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Meeting

NORTH WALES CJC ECONOMIC WELL-BEING SUB-COMMITTEE

Date and Time

9.30 am, FRIDAY, 17TH JULY, 2026

Location

Cyfarfod Rhithiol / Virtual Meeting

For public access to the meeting, please contact us

Contact Point

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NORTH WALES CJC ECONOMIC WELL-BEING SUB-COMMITTEE

Voting Members

Councillors

Gary Pritchard	Isle of Anglesey County Council
Nia Jeffreys	Cyngor Gwynedd
Julie Fallon	Conwy County Borough Council
Jason McLellan	Denbighshire County Council
Dave Hughes	Flintshire County Council
Mark Pritchard	Wrexham County Borough Council

Co-optee Members – Non Voting

Professor Edmund Burke	Bangor University
Professor Joe Yates	Wrexham University
Yana Williams	Coleg Cambria
Aled Jones-Griffith	Grŵp Llandrillo Menai
David Roberts	Chair of the Regional Skills Partnership
Ifor Glyn Lloyd	Eryri National Park
Dave Penrith	Non-executive Adviser

Constituent Council Chief Executives

Dylan Williams	Isle of Anglesey County Council
Dafydd Gibbard	Cyngor Gwynedd
Rhun ap Gareth	Conwy County Borough Council
Helen White	Denbighshire County Council
Neal Cockerton	Flintshire County Council
Alwyn Jones	Wrexham County Borough Council

Officers in Attendance

Alwen Williams	CJC Chief Executive
Mark Watkins	Monitoring Officer
Helen Edwards	Deputy Monitoring Officer
Dewi Morgan	Chief Finance Officer
Hedd Vaughan-Evans	Portfolio Director
Nia Medi Williams	Senior Operations Officer

A G E N D A

1. ELECT CHAIR

To elect a Chair for 2026-27.

2. ELECT VICE-CHAIR

To elect a Vice-chair for 2026-27.

3. APOLOGIES

To receive any apologies for absence.

4. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

To receive anyd declaration of personal interest.

5. URGENT BUSINESS

To note any items that are a matter of urgency in the view of the Chair for consideration.

6. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

5 - 7

The Chair shall propose that the minutes of the meeting held on 12 June 2026 be signed as a true record.

7. FREEPORT GATEWAY PROJECT - REQUEST TO EXTEND VALIDITY PERIOD

8 - 10

David Mathews (Land and Property Programme Manager) to present the report.

8. NORTH WALES SKILLS AND EMPLOYMENT PLAN 2026-2028

11 - 46

David Roberts (Chair of the North Wales Regional Skills Partnership) and Catherine Morris-Roberts (Regional Skills Manager) to present the report.

9. LOCAL GROWTH FUND IN NORTH WALES - ADVANCE PLANNING FOR GREATER REGIONAL COLLABORATION FROM 2027/28

47 - 52

Alwen Williams (Chief Executive) to present the report.

10. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

The Chair shall propose that the press and public be excluded from the meeting during the discussions on the following items due to the likely disclosure of exempt information defined in Paragraph 14 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972: Information relating to the financial

business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

While there is a public interest in transparency and accountability, this is outweighed at this stage by the need to protect commercially sensitive information given that disclosure would likely prejudice ongoing negotiations and the authority's ability to secure best value and protect the proper use of public funds.

11. HOLYHEAD HYDROGEN HUB OUTLINE BUSINESS CASE

Meghan Davies (Energy & Net Zero Programme Manager) and Hedd Vaughan-Evans (Portfolio Director) to present the report.

12. RESPONSIBLE ADVENTURE ZIP WORLD PROJECT SLATE EXPLORER (CARTIAU GWYLLT) BUSINESS JUSTIFICATION CASE

Elliw Hughes (Growth Deal Programme Manager) to present the report.

13. ACADEMI CROESO (PREVIOUSLY KNOWN AS TOURISM TALENT NETWORK) BUSINESS JUSTIFICATION CASE FOR DYLAN'S RESTAURANT LTD INCLUSION AS REPLACEMENT SPOKE PARTNER

Elliw Hughes (Growth Deal Programme Manager) to present the report.

14. STRATEGY FOR REMAINING UNALLOCATED GROWTH DEAL FUNDING

Hedd Vaughan-Evans (Portfolio Director) to present the report.

15. FLINTSHIRE AND WREXHAM INVESTMENT ZONE - YEAR 2 ANNUAL DELIVERY PLAN AND WLA PROJECT

Alwen Williams (Chief Executive) and Iain Taylor (AMION Consulting) to present the report.

NORTH WALES CJC ECONOMIC WELL-BEING SUB-COMMITTEE 12/06/2026

Present:

Councillors: Councillor Mark Pritchard (Wrexham County Borough Council) (Chair)
Councillor Jason McLellan (Denbighshire County Council) (Vice-chair).

Paul Johnson (Flintshire County Council), Nia Jeffreys (Cyngor Gwynedd), Julie Fallon (Conwy County Borough Council) and Gary Pritchard (Isle of Anglesey County Council).

Co-opted Members: Professor Paul Spencer (Bangor University), David Roberts (Chair of the Regional Skills Partnership), Ifor Glyn Lloyd (Eryri National Park) and Nick Bennett (Non-executive Adviser).

Chief Officers of Constituent Councils: Dylan Williams (Isle of Anglesey County Council), Dafydd Gibbard (Cyngor Gwynedd), Rhun ap Iarthur (Conwy County Borough Council), David Fitzsimon (Flintshire County Council), Helen White (Denbighshire County Council) and Alwyn Jones (Wrexham County Borough Council).

Other officers present: Alwen Williams (Chief Executive), Sian Pugh (Assistant Head of Finance), Mark Watkins (Monitoring Officer), Helen Edwards (Deputy Monitoring Officer), David Mathews (Land and Property Programme Manager), Eilw Alaw Hughes (Growth Deal Programme Manager), Nia Medi Williams (Resources and Operations Manager) and Rhodri Jones (Democracy Services Officer).

Observers: Dewi Williams and Bryn Richards (Welsh Government)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from:

- Councillor Dave Hughes (Flintshire County Council) with Councillor Paul Johnson deputising
- Professor Edmund Burke (Bangor University) with Professor Paul Spencer deputising
- Professor Joe Yates (Wrexham University)
- Yana Williams (Coleg Cambria)
- Aled Jones-Griffith (Grŵp Llandrillo Menai)
- Dave Penrith (Non-executive Adviser) with Nick Bennett deputising
- Neal Cockerton (Flintshire County Council) with David Fitzsimon deputising
- Dewi Morgan (Cyngor Gwynedd)
- Hedd Vaughan-Evans (Portfolio Director).

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

A declaration of personal interest was received from Professor Paul Spencer, Bangor University, for Item 6 as the institution was involved with the application. It was noted that it was a prejudicial interest and he withdrew from the meeting for the discussion.

3. URGENT ITEMS

None to note.

4. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Chair signed the minutes of the meetings held on 15 May 2026 as correct.

5. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

The Chair proposed to exclude the press and public from the meeting during the discussion on the following items due to the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 14, Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972: Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

While there is a public interest in transparency and accountability, this is currently outweighed by the need to protect commercially sensitive information given that disclosure would likely prejudice ongoing negotiations and the authority's ability to secure the best value and protect the appropriate use of public funds.

It was resolved to exclude the press and public.

6. ALBERT GUBAY BUSINESS SCHOOL, BANGOR UNIVERSITY, FULL BUSINESS CASE

The report was submitted by the Land and Property Programme Manager.

RESOLVED

- 1. To approve the Full Business Case for the Albert Gubay Business School.**
- 2. To approve an additional £143,000 from the Cost Inflation Reserve to deliver the project.**
- 3. To authorise the Portfolio Director, in consultation with the Chair, Vice-chair, Section 151 Officer and Monitoring Officer to agree and enter into a funding agreement with Bangor University for the delivery of the project, on condition that Bangor University satisfactorily addresses the outstanding issues, including the increase in procurement costs.**
- 4. It was confirmed that the Sub-committee's approval is valid for a period of six months and should the project not proceed to a signed funding agreement during this time, it will be required to return and re-present the business case to the Sub-committee for approval.**

REASONS FOR THE DECISION

To seek the Sub-committee's approval of the Full Business Case for the Albert Gubay Business School.

DISCUSSION

The Report was discussed.

The meeting started at 09:30 and concluded at 09:50.

Chair

ECONOMIC WELL-BEING SUB-COMMITTEE
17th of July 2026

TITLE: Freeport Gateway Project - Request to extend validity period.
AUTHOR: David Mathews, Land and Property Programme Manager

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1. The purpose of the report is to request a further extension in validity period set by the Economic Well-being Sub-Committee on the 15th May 2026 to complete the Grant Funding Agreement.

2. DECISION SOUGHT

- 2.1. That the Sub-Committee approves the request to extend the validity period to complete the Grant Funding Agreement by three months to the 1st of October, 2026.
- 2.2. To confirm that the Portfolio Director is authorised to take all necessary operational steps to proceed with and complete the Grant Funding Agreement within the extended validity period, subject to customary legal, financial, procurement and governance requirements.
- 2.3. That the approval from the Sub-Committee is valid until 1st October 2026 should the project not proceed to a completed Grant Funding Agreement by this date, it will be required to return and represent the business case to the Sub-Committee for approval.

3. REASONS FOR THE DECISION

- 3.1. To seek the Sub-Committee's approval to extend the review date for the Grant Funding Agreement by three months due to reasons set out in Section 4.

4. BACKGROUND AND RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

- 4.1 This project was approved by the Sub Committee in October 2025 under the BJC+ single stage business case. This project was approved on the condition that the Grant Funding Agreement were completed within 6 months Validity Period of the approval date, however this was not met and a time extension period granted by the Sub-Committee in May 2026. This extension was provided for two Isle of Anglesey County Council projects – Gogledd Mon and Freeport Gateway with the date set for completing both agreements as 1st July 2026.
- 4.2. This was an error on the part of the Portfolio Management Office and not in line with the agreed approach with Isle of Anglesey County Council to prioritise the Gogledd Mon Agreement which would then act as a precedent for the Freeport Gateway Agreement. The Gogledd Mon Agreement was completed in line with the set validity period and work is now progressing on the Freeport Gateway agreement. The extension requested in this report is to correct the initial error and to provide time for the agreement to be completed.

5. Key Risks

- 5.1. Ambition North Wales considers the following as key risks which will need to be carefully managed by the Projects Sponsor due to the extended time required to complete the Grant Funding Agreement.

Risk	Likelihood	Impact Description	Mitigation / Countermeasures
Time		The key impact is delayed project start.	Timely completion of all documentation to have access to Growth Deal Funding.
Costs		The increased delay of project start means an increase in costs.	Timely completion of all documentation to have access to Growth Deal Funding.

6. Conclusions

- 6.1. Ambition North Wales is recommending that the Sub-Committee approves the extension to the validity period for this project to allow the Funding Agreement to be completed. This extension includes the previous delegation to the Portfolio Director in consultation with the Chair, Vice Chair, Section 151 Officer and Monitoring Officer to agree and complete the Grant Funding Agreement.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. There are no financial implications arising from this decision.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. The decision provides the legal framework for the Grant Funding Agreement to be completed.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS *(available on request)*

- Freeport Gateway BJC and Appendices

STATUTORY OFFICERS RESPONSE:

i. Monitoring Officer:

"I have no objection to the decision sought, provided the extension is treated as an extension of the existing approval validity period only and does not amount to approval of any materially amended business case or project scope

If the Agreement is not completed by 1 October 2026, or if any material changes arise before completion, the matter should return to the Sub-Committee for further consideration and approval.

The risks identified in the report, particularly delay and cost escalation, should be actively managed and kept under review.”

ii. **Statutory Finance Officer:**

“I do not have objections with the principle of the decision sought, but as noted in 5.1 above, key risks associated with the request to extend the validity period will need to be carefully managed”.



