmented nature of the county's skills landscape has complicated communication efforts, created a postcode lottery in provision, and made it difficult to retain experienced programme staff. This is further exacerbated by the ongoing demands of reporting, contract renegotiation, and the time-intensive nature of delivery.

## **5. Inflexibility of Funding**

As a non-devolved area, Worcestershire adheres to national programme rules, but greater flexibility is needed to tailor these programmes to local needs. While many initiatives are promoted as offering local discretion, in practice they often become rigid due to funding constraints.

A recent example is the 'Connect to Work' programme, which was initially welcomed for its promise of local design and flexibility. However, the reality has been a highly structured model of employment support with limited room to adapt funding or delivery to local circumstances.

Compounding the inflexibility at the programme level is the rigid capital investment approach from the Department for Education, which continues to prioritise funding for public infrastructure such as Further Education colleges. This narrow focus does not reflect the broader landscape in counties like Worcestershire, where a more flexible, locally driven capital funding model is needed to support the expansion of provision in apprenticeships, Skills Bootcamps, Higher Technical Qualifications, and other pathways that address the county's evolving skills needs.

To truly meet the needs of individuals and communities across Worcestershire, national programmes must allow for meaningful local discretion – enabling targeted responses to geographic and demographic challenges across both capital and revenue streams.

## **6. Funding calculations**

Worcestershire is often perceived as a highly affluent area with relatively low employment need. However, this masks significant challenges, including high levels of economic inactivity driven by health-related issues, which require targeted attention. This misperception affects funding allocations, which are frequently lower than expected and do not reflect the true scale of local need.

Funding streams such as the Adult Skills Budget and Connect to Work come with extensive assurance requirements – from Ofsted inspections to Supported Employment Fidelity Frameworks – that demand internal audits and monitoring. These compliance obligations consume valuable resources and are often disproportionate to the scale of activity being delivered. The result is reduced funding available for frontline services, ultimately impacting the outcomes for residents and employers.

While larger allocations and broader geographies can benefit from economies of scale, Worcestershire's smaller footprint means these assurance burdens have a greater relative impact, stretching limited resources even further.

An example of this would be in Connect to Work, where Worcestershire has an 18% inactivity rate, a £3800 per head available funds, peak flows of 800 and a total programme worth £7.4M, whereas Neighbouring county of Gloucestershire has a similar working age population, 17.5% inactivity, a £3900 per head available funds, peak flows of 1000 and a programme worth around £11.1M.

## 7. The Apprenticeship Levy and Standards in Worcestershire

The introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy in Worcestershire continues to have a lasting impact. While it has successfully increased participation among those aged over 25 and driven a strong focus on upskilling, it has also unintentionally diverted attention from broader adult education provision. Providers and employers have increasingly opted for levy-funded apprenticeships as an alternative pathway, which has narrowed the scope of opportunities available to adults.

This shift has significantly altered age demographics within apprenticeship delivery. Currently, 20% of apprenticeships are undertaken by individuals over 25, whereas previously these opportunities were primarily accessed by those under 25. This change has contributed to rising youth unemployment and reduced pathways for young people entering the workforce.

Compounding this issue is the loss of Level 2 Intermediate Apprenticeship standards, which traditionally served as vital entry points into employment. The current policy direction appears misaligned with the original intent of apprenticeships – to provide accessible, foundational routes into work.

Many employers in Worcestershire report difficulties in understanding how to make full use of their apprenticeship levy, often citing complex processes and limited support. While Worcestershire has taken steps to address this locally, future funding uncertainties threaten the sustainability of these services. There is a clear need for simplification.

Worcestershire advocates for reform that places young people at the forefront and provides employers with a streamlined, accessible process. This would restore apprenticeships as a vital succession planning tool for businesses and a meaningful pathway into employment for young people. Without such change, Worcestershire is concerned that, without this necessary reform, youth unemployment will continue to rise at a local level.



## **8. Maintaining the changes**

Worcestershire recognises the need for ongoing reform in education and curriculum design. However, many of our providers are increasingly frustrated by the pace and nature of changes particularly when they appear to lack clear rationale or consideration of practical impact.

A recent example includes the adjustments to off-the-job training hours for apprenticeships, announced in May 2025 and then revised again in July, without transparent reasoning. These shifts have created unnecessary administrative burdens and confusion. Similarly, changes to some apprenticeship standards have previously been approved and introduced in September, after new apprentices have already enrolled and programmes have been agreed with employers. This has forced providers to backtrack, apologise, and manage the reputational consequences.

