Get Sussex Working Plan

Labour Market Data Mapping and Analysis

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with **always possible Ltd**
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Commissioned by

Brighton & Hove City Council
East Sussex County Council
West Sussex County Council

Contents

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1. Introduction

This report has been commissioned by Brighton & Hove City Council, East Sussex County Council and West Sussex County Council. Its aim is to inform the Get Sussex Working Plan and the implementation plan, and to identify pan-Sussex common themes that can be worked on collaboratively. These themes will also help inform decisions made by the future Sussex & Brighton Mayoral Combined County Authority. Sussex comprises East and West Sussex and Brighton and Hove.

This is principally a data evidence report that draws on a wide range of mainly publicly available data. It will be used alongside a stakeholder engagement report that has been commissioned by the three councils.

This report presents baseline employment data and supporting evidence, that is related to and can inform initiatives to support people into sustainable employment. The latest available figures are presented at district and borough level, county and unitary authority level, and compared with the South-East region and England where possible. Data at sub-county/unitary level is often not robust due to sample sizes; nevertheless, where possible and appropriate, maps and charts have been used to illustrate more localised issues. The Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) also includes data mapping that aligns with evidence in this report whilst Future Skills Sussex has recently produced and deep dive reports[1] for the construction, creative & digital, engineering & manufacturing, health & care; land-based and visitor economy & hospitality sectors alongside and its 2025 progress report[2].

Quantitative data do not always tell the full story of place and community-based opportunities and challenges. They often represent a particular point in time and are typically historic. How data is classified and characterised also shapes the narrative. Quantitative data is helpful in answering ‘what?’, but less effective in framing ‘why?’ and ‘how?’. And while they help set the context, they do not, in and of themselves, determine future direction – that is a matter of vision, partnership, leadership, ambition and strategy.

This study has therefore also been informed by discussions with economy, employment and skills leads at Brighton & Hove City Council, East Sussex County Council and West Sussex County Council, and by a review of documents, plans and strategies that outline and aid understanding of challenges and opportunities at different spatial levels.

The stakeholder engagement summaries that accompany this report provide further qualitative insights into labour market conditions and recommendations on ‘how’ these can best be addressed.

1 Sector deep dives: Construct
2 https://www.futureskillssussex.co.uk/about

2. Setting the Context

In November 2024, the UK Government published the *Get Britain Working White Paper*, setting out its approach to reducing economic inactivity and supporting people into employment, education and training by improving provision. Its ambition is to achieve an 80% national employment rate – equivalent to getting an additional two million people into work.

The *Get Britain Working White Paper* stems from concern that the current employment support system is not operating as effectively as it should. In 2024, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation noted that Jobcentre operations prioritise Universal Credit compliance, which "crowds out the opportunity for support which could help people towards work". It also suggested that "unacceptably low" benefit levels for jobseekers may be contributing to higher levels of health-related worklessness.

The White Paper identifies ill health, caring responsibilities and low skills as key barriers to labour market participation. It also acknowledges that too many people are in insecure, poor-quality and low-paid jobs once in employment.

Alongside this, the Pathways to Work Bill (2025) aims to fix what the Government sees as a "broken incapacity and disability benefits system" that produces poor employment outcomes. This includes creating a "pro-work" benefits system that supports people to manage their health conditions so that they are better able to work and removing binary fitness to work assessments.

Improving employment outcomes is also a key goal of the NHS 10-Year Health Plan. It aims to narrow health inequalities, including by joining up support from across work, health and skills systems to help people find and stay in work[3].

The Government recognises the need for a localised approach and expects areas to develop their own Local Get Britain Working Plans. This aligns with devolution plans, including the proposed Sussex-wide Mayoral Authority and associated unitary authorities – the details of which are still emerging.

The Government is currently working with established Mayoral Combined Authorities and the Welsh Government to establish eight 'trailblazer' areas to test new approaches to:

- Reducing economic inactivity in ways that can be scaled up elsewhere.
- Delivering a new Youth Guarantee, including reforms to the Apprenticeship Levy and benefit rules.

Sussex does not include any of the designated trailblazer areas.

[3] Fit for the Future – 10 Year Health Plan for England; NHS; July 2025

The *Get Britain Working White Paper* includes plans to reform the National Careers Service and Jobcentre Plus. The aim is to offer a universal, digital service, with personalised support where needed most.

Other proposed reforms include a review of the role of employers in fostering healthy and inclusive workplaces, and changes to the health and disability benefits system to increase participation in work.

Analysis by national charity Impetus[4] suggests that one million young people across England are neither earning nor learning. These young people are significantly more likely to have been on Free School Meals, and to have low qualifications, and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). Impetus recommend a four-pronged approach:

- Targeted, flexible and holistic support;
- Localised support;
- Representation and work experience;
- Better data collection and evaluation.

It also calls for programmes to better reflect the characteristics of young people, and to acknowledge the specific barriers facing particular communities.

The Get Sussex Working Plan and local area implementation plan will be informed by the evidence in this study, which draws together both qualitative data and quantitative insights from the three councils, and other publicly available or council-held data.

Wider Labour Market Influences

The way people work – and the skills they need – are evolving rapidly. Many people now work from home part- or full-time. Meanwhile, rapid technological change, including the rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI), is altering or replacing many job roles and opening new possibilities for businesses and employees.

The UK Government's Invest 2035 – A Modern Industrial Strategy prioritises sectors and places that are expected to drive future growth.

- Advanced manufacturing
- Clean energy
- Creative industries
- Defence
- Digital and tech
- Financial services
- Life sciences
- Professional and business services

It also emphasises the need to strengthen the resilience of the foundational industries[5] and their supply chains, enhance skills and access to talent by improving the skills and employment support systems, support Mayors and local authorities, strengthen links between and within city regions and clusters, and support small and medium-sized businesses.

Sussex has some key strengths in several of the industrial strategy's growth-driving sectors, which are highlighted in the councils' economic growth strategies. There are also strengths in other sectors including construction, health and social care, tourism and hospitality, transport and the land-based industries including horticulture and viticulture.

Skills development is central to the Industrial Strategy. A priority of Skills England is to address the fragmented skills system and drive action nationally in key sectors and across regions through strategic authorities and Local Skills Improvement Plans. This will support technical education and apprenticeships, enabling employers to

[4] Youth Jobs Gap: Exploring Compound Disadvantage; Impetus; 2025
[5] These include electricity networks, ports, construction, steel, critical minerals, composites, materials, and chemicals

access the skilled workforce they need and enhance the understanding of learning pathways among learners, providers and employers

Local Economic Boards and economic strategies exist across the UK – including in Brighton & Hove[6], East Sussex and West Sussex[7] – to help shape local contributions to this agenda.

Digitalisation and Artificial Intelligence

AI and digitalisation are transforming jobs and the labour market. Adapting to these technologies is essential.

AI, although in its early stages of development, already offers employers potential productivity boosts and time savings. Jobs involving manual dexterity are less exposed to AI, while those relying on data and cognitive tasks – such as in admin and finance – are more vulnerable.

One study estimates that AI could ultimately result in 1 to 3 million displaced jobs, peaking at 60,000 to 275,000 UK job losses annually. While significant, this remains relatively modest in the context of a 33-million-strong workforce[8].

According to the World Economic Forum, technology-related jobs are the fastest growing jobs internationally. This includes Big Data specialists, Fintech Engineers, AI and Machine Learning Specialists and Software and Application Developers. It suggests that the most sought-after core skill is analytical thinking, followed by resilience, flexibility and agility, along with leadership and social influence[9].

A PWC report suggests that 7% of UK jobs were at high risk of automation over five years from 2021, rising to 30% over the next two decades[10].

Job losses are expected to be most likely in manufacturing, logistics, public administration, defence, and retail. Lower-paid administrative roles are particularly at risk, whereas job gains are expected in health, care, education, professional services, and IT.

In the short term, digitalisation and AI are likely to assist people in their jobs, with potential social-levelling effects in sectors like education. Over the longer term, it will change the face of the labour market, and could reduce repetitive work, improve workplace diversity, and increase overall productivity.

Hybrid and Remote Working

In 2022, around 22% of the UK workforce worked from home at least one day per week, with 13% working exclusively from home – up from pre-pandemic levels of 12% and 5% respectively[11]. Those working in information and communication, professional, technical and administrative sectors are more likely to work remotely, as are people in senior roles or with higher-level qualifications.

Hybrid working brings potential benefits including improved well-being, productivity and job satisfaction. It can also widen access

6 Fairer, Greener, More Productive – Brighton & Hove Economic Plan 2024-2027; Brighton & Hove City Council & Brighton & Hove Economic Partnership; 2024
7 The East Sussex 2050 Economic Prosperity Strategy, East Sussex County Council; 2024
8 The Impact of AI on the Labour Market; Tony Blair Institute for Global Change; 2024
9 Future of Jobs Report; World Economic Forum; 2025
10 The Potential Impact of Artificial Intelligence on UK Employment and the Demand for Skills; PWC/BEIS; October 2021
11 The impact of remote and hybrid working on workers and organisations; UK Parliament Research Briefing; 2022

to the labour market, particularly for people with caring responsibilities. However, there are challenges – such as blurred work-life boundaries, increased isolation, digital exclusion, and reduced opportunities to build workplace culture or share tacit knowledge.

Research from the Policy Institute at King's College London suggests that young people in particular value remote working, although some face barriers to working from home. They report being more confident asking questions and volunteering for tasks in virtual settings[12].

A study into public sector office space across Sussex found that enabling home-working required upgrades to IT systems, training and management support. It also highlighted the need for employers to better understand domestic working conditions. Challenges included onboarding new staff and creating appealing environments for young or inexperienced workers[13].

Supporting long-term hybrid working will mean improving digital infrastructure and skills, developing inclusive approaches to remote work, and offering more cybersecurity training.

Benefits and Worklessness

In 2022/23, a report to the House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee[14] suggested that the UK workforce has been 'squeezed' by four factors:

- Large numbers of people aged 50-64 who have 'retired' from the labour market;
- Increasing sickness;
- Changes in the structure of migration; and
- The impact of the UK population with people in older age groups likely to have lower participation rates.

Sickness related worklessness is a significant challenge that the Government is seeking to address. The UK has a complicated system of benefits, which are perceived by some to act as a barrier to labour market participation.

A study by the Department for Work & Pensions in 2023[15] found that benefit sanctions reduce the duration of Universal Credit claims, but this does not translate into better PAYE earnings. The report found that sanctions decrease the exit from Universal Credit into higher paid work. Sanctioned claimants are also more likely to earn less than non-sanctioned claimants on exit from Universal Credit, largely due to lower employment earnings.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies[16] has also found that whilst changes to the benefits system over the past decade have led to higher employment, they have largely pushed people into low paid, part-time work, with the result that they often continue to receive in-work benefits and have little prospect of career progression.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation9 suggests that initiatives to support people with disabilities into work should focus on improving job design and providing a more supportive environment for employees when they become ill. This includes increasing job adaptability, flexible working and encouraging a shift in employers' attitudes towards people with disabilities. People who

[12] Young people most likely to see career benefits to remote working; Kings College, London; 2022
[13] The Future of Public Sector Office Spaces; Marshall Regen & Nairne Consultancy Services Ltd; 2022
[14] Where have all the workers gone? Economic Affairs Committee Report; House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee; 2022
[15] The Impact of Benefit Sanctions on Employment Outcomes; Department for Work & Pensions; 2023
[16] Decades of benefit reforms have pushed more people into work – but very often into part-time, low-paid work with little prospect of progression; Institute for Fiscal Studies; 2023

move from work-related benefits into work can face risks around benefit loss, if they find out that they are unable to work as they had intended.

Health & Disability

In July 2025, the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) undertook a survey[17] of 3,401 disability benefit claimants[18] that found that nearly half (49%) of customers responding to their survey did not believe that they would be able to work again. This rose to nearly two-thirds (62%) of claimants aged 50+.

The proportion of claimants who reported that they were able to work "right away" was small (5%) and just over a quarter (27%) of respondents believed that they might be able to work in the future, but only if their health improved. People with mental health conditions (44%) were more likely to believe that they might be able to work again in the future.

The report identifies a link between the take up of benefits and waiting lists for treatment – half (50%) of out of work respondents believed that their ability to work depended on receiving treatments.

The rise of homeworking was identified as an opportunity, but a majority (60%) of respondents were concerned that the DWP would make them look for "unsuitable" work. There was interest in receiving skill development support and finding and staying in work, but this needed to be based on a personal approach from DWP staff that involved understanding their unique needs and circumstances.

- 49% of customers felt they would never be able to work or work again. 62% were over the age of 50, and 66% felt their health was likely to get worse in the future.
- 5% of customers felt they could work right away if the right job or support was available. Those whose main health condition was a cognitive or neurodevelopmental impairment – including memory and concentration problems alongside learning difficulties and disabilities, as well as autism – were around twice as likely to feel this way compared to other customers.
- 27% of customers felt they might be able to work in future but only if their health improved. Those with mental health conditions were more likely to feel this way: 44% of customers whose main health condition was a mental health condition felt they might be able to work again if their health improve.
- The findings indicated a link between take up of health and disability benefits and challenges in the healthcare system: two in five customers (41%) were on a waiting list for treatment for their health condition(s), and half (50%) who were out of work felt their ability to work was dependent on receiving treatment.
- A key challenge is the complex relationship many customers have with DWP. Of those customers not in work who didn't rule out work permanently, 60% were worried that DWP would make them look for unsuitable work, and 50% were worried they would not get their benefits back if they tried working.

17 Work aspirations and support needs of health and disability customers: Final findings report; Department for Work & Pensions; July 2025

18 Those receiving Personal Independence Payment (PIP), Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), and those on the Universal Credit (UC) Health Journey

- 69% of customers were open to receiving contact from DWP about offers of support for employment, benefits or disability services. They wanted help to develop skills, including emotional, social and communication skills. They wanted help finding and applying for jobs, and help to stay in work, including engaging with employers to ensure their needs were met.
- They wanted genuine attempts to understand their unique needs and circumstances. They wanted to feel supported rather than coerced, monitored or blamed. They wanted to see more joined-up services so that they didn't need to explain their health conditions repeatedly to different staff and agencies.

3. Sussex

3.1 Sussex Summary

Sussex covers an area of 1,461 square miles, with a 140-mile coastline stretching from Camber Sands in the east to Chichester Harbour in the west. The South Downs National Park and the densely wooded Weald are key features of Sussex, contributing to its outstanding natural environment.

TABLE: THE POPULATION OF SUSSEX

West Sussex	882,726	51.46%
Brighton	277,000	16.15%
East Sussex	555,484	32.39%
Sussex	1,715,184	100.00%

Administratively, Sussex has two county councils – East and West Sussex – and a unitary authority, Brighton & Hove. East Sussex comprises five districts and boroughs (Eastbourne, Hastings, Lewes, Rother and Wealden), while West Sussex has seven (Adur, Arun, Chichester, Crawley, Horsham, Mid Sussex and Worthing). Brighton & Hove is the largest conurbation in Sussex, with a resident population of around 280,000. Other urban centres include Hastings and Eastbourne in East Sussex, and Worthing and Crawley in West Sussex.

Sussex's natural environment means that it is an appealing place to live, but it also restricts development opportunities, contributes to transport and connectivity difficulties in some areas, high property and land prices, and leaves several coastal towns suffering from peripherality and isolation.

Housing affordability is a major issue across Sussex. Median house prices are 10.6 times median earnings for full-time workers, compared with 7.7 times in England. Local jobs generally do not match the high cost of housing, making it difficult for those who are solely reliant on employment for their income and for businesses trying to attract and retain staff.

Sussex has a diverse, polycentric nature meaning that it does not fit comfortably into a neat economic geography. West Sussex has a relatively strong economy with diverse employment sectors, with Crawley and Worthing performing particularly well; Brighton & Hove is heavily service sector based and benefits from two large universities and a well-qualified resident population. In contrast, East Sussex has too few jobs even for its relatively small working-age population, with an economy that is generally reliant on lower and intermediate level service sector jobs.

Key sectors include tourism, land-based industries, and health and social care – often low-value sectors contributing to low median earnings in many parts of Sussex. West Sussex has several large private sector employers, with a particular concentration in Crawley and around the economic hub of Gatwick Airport in the north. However, in East Sussex and Brighton and Hove, the number of large employers is small. Many of these are public sector 'anchor institutions'. Anchor institutions are place-based institutions, such as councils, hospitals and universities, that play an important role in building successful local economies and communities. Characteristics include spatial immobility, embeddedness in the local economy and community, and a large resource base that is manifested in local purchasing, employment and business support. They provide opportunities to take a coordinated approach to promoting skills and employment both through direct employment and training, and through effective procurement and commissioning.

Sussex is an attractive part of the country with significant natural assets. Much of it is covered by environmental designations, which restricts development opportunities. Its coastal location makes it a 180˚ economy, which naturally constrains movement and development opportunities. Transport and connectivity are significant issues for much of the county, particularly along east-west routes, and connecting employment hubs and urban areas to rural areas. There are significant congestion issues on the east-west A27, while coastal rail services can be slow and fragmented. The extensive rural landscape poses challenges for accessing services – particularly for those who rely on public transport.

Coastal decline, the economic and social downturn experienced by many seaside towns and communities, and often characterized by a decrease in tourism, job losses and population decline, is a feature of several parts of the Sussex coast. Towns like Hastings, Bognor Regis, Littlehampton, Bexhill, Eastbourne and Newhaven are having to adapt to new economic realities. There has been considerable public investment to support their regeneration, but low qualification and skills levels, and low-paying and often seasonal employment persist, making it difficult to boost economic productivity and improve people's lives. These characteristics are not confined to the coast, however. In West Sussex, there are major skills challenges in Crawley, for example, despite the plentiful supply of jobs in the borough.

Much of the social and economic deprivation in Sussex is found along its coastal strip. There is evidence of significant achievement gaps between young people with Special Educational Needs and on Free School Meals and others, across many parts of Sussex. This makes it doubly challenging for them to enter and progress successfully through the labour market. NEET and claimant unemployment rates, particularly amongst residents aged 50+, have begun to rise quite sharply in several parts of Sussex – not just those that have tended to have higher levels of worklessness.

Larger coastal towns like Worthing have arguably fared better; their size enables them to sustain a broader economic base. Brighton & Hove has become one of the UK's more prosperous coastal locations, likely benefiting from its proximity to London and Gatwick Airport, its two universities, and its overall scale. However, skills and employment challenges are often most acute among residents living on the city's outskirts, particularly in neighbourhoods where socio-economic conditions are challenging, whilst its diverse population means that employment and skills programmes need to respond to the support needs of different communities.

Crawley is a significant economic driver for Sussex and the wider South-East economy. It offers a plentiful supply of good jobs and good transport connections, that attract talent from a wide geographical area, although this can increase the competition for these jobs for local people. In Horsham, Mid Sussex and much of Wealden socio-economic conditions are generally markedly different to those along the coast. These areas are characterised by high economic activity and smaller pockets of deprivation.

Overall, Sussex has an older resident population, but this masks extremes: Brighton & Hove and Crawley have much younger populations, while areas like Arun and Rother have significant and growing proportions of post-working-age residents. Brighton & Hove's population is heavily influenced by its student population; this contributes to the diversity of the city but also contributes a high level of population transience. Post-working age residents are projected to account for most of the population increase over the next decade, and for many parts of Sussex this is from an already high baseline. This will influence the demand for local services, including in health and social care. It may also partly explain quite high levels of long-term ill-health and disability amongst the population. However, with the right support, older people and those with long-term health challenges could also provide a relatively untapped resource if engaged more effectively in the labour market, for example through greater flexibility in the workplace.

The high proportion of older and post-working-age residents and the shortage of younger people in some parts of Sussex has labour market implications. With some exceptions, earnings are low, and house prices are high – reflecting a part of the country that may be considered asset-rich but productivity-poor. In some parts of Sussex, there is high demand for low-value services that do not provide incomes aligned with local housing costs, whilst in places like Crawley there are challenges in supporting residents to access better paying local jobs.

For Sussex to achieve the Government's 80% employment rate across the geography, 25,500 more working age residents would need to be in work, assuming no increase in the working age population. More than 300,000 Sussex residents have a disability that limits daily activity, and there are 145,000 unpaid carers. Those with long-term health conditions are less likely to be in work – particularly in East and West Sussex. Over a quarter of the economically inactive population are so due to long-term sickness.

Self-employment rates are high, possibly partly reflecting a lack of good quality jobs that reflect skills levels, and barriers to accessing employment opportunities. Self-employment can be a positive lifestyle choice for some; but for others it will be necessity-driven because they lack the qualifications, language skills or face other barriers to securing traditional employment. Self-employment is not always a proxy for entrepreneurship, if we take entrepreneurs to be people who plan to grow businesses that employ others.

Nevertheless, some self-employed will be looking to grow businesses and join the large number of micro-businesses in Sussex. These are likely to need additional support to recruit, train and retain the inclusive workforce that they need to succeed.

Sussex is a disparate geography, with different challenges in different areas. Isolation and poor digital and transport connectivity hinder access to work in many rural parts, while homelessness, low skills and health-related issues are more prevalent along the coastal strip, where job quality is often poor and housing costs are high.

Brighton & Hove, East Sussex, and West Sussex all have established partnerships and current and emerging programmes to support people into work. These include the Connect to Work and Skills Bootcamp programmes, and Careers Hubs. The Future Skills Sussex Local Skills Improvement Plan provides detailed analysis of skills demand and deep dive reports into Sussex's key employment sectors[19].

[19] https://www.futureskillssussex.co.uk/about

A challenge in some parts of Sussex is delivering employment and skills services to small, dispersed populations, some of which are within relatively affluent areas, where support infrastructure may be weaker than in urban centres. However, the Pathways to Work Bill – Pathways to Work: Reforming Benefits and Support to Get Britain Working Green Paper outlines reforms to the welfare and employment support systems.

There is already a good track record of collaborative working within each local authority and increasingly across Sussex. The Integrated Care Board (ICB) and the NHS are in a more central position alongside the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP), to provide employment-related support, particularly for people with long-term disabilities and health conditions.

The pan-Sussex Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) Board and other emerging regional networks are increasingly embedding skills and employment initiatives. There are well-established skills and employment networks in Brighton & Hove, East Sussex and West Sussex, including Skills East Sussex, the Synchronise Network (West Sussex) and the Pre-Employment Network in Brighton and Hove. Reviewing where Sussex-wide networks and partnerships would be beneficial to shared employment and skills outcomes could be explored whilst new Economic Growth Boards offer opportunities to enhance the skills and employment agenda and support governance across Sussex.

Chichester College Group and East Sussex College are the largest FE providers in the region, and both are working in collaboration with local HE through the associated Institutes of Technology in both East and West Sussex. Sussex Council of Training Providers represents training organisations operating across Sussex. Brighton & Hove and West Sussex have higher education institutions in the Universities of Brighton and Sussex, and the University of Chichester, but following the closure of the University of Brighton campuses in Hastings and Eastbourne, East Sussex now lacks a higher education presence, potentially dampening aspirations among residents, reducing the availability of specialist business and innovation support, and the pipeline of qualified people for local high-value employment.

Sussex has a diverse socio-economic landscape, with significant local distinctiveness across the geography. Approaches to supporting people into sustained, good quality work are likely to require a ‘managed difference’ approach that recognises and responds to pan-Sussex opportunities and challenges where this is appropriate, but which takes a more nuanced and granular approach, responsive to the specific needs at sub-Sussex level.

3.2 Strengths and Challenges

Strengths	Challenges
• A highly attractive and liveable part of England with outstanding natural and cultural assets. • Proximity to London and Gatwick Airport is attractive for investors and talent. • A mixed economy, with jobs across a range of sectors, but few of the high value sectors are in East Sussex. • A strong visitor economy that caters for a range of visitor types as well as strong land-based economy with nationally significant agriculture, viticulture and horticulture sectors, supported by specialist colleges at Plumpton and Brinsbury. • Significant anchor institutions including the health and care sector (ICB, NHS) and the public sector influencing the local labour market. • Three universities with around 40,000 students between them and Institutes of Technology and innovation offering high level skills training and business support across Sussex. • Established strategic economy, employment and skills networks and emerging economic governance across Sussex, including Local Skills Improvement Plan Board and the Sussex Visitor Economy Board. • Active voluntary and community sector organisations providing wide-ranging but fragmented skills and employment support.	• The employment picture in terms of demographic cohorts, job vacancy rates, employer size and composition, and employment and skills levels differ across Sussex. • Areas of deprivation exist across Sussex, including more isolated coastal towns, Bexhill, Newhaven, Bognor Regis and Littlehampton, as well as parts of Brighton & Hove and Crawley. Deprivation in Hastings is significant and widespread. • Housing affordability is an important issue across most of Sussex. • There are significant differences in skills levels across Sussex and evidence of attainment gaps between those with Special Education Needs and Free School Meal eligibility. • Sussex covers a wide and diverse geography, making delivering services to dispersed populations challenging and therefore a 'one size fits all' approach is unlikely to be effective. • East to west transport and links between commercial and rural areas are often unreliable and patchy. • Much of East and West Sussex have large and growing post-working age populations, and a retraction in populations of working age. • The lack of Higher Education presence in East Sussex risks further diluting aspiration and opportunity. • Rising NEET rates across East Sussex and Brighton and Hove, with high number of 'unknown' destinations in West Sussex.

3.3 Labour Supply

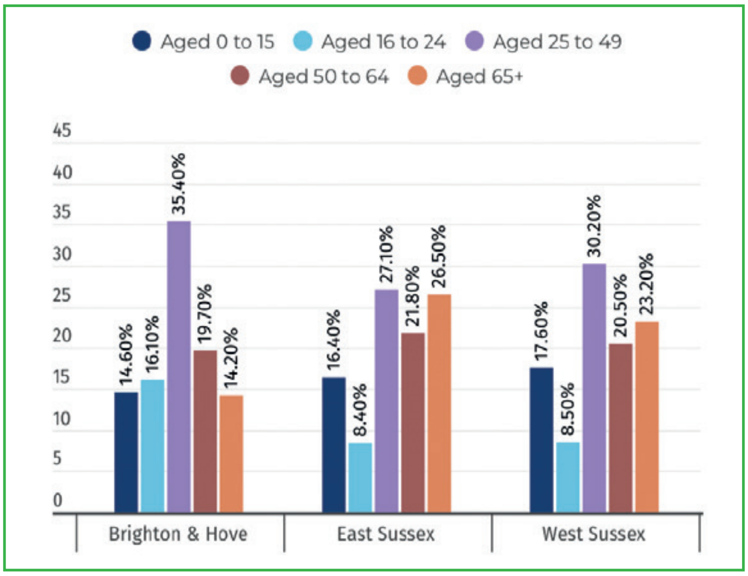
Population by Age

TABLE: RESIDENT POPULATION BY AGE GROUP (% OF TOTAL POPULATION)

Area	All Ages %	Aged 0 to 15 %	Aged 16 to 64 %	Aged 16 to 24 %	Aged 25 to 49 %	Aged 50 to 64 %	Aged 65+ %	Dependency ratio
Sussex	**100**	**16.7**	**60.5**	**9.7**	**30.0**	**20.8**	**22.8**	**0.65**
Brighton & Hove	100	14.6	71.2	16.1	35.4	19.7	14.2	0.40
East Sussex	100	16.4	57.2	8.4	27.1	21.8	26.5	0.75
West Sussex	100	17.6	59.2	8.5	30.2	20.5	23.2	0.69
South East	100	18.6	61.7	10.0	31.9	19.8	19.8	0.62
England	100	18.5	62.9	10.7	32.9	19.3	18.7	0.59

Source: Population Estimates; Office for National Statistics; 2023

FIGURE: SUSSEX POPULATION BY AGE



In 2023, Sussex had a resident population of 1.74 million. Just over a million people (60.5%) were of working age.

This is a lower proportion than in England (62.9%) and the South East (61.7%). However, this masks significant variation within Sussex: more than seven in ten (71.2%) of Brighton & Hove's residents are of working age, compared with 59.2% in West Sussex and 57.2% in East Sussex.

There are also notable differences at district and borough level within the two counties. In East Sussex, all areas except Hastings (61.5%) have fewer than 60% of residents of working age. In West Sussex, only Crawley (64.9%) and Worthing (60.7%) have more than 60% of residents in this age group.

The dependency ratio shows the number of non-working-age residents for every one working-age resident. A higher number indicates a greater proportion of residents who are either below or above working age. In Sussex, the dependency ratio was 0.65 – higher than in England (0.59) and the South East (0.62). In Brighton & Hove, the dependency ratio is significantly lower (0.40) than in East Sussex (0.75) and West Sussex (0.69). Among all districts and boroughs in Sussex, the ratio is highest in Rother (0.89).

Ethnicity

TABLE: ETHNICITY (POPULATION COUNTS AND % OF TOTAL POPULATION), 2021

Area	GEM* Count	GEM* %	Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh	%	Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African	%
Sussex	**136,076**	**18.1**	**24,835**	**18.3**	**9,955**	**7.3**
Brighton & Hove	72,272	26.2	13,217	18.3	5,458	7.6
East Sussex	63,804	11.7	11,618	18.2	4,497	7.0
West Sussex	139,102	15.8	38,288	27.5	11,429	8.2
South East	1,963,005	21.2	650,545	33.1	221,584	11.3
England	14,949,257	26.5	5,426,392	36.3	2,381,724	15.9

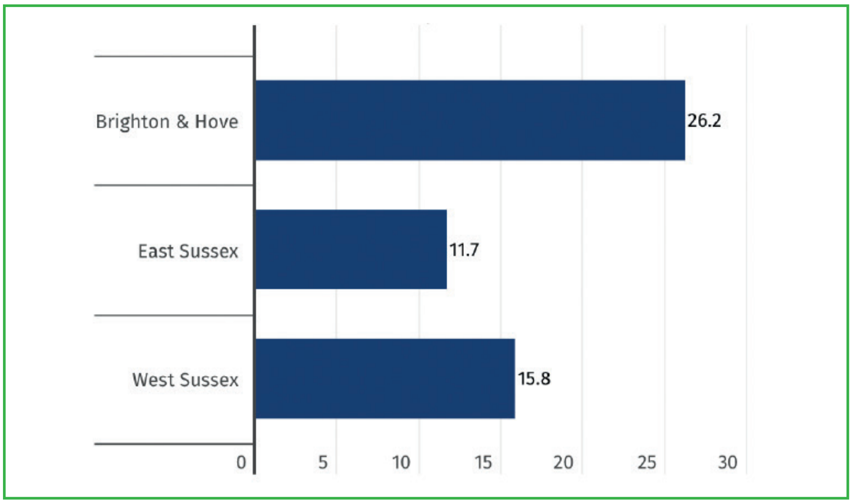
Table continued below

Area (continued)	Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups	%	Other White	%	Other ethnic group	%
Sussex	**25,541**	**18.8**	**62,134**	**45.7**	**13,611**	**10.0**
Brighton & Hove	13,228	18.3	31,740	43.9	8,629	11.9
East Sussex	12,313	19.3	30,394	47.6	4,982	7.8
WestSussex	20,811	15.0	59,948	43.1	8,626	6.2
South East	260,871	13.3	694,322	35.4	135,683	6.9
England	1,669,378	11.2	4,242,610	28.4	1,229,153	8.2

Source: Census 2021 *GEM = Global Ethnic Majority

In 2021, over 136,000 Sussex residents (18.1%) were from a Global Ethnic Majority (GEM) group. This is a smaller proportion than in the South East (21.1%) and England (26.5%). However, this headline figure masks significant variation within Sussex. Over a quarter of Brighton & Hove's residents are from a Global Ethnic Majority background, compared with fewer than 12% in East Sussex and just under 16% in West Sussex.

FIGURE: ALL GLOBAL ETHNIC MAJORITY GROUPS 2021 (% OF TOTAL POPULATION)



Source: Census 2021; Office for National Statistics

'Other White' residents account for a much larger proportion of GEM residents in Sussex (45.7%) than in the South-East (35.4%) and England (28.4%). All three local authority areas have a high proportion of GEM residents who are classified as 'White Other'. By contrast, Sussex has a relatively small proportion of residents from Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh backgrounds, and from Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African backgrounds, when compared with the South-East region and England.

More detailed analysis shows that White – Mixed European (21,200), White Irish (15,100), and White Polish (12,500) residents make up the largest groups within the 'White Other' category in Sussex.

Indicative data from the Sussex Interpreting Service for 2024/25 shows that they provided interpreting support to 4,164 residents in Brighton and Hove, 1,862 in West Sussex and 626 in East Sussex. Arabic was the most common language spoken by service users in Brighton and Hove and East Sussex, and Polish in West Sussex. A lack of English language skills is a key barrier to employment. In 2021, there were 14,200 residents in Sussex who either could not speak English well or could not speak it at all. This included 7,000 people in West Sussex (of whom 2,500 were in Crawley), 3,100 in Brighton & Hove, and 2,800 in East Sussex (including 1,000 in Eastbourne).

There is also significant variation in ethnic mix at a county level. For example, in Crawley 27% of the resident population is non-white, compared to just 9% across West Sussex.

Refugees and Asylum Seekers

Since the 2021 Census, the UK has welcomed significant numbers of refugees and asylum seekers. All three local authorities in Sussex provide settlement programmes to support these groups, including specific schemes for Ukrainian and Afghan refugees. The resettlement programme is a national scheme that supports Afghans who worked with or for the UK Government in Afghanistan. It provides them with indefinite leave to remain. The Government provides funding to local councils to support the resettlement effort and the extent to which local areas can accommodate people on the programme depends, to an extent, on the availability of suitable accommodation locally.

The table overleaf (p18) shows the number of people who have arrived in Sussex under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, the Afghan Resettlement Programme, and the Supported Asylum Programme.

TABLE: REFUGEES & ASYLUM SEEKERS, 2025

Area	Homes for Ukrainians	Afghan Resettlement Programme	Supported Asylum	Total	% of Population
Sussex	**5,405**	**1,866**	**1,535**	**8,806**	**0.42**
Brighton & Hove	639	177	170	986	0.35
East Sussex	2,065	196	121	2,382	0.43
West Sussex	2,701	1,493	1,244	5,438	0.60
South East	27,111	5,541	7,287	39,939	0.42
England	125,290	23,680	94,754	243,724	0.42

Source: Immigration System Statistics; Home Office; 2025

As at April 2025, over 8,800 people had been welcomed to Sussex under the three programmes. This includes over 5,400 Ukrainians, nearly 1,900 Afghans and a further 1,500 people arriving under the Supported Asylum Programme. Over 5,400 people were supported in West Sussex, just under 2,400 in East Sussex and just under 1,000 in Brighton & Hove. West Sussex has supported a particularly large number of Afghans and other supported asylum seekers.