ECONOMIC WELL-BEING SUB-COMMITTEE

17th July 2026

TITLE: North Wales Skills and Employment Plan 2026-2028

AUTHOR: David Roberts, Chair of North Wales Regional Skills Partnership
Catherine Morris-Roberts, Regional Skills Manager

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1. The Plan has been produced by the North Wales Regional Skills Partnership (RSP) following consultation with employers, providers and stakeholders across the region, supported by labour market intelligence and employer engagement activity.

2. DECISION SOUGHT

- 2.1. To endorse the North Wales Skills and Employment Plan and the priorities as set out in the plan.

3. REASON FOR THE DECISION

- 3.1. To report to the Economic Wellbeing Sub-Committee on the North Wales Skills and Employment Plan and seek endorsement of its priorities to support regional delivery.

4. BACKGROUND AND RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

4.1. Purpose and approach

- 4.1.1. The North Wales Regional Skills Partnership (RSP) continues to play a key role in supporting Welsh Government's ambition to address regional skills challenges and improve productivity, by identifying skills gaps and aligning provision with employer needs.
- 4.1.2. Welsh Government's requirement for 2026–27 was for the existing Skills and Employment Plan 2023–2025 to be updated to reflect changes in the regional economy and current and future skills needs. The Regional Skills Partnership Board, however, recognised the value of a longer-term strategic approach and requested that this be developed into a new three-year Skills and Employment Plan to provide a clear framework for regional priorities and delivery. The regional skills and employment plan can be used to inform recommendations for post-16 education and training provision, informed by data, labour market intelligence and employer engagement. For this three-year plan, it has been agreed with the RSP Board that the focus will continue to be on key policy areas such as Net Zero, digital skills and Welsh language skills.
- 4.1.3. The 2026–2028 Plan has been developed through extensive engagement with over 350 employers across priority sectors, alongside analysis of labour market data, policy context and intelligence gathered through surveys, employer networks and strategic stakeholder engagement.

- 4.1.4. The RSP team have worked with employers and regional stakeholders/providers over the last 9 months. In developing the plan, the RSP carried out a comprehensive review of economic and policy context, analysis of labour market intelligence along with primary intelligence, which was gathered through a North Wales Employer Skills Survey and direct conversations with employers and stakeholders.
- 4.1.5. The draft Skills and Employment Plan was presented to the RSP Board on 3rd June 2026, and members provided further feedback which has been incorporated into the version attached in Appendix 1. The updated Plan is scheduled to be considered for formal endorsement by the RSP Board at its meeting on 15th July 2026, prior to consideration by the Economic Well-being Sub-Committee.

4.2. Overview of the Plan

- 4.2.1. The North Wales Skills and Employment Plan 2026 - 2028 provides a comprehensive overview of the region's current and emerging skills landscape. It brings together insights from employers across sectors, highlighting their recruitment and skills needs, while also reflecting the barriers faced by individuals as they navigate training, progression, and employment opportunities. The Plan includes an overview of our economy, labour market and skills landscape as it currently stands, and identifies some of the key challenges that the region will need to tackle to have a sustainable skills system.
- 4.2.2. The region is experiencing both significant opportunity and challenge. While major investments such as the North Wales Growth Deal, Flintshire and Wrexham Investment Zone, Anglesey Freeport and clean energy projects are creating high-quality job opportunities, employers continue to report recruitment and retention challenges, skills shortages and workforce pressures.
- 4.2.3. The nature of the labour market continues to evolve rapidly, influenced by:
- The transition to a Net Zero economy and demand for green skills
 - Digital transformation and increasing adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI)
 - Demographic pressures, including an ageing workforce and declining working-age population
 - Ongoing economic inactivity and barriers to employment, with 15.1% of young people aged 16-24 not in employment, education or training, which are the highest figures in Wales (December 2025)
 - Rurality and access to opportunities across dispersed communities

These drivers (among others) are reshaping the skills required by employers and increasing the need for a responsive and adaptable skills system.

- 4.2.4. Employers continue to report skills gaps across multiple areas, including:
- Leadership and management
 - Digital and AI-related skills
 - Specialist technical and engineering skills
 - Welsh language skills
 - Core employability and work-readiness skills

At the same time, many employers face challenges in knowing how to access training support and navigating the skills system.

4.2.5. Key findings from the report also include:

- 53% of survey respondents noted that recruitment was the main challenge they are facing as a business and 68% said that they have difficulty recruiting for specific roles.
- 56% of employers in the region are facing skills challenges with skilled trades, professional and manager, directors and senior officials in demand.
- Future Skills Needs: Top five future skills needed by employers across all sectors were leadership and management, Welsh language, digital (AI/coding/web development), specialist engineering, and programme/project management skills.
- Most employers anticipate that they will need AI-related skills within the next three years, particularly the ability to use AI-enabled tools for data analysis, content creation, and customer service.
- While Apprenticeships are widely recognised (81%), awareness of other programmes such as Degree Apprenticeships, Jobs Growth Wales+, ReAct+ and the Flexible Skills Programme is notably lower.
- However, many employers experience barriers to investing in workforce development, including a lack of funding for training and difficulties releasing staff from day-to-day operations, which limits participation in training activity.

4.2.5. The Plan also reflects sector-specific challenges across key sectors including energy, construction, advanced manufacturing, health and social care, digital, tourism and hospitality, highlighting workforce demand and areas for development.

4.3. Priorities of the Plan

4.3.1. The Plan sets out a clear vision and three core priorities to address the challenges and opportunities identified. These build on previous plans and remain broadly consistent in structure, while reflecting the evolving context:

4.3.2. Priority 1: Enabling and Empowering Employers

- Supporting employers to develop their workforce
- Supporting employers to grow and access diverse talent and work ready employees
- Improve awareness and perceptions of employment opportunities in key and growth sectors in North Wales

Deliverables

- Raise awareness of, and signpost to support available to develop and grow the workforce, with a particular focus on supporting SMEs
- Improve employers' awareness, understanding and uptake of apprenticeships and other training
- Support employers to adopt inclusive and adaptable workplace practices that recognise the needs of young people, enabling a shared approach to their successful transition into and retention in employment.
- Strengthen employer engagement and informed decision making by using the North Wales Skills Portal to share insights, showcase good practice, and improve access to labour market intelligence and training opportunities

- Enable collaboration between employers and providers to co-create courses that truly reflect the needs of employers now and in the future
- Increase employer involvement in developing young people's skills through expanded employer-led engagement, training input, and industry-aligned opportunities
- Promote inclusive hiring and retention by raising employer awareness of the benefits and available support for bringing new and returning workers into the workforce
- Promote upskilling, reskilling and lifelong learning programmes to employers to ensure their workforce adapts to labour market changes

4.3.3. Priority 2: Enabling and Empowering Individuals

- Support the promotion of clear training pathways, to enable sustainable progression and employment
- Raise awareness and signpost to the different support available to individuals at key life stages
- Raise awareness and plan for the current and future skills needs in the region

Deliverables

- Improve understanding of the different pathways available into training or careers, including lifelong learning, upskilling and reskilling in priority sectors.
- Promote and signpost to different entry points into careers, including career changes at different life stages and entrepreneurship opportunities.
- Promote and signposting to apprenticeship opportunities, including progression to higher-level and degree apprenticeships.
- Support key influencers, including parents, teachers and careers advisors, to understand local opportunities and better inform individuals.
- Help education providers connect more effectively with employers and industry partners, including public and third sector.
- Expand access to work experience and placements by embedding employer engagement into learning.
- Support programmes that reduce economic inactivity, including young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) and those who are at risk of becoming NEET.
- Support programmes to widen access to employment and skills for disabled people, people with long term health conditions and underrepresented groups.
- Encourage graduates to return to or remain in the region after completing their degree by showcasing the high-level opportunities available to them.
- Enable people aged 50+ to change career, return to work, or remain in work by promoting upskilling, reskilling and the transfer of existing skills.
- Leverage the RSP's position within the CJC to ensure the delivery of the Regional Transport Plan considers the impact of skills, training, work opportunities and digital connectivity.

4.3.4. Priority 3: How support is provided and making the connections

- Raise awareness of regional drivers for both employers and individuals, ensuring accessible information is available on how to maximise opportunities
- Support collaboration between providers, key stakeholders and individuals
- Promote streamlining of the skills landscape, encouraging simplicity, and minimising duplication by identifying and filling gaps

Deliverables

- Build a connected regional skills community that strengthens employer engagement, enables peer-to-peer support, and recognises key advocates who champion workforce development
- Continue to improve visibility of regional skills support by bringing together information, networks, and opportunities in one accessible place through the North Wales Skills Portal, supporting the streamlining of information, and reducing duplication
- Use intelligence to shape, inform and influence evidence-based policy, investment decisions and funding priorities across Medr, Welsh Government and UK Government, driven by emerging skills needs and labour market evidence
- Ensure policy changes and their effects are communicated to employers and other affected groups
- Ensure training provision and facilities are aligned to current and future economic need, including large-scale developments, through proactive forward planning and anticipation of emerging opportunities.
- Raise awareness of opportunities arising from large-scale economic developments and support individuals, employers and supply chains to access and benefit from them.
- Make connections, collaborate and share best practice with cross-border authorities and partnerships
- Support the delivery of Welsh Government's Net Zero Skills Action Plan
- Share and promote Labour Market Intelligence on key and growth sectors of North Wales with individuals and stakeholders, making use of the North Wales Skills Portal
- Work collaboratively to prepare and respond to new technological developments such as Artificial Intelligence and transitions to Net Zero
- Raise awareness to encourage uptake of Welsh language training opportunities across sectors to reduce the Welsh language skills gaps in the workplace

4.4. Next steps

- 4.4.1. The next stage will be delivery of the priorities set out in the Plan. The Plan provides a shared delivery framework for the region, setting out the agreed priorities, actions, deliverables and measures for the next three years. Responsibility for delivery will be shared across RSP Board members and partner organisations, with individual organisations leading on relevant actions within their remit. The RSP Officers will support, coordinate and monitor delivery, reporting progress against the agreed measures to the RSP Board on a regular basis.
- 4.4.2. An official launch event will take place on a provisional date of the 16th of September 2026 in Venue Cymru.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1. No request from RSP for EWSC to finance their main function, although subsequent projects may have a resource implication.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. No direct impact assessments are required for the endorsement decision itself; relevant impacts should be considered as specific delivery proposals are developed

7. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

- 7.1. None identified.

APPENDICES:

Appendix 1

North Wales Skills and Employment Plan 2026-28

STATUTORY OFFICERS RESPONSE:

i. Monitoring Officer:

"I have no objection to the decision sought, noting that the recommendation is to endorse the Plan and its priorities, rather than to approve any specific project, funding commitment or binding delivery obligation.

Any subsequent proposals arising from the Plan which require CJC funding, procurement activity, formal partnership arrangements or the exercise of statutory functions should be brought forward through the appropriate governance route with separate legal, financial and impact assessment advice.

The delivery of the Plan should continue to have regard to the CJC's public law duties, including equality, Welsh language and well-being considerations, where relevant."

ii. Statutory Finance Officer:

"No comments from the perspective of financial propriety."

North Wales Skills and Employment Plan 2026-2028

Welcome

I am pleased to introduce our Skills and Employment Plan for the next three years, setting out our shared priorities for supporting employers, developing skills and strengthening our regional economy.

This is an exciting time for North Wales. With significant investment, growth opportunities and a strong pipeline of projects across a range of sectors, there is great potential to create high-quality jobs and drive sustainable economic growth.

At the same time, the world of work is changing rapidly. Skills shortages, demographic change, advances in technology, the growing impact of artificial intelligence (AI) and the transition to a greener economy are all reshaping the labour market. These opportunities and challenges highlight the need for a skills system that is responsive to both current and future workforce needs.

