

LANCASHIRE & CUMBRIA

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TECHNICAL SKILLS. BUSINESS IMPACT.

Higher-level
technical
capability
designed around
employers in
Lancashire and
Cumbria.

Explore what this could
mean for your business.

Email employer@landciot.ac.uk
or scan the QR code.





WHY THIS MATTERS NOW

Most organisations are operating with more technical complexity than they had five years ago. Systems are more digital. Compliance standards are tighter. Clients expect more.

At the same time, experienced technical staff are harder to recruit and expensive to replace.

In many businesses, delivery depends on a small number of highly capable individuals. When they are stretched, risk increases.

If a key employee left tomorrow, how exposed would your business be?

Experienced technical hires are increasingly scarce and expensive. Developing capability internally can be faster and more controlled.

Strengthening higher-level technical capability reduces recruitment spend, consultancy reliance and operational downtime. It protects productivity and builds resilience as your market evolves.

Doing nothing rarely feels urgent - until a contract is lost or a key individual leaves.

If you want to assess where your technical exposure sits, email employer@landciot.ac.uk or scan the QR code.



WHAT YOU ACTUALLY GET

We work with SMEs and larger employers across engineering, manufacturing, digital, health, construction and technical sectors.

When you partner with the IoT, you are not buying a course. You are strengthening technical capability inside your business.

That might mean an engineer developing deeper diagnostic expertise to reduce downtime. It might mean a digital specialist gaining the skills to lead automation projects internally rather than outsourcing them. It could mean preparing a supervisor to step into a more senior technical role with confidence.

We help you identify opportunities to upskill or reskill employees, or tap into the future talent pipeline from courses we run.

Learning is aligned to real operational priorities, so impact is visible during delivery. This means capability improves while the employee continues contributing to revenue.

Before anything begins, we clarify the role you want strengthened, the outcome you expect and how progress will be reviewed.

Want to explore what capability your business could strengthen next?

Email employer@landciot.ac.uk or scan the QR code.



HOW ENGAGEMENT WORKS

It starts with a short conversation about where pressure is building.

We discuss the roles that are hardest to recruit, the areas where projects stall, and the technical capability you will need over the next year.

In many cases, employer contribution is significantly lower than the cost of external recruitment, and funding contributions are explained clearly at the outset.

From there, we outline a practical route forward. That may involve developing one existing team member against a defined challenge. It may involve building a progression pathway to reduce future recruitment pressure.

Before delivery begins, we agree what success looks like in commercial terms. That could be reduced downtime, improved efficiency, stronger in-house expertise or readiness for new contracts.

You have a named contact throughout. Progress is reviewed formally. Adjustments are made if required.

This is structured support, not open-ended training.



Start with a focused discussion about your current pressures.

Email **employer@landciot.ac.uk** or scan the QR code.



WHAT MAKES THE IoT DIFFERENT

Many employers already invest in internal development. Others use private providers when a short-term need arises. The IoT offers something different.

The Lancashire & Cumbria IoT is a partnership between eight colleges including Blackpool and The Fylde College, East Lancashire Learning Group, Burnley College, Blackburn College, Preston College, Runshaw College, Lancaster and Morecombe College, The Lakes College, and three university research partners.

Through this partnership, you gain access to specialist equipment and expertise that can reduce reliance on external contractors and accelerate internal capability - advanced equipment and technical expertise that would be difficult to replicate independently.

The Lancashire & Cumbria IoT has invested £8.7million in state-of-the-art, industry leading equipment – such as cyber labs, advanced manufacturing equipment and healthcare technology.

Provision is shaped with employer input, ensuring it reflects real-world operational demands rather than generic content.

It sits between internal training and traditional higher education. Practical enough to deliver workplace impact. Structured enough to deepen technical capability.

It strengthens what you already do rather than replacing it.

If you would like to understand how this compares to your current approach, email: employer@landciot.ac.uk or scan the QR code.



RISK REDUCTION AND FLEXIBILITY

Committing to skills development should feel controlled.