West Sussex (0.6%) has supported a larger number of asylum seekers, relative to the size of its population than England (0.42%), the South East (0.42%), East Sussex (0.43%) and Brighton & Hove (0.35%).

LGBTQ+

Just under 65,000 Sussex residents described their sexuality as something other than ‘Straight or Heterosexual’, with 41% living in Brighton & Hove, 35% in West Sussex, and 25% in East Sussex. In 2021, more than one in ten adult residents in Brighton & Hove (10.7%) identified as LGBTQ+. This is significantly higher than the proportion in England (3.1%), the South East (3.1%), East Sussex (3.3%) and West Sussex (2.9%).

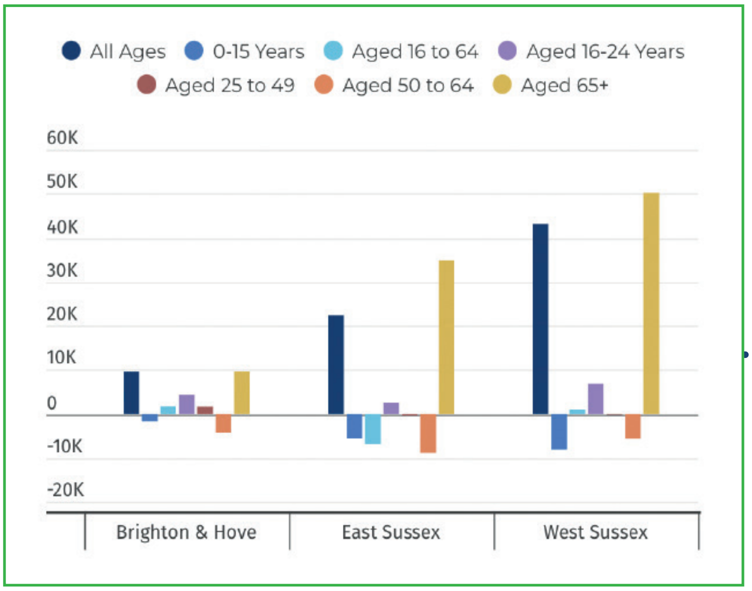
Population Projections

TABLE: POPULATION PROJECTIONS 2025-2035

Area	All Ages	Aged 0 to 15	Aged 16 to 64	Aged 16 to 24	Aged 25 to 49	Aged 50 to 64	Aged 65+
Sussex	+75,160	-15,408	-4,082	+13,718	+1,030	-18,830	+94,635
Brighton & Hove	+9,617	-1,702	+1,669	+4,386	+1,607	-4,324	+9,648
East Sussex	+22,429	-5,572	-6,805	+2,481	-406	-8,880	+34,795
West Sussex	+43,114	-8,134	+1,054	+6,851	-171	-5,626	+50,192
South East	+284,241	-110,309	-18,160	+84,098	-33,294	-68,964	+412,729
England	2,123,686	-506,921	264,463	595,609	108,784	-439,930	2,366,134

Source: Population Projections (2018) based; Office for National Statistics; 2025

FIGURE: POPULATION PROJECTIONS BY AGE, 2018



Source: Population Projections (2018); Office for National Statistics; 2025

The population of Sussex is projected to grow by over 75,000 residents between 2025 and 2035 – a 4.2% increase over the decade. This compares with projected increases of 3.0% in the South East and 3.7% in England.

West Sussex is expected to see the largest growth, both proportionally (+4.8%) and numerically (+43,100). Projected increases in Brighton & Hove (+9,600 / +3.2%) and East Sussex (+22,400 / +3.9%) are slightly more modest.

The structure of the population is also projected to change, with further increases in the post-working-age population (+94,600) and reductions in the pre-working-age population (-15,400), the working-age population (-4,100), and in particular, residents aged 50-64 (-18,800).

This pattern is largely reflected across Brighton & Hove, East Sussex and West Sussex, with some variation. In West Sussex, the decline in the 50–64 age group is expected to be more modest (–3.0%), while

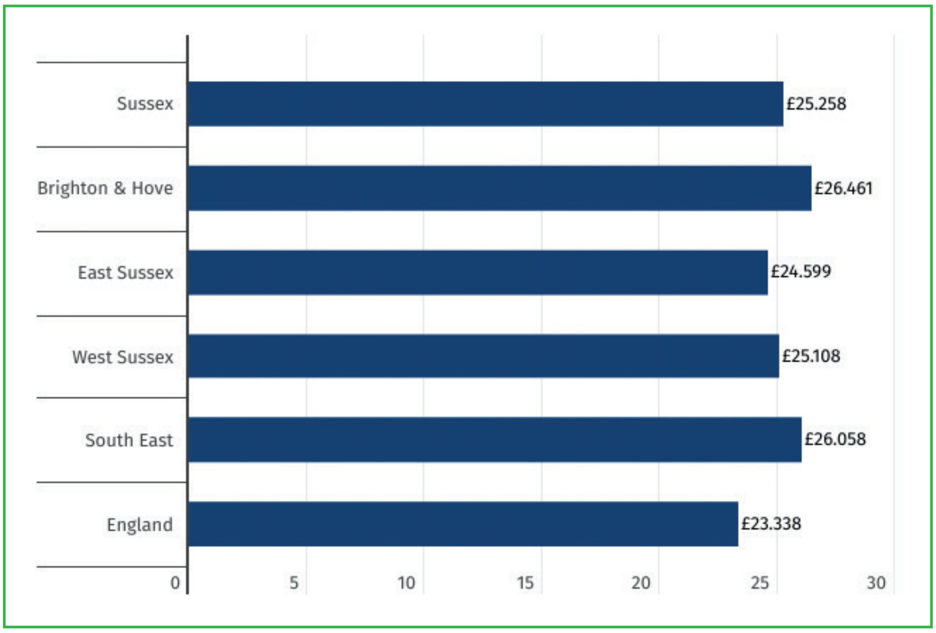
East Sussex is projected to see a 5.2% increase in residents aged 16-24 – compared with +8.4% in Brighton & Hove and +9.2% in West Sussex.

The main challenge for parts of the county lies in the starting point. In many areas, the population is already disproportionately older, and further increases are likely to deepen this demographic imbalance.

For example, in West Sussex the highest percentage of projected population growth by 2043 is expected in the 90+ age bracket, with an 86% increase (higher than regional and national figures). Horsham can expect to see a 131% projected growth in the 90+ years population. This has significant implications for both the supply of and demand for labour-intensive services, many of which are characterised by low pay and job insecurity.

Households & Incomes

FIGURE: AVERAGE GROSS DOMESTIC HOUSEHOLD INCOME (2022)



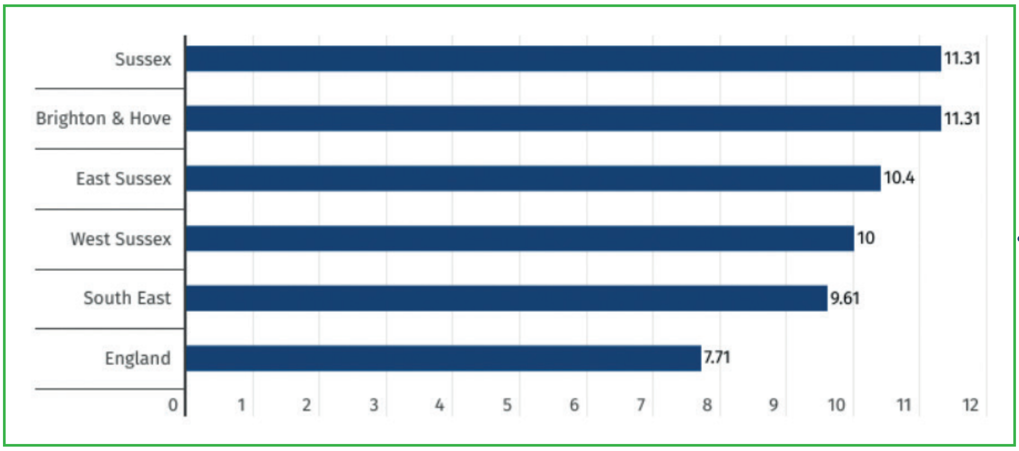
Regional Gross Disposable Income; Local Authorities by ITL 1 Region; ONS; 2024

Household income is a broad measure of household wealth. The graph shows Gross Disposable Household Income (GDHI) per head, indexed to England (100). It indicates that, overall, Sussex is a relatively wealthy part of England, with a GDHI of £25,258 – compared with £23,338 in England and £26,058 in the South East.

Brighton & Hove has the highest GDHI in Sussex (£26,461), exceeding the regional average for the South East (£26,058). GDHI is lowest in East Sussex (£24,559), with West Sussex sitting between the two (£25,108).

However, averages do not reflect distribution, and these figures are likely to mask significant inequalities within each area. Indeed, a recent report into compound disadvantage among young people highlights Brighton & Hove as a place where socioeconomic inequality is particularly pronounced – linked to low levels of social mobility, educational attainment, and higher levels of economic instability.

FIGURE: HOUSE PRICE AFFORDABILITY RATIOS (2022)



Source: House Price to Workplace-Based Earnings Ratio; Office for National Statistics; 2023

Overall, Sussex is a notably unaffordable part of the country when measured by the ratio of median house prices to median workplace earnings. Across Sussex, median house prices are 10.57 times median workplace earnings, compared with 7.71 in England and 9.61 in the South East. In many respects, large numbers of people across Sussex do not share in the region's overall affluence.

The median house price ratio is particularly high in Brighton & Hove (11.31), further emphasising the socio-economic inequality in the city noted earlier. However, both East Sussex (10.40) and West Sussex (10.00) also face significant affordability challenges. A more detailed sub-county analysis is presented later in this report.

A particularly striking feature of the Sussex economy is the number of areas where non-employment income accounts for a substantial share of local economic value. In England overall, homeowners' imputed rental income contributes around 9% to the value of the economy, but in parts of both East and West Sussex, this figure exceeds 25%.

This, combined with other forms of passive income among some residents – including pension income – can skew local economies towards lower-value, labour-intensive and low-paying employment sectors. While this may suit those who are less reliant on employment to support their household, it makes life much more difficult for those who are not asset-rich and who rely solely on earned income to meet their basic needs.

Lone Parent Households

In 2021 there were over 42,000 lone parent households with dependent children in Sussex. This is 5.7% of all households, compared with 6.0% in the South East and 6.9% in England. West Sussex (5.5%) had a lower proportion (but higher count) of lone parent households with dependent children than Brighton & Hove (6.0%) and East Sussex (6.0%).

The local areas with the highest proportion of lone parent households with dependent children were Crawley (7.8%) and Hastings (7.7%). Horsham (4.6%) and Chichester (4.9%) had the lowest proportion of lone parent households with dependent children.

TABLE: LONE PARENT HOUSEHOLDS WITH DEPENDENT CHILDREN (2021)

Area	Number of households	%
Sussex	42,077	5.7
Brighton & Hove	7,229	6.0
East Sussex	14,343	6.0
West Sussex	20,505	5.5
South East	227,161	6.0
England	1,617,076	6.9

Source: 2021 Census; Office for National Statistics

Median Earnings

TABLE: MEDIAN ANNUAL EARNINGS FOR FULL-TIME WORKERS BY RESIDENCE AND WORKPLACE, 2024

Area	Worker Earnings	Worker Index (England = 100)	Resident Earnings	Resident Index (England = 100)	Difference (£)	Difference (%)
Sussex	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available
Brighton & Hove	£36,921	98	£38,556	102	-£1,635	-4.2
East Sussex	£32,703	87	£35,298	94	-£2,595	-7.4
West Sussex	£38,006	101	£38,700	103	-£694	-1.8
South East	£39,038	104	£40,339	107	-£1,301	-3.2
England	£37,630	100	£37,617	100	£13	0.0

Source: Annual Survey of Hours & Earnings (ASHE); ONS via NOMISWEB

Median workplace earnings for full-time workers and full-time working residents are not available at the Sussex level. However, while both workplace-based and residence-based median earnings are slightly above the national average in West Sussex and broadly in line with the national average in Brighton & Hove, they are significantly lower in East Sussex.

Full-time working residents in East Sussex earn just 94% of the England average. The situation is even more pronounced for people working within East Sussex, who earn on average £2,595 less than local residents.

This suggests a particular challenge in the quality of local jobs available to residents in East Sussex. Put simply, too many of the county's jobs are not well-paid enough for people to afford access to the local housing market. While job quality may be an issue in other parts of Sussex as well, it is a particularly marked feature of the East Sussex labour market.

Health & Disability

TABLE: RESIDENTS AGED (16+) WITH DISABILITIES & LONG TERM ILLNESS (2021)

Area	All Disabled (Count)	All Disabled (%)	Limitimg a little (Count)	Limiting a little (%)	Limiting a lot (Count)	Limiting a lot (%)
Sussex	**311,250**	**18.2**	**187,951**	**11.0**	**123,299**	**7.2**
Brighton & Hove	51,797	18.7	31,446	11.3	20,351	7.3
East Sussex	110,553	20.3	65,361	12.0	45,192	8.3
West Sussex	148,900	16.9	91,144	10.3	57,756	6.5
South East	1,496,340	16.1	915,292	9.9	581,048	6.3
England	9,774,510	17.3	5,634,153	10.0	4,140,357	7.3

Source: Census 2021; Office for National Statistics

In 2021, there were over 311,000 residents in Sussex with a disability that limited their daily activities either a little (188,000) or a lot (123,300). This represents 18.2% of the population – a higher proportion than in the South East (16.1%) and England (17.3%).

East Sussex had the highest proportion of people living with a limiting disability (20.3%), while West Sussex had the lowest (16.1%). Four in ten (40%) people with work-limiting disabilities reported that their condition limited their day-to-day activities a lot. This accounts for 7.2% of the Sussex population. In East Sussex, the figure was 8.3%, compared with 6.5% in West Sussex.

In its evidence for the Work Well Partnership Programme, Sussex Health & Care reported that sickness absence rates were higher among women than men across most age groups. The evidence also showed that in 2022, there were just under 36,000 Employment Support Allowance claimants in Sussex – half of these claims were related to mental health, which was often cited as a secondary reason for absence.

Universal credit

Universal Credit (UC) is a monthly payment to help eligible people with their living costs who have £16000 or less in money, savings and investments. UC can be claimed by people who are working and on a low income, out of work or who cannot work because of a health condition. UC replaced Working Tax Credits, Child Tax Credits, Housing Benefit, Income Support, income-based Job Seekers Allowance and income related Employment and Support Allowance.

Employment Support Allowance (ESA)

People who are employed, self-employed or unemployed with a disability or health condition that affects how much they can work can apply for ESA. Paid fortnightly it provides money to support people to get back into work who can, and they are assigned to the Work-Related Activity Group. ESA also provides money to help with living costs for people who can't work to work, they are assigned to the Support Group. People can get UC at the same time as New Style ESA which is a contributory benefit based on insurance contributions rather than income or savings. People on Old Style ESA are being moved to Universal Credit as part of the managed migration process.

Data[20] from November 2024 showed there were 31,807 Employment Support Allowance (ESA) claimants in Sussex. 43.4% were in West Sussex, 34.9% in East Sussex, and 21.7% of these were in Brighton & Hove.

However, relative to population size, 1.56% of West Sussex residents were claiming claiming ESA compared to 1.99% and 2.49% respectively in East Sussex and Brighton and Hove.

TABLE: SUSSEX ESA CLAIMANT COUNT BY CLAIMANT PHASE AND AREA, NOVEMBER 2024

Area	Assessment phase	Work Related Activity group	Support group	Unknown	Total
Brighton and Hove	125	721	5,836	230	6,912
Eastbourne	58	277	2,149	90	2,570
Hastings	45	223	2,230	80	2,580
Lewes	68	188	1,594	103	1,953
Rother	49	122	1,513	84	1,763
Wealden	83	140	1,886	118	2,220
Adur	51	134	1,022	46	1,253
Arun	83	210	2,698	143	3,127
Chichester	61	107	1,433	75	1,673
Crawley	67	126	1,677	74	1,940
Horsham	57	128	1,445	82	1,714
Mid Sussex	64	138	1,482	71	1,758
Worthing	42	230	1,976	94	2,344
Total	**853**	**2,744**	**26,941**	**1,290**	**31,807**

Musculoskeletal conditions and mental ill-health are the leading causes of work loss, and they are often interrelated. Several factors contribute to poor mental health, including financial difficulties, insecure and poor-quality housing, and precarious employment.

In 2022/23, General Practitioners (GPs) in Sussex issued 262,409 Fit for Work notes. In 94.1% of cases, patients were assessed as not fit for work – typically for a short period (most commonly 5 to 12 weeks). In 190,500 of these cases, no diagnosis was provided. Where a diagnosis was given, the most common was 'mental and behavioural disorders' (23,419), followed by 'musculoskeletal and connective tissue diseases' (9,106).

The number of Fit for Work notes per 100,000 registered patients was lower in East Sussex (23,987) than in England overall (28,694). However, there were notable differences across the sub-Integrated Care Board areas: West Sussex (27,898); East Sussex (23,877); and Brighton & Hove (18,915).

[20] Stat-explore: Department for Work & Pensions; 2025

Unpaid Carers

TABLE: UNPAID CARERS BY AREA

Area	Unpaid Carers	% of population	Caring 20+ hours /wk	% of population
Sussex	**145,025**	**8.9**	**67,930**	4.2
Brighton & Hove	20,804	7.8	9,470	3.5
East Sussex	51,405	8.6	25,284	4.9
West Sussex	72,816	9.9	33,176	3.9
South East	733,364	8.3	344,742	3.9
England	4,678,265	8.7	2,374,540	4.4

Source: 2021 Census, Office for National Statistics

In 2021, there were 145,000 unpaid carers in Sussex – equivalent to 8.9% of the population aged 5 and over. This is a higher percentage than in the South East (8.3%) and England (8.7%). West Sussex has the highest proportion of unpaid carers (9.9%), while Brighton & Hove has the lowest (7.8%). This may relate to the different age structures of the populations, with West Sussex having a higher proportion of older working age residents.

Just under half (47%) of unpaid carers provide care for 20 or more hours per week. This represents 4.2% of the population aged 5 and over. While this is a higher proportion than in the South East (3.9%), it is slightly lower than the figure for England (4.4%).

East Sussex has the highest proportion of residents providing intensive unpaid care (4.9%), while Brighton & Hove has the lowest (3.5%).

Employment and Disability

TABLE: DISABILITY, DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT RATE AND OVERALL EMPLOYMENT RATE (2025)

Area	16-64 Equalities Act core/ work-limiting disabled	% of popu-lation	16-64 Equalities Act core/ work-limiting disabled in employment	Employ-ment rate %	No. of 16-64 in employ-ment	Overall 16-64 employ-ment rate %
Sussex	**292,100**	**28.0**	**173,300**	**59.3**	**798,000**	**76.5**
Brighton & Hove	66,700	31.9	42,300	63.4	154,900	74.1
East Sussex	93,500	28.9	47,600	50.9	233,300	72.2
West Sussex	131,900	25.8	83,400	63.2	409,800	80.2
South East	1,453,900	25.7	918,200	63.2	4,436,900	78.4
England	9,178,100	26.0	5,288,500	57.6	26,720,600	75.7

Source: Annual Population Survey; ONS; 2025

In the 12 months to March 2025, there were 292,100 16-64-year-old residents in Sussex who were either Equality Act (EA) or work-limiting disabled. This was 28% of the working age population – higher than in the South East (25.7%) and in England (26.0%). Brighton & Hove (31.9%) had the highest proportion of disabled working age residents and West Sussex (25.8%) had the lowest proportion.

The employment rate for disabled working age residents was 59.3%, compared with an overall employment rate of 76.5%. The employment rate for people in Sussex with disabilities was lower than in the South East (63.2%), but higher than in England (57.6%). Brighton & Hove (63.4%) and West Sussex (63.2%) had higher employment rates for disabled residents than East Sussex (50.9%).

Employment and Long-Term Health Conditions

People with long-term health conditions have much lower employment rates than the average, as shown in the table below.

TABLE: EMPLOYMENT RATE OF PEOPLE (AGED 16+) WITH HEALTH CONDITIONS BY AREA (2024)

Area	Residents with long-term health conditions in work	% in work	Residents with mental health conditions in work	% in work
Sussex	**313,400**	**50.3**	**100,900**	**50.0**
Brighton & Hove	69,000	64.6	22,500	54.8
East Sussex	95,600	47.8	31,800	46.5
West Sussex	148,800	47.0	46,600	50.3
South East	1,583,400	52.3	455,800	50.9
England	9,148,300	49.4	2,592,500	46.4

Source: Annual Population Survey (2024), Office for National Statistics (2025)

Across Sussex, just half (50%) of people with long-term health conditions are in work. This is slightly below the rate in the South East (52.3%) but slightly above the rate in England (49.4%). It is also 10 percentage points below the overall employment rate for residents aged 60 and over across Sussex. The gap is much wider in West Sussex (15 percentage points) than in East Sussex (7 percentage points) and Brighton & Hove (1 percentage point).

The employment rate for people with long-term health conditions in Brighton & Hove is relatively high (64.6%), but it is lower in East Sussex and West Sussex. This may reflect differences in age profiles across the three areas.

Around half (50%) of people with long-term mental health conditions are in employment. This is broadly in line with the South East (50.9%) and higher than in England overall (46.4%).

Education & Skills

TABLE: LEVEL 3 ATTAINMENT BY 19 YEARS - BY CHARACTERISTIC, 2023/24

Area	All %	Non- Free School Meals %	Free School Meals %	Attainment Gap %	Non-SEN %	SEN %	Attainment Gap %
Brighton & Hove	61.1	67.2	33.2	34.1	67.7	31.2	36.5
East Sussex	52.6	57.3	31.6	25.7	57.3	25.0	32.2
West Sussex	56.9	62.8	31.6	31.3	30.2	31.6	31.3
South East	58.7	63.0	31.4	31.7	62.6	33.4	29.4
England	57.6	62.4	36.8	25.5	64.2	35.4	28.8

Source: Level 2 & 3 Attainment 16-25 years; 2023/24; DfE, 2025 * Sussex data unavailable

Qualification levels are commonly used as a proxy for skill levels and the opportunities individuals are likely to have to enter and progress in the labour market. The table above shows the proportion of 19-year-olds who have attained Level 3 qualifications. It presents percentages for all 19-year-olds, those who have been eligible for Free School Meals (FSM), and those with Special Educational Needs (SEN), along with the attainment gaps between these groups and their peers.

There are no data available at the Sussex-wide level. However, 19-year-olds in Brighton & Hove (61.1%) are more likely to hold a Level 3 qualification than their counterparts in the South-East (58.7%) and England (57.6%). This is not the case in either West Sussex (56.9%) or East Sussex (52.6%), where the proportion in East Sussex is notably below both national and regional averages.

The more detailed analysis in the sub-sections of this report shows that Eastbourne (50.4%), Crawley (49.9%), Arun (48.3%) and Hastings (36.4%) have the lowest proportion of 19-year-olds with Level 3 qualifications. There are skills and qualifications challenges in several coastal parts of Sussex, including parts of Brighton & Hove, but this is an issue in Crawley, too.

There are also significant differences in attainment between young people who had been eligible for Free School Meals and who had Special Educational Needs, and those without disadvantages. This disparity is particularly pronounced in Brighton & Hove, which may again point to high levels of socio-economic inequality in the city. Although as noted above overall attainment in the city is higher, over two-thirds (67.2%) of 19-year-olds in Brighton & Hove who were not eligible for Free School Meals attained a Level 3 qualification, only one-third (33.2%) of those who were eligible did so. The attainment gap is even wider (36.5 percentage points) between young people with and without Special Educational Needs.

The FSM attainment gap is also high in West Sussex (31.3%), while in East Sussex it is closer to the England average (25.7%). The SEN attainment gap is higher than the national average in all three local authority areas.

RQF Level 3 is equivalent to an advanced apprenticeship or, academically, to A-levels. It typically provides the knowledge and skills required for higher education or more specialised roles within an industry.

There are, however, significant differences across Sussex. Overall Brighton & Hove has a much lower proportion of lower-qualified residents (16.8%), although there are wards which have significantly more, compared with East Sussex (34.5%), West Sussex (33.5%), the South-East (29.7%) and England (32.4%). In East Sussex, coastal areas, such as Hastings (40.9%), Rother (42.7%), Arun (37.1%) and Worthing (42.4%), as well as Crawley (35.4%) had a high proportion of lower qualified residents.

There is also evidence of skills mismatches among those already in employment, which may leave them vulnerable to changes in the labour market that demand higher-level skills. Across Sussex, around 221,000 people in work (29%) are reported to have lower skill levels than their jobs require. Once again, this figure is considerably lower in Brighton & Hove (22%) than in East Sussex (30%) and West Sussex (30%).

Employment

TABLE: EMPLOYMENT RATE BY AREA (COUNTS AND %), 2024

Area	Count	Percent	Count for 80%
Sussex	**807,700**	**77.6**	**+25,500**
Brighton & Hove	159,100	76.6	+7,140
East Sussex	233,500	72.1	+25,540
West Sussex	415,100	81.4	**-7,180**
South East	4,448,600	78.7	+73,320
England	26,720,000	75.7	+1,499,760

Source: Annual Population Survey; Office for National Statistics; 2024

In 2024, 807,700 of Sussex's working-age residents were in employment, giving an employment rate of 77.6%. This is below the rate for the South East (78.7%) but above the rate for England (75.7%). The UK Government has set a target of achieving an 80% employment rate as part of its Get Britain Working Plan. West Sussex (81.4%) already exceeds this target, but Brighton & Hove (76.6%) and East Sussex (72.1%) fall short. There are also differences within the three areas, which are set out in more detail in later sections.

For Sussex as a whole to reach an 80% employment rate, an additional 25,500 residents would need to be in work, assuming no change in the overall population. Brighton & Hove would need to support an additional 7,140 people into employment to hit the 80% threshold, whilst in East Sussex an additional 25,540 working-age residents would need to be employed for the county to achieve an 80% employment rate. This would require an 11% increase in the number of people in work – twice the rate of increase needed in England as a whole (5.6%).

There are significant variations within the sub-areas of Sussex. Hastings would need +7,620 more people in work to achieve an 80% employment rate and Rother would need +7,960.

Economic Inactivity

TABLE: 16–64-YEAR-OLD ECONOMIC INACTIVITY RATES, 2024

Area	Count including students	% including students	Count excluding students	% excluding students
Sussex	**199,900**	**19.2**	**147,500**	**14.9**
Brighton & Hove	40,600	19.5	22,000	11.6
East Sussex	74,800	23.1	58,100	18.9
West Sussex	84,500	16.6	67,400	13.7
South East	1,040,000	18.4	734,400	13.7
England	7,450,500	21.1	5,404,600	16.3

Source: Annual Population Survey; Office for National Statistics; 2025

People who are economically inactive are neither employed nor have they been actively seeking work in the previous four weeks. The main reasons for economic inactivity include being a student, having ill health, providing care, or being retired. Some forms of inactivity – such as studying or retirement – are not necessarily disadvantageous. The table below shows both the overall economic inactivity rates and the rates excluding students.

There are just under 200,000 working-age people in Sussex who are economically inactive. This represents 19.2% of 16-64-year-olds – a higher rate than in the South East (18.4%) but lower than in England (21.1%).

East Sussex (23.1%) has a particularly high economic inactivity rate, while West Sussex (16.6%) has a notably low rate.

Once students are excluded, around 147,500 working-age residents in Sussex – equivalent to 14.9% – are economically inactive. This adjusted rate again sits between the figures for England (16.3%) and the South East (13.7%). East Sussex (18.9%) continues to show a significantly higher level of economic inactivity than both national and regional averages. In contrast, West Sussex (13.7%) matches the South-East average (13.7%), but is below the national figure (16.3%). In Brighton & Hove, the economic inactivity rate (excluding students) is 11.6%, below both the regional rate (13.7%) and national rate (16.3%).

Reasons for Economic Inactivity (excluding students)

TABLE: REASONS FOR ECONOMIC INACTIVITY – EXCLUDING STUDENTS BY AREA (16-64 YEAR-OLDS), 2024

Area	Looking after a family/ home	Looking after a family/ home – % of economically inactive	Long-term sick	Long-term sick – % of economically Inactive	Early retirees	Early retirees – % of economically inactive
Sussex	**31,600**	**15.8**	**51,600**	**25.8**	**34,400**	**17.2**
Brighton & Hove	5,000	12.4	6,000	14.7	3,900	9.7
East Sussex	12,900	17.3	20,200	27.0	13,500	18.0
West Sussex	13,700	16.3	25,400	30.0	17,000	20.1
South East	197,100	19.0	228,100	21.9	150,000	12.8
England	1,415,500	19.0	2,009,900	27.0	934,900	11.5

Source: Annual Population Survey; Office for National Statistics; 2024

Just over a quarter (25.8%) of Sussex's economically inactive residents are inactive due to long-term sickness. This compares with 21.9% in the South-East and 27% in England. In West Sussex, 30% of economic inactivity is due to ill health; in East Sussex, it is 27%; and in Brighton & Hove, it is 15%. The local areas that have the highest proportion of ill-health related economic inactivity are Chichester (44.2%), Crawley (44.1%) and Rother (38.9%)

This means that most of the economic inactivity is due to other reasons. In many cases, this is likely to reflect a voluntary decision to withdraw from the labour market.

There are 34,400 working-age residents (17% of 16-64-year-olds) in Sussex who have retired early. This is significantly higher than in the South East (13%) and England (12%).

In West Sussex, early retirees account for one in five (20%) of all economically inactive working-age residents, and in East Sussex, the figure is 18%. The proportion and number in Brighton & Hove are much lower – 10% and 3,900, respectively.

Just under 16% of economically inactive residents in Sussex are looking after a family or home – lower than in both the South-East (19%) and England (19%). Relative to regional and national averages, this is a less prominent feature of worklessness in Sussex.

Looking after a family or home is a common reason for economic inactivity, particularly among women. It is not always clear how much of this is voluntary, and how much reflects difficulties related to the cost of childcare and in managing home and work responsibilities.

In Sussex, 44,200 (22.1%) out of 200,000 economically inactive residents report that they want to work. This represents a higher proportion than in the South East (18.7%) and England (20.5%). Economically inactive residents in Brighton & Hove (37.5%) are far more likely to want work than their counterparts in East Sussex (14.9%) and West Sussex (21.2%). It must be noted that the majority of working-age people who are economically inactive do not state that they want a job. Data at this level has quite wide confidence bands, so it needs to be interpreted with some caution.

Claimant Count Unemployment

TABLE: CLAIMANT COUNT UNEMPLOYMENT, APRIL 2024 AND APRIL 2025

Area	April 24 Count	April 24 %	April 25 Count	April 25 %	Difference Count	Difference %
Sussex	**33,010**	**3.1**	**36,875**	**3.5**	**+3,865**	**+11.7**
Brighton & Hove	7,800	3.9	8,745	4.4	+945	+12.1
East Sussex	10,840	3.4	11,650	3.7	+810	+7.5
West Sussex	14,370	2.7	16,480	3.1	+2,110	+14.7
South East	170,210	2.9	186,695	3.2	+16,485	+9.7
England	1,387,390	3.8	1,529,600	4.2	+142,210	+10.3

Source: Claimant Count; Office for National Statistics; 2025

In April 2025, there were just under 37,000 claimant count unemployed residents in Sussex – equivalent to 3.5% of the working-age population. This is a higher proportion than in the South East (3.2%) but lower than in England (4.2%). Brighton & Hove has the highest claimant count unemployment rate (4.4%), while West Sussex has the lowest (3.1%).

The claimant count for unemployed residents in Sussex increased by 3,865 (+11.7%) between April 2024 and April 2025. This represents a faster rate of increase than in both the South East (+9.7%) and England (+10.3%). The largest increase occurred in West Sussex (+14.7%), while the smallest was in East Sussex (+7.5%).

Claimant Count Unemployment by Age

The table below shows the claimant count for unemployed residents in April 2024 and April 2025 for 18-24-year-olds 25-49 year olds and people aged 50+. In April 2024, there were also 65 16-17-year-olds who were claimant count unemployed – 25 in East Sussex and 25 in West Sussex and 15 in Brighton & Hove.

TABLE: CLAIMANT UNEMPLOYMENT BY AGE, APRIL 2024 AND APRIL 2025

Area	18-24 Years Apr-24	18-24 Years Apr-25	Change	Change %
Sussex	**5,705**	**6,145**	**440**	**7.7**
Brighton & Hove	1,390	1,385	-5	**-0.4**
East Sussex	2,010	2,090	80	4.0
West Sussex	2,305	2,670	365	15.8
South East	28,640	31,425	2,785	9.7
England	243,300	265,305	22,005	9.0

Table continued below

Area (continued)	25-49 Years Apr-24	25-49 Years Apr-25	Change	Change %
Sussex	**19,080**	**20,485**	**1,405**	**7.4**
Brighton & Hove	4,595	5,015	420	9.1
East Sussex	6,125	6,205	80	1.3
West Sussex	8,360	9,265	905	10.9
South East	100,075	106,225	6,150	6.1
England	826,000	883,235	57,235	6.9

Table continued below

Area (continued)	50+ Years Apr-24	50+ Years Apr-25	Change	Change %
Sussex	**8,175**	**9,565**	**1,390**	**17.0**
Brighton & Hove	1,805	2,170	365	20.2
East Sussex	2,685	3,085	400	14.9
West Sussex	3,685	4,310	625	17.0
South East	41,220	45,425	4,205	10.2
England	315,885	349,340	33,455	10.6

Source: Claimant Count Unemployment; Office for National Statistics; 2025

In April 2025, there were 6,145 18-24-year-olds who were claimant count unemployed in Sussex. This is +440 (7.7%) more than there had been in April 2024 – a smaller proportionate increase than in the South East (+9.7%) and England (+9.0%). West Sussex (+15.8%) had the largest increase and accounted for 83% of the increase in Sussex.

There were 20,485 25-49-year-old claimant count unemployed residents in Sussex in April 2025. This is an increase of +1,405 (+7.4%) compared with a year earlier. This is a slightly faster increase than in the South East (+6.1%) and England (+6.9%) over the period. West Sussex (+10.9%) had the largest percentage increase, followed by Brighton & Hove (+9.1%) and East Sussex (+1.3%).