Reflecting this, our first priority is to support employers. By working closely with businesses, education and training providers, local authorities and other partners, we will help ensure that employers can access the skills and talent they need to innovate, grow and succeed.

At the same time, we remain committed to helping people develop the skills, confidence and opportunities needed to access education, training and employment, and to progress throughout their learning and career journeys. By supporting those facing barriers and ensuring that no one is left behind, we can create a stronger economy and a more resilient workforce for the future.

I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to the development of this plan and look forward to working together to deliver its ambitions.

David Roberts
Chair of the North Wales Regional Skills Partnership

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1. Overview of the skills plan

The North Wales Skills and Employment Plan 2026 - 2028 provides a comprehensive overview of the region's current and emerging skills landscape. It brings together insights from employers across sectors, highlighting their recruitment and skills needs, while also reflecting the barriers faced by individuals as they navigate training, progression, and employment opportunities.

Over recent years, the North Wales Regional Skills Partnership (RSP) has worked hard to build a strong and supportive foundation for both businesses and individuals, strengthening employer engagement, improving awareness of skills provision, and creating meaningful connections between employers and individuals. While significant progress has been made, the RSP recognises that continued coordination and collaboration across the region is essential.

This plan sets out the priorities and high-level actions the RSP believes the region should take forward to keep the skills system responsive, aligned and ready for the future. It builds on the progress already made, offering a practical direction to continue to strengthen what's working, address the gaps, and ensure that people and employers across North Wales can access the support and opportunities they need to thrive.

Purpose and approach

The three-year skills and employment plan has been developed in collaboration with a diverse range of businesses, employers and stakeholders across North Wales. To inform the development of the plan, the RSP also undertook a comprehensive review of relevant labour market intelligence, evidence and data sources. The plan has been shaped by the wider strategic, policy, economic and labour market context, alongside consideration of the current regional skills landscape.

The plan sets out the evolving skills requirements of employers across the region's priority sectors and highlights the challenges faced by employers, individuals and training providers. It also identifies regional actions to strengthen and build upon existing coordination of skills and employment activity across North Wales. Responding to these opportunities and challenges will require continued partnership working and collaboration between employers, providers and regional stakeholders.

Your support

The successful delivery of this plan and its priorities depend on the commitment and support of all partners and stakeholders. To enable North Wales to prosper, employers, individuals, and partners across the region are encouraged to work together through collaboration and shared commitment, helping to create a dynamic skills system that empowers individuals and employers while driving opportunity across the region.

Our engagement with employers

While developing the Skills and Employment Plan, the RSP engaged with more than 350 employers from identified priority sectors across North Wales. The RSP engaged with employers through an employer skills survey, consulted with employers through its employer sub-groups, as well as employer workshops. During these engagements, the RSP also spoke directly to some of the large-scale capital investment projects, including the North Wales Growth Deal, the Flintshire and Wrexham Investment Zone, the Freeport and Wylfa Small Modular Reactor (SMR) to understand their pipeline projects and any anticipated skills needs, gaps or challenges. Each engagement helped to better understand how things have changed for employers since 2023 and gave insights to their current skills gaps and challenges. Desk-based research was also used to understand current and predicted labour market intelligence which further supports the plan.

2. Vision and outline of the plan

The vision

- The vision is for North Wales to be a region where people's skills and talents drive a thriving economy and strong communities. The RSP wants to help create a skilled workforce that enables local employers to grow and succeed, while attracting new businesses that recognise

the value of the region's potential.

North Wales Skills Blueprint

- Enabling and empowering employers
 - Supporting employers to develop their workforce
 - Supporting employers to grow and access diverse talent and work ready employees
 - Improve awareness and perceptions of employment opportunities in key and growth sectors in North Wales
- Enabling and empowering individuals
 - Support the promotion of clear training pathways, to enable sustainable progression and employment
 - Raise awareness and signpost to the different support available to individuals at key life stages
 - Raise awareness and plan for the current and future skills needs in the region
- How support is provided and making the connections
 - Raise awareness of regional drivers for both employers and individuals, ensuring accessible information is available on how to maximise opportunities
 - Support collaboration between providers, key stakeholders and individuals
 - Promote streamlining of the skills landscape, encouraging simplicity, and minimising duplication by identifying and filling gaps

3. Governance

The Regional Skills Partnership's Role and Remit

- The North Wales RSP brings employers, training providers, and local stakeholders together to understand and respond to the region's skills needs. The RSP's have been doing this for over 10 years with real impact, creating a workforce that's prepared for growth across priority sectors.

The North Wales RSP is one of four partnerships across Wales. The team operates within the structure of the North Wales Corporate Joint Committee (Ambition North Wales), placing the partnership in a strong position to deliver outcomes that reflect the needs of the regional economy. This structure enables collaborative working across sectors and local authorities, ensuring that skills development is integrated into major investment programmes, including the North Wales Growth Deal, the Flintshire and Wrexham Investment Zone, and the Anglesey Freeport.

Extensive employer networks give the RSP access to real-time insight, enabling them to promote training that reflects genuine business needs. Working closely with employers as trusted partners, the RSP helps shape post-16 provision using robust data and labour market intelligence. Supported by strong regional networks, the partnership also advises the Welsh

Government, regional investment programmes, local decision-makers, and training providers to help ensure that provision reflects current and future workforce demand.

RSP Board Membership

The work of the RSP is made possible by its members. These members represent networks of partners, rather than solely their own organisation or institution. They act as conduits to wider networks of stakeholders and providers to the skills and employment ecosystem, of North Wales. Together, they bring their expertise and provide a crucial link between local and national policy development.

- Graphic to stay the same, but to be updated.
 - FE
 - HE
 - Welsh Government
 - FSB
 - West Cheshire & North Wales Chamber of Commerce
 - North Wales Business Council
 - Employer – Energy
 - Employer – Manufacturing
 - Employer – Construction
 - Employer – Creative and Digital
 - Employer – Health and Social Care
 - Employer – Tourism and Hospitality
 - Employer – Food and Drink
 - Employer – Financial and Professional Services
 - Local authorities
 - Careers Wales
 - Training providers
 - Employability providers
 - Wales TUC
 - Local Education Authorities
 - DWP

4. Policy landscape and regional drivers

Factors influencing the North Wales labour market

- Digital Technologies

Digital technologies have dramatically reshaped how we work, forcing businesses to redesign their processes, roles and tasks. Demand for digital skills has grown substantially over the past five years and is expected to continue rising, particularly as Artificial Intelligence (AI) becomes increasingly embedded in the workplace. Engagement with AI varies by employer, with some using AI daily, others piloting its use, and many having not yet started using it yet, suggesting a wider AI-driven transformation is on the horizon. Alongside AI, the need for advanced digital skills such as coding, cyber security, and data science continues to increase, making ongoing investment in training and upskilling essential.
- Economic Wellbeing

Following a period of economic uncertainty, there is continued focus on improving the quality, security and accessibility of employment across North Wales. Increasing wages, promoting fair work, and raising awareness of the sustainable employment opportunities in the region will be critical to improving economic wellbeing. Addressing these challenges will help tackle persistent labour shortages across priority sectors while also enabling individuals to progress in their careers to higher-skilled and better paid roles. By focusing on inclusion, opportunities can be more accessible to those facing barriers to employment, helping to reduce inequality and in-work poverty. This is essential to retain local talent, attracting new entrants to the workforce, and supporting inclusive economic growth that benefits all communities.

- **Growing Inequality**
Inequality continues to affect the North Wales labour market, with many individuals facing barriers linked to health, confidence, access to transport, and long-term unemployment. This is contributing to rising levels of economic inactivity in parts of the region. Targeted support is increasingly important in addressing these challenges. In Denbighshire, the Trailblazer for Economically Inactive Residents helps individuals overcome barriers and re-engage with skills provision. Programmes such as Connect to Work and wider Welsh Government employability support provide flexible, person centred pathways into training and employment. There is also a growing need for employers to understand and adopt inclusive recruitment practices helping to widen access to job opportunities, address skills shortages, and to ensure that those furthest from the labour market are not left behind.
- **Rurality**
Rurality is a defining characteristic of the North Wales labour market, with dispersed communities and a high proportion of rural and coastal areas creating unique challenges for access to employment, education, and skills provision. Transport connectivity and affordability can act as significant barriers to participation in training and work, particularly for those in more remote communities. In addition, variations in digital infrastructure and broadband access can further limit access to online learning, remote working opportunities, and digital job markets. Addressing rurality-related barriers through improved connectivity, flexible delivery models, and support for transport is therefore essential to supporting inclusive growth and ensuring equal access to opportunity across all parts of the region.
- **Net Zero**
The transition to a net zero economy is reshaping skills needs across North Wales. Major clean energy developments, including the Wylfa Small Modular Reactor (SMR), expanding offshore wind projects along the north coast, and wider investment in renewables such as solar, hydrogen, and tidal are creating demand for specialist technical and engineering skills. As businesses adjust to new carbon-reduction requirements, there is growing need for training in areas such as renewable energy installation, retrofitting, environmental management, and low carbon construction. With large-scale projects expected to progress over the coming years, employers are likely to increase investment in upskilling to ensure their workforce is prepared for emerging green technologies and the wider net zero transition, with focus needed on raising awareness of green skills and green job pathways to ensure people across the region understand the opportunities emerging from the transition.
- **Socio-cultural drivers**

North Wales faces ongoing demographic pressures, including an ageing population and a declining working-age cohort. With fewer young people entering the labour market, the pipeline through education, apprenticeships, and early career pathways is shrinking. Combined with the loss of experienced workers through retirement and given that North Wales is home to the highest population of over 65s in Wales, there is a particular challenge for sectors reliant on technical and specialist knowledge, where effective succession planning and knowledge transfer are critical.

- **Population mobility and migration**
Population mobility and migration continue to influence the North Wales labour market, with many individuals, particularly young people, leaving the region in search of what they perceive to be better opportunities elsewhere, despite wanting to study locally. Although some individuals return later in life, retaining people in the early stages of their careers remains a challenge despite a strong desire among many to stay due to the love for their home. While this is a key challenge with undergraduates and graduates, it is not limited to this cohort of individuals as the region requires a broad range of skills across different levels and occupations. Strengthening the visibility of local opportunities and career pathways will be key to changing perceptions, improving retention, encouraging return migration and fully utilising the region's workforce potential.

Regional and National drivers

Skills, Employability and System Reform

- **Local Growth Fund**
 - The Local Growth Fund (LGF), which replaced the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) from April 2026, will play an important role in delivering the priorities set out within this Skills Plan. Investment through the Fund will support initiatives that increase participation in learning and employment, reduce barriers to progression, strengthen pathways into priority sectors, and help ensure that employers have access to the skills and talent needed to drive sustainable economic growth across North Wales. The Fund will complement existing provision and help address gaps where additional intervention is required to achieve regional outcomes. The RSP will work closely with local authorities, Ambition North Wales and other partners to help inform skills and employability priorities within the Local Growth Fund programme, ensuring investment is aligned with identified labour market needs and contributes to the delivery of regional skills and economic objectives.
- **Medr**
 - Medr, the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research in Wales, is the national body responsible for the planning, funding and regulation of tertiary education and research across Wales. The North Wales Regional Skills Partnership works closely with Medr through an agreed Principles of Partnership framework, which sets out shared ways of working to support regional skills planning, labour market intelligence, curriculum responsiveness and workforce development. This collaborative approach helps ensure that post-16 education and training provision is aligned to regional skills priorities, employer demand and emerging economic opportunities across North Wales. From August 2027, a new apprenticeships programme will be introduced in Wales, designed as a more flexible programme that

meets the needs and priorities of the economy, the employer, and the learner. This will strengthen the apprenticeship system by ensuring it is more responsive to economic and labour market need, supporting clearer progression routes and improving alignment between skills provision and workforce demand.