Learning is structured around live business projects. Early review points ensure investment remains aligned to business priorities.

Milestones are built into programmes. If additional support is needed, it is provided. If business priorities shift, conversations happen early.

Funding contributions are explained clearly at the outset. There are no hidden stages or unexpected obligations.

Many employers begin with one learner aligned to one defined objective. Expansion happens only when value is evident. Employers often find that investing in progression strengthens retention and commitment.

If you want to explore a low-risk starting point, email:

employer@landciot.ac.uk

or scan the QR code.



FINDING THE PEOPLE WHO CAN DO WHAT COMES NEXT



Ram Gupta
Managing Director
Nybble



Ram Gupta has been running Nybble for over 25 years. The Blackburn-based managed service provider has grown from a retail business into a five-pillar operation covering IT infrastructure, software development, audio-visual, cyber security and AI. In that time, Ram has watched the technology sector change faster than almost any other industry - and he's learned that the only way to stay relevant is to move with it.

That restlessness is what brought him to the Lancashire & Cumbria Institute of Technology as one of its founding employer partners. Nybble could foresee a future skills gap, and Ram wanted to be part of shaping the solution.

"We thought the IoT - the way it was described and the way it was orchestrated, and for the reason it was set up - was a perfect example of how that skills gap could be met. How all the dots could be joined up and you get an all-rounded individual that's skilled, that's relevant and very employable."

Nybble has roughly doubled its headcount since the IoT first approached them and has also gone international with its services - recruiting constantly across cyber, cloud, networks, data, AI and audio-visual. The demand is relentless, and so is the pace of change.

Using all the tools available

"I've never seen the industry being as fast-paced as it is now," Ram says. "Whatever you did yesterday truly changed what you might do tomorrow. You have to use the tools available to you to do the job - and that tool set is constantly evolving."

Last year Nybble brought on several new staff. The roles span the full breadth of the business: network engineers, cloud specialists, cyber analysts, data professionals, AV technicians. And despite the rise of AI - which Nybble has embraced, including acquiring a small AI business in 2025 - they're still recruiting at a swift rate. Technology handles the repetitive; humans handle the judgement.

Curiosity

What Ram looks for isn't a finished CV. It's flexibility and curiosity. "Knowledge isn't power anymore," he says. "Knowledge is at your fingertips - everyone's got it. It's curiosity. We look for curious people that actually want to discover how to solve a problem. Is there a better way? We did it this way last time - how can we do better?"

Alongside curiosity, he values ambition and the appetite to learn. Nybble's approach is to employ, nurture and mentor - taking people with the right mindset and building the technical capability around them, whether that's in-house or through external provision.

“Whatever you did yesterday truly changed what you might do tomorrow. You have to use the tools available to you to do the job - and that tool set is constantly evolving.”

Ram Gupta
Managing Director
Nybble

As an anchor employer and board member, Ram brings the perspective of a business operating at the sharp end of digital change, helping steer what the IoT focuses on and how it responds to what employers actually need.

He's also on the ground: he recently judged an IoT-led competition round as part of The Lancashire Colleges' (TLC) Skills Competition Programme 2025, working directly with students from colleges across Lancashire. He and his fellow judges assessed how they approach real technical challenges in cyber, data and gaming. “It was a real celebration - three very difficult tasks, and you couldn't separate them. They were so good.”

The access the IoT offers is something Ram is direct about valuing. “We've never had the opportunity - and I didn't think a business of our shape, size and scale would ever get the opportunity to influence curriculum at such a high level.”

But he's equally clear that this isn't just Nybble's gain. The needs of an SME and a large enterprise are fundamentally the same: skilled people, the right talent, someone who'll work hard and grow with you. “Whether you're 60 people or 600, it makes no difference - you need talent, you need skilled people, and you need people that are going to work hard for you.”