There were 9,565 aged 50+ claimant count unemployed residents in Sussex in April 2025. This is +1,390 more (17.0%) more than there had been a year earlier. This is a faster increase than in the South East (+10.2%) and England (+10.6%). Brighton & Hove (+20.2%) had the largest proportionate increase, followed by West Sussex (+17.0%) and East Sussex (+14.9%).

Not in Education, Employment & Training (NEET)

TABLE: 16-17 YEAR OLDS - NEET / ACTIVITY NOT KNOWN (2025)

Area	Total Count	NEET & Not Known Count	%	NEET Count	%	Not Known Count	%
Sussex	**36,349**	**3,223**	**8.9**	**1,283**	**3.5**	**1,940**	**5.3**
Brighton & Hove	5,713	383	6.7	286	5.0	97	1.7
East Sussex	11,979	695	5.8	587	4.9	108	0.9
West Sussex	18,657	2,146	11.5	410	2.2	1,735	9.3
South East	215,720	15,100	7.0	7,334	3.4	7,982	3.7
England	1,335,160	74,769	5.6	45,395	3.4	29,374	2.2

Source: Participation in education, training & NEET age 16-17 by local authority; Department for Education; 2025

There were 36,349 16–17-year-olds in Sussex in 2025. Of these, 1,283 (3.5%) were known to be Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). This is a very similar percentage to the South-East (3.4%) and England (3.4%).

Nearly half (45% or 587) of the known NEET cohort were in East Sussex, just under a third (32% or 410) in West Sussex, and just under a quarter (22% or 286) were in Brighton & Hove. Although West Sussex had a known NEET rate of 2.2%), there were a significant proportion (9.3%) of young people who had a 'not known' destination – suggesting a challenge with tracking the current situations of young people in the county to be addressed. In contrast, Brighton & Hove (1.7%) and East Sussex (0.9%) had much lower rates of 'not known' destinations than West Sussex, the South East (3.7%), and England (2.2%).

Universal Credit

Universal Credit is a monthly payment to help people with their living costs. People who are on low income, out of work or who cannot work are eligible to claim Universal Credit. It is replacing housing benefit, income support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), and income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA).

TABLE: AVERAGE MONTHLY UNIVERSAL CREDIT CLAIMANTS BY AGE (JANUARY 2024 - DECEMBER 2024)

Area	Total UC Claimant Count	%	16-24 Year Olds Count	%	25-49 Year Olds Count	%	50-64 Years Count	%
Sussex	**34,588**	**2.0**	**5,725**	**3.4**	**20,098**	**3.9**	**8,769**	**2.4**
Brighton & Hove	8,124	2.9	1,374	3.1	4,776	4.8	1,974	3.6
East Sussex	11,286	2.0	2,018	4.4	6,400	4.3	2,870	2.4
West Sussex	15,178	1.7	2,333	3.0	8,922	3.3	3,925	2.1
South East	177,194	1.9	29,009	3.1	104,960	3.5	43,225	2.3
England	1,461,140	2.5	249,577	4.1	874,513	3.0	337,450	3.0

Source: Stat-Xplore; Department for Work & Pensions; 2025

In 2024, there were an average of 34,588 working age residents in Sussex claiming Universal Credit. This is 2.0% of the resident population. This compares with 1.9% in the South-East and 2.5% in England. Brighton & Hove (2.9%) had the highest rate of claimants, followed by East Sussex (2.0%) and West Sussex (1.7%).

People aged 25-49 years were most likely to be claiming Universal Credit (3.9%), followed by people aged 16-24 years (3.4%) and people aged 50-64 years (2.4%). East Sussex had the highest proportion of 16-24 year olds (4.4%) claiming Universal Credit; Brighton & Hove had the highest proportion of 25-49 year olds (4.8%) and 50-64 year olds (3.6%).

Between January and December 2024, the number of Universal Credit claimants in Sussex increased by 1,780, with seven out of ten (70%) of this increase among older residents (aged 50+). Almost six out of ten (57%) of the rise was among West Sussex residents; a quarter in East Sussex (27%) and one in seven (15%) in Brighton & Hove.

3.4 Labour Demand

Jobs and Job Density

TABLE: JOBS & JOB DENSITY, 2024

Area	Job Count	% of Sussex Jobs	Job Density
Sussex	**722,790**	**100**	**0.82**
Brighton & Hove	140,740	19.5	0.88
East Sussex	190,300	26.3	0.72
West Sussex	391,750	54.2	0.86

Source: Job Density; Office for National Statistics; 2024

There are 722,790 jobs in Sussex. Over half (54%) of these are in West Sussex, just over a quarter (26%) are in East Sussex, and a fifth (20%) are in Brighton & Hove. However, jobs are not evenly distributed across the county. One-third (32%) of all Sussex jobs are located in either Brighton & Hove or Crawley – both situated along Sussex's central spine between the coast and London.

Only two local areas have more jobs than working-age residents: Crawley, with a job-to-working-age ratio of 1.16, and Chichester, at 1.08. In contrast, East Sussex has just 0.72 jobs per working-age resident, significantly lower than Brighton & Hove (0.88) and West Sussex (0.86).

This disparity has major implications for matching people to jobs and ensuring transport systems are suitable to support this. Put simply, in many parts of Sussex – especially in remote rural areas of East and West Sussex – jobs are not located where people live.

Self-Employment

TABLE: SELF-EMPLOYMENT BY AREA, 2024

Area	Self employed	% of Population	Index (England = 100)
Sussex	**123,000**	**15.2**	**121**
Brighton & Hove	24,000	15.1	120
East Sussex	37,000	15.8	125
West Sussex	62,000	14.9	118
South East	559,900	12.6	100
England	3,358,400	12.6	100

Source: Annual Population Survey; Office for National Statistics; 2024

High levels of self-employment can indicate a lack of high-quality employment opportunities and can provide low-quality, insecure sources of income. Certain sectors are known for high levels of self-employment, such as construction and the creative industries, where work is often project-based and time limited.

A relatively high proportion of Sussex's working residents (15.2%) are self-employed, compared with both England and the South-East (each at 12.6%). This pattern is consistent across Sussex: East Sussex has the highest rate (15.8%), followed by Brighton & Hove (15.1%) and West Sussex (14.9%).

Within Sussex, some of the most affluent areas have the highest levels of self-employment – Rother (21.8%), Chichester (21.1%), Wealden (21.1%) and Horsham (17.6%), perhaps reflecting a lifestyle choice in these areas, and a desire for greater flexibility.

High levels of self-employment pose challenges for supporting people on the fringes of the labour market. When self-employment is not growth-oriented, it offers limited entry points and employment opportunities for those seeking to enter work. Micro-businesses often lack the capacity to take on and train staff.

Employment by Sector

Local economies and their labour markets are shaped by the structure of their economic activity. In Sussex, Human Health & Social Work (16%) and Wholesale & Retail (15%) together account for nearly a third of all jobs. Some sectors are high value and provide well-paid employment, while others are more labour-intensive and tend to offer lower pay.

The table opposite (p37) shows how employment in Sussex compares with England.

There is a clear pattern across much of Sussex: the economy is heavily reliant on the following sectors:

- Land-based industries (agriculture, forestry and fishing)
- Tourism (accommodation and food services)
- Health (health and social work activities)
- Creative industries (arts, entertainment and leisure)

These are also identified as important sectors in the Sussex LSIP sector deep dive reports.

There are some additions and exceptions. Brighton & Hove also has notable strengths in ICT and Finance & Insurance; East Sussex has strengths in Education and Construction; and West Sussex performs well in Manufacturing, Admin and Transport & Storage. There are also variations at district and borough level.

However, overall, Sussex is heavily reliant on some of the lowest-value sectors of the economy – many of which also rely heavily on insecure employment. In 2024, UK-wide productivity stood at £45.95 per hour. By contrast, in sectors where Sussex has strengths, output per hour was:

- Agriculture, forestry and fishing: £20.91
- Accommodation and food services: £21.61
- Human health work: £30.57
- Arts, entertainment and recreation: £24.49[21]

In addition, Retail and Wholesale – another major employment sector in Sussex – had a productivity rate of £31.95 per hour.

None of the sectors in which Sussex has significant employment strengths are high value. As a result, they tend not to offer well-paid jobs, making the local labour market a less reliable source of income – particularly when set against the region's high housing costs. However, they do offer young people in particular a valuable entry route into the labour market and opportunity to develop key employability skills and experience, as well as progression routes.

[21] Output per hour, UK; Office for National Statistics; 2025

TABLE: EMPLOYMENT BY SECTOR 2024

Sector	Sussex Count	%	Brighton & Hove	%	East Sussex	%	West Sussex	%
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	6,540	0.9	40	0.0	2,000	1.0	4,500	1.1
Mining & quarrying	300	0.0	0	0.0	50	0.0	250	0.1
Manufacturing	43,500	6.0	2,500	1.7	12,000	6.3	29,000	7.4
Electricity, gas, steam & air conditioning supply	2,250	0.3	1,000	0.7	250	0.1	1,000	0.3
Water supply; sewerage, waste management & remediation activities	5,200	0.7	700	0.5	1,500	0.8	3,000	0.8
Construction	30,500	4.2	3,500	2.4	11,000	5.8	16,000	4.1
Wholesale & retail	107,000	14.8	17,000	11.9	30,000	15.7	60,000	15.2
Transport & storage	37,000	5.1	3,500	2.4	4,500	2.4	29,000	7.4
Accommodation & food service	81,000	11.2	18,000	12.6	25,000	13.1	38,000	9.6
Information & communication	24,000	3.3	8,000	5.6	4,000	2.1	12,000	3.0
Finance & insurance	23,000	3.2	8,000	5.6	4,000	2.1	11,000	2.8
Real estate	13,500	1.9	3,000	2.1	3,500	1.8	7,000	1.8
Professional, scientific & technical	49,000	6.8	11,000	7.7	11,000	5.8	27,000	6.9
Admin. support service	54,000	7.5	10,000	7.0	8,000	4.2	36,000	9.1
Public admin. & defence; social security	27,000	3.7	6,000	4.2	9,000	4.7	12,000	3.0
Education	65,000	9.0	17,000	11.9	17,000	8.9	31,000	7.9
Human health & social work	114,000	15.8	23,000	16.1	37,000	19.4	54,000	13.7
Arts, entertainment & recreation	24,000	3.3	5,000	3.5	6,000	3.1	13,000	3.3
Other services	16,000	2.2	3,500	2.4	4,500	2.4	8,000	2.0
Total	**722,790**	**100.0**	**140,740**	**100**	**190,300**	**100**	**391,750**	**100**

Source: Business Register & Employment Survey (2024)

Business Units

TABLE: BUSINESS UNITS BY SIZE 2024

Area	Total Business Count	0-4 staff Count	%	5-9 staff Count	%
Sussex	**84,900**	**62,180**	**73.2**	**10,320**	12.2
Brighton & Hove	16,155	11,935	73.9	1,875	11.6
East Sussex	26,145	19,335	74.0	3,220	12.3
West Sussex	42,605	30,910	72.6	5,225	12.3
South East	465,155	340,175	73.1	55,570	11.9
England	2,735,615	1,972,515	72.1	341,000	12.5

Table continued below

Area (continued)	10-49 staff Count	%	50-249 staff Count	%	250+ staff Count	%
Sussex	**10,265**	**12.1**	**1,870**	**2.2**	**265**	**0.3**
Brighton & Hove	1,970	12.2	315	1.9	55	0.3
East Sussex	3,010	11.5	535	2.0	45	0.2
West Sussex	5,285	12.4	1,020	2.4	165	0.4
South East	56,195	12.1	11,540	2.5	1,680	0.4
England	339,670	12.4	71,435	2.6	11,000	0.4

Source: UK Business Counts; Office for National Statistics; 2025

The business base of most local economies is dominated by micro-business units employing fewer than five people. In this respect, Sussex is broadly like other areas. A slightly higher proportion of business units in Sussex employ 0-4 staff (73.2%) compared with England (72.1%), and the figure is almost identical to the South East average (73.1%). Within Sussex, East Sussex (73.9%) and Brighton & Hove (74.0%) have slightly higher proportions of micro-businesses than West Sussex (72.6%).

The more pressing local issue is the relatively small number of medium-sized (50-249 employees) and large (250+ employees) business units. Brighton & Hove has only 315 businesses employing 50-249 staff, and just 55 employing 250 or more. In East Sussex, the figures are 535 and 45 respectively. West Sussex has a larger number, with 1,020 businesses employing 50-249 people, and 165 organisations that employ 250+ employees.

A significant proportion of larger business units in Sussex are in public services. There are 100 large organisations in public administration, education, and health, distributed across Brighton & Hove (25), East Sussex (30) and West Sussex (45). Other sectors with a reasonably significant number of large businesses include wholesale and retail (35), administrative and support services (25), and transport and storage (20).

TABLE: BUSINESS UNITS BY SECTOR 2024

Sector	Sussex Count	%	Brighton & Hove	%	East Sussex	%	West Sussex	%
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	2,660	3.1	50	0.3	1,300	5.0	1,310	3.1
Mining & quarrying	30	0.0	0	0.0	10	0.0	20	0.0
Manufacturing	3,675	4.3	450	2.8	1,265	4.8	1,960	4.6
Electricity, gas, steam & air conditioning supply	160	0.2	30	0.2	30	0.1	100	0.2
Water supply; sewerage, waste management & remediation activities	315	0.4	25	0.2	115	0.4	180	0.4
Construction	11,540	13.6	1,585	9.8	4,005	15.3	5,950	14.0
Wholesale & retail	13,395	15.8	2,590	16.0	4,110	15.7	6,695	15.7
Transport & storage	2,290	2.7	240	1.5	540	2.1	1,515	3.6
Accommodation & food service	6,110	7.2	1,495	9.3	1,920	7.3	2,695	6.3
Information & communication	6,010	7.1	1,790	11.1	1,465	5.6	2,755	6.5
Finance & insurance	1,520	1.8	235	1.5	420	1.6	865	2.0
Real estate	3,375	4.0	730	4.5	1,000	3.8	1,645	3.9
Professional, scientific & technical	12,885	15.2	2,790	17.3	3,635	13.9	6,465	15.2
Admin. support service	7,530	8.9	1,390	8.6	2,130	8.1	4,010	9.4
Public admin. & defence; social security	525	0.6	90	0.6	190	0.7	250	0.6
Education	2,055	2.4	390	2.4	650	2.5	1,015	2.4
Human health & social work	4,595	5.4	850	5.3	1,485	5.7	2,265	5.3
Arts, entertainment & recreation	2,925	3.4	810	5.0	880	3.4	1,235	2.9
Other services	3,290	3.9	610	3.8	1,000	3.8	1,680	3.9
Total	**84,900**	**100.0**	**16,155**	**100.0**	**26,145**	**100.0**	**42,605**	**100.0**

Source: UK Business Counts; Office for National Statistics; 2024

At the Sussex level, when compared nationally, there is nothing particularly distinctive about the sectoral structure of its business units, apart from a modest concentration in arts, entertainment and recreation.

However, more notable differences emerge at county and unitary authority level. The business base in Brighton & Hove is heavily service-sector oriented, with very little production activity. There is some evidence of strength in ICT and professional, scientific and technical services – although many of these are likely to be small, lifestyle-oriented businesses. The city also has a large number of accommodation and food service businesses.

In East Sussex, there is a notable concentration of land-based industries and construction business units. The business base in West Sussex, by contrast, more closely resembles the sector profile of England as a whole. Overall, West Sussex has a more balanced economy than either East Sussex or Brighton & Hove.

Job Vacancies

TABLE: UNIQUE JOB POSTINGS BY KEY SECTOR, 2024

Area / metric	Total	Construction	Creative & cultural	Digital	Health & care	Land based	Manufacturing & engineering	Visitor economy
Sussex postings	110,500	13,728	7,277	10,410	33,331	1,714	15,846	28,194
%	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Brighton & Hove postings	23,659	2,966	2,182	3,326	6,263	283	2,327	6,312
%	21.4	21.6	30.0	32.0	18.8	16.5	14.7	22.4
East Sussex postings	28,727	3,413	1,479	1,864	10,733	477	4,206	6,555
%	26.0	24.9	20.3	17.9	32.2	27.8	26.5	23.2
West Sussex postings	58,114	7,349	3,616	5,220	16,335	954	9,313	15,327
%	52.6	53.5	49.7	50.1	49.0	55.7	58.8	54.4

Source: Lightcast 2024

In 2024, there were 110,000 unique job postings in Sussex. Over half (53%) were in West Sussex, just over a quarter (26%) in East Sussex, and just over a fifth (21%) in Brighton & Hove.

Health and Care accounted for the largest number of job postings (33,300), followed by roles in the Visitor Economy – broadly reflecting the importance of these sectors to the Sussex economy.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Brighton & Hove had a disproportionate share of Creative, Cultural and Digital job postings. East Sussex saw a higher-than-average concentration of Health and Care roles, while West Sussex had a disproportionate share of jobs in Land-Based industries and Manufacturing & Engineering.

3.5 Current Provision

Strong strategic partnerships are well-established across each local authority area, with collaborative working increasing across Sussex. Where collaboration is less developed, this reflects a range of factors – including the commissioning structure of government contracts, and current funding constraints, as well as variations in capacity or service delivery models and organisational priorities across local agencies.

Nationally funded employment-related partnerships and programmes

Connect to Work

Connect to Work is a national government programme that supports people with long-term health conditions to secure sustainable employment, using a voluntary supported employment model delivered by a range of providers. The programme is administered by East Sussex and West Sussex County Councils, with delivery across Sussex and Brighton & Hove.

Access to Work

Access to Work is a national programme managed by local DWP offices and offers financial and practical support to individuals with disabilities or health conditions to help them start or remain in employment. It is delivered by a range of local organisations and provides tailored services based on individual needs. It is currently under review by the government's Pathways to Work white paper.

WorkWell Programme

The WorkWell programme is a Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) initiative aimed at supporting people with health-related barriers to work by offering integrated employment and health support. There is currently no WorkWell programme in Sussex, however the Integrated Care Board is working with partners to map how the programme could be supported in Sussex with pilot projects planned for Hastings, Crawley, and East Brighton, should further funding become available in the future.

The WorkWell Discovery Phase report[22] has found that individuals with mental health and musculoskeletal (MSK) conditions face significant barriers to work, including long waiting lists, digital exclusion, fragmented referral pathways, and inconsistent employer support the report suggests that for it to succeed, WorkWell must be designed with sustainability, equity, and local ownership at its core. It should prioritise early intervention and the use of digital tools to support this pathway where appropriate, with a call for a cultural shift around the use of fit notes as an enabler to this work to provide timely support.

Skills Bootcamps

Skills Bootcamps provide intensive, sector-specific training courses designed to improve employability and address local skills shortages in high-demand industries by supporting people into jobs and aiding career progression. Skills Bootcamps are funded by DfE and commissioned by local authorities. Delivered in partnership with local employers and training providers, courses typically last up to 16 weeks. Bootcamps are focused on a range of specific sector skills vital to the local economy, for example, digital marketing or wine production.

Restart

The Restart Scheme is a free, government-funded employment support programme for adults aged 18 and over in Sussex who have been out of work and claiming Universal Credit for at least 6 months. Commissioned by the DWP, the scheme is delivered locally by providers such as Fedcap Employment and Reed in Partnership. It offers up to 12 months of tailored, one-to-one support to help individuals overcome barriers to employment and secure sustainable work.

[22] NHS Sussex Workwell Discovery; Health Innovation Kent, Surrey & Sussex; 2025

Participants are referred by their Jobcentre Plus Work Coach and receive assistance with job searching, CV writing, interview preparation, skills development, and accessing local job opportunities. The Restart Scheme complements existing Jobcentre Plus services by providing additional, personalised support to long-term unemployed individuals.

National Careers Service

The National Careers Service is a free, government-funded support service available to individuals aged 13 and over across Sussex. Delivered by CXK in East Sussex and the Education and Development Trust in Brighton and Hove and West Sussex. The service offers personalised, one-to-one guidance to help people at all stages of their career journey make informed decisions about learning, training, and work opportunities.

Youth Employability Service

Local authorities have a statutory responsibility to support young people aged 16-18 not in education, employment, or training (NEET), or who are at risk of becoming NEET. In East Sussex it is a commissioned service; in Brighton & Hove and West Sussex the service is delivered in-house. The provision offers personalised, support and guidance to help young people explore their options and plan their next steps, as well as track destinations and identify young people who need support.

Careers Hubs

There are two Careers Hubs in Sussex: one covering East Sussex and the other covering Brighton & Hove and West Sussex. These hubs provide resources, experiences of the workplace, and other forms of support to help young people with career choices and transitions. The Careers Hubs are supported by volunteer employers such as Enterprise Advisers, who support schools with their careers strategies and Industry Champions, who take part in careers activities to support young people's understanding of the world of work. Each hub is also supported by 'Cornerstone' Employers from across the county who act as ambassadors, connecting education institutions with businesses and supporting careers events and activities.

Pan-Sussex skills and employment partnerships that can support workforce development

Local Skills Improvement Partnership

The Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP – Future Skills Sussex), led by the Sussex Chamber of Commerce, outlines the skills challenges, gaps, and needs across Sussex. It has resulted in the Future Skills Sussex Improvement Framework, developed under five themes: Intelligence, Conversation, Innovation, Offer, Talent[23]. A new LSIP Progress Report was produced in 2025 alongside updated sector deep dive reports.

Employer Representative Bodies

Whilst the Sussex Chamber of Commerce is the designated Employer Representative Body (ERB) for Sussex, encompassing East Sussex, West Sussex, and Brighton & Hove, there are many town and city employer networks, chambers and sector support representatives that support local skills, employment projects and Careers Hubs.

FE Sussex

FE Sussex brings together the seven member colleges serving Sussex to provide a coordinated and influential post-16 educational voice. It also supports the sharing of best practice in learning provision across the county.

Sussex Council of Training Providers (SCTP)

The Sussex Council of Training Providers represents training organisations offering apprenticeships, work-based learning, and pre-employment training across Sussex. It

[23] https://www.futureskillssussex.co.uk/

provides information, resources, networking, and knowledge exchange opportunities. They organise a regular pre-employment group meeting bringing local authorities, DWP and other local agencies together to discuss issues and identify opportunity.

Apprenticeships in Sussex (AIS)

AIS (run by Sussex Council of Training Providers) publishes details of apprenticeship and training providers, and pre-employment training opportunities throughout Sussex.

Sussex Learning Network (SLN)

The Sussex Learning Network is a collaborative partnership, comprising 14 core members, including further education colleges, universities, local authorities, and enterprise partnerships across Sussex. Its primary mission is to enhance access to higher-level education and improve social mobility by addressing barriers faced by learners, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Sussex Training Consortium (STC)

The Sussex Training Consortium is a strategic partnership of local authorities in East and West Sussex, dedicated to providing high-quality, cost-effective training for local government staff. Founded in 2004, STC offers a broad range of courses, including general training, management programs, IT training, and specialised courses in investigation and enforcement. By pooling resources, the consortium ensures that training is tailored to the specific needs of local government employees, promoting professional development and service improvement across the participating councils.

The Sussex Platform for Education, Careers and Skills (SPECS)

SPECS is an initiative by the NHS Sussex Training Hub aimed at enhancing education and career development within the region. SPECS focuses on providing resources and support for individuals pursuing careers in primary care and related sectors. It offers a range of educational programmes, training opportunities, and career guidance to help individuals navigate their professional paths in healthcare.

Higher Education

There are three universities in Sussex: the University of Sussex and the University of Brighton, both with main campuses in Falmer, on the outskirts of Brighton & Hove; and the University of Chichester, with campuses in Chichester and Bognor Regis

Additionally, the new Sussex and Surrey Institute of Technology developed as a partnership between Chichester College Group, NESCOT, University of Brighton, University of Chichester and University of Sussex provides high quality, higher level technical education up to level 5 including in:

- Engineering & Manufacturing Technologies
- Digital Technologies
- Construction, Planning & The Built Environment
- Sustainable Technologies & Practices

East Sussex College has recently partnered with the South East Institute of Technology (SE IOT), focusing on developing skills for the technology-driven economy in the South East. The college offers a range of technical and professional courses, apprenticeships, and higher education options, with a strong emphasis on industry partnerships and state-of-the-art facilities.

There is no dedicated higher education provision in East Sussex, but HEIs are represented on the Skills & Employment East Sussex sector task groups.

4. Brighton & Hove

4.1 Brighton & Hove Summary

Brighton & Hove is the main urban centre covering an area of 32 square miles. It is centrally located along the Sussex coast – around 38 miles west of Hastings and 31 miles east of Chichester which are the boundaries of East and West Sussex. It is bounded by the South Downs National Park to the north and the English Channel to the south, and like much of coastal Sussex, this geography limits development opportunities. It is one of the UK's most high-profile seaside locations, known for its diverse and liberal character. It benefits from good rail connections to London and Gatwick Airport and a well-connected bus service.

The Universities of Brighton and Sussex are an important part of the city's economic and cultural fabric. Together, they have around 35,000 students, many of whom remain in the city after completing their studies to enjoy its distinctive lifestyle although it is not in the UK top ten graduate retention cities[24].

The city's economy is characterised by high levels of freelance work, micro-businesses. According to Invest in Brighton & Hove[25], business start-ups and self-employed workers are 5% above the national average and the city has more freelancers than anywhere else in the UK. It suggests that this "contributes to an open, flexible and collaborative way of working".

Housing and rent affordability are significant local challenges. The city's 23 wards display a wide range of socio-economic profiles, with the highest levels of social and economic deprivation concentrated in areas such as Moulsecoomb, Whitehawk, Hangleton, Coldean and Bevendean.

The Brighton and Hove Economic Plan (2024-2027)[26] includes a strong commitment to building a more inclusive labour market by providing employment and skills support that is directly aligned with local economic needs and opportunities.

Demographically, the city is distinct from other parts of Sussex. It has a youthful population, driven in part by the large number of students attending the Universities of Brighton and Sussex which leads to a more transient community. Although future population growth is expected to be among older residents, it is also anticipated that there will be growth in the 16-49 age groups. It is a suggestion that some working age people are moving out

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24 https://www.thestudentpocketguide.com/2025/01/student-life/education-career/graduate-retention-rate/
25 https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/sites/default/files/migrated/article/inline/invest-in-brighton-hove.pdf
26 Brighton & Hove Economic Plan 2024 to 2027 PDF plan, highlight report and first year action plan
27 Census 2011 and Census 2021 via NOMISWEB; Office for National Statistics; 2025

of the city to more affordable neighbouring areas, although this is difficult to evidence conclusively.

Brighton & Hove's population is genuinely diverse and, overall, well-qualified – 20% of residents were born outside the UK. Between 2011 and 2021, the city's population increased by only 1.4%, but the ethnic mix changed considerably. There were -15,187 (-6.9%) fewer white British residents and +18,921 (+35%) more residents from other ethnic backgrounds[27].The design and delivery of employment and skills support services need to reflect this diversity.

Although economic inactivity is relatively high, this is largely attributable to the student population. However, 15,200 people, or 37.5% of the city's economically inactive residents – report that they would like to work.

For a city with two universities, Brighton & Hove maintains a healthy employment rate – though it remains below the Government's 80% target. However, unemployment is increasing and remains above pre-pandemic rates.

There are 69,000 residents in the city with a long-term health condition who are in work, including 22,500 with a mental health condition. However, compared with regional and national figures, the employment rate among people with health conditions is relatively high.

Brighton & Hove has a highly active and vibrant voluntary and community sector that engages with a wide range of communities. However, the sector is facing significant funding pressures, and the employability support it provides can only be delivered subject to funding.

4.2 Strengths and Challenges

Strengths	Challenges
Overall, a well-qualified and youthful resident population.	Rising unemployment 12.1% and 20% for over 50s. Increasing numbers of young people Not in Employment, Education and Training (NEET). 5% in 2025 compared to 4.1% in 2024.
A high profile and vibrant city that is a key visitor destination with a culturally, ethnically and LGBTQ+ population.	Whilst attainment at Level 3 is higher in the city that East and West Sussex. Attainment gaps at age 19 for SEN and free school meal pupils is also higher, this can lead to economic inequality and poor social mobility. 17% of the city's working age population don't have a Level 3 qualification.
71% of the population are working age, approximately 199,000 people (2023). With the number of working age adults aged up to 49 set to increase up to 2035. 23% of the city's working-age population are 16-24 years old.	Higher levels of self-employment than in England reflects insecurity and labour market vulnerability and the need for support for people on the fringes of the labour market. Self-employment is generally not growth-oriented and offers limited entry points for those seeking to enter work.

Strengths	Challenges
A notably high concentration of employment in several sectors: accommodation and food services, utilities, human health and social work, arts, entertainment and recreation, education, information and communication, finance and insurance and other services. With strong service, digital and creative sector economy.	The high working age population means the city needs to supply enough jobs to maintain a high employment rate. There are relatively low numbers of medium and large organisations in the city. However, increasing year on year unemployment growing numbers for 50+ and anticipated decline of 8% in working age population 50+ over the next 10 years.
The city has 140K jobs, accounting for 20% of all employment in Sussex and a strong ratio of jobs to working age adults at 0.88.	Low productivity sectors dominate the local economy translating into low-paying jobs and labour market challenges particularly in relation to high living and housing costs and modest earnings.
At 76.6% a strong employment rate for a city with two universities and 35,000 students but still below the national ambition of 80% employment.	Sufficiency of provision of support for economically inactive people who want to work and people with physical and mental health conditions and language barriers to find and maintain employment.
A very active community voluntary sector infrastructure.	Brighton & Hove (2.9%) has the highest rate of Universal Claimants in Sussex. The 25-49 age group is overrepresented among claimants, suggesting financial vulnerability among this core working age group. Based on resident population sizes, the city has higher level of residents in receipt of Employment Support Allowance at 2.5%.
A diverse city with 20% of residents born outside of the UK which brings a need and opportunity to design employment and skills support services to reflect this diversity.	Achieving an 80% employment rate requires approx. 7000 to be supported into employment. 15,200 people, or 37.5% of the city's economically inactive residents – report that they would like to work. 17.3% active residents do not give a reason for their economic inactivity.

4.3 Labour Supply

Population by Age

TABLE: POPULATION BY AGE (2023)

Area	All Ages %	Aged 0 to 15 %	Aged 16 to 64 %	Aged 16 to 24 %	Aged 25 to 49 %	Aged 50 to 64 %	Aged 65+ %	Dependency ratio
Sussex	100	16.7	60.5	9.7	30.0	20.8	22.8	0.65
Brighton & Hove	**100**	**14.6**	**71.2**	**16.1**	**35.4**	**19.7**	**14.2**	**0.40**
East Sussex	100	16.4	57.2	8.4	27.1	21.8	26.5	0.75
West Sussex	100	17.6	59.2	8.5	30.2	20.5	23.2	0.69
South East	100	18.6	61.7	10.0	31.9	19.8	19.8	0.62
England	100	18.5	62.9	10.7	32.9	19.3	18.7	0.59

Source: Office for National Statistics

In 2023, Brighton & Hove had a resident population of just under 280,000. Over seven in ten residents (71%) were of working age, equating to approximately 199,000 people. The city has a much higher proportion of working-age residents than the South East (62%), England (64%), and Sussex as a whole (61%).

Unlike much of Sussex, Brighton & Hove's working-age population is heavily skewed towards younger adults (16-24-year-olds). One in six residents (16%) fall into this age group, and they make up nearly a quarter (23%) of the city's working-age population. This is largely attributable to the presence of the Universities of Sussex and Brighton. Nonetheless, it is a notable feature of the city's labour market – particularly when set against the broader Sussex context, where a significant share of the population is aged 65 and over.

The dependency ratio – measuring the number of non-working-age residents for every working-age resident – was 0.40 in Brighton & Hove in 2023. This is significantly lower than the figures for England (0.59) and the South East (0.62), indicating a relatively low level of demographic dependency.

The large number of working-age residents is a potential asset for employers, offering a bigger local labour pool than many areas. However, it also creates pressure to ensure that the city offers enough jobs to maintain a high employment rate.

Ethnicity

TABLE: GLOBAL ETHNIC MAJORITY POPULATION 2021

Area	GEM Count	GEM* %	Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh	%	Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African	%
Sussex	136,076	18.1	24,835	18.3	9,955	7.3
Brighton & Hove	**72,272**	**26.2**	**13,217**	**18.3**	**5,458**	**7.6**
East Sussex	63,804	11.7	11,618	18.2	4,497	7.0
West Sussex	139,102	15.8	38,288	27.5	11,429	8.2
South East	1,963,005	21.2	650,545	33.1	221,584	11.3
England	14,949,257	26.5	5,426,392	36.3	2,381,724	15.9

Table continued below

Area (continued)	Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups	%	Other white	%	Other ethnic group	%
Sussex	25,541	18.8	62,134	45.7	13,611	10.0
Brighton & Hove	**13,228**	**18.3**	**31,740**	**43.9**	**8,629**	**11.9**
East Sussex	12,313	19.3	30,394	47.6	4,982	7.8
WestSussex	20,811	15.0	59,948	43.1	8,626	6.2
South East	260,871	13.3	694,322	35.4	135,683	6.9
England	1,669,378	11.2	4,242,610	28.4	1,229,153	8.2

Source: Census 2021; Office for National Statistics * GEM = Global Ethnic Majority

In 2021, over 72,000 residents of Brighton & Hove (26%) were from a Global Ethnic Majority background. This is a higher proportion than in the South East (21.1%) and similar to the national figure for England (27%). Brighton & Hove has a significantly larger Global Ethnic Majority than either East or West Sussex.

‘Other White’ residents account for nearly half (44%) of the city’s Global Ethnic Majority – a figure notably higher than in the South East (35%) and England (28%). In contrast, Brighton & Hove has relatively smaller Asian and Black populations compared with both regional and national averages.

People from Global Ethnic Majority backgrounds live in all wards of the city. Hollingdean & Stanmer (3,400) and St Peter’s & North Laine (3,100) have the largest.

Indicative data from the Sussex Interpreting Service for 2024/25 shows that they provided interpreting support to 4,164 residents in Brighton and Hove. A lack of English language skills can be a significant barrier to employment. In 2021, there were 3,100 residents in Brighton & Hove who either could not speak English well or could not speak it at all.

Refugees and Asylum Seekers

The table below shows the number of people who have arrived in Brighton & Hove under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, the Afghan Resettlement Programme, and the Supported Asylum Programme.