- Employability: Single operating model
 - The Welsh Government's new Employability Support Programme is a key regional driver reshaping skills and employability across North Wales, introducing a single operating model to replace a system of multiple overlapping programmes. By bringing provision together into a more coordinated, person-centred approach aligned to national priorities, it aims to streamline access to support, strengthen collaboration across regional delivery and create clearer pathways into sustainable employment, particularly for those furthest from the labour market.

Economic and Capital Investment Drivers

- North Wales Growth Deal
 - The Growth Deal aims to build a more vibrant, sustainable and resilient economy in North Wales, generating a total investment of over £1 billion for the region by 2036. This Investment will create over 4,000 new jobs and will increase GVA by £2.4 billion. There are more than 25 projects, sitting within 5 programme areas which are Agri-food and Tourism, Digital Connectivity, Innovation in High Value Manufacturing, Land and Property and Low Carbon Energy. The RSP works closely with Growth Deal projects to develop an understanding of their skills needs or challenges. Where necessary they make connections with local providers to ensure that there is a sufficient pipeline of skills in the region, to reach their jobs and training targets. You can find out more about the North Wales Growth Deal on the [Ambition North Wales website](#).
- Investment Zone
 - The Flintshire and Wrexham Investment Zone is a collaborative project expected to attract £1 billion of private sector investment and create 6,000 new jobs over a 10-year programme (2025 – 2035). The focus of the Investment Zone is on advanced manufacturing, digital technologies and logistics and distribution. This initiative aims to strengthen the region's manufacturing sector and create a competitive business environment. Included in the Investment Zone is a Skills Programme which focuses on *pre-16*, *16 – 18*, *enhanced pathways* and *upskilling and reskilling*. The RSP plays a central role in this project and is responsible for the design and monitoring of delivery for the Skills Programme. To find out more about the Skills Programme, the skills strategy can be read [here](#).
- Freeport
 - Anglesey has been designated as a Freeport, a special economic zone offering tax incentives and customs benefits to attract investment. The Anglesey Freeport is set to create between approximately 3,500 and 13,000 jobs across Anglesey and the wider North Wales region by 2030, spanning roles in energy, manufacturing, logistics, and high-value sectors. Anglesey Freeport is committed to delivering upon the Welsh and UK Government's shared objectives around the broader freeport

programme, including in ensuring the Freeport operates as a hub for global trade, innovation and investment, supporting local talent and embracing new employment opportunities.

- **AI Growth Zone**
 - The AI Growth Zone will build on the Anglesey Freeport's objectives to deliver a hub for global trade, innovation and investment. Together, these developments will strengthen the regional economy, generate high quality jobs, and help position Wales and the UK at the forefront of global technological advancement.
- **Clean energy**
 - The transition to a low-carbon economy is a major driver of growth across North Wales, supported by major investment in nuclear, offshore wind, hydrogen, and emerging marine energy technologies. Key regional developments including HyNet, Menter Môn's Morlais tidal energy project, RWE's Gwynt y Môr offshore wind farm, other onshore and offshore wind developments, and a growing pipeline of hydrogen and green energy projects linked to the North Wales Growth Deal's Low Carbon Energy programme. This investment is generating substantial opportunities for high-value employment, supply chain expansion and innovation, particularly in engineering, construction, electrical, digital and environmental skills. The RSP is working collaboratively with employers, developers and education providers across the energy sector to identify emerging skills needs and support the development of responsive training pathways aligned to the region's low-carbon economy growth.
- **Wylfa SMR**
 - Wylfa Small Modular Reactor (SMR) on Anglesey represents a major low-carbon energy investment in North Wales, supporting the region's Net Zero ambitions and local economic growth. This investment will include development and construction of the Rolls-Royce SMR to provide low-carbon, reliable electricity in partnership with a leading developer of SMR technology, creating a number of high-skilled jobs in nuclear engineering, construction, project management, and technical operations. It will also allow for the continuation of decommissioning and site remediation at Wylfa and Trawsfynydd. The RSP is working closely with Great British Energy – Nuclear (GBE-N) and Rolls-Royce SMR alongside industry and education partners to support workforce planning, identify future skills needs, and strengthen regional training pathways for the nuclear sector.
- **HyNet**
 - HyNet North-West is a major low-carbon energy programme linking North Wales with North-West England, supporting Net Zero and bringing new investment and industry into North Wales. The project will create and support thousands of jobs, including around 2,800 skilled roles, with opportunities for people in North Wales across construction, engineering and long-term clean energy careers. It will also increase demand for local skills and help safeguard existing employment. HyNet strengthens North Wales' role in a growing low-carbon economy, creating new cross-border opportunities, shared supply chains, and clearer pathways into well-paid, future-focused jobs.

- Retrofit of Homes and Decarbonisation of Housing Stock
 - Improving the energy efficiency of homes across North Wales is a key part of the Net Zero transition. Retrofit activity, including improving insulation, installation of heat pumps and low-carbon heating systems, is being delivered through the Optimised Retrofit Programme (ORP) and local authority schemes. As a result, there is a growing demand for construction, electrical, plumbing and energy efficiency skills. The RSP is working with housing associations, construction employers and providers to support the development of retrofit skills and respond to increasing workforce demand in the low-carbon housing sector.

Map

- All of the regional drivers listed above
- Also include hydro, Trawsfynydd, HE and FE, ports

5. Our region: North Wales Labour Market Overview

- Population
 - 687,000 (2021 census)
 - Age of population: 33% of the population is over 55 years old, which is the highest percentage of over 55's across the nation.
 - Age of population: 16.5% of the population is under 16 years old
 - Trends are continuing to show an ageing population which could lead to an increase in the economically inactive through retirement, age-related ill health, and caring responsibilities.
 - Population growth: +10,889 in growth over than last 5 years and is projected to grow by a further +1,319 by 2030.
- GVA
 - North Wales' GVA value was £18.96 billion in 2023
- Business base, enterprise and innovation
 - 98% of organisations in North Wales are SMEs, with 84% classed as micro businesses, with fewer than 10 employees. However, there are barriers that prevent these businesses from growing beyond 50 employees.
- Economy
 - Unemployed and economic inactivity:
 - North Wales continues to have lower unemployment rates than the rest of Wales and the UK at 3.7% (2025), however this is a 0.3% increase over the year. The economic inactivity rate for North Wales is 22.3%. Despite a 0.9% increase in the last 12 months, the figure remains consistently lower than the other regions in Wales. These figures indicate a general decline in the number of people in employment.
 - Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) 2025
 - WIMD 2025 shows that deprivation in North Wales remains concentrated in a number of urban, coastal and north-east communities, particularly Rhyl and parts of Wrexham. These communities continue to rank among the most deprived in Wales and experience long-standing challenges relating to income, employment, health and education. While deprivation is less widespread across Gwynedd, Anglesey, Conwy and Flintshire, some rural and

semi-rural areas are still likely to face challenges linked to access to services, transport connectivity and economic opportunities, which can affect labour market participation and wider socio-economic outcomes.

- Regional average earnings
 - £34k average wage per job (2025).
 - Despite seeing an increase in salaries since 2021, regional average wages per job are £1.8k below the national average of £35.8k per role in Wales.
 - There are inconsistencies across the region and sectors in North Wales, with the highest average salaries in Flintshire, linked to manufacturing, and the lowest average salaries in Gwynedd and Denbighshire, linked to their rurality.
- Travel to work area
 - Transport for Wales estimates that:
 - 102,540 people travel from across North Wales to England for work
 - 110,435 people travel from England into North Wales for work
- Welsh speakers
 - 217,340 Welsh speakers in the region (2021) which is down by 5% since 2011.
 - The highest percentages of Welsh speakers can be found in Gwynedd and the Isle of Anglesey.
- Qualifications
 - Working age population with No / High qualifications:
 - An estimated **8.5%** of people in the region have no qualifications, which is 0.6% higher than the Wales average (2024). **46.9%** of the working age population in the region have a level 4+ qualification, which is marginally higher than the Wales average (46.4%). On a local level, the qualification figures vary.

6. Our employers' skills demand: enabling and empowering employers

Current situation

- North Wales is benefiting from significant economic investment, including the Growth Deal, Freeport, Investment Zones, AI Growth Zone, and clean energy developments, strengthening its position as a growing regional economy.
- Investment across sectors such as advanced manufacturing, digital, AI, low-carbon energy, and construction is increasing demand for higher-level, technical, and green skills.
- The scale and spread of investment across sectors and locations requires a joined-up approach to ensure that benefits are felt by individuals and employers across the entire region and not confined to where investment is delivered.
- Employers continue to face recruitment and retention challenges, alongside skills shortages, an ageing workforce, rising economic inactivity, and cost pressures affecting both businesses and individuals.
- Technological change is reshaping the labour market and highlights the need for an inclusive and adaptable skills system that supports workforce development and enables access to emerging opportunities.

What do we need?

- Supporting employers to develop their workforce
- Supporting employers to grow and access diverse talent and work ready employees

- Improve awareness and perceptions of employment opportunities in key and growth sectors in North Wales

How are we going to do it?

- Raise awareness of, and signpost to support available to develop and grow the workforce, with a particular focus on supporting SMEs
- Improve employers' awareness, understanding and uptake of apprenticeships and other training
- Support employers to adopt inclusive and adaptable workplace practices that recognise the needs of young people, enabling a shared approach to their successful transition into and retention in employment.
- Strengthen employer engagement and informed decision making by using the North Wales Skills Portal to share insights, showcase good practice, and improve access to labour market intelligence and training opportunities
- Enable collaboration between employers and providers to co-create courses that truly reflect the needs of employers now and in the future
- Increase employer involvement in developing young people's skills through expanded employer-led engagement, training input, and industry-aligned opportunities
- Promote inclusive hiring and retention by raising employer awareness of the benefits and available support for bringing new and returning workers into the workforce
- Promote upskilling, reskilling and lifelong learning programmes to employers to ensure their workforce adapts to labour market changes

What Success Looks Like

• Increase in the number of employers engaged in workforce development, training, upskilling and reskilling opportunities
• Increase in the number of employers contributing to skills intelligence, and co-creation of training courses
• Increase in the number of employers engaged in opportunities delivered for learners and young people, including work experience, industry engagement and careers activity
• Increase in the number of employers engaging with apprenticeships
• Increase in the number of employers engaged with inclusive recruitment, retention and workforce participation initiatives
• Increase in the number of engagements with the North Wales Skills Portal to access labour market intelligence, skills information and workforce development resources

Employer skills challenges at a glance

Recruitment and Shortage of Talent to Fill Particular Roles

- North Wales continues to experience recruitment challenges across multiple priority sectors, including construction, advanced manufacturing, health and social care, and tourism and hospitality, reflecting a tight labour market and an ageing workforce.
- 53% of survey respondents noted that recruitment was the main challenge they are facing as a business and 68% said that they have difficulty recruiting for specific roles.

- Labour shortages are intensified by rapid technological change, and the transition to a low-carbon economy.
- Rising costs, including business taxes and National Insurance contributions limit employers' ability to offer competitive pay, recruit effectively, and invest in workforce training.
- There is a growing need to upskill and reskill existing staff, to ensure employees can meet evolving sectoral requirements, adopt new technologies, and support productivity.

Skills demands

- 56% of employers in the region are facing skills challenges with skilled trades, professionals and managers, directors and senior officials in demand.
- Staff retention is an issue for employers in certain sectors such as health and social care, advanced manufacturing and hospitality and tourism.
- Future Skills Needs: Top five future skills needed by employers across all sectors were leadership and management, Welsh language, digital (AI/coding/web development), specialist engineering, and programme/project management skills.
- Digital skills at all levels are a common need for most, however, some find it difficult to recruit and retain staff with the appropriate level of digital expertise.
- Most employers anticipate that they will need AI-related skills within the next three years, particularly the ability to use AI-enabled tools for data analysis, content creation, and customer service. Many employers also report that they are already piloting or exploring the use of AI technologies.
- Many employers across a range of sectors struggle to recruit people with the appropriate level of Welsh language skills, which is most prominent for employers in the North-East of the region.