This is reflected in both the funding guidance and its timing, which often arrives too late. As a result, organisations are forced to revisit applications to confirm eligibility. Many reported having to retrospectively inform applicants whether their participation would incur costs.

Change can bring positive outcomes, but its effectiveness often depends on timing and the clarity provided at the point of introduction. Clear communication and thoughtful implementation are key to ensuring changes enhance efficiency rather than disrupt it.

## **9. Organisational Boundaries around information**

Individuals who are already known to services often have a history of engagement across health, employment, and skills support. Yet they are frequently asked to repeat their stories or omit valuable information that could lead to more effective, joined-up support. Barriers to this integration often stem from national policies around GDPR and data security, but also from the absence of shared systems and formal agreements between government organisations.

Improving the flow of insights and information would enable better service integration and a clearer understanding of local needs. While this is a complex challenge, it requires a more strategic and coordinated approach – both locally and nationally – to ensure support systems are designed around the real needs of residents.

## 10. Systems – Access to Work

Throughout this consultation, the government-led Access to Work scheme has consistently been highlighted as one of the most significant challenges within the system. It's clear that meaningful reform is needed to better support the employability of some of Worcestershire's most vulnerable residents.

While the most visible concern has been the extensive delays, often resulting in job offers being withdrawn, there are also deeper, less visible impacts. The process itself has been described as distressing, with the language used and the uncertainty caused by delays contributing to anxiety and, in some cases, negatively affecting individuals' mental health. These experiences underscore the urgent need for a more responsive, compassionate, and streamlined approach. One that should be a given, not something individuals have to ask for.

## 11. Reforms to DWP, ICBs and Local Government

At a time of significant organisational and policy change, it is vital that momentum around the employment and skills agenda is not lost. Local collaboration must remain focused on delivering for residents, regardless of shifts such as the formation of Integrated Care Boards or the emergence of new strategic authorities. These structural changes must not overshadow the continued need to support individuals into employment and develop their skills.

Worcestershire urges Government to ensure this agenda remains a national priority – with consistent focus and support – so that areas like ours can raise employment levels among the working-age population and continue to invest in adult skills development. While larger geographies may benefit from economies of scale, smaller areas like Worcestershire need tailored, sustained attention to deliver meaningful outcomes for their communities.



## **Our Ask – Systemic Changes – The Way Forward for Worcestershire**

To support Worcestershire in improving the effectiveness, responsiveness, and equity of Worcestershire’s employment and skills system in light of current national and local challenges, the following should be considered:

### **1. Strengthening Employer Engagement for Skills and Employment Programmes**

- Establish a single triage point for employers by securing and enhancing the capacity of the Worcestershire Growth Hub, enabling it to better support business needs related to skills and employment within the broader business support offer.
- Introduce a requirement for workforce development planning linked to the use of the Growth and Skills Levy, enabling a percentage of the levy to be released specifically to develop succession and upskilling plans tied to wider use.

### **2. Simplify access to services at commissioning level for employers and residents**

- Establish a unified access triage point for employers through capacity building the Worcestershire Growth Hub to tilt support towards assisting businesses skills and employment needs within the wider business support offer.
- Ensure that both local and national commissioning frameworks support a localised ‘front door’ model for residents around employment support programmes, providing clear entry and triage into the most appropriate employment support services and education partners.
- Use devolved funding to coordinate service delivery in employment and skills at a local level across partners i.e. DWP, ICB and Local Authorities and providers – to reduce duplication and confusion.
- Guarantee a no ‘wrong door’ experience, particularly for those with complex needs.
- Reform the Access to Work scheme—both in terms of user experience and operational capacity. Consider whether devolving funding allocations locally could enable a more tailored, effective approach that is better integrated within local systems.

### **3. Addressing Curriculum and Funding Inequities and short-term cycles in Worcestershire**

- Address fairer funding allocations in Worcestershire in Adult Skills
- Support non devolved areas through a localised settlement for employment and skills provision.
- Challenge the assumptions of affluence that mask real need, such as high economic inactivity due to health and adjust funding formulas to reflect actual demand and demographic pressures.
- Scale assurance requirements proportionately to programme size and geography or adjust funding to meet assurance requirements.