TABLE: REFUGEES & ASYLUM SEEKERS BY AREA, 2025

Area	Homes for Ukrainians	Afghan Resettlement Programme	Supported Asylum	Total	% of Population
Sussex	5,405	1,866	1,535	8,806	0.42
Brighton & Hove	**639**	**177**	**170**	**986**	**0.35**
East Sussex	2,065	196	121	2,382	0.43
West Sussex	2,701	1,493	1,244	5,438	0.60
South East	27,111	5,541	7,287	39,939	0.42
England	125,290	23,680	94,754	243,724	0.42

Source: Immigration System Statistics; Home Office; 2025

As of April 2025, just under 1,000 people had been welcomed to Brighton & Hove under the three main refugee and asylum programmes. This includes over 600 Ukrainians, fewer than 200 Afghans, and a further 170 individuals arriving under the Resettlement Programme.

LGBTQ+

In 2021, more than 25,000 residents in Brighton & Hove described their sexuality as something other than 'Straight or Heterosexual'. This represents 11% of the city's adult population – significantly higher than the proportions in England and the South East (both 3.1%) and markedly higher than in other parts of Sussex.

This is a distinctive feature of Brighton & Hove, further reflecting the city's diversity.

Population Projections

TABLE: POPULATION PROJECTIONS 2025-2035, BRIGHTON & HOVE

Metric	All Ages	Aged 0 to 15	Aged 16 to 64	Aged 16 to 24	Aged 25 to 49	Aged 50 to 64	Aged 65+
Count	+9,617	**-1,702**	+1,669	+4,386	+1,607	**-4,324**	+9,648
%	+3.2	**-3.9**	+0.8	+8.4	+1.5	**-8.3**	+23.2

Source: Population Projections (2018 based); Office for National Statistics; 2025

The population of Brighton & Hove is projected to grow by 9,600 residents between 2025 and 2035 – a 3.2% increase over the decade. This compares with projected growth of 3.0% in the South East and 3.7% in England.

The city's population structure is expected to continue evolving, with a further increase in the post-working-age population (+9,600) and declines in both the pre-working-age population (-1,700) and the older working-age group (50-64 years) (-4,300). However, a challenge for the city is likely to continue to be the transient nature of its resident population, accounting for the student population, and the impact of high housing costs on retaining young adults and families in the city.

Although the population is projected to age, this is not the primary labour market challenge for Brighton & Hove in the way it is for much of the rest of Sussex. The city already has a comparatively young population, and the key issue is likely to remain how best to capitalise on such a large working-age population.

Households & Incomes

TABLE: GROSS DISPOSABLE HOUSEHOLD INCOME (GDHI) 2022

Area	GDHI (£)	Index (England =100)
Brighton & Hove	**£26,461**	**1.13**
South East	£26,058	1.12
England	£23,338	1.00

Source: Regional Gross Disposable Household Income; Local Authorities by ITL 1 Region; Office for National Statistics; 2024

Household income is a broad measure of household wealth. The table shows Gross Disposable Household Income (GDHI) per head, indexed to England (100). Overall, Brighton & Hove is a relatively affluent part of England, with a GDHI of £26,461 – compared with £23,338 in England and £26,058 in the South East. However, this average is likely to conceal significant disparities within the city.[28]

Housing Affordability

TABLE: HOUSE PRICE AFFORDABILITY RATIOS, 2022

Area	Ratio	England Index
Brighton & Hove	**11.31**	**147**
South East	9.61	125
England	7.71	100

Source: House Price to Workplace-Based Earnings Ratio; Office for National Statistics; 2023

[28] https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/joint-strategic-needs-assessment-jsna/key-evidence-reports-and-briefings/annual-reports-director-public-health

Brighton & Hove is one of the least affordable places to live in England outside London. Median house prices are 11.31 times median workplace earnings – significantly higher than the regional ratio (9.61) and the England average (7.71). East and West Sussex are 10.4% and 10% respectively.

Put simply, most local jobs do not pay enough for people to live in the city – particularly if they rely solely on their income to rent or buy a home, The high housing costs and poor quality of many local jobs create serious challenges in navigating the Sussex labour market. In the 2021 Census 6% of households (7,229) were lone parents.

Median Earnings

TABLE: MEDIAN ANNUAL EARNINGS FOR FULL-TIME WORKERS – RESIDENCE AND WORKPLACE BASED 2024

Area	Worker Earnings £	Index (England = 100)	Resident Earnings £	Index (England = 100)	Difference £	Workplace Earnings as % of Resident Earnings
Brighton & Hove	**£36,921**	**98**	**£38,556**	**102**	**-£1,635**	**-4.2**
East Sussex	£32,703	87	£35,298	94	**-£2,595**	**-7.4**
West Sussex	£38,006	101	£38,700	103	**-£694**	**-1.8**
South East	£39,038	104	£40,339	107	**-£1,301**	**-3.2**
England	£37,630	100	£37,617	100	£13	0.0

Source: Annual Survey of Hours & Earnings (ASHE); ONS via NOMISWEB * Sussex data unavailable

Brighton & Hove's median workplace earnings (£36,921) are slightly below both the national (£37,617) and regional (£39,038) averages. However, the median earnings of the city's residents (£38,556) are higher than the England average but remain below the South East average (£40,339).

Deprivation

TABLE: INDICES OF MULTIPLE DEPRIVATION RANKING BY AREA, 2019

Area	Median Rank 2019	Median Decile 2019	LSOAs in top guntile – Count	LSOAs in top guntile – %
Brighton & Hove	**17,597**	**6**	**29**	**18**
South East	17,729	6	46	14
England	20,874	7	18	4

Source: Indices of Multiple Deprivation; MHCLG; 2019

The purpose of the English Indices of Deprivation is to identify small areas of England that are experiencing multiple aspects of deprivation. Brighton & Hove has 29 Lower Super Output Area (LSOAs) in the top 20% most deprived in England, accounting for 17.8% of the city's total. Each LSOA is assigned a rank from 1 (most deprived) to 32,844 (least deprived) based on various indicators across seven domains, including income, employment, health, education, crime, housing, and the living environment. There are 15 neighbourhoods in the city (9%) in the 10% most deprived in England. The highest concentration of deprivation is in Whitehawk, Moulsecoomb, Hollingbury and Woodingdean.

Health & Well-Being

TABLE: DISABILITY BY AREA (2021)

Area	All Disabled (count)	All Disabled (%)	Limiting a Little (count)	Limiting a little (%)	Limiting a Lot (count)	Limiting a lot (%)
Brighton & Hove	**51,797**	**18.7**	**31,446**	**11.3**	**20,351**	**7.3**
South East	1,496,340	16.1	915,292	9.9	581,048	6.3
England	9,774,510	17.3	5,634,153	10.0	4,140,357	7.3

Source: 2001 Census; Office for National Statistics; 2021

In 2021, there were just under 52,000 residents in Brighton & Hove who had a disability that limited their day-to-day activities. This represents 18.7% of the population, compared with 16.1% in the South East and 17.3% in England. Nearly four out of ten (39%) people with a disability stated that it limited their daily activities a lot. This equates to 7.3% of the population – higher than the South East (6.3%) but the same as the national average.

According to the Brighton & Hove Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA[29]), the city has above-average levels of people with mental health issues. Over 37,000 residents are registered on GP depression registers, and just under a quarter (22%) of the population aged 20 and over has a long-term physical or mental health condition.

[29] https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/joint-strategic-needs-assessment-jsna/key-evidence-reports-and-briefings/annual-reports-director-public-health

Unpaid Carers

TABLE: UNPAID CARERS BY AREA (2021)

Area	Unpaid Carers Total	% of population	Providing 20+ hours/wk	% of population
Sussex	145,025	8.9	67,930	4.2
Brighton & Hove	**20,804**	**7.8**	**9,470**	**3.5**
East Sussex	51,405	8.6	25,284	4.9
West Sussex	72,816	9.9	33,176	3.9
South East	733,364	8.3	344,742	3.9
England	4,678,265	8.7	2,374,540	4.4

Source: 2021 Census, Office for National Statistics

In 2021, there were 20,800 unpaid carers in Brighton & Hove, representing 7.8% of the population aged 5 and over. This is a lower proportion than in both the South East (8.3%) and England (8.7%). Just under half (46%) of the city's unpaid carers provided care for 20 hours or more per week. This equates to 3.5% of the city's population – slightly lower than the averages for the South East (3.9%) and England (4.4%).

Employment and Disability

TABLE: DISABILITY, DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT RATE AND OVERALL EMPLOYMENT RATE (2025)

Area	16-64 Equality Act core/ work-limiting disabled	% of popu-lation	16-64 Equality Act core/ work-limiting disabled in employment	Employ-ment rate %	No. of 16-64 in employ-ment	Overall 16-64 employ-ment rate %
Brighton & Hove	**66,700**	**31.9**	**42,300**	**63.4**	**154,900**	**74.1**
South East	1,453,900	25.7	918,200	63.2	4,436,900	78.4
England	9,178,100	26.0	5,288,500	57.6	26,720,600	75.7

Source: Annual Population Survey; ONS; 2025

In the 12 months to March 2025, there were 66,700 16-64-year-old residents in Brighton & Hove who were either Equality Act (EA) or work-limiting disabled. This was 31.9% of the working age population – higher than in the South East (25.7%) and in England (26.0%).

The employment rate for disabled working age residents was 63.4%, compared with an overall employment rate of 74.1%. The employment rate for working age people in Brighton & Hove with disabilities was similar to the South East (63.2%), but higher than in England (57.6%).

Employment and Health Conditions

TABLE: EMPLOYMENT RATE OF PEOPLE (AGED 16+) WITH HEALTH CONDITIONS

Area	Residents with long-term health conditions in work	% in work	Residents with mental health conditions in work	% in work
Brighton & Hove	**69,000**	**64.6**	**22,500**	**54.8**
South East	1,583,400	52.3	455,800	50.9
England	9,148,300	49.4	2,592,500	46.4

Source: Annual Population Survey; Office for National Statistics 2024

Around two-thirds (65%) of people with long-term health conditions in Brighton & Hove are in work. This is less than 1% below the city's overall employment rate for people aged 16+ (65.2%). Brighton & Hove has a notably high employment rate for people with long-term health conditions compared with the South East (52%) and England (49%). This may be linked to the city's relatively young population. The employment rate for people with mental health conditions is lower, at 55%, but still above the averages for both the South East (51%) and England (46%). Note: see economically inactive table for people with long term health conditions who are not working.

Education & Skills

TABLE: LEVEL 3 ATTAINMENT BY 19 YEARS - BY CHARACTERISTIC, 2023/24

Area	All %	Non- Free School Meals %	Free School Meals %	Attainment Gap %	Non-SEN %	SEN %	Attainment Gap %
Brighton & Hove	**61.1**	**67.2**	**33.2**	**34.1**	**67.7**	**31.2**	**36.5**
East Sussex	52.6	57.3	31.6	25.7	57.3	25.0	32.2
West Sussex	56.9	62.8	31.6	31.3	30.2	31.6	31.3
South East	58.7	63.0	31.4	31.7	62.6	33.4	29.4
England	57.6	62.4	36.8	25.5	64.2	35.4	28.8

Source: Level 2 and 3 Attainment age 16-25 years; 2023/24; Department for Education' 2025
* Sussex data unavailable

Qualification levels are often used as a proxy for skill levels and the opportunities individuals are likely to have to enter and progress in the labour market. The table below shows the proportion of 19-year-olds who have attained Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications. It includes percentages for all 19-year-olds, those who have been eligible for free school meals (FSM), those with Special Educational Needs (SEN), and the attainment gaps between these groups and their peers.

In Brighton & Hove, 61.1% of 19-year-olds hold a Level 3 qualification – higher than in the South East (58.7%) and England (57.6%). However, young people facing disadvantage have significantly lower attainment. Only one in three (33%) young people who have been eligible for FSM achieve a Level 3 qualification by age 19, compared with 67% of those who have not. The attainment gap is -34 percentage points. A similarly large gap exists for young people with SEN, with a -37-percentage point difference compared to their peers.

In both cases, the attainment gaps in Brighton & Hove are wider than the regional and national averages. A recent report by Impetus[30] examining compound disadvantage among young people highlights Brighton & Hove as an area with particularly high levels of socioeconomic inequality. This inequality is closely linked to low levels of social mobility, lower educational attainment, and higher levels of economic instability.

Adult Qualifications

TABLE: RESIDENTS (16-64 YEARS) WITHOUT RQF LEVEL 3 QUALIFICATIONS (2024)

Area	Count	% of population
Brighton & Hove	**34,800**	**16.8**
South East	1,649,000	29.7
England	11,171,100	32.4

Source: Annual Population Survey, Office for National Statistics; 2024

There are 34,800 working age residents in Brighton & Hove who do not hold a qualification at Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) Level 3 or above. This equates to 17% of the city's working age population. Overall, Brighton & Hove has a well-educated population, especially when compared with the South East (30%) and England (32%). However, in some wards the number of people without a Level 3 qualification is significantly higher.

RQF Level 3 is equivalent to an advanced apprenticeship or A-levels and typically provides the knowledge and skills needed for higher education or specialised industry roles.

[30] https://impetus-org.files.svdcdn.com/production/assets/publications/Report/Youth-Jobs-Gap-Establising-the-Employment-Gap-report.pdf

Employment

TABLE: EMPLOYMENT RATE (16-64 YEAR OLDS) BY AREA, 2024

Area	Count	Percent	Count for 80%
Sussex	807,700	77.6	+25,500
Brighton & Hove	**159,100**	**76.6**	**+7,140**
East Sussex	233,500	72.1	+25,540
West Sussex	415,100	81.4	**-7,180**
South East	4,448,600	78.7	+73,320
England	26,720,000	75.7	+1,499,760

Source: Annual Population Survey; Office for National Statistics; 2024

In 2024, 159,100 of Brighton & Hove's working age residents were in employment, with an employment rate of 76.6%. This is below the employment rate in the South East (78.7%), but above the rate for England (75.7%). This is a high employment rate for a city with two universities. For comparison, other university cities such as Bristol (80.5%), Portsmouth (80.3%), York (77.8%), and Southampton (77.6%) have slightly higher employment rates, while Nottingham (68.7%), Manchester (66.0%), Liverpool (66.7%), Leeds (70.7%), and Newcastle (65.4%) all have much lower rates.

The UK Government has a target to achieve an 80% employment rate as part of its Get Britain Working Plan. For Brighton & Hove to achieve an 80% employment rate, there would need to be an additional 7,140 residents in work, assuming no change in the local population.

Economic Inactivity

TABLE: 16-64 YEAR-OLD ECONOMIC INACTIVITY RATES BY AREA, 2024

Area	Count including students	% including students	Count excluding students	% excluding students
Sussex	199,900	19.2	147,500	14.9
Brighton & Hove	**40,600**	**19.5**	**22,000**	**11.6**
East Sussex	74,800	23.1	58,100	18.9
West Sussex	84,500	16.6	67,400	13.7
South East	1,040,000	18.4	734,400	13.7
England	7,450,500	21.1	5,404,600	16.3

Source: Annual Population Survey; Office for National Statistics; 2025

People who are economically inactive are neither employed nor unemployed. The main reasons for economic inactivity include being a student, ill-health, caring responsibilities, or early retirement. Some forms of economic inactivity – such as studying or being retired – are not necessarily disadvantageous.

In Brighton & Hove, there are just under 40,600 working-age residents who are economically inactive. This represents 20% of 16-64-year-olds, which is higher than the South East average (18%) but lower than the England average (21%).

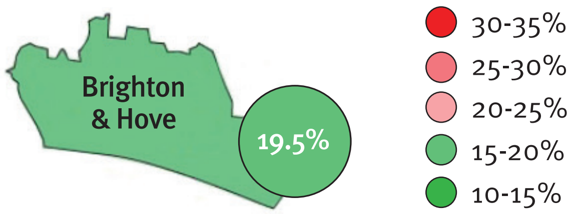
However, when students are excluded from the figures, the number drops to around 22,000 – or 12% of working-age residents. This is a significant reduction, showing that nearly half (46%) of the city's economically inactive population are students. Once students are excluded, Brighton & Hove's economic inactivity rate is below that of the South East (14%) and England (16%). However, this still means that there are 22,000 economically inactive working age residents in the city.

Brighton & Hove Economic Activity

Percentage of population who are of working age (16-64) and are economically inactive.

Areas in green are meeting the 80% economically actove target.

Figures are inclusive of students.



Reasons for Economic Inactivity (excluding students)

TABLE: REASONS FOR ECONOMIC INACTIVITY (16-64 YEAR-OLDS) 2024

Area	Looking after a family/ home – count	Looking after a family/ home – % of economically inactive	Long-term sick – count	Long-term sick – % of economically Inactive	Early retirees – count	Early retirees – % of economically inactive
Sussex	31,600	15.8	51,600	25.8	34,400	17.2
Brighton & Hove	**5,000**	**12.4**	**6,000**	**14.7**	**3,900**	**9.7**
East Sussex	12,900	17.3	20,200	27.0	13,500	18.0
West Sussex	13,700	16.3	25,400	30.0	17,000	20.1
South East	197,100	19.0	228,100	21.9	150,000	12.8
England	1,415,500	19.0	2,009,900	27.0	934,900	11.5

Source: Annual Population Survey; Office for National Statistics; 2024

There are 6,000 working residents in Brighton & Hove who are economically inactive because of long-term sickness. This is just under 15% of all economically inactive working age residents and 27% once students are removed. There are also 5,000 (12%) of inactive working age residents who are looking after a family/home and 3,900 (9.7%) early retirees. Brighton & Hove has a large proportion of economically inactive residents who do not give a reason for their economic inactivity (17.3%), compared with the South East (12.8%) and England (11.5%). Of the 40,600 who are economically inactive – 15,200 people, or 37.5% of the city's economically inactive residents – report that they would like to work.

Claimant Count Unemployment

TABLE: CLAIMANT COUNT UNEMPLOYMENT APRIL 2024 AND APRIL 2025

Area	April 24 Count	April 24 %	April 25 Count	April 25 %	Difference Count	Difference %
Sussex	33,010	3.1	36,875	3.5	+3,865	+11.7
Brighton & Hove	**7,800**	**3.9**	**8,745**	**4.4**	**+945**	**+12.1**
East Sussex	10,840	3.4	11,650	3.7	+810	+7.5
West Sussex	14,370	2.7	16,480	3.1	+2,110	+14.7
South East	170,210	2.9	186,695	3.2	+16,485	+9.7
England	1,387,390	3.8	1,529,600	4.2	+142,210	+10.3

Source: Claimant Count; Office for National Statistics; 2025

As of April 2025, there were 8,745 claimant count unemployed residents in Brighton & Hove, representing 4.4% of the working-age population. This is higher than both the South East average (3.2%) and the England average (4.2%).

Between April 2024 and April 2025, the claimant count for unemployed residents in the city rose by 945 people – a 12.1% increase. This rate of increase outpaced both the South East (+9.7%) and England (+10.3%).

Claimant Count Unemployment by Age

The table opposite (p.59) shows the number of claimant count unemployed residents in April 2024 and April 2025 for 18-24 year olds, 25-49 year olds and people aged 50+. In April 2025 there were also 15 16-17 year olds who were claimant count unemployed in Brighton & Hove.

In April 2025, there were 1,385 18-24-year-olds who were claimant count unemployed in Brighton & Hove. This is -5 (-0.4%) less than there had been in April 2024. This compares with increases in the South East (+9.7%) and England (+9.0%).

There were 5,015 25-49-year-old claimant count unemployed residents in Brighton & Hove in April 2025. This is an increase of +420 (+9.1%) compared with a year earlier. This is a faster increase than in the South East (+6.1%) and England (+6.9%) over the period.

There were 1,805 aged 50+ claimant count unemployed residents in Brighton & Hove in April 2025. This is +365 more (20.2%) more than there had been a year earlier. This is a faster increase than in the South East (+10.2%) and England (+10.6%).

TABLE: CLAIMANT COUNT UNEMPLOYMENT BY AGE APRIL 2024- APRIL 2025

Area	18-24 Years Apr-24	18-24 Years Apr-25	18-24 Years % Change
Sussex	5,705	6,145	7.7
Brighton & Hove	**1,390**	**1,385**	-0.4
East Sussex	2,010	2,090	4.0
West Sussex	2,305	2,670	15.8
South East	28,640	31,425	9.7
England	243,300	265,305	9.0

Table continued below

Area (continued)	25-49 Years Apr-24	25-49 Years Apr-25	18-24 Years % Change
Sussex	19,080	20,485	7.4
Brighton & Hove	**4,595**	**5,015**	9.1
East Sussex	6,125	6,205	1.3
West Sussex	8,360	9,265	10.9
South East	100,075	106,225	6.1
England	826,000	883,235	6.9

Table continued below

Area (continued)	50+ Years Apr-24	50+ Years Apr-25	18-24 Years % Change
Sussex	8,175	9,565	17.0
Brighton & Hove	**1,805**	**2,170**	20.2
East Sussex	2,685	3,085	14.9
West Sussex	3,685	4,310	17.0
South East	41,220	45,425	10.2
England	315,885	349,340	10.6

Source: Claimant Count Unemployment; Office for National Statistics; 2025

Not in Education, Employment & Training (NEET)

TABLE: 16-17 YEARS OLDS - NEET / ACTIVITY NOT KNOWN (2024)

Area	Total Count	NEET & Not Known Count	%	NEET Count	%	Not Known Coun	%
Brighton & Hove	**5,713**	**383**	**6.7**	**286**	**5.0**	**97**	**1.7**
South East	215,720	15,100	7.0	7,334	3.4	7,982	3.7
England	1,335,160	74,769	5.6	45,395	3.4	29,374	2.2

Source: Participation in education, training & NEET age 16-17 by local authority; Department for Education; 2025

In the Department for Education Scorecard published in July 2025, there were 5,713 16–17 year olds in Brighton & Hove, 286 were known to be Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), giving a known NEET rate of 5.0%. This is higher than the South East average (3.4%) and the England average (3.4%). The city has a low proportion of young people with unknown destinations (1.7%), compared with 3.7% in the South East and 2.2% in England. The overall NEET rate (including both known and unknown NEETs) is 6.7%, compared with 7.0% in the South East and 5.6% in England.

Recent analysis by Impetus (Youth Jobs Gap: Exploring compound disadvantage) suggests that Brighton & Hove has one of the highest likelihoods in England of young people with low or no qualifications becoming NEET. This pattern is more typically seen in areas of the North and Midlands with fewer opportunities.[31]

The report points to high socio-economic inequality, poor social mobility and localised social instability as key factors behind this trend. East Sussex is the only other part of the South where disadvantaged young people face a similarly high risk of becoming NEET.

Universal Credit

Universal Credit is a monthly payment to help people with their living costs. People who are on low income, out of work or who cannot work are eligible to claim Universal Credit. It is replacing housing benefit, income support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), and income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA).

[31] Youth Jobs Gap: Exploring compound disadvantage; Impetus; 2025

TABLE: AVERAGE MONTHLY UNIVERSAL CREDIT CLAIMANTS (JANUARY 2024 - DECEMBER 2024)

Area	Total Claimant Count	%	16-24 Years Count	%	25-49 Years Count	%	50-64 Years Count	%
Sussex	34,588	2.0	5,725	3.4	20,098	3.9	8,769	2.4
Brighton & Hove	**8,124**	**2.9**	**1,374**	**3.1**	**4,776**	**4.8**	**1,974**	**3.6**
East Sussex	11,286	2.0	2,018	4.4	6,400	4.3	2,870	2.4
West Sussex	15,178	1.7	2,333	3.0	8,922	3.3	3,925	2.1
South East	177,194	1.9	29,009	3.1	104,960	3.5	43,225	2.3
England	1,461,140	2.5	249,577	4.1	874,513	3.0	337,450	3.0

Source: Stat-Xplore; Department for Work & Pensions; 2025

In 2024, Brighton & Hove had an average of over 8,100 working age residents claiming Universal Credit. Of these, just under 1,400 (17%) were aged 16-24, 4,800 (59%) were aged 25-49, and 1,900 were aged 50 and over.

The city has a relatively low proportion of young (16-24) claimants when compared to the size of that age group in the population. In contrast, the 25-49 age group is overrepresented among claimants, suggesting financial vulnerability among this core working age group.

Between January and December 2024, the total number of Universal Credit claimants in Brighton & Hove increased by 280. Notably, this was entirely driven by a rise in claimants aged 50+, which increased by 330 – indicating reductions in other age groups over the same period.

4.4 Labour Demand

Employee Jobs and Job Density

TABLE: JOBS & JOB DENSITY 2023

Area	Count	% of Sussex Jobs	Job Density
Brighton & Hove	140,740	19.5	0.88

Source: Job Density; Office for National Statistics; 2024

Brighton & Hove has 140,740 jobs, accounting for a fifth (20%) of all employment in Sussex. There are 0.88 jobs for every working age adult in the city – comparable to job densities in Slough, Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole, and Derby. Within Sussex, only Crawley (1.16) and Chichester (1.08) have a higher ratio of jobs to working age residents than Brighton & Hove.

Self-Employment

TABLE: SELF-EMPLOYMENT 2024

Area	Count	Percent	Index (England)
Brighton & Hove	**24,000**	**15.1**	**120**
South East	559,900	12.6	100
England	3,358,400	12.6	100

Source: Annual Population Survey; Office for National Statistics; 2024

Self-employment is a notable feature of the Brighton & Hove labour market. Just over 15% of employed residents work for themselves, compared with 12.6% in both the South East and England. However, self-employment rates in Brighton & Hove are not especially high when compared to several rural parts of Sussex, such as Horsham, Chichester, Rother, and Wealden, where self-employment is much more prevalent. This may reflect the wider availability of employee-based job opportunities in the city.

Self-employment is often mistakenly used as a proxy for entrepreneurship, but the two are not the same. Only a small proportion of self-employed people set out to build and grow businesses that create jobs. For many, self-employment is either a response to a lack of viable alternatives, influenced by sector and type of work i.e. construction trades, or a lifestyle choice made possible by financial stability and a desire for greater flexibility.

Employment by Industry

The structure of the local economy significantly shapes employment patterns in Brighton & Hove. Over half (53%) of all jobs in the city are concentrated in just four sectors: human health & social work (16%), accommodation & food service (13%), wholesale & retail (12%), and education (12%). This reflects Brighton & Hove's dual identity as both a hub for learning and a prominent visitor destination.

Compared with national averages, Brighton & Hove has notably high concentrations of employment in several sectors: accommodation & food service, utilities, human health & social work, arts, entertainment & recreation, education, information & communication, finance & insurance, and other services.

However, many of these sectors – particularly those that dominate the local economy – are low productivity. Gross Value Added (GVA) per hour worked in accommodation & food service (£21.61), human health & social work (£30.57), arts, entertainment & recreation (£24.49), and wholesale & retail (£31.95) all fall well below the all-industries UK average of £45.95.

This reliance on low productivity sectors often translates into low-paying jobs, which makes the local labour market challenging – particularly in a city with high living and housing costs.

TABLE: EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY (2024)

Industry	Count	%
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	40	0.03
Mining & quarrying	0	0.0
Manufacturing	2,500	1.7
Electricity, gas, steam & air conditioning supply	1,000	0.7
Water supply; sewerage, waste management & remediation activities	700	0.5
Construction	3,500	2.4
Wholesale & retail	17,000	11.9
Transport & storage	3,500	2.4
Accommodation & food service	18,000	12.6
Information & communication	8,000	5.6
Finance & insurance	8,000	5.6
Real estate	3,000	2.1
Professional, scientific & technical	11,000	7.7
Admin. support service	10,000	7.0
Public admin. & defence; social security	6,000	4.2
Education	17,000	11.9
Human health & social work	23,000	16.1
Arts, entertainment & recreation	5,000	3.5
Other services	3,500	2.4

Source: Business Register & Employment Survey; Office for National Statistics; 2024

Business Units

TABLE: BUSINESS UNITS BY SIZE (2024)

Area	Total Business Count	0-4 staff Count	%	5-9 staff Count	%
Brighton & Hove	**16,155**	**11,935**	**73.9**	**1,875**	**11.6**
South East	465,155	340,175	73.1	55,570	11.9
England	2,735,615	1,972,515	72.1	341,000	12.5

Table continued below

Area (continued)	10-49 staff Count	%	50-249 staff Count	%	250+ staff Count	%
Brighton & Hove	**1,970**	**12.2**	**315**	**1.9**	**55**	**0.3**
South East	56,195	12.1	11,540	2.5	1,680	0.4
England	339,670	12.4	71,435	2.6	11,000	0.4

Source: UK Business Counts; Office for National Statistics; 2024

There are over 16,100 business units in Brighton & Hove, with nearly three-quarters (74%) employing between 0-4 people. This is slightly higher than in the South East (73%) and England (72%), reflecting a local economy dominated by micro-businesses.

The city has 315 medium-sized business units (50–249 employees) and 55 large ones (250+ employees). That equates to just 1.9% of businesses being medium-sized – lower than the South East (2.5%) and England (2.6%) – and only 0.3% being large, compared with 0.4% regionally and nationally. Brighton & Hove's business base is vibrant but small-scale.

Business Units by Sector

TABLE: BUSINESS UNITS BY SECTOR (2024)

Sector	Count	%
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	50	0.3
Manufacturing	450	2.8
Electricity, gas, steam & air conditioning supply	30	0.2
Water supply; sewerage, waste management & remediation activities	25	0.2
Construction	1,585	9.8
Wholesale % retail	2,590	16.0
Transport & storage	240	1.5
Accommodation & food service	1,495	9.3
Information & communication	1,790	11.1
Financial & insurance activities	235	1.5
Real estate	730	4.5
Professional, scientific & technical	2,790	17.3
Admin. & support service	1,390	8.6
Public admin. & defence; social security	90	0.6
Education	390	2.4
Human health & social work	850	5.3
Arts, entertainment & recreation	810	5.0
Other services	610	3.8

Source: Business Register & Employment Survey; Office for National Statistics; 2024

Nearly half (44%) of Brighton & Hove's business units are in just three sectors: wholesale & retail (16%), professional, scientific & technical services (17%), and information & communication (11%).

The city also has notable concentrations of businesses in accommodation & food service, professional, scientific & technical services, and arts, entertainment & recreation – highlighting a strong service sector focus with a creative and visitor-led edge.

Job Vacancies

TABLE: UNIQUE JOB POSTINGS 2024 – BRIGHTON & HOVE

Metric	Total	Construction	Creative & cultural	Digital	Health & care	Land based	Manufacturing & engineering	Visitor economy
Count	23,659	2,966	2,182	3,326	6,263	283	2,327	6,312
%	100.0	12.5	9.2	14.1	26.5	1.2	9.8	26.7

Source: Lightcast 2024

4.5 Current Provision

Further Education

The largest Further Education College in Brighton & Hove is Brighton MET. There are also sixth form colleges at BHASVIC, Varndean, BACA, Kings, specialist provision at Downs Link College and post 16 provision offered by a range of providers.

Higher Education

Brighton & Hove has two universities, whose main campuses are located at Moulsecoomb and Falmer. There are around 35,000 students at the universities, including large numbers of overseas students, studying a wide range of learning programmes at undergraduate and post graduate level.

Brighton & Hove Adult Learning

The city is well served with adult education providers which include the council's Adult Education Hub, MET Brighton, Whitehead Ross, Functional Skills UK, Aldridge Adult Learning and Varndean Adult Education. They offer a wide curriculum of accredited and non-accredited learning and employability support.

In addition to nationally funded programmes delivered by the Department for Work and Pensions and the National Careers Service, examples of other organisations that provide employment support in the city are shown below. This is not an exhaustive list.

Brighton & Hove Youth Hub and Employability Service

The Youth Employment Hub provides information, advice and guidance for unemployed and not in education, young people aged 16-25 years in partnership with the local jobcentre.

Brighton & Hove Well-Being Service

The Brighton & Hove Well-Being Service has an Employment Advice Service that is run by MIND. This provides support with CV writing, job applications and support to employers in how to support staff with mental health challenges.

In partnership with the Sussex Partnership NHS Trust, Southdown provides a Work and Wellbeing that provides specialist employment support for people living with mental health challenges across Sussex.

BHT Sussex

BHT Sussex has an Accommodation for Work project, which aims to help homeless people into work and independent accommodation. It offers temporary shared accommodation and support with work and learning.

5. East Sussex

5.1 East Sussex Summary

East Sussex covers an area of 660 square miles, stretching from Camber Sands in the east to Peacehaven in the west. From north to south, it spans the English Channel up to the High Weald. Around 40% of the county lies within the South Downs National Park or the High Weald National Landscape.

Beyond the coastal strip, much of the county is rural – characterised by woodland, farmland, and small villages and towns serving local hinterlands. The main urban centres are predominantly coastal and include Newhaven, Seaford, Eastbourne, Bexhill, and Hastings. The county town is Lewes, located on the western edge of East Sussex, seven miles inland from the sea.

Compared with most parts of the South East, East Sussex does not have a strong economy. Transport links are often poor, with slow rail journeys and a road network that hampers the efficient movement of goods and people. Rurality compounds the problem – access to and from many parts of the county is difficult, especially for those reliant on public transport.

There are only a small number of large organisations in East Sussex. Employment is heavily concentrated in the public sector and lower-value service industries. Many parts of the county face demographic pressures, with an ageing population and a relatively small pool of working age residents.

While some areas may be asset-rich, they are productivity-poor. For those who rely solely on employment to support household incomes, low-paid job opportunities can make life difficult.

There are significant socio-economic challenges, particularly along the coastal strip. These are most acute in Hastings, where pockets of entrenched, generational deprivation remain a serious concern.

The East Sussex Economic Prosperity 2050 Strategy sets the framework for supporting long-term economic growth. Its *Prosperity for People* strand focuses on developing better opportunities for young people to build careers locally, attracting a skilled and diverse workforce to the county (including those returning after time away), and supporting people to develop new skills and career paths throughout their lives. The strategy also recognises that providing a more affordable and diverse mix of housing is critical to achieving these ambitions.

East Sussex has an economy that is not characteristic of most of the South East of England. Its working age population is small, yet there are still not nearly enough jobs to meet the need. None of its districts or boroughs has an employment rate close to the Government's 80% target. To reach that target, the county would need to find work for an additional 25,500 working age residents – without any change in the working age population.

There are around 58,000 economically inactive working age residents in East Sussex, excluding students. A quarter (23%) of these have retired early and a third (35%) are not working because of long-term health conditions[32].

The county's urban centres, Hastings and Eastbourne, have a number of opportunities. However, multi-dimensional deprivation is widespread in Hastings, and it extends along the coast into poorly connected places, isolated from strong commercial hubs.

Rural East Sussex is more affluent, with a significant agricultural and viticulture sector supported by the specialist college at Plumpton. But there are ongoing transport and digital connectivity challenges. Many land-based businesses struggle to recruit and are operating with ever-tightening margins.