Occupational demands

- According to Working Futures forecasts, North Wales will need the following key roles annually, up to 2027:
 - 1,100 Senior managers, directors, and proprietors (experienced individuals)
 - 830 Health professionals (NQF 3+)
 - 710 Teaching professionals (NQF 5+)
 - 930 Business, media, public sector professionals / associate professionals (NQF 4+)
 - 910 Administrative occupations (NQF 2+)
 - 1,200 Caring personal service occupations (NQF 2+)
 - 1,200 Elementary administration occupations (NQF 1+)

Transferrable and work ready skills

- 87% of employers reported that new entrants to the workforce are either not “work-ready” or that their work-readiness varies, with the most common issues identified as a lack of soft skills, poor attitudes or low levels of motivation.
- Employers have reported gaps in core employability skills, including communication, teamwork, time management, and problem-solving.

- Reliability, professionalism, and workplace behaviours such as punctuality, accountability, and the ability to follow instructions are often cited as areas where new entrants require further development.
- Many employers highlight the need for greater resilience, adaptability, and willingness to learn, particularly as workplaces adapt to technological change and new ways of working.
- Customer service and interpersonal skills are particularly important in sectors such as tourism and hospitality, health and social care, and public sector.
- Work experience, placements, and industry engagement are seen as important in helping young people and new entrants develop practical workplace awareness and expectations.

Upskilling and reskilling

- Many employers are focusing on developing the skills of their existing workforce, particularly as recruitment challenges persist and competition for skilled workers increases. Upskilling and reskilling employees is increasingly viewed as a key approach to addressing internal skills gaps and reducing reliance on external recruitment.
- Leadership and management development is one of the most significant workforce priorities for employers. Survey responses indicate that 58% of employers anticipate leadership and management skills gaps within their workforce, highlighting the importance of developing supervisory and managerial capability to support business growth and staff retention.
- Employers also report growing demand for digital and technical upskilling, particularly in areas such as AI-enabled tools, data analysis, and specialist technical skills as businesses adopt new technologies and modernise working practices.
- However, many employers experience barriers to investing in workforce development, including a lack of funding for training and difficulties releasing staff from day-to-day operations, which limits participation in training activity.
- Increasing access to flexible training provision, short courses, and clearer information on available funded programmes could support greater employer engagement in workforce development and help businesses build stronger leadership capability alongside wider skills development.

Awareness and Engagement with Skills Programmes

- Awareness of funded skills and training programmes among employers varies. While Apprenticeships are widely recognised (81%), awareness of other programmes such as Degree Apprenticeships, Jobs Growth Wales+, ReAct+ and the Flexible Skills Programme is notably lower.
- Employers report mixed experiences when trying to access information on training and funding opportunities. Only around three in ten employers find it easy to locate this information, while others report that the process can be difficult or that they do not actively search for available support.
- Navigating the skills and funding landscape remains a challenge for many businesses. Employers frequently report uncertainty about which programmes are suitable, difficulties finding clear information, and complex processes or eligibility requirements.

- Limited time and capacity within businesses also restrict engagement with skills programmes, with some employers indicating that they lack the time or resources to explore available opportunities, while others remain unaware of the support available.
- Employers typically access information through a range of channels including Welsh Government and public sector websites, further education colleges and training providers, business networks and professional contacts.
- Employers also face challenges when promoting employment and skills opportunities. Many report difficulties reaching suitable candidates, alongside pressures linked to advertising costs and competition from other employers.
- Employers highlight the need for clearer guidance, a single place to compare available programmes, regular updates and accessible briefings, alongside opportunities for more direct one-to-one support to help them navigate the skills system.

Sector insights

- Energy and environment
 - Growth = +2.7%
 - Workforce profile
 - Occupations in demand:
 - Electrical / energy engineers
 - Environmental consultants
 - Renewable energy technicians
 - Civil / infrastructure engineers
 - Planning / development officers
 - Sustainability / Net Zero officers
 - Project / programme managers
 - Environmental monitoring technician
 - Energy and climate policy / advisory officers
 - Welders
 - Pipefitters / mechanical fitters
 - Challenges
 - Potential workforce and skills gaps linked to the scale of pipeline energy projects, with some developers unable to clearly identify or share future workforce demand, skills needs and delivery timelines to support workforce readiness.
 - Increasing competition for key technical and engineering talent, including electricians, welders, mechanical engineers and technicians required for renewable and low-carbon energy projects.
 - Limited awareness of career pathways across the energy sector among young people and underrepresented groups, alongside low participation in STEM subjects.
 - What should the region focus on
 - Build on existing regional coordination to support skills planning and development of training opportunities linked to major energy and infrastructure investment.

- Support development of the skills pipeline required to meet current and future demand across energy, nuclear and net zero sectors.
 - Improve awareness of careers, progression pathways and STEM opportunities in energy and net zero sectors among young people and underrepresented groups through employer-led engagement, work experience and outreach activity.
 - Enable upskilling in green technologies, environmental management, digital systems and project and programme management.
- Construction
 - Growth = +1.1%
 - Workforce profile
 - Occupations in demand:
 - Electrical, plumbing and heating trades including electricians, plumbers, heating engineers and heat pump installers
 - Bricklayers
 - Carpenters / joiners
 - Civil engineering roles including civil engineers, site engineers and civil engineering technicians
 - Site managers
 - Construction project managers
 - Quantity surveyors
 - Retrofit and energy efficiency roles including retrofit coordinators, retrofit assessors and energy efficiency specialists
 - Groundworkers
 - Plasterers and finishing trades
 - Challenges
 - Persistent skills shortages across key trades and technical roles, including electricians, plumbers, heating engineers, bricklayers, carpenters, site managers and civil engineering professionals, alongside growing demand from retrofit and low-carbon construction activity.
 - Increasing demand for green construction skills, including retrofit, energy efficiency, heat pump installation and sustainable building practices, with current training provision struggling to keep pace with emerging requirements.
 - Ageing workforce and limited diversity in the talent pipeline, contributing to high replacement demand and ongoing recruitment challenges across both skilled trades and professional roles.
 - Recruitment challenges in rural and coastal areas, where transport barriers, limited local labour supply and competition for skilled workers further constrain workforce availability.
 - What should the region focus on
 - Undertake regional mapping of construction workforce demand linked to energy projects, large-scale infrastructure investment and housing retrofit activity to provide clear evidence base of current and future skills needs.

- Improve gender balance across the sector through targeted outreach and promotion of inclusive career pathways that challenge stereotypes and encourage greater participation of women in construction roles.
 - Develop accessible and flexible training and progression pathways into construction trades, retrofit and technical roles to support entry, upskilling and career progression aligned to employer demand.
 - Work with partners to improve SME engagement in workforce development by simplifying access to training, including apprenticeships and higher-level pathways, and strengthening support for recruitment, development and retention of talent.
- Advanced manufacturing
 - Growth = +1.8%
 - Workforce profile
 - Occupations in demand:
 - Process operators and production machine operatives
 - Assemblers and routine operatives
 - Transport and distribution clerks and assistants
 - CNC machinists and CNC programmers
 - Maintenance engineers (mechanical and electrical)
 - Manufacturing engineers
 - Production and process engineers
 - Engineering technicians
 - Automation and robotics engineers
 - Quality assurance and regulatory professionals
 - Production supervisors and operations managers
 - Challenges
 - Ageing workforce and high replacement demand, alongside limited diversity in the talent pipeline.
 - Persistent shortages in electrical, mechanical, controls and systems engineering, including PLCs, CNC and advanced manufacturing operations.
 - Growing demand for automation, AI, robotics and engineering–IT hybrid skills, alongside logistics, planning and warehouse capability gaps (e.g. FLT, production planning, WMS/ERP).
 - Difficulties attracting young people, compounded by weak work readiness and soft skills (communication, teamwork, problem-solving and resilience) and geographic barriers in key industrial locations.
 - What should the region focus on
 - Support delivery of priority programmes such as the Flintshire and Wrexham Investment Zone and apprenticeships by facilitating collaboration between employers and training providers.
 - Promote workforce development and future skills adoption, including automation, digital manufacturing, AI and engineering–IT hybrid skills,

- Improve gender balance and representation of underrepresented groups across the sector to widen the talent pipeline and support workforce sustainability.
- Strengthen industry engagement to improve workforce readiness and attract new entrants.
- Creative and digital
 - Growth = -0.7%
 - Workforce profile
 - Occupations
 - UX/UI designers
 - Digital marketing
 - Video producer / content creators
 - Game designer / animator
 - Data analyst
 - Software developer
 - Cyber security
 - Artificial intelligence (AI) roles
 - Challenges
 - Growing demand for adopting new technologies such as AI, but uncertainty around how to do this or what the benefits are to businesses.
 - Basic and advanced digital skills are desirable skills by most employers, however recruiting the right skills level is a challenge.
 - Automation and digitalisation of sectors such as construction and manufacturing are causing a skills gap, but training is sometimes met with resistance.
 - As an evolving and growing sector, skills demands are changing, meaning the need for employers to invest in training is constant.
 - What should the region focus on
 - Raise awareness of the digital skills provision available in the region to upskill or reskill new and existing staff.
 - Improve gender balance and representation of underrepresented groups across the sector to widen the talent pipeline and support workforce sustainability.
 - Raise awareness of the different types of roles available to inspire young people to consider a career in digital.
- Tourism and hospitality
 - Growth = +0.4%
 - Workforce profile
 - Occupations in demand:
 - Chefs
 - Kitchen and catering assistants
 - Waiting staff and bar staff
 - Hotel reception and front of house staff
 - Social media and digital marketing officers
 - Hospitality supervisors and managers

- Tour guides and visitor attraction staff
 - Outdoor activity and adventure tourism instructors
- Challenges
 - Ongoing recruitment and retention challenges driven by low pay, seasonal instability, and perceived lack of long-term career progression.
 - Persistent shortages in core operational roles, particularly in rural and coastal areas.
 - Limited awareness of tourism and hospitality careers among young people and influencers, with the sector often viewed as seasonal or low-skilled despite growing opportunities.
 - Skills gaps in digital marketing, revenue management and customer service, particularly among SMEs with limited capacity to invest in training and upskilling.
- What should the region focus on
 - Improve perceptions of tourism and hospitality careers by promoting progression opportunities, transferable skills and long-term career pathways, including a shift towards more sustainable, year-round employment.
 - Support workforce development in customer service, leadership, digital marketing and Welsh language skills.
 - Increase recruitment and retention through inclusive employment practices.
 - Support SMEs to access flexible training and workforce development opportunities.
- Health and social care
 - Growth = +4.5%
 - Workforce profile
 - Occupations in demand:
 - Care workers and home care staff
 - Registered nurses
 - Healthcare assistants
 - Social workers
 - Mental health support workers
 - Occupational therapists
 - Physiotherapists
 - Community care staff
 - Medical and dental technicians
 - Health care support workers
 - Health care practice managers
 - Office administrators
 - Children's care workers
 - Radiographers
 - Challenges
 - Persistent recruitment and retention challenges driven by low pay, workload pressures, and competition from other sectors offering better terms and conditions on a national level.

