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GROWTH HUB NEWSLETTER

December 2024



Support for your business – OxLEP Business is the Growth Hub for Oxfordshire, simplifying the business support landscape and helping individuals and businesses to connect more easily. We are here to help SMEs and entrepreneurs find the support they need, offering prompt, friendly, impartial advice. We signpost businesses to the right no cost business support both locally and nationally.

Get started..

Complete OxLEP's Business Support Tool to get started and receive your business support plan signposting you to profit boosting, market growing, fully funded business support:

[Business Support Tool](#)

If you have any questions or requests for support
please email us directly at
business@oxfordshirelep.com

OxLEP Business

'Use it or lose it!' urges OxLEP, with less than six months until key free business support programme comes to a close

'Businesses in the districts of West Oxfordshire and Cherwell are running out of time to access two strands of activity set to finish in March 2025. So with the New Year approaching why not take this opportunity to Start, Grow and increase your business network.

OxLEP is urging budding entrepreneurs, start-ups and businesses looking to grow in the west of the county and Cherwell, to sign up to its two programmes, or risk missing out on the tailored business support offer for the district.

The Spark programme sets out to help individuals to start their own successful business, or create a profitable 'extra income stream', whilst the Accelerator provides the expertise and support to help small businesses grow – for those already registered and trading.

The support programmes are being delivered by OxLEP Business on behalf of West Oxfordshire and Cherwell District Councils, with the project funded by the UK Government through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Support on offer includes

- an initial 1:1 to register for the programme
- a host of webinars and masterclasses hosted by experts
- a branded course handbook
- the opportunity to build your network and connect with over 100 business leaders/entrepreneurs over the course of the programmes

The Peer Networks strand of the Accelerator Programme takes place over a course of weekly sessions for three weeks – so it's vital interested parties book on as soon as possible, to ensure they don't miss out on a place. The next peer networks series is due to start on :

- **West Oxfordshire Spark: 8th Jan 25**
- **West Oxfordshire Accelerator: 13th Jan 25**

- **Cherwell Spark: 14th January 25**
- **Cherwell Accelerator: 14th January 2025**

OxLEP previously announced that between October 2016 and March last year, it had worked with over 6,200 businesses from across Oxfordshire, providing around 18,000 hours of support and advice, worth over £28.75 million.

OxLEP Business

To find out more and register your interest in taking part in either of the Spark or Accelerator programmes – or to understand the wider support available to Oxfordshire businesses, fill out the Business Support Tool.

<https://oxlepbusiness.co.uk/business-support-tool/>

or email business@oxfordshirelep.com for more information.

Cherwell Business Support Programme

<https://oxlepbusiness.co.uk/cherwell-business-support-programme-overview/>

Entrepreneurs, start-ups and businesses wanting to grow in Cherwell are set to benefit from two new business support programmes. These two new programmes will support organisations to develop, commercialise ideas and bring them to market, as well as supporting already established businesses to grow.

EVENT

Friday, 6 December

Boosting Your Business Workshop - Cherwell Accelerator

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/boosting-your-business-workshop-cherwell-accelerator-tickets-1069008105019?aff=oddtcreator>

West Oxfordshire Business Support

<https://oxlepbusiness.co.uk/west-oxfordshire-business-support-programme-overview/>

It is for entrepreneurs, start-ups and businesses wanting to grow that are based in West Oxfordshire.

The two new programmes will support organisations to develop, commercialise ideas and bring them to market, as well as supporting already established businesses to grow.

EVENT

Thursday, 5 December

Boosting Your Business Workshop - West Oxfordshire Accelerator

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/boosting-your-business-workshop-west-oxfordshire-accelerator-tickets-1075584274519?aff=oddtcreator>

Please email for more information: business@OxfordshireLEP.com

OxLEP Business

New online platform to support Oxfordshire businesses on their journey to net zero

<https://oxlepbusiness.co.uk/net-zero/>

The new platform – available via the OxLEP Business website – is designed to help businesses navigate the complexities of net zero by bringing together into one place, up-to-date actionable insights, practical tools and signposting to relevant support, news, events and funding opportunities from both within and outside of Oxfordshire, helping make the journey to net zero journey easier for businesses, whatever stage of their journey they are at.

The platform which is Oxfordshire wide has been developed in collaboration with a range of Oxfordshire businesses and organisations, each with valuable, real-world experience in implementing effective net zero strategies.

