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ECONOMIC WELL-BEING SUB-COMMITTEE  
13 March, 2026

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**TITLE:** Flintshire & Wrexham Investment Zone Skills Programme  
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**1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1. The purpose of the report is to present the Investment Zone Skills Programme and seek approval to the initial round of projects to the Economic Well-being Sub-Committee.

**2. DECISION SOUGHT**

- 2.1. The Economic Well-being Sub-Committee is asked to:

- Note the progress on implementing the Investment Zone programme in close partnership with the Local Education Authorities, Coleg Cambria, Wrexham University and the Regional Skills Partnership.
- Note the process for developing the projects contained in this report and that they have been agreed as suitable skills projects for the Investment Zone to support by the Regional Skills Partnership and are in line with the objectives of the Investment Zone Skills Plan.
- Approve the project proposals submitted by Coleg Cambria to a value of **£8,183,000** and delegate to Ambition North Wales Chief Executive, Monitoring Officer, Section 151 Officer in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair to agree and enter into a Grant Funding Agreement between the North Wales Corporate Joint Committee and Coleg Cambria.
- Approve the project proposals submitted by Wrexham University to a value of **£4,247,014** and delegate to Ambition North Wales Chief Executive, Monitoring Officer, Section 151 Officer in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair to agree and enter into a Grant Funding Agreement between the North Wales Corporate Joint Committee and Wrexham University.

**3. REASONS FOR THE DECISION**

- 3.1. To seek the Economic Well-being Sub-committee's approval for the Flintshire and Wrexham Zone Skills Programme. This will enable the start of the Investment Zone skills programme at the time the Investment Zone is agreed between Flintshire County Council, Wrexham County Borough Council, the North Wales Corporate Joint Committee, Welsh Government and UK Government.



#### 4. BACKGROUND AND RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

4.1. Decisions regarding Investment Zone investment in skills and training are based on the following principles:

- in line with the Investment Zone Skills Strategy;
- delivered in facilities or by partners based in Flintshire and Wrexham; and
- accessible to all.

#### 4.2. The Investment Zone Skills Plan

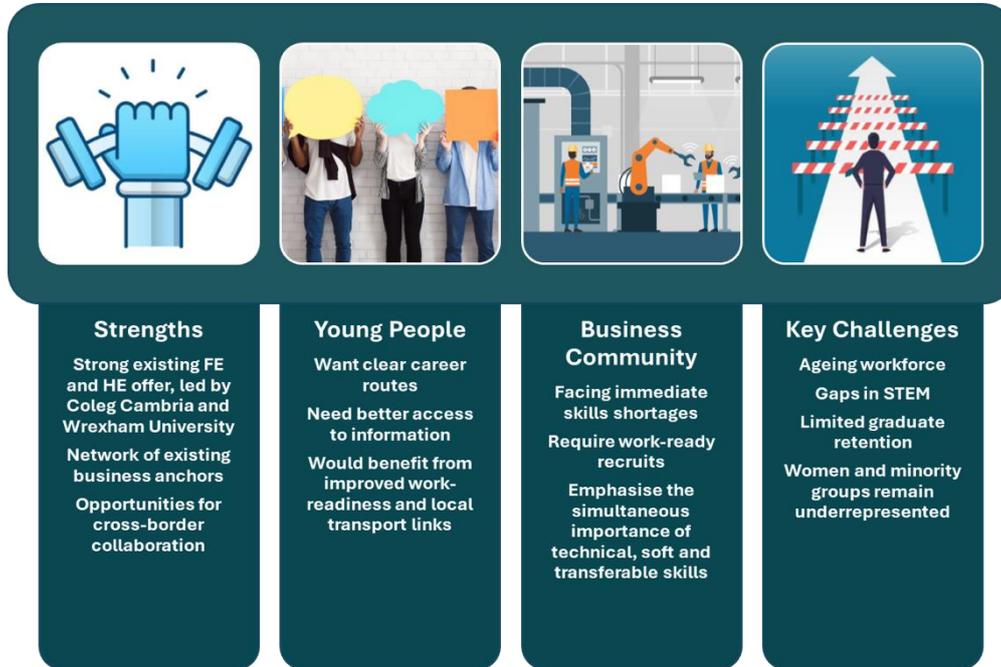
The importance of the Investment Zone opportunity for Flintshire & Wrexham can be summarised as promoting growth, inclusion and the enhancement of existing economic clusters.