There are few large employers in East Sussex and SMEs do not have access to human resources functions, which may limit their ability to become more inclusive employers. Much of the employment is in low- and intermediate-level sectors that are not well paid and often insecure, including tourism and land-based industries. The construction sector is more prominent and can provide good work, but it remains fragmented, with high levels of self-employment and volatility.

Despite its weak economic profile, large parts of East Sussex are affluent – especially among older populations with passive incomes and limited housing costs, although a lack of affordable housing for those who need it is a significant local issue. The disparity between residents' and workers' median earnings suggests that many of the county's better-paid working residents are employed elsewhere. It is a good county to live in for those who don't rely on paid employment. For those who do, the picture is more challenging: Housing costs are high, and most local jobs do not pay well enough.

East Sussex is heavily reliant on the public sector for its higher-quality employment. This creates a strong case for public sector organisations to wield their economic power more intentionally to support the wider economy.

With the University of Brighton closing its campuses in Hastings and Eastbourne, there is now no Higher Education presence in the county. The wider impact of this is unclear, but the absence of a local university may further dilute aspirations, particularly among disadvantaged communities. The East Sussex College Group does maintain a strong presence across the county, offering a wide range of vocational learning programmes for residents and businesses. However, Level 3 attainment among 19-year-olds remains low across most of the county – particularly in Hastings.

Despite these challenges, East Sussex has a well-established skills and employability support infrastructure. Skills & Employment East Sussex and its sub-groups bring together employers, learning providers, and other partners to develop collaborative approaches to skills development across the county.

[32] Annual Population Survey; Office for National Statistics; 2024

5.2 Strengths and Challenges

Strengths	Challenges
• High quality of life and excellent natural assets. • Strong land-based sector, including Plumpton College as a significant supplier of skills to the sector. • Well established strategic employment and skills infrastructure, including through Skills & Employment East Sussex. • Considerable cultural assets and the associated opportunities in the creative industries. • High levels of self-employment, particularly in rural areas. • Public sector, including health, as a key source of local employment. • Strong construction sector with good skills support infrastructure. • Hybrid and homeworking may provide more opportunities for people who need more flexible work opportunities. • There are high levels of self-employment, which, in some, cases may lead to new businesses that create jobs. • Affluent residents whose talents could be deployed for mentoring and other support programmes.	• A small working age population and a large number of post-working age adults, which is projected to grow. • Low employment rates and high levels of economic inactivity. • Significant concentrations of deprivation, particularly in Hastings, but stretching along the East Sussex coast to Bexhill, Eastbourne and Newhaven. • Insufficient jobs for the number of working age residents and too many of the jobs that exist are not well-paid enough. • High housing costs and low levels of affordability in most parts of the county. • Large numbers of asset rich people with passive incomes (e.g. pensions, who rely less on labour market participation to support their lifestyles). • Significant numbers of workless people, some of whom are not seeking employment, particularly in coastal areas. • There is evidence of an increase in unemployment amongst people aged 50+. • Difficult transport connectivity, including between commercial centres and remote communities; and also in terms of strategic links to other commercial centres. • Lack of Higher Education presence and low educational attainment in many parts of the county. • 86% of businesses employ fewer than 10 people and there are just 45 businesses large businesses with 250+ staff.

5.3 Labour Supply

Population by Age

TABLE: POPULATION BY AGE 2023

Area	Aged 0 to 15 %	Aged 16 to 64 %	Aged 16 to 24 %	Aged 25 to 49 %	Aged 50 to 64 %	Aged 65+ %	Dependency ratio
East Sussex	**16.4**	**57.2**	**8.4**	**27.1**	**21.8**	**26.5**	**0.75**
Eastbourne	16.5	58.8	9.4	29.4	19.9	24.7	0.70
Hastings	17.7	61.5	8.8	31.0	21.7	20.8	0.63
Lewes	16.4	56.7	8.4	26.6	21.7	26.9	0.76
Rother	14.6	52.9	7.6	23.0	22.4	32.5	0.89
Wealden	16.6	56.5	7.9	26.0	22.6	26.9	0.77
South East	18.6	61.7	10.0	31.9	19.8	19.8	0.62
England	18.5	62.9	10.7	32.9	19.3	18.7	0.59

Source: Population Estimates; Office for National Statistics; 2025

In 2023, East Sussex had a resident population of approximately 550,000. Of these, around 318,000 (57.2%) were of working age. This is significantly lower than the proportion in England (62.9%) and the South East (61.7%). Except for Hastings, all districts and boroughs in the county have an age profile heavily skewed towards older people. In Rother, for instance, one in three residents (33%) is aged 65 or over.

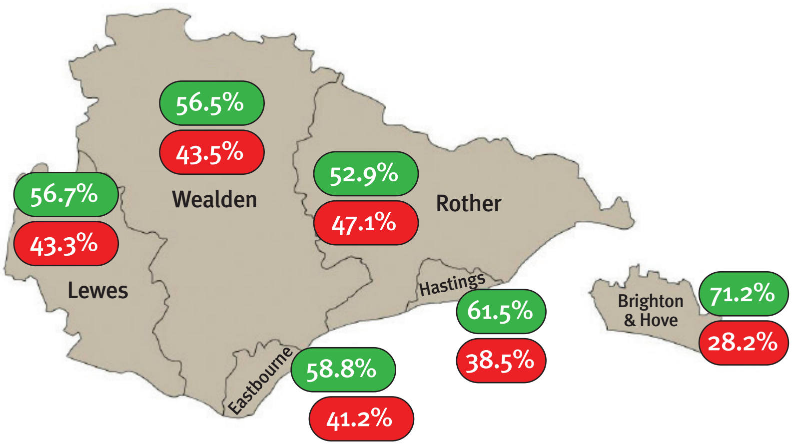
Even within the working age population, East Sussex has an older profile than both the South East and England averages.

The dependency ratio – which shows the number of non-working age residents for every one person of working age – is notably high. In East Sussex, this ratio is 0.75, compared with 0.59 in England and 0.62 in the South East. Only Hastings has

East Sussex population by age

Proportion of working age people (16-64) compared with non-working age (0-15, 65+).

working age
non-working age



a dependency ratio close to the national average. In Rother, the ratio rises to 0.89 non-working age residents for every working age person.

This demographic imbalance has far-reaching implications for the county's economy – affecting the available labour supply, the attractiveness of the area to investors, and the demand for public services. As later sections of this report will demonstrate, a significant number of East Sussex residents appear to have voluntarily withdrawn from the labour market altogether.

Ethnicity

TABLE: ETHNICITY OF POPULATION

Area	GEM Count	GEM* %	Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh	%	Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African	%
East Sussex	**63,804**	**11.7**	**11,618**	**18.2**	**4,497**	**7.0**
Eastbourne	18,215	18.0	3,544	19.5	1,308	7.2
Hastings	13,577	14.9	2,536	18.7	1,262	9.3
Lewes	11,079	11.1	1,899	17.1	722	6.5
Rother	7,752	8.3	1,390	17.9	561	7.2
Wealden	13,184	8.2	2,250	17.1	646	4.9
South East	1,963,005	21.2	650,545	33.1	221,584	11.3
England	14,949,257	26.5	5,426,392	36.3	2,381,724	15.9

Table continued below

Area (continued)	Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups	%	Other white	%	Other ethnic group	%
East Sussex	**12,313**	**19.3**	**30,394**	**47.6**	**4,982**	**7.8**
Eastbourne	2,802	15.4	8,877	48.7	1,684	9.2
Hastings	2,639	19.4	5,773	42.5	1,367	10.1
Lewes	2,461	22.2	5,271	47.6	726	6.6
Rother	1,702	22.0	3,631	46.8	468	6.0
Wealden	2,709	20.5	6,841	51.9	738	5.6
South East	260,871	13.3	694,322	35.4	135,683	6.9
England	1,669,378	11.2	4,242,610	28.4	1,229,153	8.2

Source: Census 2021; Office for National Statistics *GEM = Global Ethnic Majority

In 2021, approximately 63,800 residents of East Sussex – 11.7% of the population – identified as being from a Global Ethnic Majority background. This is significantly lower than in the South East (21.1%) and England as a whole (26.5%). Eastbourne had the highest proportion in the county, at 18%, but no district or borough recorded especially high levels of ethnic diversity compared with regional or national averages.

What sets East Sussex apart is the relatively high proportion of residents from 'Other White' minority groups and mixed or multiple ethnic backgrounds. People from 'Other White' groups made up nearly half (47.6%) of the county's ethnic minority population – a higher proportion than in the South East (35%) and England (28%). This pattern is consistent across all districts and boroughs.

A more detailed breakdown shows that the largest 'Other White' groups in East Sussex were:

- White – Mixed European: 5,450
- White Irish: 4,400
- White Polish: 2,600

Eastbourne had notably large Polish (1,200) and Portuguese (700) communities, while Hastings had a relatively large Romanian population (500), by East Sussex standards.

Language remains a barrier for some residents. In 2021, around 2,800 people in East Sussex said they either could not speak English well or not at all. Eastbourne accounted for around 1,150 of these, with a further 750 living in Hastings.

Refugees and Asylum Seekers

Since the 2021 Census, the UK has welcomed significant numbers of refugees and asylum seekers, including through the Homes for Ukraine scheme, the Afghan Resettlement Programme, and other supported asylum routes.

TABLE: REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS 2025

Area	Homes for Ukrainians	Afghan Resettlement Programme	Supported Asylum	Total	% of Population
East Sussex	**2,065**	**196**	**121**	**2,382**	**0.43**
Eastbourne	245	33	50	328	0.32
Hastings	187	31	66	284	0.31
Lewes	370	19	3	392	0.39
Rother	374	45	0	419	0.44
Wealden	889	68	2	959	0.58

Source: Immigration System Statistics; Home Office; 2025

A total of 2,382 people have been supported in East Sussex under the three resettlement schemes, including 2,065 Ukrainians. Wealden has welcomed the largest number (959), while Hastings has supported the fewest (284). There are very few Afghan refugees and asylum seekers in the county. Most of the other asylum seekers who have been accommodated have been placed in Eastbourne and Hastings.

LGBTQ+

Just over 15,000 residents in East Sussex (3.3%) described their sexuality as something other than 'Straight or Heterosexual' in 2021. This is broadly in line with the South East and England averages (both 3.1%). Within the county, Hastings (4.6%), Lewes (4.1%) and Eastbourne (3.9%) have the largest LGBTQ+ populations.

Population Projections

TABLE: POPULATION PROJECTIONS 2025-2035

Area	All Ages	Aged 0 to 15	Aged 16 to 64	Aged 16 to 24	Aged 25 to 49	Aged 50 to 64	Aged 65+
East Sussex	**+22,429**	**-5,572**	**-6,805**	**+2,481**	**-406**	**-8,880**	**+34,795**
Eastbourne	+3,262	**-1,625**	**-1,207**	+894	**-1,112**	**-989**	+6,091
Hastings	+1,284	**-1,553**	**-2,100**	+208	**-795**	**-1,513**	+4,939
Lewes	+4,561	**-653**	**-876**	+264	+406	**-1,546**	+6,093
Rother	+5,861	**-827**	**-993**	+399	+486	**-1,878**	+7,675
Wealden	+7,461	**-914**	**-1,629**	+716	+609	**-2,954**	+9,997
South East	+284,241	**-110,309**	**-18,160**	+84,098	**-33,294**	**-68,964**	+412,729
England	+2,123,686	**-506,921**	+264,463	+595,609	+108,784	**-439,930**	+2,366,134

Source: Population Projections; Office for National Statistics; 2025

Between 2025 and 2035, the population of East Sussex is projected to grow by 22,400 people – a 3.9% increase. This outpaces the projected growth for the South East (3.0%) and England (3.7%). The biggest increases are expected in Rother (+5.8%) and Wealden (+4.5%).

But it's not just about numbers; the shape of the population is shifting too. The number of post-working age residents is expected to rise by 34,800, while the pre-working age population will fall by 5,600 and the working age group by 6,800. There is, however, a small projected increase of 2,500 people aged 16-24.

Every district in East Sussex will see its older population grow, compounding an already ageing demographic. If these projections come to pass, the county could have 0.9 non-working age residents for every working age resident – and in Rother, that imbalance could tip even further, with more non-working age residents than working age ones.

In short, many parts of East Sussex are already skewed towards an older population, and this trend is set to deepen. That's a big challenge for the local economy – especially when it comes to providing enough labour for the types of jobs that are already hard to fill: often low-paid, insecure and labour-intensive roles.

Households & Incomes

TABLE: GROSS DISPOSABLE HOUSEHOLD INCOME (GDHI) 2022

Area	GDHI £	Index (England =100)
East Sussex	**£24,599**	**1.05**
Eastbourne	£21,980	0.94
Hastings	£20,006	0.86
Lewes	£25,894	1.11
Rother	£24,729	1.06
Wealden	£27,918	1.20
South East	£26,058	1.12
England	£23,338	1.00

Source: Regional Gross Disposable Household Income; Local Authorities by ITL 1 Region;' Office for National Statistics; 2024

Gross Disposable Household Income (GDHI) per head gives a snapshot of how much money households have to spend or save after tax, pensions and benefits. In East Sussex, GDHI is £24,599 per person – higher than the England average (£23,338) but still trailing behind the South East (£26,058).

But that county-wide figure hides a stark split. Lewes, Rother and Wealden sit comfortably above the England average, suggesting higher overall household wealth in those areas. In contrast, Eastbourne and Hastings lag, with GDHI levels lower than the national average – highlighting the internal economic divide within East Sussex between its more affluent rural districts and its more deprived coastal towns.

TABLE: HOUSE PRICE AFFORDABILITY RATIOS 2022

Area	Ratio	England Index
East Sussex	**10.40**	**135**
Eastbourne	8.48	110
Hastings	8.37	109
Lewes	12.09	157
Rother	11.07	144
Wealden	11.62	151
South East	9.61	125
England	7.71	100

Source: House Price to Workplace-Based Earnings Ratio; Office for National Statistics; 2023

East Sussex is one of those paradoxes the South East does so well – beautiful, desirable, and quietly unaffordable for anyone without a foot on the property ladder.

The county's house price to earnings ratio is 10.4 – significantly higher than the England average of 7.71 and the South East's 9.61. In places like Lewes, Wealden and Rother, that figure soars above 11. Jobs in East Sussex do not equate to the cost of housing.

Hastings and Eastbourne are technically more affordable by local standards, but they're still out of reach for many, especially for those relying solely on wages rather than assets.

The local economy is skewed towards lower-paid, labour-intensive sectors. However, for people who need to earn to support a household, including young people or those in rental accommodation, it presents a challenging scenario.

Median Earnings

TABLE: MEDIAN ANNUAL EARNINGS FOR FULL-TIME WORKERS – RESIDENCE AND WORKPLACE BASED 2024

Area	Worker Earnings	Worker Index (England = 100)	Resident Earnings	Resident Index (England = 100)	Difference (£)	Difference (%)
East Sussex	**£32,703**	**87**	**£35,298**	**94**	**-£2,595**	**-7.4**
Eastbourne	£33,009	88	£35,850	95	**-£2,841**	**-7.9**
Hastings	£33,463	89	£33,275	88	£188	0.6
Lewes	£32,038	85	£35,298	94	**-£3,260**	**-9.2**
Rother	29,417	78	32,120	85	**-£2,703**	**-8.4**
Wealden	£32,703	87	£35,961	96	**-£3,258**	**-9.1**
South East	£39,038	104	£40,339	107	**-£1,301**	**-3.2**
England	£37,630	100	£37,617	100	+£13	0.0

Source: Annual Survey of Hours & Earnings (ASHE); ONS via NOMISWEB

Median full-time earnings in East Sussex are notably below the national average – £32,703 for people working in the county, compared to £37,630 across England. That's just 87% of the national figure, which is a stark indicator of the local economy's lower wage base.

What's particularly telling is the gap between what people *earn* in East Sussex and what people who live there earn – £35,298. That's still below the national residence-based average (£37,617), but it's the pattern that matters. In every district except Hastings, residents earn more than local workers. In places like Lewes, Rother and Wealden, that gap exceeds 8%.

In plain terms: if you live in East Sussex and you're a higher earner, chances are you commute elsewhere. These are also the parts of the county with the most unaffordable housing and the highest proportions of residents with asset or pension-based incomes. So, East Sussex continues to be a place where the wealthiest often don't rely on local jobs – and where local jobs often don't pay enough for people without other means.

Deprivation

TABLE: RELATIVE DEPRIVATION LEVELS ACROSS EAST SUSSEX, 2019

Area	Median Rank 2019	Median Decile 2019	LSOAs in top guntile – Count	LSOAs in top guntile – %
East Sussex	17,729	6	46	14
Eastbourne	12,960	4	11	19
Hastings	7,860	3	23	43
Lewes	21,084	7	2	3
Rother	16,277	5	6	10
Wealden	22,422	8	4	4

Source: Indices of Multiple Deprivation; MHCLG 2019

East Sussex as a whole doesn't appear particularly deprived on the surface – only 14% of its Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) fall into the most deprived 20% in England. But this overall figure hides a very uneven picture.

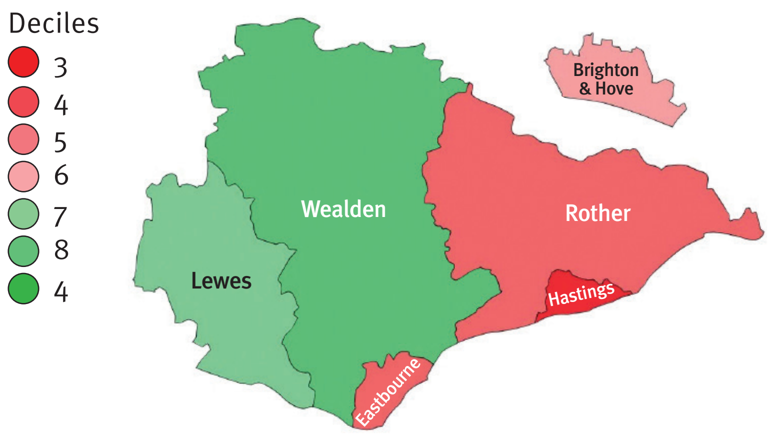
Each LSOA is assigned a rank from 1 (most deprived) to 32,844 (least deprived) based on various indicators across seven domains, including income, employment, health, education, crime, housing, and the living environment.

Half of these deprived areas are in Hastings alone, with another quarter in Eastbourne. That means three-quarters of the most deprived communities in the county are concentrated in just two towns. Hastings stands out as having entrenched deprivation at a scale not seen elsewhere in East Sussex.

In contrast, Wealden and Lewes barely register, with only isolated pockets of deprivation. There are two Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in Lewes that are in the top 20% most deprived in England, one in Newhaven and one in Lewes town. There are four LSOAs in Wealden that are in the top 20% most deprived in England, all of which are in or around Hailsham.

So, while East Sussex might look broadly comfortable on a national scale, the local disparities are sharp and persistent – especially along the coast.

IMD Ranking 2019 (East Sussex / Brighton & Hove)



Health & Wellbeing

The East Sussex Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) makes a clear and important distinction: while being in employment can protect against mental health issues like psychological distress and depression, poor-quality work can have the opposite effect and actively harm mental health.

It also identifies the two leading causes of sickness absence as mental health problems and musculoskeletal conditions – both of which are exacerbated by the kinds of insecure, low-paid, or physically demanding work that are common in East Sussex.

Nearly 1 in 5 residents (19%) are classed as disabled under the Equality Act, though this figure likely includes a high number of older residents who are no longer working. Still, the JSNA points to deep-rooted health inequalities in the county, driven by structural issues: unaffordable housing, precarious employment, and poor pay. In a local economy already marked by low productivity and an ageing workforce, this presents a serious challenge – not just for individuals' wellbeing, but for economic resilience too.

According to the East Sussex JSNA, over 110,500 East Sussex residents had a long-term limiting illness. These residents live in all parts of the county.

TABLE: LIMITING LONG TERM ILLNESS (16+)

Area	Limiting Long-Term Illness
East Sussex	**110,553**
Eastbourne	21,919
Hastings	20,525
Lewes	20,342
Rother	20,138
Wealden	27,629

Source: 2021 Census; Office for National Statistics

Unpaid Carers

TABLE: UNPAID CARERS (2021)

Area	Unpaid Carers Total	% of population	Providing 20+ hours/wk	% of population
East Sussex	**51,405**	**9.9**	**25,284**	**4.9**
Eastbourne	9,415	9.7	5,071	5.2
Hastings	8,665	10.1	4,780	5.6
Lewes	9,810	10.3	4,490	4.7
Rother	9,329	10.4	4,690	5.2
Wealden	14,187	9.3	6,254	4.1
South East	4,678,265	8.7	2,374,540	4.4
England	733,364	8.3	344,742	3.9

Source: 2021 Census; Office for National Statistics

In 2021, East Sussex was home to 51,400 unpaid carers – about 10% of all residents aged 5 and over. That's a touch higher than the South East (8.7%) and England (8.3%) averages and reflects a population with significant care needs spread across the county.

Roughly half of these unpaid carers (around 5% of the total population) were providing 20 hours or more of care each week – a substantial commitment. While unpaid carers live in every corner of East Sussex, Hastings has a slightly higher concentration, which aligns with its broader profile of health inequalities and deprivation.

In short, unpaid care is a hidden backbone of the East Sussex community. But the scale of care being delivered informally suggests added pressure on the health and social care system – and a need to ensure these carers are properly supported.

Education & Skills

The qualification data for 19-year-olds in East Sussex reveals significant disparities in attainment. While a majority of young people achieve Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications, those who have been eligible for free school meals (FSM) and those with Special Educational Needs (SEN) fare markedly worse. The attainment gap between disadvantaged learners and their peers is stark – much wider than regional or national averages in some areas. This highlights ongoing challenges in educational equity and suggests that more targeted support is needed to close these gaps and improve progression for all learners, regardless of background or need.

TABLE: LEVEL 3 ATTAINMENT BY 19 YEARS – BY CHARACTERISTIC 2023/24

Area	All %	Non FSM %	FSM %	Attainment Gap %	Non-SEN %	SEN %	Attainment Gap %
East Sussex	**52.6**	**57.3**	**31.6**	**-25.7**	**57.3**	**25.0**	**-32.3**
Eastbourne	50.4	54.3	33.0	**-21.3**	53.7	27.8	**-25.9**
Hastings	36.4	40.5	27.1	**-13.5**	41.0	16.0	**-25.0**
Lewes	55.3	59.7	33.5	**-26.2**	61.1%	24.2	**-36.9**
Rother	55.6	59.4	35.4	**-24.0**	61.1	23.9	**-37.2**
Wealden	59.4	63.6	30.6	**-32.9**	62.9	32.7	**-30.3**
South East	58.7	63.0	31.4	**-31.6**	62.6	33.4	**-29.2**
England	57.6	62.4	36.8	**-25.6**	64.2	35.4	**-28.8**

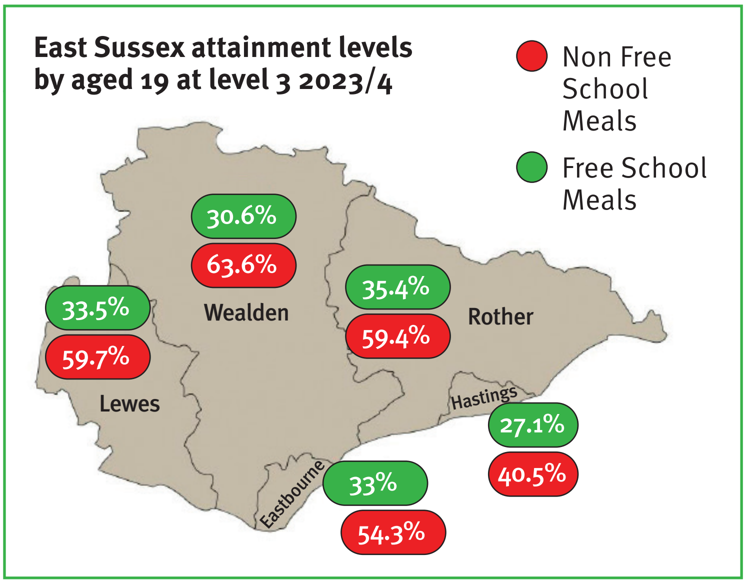
Source: explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/level-2-and-3-attainment-by-young-people-aged-19/2023-24. * FSM = Free School Meals

In East Sussex, just over half (52.6%) of 19-year-olds hold a Level 3 qualification – lower than both the South East (58.7%) and England (57.6%). Wealden is the only district in the county to exceed the national average (59.4%), while Hastings lags significantly behind, with only 36.4% of 19-year-olds achieving Level 3 – one of the lowest rates in the country.

The attainment gap between those who have been eligible for free school meals (FSM) and those who haven't is 25.7% in East Sussex. This is slightly narrower than the South East gap (31.6%) and in line with England (25.6%). Hastings has the smallest FSM gap (13.5%), but this is largely due to universally low attainment in the area rather than stronger outcomes for disadvantaged learners.

By contrast, the attainment gap between young people with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and their peers is wider in East Sussex (32.3%) than both the regional (29.2%) and national (28.8%) averages. The SEN gap is particularly acute in Lewes (36.9%) and Rother (37.2%).

East Sussex, along with Brighton & Hove, is one of the few places in the South of England where disadvantaged young people have a similarly high likelihood of being not in education, employment or training (NEET) as in some of the most deprived areas of the North and Midlands. This highlights deep-rooted challenges in ensuring equitable educational outcomes and life chances.



Adult Qualifications

TABLE: RESIDENTS (16-64 YEARS) WITHOUT REGULATED QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK (RQF) LEVEL 3

Area	Count	%
East Sussex	**110,300**	**34.5**
Eastbourne	16,300	26.9
Hastings	24,500	40.9
Lewes	18,200	30.7
Rother	22,100	42.7
Wealden	29,100	33.1
South East	1,649,000	29.7
England	11,171,100	32.4

Source: Annual Population Survey; Office for National Statistics; 2024

Over 110,000 working age residents in East Sussex (34%) do not hold a qualification at Level 3 or above – higher than the regional (29.7%) and national (32.4%) averages. Level 3 is broadly equivalent to A levels or advanced apprenticeships and is often the gateway to higher education or skilled employment.

There are significant variations within the county. Hastings (40.9%) and Rother (42.7%) have particularly high proportions of residents lacking Level 3 qualifications, while Eastbourne (26.9%) fares much better.

Even among those in work, skills mismatches are common. Around 70,000 people (30%) in employment are in roles that require higher skills than they currently have – posing a vulnerability as the labour market shifts. The problem is most acute in Rother (31.8%), Wealden (31.2%) and Hastings (30.8%). This suggests a widespread need for upskilling and more responsive lifelong learning systems across the county.

Employment

TABLE: EMPLOYMENT RATE (16-64 YEAR OLDS) 2024

Area	Count	%	Count for 80%
East Sussex	**233,500**	**72.1**	**+25,540**
Eastbourne	46,300	76.0	+2,420
Hastings	40,300	67.3	+7,620
Lewes	46,200	77.1	+1,640
Rother	33,800	64.7	+7,960
Wealden	66,900	73.6	+5,820
South East	4,448,600	78.7	+73,320
England	26,720,000	75.7	+1,499,760

Source: Annual Population Survey; Office for National Statistics; 2024

In 2024, 233,500 working age residents in East Sussex were in employment, giving the county an employment rate of 72.1%. This is below the South East average (78.7%) but slightly higher than England's (75.7%).

Employment rates vary widely across the county. Rother (64.7%) and Hastings (67.3%) have the lowest rates, while Lewes (77.1%) and Eastbourne (76.0%) outperform the national average.

To meet the UK Government's 80% employment target, East Sussex would need 25,540 more people in work – an 11% increase, which is twice the rate required nationally, and assumes no rise in population. Hastings and Rother would need the biggest uplift, requiring an extra 7,600 and 8,000 workers respectively.

Employment rates for people with long-term health conditions remain lower than average, highlighting a key barrier to inclusive growth, as shown in the table below.

EMPLOYMENT RATE (16+)[33] FOR PEOPLE WITH LONG-TERM HEALTH CONDITIONS (2024)

Area	Residents with long-term health conditions in work	% in work	Residents with mental health conditions in work	% in work
East Sussex	**95,600**	**47.8**	**31,800**	**46.5**
Eastbourne	16,400	46.6	9,000	59.9
Hastings	17,200	46.5	6,400	43.9
Lewes	24,200	59.2	4,600	41.9
Rother	15,000	39.2	5,800	45.5
Wealden	22,900	46.9	5,900	39.9
South East	1,583,400	52.3	455,800	50.9
England	9,148,300	49.4	2,592,500	46.4

Source: Annual Population Survey; Office for National Statistics; 2024

In East Sussex, only 48% of people with long-term health conditions are in employment, compared with the employment rate for people aged 16+ of 58.7% in East Sussex. The employment rate of people with long-term health conditions in England is 49%) and in the South East it is 52%. The rate varies across the county, from 59% in Lewes to just 39% in Rother.

For those with mental health conditions, the employment rate is 46.5%, matching the England average. Again, there's notable variation: Eastbourne performs best at nearly 60%, while Wealden lags at 39.9%.

Employment and Disability

TABLE: DISABILITY, DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT RATE AND OVERALL EMPLOYMENT RATE (2025)

Area	% aged 16-64 who are EA core or work-limiting disabled		Employment rate aged 16-64 – EA core or work-limiting disabled		Employment rate – aged 16-64	
	Count	%	Numerator	%	Numerator	%
East Sussex	**93,500**	**28.9**	**47,600**	**50.9**	**233,300**	**72.2**
Eastbourne	18,400	29.8	8,500	46.5	44,000	71.2
Hastings	16,400	28.4	9,500	58.2	44,800	77.8
Lewes	16,100	26.7	8,300	51.8	44,800	74.5
Rother	17,200	32.7	7,400	42.9	34,100	64.9
Wealden	25,500	28.0	13,800	54.1	65,700	72.0
South East	1,453,900	25.7	918,200	63.2	4,436,900	78.4
England	9,178,100	26.0	5,288,500	57.6	26,720,600	75.7

Source: Annual Population Survey; ONS 2025. *EA = Equality Act

In the 12 months to March 2025, there were 93,500 16-64-year-old residents in East Sussex who were either Equality Act (EA) or work-limiting disabled. This was 28.9% of the working age population – higher than in the South East (25.7%) and in England (26.0%).

The employment rate for disabled working age residents was 50.9%, compared with an overall employment rate of 72.2%. The employment rate for working age people with disabilities in East Sussex was lower than the South East (63.2%) rate England (57.6%) rate.

The employment rate for people with disabilities was lowest in Rother (42.9%) and Eastbourne (46.5%) and highest in Hastings (58.2%) and Wealden (54.1%).

According to the NHS Sussex WorkWell Discovery Phase report, nearly a quarter (22.5%) of the county's adult (16+ residents) has long-term musculoskeletal conditions, compared with 18.4% in England; and there were 192.7 emergency hospital admissions per 100,000 residents compared with 117 per 100,000 in England[33].

[33] NHS WorkWell Discovery; Health Innovation, Kent, Surrey, Sussex; 2025

These figures highlight persistent inequalities in access to work for people with health conditions, especially in areas already facing wider economic challenges.

Economic Inactivity

People who are economically inactive are not in employment and have not actively sought work in the previous four weeks. The main reasons for economic inactivity include being a student, ill health, caring responsibilities, being retired or other, unstated reasons.

Some forms of economic inactivity, such as retirement or studying, are not necessarily disadvantageous. The table below shows the overall economic inactivity rates and the rates excluding students.

TABLE: 16-64 YEAR OLD ECONOMIC INACTIVITY RATES 2024

Area	Count including students	% including students	Count excluding students	% excluding students
East Sussex	**74,800**	**23.1**	**58,100**	**18.9**
Eastbourne	13,300	21.8	11,800	19.9
Hastings	13,200	22.0	10,000	17.6
Lewes	12,600	21.0	9,900	17.3
Rother	16,600	31.8	Not available	Not available
Wealden	19,100	21.1	12,900	15.2
South East	1,040,000	18.4	734,400	13.7
England	7,450,500	21.1	5,404,600	16.3

Source: Annual Population Survey; Office for National Statistics; 2024

There are just under 75,000 working age people in East Sussex who are economically inactive. This represents 23.1% of 16–64-year-olds – a higher rate than in the South East (18.4%) and England (21.1%). Rother (31.1%) has a significantly higher economic inactivity rate than other districts and boroughs in East Sussex.

Once students are removed from the estimates, around 58,100 working age residents (18.9%) in East Sussex are economically inactive. This remains higher than the rates for England (16.3%) and the South East (13.7%).

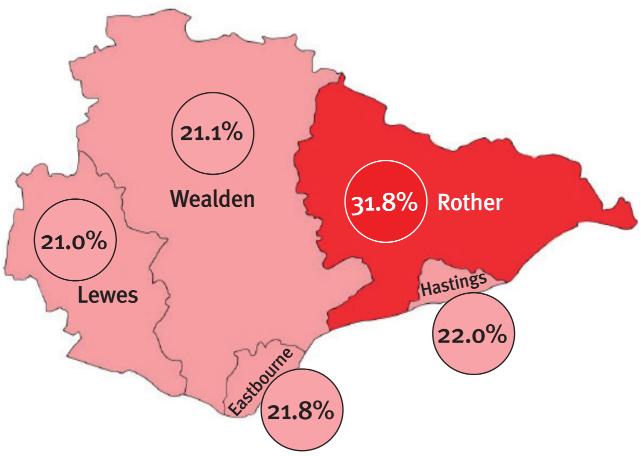
East Sussex Economic Activity

Percentage of population who are of working age (16-64) and are economically inactive.

Areas in green are meeting the 80% economically active target.

Figures are inclusive of students.