The platform includes:

- Net zero and your business – some of the reasons why businesses should think about net zero
- Net zero heroes – inspiring stories of Oxfordshire businesses who have taken action
- Net zero support – organisations supporting net zero within Oxfordshire
- Funding & grants – local and national funding
- Net zero jargon – a simple guide to common terms
- Carbon calculator & net zero toolkit – through the UK SME Climate Hub
- Climate adaptation

Code Red – Oxfordshire Business Resilience Scheme

<https://oxlepbusiness.co.uk/business-resilience-and-continuity/>

Is your business winter-ready? Do you have plans in place to protect against cyber-attacks, or know what to do if a flood risk is announced?

OxLEP Business has received funding for a new pilot scheme called Code Red which aims to help local businesses be more resilient, and to be able to survive and thrive, even if unexpected events happen.

Events such as cyber-attacks, flooding, power cuts and extreme weather can happen at any time, and small businesses can be particularly vulnerable, as may not have the time and resources to understand their vulnerabilities or to put plans in place.

Code Red aims to make it easier for businesses to understand their risks, to prepare and to put plans in place, through:

- Text messages – with information and signposting
- A new webpage – with resources on key topics for resilience



OxLEP Business is partnering for this pilot with the Berkshire and Buckinghamshire Growth Hubs, Thames Valley Resilience Forum, and local resilience teams, including the Joint Resilience Team at Oxfordshire County Council. Funding is from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) Innovation Fund until April 2025.



OxLEP Business Events

All our planned fully funded events can be accessed and booked here: <https://oxlepbusiness.co.uk/events-overview/>

Building Your Social Selling Masterplan For 2025

Thursday, 5 December - 15:00 - 16:00 GMT

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/building-your-social-selling-masterplan-for-2025-tickets-1083041248529>

With the UK's 2024 budget focusing on innovation and digital transformation, the message is clear: adopting digital-first strategies is essential. Social selling will be the cornerstone of successful sales in 2025, empowering businesses to connect with customers, build trust, and thrive in an evolving marketplace.

In 2025, Social Selling will be the foundation of successful sales strategies.

Are you prepared to harness the power of social media to reach your ideal customers, foster meaningful connections, and close more deals? Join us for an exclusive, forward-thinking webinar where we'll explore the strategies and tools needed to craft a powerful social selling plan. Learn how to leverage social platforms to engage audiences effectively, drive growth, and adapt to a digital-first world without incurring high ad spend.

AI Tools to Grow Your Business

Tuesday, 17 December - 12:00 - 14:00 GMT

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/ai-tools-to-grow-your-business-tickets-1083062321559>

This insightful workshop is designed for small business owners who are eager to revolutionise their business and customer engagement!

By attending this workshop you will learn:

- Why you must understand your Customer Needs,
- How AI tools can enable personalised experiences for your customers,
- How AI Tools can help your to grow your business,
- And many more hints and tips to benefit from AI in your business.

Discover the transformative power of AI tools in crafting personalized experiences that resonate deeply with your clients. From intelligent chatbots providing real-time assistance to algorithms deciphering consumer preferences, you'll uncover how AI can elevate customer interactions to new heights. But that's not all!

Learn how AI's predictive prowess can anticipate customer needs and behaviours, positioning your business one step ahead. Explore cutting-edge strategies to proactively address challenges, deliver relevant solutions, and foster lasting loyalty.

Led by a self-confessed AI Geek, this workshop blends practical insights with actionable strategies, equipping you to thrive in the digital era. Don't miss this opportunity to unlock the full potential of AI and redefine the customer experience journey for your business!

OxLEP Skills

Oxfordshire Apprenticeship Awards 2025 Now Open for Entries and Nominations

<https://oxlepskills.co.uk/oaawards>

The Oxfordshire Apprenticeship Awards 2025 opened for entries and nominations on 21 November.

Winners will be announced at a special celebration evening, set to take place on 22 May 2025 in one of the most prestigious venues in the world, the iconic Long Library at Blenheim Palace, itself a World Heritage Site, an attraction for local and global visitors and central to the everyday lives and livelihoods of the neighbouring communities.

The awards are organised by OxLEP Skills on a not-for-profit basis, with the generous support of a number of sponsoring organisations.