- Increase flexibility in programme design and enable greater tailoring in national programmes such as Connect to Work.
- Expand investment in skills capital and fund skills innovation to meet local needs of employers.
- Push for multi-year funding settlements to enable strategic planning and staff retention in the employment and skills piece.
- Develop a structured and unchangeable timeline for curriculum and funding reforms that allows for clear communication into a new academic year with adequate lead-in time, and, where appropriate, co-design with stakeholders to ensure changes are practical and minimise disruption.

#### **4. Rebalancing priorities – Increasing the focus on Adult Skills**

- Rebalance provider incentives and funding to ensure adult learners are not deprioritised over 16-19 funding, enabling both to evolve with local needs.
- Introduce long-term strategic funding to support adult skills development and incentivise employer participation beyond the Growth and Skills Levy.
- Consider what mechanisms can be put in place to access unspent Growth and Skills levy locally and nationally.
- Deliver national upskilling campaigns that clearly communicate the benefits for residents, building on and expanding reach of the “Skills for Life” initiative.
- Ensure that reforms to the Apprenticeship Levy maintain a strong focus on entry-level roles and support a more balanced approach to upskilling by expanding alternative qualification pathways. Employers should be encouraged to invest in training and development through a wider range of methods beyond the Levy, helping to diversify and strengthen workforce progression routes.



# Worcestershire's Short-Term Priorities for the Get Worcestershire Working Plan

Aligned with the Get Worcestershire Working Strategy, Worcestershire has established dedicated workstreams to deliver on the plan's objectives. The key priorities and associated workstreams are outlined below:

## 1. Youth Employment and Transitions

Focuses on supporting young people through education-to-work transitions and early career development.

### Aim

To support young people aged 16–24 in Worcestershire to successfully transition from education into sustained employment, productive careers, and positive life outcomes—particularly at key transition points and for those facing additional barriers.

### Approach

1. Deliver the UKSPF match-funded DWP Youth Hubs programme, while seeking future funding to sustain and expand successful models in preparation for the Youth Guarantee.
2. Provide enhanced transition support at post-16 and post-18 stages through:
  - i. The Careers and Enterprise Company programme in schools and colleges
  - ii. Expansion of the Worcestershire Apprenticeship Programme, including Supported Internships, T Levels, and FE/HE pathways.
3. Implement the Modern Work Experience programme by:
  - i. Piloting in 15 schools via the Careers and Enterprise Company.
  - ii. Partnering with Cornerstone Employers to develop employer encounter models.
  - iii. Launching a Talent and Skills Pledge to engage more employers.
4. Strengthen system partnerships through Worcestershire's NEET Strategy, focusing on young people with Special Educational Needs and those leaving care.

### Outputs

Performance metrics including:

- Number of young people engaged through Youth Hubs.
- Numbers entering and sustaining employment.
- Compliance with Provider Access Legislation in schools.
- Engagement in apprenticeships and other pathways.
- Gatsby Benchmark 5 & 6 compliance.
- Cornerstone employer interventions and pledge sign-ups.
- NEET tracking data, especially for vulnerable groups.

## Outcomes

- Reduction in youth unemployment and NEET levels across Worcestershire.
- Increased employment rates among 19-year-olds.
- Improved career readiness and aspiration among young people.
- Greater equity in access to employment and education for SEND and care-experienced youth.
- Enhanced long-term wellbeing and life chances for young people.

## Risks

- UKSPF funding ends in 2026, risking gaps in delivery and continuity.
- Rising demand for youth support may outpace available resources.
- Inconsistent employer engagement in work experience and apprenticeship programmes.
- Difficulty in tracking long-term outcomes without robust data systems.
- Potential increase in youth unemployment and public finance costs due to missed early interventions.

## 2. Employer and System Integration

Focuses on improving integration by embedding services within existing structures and improving coordination.

### Aim

To improve integration and coordination of employment and skills services across Worcestershire by embedding support within existing structures, enhancing access for residents and employers, and strengthening system-wide collaboration to deliver better outcomes and value for money.

### Approach

1. Embed the Jobs and Careers Service within DWP sites and other community locations by merging National Careers Service provision with Jobcentre Plus offices.
2. Enhance service visibility and reduce duplication by:
  - > Reviewing and improving the Worcestershire Growth Hub website.
  - > Upskilling Growth Hub Account Managers on employment and skills programmes.
  - > Collaborating with Worcestershire County Council and NHS to simplify access to community services via platforms like the Joy App and Community Services Directory.
3. Develop the Worcestershire Jobs site as a centralised platform for employers to promote vacancies and for stakeholders to support jobseekers.
4. Strengthen system partnerships across DWP, Local Authorities, and NHS through:
  - > Quarterly joint planning meetings.