Be part of the change

His message to other businesses is rooted in the same thinking that got Nybble involved in the first place: you have to be part of the change you want to see. “Get involved. You're not doing it for somebody else - you're doing it for your own business. Think almost selfishly about what your industry needs and then make sure the IoT delivers on that, because that's what the IoT is there for. You can only influence what you're involved in.”

And for those who think they don't have the time? Ram's answer is straightforward. “Time will pass anyway, no matter what you do. If you think you're going to do something because it's going to take five years - if you don't do anything, five years will still pass. You're better off doing something.”

The talent pipeline that keeps Nybble competitive doesn't happen by accident. It's built by businesses willing to show up, shape the agenda, and invest in the people coming through. Ram Gupta has been doing exactly that since day one.

If you would like to explore similar impact within your organisation, email: employer@landciot.ac.uk or scan the QR code.



BLACKPOOL TRANSPORT : GETTING THE NEXT GENERATION ON BOARD TO KEEP BLACKPOOL MOVING

Ensuring people get from A to B is a lot more complex than you might think, requiring various skills and jobs to keep things running. It's an area of immense opportunity for the next generation to secure high-quality jobs from engineering to HR and project management. But finding the skills and people required is proving a complex challenge in itself.

Blackpool Transport currently employs over 600 staff, from operators and engineers through to maintenance staff and administrative roles. It operates one of the last remaining first-generation tramways in the UK, as well as 15 local bus routes connecting people to towns such as Fleetwood, Lytham St Annes, Cleveleys and Preston. The network is the backbone that supports the region's economy and helps draw three to four million visitors during peaks like the Blackpool Illuminations every year.

Blackpool Transport is one of the founding partners of the Lancashire & Cumbria IoT – and is in discussions with them to ensure they can create a thriving local job market for high-quality specialist engineers in the years to come.

James Clough has been with Blackpool Transport for eight years, the last three as finance commercial director. He came in as a business analyst, leading major transformation projects – converting ticket machines to contactless, and bringing richer data into the company. That hands-on background shapes how he thinks about the challenge now sitting

in front of the company : how do you transfer knowledge to a new workforce when the majority is approaching retirement age?

He said: "We've got people that we know are going to retire in the next five years, and the difficulty is transferring that knowledge."

Over 60% of Blackpool Transport's workforce is over 50, with an estimated 30% of its managerial positions needing replacing within five years. With only eight employees under the age of 20, work needs to happen to inspire the next generation – and get them trained.

Skills

Engineering sits at the sharpest end of that pressure. Blackpool transport runs 72 buses and 13 trams, requiring around 40 engineers across both fleets. Bus and tram engineering are among the hardest roles to recruit into – partly because the industry skews heavily towards truck maintenance, leaving a gap for operators like Blackpool Transport who need engineers trained on different vehicle types. Tram engineering is even more specialist.

"We just have to find them an apprenticeship course that's as closely matched as possible," James said, "and then rely on knowledge transfer between engineers." With a largely senior engineering workforce, that knowledge transfer is the pipeline – but it won't be available indefinitely.



James Clough
Finance Commercial Director
Blackpool Transport



Without addressing these shortages, the network will face reduced, less frequent, and less reliable services, which can have a major knock-on effect on the local economy, especially during its peak over the summer and festive periods.

"If you've seen what's happening with bus franchising," James said, "the demand for engineering skills for both diesel and electric buses is becoming high across the entire industry. It's not just us."

Conversations are now taking place to see how the IoT can support Blackpool Transport to ensure it is on track for the future.

Blackpool Transport has been an anchor employer partner with the Lancashire & Cumbria IoT since its inception. Jane Cole, the previous Managing Director, chaired the IoT board and was involved in the original Department for Education bid that established the IoT in the region.

James has now been invited to join the IoT board himself, stepping into the relationship at a moment when the conversation between the business and the IoT is becoming more urgent.

Getting the right leaders in place is critical to deliver projects and Blackpool Transport's wider business goals. But, having people who can lead with confidence at scale has also proved a huge challenge for the organisation.

Current practice promotes good workers into management roles without providing them with the tools to lead effectively. This then puts a strain on HR managers to help guide new managers through basic processes.