The 2025 headline sponsor is The Hill Group, who will choose the overall Apprentice of the Year from the winners of the five apprentice awards. The award categories and sponsors are as follows:

- Intermediate Apprentice of the Year – Abbott Diabetes Care
- Advanced Apprentice of the Year – NielsenIQ
- Higher / Degree Apprentice of the Year – Siemens Healthineers Magnet Technology
- Special Recognition Award – Milestone Infrastructure
- Rising Star Award – Popham Hairdressing
- Shining Star Award – IST INTECH
- Apprenticeship Ambassador Award – Grondon Waste Management
- Inspiring the Future Employer Award – Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust
- Skills Champion Award – The Engineering Trust
- Training Provider Individual Award – Oxford Brookes University
- Apprenticeship Employer of the Year (<250 employees) – Olamalu
- Apprenticeship Employer of the Year (250+ employees) – Assure UK

OxLEP Skills are also grateful to have the support of High Spec Composites, Darke & Taylor, Jonas Software UK & Europe, Oxford North, Activate Learning, Oxfordshire Advanced Skills, the South East Apprenticeship Ambassador Network, Oxfordshire County Council and the University of Oxford.

Entering the awards as an employer, or nominating an individual, is a fantastic way to showcase your organisation and celebrate the achievements of your star apprentices and the colleagues and training providers who support them along their journey. Finalists and guests will have the opportunity to join us at Blenheim Palace for a fantastic evening of apprenticeship celebrations.

OxLEP Skills

A promotional poster for the Oxfordshire Apprenticeship Awards 2025. The poster features a blue background with a circular inset showing a group of people holding certificates. The text on the poster includes the event name, date, and a call to action for entries and nominations. The OxLEP Skills logo and the hashtag #OAAwards2025 are also present.

OXFORDSHIRE
APPRENTICESHIP
Awards 2025
THURSDAY 22ND MAY

Now open for entries

The Oxfordshire Apprenticeship Awards 2025 are now open for entries and nominations

With categories for apprentices, former apprentices, employers, schools and training providers, there's something for everyone

oxlepskills.co.uk/oaawards

#OAAwards2025



The 'Grow Your Own' Apprenticeship Levy Pledge Initiative: In Conversation with Employers

<https://www.oxfordshirelep.com/news/article/grow-your-own-apprenticeship-levy-pledge-initiative-conversation-employers>

A key initiative within OxLEP Skills' Social Contract Programme, the 'Grow Your Own' Apprenticeship Levy Pledge Initiative, sees Oxfordshire's apprenticeship levy-paying businesses transfer their unused funds to other organisations within the county to support their own skills needs - rather than returning them back to the Treasury.

Employers with an annual pay bill of over £3m pay 0.5% of this as an apprenticeship levy and are able to pledge up to 50% of their levy annually. Through the 'Grow Your Own' Apprenticeship Levy Pledge Initiative, businesses are supported in pledging their unused levy funds and transferring them to eligible Oxfordshire based small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), charities and social enterprises to help fund their apprenticeship training and assessment.

Since the programme began back in May 2022, over £2.3m has been successfully allocated through the fund, with £1.3m remaining to eligible businesses to fulfil their own apprenticeship aspirations. Any funds that remain unused after the programme end will be lost to Oxfordshire and over a period of time returned to the Treasury.

Leah Bryan, Oxfordshire Apprenticeship Advisor for OxLEP Skills, caught up with Gregory Surveyors Ltd's Louise Gregory and Live Wire Productions' Gavin Pledge, to hear their experience of the initiative and working alongside OxLEP Skills, how simple the process can be for recipients of the funding and how small businesses can benefit from apprenticeship levy funds which would otherwise have gone unutilised and been returned back to the Treasury.

OxLEP Skills



Further Key Delivery Partners Announced as Part of OxLEP's Skills Bootcamps Programme

<https://oxlepskills.co.uk/skillsbootcamps>

A £1.2 million Skills Bootcamps programme – part of the Department for Education's 'Skills for Life' activity – is being led in Oxfordshire by OxLEP Skills and delivered through to March 2025. Launched this summer, the programme is set to give Oxfordshire residents the opportunity to develop a variety of sector-specific skills, helping to fast-track individuals to potential, future interview opportunities and ultimately, paid work.

Skills Bootcamps will particularly boost opportunities for jobseekers, those re-entering work after a career gap, or retirees returning to employment, likely triggered by the cost-of-living crisis. Skills Bootcamps provides free, flexible courses to its participants – running for up to 16 weeks in some instances – available to residents from across Oxfordshire, subject to the programme's eligibility criteria.