- > Joint ownership of “Connecting Worcestershire – Health and Disability Network” events.
  - > Agreed protocols for collaborative commissioning and delivery.
5. Grow Social Value Movement in Worcestershire, improving the relevance of social value delivered for the region through contracting of DWP, NHS and Local Authorities.

## Outputs

Performance Metrics including:

- Increased number of residents accessing personalised employment support through embedded services.
- Improved digital platforms and referral pathways (e.g. Growth Hub, Worcestershire Jobs, Community Services Directory/Joy App).
- Analytical dashboards tracking:
  - Interventions and transitions into employment/education.
  - Site traffic, vacancy postings, and engagement on Worcestershire Jobs.
  - Referral success rates from community services.
- Shared performance and evaluation framework across system partners.
- Create Social Value Measures across system partners.

## Outcomes

- Easier access to tailored employment and skills services for residents and employers.
- Improved job matching, career progression, and business growth.
- Increased employment rates and median earnings across Worcestershire.
- More coordinated and efficient services, reducing duplication and gaps.
- Enhanced resident experience and improved health, employment, and wellbeing outcomes.

## Risks

- Funding uncertainty, particularly post-2026 when UKSPF ends, may disrupt service continuity i.e., Growth Hub services
- Limited marketing of digital platforms could confuse users if not well integrated. Variable engagement from employers and system partners may limit reach and impact.
- Capacity constraints within partner organisations could hinder delivery and collaboration.
- Lack of robust data systems may affect the ability to measure and demonstrate impact effectively.

### **3. Inclusive Employment and Health Integration**

Supporting the vision of the NHS to create “A dynamic workforce that drives a vibrant local economy, where everyone has access to meaningful employment, where health and wellbeing are prioritised, and residents with health conditions and disabilities are supported to thrive in employment.”

#### **Aim**

To create a more inclusive and health-aware employment system across Worcestershire by increasing employer engagement, supporting individuals with health conditions and disabilities, and embedding health-employment integration across services and communities.

#### **Approach**

1. Continue to deliver Inclusive Worcestershire Leaders across the county, seeking to grow the number of employers who meet the standard by 50 in 2025/26.
2. Increase the levels of Disability Confident Employers in Worcestershire working in collaboration with Department of Work and Pensions from 250 to 328 over 25/26.
3. Embed focus on supporting individuals with health conditions and disabilities through the geography and deliver the NHS Herefordshire and Worcestershire Health and Work Strategy.
4. Deliver the Workwell Vanguard for Worcestershire, securing future funding beyond April 2026 and increasing the number of employers engaged and reducing the dependence on fit notes.
5. Embed the new DWP Connect to Work programme into Worcestershire, supporting residents with health conditions and disabilities to access intensive personalised support.
6. Improve visibility and awareness of support from health services to employment services, working closely with the Neighbourhood health centres to ensure maximum integration within deprived communities.
7. Map and embed solutions to improve the transfer of information at the point of physical health and employment touchpoints where residents where support could be offered support i.e. (e.g. Fit Notes, DWP work coaches, National Careers Service Advisors etc.)
8. Collaborate with the NHS Integrated Care Board to implement the NHS 10-Year Plan on Employment and Good Health, while also driving a broader shift in thinking around the relationship between health and employment. This includes addressing the impact of health on residents' ability to work, as well as the role of health services on employment outcomes.

## Outputs

Performance Metrics to include:

- 50 new Inclusive Worcestershire Leaders and 78 new Disability Confident Employers.
- Delivery of Workwell Vanguard and Connect to Work programmes outputs across the county.
- Increased employer engagement in health and disability support initiatives.
- Improved integration of employment support within health settings.
- Development of shared protocols and data systems to support information transfer.
- Awareness campaigns and training delivered to health and employment professionals.

## Outcomes

- Increased employment opportunities and retention for individuals with health conditions and disabilities.
- Reduced dependency on fit notes and improved workplace health management.
- Greater employer confidence and capability in supporting inclusive workforces.
- Improved health and wellbeing outcomes for residents through integrated support.
- More inclusive and resilient local labour market.