- Ongoing shortages in key roles, including care workers, nurses, social workers and allied health professionals, particularly in rural and coastal communities.
 - Digital skills gaps in using care systems, electronic records and emerging technologies, particularly in health care.
 - Limited capacity for continuous professional development and Welsh language upskilling, impacting workforce progression, service delivery and compliance requirements.
 - What should the region focus on
 - Promote clear progression pathways into health and social care careers to support recruitment, retention and workforce sustainability.
 - Promote early interventions in schools to inspire children from an early age to consider the broad range of opportunities available in Health and Social Care.
 - Enable workforce development in digital health systems, Welsh language capability, leadership and emerging technologies.
 - Support access to continuous professional development, apprenticeships and flexible learning opportunities across the workforce.
- Food and farming
 - Growth = +1.2%
 - Workforce profile
 - Occupations in demand:
 - Farm operatives
 - Machinery operators
 - Agricultural technicians
 - Agricultural engineers
 - Livestock stockpersons
 - Food production operatives
 - HGV drivers
 - Skilled agricultural trades
 - Crop and horticulture workers
 - Agri-tech and precision farming assistants
 - Challenges
 - Recruitment difficulties across seasonal and rural roles, driven by low pay, long hours, and limited transport links in remote areas.
 - Persistent shortages in both entry-level and skilled roles.
 - Skills gaps in digital, technical and precision farming practices, including adoption of new technologies, data use and sustainable/low-carbon farming methods.
 - Limited awareness of food and farming career pathways among young people, with the sector often perceived as low-skilled or family-based, reducing the future talent pipeline.
 - What should the region focus on
 - Work with partners to address recruitment and retention challenges in rural and seasonal roles by improving access to training, strengthening local

- labour supply, and supporting more sustainable workforce models across the sector.
 - Improve awareness of careers in food production, agriculture and agri-tech to strengthen the future workforce pipeline.
 - Support development of digital, technical and low-carbon farming skills, including precision agriculture and sustainable practices.
 - Increase employer engagement with schools, work experience and apprenticeship activity to attract new entrants into the sector.
- Financial and professional
 - Growth = +0.3%
 - Workforce profile
 - Occupations in demand:
 - Accountants
 - Bookkeepers
 - Payroll officers
 - HR officers and managers
 - Financial analysts
 - Finance business partners
 - Administrators
 - IT technicians
 - Sales and marketing professionals
 - Managers and business consultants
 - Challenges
 - Recruitment challenges for accounting, finance, legal and professional services roles, particularly in smaller firms and rural areas with a limited local talent pool.
 - Skills gaps in digital finance and professional systems, including data analysis, financial modelling, AI-enabled tools, and cyber security awareness.
 - Limited leadership and management capability in SMEs, restricting growth, succession planning and workforce development.
 - Difficulties attracting and retaining talent due to competition from larger urban centres offering higher salaries, broader career progression and more flexible working options.
 - What should the region focus on
 - Strengthen digital capability in areas including AI-enabled systems, cyber security, data analysis and financial technologies.
 - Support leadership, management and succession planning development across SMEs and professional services businesses.
 - Improve awareness of career opportunities to attract and retain graduates and skilled professionals within the region.
 - Expand access to higher-level skills, professional qualifications and apprenticeships aligned to sector demand.
- Public sector
 - Occupations in demand:
 - Health and social care related occupations
 - Teachers (primary and secondary)
 - Teaching assistants / additional learning needs (ALN) support staff

- Civil service and Local Government administrative officers
- Programme / project managers
- Environmental health and planning officers
- Emergency services roles
- Housing officers and community support roles
- Planning and regeneration officers
- Digital and IT support roles
- Procurement officers and managers
- Educational psychologists
- Challenges
 - Recruitment and retention challenges across key roles including teaching, social care, planning, environmental health, housing, and professional services, driven by workload pressures and competition from other sectors.
 - Skills gaps in digital capability, including data management, use of modern systems, and adoption of emerging technologies such as AI and automation in service delivery.
 - Limited Welsh language capability across parts of the workforce, alongside ongoing need to upskill staff to meet statutory and service delivery requirements.
 - Gaps in leadership, management and specialist technical skills, including succession planning and development of future public sector leaders and managers.
- What should the region focus on
 - Strengthen workforce development in leadership, management and project management.
 - Expand digital capability, including AI, data management and modern service delivery skills.
 - Increase Welsh language capability and inclusive workforce practices across the sector.
 - Support succession planning and future workforce development to address ageing workforce pressures and skills gaps.

7. Our people and skills supply: enabling and empowering individuals

Current situation

- Individuals in North Wales are seeing increased opportunities as regional investment creates more pathways into employment across priority sectors, including digital, advanced manufacturing, low-carbon energy and construction.
- Economic inactivity, particularly among young people, alongside rising living costs, continues to create barriers to participation in the labour market.
- Awareness and understanding of education, training, and career pathways remains a challenge, particularly in supporting young people and adults to navigate options, transition between stages, and re-engage with learning or employment.
- Progression within work continues to be limited for some, highlighting the need for greater access to upskilling and reskilling opportunities to support career development and higher-value employment, with additional barriers in some rural and coastal communities, alongside accessibility challenges in more dispersed or less well-connected areas across the region.

- Despite a relatively well-qualified population, cross-border commuting and low awareness of local opportunities contribute to challenges in retaining talent, including graduates, within the region.
- Changing attitudes to work and increased movement between sectors are reshaping career pathways, while ongoing replacement demand across sectors presents opportunities at all skill levels.

What do we need?

- Support the promotion of clear training pathways, to enable sustainable progression and employment
- Promote and signpost to the different support available to individuals at key life stages
- Raise awareness and plan for the current and future skills needs in the region

How are we going to do it?

- Support programmes that reduce economic inactivity, including young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) and those who are at risk of becoming NEET.
- Support programmes to widen access to employment and skills for disabled people, people with long-term health conditions and underrepresented groups.
- Improve understanding of the different pathways available into training or careers, including lifelong learning, upskilling and reskilling in priority sectors.
- Promote and signpost to different entry points into careers, including career changes at different life stages and entrepreneurship opportunities.
- Promote and signposting to apprenticeship opportunities, including progression to higher-level and degree apprenticeships.
- Support key influencers, including parents, teachers and careers advisors, to understand local opportunities and better inform individuals.
- Help education providers connect more effectively with employers and industry partners, including public and third sector.
- Expand access to work experience, placements and apprenticeships by embedding employer engagement into learning.
- Encourage graduates to return to or remain in the region after completing their degree by showcasing the high-level opportunities available to them.
- Enable people aged 50+ to change career, return to work, or remain in work by promoting upskilling, reskilling and the transfer of existing skills.
- Leverage the RSP's position within the North Wales Corporate Joint Committee to ensure the delivery of the Regional Transport Plan considers the impact of skills, training, work opportunities and digital connectivity.
- Support providers when they review the provision on offer following the publication of the Alan Milburn report (2026).

What Success Looks Like

- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased participation and sustained progression of young people into skills, education, training and employment, contributing to a reduction in the regional NEET rate, with the aim of achieving levels below the Welsh average of X% and, over the longer term, at or below the UK average of X% |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the number of individuals engaged through careers, skills and employability awareness activity |

• Increase in the number of individuals accessing information on training pathways, apprenticeships and career opportunities
• Increase in the number of employer engagement opportunities delivered for learners, including work experience, placements and industry-led activities
• Increase in the number of individuals from underrepresented groups, including economically inactive people and those facing barriers to employment, participating in regional skills and employability initiatives
• Increase the number of individuals accessing upskilling, reskilling, progression and return-to-work opportunities across North Wales.

Employment pathways for individuals

- Keep the pathway infographic

Workforce characteristics

- Young workers (16 – 24-year-old)
 - As new generations enter the workforce, their priorities differ to what has previously been seen. For young workers, they prioritise:
 - Work-life balance
 - Good pay and career progression
 - Wellbeing
 - Flexible hours
 - Diversity and inclusion
 - Positive environmental impact
- Older workers (50+)
 - Due to recent economic changes, individuals over 50 are more likely to consider returning to work or changing careers and are therefore a potential source of untapped talent. Similarly to young workers, older workers are looking for:
 - Flexible hours
 - Ability to work remotely
 - Job that fits around family / caring responsibilities

Skills supply

- Pre-16 and schools
 - Children and young people are influenced by what they see and what they engage with, meaning there is significant emphasis on inspiring children and young people through tangible activities.
 - There are 334 primary schools, 52 secondary schools and 10 special education schools in the region.
 - As part of the careers and work-related experiences aspect of the New Curriculum for Wales, employers can engage with schools as guest speakers, offer site visits or support with work experience.
 - There is growing demand for work experience for school age individuals, with employers across all key and growth sectors keen to support this.
 - To ensure young people feel supported when making decisions about their future, there is work to be done to educate the key influencers in their lives, such as parents, teachers and careers advisors about the different career pathways and opportunities available in North Wales.

- Greater emphasis is now being placed on employability and work-readiness skills, which have been identified as a significant challenge for employers during recruitment. Reports suggest that many young people lack essential communication, teamwork, and problem-solving abilities.
- VCSEs are practical, industry-focused Level 1 and 2 qualifications for 14–16-year-olds in Wales. They are designed to develop skills and knowledge for progression to further study, work-based learning, or employment, alongside or as an alternative to GCSEs. These will be available from September 2027.

Post-16

- Further education colleges
 - Grŵp Llandrillo Menai (GLLM) and Coleg Cambria remain key partners in delivering the skills required to support regional economic growth, productivity and employability, working closely with employers, universities, local authorities and regional stakeholders.
 - GLLM and Coleg Cambria have both experienced significant growth in learner demand, particularly among learners requiring additional support and those studying at Entry and Level 1. One college reports a 49% increase in these learner groups between 2022/23 and 2025/26, placing additional pressure on capacity and resources.
 - Colleges play a vital role in supporting learner wellbeing, progression and social inclusion through pastoral, financial and mental health support services, helping reduce the risk of young people becoming NEET.
 - A key challenge for both institutions is ensuring sufficient access to training opportunities and developing the pipeline of skilled workers required to support major regional investments, particularly in renewable energy, advanced manufacturing, construction and digital technologies.
 - Priority areas for both colleges include Net Zero and low-carbon skills, renewable energy, advanced manufacturing, digital and AI skills, Welsh language development, and higher-level technical and professional skills aligned with regional employer needs.
 - GLLM continues to strengthen its position as a leading provider for engineering, infrastructure and renewable energy skills through its £13m Engineering and Renewable Energy Centre in Rhyl, the RWE National Apprenticeship Hub, and Growth Deal investment at Glynllifon focused on agri-tech, food innovation, rural enterprise and sustainable land-based industries.
 - Coleg Cambria continues to invest in advanced manufacturing, automation and digital technologies through its Deeside engineering facilities and the MEDRU Industry 4.0 partnership, which supports skills development in robotics, automation, cyber security, data and smart manufacturing. The college is also developing its Llysfasi campus as a centre for sustainable agriculture, environmental technologies and Net Zero innovation.
 - There remains a need to strengthen engagement with schools, parents and communities to raise awareness of vocational and technical pathways and to inspire young people to pursue careers in priority sectors.
 - Other challenges facing the FE sector include recruiting and retaining specialist teaching staff, responding to rapidly evolving technologies, addressing workforce

shortages in priority sectors, strengthening Welsh language skills, and ensuring learning opportunities remain accessible across all communities.