- Flintshire & Wrexham has one of the strongest advanced manufacturing clusters in Wales, employing 19,000 people.
- The sector faces major opportunities through new technologies, but also risks around ageing workforce, skills gaps, and future workforce readiness.
- An inclusive approach is needed to widen access, attract underrepresented groups, and develop local career opportunities.

The role of a strategy is to shape decision-making by ensuring that access to opportunity is increased and business needs are met. In particular, this strategy sets out to:



The evidence underpinning the Skills Plan can be summarised as:



### Key Investment Areas

The Investment Zone’s skills programme will focus on the following core themes and areas, which span across all stages of the sectoral employment pathway.

Intervention Theme	Intervention Areas
Increased engagement with pre-16 and Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Careers engagement</li> <li>• Raising awareness of local opportunities</li> <li>• Expansion of STEM pathways</li> <li>• Pre-16 engagement</li> </ul>
Support for 16-18 Learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expansion of apprenticeships</li> <li>• Work placements</li> <li>• Provision of employer incentives for apprenticeships</li> <li>• Alignment of training provision with sectoral needs</li> <li>• Employer-led Curriculum Co-Design</li> </ul>
Enhanced Pathways for 18+	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expansion of degree apprenticeships</li> <li>• Creation of new MSc/PhD routes</li> <li>• Delivery of skills bootcamps and other micro-credentials</li> <li>• Employer led curriculum co-design</li> </ul>
Upskilling & Reskilling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retraining for career transitions</li> <li>• Support for lifelong, and work-based learning</li> </ul>



The effective governance of the Investment Zone skills programme will be co-ordinated by the North Wales Regional Skills Partnership, whilst delivery will be led by the Investment Zone Skills Steering Group. Given the long-term nature of the Investment Zone programme and the uncertainty surrounding the precise timing of future inward investment, the skills programme must remain agile and responsive and will therefore be shaped by Annual Delivery Plans to identify priorities, inform resource allocations and design monitoring activities.

## 5. INTRODUCTION TO THE INVESTMENT ZONE SKILLS PROGRAMME PROJECTS

### 5.1. Coleg Cambria Projects

#### **Project 1 - Medru Skills Factory**

The primary aim of this project is to address the immediate and future skills needs of the Advanced Manufacturing and Digital sectors in North Wales. It focuses on two key areas - Upskilling - Providing advanced training to existing employees to enhance their capabilities. Reskilling - Training new entrants to prepare them for careers in the sector. The project provides a range of training programs in Advanced Manufacturing, Digital, Management and Industry 4.0 areas.

**Project duration:** 5 years

**Outcomes:**

- Support at least 25 organisations to access Industry 4.0 and Advanced Manufacturing skills
- Establish 5 Toolbox Skills Centres
- Deliver 8 Skills Bootcamps
- Minimum 100 training courses
- Minimum of 1000 participants engaged or enrolled
- Minimum of 5 employers involved in co-designing courses.

#### **Project 2 - Emerging Talent**

The programme's overarching aim is to increase apprenticeship participation (L2-L6) by making the pathway more attractive to both individuals and employers. It will also enhance learner participation and awareness of apprenticeship opportunities in Flintshire and Wrexham. It will be a key enabler to updated provision linked to proposed apprenticeship changes and advances in the sector. This will drive growth in the advanced manufacturing sectors at all levels, including Aerospace, Digital, Pharmaceutical, Food & Drink, Papermaking and Mechanical/Electrical Engineering.

**Project duration:** 5 Years

**Outcomes:**

- 10 x SME Apprentices / year
- 15 x Higher Engineering Apprentices / year
- 10 x Digital Degree Apprentices



## 5.2. Coleg Cambria Budget Request

The request from Coleg Cambria is for £8,183,000 of which £1.5m is for capital costs. Table 1 illustrates the breakdown across the Medru Skills Factory and Emerging Talent projects.