## Risks

- Funding uncertainty beyond April 2026 for key programmes like Workwell Vanguard.
- Limited employer capacity or engagement, especially among SMEs.
- Fragmented service delivery without strong coordination across health and employment systems.
- Data sharing and privacy challenges in integrating health and employment records.
- Inconsistent awareness or uptake of support services in deprived communities.

## 4. Skills Development and Adult Learning

Targets upskilling and reskilling the adult population to meet economic needs.

### Aim

To strengthen Worcestershire's adult skills system by expanding access to high-quality training, aligning provision with employer needs, and supporting residents into sustainable employment and career progression.

### Approach

1. Adult Skills Offer – Launch “Think Skills Worcestershire” & work with colleges towards delivering a more comprehensive skills offer for adults
2. Continue to grow the DfE Skills Bootcamps programme and deliver successful outcomes into employment

3. Review and enhance the Sector-Based Work Academy Programme (SWAPs) to strengthen recruitment strategies and improve participant outcomes
4. Continue to embed the Local Skills Improvement Plan into Worcestershire and gain greater understanding of workforce needs
5. Develop the countywide Talent and Skills Pledge for Worcestershire

## **Outputs**

Performance Metrics to include:

- Increased number of adults participating in skills programmes, including Bootcamps and SWAPs.
- Expanded and diversified adult learning offer across colleges and providers.
- Employer sign-ups to the Talent and Skills Pledge.
- Improved participation of employers in taking up and contributing to the design of training provision to support the Local Skills Improvement Plan priorities.
- Performance metrics tracking resident skills levels in Worcestershire.

## **Outcomes**

- Increased employment and career progression for adult learners.
- Stronger alignment between workforce skills and employer needs.
- Enhanced productivity and economic resilience in key sectors.
- More inclusive access to lifelong learning opportunities.

## **Risks**

- Limited employer engagement in pledges and programme design.
- Funding constraints or changes to national programmes (e.g., Bootcamps, SWAPs).
- Mismatch between provision and local labour market needs if LSIP insights are not fully embedded.
- Low awareness or uptake of adult learning opportunities among residents.
- Capacity challenges within colleges and providers to scale delivery.

## **5. Strategic Infrastructure, Reform and Accessibility**

Focused on creating integrated systems and services that remove barriers to employment, respond to national policy changes, and ensure residents and employers can easily access the support they need.

### **Aim:**

To improve access to employment and volunteering opportunities across Worcestershire by addressing transport barriers, embedding national reforms, securing future funding, and enhancing integration between health, employment, and community services.

## Approach

1. Commence the Bus Service Improvement Plan and Worcestershire Enhanced Partnership Forum , gain greater understanding of the transport barriers to access workplaces across the county
2. HM Government Reforms – Deliver and support reforms from Government whilst continuing to consider agenda and impacts, embed into workstreams across partners i.e. Youth Employment Guarantee, Local Government Reforms, ICB Clustering, DWP Reforming of Jobcentres etc.
3. Seek Funding for 2026 and beyond, whilst creating new structures for partnership approach, improving integration into geography and reduce duplication, silos etc
4. Deliver Fit note Pilot across Primary Care in Worcestershire, designed to reduce reliance on fit notes and reduce the level of multiple fit notes across GP Practices.
5. Develop a countywide volunteer portal which will provide an online recruitment portal for organisations to advertise volunteering vacancies and for residents to seek opportunities.

## Outputs

- Launch of the Bus Service Improvement Plan and establishment of the Worcestershire Enhanced Partnership Forum for Passenger Transport.
- Delivery of reform-aligned workstreams including the Youth Employment Guarantee, Local Government Reforms, ICB Clustering, and DWP Jobcentre transformation.
- Development of new partnership structures to support post-2026 funding and reduce duplication.
- Implementation of the Fit Note Pilot across Primary Care to reduce reliance on repeat fit notes.
- Creation and launch of a countywide volunteer portal for residents and organisations.

## Outcomes

- Improved transport access to workplaces, reducing barriers for residents.
- Greater alignment with national reforms, ensuring Worcestershire remains responsive and future ready.
- More integrated service delivery, reducing silos and improving efficiency.
- Reduced dependence on fit notes, supporting better health and employment outcomes.
- Increased volunteering participation, enhancing community engagement and pathways into employment.

## Risks

- Funding uncertainty beyond 2026 may impact continuity of programmes and partnerships.
- Complexity of organisational reform agendas could lead to inconsistent implementation across partners.
- Limited uptake or awareness of new services such as the volunteer portal or transport initiatives.
- Resistance to change or lack of capacity within systems to embed new structures and reforms.