- 30-35%
- 25-30%
- 20-25%
- 15-20%
- 10-15%



Reasons for Economic Inactivity

TABLE: REASONS FOR ECONOMIC INACTIVITY (EXCLUDING STUDENTS) 2024

Area	Looking after a family/home – Count	Looking after a family/home – % of Economically Inactive	Long-term Sick – Count	Long-term Sick – % of Economically Inactive
East Sussex	**12,900**	**17.3**	**20,200**	**27.0**
Eastbourne	2,700	20.4	4,400	33.2
Hastings	Not available	Not available	1,900	14.1
Lewes	3,000	24.2	3,600	28.3
Rother	2,300	14.0	6,500	38.9
Wealden	2,700	13.9	3,900	20.5
South East	197,100	19.0	228,100	21.9
England	1,415,500	19.0	2,009,900	27.0

Table continued below

Area (continued)	Early Retirees – Count	Early Retirees – % of Economically Inactive	Other – Count	Other – % of Economically Inactive
East Sussex	**13,500**	**18.0**	**9,100**	**12.1**
Eastbourne	3,600	27.2	1,000	7.5
Hastings	2,100	15.2	2,600	19.9
Lewes	1,300	10.4	1,000	10.8
Rother	4,800	28.7	Not available	Not available
Wealden	1,600	8.6	4,100	21.4
South East	150,000	14.4	854,800	12.8
England	934,900	12.5	133,300	11.5

Source: Annual Population Survey; Office for National Statistics; 2024

Just over a quarter (27%) of East Sussex's economically inactive residents are so due to long-term sickness. This compares with 22% in the South East and 27% in England. Once students are removed, the percentage increases to 35%. There are over 9,100 working age residents in East Sussex who do not state the reasons for their economic inactivity.

Data at district and borough level is subject to wide confidence bands, so should be treated with caution. However, sickness-related economic inactivity appears to be more common in Rother (39%) and Eastbourne (33%) and less common in Hastings (14%).

Economically inactive residents in East Sussex (18%) are more likely to be early retirees than in the South East (14%) and England (13%). This is a particularly strong feature of economic inactivity in Eastbourne (27%) and Rother (29%). One in six (17%) of economically inactive residents in the county are looking after a family or home. Data is unavailable for Hastings, but this seems to be a more common feature of economic inactivity in Lewes (24%) than in other parts of the county.

Around 15% (11,100 out of 74,800) (15%) of economically inactive residents in East Sussex want a job[34]. This is a lower proportion than in the South East (19%) and England (21%). 1,700 economically inactive residents in Lewes (13%) would like a job, compared with 3,400 (26%) in Hastings.

Claimant Count Unemployment

TABLE: CLAIMANT COUNT UNEMPLOYMENT APRIL 2024-APRIL 2025

Area	April 24 Count	April 24 %	April 25 Count	April 25 %	Difference Count	Difference %
East Sussex	**10,840**	**3.4**	**11,650**	**3.7**	**+810**	**+7.5**
Eastbourne	2,670	4.4	2,905	4.8	+235	+8.8
Hastings	2,880	5.2	2,910	5.2	+30	+1.0
Lewes	1,820	3.2	2,050	3.6	+230	+12.6
Rother	1,530	3.1	1,670	3.3	+140	+9.2
Wealden	1,940	2.1	2,115	2.3	+175	+9.0
South East	170,210	2.9	186,695	3.2	+16,485	+9.7
England	1,387,390	3.8	1,529,600	4.2	+142,210	+10.3

Source: Claimant Count Unemployment; Office for National Statistics; 2025

There were 11,650 (3.7%) claimant count unemployed residents in East Sussex in April 2025. This is a higher proportion than in the South East (3.2%) but a lower proportion than in England (4.2%). Hastings (5.2%) and Eastbourne (4.8%) have the highest unemployment rates, while Wealden (3.2%) has the lowest.

Claimant count unemployment increased by 810 (+7.5%) in the year to April 2025. This is a slower rate of increase than in the South East (+9.7%) and England (+10.3%). Unemployment increased fastest in Lewes (+12.6%) and slowest in Hastings (+1.0%) over the period.

Claimant Count Unemployment by Age

The table below shows the number of claimants count unemployed residents in April 2024 and April 2025 for 18-24-year-olds, 25-49 year olds and people aged 50+. In April 2024, there were also 25 16-17-year-olds who were claimant count unemployed in East Sussex.

[34] Source: Annual Employment Survey; Office for National Statistics; 2024

TABLE: CLAIMANT COUNT UNEMPLOYMENT BY AGE (APRIL 2024-APRIL 2025)

Area	18-24 Years Apr-24	18-24 Years Apr-25	Change	Change %
East Sussex	**2,010**	**2,090**	**80**	**4.0**
Eastbourne	485	515	30	6.2
Hastings	570	555	-15	**-2.6**
Lewes	350	385	35	10.0
Rother	280	285	5	1.8
Wealden	325	350	25	7.7
South East	28,640	31,425	2,785	9.7
England	243,300	265,305	22,005	9.0

Table continued below

Area (continued)	25-49 Years Apr-24	25-49 Years Apr-25	Change	Change %
East Sussex	**6,115**	**6,200**	**85**	**1.4**
Eastbourne	1,540	1,575	35	2.3
Hastings	1,605	1,530	-75	**-4.7**
Lewes	1,025	1,085	60	5.9
Rother	825	855	30	3.6
Wealden	1,120	1,155	35	3.1
South East	100,075	106,225	6,150	6.1
England	826,000	883,235	57,235	6.9

Table continued below

Area (continued)	50+ Years Apr-24	50+ Years Apr-25	Change	Change %
East Sussex	**2,685**	**3,085**	**400**	**14.9**
Eastbourne	640	750	110	17.2
Hastings	695	745	50	7.2
Lewes	440	525	85	19.3
Rother	420	470	50	11.9
Wealden	490	595	105	21.4
South East	41,220	45,425	4,205	10.2
England	315,885	349,340	33,455	10.6

Source: Claimant Count Unemployment; Office for National Statistics; 2025

In April 2025, there were 2,090 18–24-year-olds who were claimant count unemployed in East Sussex. This is +80 (+4.0%) more than there had been in April 2024. This compares with increases in the South East (+9.7%) and England (+9.0%). The largest increases were in Lewes (+10.0%), Wealden (+7.7%) and Eastbourne (+6.2%).

There were 6,200 25-49-year-old claimant count unemployed residents in East Sussex in April 2025. This is an increase of +85 (+1.4%) compared with a year earlier. This is a slower increase than in the South East (+6.1%) and England (+6.9%) over the period. Lewes (+5.9%) had the largest increase and there was a reduction in Hastings (-4.7%).

There were 3,085 aged 50+ claimant count unemployed residents in East Sussex in April 2025. This is +400 (14.9%) more than there had been a year earlier. This is a faster increase than in the South East (+10.2%) and England (+10.6%). Wealden (+21.4%) and Lewes (+19.3%) had the fastest rate of increase and Hastings (+7.2%) had the slowest.

Not in Education, Employment & Training (NEET)

TABLE: NEET AND UNKNOWNS (2025)

Area	Cohort	NEET & Not Known		NEET		Not Known	
	Count	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
East Sussex	**11,979**	**695**	**5.8**	**587**	**4.9**	**108**	**0.9**
South East	215,720	15,100	7.0	7,334	3.4	7,982	3.7
England	1,335,160	74,769	5.6	45,395	3.4	29,374	2.2

Source: Participation in education, training & NEET age 16-17 by local authority; Department for Education; 2025

In 2025, there were 11,979 16–17-year-olds in East Sussex, 589 of whom were known to be Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). This represents a known NEET rate of 4.9%, which is higher than the rate in the South East (3.4%) and England (3.4%). East Sussex has a low proportion of 'not known' NEETs (0.9%), compared with the South East (3.7%) and England (2.2%). The overall NEET rate (including both known and unknown NEETs) in East Sussex is 5.8%. This compares with 7.0% in the South East and 5.6% in England.

Recent evidence from Impetus[35] suggests that young people in East Sussex and Brighton & Hove have a higher likelihood of being NEET than their peers in most other parts of the South of England. There are pockets of high numbers of NEET young people particularly in coastal areas of deprivation across the geography, particularly in Hastings (9.5%).

[35] Youth Job Gap – Exploring Compound Disadvantage; Impetus; 2025

Universal Credit

TABLE: UNIVERSAL CREDIT CLAIMANTS: AVERAGE - JANUARY TO DECEMBER 2024

Area	Total UC Claimant Count	%	16-24 Years Count	%	25-49 Years Count	%	50-64 Years Count	%
East Sussex	**11,286**	**2.0**	**2,018**	**4.4**	**6,400**	**4.3**	**2,870**	**2.4**
Eastbourne	2,725	2.6	478	4.9	1,574	5.2	675	3.3
Hastings	2,961	3.3	576	7.2	1,644	5.8	741	3.8
Lewes	1,905	1.9	347	4.1	1,081	4.0	478	2.2
Rother	1,614	1.7	282	3.9	890	4.1	443	2.1
Wealden	2,081	1.3	335	2.6	1,212	2.8	534	1.4

Stat-Explore; Department for Work & Pensions; 2025

There was an average of 11,300 Universal Credit claimants in East Sussex during 2024. Hastings (3.3%) had the largest proportion of Universal Credit claimants, followed by Eastbourne (2.6%). The rate amongst 16–24-year-olds (7.2%) in Hastings was particularly high.

The number of Universal Credit claimants in East Sussex rose by 485 between January and December 2024. Almost all this increase (+455) was among residents aged 50 and over. Lewes (+155) and Wealden (+120) saw the largest rises in claimant numbers.

5.4 Labour Demand

Employee Jobs and Job Density

TABLE: JOBS & JOB DENSITY 2023

Area	Count	%	Job Density
East Sussex	**190,300**	**100.0**	**0.72**
Eastbourne	39,085	20.5	0.80
Hastings	33,825	17.8	0.69
Lewes	35,285	18.5	0.69
Rother	32,890	17.3	0.82
Wealden	50,925	26.8	0.66

Job Density; Office for National Statistics; 2023

There are 190,300 jobs in East Sussex. Wealden (51,000) has the largest number of jobs, followed by Eastbourne (39,000). There are just 0.72 jobs for every working age resident in the county. This is similar to many areas in the north of England, including North Tyneside (0.73), Wolverhampton (0.73) and Stockton-on-Tees. None of the county's districts or boroughs is 'employment rich'. Wealden (0.66) has the lowest job density, and Rother (0.82) has the highest.

East Sussex does not have the employment characteristics usually associated with the South East of England. It lacks enough jobs to support even its relatively small working age population. This contributes to high levels of economic inactivity, insecure and seasonal employment, and forces many highly qualified residents to commute out of the area in search of better paid work.

Self-Employment

TABLE: SELF-EMPLOYMENT 2024

Area	Count	Percent	Index (England)
East Sussex	**5,300**	**15.8**	**125**
Eastbourne	4,400	11.5	91
Hastings	4,400	11.0	87
Lewes	5,800	12.6	100
Rother	7,400	21.8	173
Wealden	14,100	21.0	167
South East	559,900	12.6	100
England	3,358,400	12.6	100

Source: Annual Population Survey; Office for National Statistics; 2024

Self-employment is an important feature of the East Sussex labour market; nearly 16% of residents in work are self-employed. This compares with 12.6% in both the South East and England. Self-employment is particularly common in the county's rural areas – over a fifth of working residents in Wealden (21%) and Rother (22%) are self-employed. Paid employment is more prevalent in the urban centres of Eastbourne and Hastings, although much of this is poorly paid.

A key question for East Sussex is how much of this self-employment reflects lifestyle choice, and how much is driven by the lack of decently paid local jobs. Self-employment can work well for those with the financial flexibility to choose when and how they work. But for people who need reliable income to support a household, it's often not a viable or sustainable option.

Self-employment is too often confused with entrepreneurship, but the two aren't the same. Only a small proportion of people who go it alone aim to grow businesses or create jobs. Many are self-employed simply because better alternatives don't exist – or because they're in a position to prioritise autonomy over income stability.

Employment by Industry

Local economies and their labour markets are shaped by the structure of their industries. In East Sussex, human health & social work (19%) and wholesale & retail (16%) account for over a third of all jobs. Accommodation & food service (13%) is also a significant part of the county's economy.

The table below shows the percentage of employment by sector for the county and its districts and boroughs. The colour coding highlights where there is a higher (green) concentration of employment compared with England.

TABLE: EAST SUSSEX EMPLOYMENT EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY (2024)

Sector	East Sussex %	Eastbourne %	Hastings %	Lewes %	Rother %	Wealden %
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	1.0	0.0	0.2	1.1	1.5	2.0
Mining & quarrying	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0
Manufacturing	6.3	3.8	9.1	6.4	3.8	7.8
Electricity, gas, steam & air conditioning supply	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.6	0.0	0.1
Water supply; sewerage, waste management & remediation activities	0.8	0.4	0.5	1.3	0.3	1.0
Construction	5.8	3.2	4.5	5.7	5.3	7.8
Wholesale & retail	15.7	17.9	15.2	14.3	12.1	17.6
Transport & storage	2.4	2.1	3.0	3.6	1.8	2.0
Accommodation & food service	13.1	11.5	10.6	10.0	24.2	9.8
Information & communication	2.1	2.1	2.1	2.6	1.2	2.9
Finance & insurance	2.1	1.3	1.2	0.6	8.8	0.9
Real estate	1.8	1.5	1.5	2.6	1.5	2.0
Professional, scientific & technical	5.8	5.1	3.8	7.1	5.3	7.8
Admin. support service	4.2	3.8	3.8	3.6	4.5	4.9
Public admin. & defence; social security	4.7	3.8	6.8	11.4	1.5	1.8
Education	8.9	10.3	6.1	10.0	9.1	9.8
Human health & social work	19.4	28.2	30.3	14.3	13.6	13.7
Arts, entertainment & recreation	3.1	3.2	2.4	3.6	2.7	4.4
Other services	2.4	1.8	1.4	2.0	1.8	3.4

Source: Business Register & Employment Survey (BRES); Office for National Statistics; 2024

Retail & wholesale, agriculture, accommodation & food service, construction, human health & social work, and arts, entertainment & recreation are all over-represented in East Sussex. Key sectors that are under-represented include information & communications, finance & insurance, administrative & support services, and transport & storage.

District breakdown:

- **Eastbourne** is disproportionately represented in human health & social work; arts, entertainment & recreation; accommodation & food service; wholesale & retail; construction; and other services.
- **Hastings** is disproportionately represented in education; public administration; accommodation & food service; and manufacturing.
- **Lewes** is disproportionately represented in education; public administration; arts, entertainment & recreation; real estate; accommodation & food service; energy & utilities; construction; and agriculture.
- **Rother** is disproportionately represented in finance & insurance; accommodation & food service; and agriculture.
- **Wealden** is disproportionately represented in arts, entertainment & recreation; other services; accommodation & food service; wholesale & retail; construction; and agriculture.

There is some economic diversity within East Sussex, but overall, the county is disproportionately reliant on public services, tourism-related activities, retail, and land-based industries for employment. These are not, generally, high-value sectors of the economy.

Gross Value Added (GVA) per hour worked in key East Sussex sectors:

- Agriculture, fishing & forestry – £20.91
- Accommodation & food service – £21.61
- Human health & social work – £30.57
- Arts, entertainment & recreation – £24.49
- Wholesale & retail – £31.95[36]

Low productivity in these sectors means they cannot provide jobs with strong earnings potential, which makes the labour market less useful as a source of income – especially when housing costs are high.

Business Units

There are over 26,100 business units in East Sussex, just under three-quarters (74%) of which employ 0-4 people. This is slightly higher than in the South East (73%) and England (72%). Wealden (78%) and Rother (76%) have the highest proportion of micro-businesses, while the urban areas of Hastings (70%) and Eastbourne (69%) have the lowest.

[36] Output per hour, UK; Office for National Statistics; 2025

TABLE: EAST SUSSEX BUSINESS UNITS BY SIZE (2024)

Area	Total Business Count	0-4 staff Count	%	5-9 staff Count	%
East Sussex	**26,145**	**19,335**	**74.0**	**3,220**	**12.3**
Eastbourne	3,810	2,610	68.5	520	13.6
Hastings	3,445	2,405	69.8	460	13.4
Lewes	4,810	3,485	72.5	655	13.6
Rother	4,655	3,535	75.9	520	11.2
Wealden	9,425	7,300	77.5	1,070	11.4
South East	465,155	340,175	73.1	55,570	11.9
England	2,735,615	1,972,515	72.1	341,000	12.5

Table continued below

Area (continued)	10-49 Count	%	50-249 Count	%	250+ Count	%
East Sussex	**3,010**	**11.5**	**535**	**2.0**	**45**	**0.2**
Eastbourne	550	14.4	125	3.3	10	0.3
Hastings	480	13.9	85	2.5	15	0.4
Lewes	555	11.5	105	2.2	10	0.2
Rother	515	11.1	80	1.7	5	0.1
Wealden	905	9.6	145	1.5	10	0.1
South East	56,195	12.1	11,540	2.5	1,680	0.4
England	339,670	12.4	71,435	2.6	11,000	0.4

Source: UK Business Counts; Office for National Statistics; 2024

East Sussex has 535 business units that employ between 50 and 249 people, and just 45 that employ 250 or more staff. Eastbourne (125) and Lewes (105) have the largest number of medium-sized employers. The larger business units are spread across the county and are primarily concentrated in the public administration, human health and social work, and wholesale and retail sectors.

Business Units by Sector

Nearly half (45%) of East Sussex's business units are in just three sectors: construction (15%), wholesale and retail (16%), and professional, scientific and technical services (14%). Aside from wholesale and retail, these are not the sectors that provide the most jobs locally. The county also has notable concentrations of business units in agriculture, fishing and forestry; construction; and arts, entertainment and recreation.

TABLE: BUSINESS UNITS BY SECTOR (2024)

Sector	Count	%	Eastbourne %	Hastings %	Lewes %	Rother %	Wealden %
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	1,300	5.0	0.5	0.7	4.0	8.3	7.2
Mining & quarrying	10	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.0
Manufacturing	1,265	4.8	3.4	4.9	5.4	4.7	5.1
Electricity, gas, steam & air conditioning supply	30	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.2	0.1	0.2
Water supply; sewerage, waste management & remediation activities	115	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.5	0.4	0.5
Construction	4,005	15.3	13.4	14.8	14.8	15.3	16.7
Wholesale & retail	4,110	15.7	17.5	17.4	14.8	15.5	15.0
Transport & storage	540	2.1	2.1	2.2	2.8	2.0	1.6
Accommodation & food service	1,920	7.3	10.4	9.7	6.3	8.5	5.1
Information & communication	1,465	5.6	4.7	6.2	6.3	4.4	5.9
Finance & insurance	420	1.6	2.0	1.5	1.4	1.5	1.6
Real estate	1,000	3.8	4.3	3.6	4.1	3.7	3.7
Professional, scientific & technical	3,635	13.9	12.5	12.0	15.6	12.7	14.9
Admin. support service	2,130	8.1	8.3	7.5	7.9	7.8	8.5
Public admin. & defence; social security	190	0.7	0.5	0.7	1.0	0.8	0.7
Education	650	2.5	2.8	2.2	2.7	2.3	2.4
Human health & social work	1,485	5.7	8.7	7.8	4.7	5.4	4.3
Arts, entertainment & recreation	880	3.4	3.5	4.2	3.8	2.9	3.0
Other services	1,000	3.8	5.1	3.9	3.7	3.8	3.3

Source: UK Business Counts; Office for National Statistics; 2024

- **Eastbourne** is over-represented in accommodation and food service; human health and social work; arts, entertainment and recreation; and other services.
- **Hastings** is over-represented in construction; accommodation and food service; human health and social work; and arts, entertainment and recreation.
- **Lewes** is over-represented in agriculture, forestry and fishing; manufacturing; construction; accommodation and food service; and arts, entertainment and recreation.
- **Rother** is over-represented in agriculture, forestry and fishing; construction; and accommodation and food service.
- **Wealden** is over-represented in agriculture, manufacturing, forestry and fishing; water supply and related services; and construction.

Job Vacancies

TABLE: UNIQUE JOB POSTINGS 2024

Area	Total	Construction	Creative & cultural	Digital	Health & care	Land based	Manufacturing & engineering	Visitor economy
East Sussex Count	28,727	3,413	1,479	1,864	10,733	477	4,206	6,555
Eastbourne	7,226	645	274	353	3,541	56	634	1,723
%	25.2	18.9	18.5	18.9	33.0	11.7	15.1	26.3
Hastings	5,216	694	230	356	2,075	63	821	977
%	18.2	20.3	15.6	19.1	19.3	13.2	19.5	14.9
Lewes	7,119	998	466	643	1,910	122	1,584	1,396
%	24.8	29.2	31.5	34.5	17.8	25.6	37.7	21.3
Rother	2,602	263	139	169	1,002	59	264	706
%	9.1	7.7	9.4	9.1	9.3	12.4	6.3	10.8
Wealden	6,564	813	370	343	2,205	177	903	1,753
%	22.8	23.8	25.0	18.4	20.5	37.1	21.5	26.7

Source: Lightcast 2024

In 2024, there were 28,700 job postings in East Sussex. A quarter (25%) were in Eastbourne, another quarter (25%) in Lewes, and 24% in Wealden. The remainder were in Hastings (18%) and Rother (9%).

Eastbourne accounted for 31% of healthcare job postings. Hastings had a relatively large share of construction vacancies (20%). Lewes featured strongly across several sectors, with 29% of construction, 32% of creative and cultural, 35% of digital, and 38% of manufacturing and engineering job postings. Rother had a higher share of land-based industries (12%) and visitor economy (11%) postings compared with its overall job posting share. Wealden also had a disproportionate number of vacancies in creative and cultural (25%), land-based industries (37%) and the visitor economy (27%).

5.5 Current Provision

Skills & Employment East Sussex (SES) is the county's strategic body for employment and skills. It has an independent chair and includes representatives from local authorities, Further Education and Higher Education institutions, employer organisations, the Department for Work & Pensions, the National Careers Service, the Integrated Care Board/NHS, and the voluntary sector. It is supported by employer-led task groups aligned to key sectors of the economy, as well as cross-sector working groups: *Apprenticeships East Sussex, the Employability Forum* and the *Adult Learning Network*.

The East Sussex County Council *Employability & Skills Team* reports to Skills & Employment East Sussex and oversees:

- *East Sussex Careers Hub,* which brings together secondary schools, colleges, and special schools across the county, alongside employers and other partners.
- *ESTAR*, which supports adult job seekers furthest from the labour market into work through employment support programmes like Moving on Up, Level Up, Support into Work for refugee and Ukrainian visitors, and a specialist service for those at risk of homelessness.
- *Connect to Work in East Sussex*, which supports people with disabilities, long-term health conditions or complex barriers to employment, using a voluntary supported employment model.
- *Skills Bootcamps*, 16-week sector-specific training designed to improve employability and address local skills shortages in high-demand industries.

Further Education

East Sussex Colleges Group (ESCG) is the main Further Education provider in East Sussex. Its main campuses are in Lewes, Eastbourne and Hastings. It also has a Marine Workshop in Newhaven; a campus in Ore Valley; and an Automotive Training Centre in Hastings. It also has a partnership with OHM Energy based at its Eastbourne campus.

ESCG offers learning programmes for 16-19-year-olds and for Adults. It has an Employer Exchange Programme that strengthens education business partnerships and includes work experience and internship programmes.

ESCG provides learning programmes up to and including degree level and operates an apprenticeship programme that develops skills across a broad range of sectors.

Specialist Colleges

Plumpton College is a specialist agricultural college that provides learning programmes for learners aged 14-16 years and 16+ years. It provides agricultural apprenticeships, LandPro training courses, Skills Bootcamps and land and environmental degree courses.

Higher Education

There are no dedicated Higher Education providers in East Sussex, although both Plumpton College and the East Sussex Colleges Group (ESCG) provide learning programmes at degree level. East Sussex College has recently launched the South East Institute of Technology (IOT), which focuses on delivering technical and professional courses and apprenticeships in collaboration with employers. The IOT aims to enhance career and employment prospects for young people and adults by equipping them with skills relevant to the technology-driven economy in the South East.

Adult and Community Learning (ACL)

ACL programmes are free to adults aged 19+, who are eligible to receive public funding. Courses focus on arts, creative writing and crafts and wellbeing and have a duration of 3-12 weeks.

Other Provision

In addition to nationally funded programmes that are funded and delivered by the Department for Work and Pensions, there is a wide range of skills and employment support programmes that are delivered in East Sussex by private and voluntary and community organisations. Whilst not an exhaustive list, these include:

Youth Employability Service (YES)

YES East Sussex provides guidance and support to 16-18-year-olds who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) and those up to the age of 25 years with an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP).

Sussex Community Development Association (SCDA)

The SCDA Employability Team provides support to people in East Sussex who are not in employment. This includes finding opportunities in volunteering, training, work experience, finding work and sustaining employment.

Work in Mind

Work in Mind is a free service run by the NHS that provides employment-related support for people who are accessing East Sussex Health in Mind mental health services.

Southdown Housing

Southdown Housing's Work and Well-Being programme provides individual placement support to people who want to work but whose mental health creates barriers to them doing so. It pairs people with mental health needs with an employment specialist to help them find and sustain work.

Further details of provision in East Sussex can be found at the **Careers East Sussex** website.

6. West Sussex

6.1 West Sussex Summary

West Sussex covers an area of 768 square miles, around 41% of which falls within the South Downs National Park. It has a coastline of around 85 miles, stretching from Chichester Harbour in the west to Southwick in the east.

West Sussex's diverse, polycentric nature means it is a county of contrasts. Coastal towns like Littlehampton, Bognor Regis and Selsey have struggled to recover from the decline of traditional seaside resorts. Worthing, on the other hand, has a strong and diversified economy that is less reliant on seasonal employment. The county's economic powerhouse is centred around Gatwick Airport and Crawley. Worthing (18%) and Crawley (22%) between them account for around 40% of the county's economy. This area provides significant high-value jobs, including at the Manor Royal Business District, drawing from a labour market catchment that stretches well beyond the county's boundaries.

West Sussex is also home to an historic cathedral city, Chichester and market towns, including Arundel and Petworth. The quality of the county's soil and levels of sunlight make it a rich location for land-based industries, and its horticultural and viticulture sectors
are nationally significant.

Overall, West Sussex has a reasonably well-performing economy, but this masks significant variations and challenges within it. These include an unbalanced resident age profile in many areas, unaffordable housing, and connectivity issues – particularly in rural parts of the county. Skills levels are variable: It remains a challenge for example in Crawley to equip local people to compete for the high-quality jobs on offer. At the other extreme, a scarcity of jobs and support services in more isolated parts of the county, particularly along the coast and in more isolated rural areas, can dampen opportunity and aspirations.

For the working age population, local jobs are often insufficiently well-paid to address the high cost of living particularly the high cost of housing.

As of the end of 2023, West Sussex was home to approximately 59,900 registered businesses, making up a diverse and dynamic economy, a range of thriving sectors and a mix of micro, small, medium, and large employers. Key industries include advanced manufacturing, health and life sciences, financial and business services, transport and logistics, agriculture and horticulture, retail, and the visitor economy.

The county's economic strength is further bolstered by significant assets such as Gatwick Airport and the Manor Royal Business District in Crawley, which serve as major employment hubs and contribute substantially to the regional economy. It is rich in its economic diversity. It also has an employment rate that is already above the UK Government's 80% target, although this may mask more extensive worklessness at a more localised level.

However, much of the county is still over-reliant on low productivity sectors, including health & social work, retail, the visitor economy, and land-based industries. These often come with earnings that do not reflect the county's high house prices.

West Sussex-wide data can mask more localised need and deprivation, particularly in coastal areas and in Crawley. There are clear pockets of disadvantage, but these can be widely dispersed, making it challenging to deliver good quality skills and labour market support cost-effectively. Many people face barriers to work due to ill health or other socio-economic factors.

A shrinking labour pool potentially dilutes the attractiveness of West Sussex to inward investors that could create jobs, while environmental designations – including the South Downs National Park and the long coastline – restrict development opportunities.

Crawley is an exception to the West Sussex demographic narrative. It has a younger population, a plentiful supply of jobs, and greater ethnic diversity than the rest of the county. Crawley has some of the best jobs in Sussex, and its businesses draw talent from a much wider area than the borough itself. Located in central Sussex, it is an important employment hub for much of Sussex and parts of Surrey. Unlike the rest of West Sussex, Crawley's economy however is lacking diversity, being heavily reliant on Gatwick Airport and its supply and value chains, leaving it vulnerable to economic shocks such as that seen during the pandemic.

The rural economy is an important part of West Sussex, with strengths in sectors including land-based industries, tourism and hospitality and manufacturing; and the rural areas are where many of the county's micro-businesses and self-employed people are located. This rurality and the corresponding uneven spread of employment and training opportunities across the county mean that good transport and digital connectivity are vital to the county's economy.

Both Horsham and Mid Sussex are affluent parts of West Sussex, where many of the local concerns are around high house prices, supporting rural communities and accessing support services, talent retention, and creating good quality local jobs. Their towns are within commuting distance of London and have good access to Gatwick Airport, which makes them great locations for affluent residents who work both in county and elsewhere. Horsham has a notably high level of self-employment and there is scope for both residential and commercial development opportunities in both Mid Sussex and Horsham.

The University of Chichester with campuses in Bognor Regis and Chichester, Chichester College Group of FE colleges, and the Institute of Technology, are strong local assets on the supply side. There are also good links with the universities of Sussex and Brighton. There is significant economic leverage in large public sector organisations, which can be used to support skills and workforce development in the wider economy, for example, through inclusive employment, effective procurement and commissioning, and applying social value principles.

The employment and skills support infrastructure will benefit from greater collaboration and integration across agencies and support services, including Local Authority functions, the community and voluntary sector and the health sector.

6.2 Strengths and Challenges

Strengths	Challenges
• High employment rate and significant local employment centres, including Crawley as a major sub-regional employment hub. • University of Chichester, with campuses in Chichester and Bognor Regis. • Strong FE sector; Chichester College Group. • Strong links with the universities of Brighton & Sussex, supporting innovation and business growth in the region. • Mixed economy with jobs across a broad range of sectors (e.g. land-based sector, visitor economy, health and advanced engineering). • Strong and diverse micro and SME community. • 165 large businesses that each employ 250+ staff. • Overall low levels of deprivation, and generally high quality of living. • Relatively high resident skills levels (with some exceptions in Crawley, Arun and Worthing). • Relatively low economic inactivity. • Outstanding natural assets and protected landscapes. • Establishment of Surrey & Sussex Institute of Technology in Crawley • Establishment of new West Sussex Economic Growth Board could help to drive growth. • Active community and voluntary sector providing wide-ranging, if fragmented, employment and skills support. • High levels of self-employment particularly in rural areas, which in some cases, lead to growing businesses that create jobs. • Many 'foundational sectors' e.g. tourism, agriculture and care, with low traditional productivity but high social productivity, for example bringing. opportunities for entry routes into work.	• Mixed economic performance between districts and boroughs and jobs not evenly distributed across the county. • Large numbers of people who are economically inactive are so due to long-term health conditions. • Barriers to work persist for certain cohorts including those with a lack of work experience, mental health challenges or skills mismatch. • Shrinking working age population and growing age-related dependencies. • High house prices and low housing affordability. • Heavy reliance on low value, seasonal sectors. • Lack of diversity in Crawley economy leaving it vulnerable to economic shocks. • Pockets of coastal deprivation. • Transport and connectivity issues, especially in rural areas. • Attainment deficit for SEND and Free School Meal recipients. • High levels of NEET, with unknown destinations for many young people. • Increasing claimant count and unemployment, particularly amongst young people and those aged 50+ years. • Dispersed disadvantaged makes it difficult to provide cohesive support cost effectively. • High-cost areas have high out-commuting, with many residents crossing the county boundary for work.

6.3 Labour Supply

Population by Age

TABLE: POPULATION BY AGE (2023)

Area	Aged 0 to 15 %	Aged 16 to 64 %	Aged 16 to 24 %	Aged 25 to 49 %	Aged 50 to 64 %	Aged 65+ %	Dependency ratio
West Sussex	**17.6**	**59.2**	**8.5**	**30.2**	**20.5**	**23.2**	**0.69**
Adur	17.9	58.1	8.0	29.4	20.8	24.0	0.72
Arun	15.2	55.9	8.0	27.0	21.0	28.8	0.79
Chichester	15.5	57.1	9.7	26.4	21.0	27.4	0.75
Crawley	21.5	64.9	9.5	37.7	17.7	13.6	0.54
Horsham	17.9	58.6	8.0	29.1	21.5	23.5	0.71
Mid Sussex	19.4	59.8	8.1	31.7	20.1	20.8	0.67
Worthing	16.5	60.7	8.4	31.3	21.0	22.8	0.65
South East	18.6	61.7	10.0	31.9	19.8	19.8	0.62
England	18.5	62.9	10.7	32.9	19.3	18.7	0.59

Source: Population Estimates; Office for National Statistics; 2023

In 2023, West Sussex had a resident population of around 900,000. Around 533,000 (59.2%) were of working age (16-64). This is a lower proportion than in England (62.9%) and the South East (61.7%). Arun (55.9%) and Chichester (57.1%) have the lowest proportions of working age residents, while Crawley (64.9%) and Worthing (60.7%) have the highest. Only Crawley has a higher proportion of working age residents than England.

The dependency ratio shows the number of non-working age residents for every person of working age. The higher the number, the greater the proportion of non-working age residents. In West Sussex, there were 0.69 non-working age residents for every working age resident. This is higher than in England (0.59) and the South East (0.62). Again, only Crawley has a lower dependency ratio than England. In Arun, there are 0.79 non-working age residents for every working age resident.

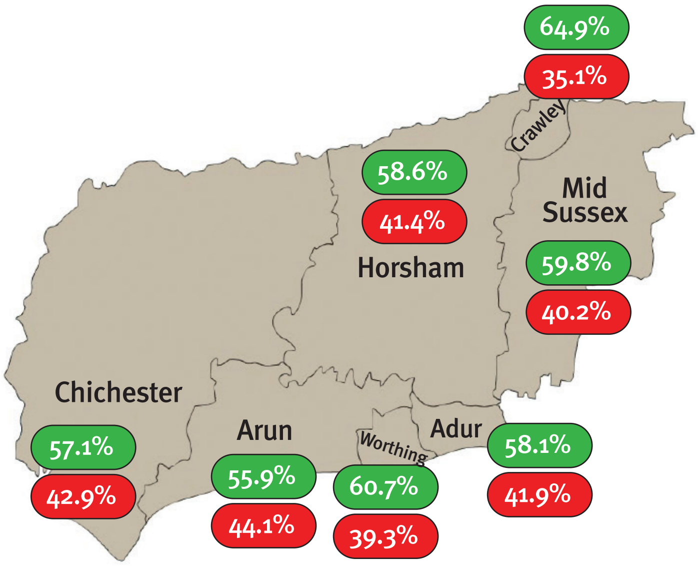
Population growth between 2013 and 2023 has been more rapid in West Sussex (+9.2%) than in Brighton & Hove (+1.5%) and East Sussex (+4.2%). With the exception of Crawley, inward migration has been the main driver of change.

