

## 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

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in the number of employers engaged in workforce development, training, upskilling and reskilling opportunities</li> </ul>                                                   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in the number of employers contributing to skills intelligence, and co-creation of training courses</li> </ul>                                                              |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in the number of employers engaged in opportunities delivered for learners and young people, including work experience, industry engagement and careers activity</li> </ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in the number of employers engaging with apprenticeships</li> </ul>                                                                                                         |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in the number of employers engaged with inclusive recruitment, retention and workforce participation initiatives</li> </ul>                                                 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in the number of engagements with the North Wales Skills Portal to access labour market intelligence, skills information and workforce development resources</li> </ul>     |

#### 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,

alongside improving how young people and underrepresented groups are attracted into the sector.

- 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"> <li>• 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%</li> </ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the number of individuals engaged through careers, skills and employability awareness activity</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                              |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in the number of individuals accessing information on training pathways, apprenticeships and career opportunities</li> </ul>                                                                                         |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in the number of employer engagement opportunities delivered for learners, including work experience, placements and industry-led activities</li> </ul>                                                              |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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</li> </ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the number of individuals accessing upskilling, reskilling, progression and return-to-work opportunities across North Wales.</li> </ul>                                                                              |

#### 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 Llysfas 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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