Several managers at Blackpool Transport have since been put through Level 5 CMI management qualifications via Blackpool and Fylde College, the IoT's lead partner. The business currently has apprentices in both bus and tram engineering.

Data and AI literacy

The skills gap at Blackpool Transport isn't limited to engineering. James identifies data literacy, management confidence and AI capability as areas where the workforce needs development - and where the IoT could help bridge the gap between what people currently know and what the job now requires.

"It's not just your IT technicians - data skills are now for managers."

For Blackpool Transport, the relationship with the IoT is at an important juncture. The workforce data tells a story that can't be ignored - and the question of where the next generation of engineers, managers and skilled staff will come from is one the business is already working to answer, with the IoT as a key part of that plan.

COMPLETING THE CIRCUIT ON THE SKILLS GAP: LINKING EMPLOYERS AND EDUCATION



Kate Houlden
Managing Director
Like Technologies Ltd



Electronics is everywhere. It sits in our pockets, on our wrists, in our homes. And yet, as a career path, it has quietly disappeared from the mainstream - creating a skills gap that businesses such as Like Technologies are working hard to close, in partnership with the Lancashire & Cumbria Institute of Technology (L&C IoT).

Like Technologies is a specialist nuclear engineering business based in Lancaster, with a workforce of 28. The company works in one of the most technically demanding and safety-critical environments there is; maintaining and re-engineering the legacy control systems that keep the UK's nuclear power stations running. Working with nuclear power stations across the UK, including nearby Heysham, Like Technologies specialises in the electronics and control systems built in the 1980s that still sit at the heart of the UK's nuclear infrastructure.

"These systems were built to last," says Kate Houlden, Managing Director at Like Technologies. "They don't replace them unless there's a reason to. The focus is on repair, refurbish and re-engineer - and that's where our specialist team of experts come in."

A skills shortage in plain sight

The majority of Like Technologies' workforce are engineers and technicians bridging that gap between legacy hardware and modern maintenance - a highly specialist skillset that, as Kate puts it, is "not easy to find."

"Many go into engineering without really understanding the different specialisms. They'll consider mechanical, chemical, electrical - but electronics as a specific discipline is rarely on the radar."

Kate Houlden
Managing Director
Like Technologies Ltd

It was this challenge that first prompted Kate to explore how the business could help shape the pipeline from the ground up and led to Like Technologies becoming an employer partner of the L&C IoT.



Taking action

In 2020, Like Technologies joined forces with five other local businesses and applied for funding and resources, launching a free introductory electronics course designed to encourage greater uptake in the sector. Of the 65 people who completed the programme, 45 secured employment within six months, making it a resounding success and highlighting both the demand for electronics careers and the impact of making opportunities more accessible.

Building on that success, partnering with the IoT became a natural next step, helping to shape what is taught in local colleges and universities while bringing valuable real-world industry insight into the curriculum.

Partnering with the IoT

Joining the IoT's employer panel gave Kate a direct voice in shaping electronics provision across the region and opened doors to colleges and capabilities she hadn't previously been aware of.

Through the IoT's employer network, Like Technologies was introduced to Blackpool & The Fylde College, an institution with a particularly strong electronics curriculum - so much so that the business is now actively exploring apprenticeship opportunities through the college.

"I feel strongly about making sure young people have different paths available to them - that they don't feel judged for not going to university. There are well-paid careers in electronics - they're just not talked about enough," says Kate. "But unless employers have an input into education and influence what's being taught, they're not going to get the skills needed at the end of it."

For Like Technologies, the IoT partnership is far more than a box-ticking exercise; it is a strategic investment in the future of the business, helping ensure the next generation of electronics engineers are equipped with the skills, knowledge and direction needed to succeed.