This has major implications for the local economy, labour supply, attractiveness to investors, and the demand for services across most of West Sussex. Later sections of this report will explore this in more detail and demonstrate that there are large numbers of people in West Sussex who appear to have voluntarily withdrawn from the labour market.

West Sussex population by age

Proportion of working age people (16-64) compared with non-working age (0-15, 65+).

working age
non-working age



Ethnicity

In 2021, around 139,100 (15.8%) of West Sussex residents were from a Global Ethnic Majority (GEM) group. This is a smaller proportion than in the South East (21.1%) and in England (26.5%). The demographic make-up of Crawley is markedly different to other parts of West Sussex: over a third (38.2%) of its residents are from a Global Ethnic Majority background. The other districts and boroughs in the county have much lower proportions. For example, only one in ten (9.9%) of Chichester's residents are from an ethnic minority background.

Nearly half (40%) of Crawley's GEM population are Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh. A more detailed analysis shows that in 2021, Crawley had over 7,300 Indian or British Indian residents, 6,100 Pakistani or British Pakistani residents, and 1,900 Sri Lankan residents. Over four fifths (84%) of West Sussex's Pakistani/British Pakistani residents, over half (52%) of the county's Indian/British Indian residents, and nearly three-quarters (74%) of its Sri Lankan residents live in Crawley. The town also has large Polish (1,900) and Romanian (1,700) communities.

In other parts of West Sussex, there is less ethnic diversity, with the biggest ethnic groupings from mixed ethnic groups or 'Other White' backgrounds. At the time of the census, the county had 9,800 mixed European residents, 7,800 Polish residents, 6,700 Irish residents, and 4,200 Romanian residents.

Over a third (37%) of the county's Polish population live in Arun, particularly around Littlehampton and Bognor Regis. Arun also has nearly half of the county's Lithuanians (580) and Latvians (370). In 2021, there were 8,200 residents in West Sussex with language barriers, notably 2,900 in Crawley and 2,200 in Arun.

Refugees and Asylum Seekers

Since the 2021 Census, the UK has welcomed significant numbers of refugees and asylum seekers. This has included support through the Homes for Ukraine scheme, the Afghan Resettlement Programme, and Other Supported Asylum routes.

A total of 5,438 people have been supported under these three schemes in West Sussex. This represents 0.60% of the county's resident population – a higher proportion than in both the South East (0.42%) and England (0.42%).

TABLE: ETHNICITY OF POPULATION 2021

Area	GEM Count	GEM* %	Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh	%	Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African	%
West Sussex	**139,102**	**15.8**	**38,288**	**27.5**	**11,429**	**8.2**
Adur	7,153	11.1	1,395	19.5	530	7.4
Arun	18,709	11.3	2,630	14.1	857	4.6
Chichester	12,249	9.9	2,168	17.7	783	6.4
Crawley	45,314	38.2	18,236	40.2	5,331	11.8
Horsham	17,428	11.9	3,974	22.8	1,312	7.5
Mid Sussex	21,595	14.2	5,505	25.5	1,337	6.2
Worthing	16,658	15.0	4,387	26.3	1,281	7.7
South East	1,963,005	21.2	650,545	33.1	221,584	11.3
England	14,949,257	26.5	5,426,392	36.3	2,381,724	15.9

Table continued below

Area (continued)	Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups	%	Other white	%	Other ethnic group	%
West Sussex	**20,811**	**15.0**	**59,948**	**43.1**	**8,626**	**6.2**
Adur	1,627	22.7	2,904	40.6	697	9.7
Arun	2,484	13.3	11,824	63.2	914	4.9
Chichester	2,047	16.7	6,582	53.7	669	5.5
Crawley	4,838	10.7	13,761	30.4	3,148	6.9
Horsham	3,130	18.0	8,094	46.4	918	5.3
Mid Sussex	3,827	17.7	9,753	45.2	1,173	5.4
Worthing	2,854	17.1	7,029	42.2	1,107	6.6
South East	260,871	13.3	694,322	35.4	135,683	6.9
England	1,669,378	11.2	4,242,610	28.4	1,229,153	8.2

Source: Census 2021; Office for National Statistics; 2021 *GEM = Global Ethnic Majority

TABLE: REFUGEES & ASYLUM SEEKERS (2025)

Area	Homes for Ukraine	Afghan Resettlement Programme	Supported Asylum	Total	% of Population
West Sussex	**2,701**	**1,493**	**1,244**	**5,438**	**0.60%**
Adur	117	12	0	129	0.20%
Arun	383	93	2	478	0.28%
Chichester	648	172	194	1,014	0.79%
Crawley	304	1,026	399	1,729	1.43%
Horsham	533	66	113	712	0.48%
Mid Sussex	555	96	519	1,170	0.74%
Worthing	161	28	17	206	0.18%
South East	27,111	5,541	7,287	39,939	0.42%
England	125,290	23,680	94,754	243,724	0.42%

Source: 'Regional and Local Authority Data on Immigration Groups'; Home Office; 2025

Nearly half (2,701) of the refugees and asylum seekers supported in West Sussex are Ukrainian. Crawley has welcomed the largest number overall (1,729), followed by Mid Sussex (1,170) and Chichester (1,014). Of the 1,493 beneficiaries of the Afghan Resettlement Programme, 1,026 (69%) have been housed in Crawley. Mid Sussex has housed the largest number of people under the Homes for Ukraine scheme (42%).

LGBTQ+

Just over 21,000 (2.9%) of West Sussex residents described their sexuality as other than 'Straight or Heterosexual'. This is similar to the proportion in both the South East and England (3.1%). Worthing (4.0%) and Adur (3.4%) have the largest LGBTQ+ populations in West Sussex.

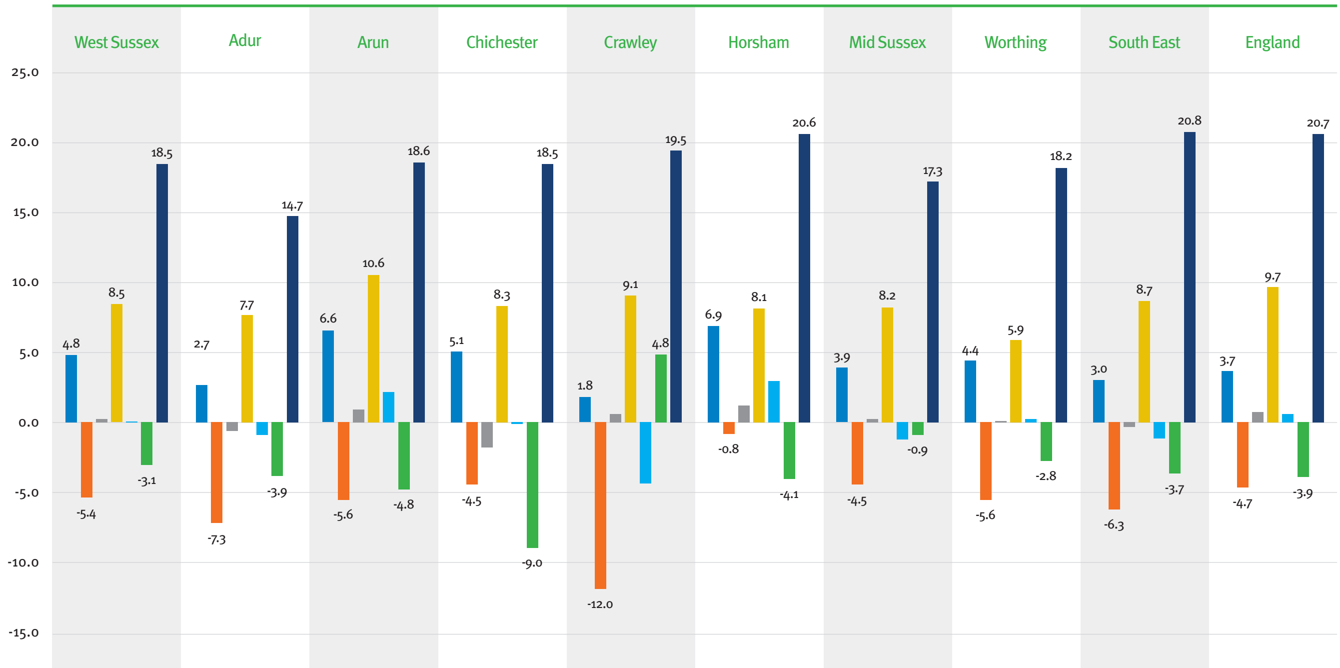
Population Projections

TABLE: POPULATION PROJECTIONS 2025-2035

Area	All Ages	Aged 0 to 15	Aged 16 to 64	Aged 16 to 24	Aged 25 to 49	Aged 50 to 64	Aged 65+
West Sussex	**43,114**	**-8,134**	**+1,054**	**+6,851**	**-171**	**-5,626**	**+50,192**
Adur	+1,757	**-784**	**-237**	+449	**-169**	**-517**	+2,775
Arun	+11,169	**-1,396**	+824	+1,563	+924	**-1,663**	+11,738
Chichester	+6,427	**-858**	**-1,236**	+1,075	**-33**	**-2,278**	+8,515
Crawley	+2,030	**-2,577**	+438	+1,103	**-1,743**	1,078	+4,173
Horsham	+10,547	**-220**	+1,015	+992	+1,324	**-1,301**	+9,753
Mid Sussex	+6,131	**-1,284**	+232	+1,084	**-558**	**-294**	+7,186
Worthing	+5,053	**-1,015**	+18	+585	+84	**-651**	+6,052
South East	+284,241	**-110,309**	**-18,160**	+84,098	**-33,294**	**-68,964**	+412,729
England	+2,123,686	**-506,921**	+264,463	+595,609	+108,784	**-439,930**	+2,366,134

Source: Population Projections (2018 based);' Office for National Statistics; 2025

The chart below shows the projected population changes between 2025 and 2035 in percentage terms for West Sussex, its districts and boroughs, the South East and England



There are projected to be 43,100 more residents living in West Sussex in 2035 compared with 2025 – a 4.8% increase in the county's population over the next decade. This compares with projected increases of 3.0% in the South East and 3.7% in England. Horsham (+6.9%) is expected to see the largest population growth, followed by Arun (+6.6%). Crawley (+1.8%) and Adur (+2.7%) are projected to see the slowest growth.

The structure of the population is also set to shift, with a further increase in the post-working age population (+50,200 or +18.5%) and a reduction in the pre-working age population (-8,100 or -5.4%). The working age population (16-64 years) is projected to grow only marginally (+1,100 or +0.2%), with a rise of 6,900 among 16-24-year-olds (+8.5%) offset by a fall of 5,600 (-3.1%) among 50-64 year olds.

All districts and boroughs in West Sussex are projected to see an increase in their post-working age populations, building on already older-than-average demographics. If these projections are realised, there could be 0.81 non-working age residents for every working age resident in the county. In Arun, that figure could reach 0.95 by 2035.

Only Crawley (0.58) is expected to maintain a low 'dependency ratio' – indicating a high proportion of working age residents. Every other district and borough is projected to exceed the dependency ratios for both the South East (0.71) and England (0.67).

Households & Incomes

TABLE: GROSS DISPOSABLE HOUSEHOLD INCOME (GDHI) 2022

Area	GDHI £	Index (England = 100)
West Sussex	**£25,108**	**1.08**
Adur	£21,769	0.93
Arun	£23,068	0.99
Chichester	£29,358	1.26
Crawley	£19,883	0.85
Horsham	£29,442	1.26
Mid Sussex	£28,211	1.21
Worthing	£23,049	0.99
South East	£26,058	1.12
England	£23,338	1.00

Source: 'Regional Gross Disposable Household Income: Local Authorities by ITL1 Region'; Office for National Statistics; 2024

Household income is a broad measure of household wealth. The table shows Gross Disposable Household Income (GDHI) per head, indexed to England (100). Overall, West Sussex is a relatively wealthy part of England, with a GDHI of £25,108 – compared with £23,338 in England and £26,058 in the South East. However, there are notable differences within the county. GDHI in Crawley (£19,883) is well below both the regional and national averages, while GDHI in Horsham (£29,442) and Mid Sussex (£28,211) is exceptionally high (at 26% and 21% higher than the national benchmark respectively).

Housing Affordability

The median affordability ratio is calculated by dividing the median house price by the median gross annual workplace-based earnings, offering insight into the relative affordability of housing in different regions.

TABLE: MEDIAN HOUSING AFFORDABILITY RATIO (2023)

Area	Ratio	Index (England = 100)
West Sussex	**10.00**	**129.7**
Adur	10.06	130.5
Arun	10.18	132.0
Chichester	12.82	166.3
Crawley	7.93	102.9
Horsham	11.68	151.5
Mid Sussex	11.35	147.2
Worthing	9.70	125.8
South East	9.61	124.6
England	7.71	100.0

Source: Housing Affordability in England and Wales: 2023; Office for National Statistics; 2024

Overall, West Sussex is one of the least affordable parts of the country when measured by the relationship between median house prices and median workplace earnings. Across the county median house prices are 10.0 times median earnings for full-time workers, compared with 7.71 in England and 9.61 in the South East region.

For residents, it is a difficult county in which to find work that matches the high cost of housing. The median house price ratio is particularly high in Chichester (12.82), Horsham (11.68), and Mid Sussex (11.35). Crawley (7.93) is the most affordable area – if local people can access the good quality jobs available locally. Crawley is the only district or borough in West Sussex where housing affordability is close to the England average (7.71).

Median Earnings

TABLE: MEDIAN ANNUAL EARNINGS FOR FULL-TIME WORKERS – RESIDENCE AND WORKPLACE BASED 2024

Area	Worker Earnings	Worker Index (England = 100)	Resident Earnings	Resident Index (England = 100)	Difference (£)	Difference (%)
West Sussex	**£38,006**	**101**	**£38,700**	**103**	**-£694**	**-1.8**
Adur	£36,273	96	£36,655	97	-£382	**-1.0**
Arun	£33,048	88	£36,840	98	-£3,792	**-10.3**
Chichester	£33,151	88	£36,000	96	-£2,849	**-7.9**
Crawley	£42,886	114	£38,368	102	+£4,518	11.8
Horsham	£36,808	98	£41,643	111	-£4,835	**-11.6**
Mid Sussex	£37,977	101	£40,000	106	-£2,023	**-5.1**
Worthing	£36,610	97	£37,381	99	-£771	**-2.1**
South East	£39,038	104	£40,339	107	-£1,301	**-3.2**
England	£37,630	100	£37,617	100	+£13	0.0

Source: Annual Survey of Hours & Earnings (ASHE); ONS via NOMISWEB

Median workplace-based (£38,006) and residence-based (£38,700) earnings for full-time workers in West Sussex are both just above the national figures for England (£37,630 and £37,617 respectively).

However, this masks significant variation across the county. Median workplace earnings in Crawley (£42,886) are much higher than both the regional and national medians. In all other districts and boroughs – except for Horsham – workplace earnings fall below the national and regional averages. They are particularly low in Arun (£33,048) and Chichester (£33,151).

Overall, residents' earnings are higher than those of local workers, except in Crawley, where the reverse is true. Full-time workers living in Crawley earn nearly 12% more than those working in the borough. In Horsham, residents' median earnings are £4,835 higher than local workplace earnings, and in Arun the gap is £3,792.

Deprivation

TABLE: RELATIVE DEPRIVATION LEVELS ACROSS WEST SUSSEX, 2019

Area	Average Rank 2019	Median Decile 2019	LSOAs in top quintile	
			Count	%
West Sussex	**20,874**	**7**	**18**	**4**
Adur	17,775	6	1	2
Arun	17,267	6	10	11
Chichester	20,451	7	0	0
Crawley	16,197	5	2	3
Horsham	25,199	9	0	0
Mid Sussex	27,207	9	0	0
Worthing	18,835	6	5	8

Source: English Indices of Deprivation 2019: Local Authority District Summaries';
Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government; 2019

West Sussex has 18 Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in the top 20% most deprived in England, accounting for 3.6% of the county's total LSOAs. This suggests that, overall, West Sussex is not a deprived county by national standards.

Each LSOA is assigned a rank from 1 (most deprived) to 32,844 (least deprived) based on various indicators across seven domains, including income, employment, health, education, crime, housing, and the living environment.

The small number of deprived areas are mainly located in Crawley, Arun and Adur, and to a lesser extent, Worthing. Crawley has two LSOAs considered to be severely deprived, and Arun has ten. Three of the county's seven districts and boroughs – Chichester, Horsham, and Mid Sussex – have no LSOAs within the 20% most deprived in England.

Health & Wellbeing

The West Sussex Joint Strategic Needs Analysis (JSNA) 2024/25 identifies the need for targeted action on underlying causes of poor health, including mental ill health, sensory impairment, musculoskeletal conditions, and pain management.

Groups at heightened risk of poor health include people with severe mental illness, children in care and care leavers, individuals experiencing homelessness, and those with multiple complex needs. Educational attainment, employment status, and housing conditions all significantly impact health and wellbeing.

The JSNA highlights growing pressures on income and housing in West Sussex, with particularly high use of temporary accommodation in Crawley and Worthing. It also estimates that 20,420 children and young people in the county are living with a mental health condition.

Disability

TABLE: DISABILITY 2021

Area	All Disabled (count)	All Disabled (%)	Limiting a little (count)	Limiting a little (%)	Limiting a lot (count)	Limiting a lot (%)
West Sussex	**148,900**	**16.9**	**91,144**	**10.3**	**57,756**	**6.5**
Adur	12,577	19.5	7,552	11.7	5,025	7.8
Arun	32,481	19.7	19,331	11.7	13,150	8.0
Chichester	20,976	16.9	13,088	10.5	7,888	6.4
Crawley	17,697	14.9	10,475	8.8	7,222	6.1
Horsham	21,804	14.9	13,923	9.5	7,881	5.4
Mid Sussex	22,063	14.5	14,184	9.3	7,879	5.2
Worthing	21,303	19.1	12,592	11.3	8,711	7.8
South East	1,496,340	16.1	915,292	9.9	581,048	6.3
England	9,774,510	17.3	5,634,153	10.0	4,140,357	7.3

Source: 'Disability, England and Wales: Census 2021'; Office for National Statistics; 2023

Around one in six (17%) of West Sussex residents aged 5 and over have some form of disability. This is slightly higher than the rate in the South East (16%), and broadly in line with the England average (17%). Adur (19.5%) and Arun (19.7%) have the highest proportions of residents with disabilities, while Mid Sussex (14.5%) has the lowest.

Approximately 53,000 residents have a disability that limits their day-to-day activities a lot, representing 6.5% of the 5+ population. This is slightly above the South East average (6.3%) but below the national rate (7.3%). Adur (7.8%) and Arun (8.0%) again have the highest proportions of residents with more severe disabilities, whereas Horsham and Mid Sussex have the lowest.

Employment and Disability

TABLE: DISABILITY, DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT RATE AND OVERALL EMPLOYMENT RATE (2025)

Area	% aged 16-64 who are EA core or work-limiting disabled		Employment rate aged 16-64 – EA core or work-limiting disabled		Employment rate – aged 16-64	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
West Sussex	**131,900**	**25.8**	**83,400**	**63.2**	**409,800**	**80.2**
Adur	14,600	38.6	6,400	43.9	25,300	66.7
Arun	20,700	23.2	11,300	54.5	71,900	80.6
Chichester	17,600	26.3	11,800	66.8	56,500	84.1
Crawley	17,800	24.8	11,300	63.9	54,400	76.1
Horsham	18,500	22.1	14,100	76.1	70,000	83.8
Mid Sussex	26,500	29.0	17,000	64.1	74,100	81.0
Worthing	16,300	23.2	11,600	71.1	57,600	82.1
South East	1,453,900	25.7	918,200	63.2	4,436,900	78.4
England	9,178,100	26.0	5,288,500	57.6	26,720,600	75.7

Source: Annual Population Survey; ONS 2025. * EA = Equality Act

In the 12 months to March 2025, there were 131,900 16 – 64-year-old residents in West Sussex who were either Equality Act (EA) or work-limiting disabled. This was 25.8% of the working age population – similar to the South East (25.7%) and in England (26.0%).

The employment rate for disabled working age residents was 63.2%, compared with an overall employment rate of 80.2%. The employment rate for working age people with disabilities in West Sussex was similar to the South East (63.2%), but higher than the England (57.6%) rate.

The employment rate for people with disabilities was lowest in Adur (43.9%) and Arun (54.5%) and highest in Horsham (76.1%) and Worthing (71.1%).

Employment and Health Conditions

In West Sussex, just under half (47%) of people with long-term health conditions are in work. This is 15.5 percentage points below the overall employment rate for adults aged 16 and over (62.5%) in the county. The employment rate for this group is also lower than in the South East (52%) and England (49%) – despite West Sussex's high overall employment rate.

Crawley has the highest employment rate for people with long-term health conditions (62%), while Adur has the lowest (31%).

Half (50.3%) of people with mental health conditions in West Sussex are in work. This is higher than the England average (46.4%) and broadly in line with the South East (50.9%), but still well below the overall employment rate for residents aged 16+ in the county (62.5%). Horsham has the highest employment rate for people with mental health conditions (68.1%), whilst Arun has the lowest (43.1%).

People with long-term physical and mental health conditions have a lower employment rate than the average, as shown in the table over the page (p.110).

TABLE: EMPLOYMENT RATE (16+) AND HEALTH CONDITIONS (2024)

Area	All long term health conditions	%	Mental health conditions	%
West Sussex	**148,800**	**47.0**	**46,600**	**50.3**
Adur	8,200	31.4	Not Available	Not Available
Arun	26,400	41.7	7,400	43.1
Chichester	18,800	44.6	5,900	51.2
Crawley	23,000	62.3	5,800	47.6
Horsham	20,400	53.8	7,000	68.1
Mid Sussex	28,700	46.4	9,900	54.5
Worthing	23,400	48.4	8,500	50.0
South East	1,583,400	52.3	455,800	50.9
England	9,148,300	49.4	2,592,500	46.4

Source: Annual Population Survey; Office for National Statistics; 2024

Unpaid Carers

TABLE: UNPAID CARERS IN RECEIPT OF CARERS ALLOWANCE (2023)

Area	Carers Allowance
West Sussex	**8,755**
Adur	830
Arun	1,885
Chichester	1,130
Crawley	1,480
Horsham	1,125
Mid Sussex	1,085
Worthing	1,220

Source: 'DWP Benefits Statistics: February 2023';
Department for Work and Pensions; 2024

In 2022/23, 8,755 West Sussex residents received Carer's Allowance. Carers live in all parts of the county, with the highest numbers in Arun (1,885) and Crawley (1,480).

TABLE: UNPAID CARERS (2021)

Area	Unpaid Carers Total	% of population	Providing 20+ hours/wk	% of population
West Sussex	**72,816**	**8.6**	**33,176**	**3.9**
Adur	5,876	9.5	2,800	4.5
Arun	14,569	9.3	7,232	4.6
Chichester	10,490	8.8	4,613	3.9
Crawley	8,969	8.1	4,635	4.2
Horsham	11,612	8.3	4,627	3.3
Mid Sussex	11,582	8.1	4,715	3.3
Worthing	9,717	9.2	4,553	4.3
South East	733,364	8.3	344,742	3.9
England	4,678,265	8.7	2,374,540	4.4

Source: 'Provision of Unpaid Care, Census 2021'; Office for National Statistics; 2023

There are significantly more unpaid carers than those in receipt of Carer's Allowance. In 2021, 72,800 residents in West Sussex provided unpaid care – 8.6% of the county's population aged 5 and over. Residents in Adur (9.5%), Arun (9.3%) and Worthing (9.2%) were the most likely to provide unpaid care, and also the most likely to provide more intensive care (20 hours or more per week).

Older working-age residents (aged 50-64) are the most likely to be carers. Unpaid carers live in all districts and boroughs across the county.

Insecure Housing

TABLE: INSECURE HOUSING & TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

	Owed a Duty	Temporary Accommodation
West Sussex	**3,377**	**1,342**
Adur	152	121
Arun	849	168
Chichester	372	99
Crawley	672	328
Horsham	395	133
Mid Sussex	396	73
Worthing	541	420

Source: 'West Sussex Joint Strategic Needs Assessment Public Health Data Profiles 2022/23'; West Sussex County Council; 2024

According to the JSNA, in 2022/23, 3,377 households in West Sussex were 'owed a duty' under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. Arun (849) and Crawley (672) had the largest numbers. There were 1,342 households in the county housed in temporary accommodation, with the highest numbers in Worthing (420) and Crawley (328).

Under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, local housing authorities in England have specific duties to assist individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Being 'owed a duty' means that the local authority has a legal obligation to provide support to the household.

Worthing and Crawley have also seen the most significant increases in the use of temporary accommodation in recent years. The most common reason for insecure housing was the end of a shorthold tenancy in the private rented sector.

Education & Skills

TABLE: LEVEL 2 AND 3 ATTAINMENT BY 19 YEARS - BY CHARACTERISTIC 2023/24

Area	All %	Non FSM %	FSM %	Attainment Gap %	Non-SEN %	SEN %	Attainment Gap %
West Sussex	**56.9**	**60.0**	**29.8**	**-30.2**	**62.8**	**31.6**	**-31.3**
Adur	53.0	57.6	26.2	**-31.4**	56.2	39.0	**-17.1**
Arun	48.3	51.8	24.7	**-27.1**	52.7	27.5	**-25.1**
Chichester	56.6	60.1	27.5	**-32.6**	64.2	29.4	**-34.8**
Crawley	49.9	52.7	33.0	**-19.7**	55.4	26.3	**-29.1**
Horsham	66.6	68.8	33.0	**-35.9**	73.8	39.0	**-34.8**
Mid Sussex	62.2	64.5	28.9	**-35.6**	68.2	30.7	**-30.7**
Worthing	55.7	58.7	33.1	**-25.6**	62.4	21.4	**-41.0**
South East	58.7	63.0	31.4	**-31.7**	62.6	33.4	**-29.2**
England	57.6	62.4	36.8	**-25.5**	64.2	35.4	**-28.8**

Source: Level 2 and 3 Attainment by Young People Aged 19: Academic Year 2023/24; Department for Education; Published 24 April 2025. FSM = Free School Meals

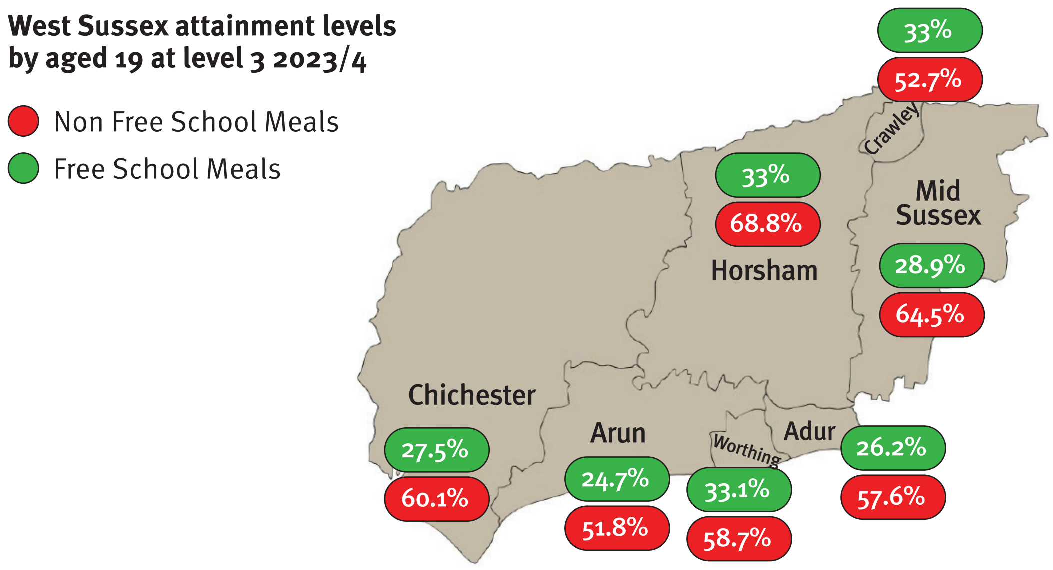
This table shows the proportion of 19-year-olds who have attained Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications. It includes percentages for all 19-year-olds, those who have been eligible for Free School Meals (FSM), and those with Special Educational Needs (SEN), along with the attainment gap between these groups.

Just over half (56.9%) of West Sussex 19-year-olds hold a Level 3 qualification. This is slightly below the South East average (58.7%) and the England average (57.6%). Only in Horsham (66.6%) and Mid Sussex (62.2%) does the proportion exceed the national average. The proportions in Crawley (49.9%) and Arun (48.3%) are particularly low.

The attainment gap between 19-year-olds who have been eligible for FSM and those who have not is smaller in West Sussex (30.2%) than in the South East (31.6%) but wider than in England (25.5%). The smallest FSM attainment gap is in Crawley (19.7%), and the largest gaps are in Horsham (35.9%) and Mid Sussex (35.6%).

The attainment gap between SEN and non-SEN 19-year-olds is larger in West Sussex (31.3%) than in the South East (29.2%) and England (28.8%). The gap is particularly high in Worthing (41.0%), Horsham (34.8%) and Chichester (34.8%), and lowest in Adur (17.1%).

West Sussex attainment levels by aged 19 at level 3 2023/4



Adult Qualifications

TABLE: RESIDENTS (16-64 YEARS) WITHOUT RQF LEVEL 3 QUALIFICATIONS

Area	Count	%
West Sussex	**169,200**	**33.5**
Adur	10,500	27.3
Arun	32,400	37.1
Chichester	15,600	23.1
Crawley	24,300	35.4
Horsham	23,300	28.5
Mid Sussex	33,600	36.5
Worthing	29,600	42.4
South East	1,649,000	29.7
England	11,171,100	32.4

Source: 'Workforce Qualification Levels Across England and Wales: Census 2021'; Office for National Statistics; 2023

There are 169,200 working-age residents in West Sussex who do not hold a qualification at Regulated Qualification Framework (RQF) Level 3 or above. This represents over a third (33.5%) of the county's working-age population – higher than the proportions in the South East (29.7%) and in England (32.4%).

Level 3 qualifications are equivalent to an advanced apprenticeship or A-levels and typically provide the knowledge and skills needed for higher education or specialised roles in industry.

There are significant differences within West Sussex. Worthing (42.4%) and Arun (37.1%) have the highest proportion of 19-year-olds without this level of qualification, whereas Chichester (23.1%) has the lowest.

There is also evidence of skills mismatches among people already in employment, with people technically under qualified for the local labour market demand; potentially making them vulnerable to labour market changes that demand higher-level skills. In West Sussex, over 122,000 (30%) people in work have lower skills levels than are required for their jobs. According to the ONS, skills mismatches are most pronounced in Arun (32.5%) and Adur (32.8%).

Employment

TABLE: EMPLOYMENT RATE (16-64 YEARS) 2024

Area	Count	Percent %	Count for 80%
West Sussex	**415,100**	**81.4**	**-7,180**
Adur	26,200	68.1	+4,600
Arun	73,500	83.6	**-3,100**
Chichester	57,500	85.3	**-3,580**
Crawley	56,600	80.9	**-600**
Horsham	70,500	83.8	**-3,220**
Mid Sussex	74,400	80.7	**-720**
Worthing	56,400	80.7	**-560**
South East	4,448,600	78.7	73,320
England	26,720,000	75.7	1,499,760

Source: 'Labour Market Profile - Nomis - Official Census and Labour Market Statistics'; Office for National Statistics; 2024

In 2024, 415,100 of West Sussex's working-age residents were in employment, giving an employment rate of 81.4%. This is higher than the rate for the South East (78.7%) and for England (75.7%). The employment rate is lowest in Adur (68.1%) and highest in Chichester (85.3%).

The UK Government's Get Britain Working plan has set a target of an 80% employment rate. As West Sussex already exceeds this target there are opportunities to target those with the most barriers to employment and those in areas of most deprivation to boost national and regional employment targets.

Economic Inactivity

TABLE: 16-64 YEAR OLD ECONOMIC INACTIVITY RATES 2024

Area	Count including students	% including students	Count excluding students	% excluding students
West Sussex	**84,500**	**16.6**	**67,800**	**13.8**
Adur	9,900	25.8	Not available	Not available
Arun	12,700	14.5	9,500	11.2
Chichester	9,900	14.7	Not available	Not available
Crawley	10,800	15.4	8,100	12.0
Horsham	11,800	14.0	8,300	10.3
Mid Sussex	16,700	18.1	14,500	16.2
Worthing	12,600	18.1	8,200	12.5
South East	1,040,000	18.4	734,400	13.7
England	7,450,500	21.1	5,404,600	16.3

Source: Economy Snapshot: July 2024; West Sussex County Council; 2024

People who are economically inactive are those aged 16 and over who are not in employment and do not meet the internationally accepted definition of unemployment. This means they have not been actively seeking work within the last four weeks and/or are unable to start work within the next two weeks. As a result, they are not classified as part of the labour force. The main reasons why people are economically inactive are being a student, ill-health, caring and being retired. Some forms of economic inactivity, such as being retired or being a student, are not disadvantageous. The table below shows the overall economic inactivity rates and the rates excluding students.

There are 84,500 working age people in West Sussex who are economically inactive. This is 16.6% of 16-64-year-olds – a lower rate than in the South East (18.4%) and England (21.1%). Adur (25.8%) has a higher economic inactivity rate than other districts and boroughs in West Sussex.

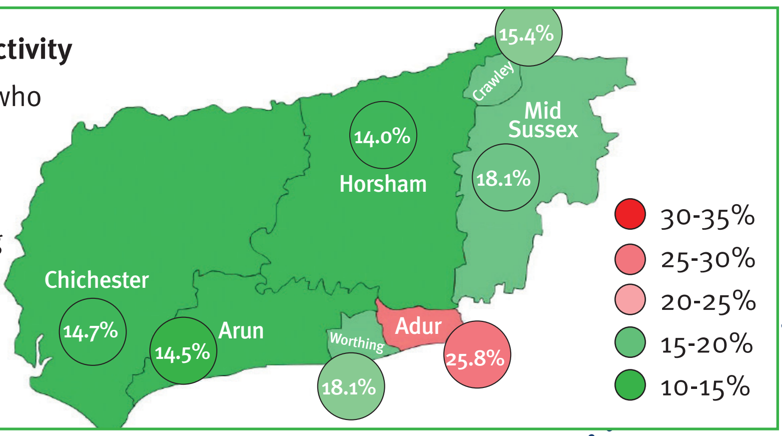
Once students are removed from the estimates, around 67,800 (13.8%) of working age residents in West Sussex are economically inactive. This is lower than in England (16.3%), but similar to the economic inactivity rate in the South East (13.7%).