Table 1 Coleg Cambria Budget Request						
	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	Total
1. Medru Skills Factory	362,000	599,000	677,000	822,000	845,000	3,305,000
2. Aerospace Programme Development	65,000	65,000	65,000			195,000
2. Higher Engineering Apprenticeship	225,000	450,000	675,000			1,350,000
2. L3 Apprentices (SMEs)	135,000	270,000	270,000			675,000
2. Digital Degree Apprenticeship	90,000	180,000	270,000			540,000
2. Incentive Scheme for Employers: SME Achievement Grant			35,000			35,000
2. Incentive Scheme for Employers: HEA Attendance Grant	50,000	100,000	150,000			300,000
2. Capital Redevelopment at Cambria Deeside		100,000	1,400,000			1,500,000
2. SME Employer Engagement and Recruitment		35,000	36,000	37,000		108,000
2. SME Attendance Grant		25,000	50,000	100,000		175,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>927,000</b>	<b>1,824,000</b>	<b>3,628,000</b>	<b>959,000</b>	<b>845,000</b>	<b>8,183,000</b>

## 5.3. Wrexham University Projects

### Project 1 - Degree Apprenticeships: Advanced Manufacturing (Level 6)

Project to increase access to high-quality, work-based higher education across the Flintshire and Wrexham Investment Zone, directly responding to the growing demand for Degree Apprenticeships in the region.

**Project duration:** 3 years

**Outcomes:**

- 12 Degree Apprenticeship Places every year, targeting minimum of 25 companies, mainly SMEs

### Project 2 - Graduate Internships

Project to tackle one of the most persistent challenges facing the regional labour market: the difficulty of retaining graduate talent in North Wales and ensuring that businesses, particularly within advanced manufacturing, can access the skills they need to thrive. The offer includes 6- and 12-month graduate internships for those ready to step into more substantial roles, an 8-week summer placement scheme.

**Project duration:** 4 years

**Outcomes:**



- *6-month internships: 36; 12-month internships: 24; Summer placements: 32; Remote placements: 32*  
**Total of 124 participants**

### Project 3 - PhD & Masters Research

Project to enable local employees and graduates to undertake Masters, MRes and PhD-level research that aligns with real operational challenges and emerging technological priorities. Co-designed by employers, companies will gain access to high-level R&D.

**Project duration:** 5 years

**Outcomes:**

- 3 PhD & 6 MRes opportunities that focus on applied, industry-led research topics in advanced manufacturing, digitalisation, automation and low-carbon technologies. Subsidised Master places will support 48 individuals to undertake advanced study in areas linked to Investment Zone priorities.

### Project 4 - Higher Education Co-Created Courses

The Higher Education Co-Created Courses project will establish a comprehensive programme of employer-led higher-level learning aligned to Advanced Manufacturing needs in Wrexham and Flintshire. Employers will shape every stage of course development to ensure relevance, practicality and direct application to the workplace. Provision will be offered through flexible delivery models that suit shift patterns, workplace scheduling and the specific requirements of SMEs and large employers.

**Project duration:** 5 years

**Outcomes:**

- Minimum 30 businesses leading to 300 participants completing employer-designed higher-level courses and micro-credentials.

## 5.4. Wrexham University Budget Request

Wrexham University is requesting **£4,247,014** of revenue funding from the Skills Revenue Allocations in the Investment Zone.

Financial Year	26/27	27/28	28/29	29/30	Total
1. Degree Apprenticeships	334,000	345,000	355,000	-	1,034,000
2. Graduate Internships	341,200	358,260	376,173	404,982	1,480,615
3. PhD and Masters Research	268,000	179,000	179,000	118,000	744,000
4. Higher Education Co-created Courses	227,000	238,350	250,268	272,781	988,399
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,170,200</b>	<b>1,120,610</b>	<b>1,160,441</b>	<b>795,763</b>	<b>4,247,014</b>



## 5.5. Analysis of Funding Availability

The project requests above are fully funded by the IZ allocation as illustrated in Table 3 below. The proposals amount to a request of £12.43m over the 5 year period. The current skills allocations covering these areas provides for investment of £13.3m. Further projects (c£895k) in the skills theme are expected from LEAs and Independent providers.