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employer@landciot.ac.uk

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COMPLETE ONLINE: INVESTING IN THE FUTURE



Tom Smith
Managing Director
Complete Online

Complete

In a crowded digital marketplace and rapidly involving online landscape, Complete Online has spent 17 years proving that a small, specialist team can really deliver. Based in Blackpool with an office in Dubai, the agency offers everything from web development and SEO to paid advertising, branding and copywriting - giving clients one trusted partner rather than a roster of disconnected specialists. It's a business built by founder Tom Smith on strong relationships, honest communication, and a genuine commitment to client success.

Finding Work-Ready Digital Talent

Recruitment has long been one of the agency's most persistent challenges. Geographically, Complete Online faces a narrower talent pool than agencies in larger cities, and despite receiving a high volume of applications when roles become available, finding candidates with the right blend of practical digital skills and professional readiness has proved frustrating at times.

"A significant part of that frustration stems from a structural problem in digital education," comments Tom. "The courses are too broad and the industry moves too fast. By the time students graduate, the skills they've been taught are already behind what businesses like ours actually need."

At the same time Tom was acutely aware that bringing an apprentice into a small team of eight carries a real operational cost, with senior staff needing to provide day-to-day training and mentoring. A different model was needed.

The Partnership with the Lancashire & Cumbria Institute of Technology

Through an introduction to Blackpool and the Fylde College, the Lancashire & Cumbria IoT (L&CIoT) gave Complete Online exactly the model it had been looking for. A T Level student, attending two days per week and working across live projects, has integrated naturally into the team - delivering a genuine contribution without the operational pressures a full-time placement can bring.

"Students arrive motivated and get stuck into real work straight away," says Tom. "It's a relationship that builds over time, and one that could easily evolve into something longer term for the right person."

The results have spoken for themselves. Complete Online is already registering for its next T Level cohort and planning to take on two students simultaneously across web developments and social media, as the business recognises that fresh, young fresh perspectives and a fluency across emerging social and AI platforms are just as valuable to the business as senior strategic counsel.



A Wider Involvement

Tom's involvement with the L&C IoT goes far beyond hosting students. From judging Digital Skills Competitions and volunteering for mock interview panels, to speaking directly to students about the realities of a career in digital, he has become a genuine advocate for the next generation of talent.

"Being able to walk into a room and speak directly to students, knowing that what I say might shape the direction they take - that's not something I take lightly. If I can help even one of them in their career or give them the confidence to back themselves, that's worth more than any business win."

That influence extends to curriculum too, with Tom feeding directly into course design to push for the specialist, industry-relevant pathways that graduates and employers actually need. The IoT has also opened Tom's eyes to world-class facilities across the college network, including immersive technology spaces and specialist equipment at Blackpool and Fylde College, that would cost significantly more to access commercially - an unexpected but welcome bonus for an agency with ambitions in AI and emerging technologies.

A Partnership with Purpose

The partnership has reinforced something Tom already believed: that the challenges of recruiting local digital talent are best tackled by being part of the solution. The L&C IoT has given the business a way to make a genuine impact without overwhelming a small team.

"The collaborative spirit of the IoT network has also been a genuine revelation. Watching competing colleges pull together in pursuit of a shared goal - better outcomes for students and employers alike, has mirrored something our agency genuinely believes - that there is enough work to go around, and that openness and collaboration serve everyone better than protectionism," comments Tom.

With plans to expand its T Level intake and explore degree apprenticeship pathways for the longer term, Complete Online is deepening its commitment to the IoT model, not as a favour to the education sector, but as a practical investment in the agency's own future and the digital industry as a whole.

TRIDENT: PARTNERING FOR A SUSTAINABLE, FUTURE-READY WORKFORCE



Michael Dugdale
Managing Director
Trident Utilities



Based in Blackpool, Trident Utilities is celebrating its 25th anniversary as a specialist energy and sustainability consultancy. Operating under the principle that “the cheapest kilowatt hour is the one you don’t use,” Trident partners with businesses to tackle energy costs, carbon emissions, and compliance.

