



ECONOMIC WELL-BEING SUB-COMMITTEE

17th July 2026

TITLE: North Wales Skills and Employment Plan 2026-2028

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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."