Table 3 - Analysis of Investment Zone Skills Funding								
IZ Skills Theme (Annual Delivery Plan Theme)	Project Allocations from Table 1 and 2 Above					Proposal	Budget	Difference
	A Skills Funding to Complement existing funding arrangements	1,480,615	195,000	1,350,000	540,000			
B Training co-designed with employers	988,399	443,000	175,000	1,500,000	3,305,000	6,411,399	5,810,500	600,899
E Apprenticeships focused on Advanced Manufacturing	1,034,000	744,000	675,000			2,453,000	2,189,000	264,000
<b>Total</b>						12,430,014	13,324,634	(894,620)

Table Key and Summary	
Coleg Cambria (including £1.5m capital)	8,183,000
Wrexham University	4,247,014
<b>Total</b>	<b>12,430,014</b>

**Note:** Wrexham University has a further request of £3.645m relating to Skills and Innovation Vouchers will be brought forward via consultation with the North Wales Innovation Board.

## 6. ASSURANCE PROCESS & OUTCOMES

6.1. The contents of this report have been co-developed and agreed by the Investment Zone Skills Working Group. This group consists of the RSP, Medr (post 16 regulator), Flintshire and Wrexham Councils, Coleg Cambria and Wrexham University and Careers Wales. The process started in the summer of 2024 and was supported by the Investment Zone Skills Plan agreement in 2025. Partners met regularly to review evidence, test need and ensure alignment with regional skills and economic priorities.



- 6.2. This report has been presented to the Regional Skills Partnership for consideration. The financial allocations to the skills themes, as well as high level reference to the projects has been agreed by the Flintshire and Wrexham Investment Zone Working Group (the meeting of Council Leaders) and included in the Annual Delivery Plan agreed by the Economic Wellbeing Sub-Committee.
- 6.3. Future assurance will place strong emphasis on demonstrating clear additionality. Working closely with Medr, the region will use established and recognised methods to measure delivery against baselines and to assess which elements represent genuinely new or enhanced activity that Investment Zone funding enables, rather than continuation of existing provision. Providers will be required to submit comprehensive Monitoring and Evaluation plans outlining delivery intentions, expected outcomes and justification for the added value delivered through Investment Zone support. Baseline assessment and additionality testing will be undertaken regionally, ensuring transparency, consistent oversight and alignment with the aims of the Investment Zone.

## **7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1. The legal implications relate primarily to the legal arrangements to secure the funds and manage the obligations arising from the Government's investment to the Corporate Joint Committee for the Investment Zone and the onward Grant Funding Agreement between the Corporate Joint Committee and the partner, in this case the Grant Funding Agreements with Wrexham University and Coleg Cambria. The expectation is that the approvals granted in this Report will be subject to a completed Investment Zone Memorandum of Understanding and an agreed Grant Offer Letter.
- 7.2. The projects set out in this Report will be contained with two Grant Funding Agreements, one with Coleg Cambria and one with Wrexham University. A Template Agreement has been prepared by Geldards LLP and will be modified, in agreement with the Corporate Joint Committee Monitoring Officer and partner's legal representation.
- 7.3. The relevant delivery requirements on the Corporate Joint Committee, as set out in the Investment Zone MOU, will be reflected in the two Grant Funding Agreements.

## **8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1. The key financial implications relate to the resources to deliver these projects and the basis for how Wrexham University and Coleg Cambria will claim the funding from the Corporate Joint Committee. Investment Zone funding will be paid, in advance by Welsh Government to the Corporate Joint Committee via a Funding Offer Letter. This is expected to have been received by the time of the Economic Well-being Sub-Committee.
- 8.2. The project claims will be made on either a monthly or quarterly claim (to be agreed). The Government's evidence requirements for the claim will be required from the partner before the claim can be approved and paid.



- 8.3. The Report indicates that the projects can be afforded within the scope of the skills allocations agreed in the Annual Delivery Plan and Gateway documentation agreed and in support of the MOU. The level of investment is slightly accelerated relative to previous iterations of the budget in the first 5 years. This will be managed over the course of the programme to ensure there is a consistent programme of skills delivery that reflects the requirements of the sector and adapts to the wider need and funding context.

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**STATUTORY OFFICERS RESPONSE:**

**i. Monitoring Officer:**

“I note the governance and assurance arrangements described in the report, including the intention to finalise the Investment Zone programme documentation and to put Grant Funding Agreements in place with appropriate monitoring and audit provisions. On that basis, I am content for the Sub-Committee to proceed with the approvals and delegations as set out.”

**ii. Statutory Finance Officer:**

“I have no objection to the decisions sought, and we will support the officers as the Investment Zone Skills Programme moves forward to delivery”.