With 62 current employees and plans to grow to 78 over the next three years, Managing Director Michael Dugdale knows that achieving this growth requires a highly capable workforce. However, finding “ready-made” talent - from Python software developers to consultant-led salespeople who deeply understand greenhouse gas protocols - is proving exceptionally difficult on the open market.

To solve this, Trident has turned to a “grow-your-own” strategy, heavily supported by its partnership with the Lancashire & Cumbria Institute of Technology (IoT).

A critical voice on the Advisory Board

Michael represents the clean energy and sustainability sector on the IoT’s advisory board - a connection initially forged through Trident’s apprenticeship programmes with Blackpool and The Fylde College. For Trident, having employers represented on the board is not just beneficial: it is “absolutely critical”.

“The speed of change within the business community in our sector, with what’s happened with the boom of net zero over the last five years, and when nobody can keep up with AI, is incredible,” Michael explains. “Employers like Trident have to have a voice for the universities and colleges to latch onto, because their curriculum can’t keep up. They could be educating a student through a curriculum, and by the time they’ve finished, it’s aged immediately”.

By sitting on the advisory board, Trident actively helps shape skills provision to bridge this widening gap between academic theory and the fast-paced reality of the modern net zero sector.

Real-world student involvement and impact

This partnership translates directly into hands-on student involvement. Trident consistently maintains an apprenticeship rate of around 10% across its workforce, working with local education providers to bring talent in early. The impact on the business has been transformative.

Because they invest heavily in internal upskilling and clear career progression, Trident currently boasts approximately 625 years of combined experience across a notably young workforce (the average employee age is around 38 and 31% of the workforce is under 30).



EMPLOYER CASE STUDY

A standout example of this “grow-your-own” success is a 26-year-old senior account manager who joined the business straight from school as an apprentice, and now holds 10 years of specialised sector experience.

Trident’s engagement with higher education is also expanding. They recently took on a second-year Master’s student in volcanology from Lancaster University for a placement year. The student stayed on as a zero-hours’ contractor to fit around her studies, demonstrating how academic placements can translate into real-world environmental impact.

Looking to the future, Trident is now exploring a Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) with the university to bring an associate into the business to help innovate their carbon accounting applications.

Creating a direct education-to-employment pipeline

For Michael, the core benefit of the IoT partnership is the creation of a “direct education-to-employment pipeline”. It addresses the sector’s recruitment bottlenecks by giving students visibility into the vibrant SME landscape.

“Students sometimes get blinded by wanting to go and work for the biggest names, like BAE Systems or Jacobs, and not all students can go to those big businesses,” Michael notes. “It’s up to the advisory board to help colleges and universities position SMEs as the heartbeat of the business community. Graduates and college leavers have a route through to having a great career in an SME. It doesn’t have to be a household name.”

Advice for other employers

As the pace of technology accelerates, Michael’s advice to other employers considering involvement with the IoT is to recognise the urgency of collaboration. The workforce of the future must be equipped to harness technologies like AI to drive productivity and achieve outcomes that wouldn’t otherwise be possible.

To thrive, businesses cannot simply wait for the open market to deliver the perfect candidate. “We need to be able to create those proof points that regional SMEs can deliver university-level careers, and develop the employees of the future,” Michael says. By joining the IoT and actively engaging with education providers, employers can step off the sidelines, shape the curriculum, and directly build the sustainable, future-ready workforce they need to succeed.

If you would like to explore similar impact within your organisation, email:

employer@landciot.ac.uk

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START WITH A CONVERSATION

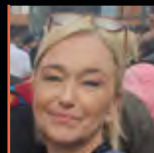
Engagement doesn't require immediate commitment to a programme. It begins with clarity.

We can review your recruitment pressures, growth plans and technical capability gaps, outline the potential impact specific to your organisation, and the level of investment required.

A short discussion often brings practical next steps into focus.

There is no obligation. Only insight.

Employer engagement lead:



Amanda Gunn
employer@landciot.ac.uk



This campaign is supported by the Gatsby Charitable Foundation as part of its work to help transform technical education in England.

LANCASHIRE & CUMBRIA

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