Several new programme partners have now been announced, delivering a number of further bootcamps as part of the activity and complementing three existing courses already in place since July this year. The new partners and courses being delivered are:

E-bikes course:

Activate Learning (cycle maintenance)

Green construction and green sustainability courses:

Abingdon & Witney College (plumbing and heating skills, and sustainability in the workplace)

OxLEP Skills

Hospitality course:

Kiwi & Yuzu Ltd (hospitality supervision)

These new courses follow the initial batch of Skills Bootcamps opportunities previously announced by OxLEP Skills, focused on health and life sciences and a further green construction-led bootcamp.

Health and life sciences courses:

CSR Scientific Training (laboratory assistant or laboratory technician skills)

Skills4Pharmacy (pharmacy laboratory technician skills)

Green construction course:

Reed in Partnership (heat pump skills)

More widely, Skills Bootcamps are set to play a key role across many Oxfordshire businesses and sectors, helping them to address specific skills gaps.



It all starts with Skills...

Working with top-class and dedicated delivery partners, Skills Bootcamps provides FREE, flexible courses...helping you to develop the skills you need and the pathway to a more prosperous future.

OxLEP Skills

Funded by UK Government

SKILLS FOR LIFE
SKILLS BOOTCAMPS

The graphic features a blue background with white and green circular accents. It includes an illustration of two people, a man with glasses and a woman, looking at a laptop. The OxLEP Skills logo is in the bottom left, the UK Government logo is below it, and the Skills For Life Skills Bootcamps logo is in the bottom right.

Oxfordshire Net Zero Business Support

Fully funded Energy assessments for South & Vale businesses, delivered by Energy Solutions Oxfordshire

Energy assessments worth a minimum £1,500 consultancy advice are being offered at no cost for organisations based in South & Vale, delivered by Energy Solutions Oxfordshire (ESOx). Any organisation that signs up will get a site-specific building decarbonise plan and pointers to funding to help them to action the energy saving recommendations.

The deadline to apply is 13th December.

There are only a limited number of assessments available so register early to avoid disappointment. This support is funded by the UK Government through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

<https://www.energysolutionsoxfordshire.org/free-energy-assessments-for-smes-in-south-and-vale/>

Oxfordshire Business Support

Other Resources: As part of our ongoing commitment to provide the best possible service to Oxfordshire's SME's we always ensure that other services and opportunities which may be available to business within Oxfordshire are highlighted and signposted.

For more information visit here: **<https://oxlepbusiness.co.uk/external-resources/>**

Business & IP Centre Oxfordshire

At the Oxford Westgate Library

Supporting Oxfordshire residents to start, protect and grow their own business.

<https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/business/business-and-intellectual-property-centre-bipc>



OSEP

OSEP provides support, empowerment, and advocacy for local social enterprises, enterprising charities, and purposeful businesses in Oxfordshire.

OSEP, a local Social Enterprise itself, plays a crucial role in fostering a community where businesses prioritise positive societal impact alongside their financial success.

Website: <https://www.osep.org.uk/>

Email: hello@osep.org.uk

Oxfordshire Business Park Information



Doing right by people and considering our planet is a top priority for us all.

Take a peek at [Oxfordshire's sustainable business parks](#), created by the Jennings team.

Have a ramble... jennings.co.uk

Non OxLEP News/Events

Christmas Business Networking at Blenheim Palace - 18th December 9.30am to 11.30am

Come and enjoy building business connections whilst you walk around the magical grounds of Blenheim Palace. Coffee and mince pies to follow in the Palace cafe.

Led by Jackie Jarvis The Walking Business Coach

Book your place here.

[Saturday 23rd November from 11 am – 5 pm at Tap Social Taproom in Botley.](https://independentoxford.com/independent-oxford-christmas-market-returns-to-tap-social-tap-room-for-the-third-year/)
<https://independentoxford.com/independent-oxford-christmas-market-returns-to-tap-social-tap-room-for-the-third-year/>

Christmas in Broad Street, Oxford from 23rd November to 5th January

<https://www.christmasinoxford.co.uk/>

The Oxford Magazine: What's on in Oxfordshire -

<https://theoxfordmagazine.com/>

Oxfordshire County Council News: [News from Oxfordshire County Council](#)

Experience Oxfordshire: [Top 10 Things to Do in Oxford and Oxfordshire – Experience Oxfordshire](#)

Oxfordshire County Council: <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/>

Festive events in Oxfordshire:

<https://www.experienceoxfordshire.org/tag/CHRISTMAS24/>