- Apprenticeships and work-based learning
 - Work-based learning and apprenticeship provision continues to be a key component of the post-16 skills landscape. In 2024/25, there were 3,320 individuals enrolled on WBL programmes in the region.
 - Apprenticeship enrolments have reduced by 785 since 2023/24 in North Wales, following the same trend as the whole of Wales.
 - Apprenticeships were more popular with females (1,905) than males (1,410) in the 2024/25 academic year.
 - There are persistent challenges with gender imbalances across different sectors, with a higher concentration of female participation in sectors such as Health and Social Care and Business Administration, and female being significantly underrepresented in areas such as Engineering and Construction.
 - 17% of all apprenticeship enrolments for 2024/25 were in North Wales, a 2% decrease since 2023/24.
 - Higher apprenticeships remain a critical route for both new entrants and existing employees, providing individuals with the opportunity to earn while learning and progress within their career.
 - In North Wales, degree apprenticeships are currently offered in digital, engineering, construction and advanced manufacturing. There is a range of provision available across Bangor University (in partnership with Grŵp Llandrillo Menai), Wrexham University (in partnership with Coleg Cambria) and The Open University.
 - The region still has a demand to expand the current degree apprenticeship offer to include other areas such as Health and Social Care and Low Carbon Energy.
 - Medr is reviewing Apprenticeship Frameworks in Wales and proposes to reduce the current 23 framework areas and 144 pathways into 18 broader sector frameworks. The review aims to create clearer progression routes from Level 2 to degree apprenticeships with a stronger focus on green and digital skills. The new framework model intends to be more flexible and responsive to changing employer and labour market needs, with changes expected to be implemented by August 2027.
 - Junior apprenticeships are vocational pathways for Year 10 and 11 learners, combining college-based training, work experience and core subjects, with qualifications equivalent to up to 4-5 GCSEs. Following a successful Medr funded pilot, the programme has received additional funding due to its proven impact on learner engagement, attendance, confidence and progression into further education, apprenticeships and employment, offering alternative pathways to young people at risk of becoming NEET.

Higher education institutions

- North Wales has two anchor institutions in Bangor University and Wrexham University, with The Open University also delivering provision in the region. All three institutions play a vital role in economic growth, innovation capacity and talent retention in North Wales by delivering provision that meets the current and future skills demands of local and regional employers.
- All three institutions are key to sustaining growth and productivity in high performing and priority sectors for North Wales.

- Research, innovation and knowledge exchange activities, including Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTPs), supporting employers to innovate, adapt and grow are all essential offers from the universities.
- They are research collaborators and industrial partners with regional, national and international employers.
- Bangor University has established strengths in Nuclear and Low Carbon energy research and development, with increased activity linked to Wylfa Small Modular Reactor (SMR).
- Bangor University has developed a Medical School, supporting medical workforce supply, clinical research and regional wellbeing outcomes.
- Wrexham University plays a central role in advanced manufacturing and engineering skills, research and innovation linked to the North Wales Growth Deal and the Flintshire and Wrexham Investment Zone priorities.
- Wrexham University has a particular specialism in optic and photonic technologies, supporting high value manufacturing and applied research.
- The Open University in Wales supports flexible and lifelong learning, enabling workforce upskilling and reskilling across North Wales.

Adult Community Learning

- Adult Community Learning provides inclusive and flexible learning opportunities that help adults over the age of 19 in Wales re-engage with education, overcome barriers, and develop essential skills for life, work, and wellbeing. Engaging with Adult Community Learning contributes to improved confidence, employability, community engagement, and progression into further learning or employment.

Welsh Government funds each local authority through a community learning grant and within the region there are three Adult Community Learning partnerships – Flintshire and Wrexham, Denbighshire and Conwy, Gwynedd and Ynys Môn. Each partnership works collaboratively and with wider partners to ensure individual, local and regional priorities are supported.

Careers information, advice and guidance

- Careers Wales and Working Wales play a crucial role in providing impartial careers information, advice and guidance to both young people and adults. In addition, they support key influencers such as parents, guardians and teachers who can impact the decisions of young people.
- Children's perceptions about certain jobs and careers are formed at a young age, with some recent research showing that children will start forming their ideas about careers at 7 years old.
- 1 in 3 young people expressed how important it was to them to be able to undertake work experience to gain valuable insights into employment. With this in mind, Welsh Government launched the New Curriculum for Wales, where Careers and Work-Related Experiences (CWRE) are now embedded in the curriculum from age 3 – 16, placing an emphasis on work experience from an early age. Employers in the region are also keen to engage with schools and inspire young people into careers and opportunities across all sectors.
- According to Careers Wales Career Check Survey 2025, 13% of year 10 pupils indicated the desire to undertake an apprenticeship after year 11. Trends show that apprenticeships remain more desirable to males than females.

- A key barrier for young people is a lack of understanding about what their education, training and employment pathway could look like in the future (National Conversation Young People Survey – Wales, 2022).

Claimants, economically inactive and unemployed

- The number of young people who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) has risen significantly across the UK. In Wales, North Wales has the highest proportion of young people who are NEET, with 15.1% of 16–24-year-olds classified as NEET (December 2025).
- Welsh Government have recently reported that 43% of disabled people in Wales of working age are economically inactive, highlighting the significant barriers many disabled people face in accessing and sustaining employment. These challenges are also reflected across North Wales.
- Economic inactivity is increasingly becoming a greater challenge than unemployment, particularly among young people, with many individuals' facing health, wellbeing and other complex barriers that prevent them from actively engaging in the labour market.
- Mental health and health-related barriers are increasingly driving labour market disengagement, particularly among young people.
- Claimant levels remain above pre-pandemic levels in many parts of North Wales, with continuing pressures on participation among young people, people with health conditions and those facing multiple barriers to employment.
- Economic inactivity in Wales remains a significant challenge, although recent annual changes have shown improvement. The economic inactivity rate in the region is approximately 22%, which is 1.3 percentage points lower than 2021 and remains the lowest across Wales.
- Entry-level employment opportunities, apprenticeships and first-step routes into work have become more difficult to access, increasing the need for targeted employability support.
- Clear progression pathways and coordinated referral arrangements remain essential to ensure individuals access the right support at the right time.
- Due to complex barriers, individuals often require support from multiple services simultaneously. Strengthening collaboration between employability, health, education and skills providers is essential to create a seamless journey into learning and employment.
- The North Wales Employability Pathway aims to ensure that support is given to individuals at every stage of their journey back into work from Pre-Employment to In-Work support.
- Existing local employment support programmes have been funded through a combination of Welsh Government, DWP and Shared Prosperity Funding (SPF). As the region transitions from SPF to Local Growth Fund, there are clear challenges and opportunities, particularly with the balance of capital and revenue funding.
- New initiatives such as Connect to Work and the Trailblazer aim to tackle some of these barriers. Connect to Work provides flexible, person centred pathways into training and employment. In Denbighshire, the Trailblazer is for Economically Inactive residents and helps individuals overcome barriers and re-engage with skills provision.

The employability pathway

- Engagement confidence building
- Pre-employment support developing soft skills
- Developing work-experience
- Labour market entry
- In-work skills to enable progression

8. Our support for employers and individuals: making the connections and joining the dots

Current situation

- The scale of investment and opportunity across North Wales requires a coordinated and collaborative approach across skills, training and employment support organisations. The RSP and stakeholders all play a key role in providing leadership and direction, ensuring that activity across sectors and locations is aligned and informed by shared intelligence.
- A wide range of partners already contribute to the skills and employment landscape across the region. The emphasis is therefore not to duplicate, but to strengthen collaboration between organisations, improving the visibility of provision, and supporting delivery against agreed regional priorities.
- Ensuring that the benefits of investment are realised across the whole region is critical. A joined-up approach to delivery will support more inclusive access to skills, employment, and progression opportunities for both individuals and employers.
- Through its role in identifying priorities and coordinating activity, the RSP will support partners to maximise the impact of investment, ensuring it translates into long-term economic and social outcomes for communities, businesses and the workforce.

What do we need?

- Raise awareness of regional drivers for both employers and individuals, ensuring accessible information is available on how to maximise opportunities.
- Support collaboration between providers, key stakeholders and individuals.
- Promote streamlining of the skills landscape, encouraging simplicity, and minimising duplication by identifying and filling gaps.

How are we going to do it?

- Build a connected regional skills community that strengthens employer engagement, enables peer-to-peer support, and recognises key advocates who champion workforce development.
- Continue to improve visibility of regional skills support by bringing together information, networks, and opportunities in one accessible place through the North Wales Skills Portal, supporting the streamlining of information, and reducing duplication.
- Use intelligence to shape, inform and influence evidence-based policy, investment decisions and funding priorities across Medr, Welsh Government and UK Government, driven by emerging skills needs and labour market evidence.
- Ensure policy changes and their effects are communicated to employers and other affected groups.
- Ensure training provision and facilities are aligned to current and future economic need, including large-scale developments, through proactive forward planning and anticipation of emerging opportunities.
- Raise awareness of opportunities arising from large-scale economic developments and support individuals, employers and supply chains to access and benefit from them.
- Make connections, collaborate and share best practice with cross-border authorities and partnerships.
- Support the delivery of Welsh Government's Net Zero Skills Action Plan.
- Share and promote labour market intelligence on key and growth sectors in North Wales with individuals and stakeholders, making use of the North Wales Skills Portal.

- Work collaboratively to prepare and respond to new technological developments such as Artificial Intelligence and transitions to Net Zero.
- Raise awareness to encourage uptake of Welsh language training opportunities across sectors to reduce the Welsh language skills gaps in the workplace.

What Success Looks Like

• Increase in the number of employers, providers and partners accessing labour market intelligence, sector insights and workforce development information.
• Increase in the number of awareness and promotion activities delivered relating to regional investment, economic opportunities and priority sectors.
• Increase in the number of organisations using regional skills intelligence to inform planning, provision and investment decisions.
• Increase in the number of collaborative initiatives involving employers, providers, local authorities and regional partners.
• Increase in the number of activities supporting future workforce needs, including Net Zero, Welsh language and emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence.

9. End page

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ECONOMIC WELL-BEING SUB-COMMITTEE

17 July, 2026

TITLE: Local Growth Fund in North Wales
– advance planning for greater regional collaboration from 2027/28

AUTHOR: Alwen Williams, Chief Executive

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to update the Economic Well-being Sub-Committee on the Local Growth Fund (LGF), and to seek the Sub-Committee's support to progress the work required over the summer to begin planning to meet the Welsh Government's requirement for greater regional collaboration and co-ordination of the fund from 1 April, 2027.
- 1.2. The CJC considered the requirement and resources provided by Welsh Government to plan for delivery of the LGF in years two and three of the programme at its meeting on 20th March 2026. The CJC decided to ask the Economic Well-being Sub-Committee to guide preparations for the transition of the Fund to the Corporate Joint Committee from 2027/28 (noting that this was in response to the anticipated requirement by Welsh Government, although contrary the Members' stated wish). The CJC also authorised the utilisation of funding provided by Welsh Government to prepare for delivery of the Local Growth Fund beyond 2026/27, working collectively with local authorities and partners to co-produce the region's proposals.
- 1.3. The CJC subsequently considered a Corporate Planning report on the 19th June, 2026 which referenced work to prepare for the transition of the LGF to the CJC from April 2027. At that meeting, the CJC resolved to defer the Corporate Planning decision to obtain a better understanding from the new Welsh Government about its views on supporting the proposed model for funding and delivering the Local Growth Fund.
- 1.4. This Sub-Committee meeting is therefore an appropriate opportunity to provide that further information and seek the necessary decision.

2. DECISION SOUGHT

- 2.1. To note the update on the Local Growth Fund transition arrangements since the relevant CJC reports presented in March and June.
- 2.2. To note that the Year 1 (2026-27) Transition Plan for LGF has been submitted on the 9th June to Welsh Government by Cyngor Gwynedd as the lead accountable body for Year 1, and that this plan sets out the approach to maintaining continuity from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) while preparing the region for a fully regionalised delivery model under the Corporate Joint Committee (CJC) in Years 2 and 3.
- 2.3. To endorse the proposed programme of work and milestones required before the next meeting of the Economic Well-being Sub-Committee in October 2026, recognising that preparatory

work must commence immediately should the CJC be required to take responsibility for the LGF from April 2027.

- 2.4. To authorise officers to progress the necessary planning, engagement, commissioning and capacity-building work over the summer, using the funding provided by Welsh Government to support preparation for delivery of the LGF from 2027/28.