West Sussex Economic Activity

Percentage of population who are of working age (16-64) and are economically inactive.

Areas in green are meeting the 80% economically active target.

Figures are inclusive of students.



Reasons for Economic Inactivity (excluding students) 2024

TABLE: REASONS FOR ECONOMIC INACTIVITY (16-64 YEAR OLDS) 2024

Area	Looking after a family/ home	Looking after a family/ home – % of economically inactive	Long-term sick	Long-term sick – % of economically Inactive	Early retirees	Early retirees – % of economically inactive
West Sussex	**12,900**	**16.3**	**25,400**	**30.0**	**17,000**	**20.1**
Adur	Not available	Not available	3,500	35.1	Not available	Not available
Arun	Not available	Not available	3,500	27.2	3,600	28.1
Chichester	Not available	Not available	4,400	14.7	3,600	26.7
Crawley	2,800	26.0	4,800	44.2	Not available	Not available
Horsham	Not available	Not available	2,400	44.1	1,800	27.2
Mid Sussex	3,500	20.9	3,800	33.2	4,500	16.1
Worthing	Not available	Not available	3,100	14.1	3,000	15.2
South East	197,100	19.0	228,100	21.9	150,000	12.5
England	1,415,500	19.0	2,009,900	27.0	934,900	14.4

Source: Economy Snapshot: July 2024; West Sussex County Council; 2024 *NA = data not available for this geography

Nearly a third (30%) of West Sussex's economically inactive residents are so due to long-term sickness. This compares with 22% in the South East and 27% in England. Data at district and borough level is subject to wide confidence intervals, so should be treated with caution. The ONS does not provide the data for some areas where the confidence level in data accuracy is too low. However, from what is available, we can see that sickness-related economic inactivity appears to be more common in Crawley (44%) and Horsham (44%), and less common in Chichester (15%) and Worthing (14%).

Economically inactive residents in West Sussex (20%) are also more likely to be early retirees than in the South East (14%) and England (13%). This is particularly evident in Arun (28%), Horsham (27%) and Chichester (27%).

People are economically inactive for a wide range of reasons. Of the people who are economically inactive in West Sussex 17,900 (21%) say they would like to work. This is a slightly higher proportion than in the South East (19%) and the same as in England (21%).

Claimant Count Unemployment

TABLE: CLAIMANT COUNT UNEMPLOYMENT APRIL 2024-APRIL 2025

Area	April 24 Count	April 24 %	April 25 Count	April 25 %	Difference Count	Difference %
West Sussex	**14,370**	**2.7**	**16,480**	**3.1**	**+2,110**	**+14.7**
Adur	940	2.5	1,140	3.0	+200	+21.3
Arun	3,135	3.3	3,480	3.7	+345	+11.0
Chichester	2,115	2.9	2,500	3.4	+385	+18.2
Crawley	3,090	3.9	3,685	4.7	+595	+19.3
Horsham	1,700	1.8	1,780	2.0	+80	+4.7
Mid Sussex	1,700	1.8	1,785	3.6	+85	+5.0
Worthing	1,805	2.6	2,110	3.1	+305	+16.9
South East	170,210	2.9	186,695	3.2	+16,485	+9.7
England	1,387,390	3.8	1,529,600	4.2	+142,210	+10.3

Source: Claimant Count by unitary and local authority (Experimental Statistics);
Office for National Statistics; April 2025

There were 16,480 (3.1%) claimant count unemployed residents in West Sussex in April 2025. This is a similar proportion to the South East (3.2%), but lower than in England (4.2%). Crawley (4.7%) has the highest unemployment rate, while Horsham (2.0%) has the lowest.

Claimant count unemployment increased by 2,110 (+14.7%) in the year to April 2025. This is a faster rate of increase than in the South East (+9.7%) and in England (+10.3%). The sharpest rises were seen in Adur (+21.3%), Crawley (+19.3%) and Chichester (+18.2%). The slowest increases were in Horsham (+4.7%) and Mid Sussex (+5.0%).

Claimant Count Unemployment by Age

The table below shows the claimant count for unemployed residents in April 2024 and April 2025 for 18-24 year olds, 25-49-year-olds and people aged 50+. In April 2024, there were also 25 16-17-year-olds who were claimant count unemployed in West Sussex.

TABLE: CLAIMANT COUNT UNEMPLOYMENT BY AGE (APRIL 2024-APRIL 2025)

Area	18-24 Years Apr-24	18-24 Years Apr-25	Change	Change %
West Sussex	**2,305**	**2,670**	**365**	**15.8**
Adur	190	205	15	7.9
Arun	495	595	100	20.2
Chichester	285	375	90	31.6
Crawley	495	565	70	14.1
Horsham	235	250	15	6.4
Mid Sussex	245	270	25	10.2
Worthing	360	410	50	13.9
South East	28,640	31,425	2,785	9.7
England	243,300	265,305	22,005	9.0

Table continued below

Area (continued)	25-49 Years Apr-24	25-49 Years Apr-25	Change	Change %
West Sussex	**8,360**	**9,270**	**910**	**10.9**
Adur	510	600	90	17.6
Arun	1,750	1,870	120	6.9
Chichester	1,225	1,375	150	12.2
Crawley	1,945	2,330	385	19.8
Horsham	910	1,005	95	10.4
Mid Sussex	1,010	1,010	0	0.0
Worthing	1,010	1,080	70	6.9
South East	100,075	106,225	6,150	6.1
England	826,000	883,235	57,235	6.9

Source: Claimant Count Unemployment; Office for National Statistics; 2025

TABLE: CLAIMANT COUNT UNEMPLOYMENT BY AGE (APRIL 2024-APRIL 2025)

Area	50+ Years Apr-24	50+ Years Apr-25	Change	Change %
West Sussex	**3,685**	**4,310**	**625**	**17.0**
Adur	245	315	70	28.6
Arun	880	950	70	8.0
Chichester	605	705	100	16.5
Crawley	640	785	145	22.7
Horsham	440	495	55	12.5
Mid Sussex	445	480	35	7.9
Worthing	430	580	150	34.9
South East	41,220	45,425	4,205	10.2
England	315,885	349,340	33,455	10.6

Source: Claimant Count Unemployment; Office for National Statistics; 2025

In April 2025, there were 2,670 18-24-year-olds who were claimant count unemployed in West Sussex. This is +365 (+15.8%) more than there had been in April 2024 – a larger proportionate increase than in the South East (+9.7%) and England (+9.0%). Chichester (+31.6%) and Arun (+20.2%) had the largest proportionate increases and Horsham (+6.4%) had the smallest proportionate increase.

There were 9,270 25-49-year-old claimant count unemployed residents in West Sussex in April 2025. This is an increase of +910 (+10.9%) compared with a year earlier. This is a faster increase than in the South East (+6.1%) and England (+6.9%) over the period. The fastest increases were in Crawley (+19.8%) and Adur (+17.6%) and there was no increase in Mid Sussex.

There were 4,320 aged 50+ claimant count unemployed residents in West Sussex in April 2025. This is +625 (+17.0%) more than there had been a year earlier. This is a faster increase than in the South East (+10.2%) and England (+10.6%). The fastest increases were in Worthing (+34.9%), Adur (+28.6%) and Crawley (+22.7%). Mid Sussex (+7.9%) and Arun (+8.0%) had the smallest increase amongst this age group.

Not in Education, Employment & Training (NEET)

TABLE: 16-17 YEAR OLDS NEETS AND NOT KNOWNS 2025

Area	Cohort	NEET & Not Known		NEET		Not Known	
	Count	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
West Sussex	**18,657**	**2,146**	**11.5**	**410**	**2.2**	**1,735**	**9.3**
South East	215,720	15,100	7.0	7,334	3.4	7,982	3.7
England	1,335,160	74,769	5.6	45,395	3.4	29,374	2.2

Source: NEET Participation Local Authority Scorecard; Department for Education; 2025

In 2025, there were 18,657 16-17-year-olds in West Sussex, 410 of whom were known to be Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). This represents a known NEET rate of 2.2%, which is lower than the rate in the South East (3.4%) and England (3.4%). West Sussex has a high proportion of 'not known' NEETs (9.3%), compared with the South East (3.7%) and England (2.2%). The overall NEET rate (including both known and unknown NEETs) in West Sussex is 11.5%. This compares with 7.0% in the South East and 5.6% in England.

Universal Credit

TABLE: UNIVERSAL CREDIT CLAIMANTS: AVERAGE - JANUARY TO DECEMBER 2024

Area	Total UC Claimant Count	%	16-24 Year Olds Count	%	25-49 Year Olds Count	%	50-64 Years Count	%
West Sussex	**15,178**	**1.7**	**2,333**	**3.0**	**8,922**	**3.3**	**3,925**	**2.1**
Adur	996	1.5	184	3.6	550	2.9	263	2.0
Arun	3,235	1.9	505	3.8	1,831	4.0	899	2.5
Chichester	2,221	1.7	282	2.3	1,308	3.9	631	2.3
Crawley	3,291	2.7	509	4.4	2,086	4.6	695	3.3
Horsham	1,703	1.1	235	2.0	991	2.3	478	1.5
Mid Sussex	1,785	1.1	240	1.9	1,076	2.2	467	1.5
Worthing	1,948	1.7	378	4.0	1,080	3.1	492	2.1

Source: Stat-Xplore; Department for Work & Pensions; 2025

There was an average of 15,200 Universal Credit claimants in West Sussex during 2024. Over half (59%) of claimants were aged 25-49, a quarter (26%) were aged 50-64 years, and around one in six (16%) were aged 16-24. Crawley (2.7%) had the highest Universal Credit rate and Mid Sussex (1.1%) had the lowest. It had the highest rate in all age groups – 15-24-year-olds (4.4%); 25-49-year-olds (4.6%); and 50-64-year-olds (3.3%)

The number of Universal Credit claimants in West Sussex increased by 1,015 between January and December 2024. This included rises of +215 among 16-24-year-olds, +335 among 25-49-year-olds, and +455 among those aged 50+.

There were significant increases in the number of Universal Credit claimants across all parts of West Sussex, except for Horsham (-15) and Mid Sussex (+15).

In May 2024, 30,028 (44.5%) of the 67,404 Universal Credit claimants were in employment. This is a higher proportion than in the South East (41.0%) and England (38.4%). The proportions were higher than the region and national in all of the West Sussex districts and boroughs, with Horsham (46.6%) and Mid Sussex (47.6%) having the highest proportion of in-work claimants.

The table below shows the Universal Credit claimant data and those who are in and not in work in May 2024.

TABLE: UNIVERSAL CREDIT CLAIMANTS – IN WORK AND NOT IN WORK MAY 2024

Area	Total	% of 16 Year Olds	Not in Work	In Work	% In Work
West Sussex	**67,404**	**12.7**	**37,376**	**30,028**	**44.5**
Adur	4,894	13.0	2,815	2,073	42.4
Arun	14,382	15.5	8,095	6,284	43.7
Chichester	9,002	12.5	5,160	3,843	42.7
Crawley	13,479	17.3	7,510	5,969	44.3
Horsham	8,077	9.2	4,313	3,766	46.6
Mid Sussex	8,560	9.2	4,480	4,078	47.6
Worthing	9,012	13.3	5,003	4,015	44.6
South East	746,352	16.3	440,681	305,671	41.0
England	5,869,099	12.9	3,614,445	2,254,654	38.4

Source: Department for Work & Pensions; via West Sussex County Council 2024

6.4 Labour Demand

Employee Jobs and Job Density

TABLE: JOBS & JOB DENSITY, 2023

Area	Count	%	Job Density (jobs per head of population)
West Sussex	**391,750**	**100.0**	**0.86**
Adur	20,865	5.3	0.61
Arun	50,880	13.0	0.60
Chichester	64,035	16.3	1.08
Crawley	88,515	22.6	1.16
Horsham	58,015	14.8	0.84
Mid Sussex	60,540	15.5	0.80
Worthing	48,750	12.4	0.82

Source: Jobs Density by Local Authority, 2023; Office for National Statistics; Published 15 March 2024

There are 391,750 jobs in West Sussex. Nearly a quarter (23%) of these are in Crawley. There are 0.86 jobs per working age resident in the county, but these are not evenly distributed. Both Crawley (1.16) and Chichester (1.08) have more jobs than working age residents, while job density is much lower along the West Sussex coast: Arun has just 0.60 jobs per working age resident, and Adur has 0.61. Worthing fares slightly better, with 0.82 jobs per working age resident.

West Sussex has a relatively healthy labour market, but the distribution of jobs varies significantly. This creates different challenges across the county. While finding work in Crawley may be less difficult, many of the better-paying roles are filled by people commuting from outside the area. Chichester also draws in workers from neighbouring districts such as Arun. This can put pressure on the county's infrastructure, with transport bottlenecks and limited connectivity between employment centres and some of the more rural and remote communities.

Self-Employment

TABLE: SELF-EMPLOYMENT RATES 2024

Area	Count	Percent	Index (England)
West Sussex	**62,000**	**14.9**	**118**
Adur	2,300	8.7	69
Arun	9,900	13.5	107
Chichester	12,100	21.1	167
Crawley	6,500	11.5	91
Horsham	12,400	17.6	140
Mid Sussex	11,400	15.3	121
Worthing	7,400	13.1	104
South East	559,900	12.6	100
England	3,358,400	12.6	100

Source: Annual Population Survey; Office for National Statistics; 2025

Self-employment is an important feature of the West Sussex labour market; nearly 15% of working residents are self-employed. This compares with 12.6% in both the South East and England. Self-employment is more common in the predominantly rural parts of the county, particularly in Chichester (21%) and Horsham (18%). In contrast, paid employment dominates in the urban centres, with lower self-employment rates in Crawley (12%) and Worthing (13%). Adur has the lowest proportion of self-employed residents, at just 9%.

Self-employment is too often used as a proxy for entrepreneurship, but the two are not the same. Only a small proportion of those who work for themselves aim to grow businesses or create jobs. Many people choose self-employment because of a lack of better alternatives – or because they are in a financial position that allows them to prioritise flexibility over security.

Employment by Industry

TABLE: EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY 2024

Industry	West Sussex		Adur	Arun	Chichester
	Count	%	%	%	%
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	4,500	1.1	0.2	1.6	3.5
Mining & quarrying	250	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
Manufacturing	29,000	7.4	10.7	6.9	9.4
Electricity, gas, steam & air conditioning supply	1,000	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.0
Water supply; sewerage, waste management & remediation activities	3,000	0.8	1.0	1.4	0.2
Construction	16,000	4.1	6.0	4.4	3.9
Wholesale & retail	60,000	15.2	19.0	17.6	14.1
Transport & storage	29,000	7.4	2.9	4.4	1.4
Accommodation & food service	38,000	9.6	8.3	15.7	10.9
Information & communication	12,000	3.0	4.8	1.6	2.7
Finance & insurance	11,000	2.8	0.6	0.7	2.0
Real estate	7,000	1.8	1.1	1.4	3.1
Professional, scientific & technical	27,000	6.9	6.0	4.9	7.0
Admin. support service	36,000	9.1	6.0	7.8	6.2
Public admin. & defence; social security	12,000	3.0	1.9	3.4	4.7
Education	31,000	7.9	10.7	6.9	9.4
Human health & social work	54,000	13.7	11.9	15.7	14.1
Arts, entertainment & recreation	13,000	3.3	6.0	3.4	5.5
Other services	8,000	2.0	2.4	2.0	2.0

Table continued on next page

Source: Business Register & Employment Survey; Office for National Statistics; 2024

TABLE: EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY 2024 (continued)

Industry (continued)	Crawley %	Horsham %	Mid Sussex %	Worthing %
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	0.0	1.2	1.3	0.1
Mining & quarrying	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0
Manufacturing	6.7	6.9	5.7	7.0
Electricity, gas, steam & air conditioning supply	0.8	0.3	0.0	0.3
Water supply; sewerage, waste management & remediation activities	0.3	0.9	0.5	2.0
Construction	2.2	6.0	4.9	2.5
Wholesale & retail	12.4	17.2	16.4	14.0
Transport & storage	23.6	2.6	3.3	2.0
Accommodation & food service	7.9	8.6	9.8	7.0
Information & communication	2.8	5.2	3.3	2.5
Finance & insurance	3.4	3.0	4.9	3.5
Real estate	0.7	2.6	1.6	2.0
Professional, scientific & technical	6.7	8.6	7.4	4.5
Admin. support service	15.7	10.3	5.7	7.0
Public admin. & defence; social security	2.8	1.6	1.5	6.0
Education	3.9	8.6	11.5	7.0
Human health & social work	6.7	8.6	14.8	26.0
Arts, entertainment & recreation	1.7	3.9	3.7	2.5
Other services	0.8	3.9	2.9	1.6

Source: Business Register & Employment Survey; Office for National Statistics; 2024

Local economies and their labour markets are shaped by the structure of their industries. In West Sussex, human health & social work (14%) and wholesale & retail (15%) together provide 29% of all jobs. Accommodation & food service (10%) is also a significant part of the county's employment base.

The table on p.124-125 shows the percentage of employment in each sector across the county and its districts & boroughs.

West Sussex has an above-average share of employment in agriculture, transport & storage, accommodation & food service, and arts, entertainment & recreation.

By district and borough:

- **Adur** has high concentrations in manufacturing; water supply; construction; wholesale & retail; education; and arts, entertainment & recreation.
- **Arun** is over-represented in agriculture; manufacturing; water supply; wholesale & retail; accommodation & food service; education; arts & entertainment; and other services.
- **Chichester** stands out for agriculture (notably horticulture); manufacturing; accommodation & food service; real estate; and arts, entertainment & recreation.
- **Crawley** has strong concentrations in utilities; transport & storage (driven by Gatwick Airport); administrative support services; manufacturing; accommodation & food service; real estate; and arts, entertainment & recreation.
- **Horsham** shows higher employment in agriculture; water supply; construction; wholesale & retail; real estate; admin support; arts, entertainment & recreation; and other services.
- **Mid Sussex** is diverse, with high employment in agriculture; water supply; construction; wholesale & retail; accommodation & food service; real estate; admin support; finance & insurance; education; arts & recreation; and other services.
- **Worthing** has notable concentrations in water supply; public administration; and human health & social work – particularly the latter, which accounts for a quarter of all jobs.

Each area shows distinct patterns. Chichester's agricultural strength (especially horticulture) and Crawley's dominance in transport & storage (due to the influence of Gatwick Airport) stand out. Worthing's economy leans heavily on human health & social work.

Overall, West Sussex has a diverse economy, but many coastal areas are overly reliant on lower-value sectors such as agriculture, accommodation & food service, and arts, entertainment & recreation. These sectors tend to be low in productivity and frequently offer seasonal or insecure work, contributing to challenges around wage levels and job stability.

This is not the case in Worthing, which has a diverse and highly productive economy. For West Sussex, employment and skills challenges are not just coastal issues. Crawley, in particular, has significant challenges in raising skills levels, tackling deprivation and enabling more local people to access the good quality jobs in the borough.

Business Units

TABLE: BUSINESS UNITS BY SIZE 2024

Area	Total Business Count	0-4 staff Count	%	5-9 staff Count	%
West Sussex	**42,605**	**30,910**	**72.6**	**5,225**	**12.3**
Adur	2,670	2,000	74.9	310	11.6
Arun	6,420	4,610	71.8	840	13.1
Chichester	7,665	5,675	74.0	905	11.8
Crawley	4,635	2,965	64.0	620	13.4
Horsham	8,345	6,230	74.7	1,020	12.2
Mid Sussex	8,215	6,115	74.4	955	11.6
Worthing	4,650	3,320	71.4	575	12.4
South East	465,155	340,175	73.1	55,570	11.9
England	2,735,615	1,972,515	72.1	341,000	12.5

Table continued below

Area (continued)	10-49 Count	%	50-249 Count	%	250+ Count	%
West Sussex	**5,285**	**12.4**	**1,020**	**2.4**	**165**	**0.4**
Adur	295	11.0	60	2.2	10	0.4
Arun	830	12.9	120	1.9	20	0.3
Chichester	905	11.8	155	2.0	25	0.3
Crawley	770	16.6	230	5.0	50	1.1
Horsham	915	11.0	165	2.0	20	0.2
Mid Sussex	965	11.7	165	2.0	20	0.2
Worthing	610	13.1	125	2.7	20	0.4
South East	56,195	12.1	11,540	2.5	1,680	0.4
England	339,670	12.4	71,435	2.6	11,000	0.4

Source: UK Business Counts; Office for National Statistics; 2024

There are over 42,600 business units in West Sussex. A fifth (20%) are in Horsham, 19% in Mid Sussex, and 18% in Chichester.

Just under three-quarters (73%) of the county's business units employ between 0-4 people. This is broadly in line with the South East (73%) and England (74%). Horsham (75%) has the highest proportion of micro-businesses, while Crawley (64%) has the lowest.

West Sussex has 1,020 business units employing between 50-249 people, and 165 that employ 250 or more. Crawley has the largest number of both medium-sized (230) and large (50) businesses. Large business units can be found across the county, but Crawley stands out with sizeable employers in transport & storage, hotels, finance & insurance, professional, scientific & technical services, and manufacturing.

Business Units by Sector

TABLE: BUSINESS UNITS BY SECTOR 2024

Sector	West Sussex		Adur	Arun	Chichester
	Count	%	%	%	%
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	1,310	3.1	0.7	2.1	6.3
Mining & quarrying	20	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1
Manufacturing	1,960	4.6	6.0	5.5	4.8
Electricity, gas, steam & air conditioning supply	100	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.1
Water supply; sewerage, waste management & remediation activities	180	0.4	0.9	0.5	0.3
Construction	5,950	14.0	19.5	16.0	12.1
Wholesale & retail	6,695	15.7	16.9	17.4	15.3
Transport & storage	1,515	3.6	3.4	4.0	2.2
Accommodation & food service	2,695	6.3	5.6	7.3	6.8
Information & communication	2,755	6.5	6.6	4.8	5.2
Finance & insurance	865	2.0	1.3	1.6	2.0
Real estate	1,645	3.9	3.0	3.9	4.9
Professional, scientific & technical	6,465	15.2	12.5	12.0	16.8
Admin. & support service	4,010	9.4	8.1	8.6	8.9
Public admin. & defence; social security	250	0.6	0.4	0.7	0.8
Education	1,015	2.4	2.4	1.9	2.3
Human health & social work	2,265	5.3	4.9	6.3	4.4
Arts, entertainment & recreation	1,235	2.9	3.2	2.7	3.4
Other services	1,680	3.9	4.3	4.3	3.5

Table continued on next page

Source: UK Business Counts; Office for National Statistics; 2024

Chichester and Worthing each host a small number of large manufacturing businesses. In most other areas of the county, large employers tend to be in public administration, health, education, and retail.

TABLE: BUSINESS UNITS BY SECTOR 2024 (Continued)

Sector (continued)	Crawley %	Horsham %	Mid Sussex %	Worthing %
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	0.2	5.0	2.8	0.2
Mining & quarrying	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.0
Manufacturing	3.5	5.1	3.8	4.0
Electricity, gas, steam & air conditioning supply	1.2	0.1	0.1	0.1
Water supply; sewerage, waste management & remediation activities	0.4	0.5	0.4	0.3
Construction	11.7	13.2	14.5	13.8
Wholesale & retail	18.4	14.7	14.1	15.1
Transport & storage	10.0	2.6	2.3	2.7
Accommodation & food service	7.2	4.9	5.3	8.1
Information & communication	6.4	7.2	7.1	8.5
Finance & insurance	2.2	2.2	2.1	2.6
Real estate	2.5	4.1	3.7	3.9
Professional, scientific & technical	11.3	17.0	17.8	14.3
Admin. & support service	11.5	9.8	10.2	8.1
Public admin. & defence; social security	0.6	0.5	0.4	0.6
Education	2.5	2.3	2.9	2.3
Human health & social work	5.1	4.1	5.5	8.0
Arts, entertainment & recreation	1.9	2.9	3.0	2.9
Other services	3.5	3.7	4.1	4.7

Source: UK Business Counts; Office for National Statistics; 2024

Nearly half (45%) of West Sussex's business units are in just three sectors – Construction (14%), Wholesale & Retail (16%), and Professional, Scientific & Technical Services (15%). The county has a broad business base with businesses across a wide range of economic sectors, and its overall business unit profile broadly reflects that of England.

However, there are some local sectoral concentrations across the districts and boroughs:

- **Adur:** High concentration in Manufacturing, Water Supply, and Construction.
- **Arun:** High concentration in Manufacturing, Water Supply, Construction, and Human Health & Social Work.
- **Chichester:** High concentration in Agriculture, Professional, Scientific & Technical Services, Public Administration, and Arts, Entertainment & Recreation.
- **Crawley:** High concentration in Utilities, Transport & Storage, and Administrative & Support Services.
- **Horsham:** High concentration in Agriculture, Water Supply, Professional, Scientific & Technical Services, and Education.
- **Mid Sussex:** High concentration in Construction, Professional, Scientific & Technical Services, Administrative & Support Services, and Education.
- **Worthing:** High concentration in Accommodation & Food Service, Information & Communication, Human Health & Social Work, and Arts, Entertainment & Recreation.

Job Vacancies

TABLE: UNIQUE JOB POSTINGS 2024

Area / metric		Total	Construction	Creative & cultural	Digital	Health & care	Land based	Manufacturing & engineering	Visitor economy
West Sussex	**Count**	**58,114**	**7,349**	**3,616**	**5,220**	**16,335**	**954**	**9,313**	**15,327**
Adur	Count	2,414	312	146	227	754	46	444	485
	%	4.2	4.2	4.0	4.3	4.6	4.8	4.8	3.2
Arun	Count	6,115	635	297	237	1,954	110	760	2,122
	%	10.5	8.6	8.2	4.5	12.0	11.5	8.2	13.8
Chichester	Count	9,867	1,480	670	588	2,761	206	1,477	2,685
	%	17.0	20.1	18.5	11.3	16.9	21.6	15.9	17.5
Crawley	Count	13,423	1,899	995	1,859	2,366	137	2,930	3,237
	%	23.1	25.8	27.5	35.6	14.5	14.4	31.5	21.1
Horsham	Count	8,865	1,004	513	816	2,548	191	1,465	2,328
	%	15.3	13.7	14.2	15.6	15.6	20.0	15.7	15.2
Mid Sussex	Count	9,602	1,116	634	891	2,843	193	1,207	2,718
	%	16.5	15.2	17.5	17.1	17.4	20.2	13.0	17.7
Worthing	Count	7,828	903	361	602	3,109	71	1,030	1,752
	%	13.5	12.3	10.0	11.5	19.0	7.4	11.1	11.4

Source: Lightcast; 2024

There were over 58,000 unique job postings in West Sussex in 2024. Health Care (28%) and the Visitor Economy (26%) accounted for more than half of these postings combined. Arun had a disproportionate share of vacancies in both sectors. Chichester had a large share in Construction, Creative & Cultural, and Land-Based Industries. Crawley featured strongly in Creative & Cultural, Digital, and Manufacturing & Engineering roles. Horsham and Mid Sussex had a significant number of job postings in Land-based Industries, while Worthing had a high concentration of roles in Health & Care.

6.5 Current Provision

In 2023, West Sussex County Council developed a Skills Reset Action Plan to better align its approach to skills development. The plan aims to position the council at the forefront of the local skills agenda, fostering cross-council collaboration to support a dynamic, demand-led skills system that contributes to inclusive economic growth.

The newly established West Sussex Economic Growth Board will oversee the actions required to deliver the West Sussex Economic Growth Strategy (2025-2035) ambition to 'Ensure a dynamic and skilled workforce'.

Further Education

Chichester College Group (CCG) is the dominant Further Education provider in West Sussex, with colleges in Chichester, Worthing, Haywards Heath, and Crawley. The group also provides commercial and professional courses supporting residents and businesses including Skills Bootcamps, apprenticeships, a range of free on-line learning programmes and degree level qualifications awarded by the University of Chichester and the University of the Arts. It also has a work experience programme.

Higher Education

The University of Chichester is the principal Higher Education provider in West Sussex, with campuses in Chichester and Bognor Regis. In addition to undergraduate and postgraduate programmes delivered across 14 academic departments from creative arts to education, the university offers degree apprenticeships, as well as a broad CPD programme, primarily focused on health-related disciplines, business, and the humanities. The University ranks highly nationally in Education, Psychology, Social Work, and Sports Science.

Specialist Education

Brinsbury College near Pulborough, part of Chichester College Group, is a specialist land-based college, within the South Downs National Park. It offers a wide spectrum of qualifications, from entry level to foundation degrees and HNDs, catering to both school leavers and adult learners. Students study subjects such as agriculture, animal care, horticulture, equine studies, blacksmithing, and furniture making, with specialist facilities including a working farm, animal care centre, forge, and stables. It also offers apprenticeships and workforce development programmes. There are dedicated buses that transport learners to and from different parts of West Sussex.

West Dean College near Chichester, provides specialist courses through its three academic schools of Conservation, of Arts, and of Design. Qualifications range from foundation diplomas to degrees and master's degrees, validated by the University of Sussex. The School of Conservation is internationally renowned for training in areas such as clocks, furniture, and metalwork, while the KLC School of Design, following a merger with West Dean in 2021, delivers industry-focused courses in interior and garden design. The college is owned and operated by the Edward James Foundation, a charitable trust.

West Sussex County Council

West Sussex County Council provides a broad spectrum of economy, employment and skills support across its services and directorates playing a key role in empowering residents and supporting inclusive growth.

Connect to Work will support up to 3,950 residents in the area. It will provide support to disabled people or people who are living with a long-term health condition, or other barriers to employment, into work.

The Adult Education Service offers accessible learning to support personal development, employability, and community engagement. The service has included programmes such as free courses in English, maths, and digital literacy, ESOL language support for non-native speakers, Routes into Employment to help adults enter or progress in the workforce, Learning for Adults with Disabilities, Family Learning, Leisure and lifestyle courses that promote confidence, creativity, and social connection, and Skills Bootcamps – short, intensive courses to develop in-demand skills for the local job market.

The Synchronise Forum exists to improve the quality of supported employment for residents who need help in reaching their work potential. This multi-agency forum which meets quarterly includes DWP (Job Centre Plus), councils, Probation/ Prison Service, NHS provider services and their commissioners, Public Heath, learning providers with a worklessness remit, Supported Employment and Employment service providers, shares best practice and progress. This group has much potential as we look for opportunities to enhance partnerships across employment, skills, health and the community sector.

Support for Young People West Sussex County Council provides supported internships for people aged 16-24 with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) who also have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) through its in-house Post-16 Service. It also offers careers advice to young people aged 16 to 24 years who are not in employment, education or training (NEET). There is also an Employability Advisor who offers care leavers additional employability support for roles in the Council and beyond. The Council has a job interview guarantee scheme for care leavers.

The West Sussex & Brighton and Hove Careers Hub works with secondary schools, colleges and independent training providers, linking education and employment to support the delivery of high-quality, inclusive careers education.

HR initiatives – Career Tasters are opportunities for people to trial jobs at the Council for 12 weeks. Apprenticeships are a strategic recruitment tool to attract new talent, build workforce skills, and create inclusive pathways into public service careers.

The County Council's Refugee Team supports people to become independent by learning English, finding employment and sustaining activities of daily living.

SEND Employment Forum is a council-convened forum that brings together partners to support people in the county with special needs to access meaningful employment.

West Sussex Economic Growth Board is a strategic partnership that brings together representatives from local authorities, business, education, and health sectors to guide economic priorities and oversee the county's Economic Strategy. The Board provides a unified voice on investment, growth, and place-based development.

West Sussex Health & Wellbeing Board chaired by the county council's Cabinet Member for Public Health and Wellbeing. Members of the Health and Wellbeing Board include representatives from the health and care system, including the county council, NHS Sussex, NHS service providers, district and borough councils, Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprises (VCSEs), and Healthwatch West Sussex.

Other Provision

There is a wide range of other provision in the county, including national programmes, delivered at local level. Below are listed just some examples of some of the other provision that is available from the health, local government and community sectors to support people to develop skills and into employment.

NHS Talking Therapies Employment Support provides employment support delivered by employment advisers to people who are on waiting lists or in treatment.

Supported Employment West Sussex delivered by Aldingbourne Trust and Impact Initiatives provide support to people in West Sussex with lifelong disabilities, physical and sensory issues, acquired brain injury and those who are carers.

Districts and Borough Council provision

Each District and Borough council also has its own approach to improving skills and employability. For example, Crawley Borough Council's Invest in Skills for Crawley programme aims to better connect residents with local employment opportunities and to enhance skills and training provision within the borough. Adur & Worthing Councils works with partners to deliver a Help to Work programme, which provides information, advice and guidance in relation to employment issues. This includes help finding job vacancies and apprenticeships, CV and interview preparation and how to access childcare support.

7. Summary and Conclusions

This report is the data evidence that will be used to inform the development of the Get Sussex Working Plan, and the area implementation plans for Brighton & Hove, East Sussex and West Sussex.

Sussex is diverse in terms of its geography, economic base, its demography and its socio-economic conditions. Nevertheless, there are employment and skills issues that transcend administrative boundaries and that can be progressed on a pan-Sussex basis, whilst acknowledging and responding to differences at a more localised level.

Networks and support structures are already in place at different spatial levels. However, there is merit in strengthening these at pan-Sussex level to work collectively on common challenges; share knowledge; scale up successful projects; and collaborate to influence decisions at national and sub-national level, and to lobby for funding to address issues that will best support Sussex's needs.

Coastal deprivation and rural isolation, high house prices, low-paid employment, a dominance of micro and small businesses, and transport connectivity challenges are all issues that feature to some degree in many parts of Sussex and better coordination to address these could yield better outcomes. Much, but not all of Sussex, has an older-age population than average. This potentially leads to higher rates of long-term health and disability challenges, which can inhibit labour market participation. An ageing population and mature workforce brings both challenges and opportunities: one challenge may be a need for re-skilling to respond to future labour market demands; whereas there is opportunity if more older people could be supported to remain in meaningful work ensuring that their valuable skills, experience and knowledge is utilised to support local economic growth if age diversity in the workplace is better encouraged and enabled.

Sussex is one of the UK's most sought after places to live, but its natural environment designations restrict development opportunities and limit the potential for major inward investment, particularly in coastal and protected rural areas. There is much potential for increased economic and employment growth through effective support of existing companies including start-ups and micro-businesses to grow. There is considerable talent within Sussex, not least amongst the large number of students that graduate from the three universities each year. Effectively connecting local talent to unevenly distributed job opportunities across Sussex demands strong coordination, smart knowledge-sharing, and innovative, targeted support tailored to diverse community needs across Sussex.

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