# Worcestershire's Long-Term Priorities for the Get Worcestershire Working Plan

The *Get Worcestershire Working* plan sets out a bold and forward-looking vision to tackle economic inactivity, improve employment outcomes, and build a resilient, inclusive labour market across the county. In line with HM Government's *Get Britain Working* guidance, this section outlines Worcestershire's long-term priorities, focusing on system transformation, strategic infrastructure, and inclusive growth.

These priorities are designed to address the structural challenges that prevent residents from accessing and sustaining good work over the next 10 years. They reflect a commitment to building holistic, integrated support systems that cut across health, education, employment, and community services. By embedding reform, improving accessibility, and strengthening employer engagement, Worcestershire aims to create a future-ready employment ecosystem that delivers value for money, supports disadvantaged groups, and drives productivity.

The plan also recognises the importance of local leadership, data driven decision-making, and collaborative delivery. It sets out a roadmap for aligning national reforms with local needs, securing future funding, and ensuring that employment and skills programmes are responsive, inclusive, and impactful.

While Worcestershire is committed to delivering on its strategic priorities, its capacity to do so is currently constrained by a challenging funding landscape. The Government's current focus on investing in devolved or combined authorities presents limitations for areas like Worcestershire. Without a shift in national policy, these constraints may persist, potentially increasing local challenges over time.

With continued collaboration and alignment with national government, Worcestershire is well-positioned to turn these long-term priorities into a foundation for a thriving local economy, where every resident can access meaningful employment, develop their skills, and actively contribute to the county's growth and prosperity.



## **1. Focus on the creation of Holistic and Integrated Support Systems – Strategy**

- Develop Front Door access points for residents and employers around employment support that builds strength-based assessments of residents and supports businesses to access appropriate support.
- Cut through system – Work towards building a holistic view of a person, identifying support needs and services accessible and accessed using information from all service partners.
- Gain a better understanding of system interactivity and explore solutions, recognise how challenges in related systems contribute to employment difficulties i.e. Delays to services and impact on economic productivity.
- Use devolved funding to coordinate service delivery across system partners – Minimise duplication and deliver value for money through commissioning across organisations.

## **2. Drive efficiencies in practice through Standardisation and System changes – Operation**

- Reduce the variety of processes across the county to standardise triage across commissioned programmes and in certain workstreams.
- Use system data across partners to better inform service needs.
- Build collective solutions to improve outcomes around employer. engagement, service directories, careers support etc.
- Expand the reach of the Connecting Worcestershire forums to include health community support such as Social Prescribers and the new Family Hub initiatives in Worcestershire.

## **3. Build greater employer engagement and workforce development**

- Deepen levels of Employer Engagement in Skills Programmes – Explore Worcestershire Growth Hub and create an Employer Skills Hub.
- Improve long-term Workforce Planning in Worcestershire.
- Ensure the Local Skills Improvement Plan creates improved understanding of local skills needs from employers.
- Tilt current Inclusive programmes to create Employer charter around Fair work and raise skills and productivity levels.
- Ensure the Growth and Skills Levy is maximised in Worcestershire.
- Continue to drive Apprenticeship Growth within the county's employers.

## **4. Continue to drive the quality of Careers and Employment support to young people**

- Increase the focus and embed programmes to reduce NEETs and Youth unemployment in Worcestershire.
- Careers Advice – Improve quality and quantity of advice across the system

assuring the Worcestershire dynamic.

- Continue to commit to delivery of the Careers and Enterprise Company Programme, improve quality of delivery across the county around LMI and Careers advice.

## **5. Develop an Inclusive Economy and specific tailored approaches to Employment and Skills**

- Create an Inclusive Economy – Healthy and inclusive businesses where economic policy lowers inactivity.
- Focus on Localities, identify areas of disadvantage and create innovative solutions to locality-specific challenges.
- Focus on disadvantaged groups and understanding the needs and demand around employability support i.e. refugees, lone parents, residents on release from prison etc.
- Create a no wrong door culture across employment support programmes in Worcestershire.
- Continue to focus on inactivity and delivery of key initiatives.

## **6. Strengthen levels of skills within our Adult population**

- Focus on Over 50s and reskilling for employed and unemployed.
- Develop Adult Skills offer within county.
- Support HE/FE Colleges and Independent Providers to develop provision. through capital/revenue funding to meet local skills needs and lobby government for devolved allocations of capital to be allocated to meet skills gaps on local level.