3. BACKGROUND AND RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

3.1. Local Growth Fund

- 3.1.1. The Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) provided almost £169 million to support economic and social development in North Wales between 2022 and 2026. 2025/26 was the final year of SPF, and from the 1st April 2026 it has been replaced by the Local Growth Fund (LGF).
- 3.1.2. Although it succeeds the SPF, the intention and priorities of the LGF differ, reflecting new UK Government priorities and the change in the composition of the funding (i.e. a shift from revenue funding to predominantly capital funding).
- 3.1.3. The stated ambition is to support productivity growth and address the issues that lead to economic inequalities across Wales.
- 3.1.4. The Fund has three priorities and eight objectives. The Fund's priorities are:
 - More productive and competitive businesses
 - Increasing skills and supporting people into work
 - Improving regional infrastructure
- 3.1.5. The Welsh Government published its [Local Growth Fund Investment Plan](#) on 23 March 2026. This sets out a strategic framework for investing in productivity growth across Wales, supporting sustainable economic development and improved living standards. The Fund is designed to target lagging areas with the greatest potential for productivity catch-up, helping businesses to grow, create better-paid jobs and strengthen regional economies.

3.2. Current Position

- 3.2.1. The LGF remains a UK Government programme, but the Welsh Government will receive the funding and be accountable for its expenditure. The Welsh Government intends to allocate a large proportion of the funding to regions and wishes to do so via the Corporate Joint Committees.
- 3.2.2. The Welsh Government considers 2026/27 to be a transitional year to allow time for the Corporate Joint Committees to prepare and plan, and therefore the SPF administration and governance arrangements will continue to be used this year.
- 3.2.3. Cyngor Gwynedd will be the lead Local Authority for the LGF on behalf of the North Wales counties in 2026/27. The grant offer letter for 2026/27 has been received by Cyngor Gwynedd. This is based on a Transition Plan which sets out a pragmatic approach to maintaining continuity during 2026/27 while preparing for more regional model in Years 2 and 3. The offer was signed on 23 April, but it included a requirement for additional detail to be provided to Welsh Government; an updated version of the Plan was submitted on the 9th June. Up to 4% of the transition year funding is available as an administration budget.

- 3.2.4. In line with the region's proposals for 2026/27, all six local authorities are currently scoping and developing proposals for delivery during first year of the programme with due regard for the priorities of the programme as well as regional alignment and local needs / opportunities. Deliverability is also a core consideration given the practical constraints. In parallel, the governance arrangements for administering the LGF in 2026/27 are being put in place by Cyngor Gwynedd - working with the other local authorities.
- 3.2.5. As noted above, from 2027/28 Welsh Government intends that responsibility for strategic planning, prioritisation, portfolio development and oversight of LGF is transferred to the CJC. Should this be the case, the CJC will need to establish the necessary strategic, governance, assurance, financial management, monitoring and delivery arrangements during 2026/27.
- 3.2.6. To this end, as previously reported, the Welsh Government has provided £200,000 to the CJC to carry out the necessary strategic planning (in the form of a 'Regional Growth Plan') and capacity building.
- 3.2.7. On the 19th June, 2026 the CJC considered a Corporate Planning report which referenced preparations for the transition to managing the LGF from April 2027. That report identified the Regional Growth Plan as a key component of the CJC's wider corporate planning work and proposed use of the £200,000 Welsh Government funding. The CJC deferred the decision to allow a better understanding of the new Welsh Government's position on the proposed model for funding and delivering the LGF.
- 3.2.68. The desire of Members to retain local decision making in relation to the LGF has been conveyed consistently and vociferously to Welsh Government. The March and June discussions reflected an evolving position. In March, Members considered the implications of the proposed transition from SPF arrangements to a CJC-led model from 2027/28. By June, the CJC sought further clarity from the new Welsh Government, post the Welsh Senedd election, before progressing wider Corporate Planning decisions.
- 3.2.9. Final Welsh Government guidance for LGF was received by officers on 30 June, 2026 (although it remains unpublished) – this provides clarity on the new Government's desired approach to future delivery of the LGF and the expectations of CJs from 2027.
- 3.2.10. The guidance reaffirms Welsh Government's intention that the LGF be administered via the CJs in future. It also confirms their desire that LGF be a strategic, plan-led and portfolio-based programme, co-ordinated regionally. Given that this runs contrary to the stated wishes of the Members, officers have asked that Welsh Government correspond formally to confirm their position; a letter to this effect from the Cabinet Minister for Enterprise, Connectivity and Energy, is anticipated imminently.
- 3.2.11. CJs are required to lead the development of Regional Growth Plans, providing a coherent and democratically accountable framework for regional investment. The 10-year Regional Growth Plan should set out the region's long-term vision for growth, describe economic needs and opportunities, identify where LGF can add value, and set out a prioritised and targeted portfolio of interventions supported by governance, assurance, monitoring, evaluation and risk management arrangements. A further guidance document is expected imminently to reference Welsh Government's expectations of the Regional Growth Plan.

- 3.2.12. The CJC has received a Welsh Government grant award letter confirming up to £200,000 in 2026/27 to produce the Regional Growth Plan and support the capacity building and partnership arrangements needed to prepare for implementation from April 2027. The grant conditions require a progress report by 30th July, 2026 a draft Regional Growth Plan by 30th September, 2026 and a final Regional Growth Plan by 30th November, 2026.

4. REASON FOR THE DECISION

4.1. Regional Growth Plan

- 4.1.1. Welsh Government guidance confirms that, from 2027 onwards, CJs will be expected to lead regional planning, prioritisation and oversight of the Local Growth Fund through a 10-year Regional Growth Plan. The transition year provides an opportunity for North Wales to prepare for those responsibilities and to shape how regional investment is prioritised and co-ordinated in future.
- 4.1.2. The development of a Regional Growth Plan provides an opportunity for the six local authorities, working through the CJC and with stakeholders, to articulate a shared vision for the future of North Wales while ensuring that local opportunities, challenges and aspirations are reflected in regional priorities. The Plan should not replace local priorities, but provide a framework through which local and regional ambitions can be aligned and presented in a way that strengthens the region's ability to secure and target future investment. The development of the Plan should therefore be viewed not as a requirement of the Local Growth Fund, but as an opportunity for North Wales to shape a shared long-term vision for growth and ensure that local priorities are reflected within future regional investment decisions.
- 4.1.3. Whilst the Local Growth Fund is the immediate catalyst for this work, the Regional Growth Plan has the potential to become the principal strategic framework for regional economic development in North Wales. The Plan will provide an opportunity to articulate a long-term vision for growth, identify the region's economic opportunities and challenges, align investment activity and demonstrate how regional priorities contribute to national objectives. It can also provide a framework within which Local Growth Fund investment, together with wider regional activity and investment programmes, can be considered in a coherent and co-ordinated way.
- 4.1.4. The transition year therefore has two distinct purposes. Firstly, it enables delivery of the Local Growth Fund during 2026/27 through existing arrangements. Secondly, it provides the opportunity to develop the strategic, governance, assurance and delivery frameworks required for the CJC to assume responsibility for regional planning, prioritisation and oversight from April 2027. This includes development of the Regional Growth Plan, governance arrangements, delivery frameworks and future investment priorities in partnership with the six local authorities and key regional stakeholders.
- 4.1.5. The decision required at this meeting is not a final decision on the Regional Growth Plan or future delivery arrangements. Rather, it is a decision to enable the preparatory work needed to develop the evidence base, undertake engagement, establish governance and assurance arrangements, and bring forward proposals for future consideration through the CJC's governance arrangements.
- 4.1.6. Welsh Government's timetable requires a progress report by 30th July, 2026 a draft Regional Growth Plan by 30th September, 2026 and a final Plan by 30th November, 2026. Commencing work now will allow North Wales to make effective use of the preparation funding provided by

Welsh Government and ensure that the region is well positioned to influence and respond to the emerging framework before responsibility transfers to the CJC from April 2027.

4.2. Proposed Approach

- 4.2.1. Development of the Regional Growth Plan will build upon the existing regional evidence, strategies and workstreams already in place. This includes the Regional Economic Framework, Growth Deal Portfolio activity, Investment Zone activity, Regional Transport Plan, Strategic Development Plan, Regional Skills and Employability Plan, Local Area Energy Plans to name a few.
- 4.2.2. The proposed approach will include: a gap analysis of existing evidence and strategies; a refresh of the regional economic baseline; development of a long-term strategic framework and vision for the region; preparation of an investment portfolio and delivery framework for LGF; and development of governance, assurance, monitoring, evaluation and risk management arrangements.
- 4.2.3. Where necessary, expertise will be commissioned to add capacity, provide independent challenge and accelerate delivery, alongside officer-led support from Ambition North Wales, the six local authorities and regional partners. This combined approach will be necessary given the Welsh Government timetable.

5. KEY MILESTONES AND RISKS

- 5.1. The timetable set by Welsh Government means that a significant amount of work must be completed before the next Sub-Committee meeting in October.
- 5.2. The immediate milestones are: submit a progress report to Welsh Government by 30th July 2026; confirm governance arrangements and align the LGF transition programme with the CJC Corporate Planning workstreams during July and August; map the 30th June guidance against current regional arrangements; commission or mobilise the capacity required to develop the Regional Growth Plan; and undertake structured engagement with the six local authorities, Welsh Government, regional partners, the private sector, further and higher education, and other stakeholders.
- 5.3. During August and September, in collaboration with the local authorities and other key partners in the region, the work will need to develop the evidence base, theory of change, prioritisation framework and initial portfolio options required to demonstrate how LGF investment will contribute to productivity growth, reduced economic inequality and the region's long-term vision. It will also need to prepare draft governance, financial management, monitoring, evaluation, risk and assurance arrangements to support CJC readiness and meet Welsh Government expectations.
- 5.4. By the 30th September, 2026 a draft Regional Growth Plan must be submitted to Welsh Government. In October, the Sub-Committee will receive the draft Plan, an update on Welsh Government feedback, any outstanding decisions required, and the programme of work needed to finalise the Plan by 30th November, 2026.
- 5.5. It is uncertain at this point how failure to meet these key milestones will impact the North Wales region. There is a risk that if required transition plans and arrangements are not in place for April 2027, this could impact on available funding and time for projects to be delivered.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. The CJC has received a Welsh Government grant award of £200,000 in 2026/27 to produce the Regional Growth Plan and support the capacity building and partnership arrangements needed to prepare for implementation from April 2027
- 6.2. The report outlines the need to utilise the £200,000 Welsh Government grant for the purposes set out in this report.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. The decision sought enables preparatory work to be undertaken in anticipation of the expected transfer of regional planning, prioritisation and oversight responsibilities for the Local Growth Fund to the CJC from April 2027.
- 7.2. The report does not seek approval of the final Regional Growth Plan, future LGF delivery arrangements, individual projects or funding awards. Those matters will require further reports and appropriate legal, financial and other advice before any binding decisions are taken.
- 7.3. The use of the £200,000 Welsh Government preparation funding will need to comply with the terms of the grant award letter, including the required milestones for progress reporting, draft plan submission, etc.

STATUTORY OFFICERS RESPONSE:

i. Monitoring Officer:

"It's noted that the decision is to progress preparatory work for the Local Growth Fund transition and Regional Growth Plan, and does not constitute final approval of the Regional Growth Plan, future delivery model, investment portfolio or individual funding decisions.

Any commissioning, engagement, et cetera would need to be undertaken in accordance with the Welsh Government grant conditions, the CJC's procurement and financial procedure requirements, and appropriate legal and governance advice.

Further reports will be required before any final Regional Growth Plan, delivery arrangements and funding commitments are approved."

ii. Statutory Finance Officer:

"In view of the Welsh Government's confirmation that it expects the Corporate Joint Committee to administer the Local Growth Fund in 2027/28 and 2028/29, and to develop a Local Growth Plan, it is appropriate that the Sub-Committee puts the necessary arrangements in place to ensure that preparatory work is undertaken in a timely manner. I can confirm the financial information contained in the report."