## **7. Seek funding opportunities for Worcestershire to grow its skills and employment offer**

- Seek Funding to deliver against challenges faced in Worcestershire.
- Working with Skills England, looking for opportunities to develop key sectors within Worcestershire.
- Maximise the use of Skills and Growth Levy in Worcestershire.

## **8. Create understanding of the impact of good employment on Health of residents**

- Improve system partners understanding of the Health contribution on Economic Development and the need for services and enable action to be taken where health drivers impact.
- Collaborate with wider health-based stakeholders around the role of employment on health i.e. Primary Care Networks , GPs etc.
- Review the impact of the healthcare system and its processes and how they affect workplace absence and economic activity to consider whether prioritisation should consider employment status.

- Create resident-based campaigns across partners around the impact of good employment on health.
- Ensure Worcestershire workplaces are health promoting environments and that people are supported with health conditions and disabilities.

## **9. Lobby Government for Change in systems and decisions**

- Seek reform to Access to work, a broken system that could be done more effectively at local levels than on a national basis
- Address fairer funding allocations in Worcestershire within adult skills, careers and employment support programmes
- Request non devolved areas to be allocated localised settlements for employment and skills activity to move forward Get Worcestershire working
- Lobby for greater flexibility within national programmes to bring local tailoring to meet needs i.e. Connect to Work



# Governance of Get Worcestershire Working

Oversight of the Get Worcestershire Working Plan will be provided by the Worcestershire Employment and Skills Board, which has been reshaped to meet the needs of the plan. This multi-agency board includes:

- Local Authority Leadership: Assistant Directors for Economy and Communities, and the Head of Skills and Employability (plan lead).
- ICB/Health Sector: Executive Director from NHS Herefordshire and Worcestershire ICB.
- DWP – DWP District Partnership Manager
- DfE – Department for Education representatives.
- Education Sector: Principals from FE colleges, a secondary school representing Worcestershire Head teachers, and a university director from local HE sector.
- Business and Employer Representation: Chamber of Commerce, LSIP Manager, and six local employers.
- Employability Providers – The Sector will nominate a representative bi- annually to serve a term on the board.
- Voluntary and Community Sector: Directors from youth and adult VCS organisations.

This board will maintain strategic oversight, ensure alignment with future initiatives, and monitor outcomes and progress against shared evaluation and monitoring framework.

The board's membership will be reviewed annually to ensure it meets the strategic alignment and direction of the plan needed to create the successful governance of Get Worcestershire Working.

## Designing the plan – Consulting on Get Worcestershire Working

Worcestershire has a strong track record of collaborative working and developing employment and skills strategies tailored to local needs. This includes joint efforts in producing the Local Skills Report (2021/22) and the Local Skills Improvement Plan (2022). The County also facilitates a range of partnerships that bring together training and employability providers to strengthen their delivery, enhance programme effectiveness, and improve outcomes across both national and local initiatives.

To support this collaborative approach, extensive engagement has taken place across sectors, including:

### Pre-development activities:

- Initial sessions held as part of the Employment and Skills Board to set a structure to consult upon.
- Followed by collaboration events with DWP and NHS ICB throughout March – July.

- Individual engagement sessions held with FE colleges, VCS alliance, Housing, Food bank alliance and training providers.
- Internal officer groups within Worcestershire County Council.
- Consultation session for all District council economic development teams.
- Individual sessions held with Local employability providers (e.g., Seetec Pluss, Shaw Trust).

In line with this process, Worcestershire used all opportunities to present to local stakeholders and hosted a dedicated stakeholder feedback page hosted until 31st July 2025, to gather input on priorities and actions.

This inclusive approach was designed to ensure that the plan reflects local needs and maintains transparency and responsiveness.

### **Monitoring and Progression**

Progress will be monitored through:

- Regular bimonthly Employment and Skills Board meetings.
- Integration with the ICB Health and Work Strategy Board.
- A shared set of Key Performance Indicators and an evaluation framework (currently in development) will be used to track engagement, service alignment, and employment outcomes—linking local delivery to national outcome measures set by the Get Britain Working programme.
- Reporting to DWP, NHS ICB Strategic Commissioning Committee, and Worcestershire County Council Cabinet.

Alongside this Worcestershire will complete progress updates annually in the joint Worcestershire Health and Employment Forum to all wider stakeholders.

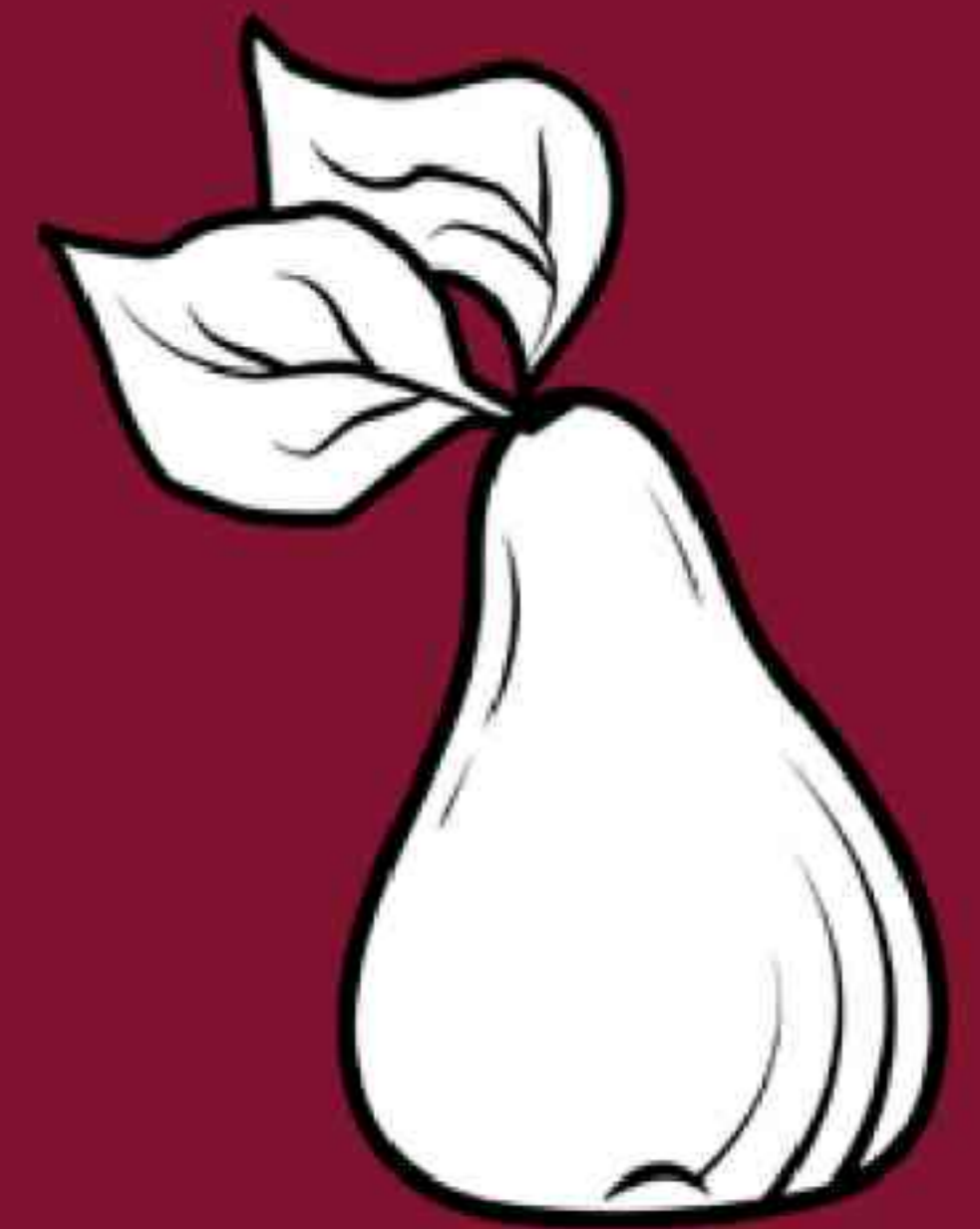
### **Plan Updates and Iteration Process**

The plan has been through a formal sign off process by Worcestershire County Council Cabinet, NHS ICB governance, and DWP Regional Director in September 2025 setting out the priorities for the partnership and a collective approach to supporting residents to move into employment and improve their prospects within employment.

The plan will be updated annually.

Future iterations will be:

- Collectively agreed through the Employment and Skills Board.
- Informed by stakeholder consultations and public feedback with a spirit of continuous improvement.
- Aligned with existing strategies such as the LSIP, NEET Strategy, and Health and Work Strategy.



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