Employer-Led Skills Challenges and Workforce Priorities in North Wales (February 2026)

1. Executive Summary

This report captures key skills challenges and priorities across North Wales, drawing on insights from employers across North Wales priority sectors. It reflects the realities of workforce development on the ground, highlighting both current pressures and emerging trends shaping the region's labour market.

North Wales is experiencing a tight and competitive labour market, with persistent recruitment and retention challenges across both public and private sectors. These pressures are intensified by an ageing workforce, technological change, Brexit-related labour impacts, and the transition to a low-carbon economy.

Cross-cutting workforce development needs are evident across all sectors:

- **Digital Skills:** From basic IT literacy to advanced AI, robotics, data analytics, and digital production tools.
- **Leadership & Management:** Supervisory, strategic, and multi-generational team management skills.
- **Welsh Language:** Upskilling existing staff to meet service delivery and statutory requirements.
- **Net Zero & Green Skills:** Low-carbon technologies, energy efficiency, retrofit, renewable energy, and sustainable practices.
- **Technical & Sector-Specific Skills:** Core technical skills across Advanced Manufacturing, Construction, Health & Social Care, Creative & Digital, Agri-Food & Farming, and Energy sectors.

Employers report limited awareness of training opportunities, fragmented provision, and challenges in releasing staff, particularly among SMEs. They also highlight variable awareness of career pathways across some sectors among young people, as well as teachers and other key influencers. There is an opportunity to improve understanding of the breadth of roles within sectors, which would support the incoming talent pool and strengthen the wider talent pipeline.

Addressing these challenges requires coordinated, industry-led action to expand access to training, improve employer-provider collaboration, embed flexible and modular provision, and promote inclusive participation. Strategic alignment between education, training, and employer needs is essential to ensure North Wales' workforce is equipped to meet current and future economic priorities. The insights and recommendations in this report are intended to inform strategic planning, investment, and delivery of training programmes, ensuring employer voice and regional workforce priorities remain central to skills planning in North Wales.

2. Introduction and Purpose

This report brings together insights from employers across North Wales priority sectors, gathered through workshops, one-to-one consultations, and cluster group discussions. It captures both current

workforce pressures and emerging skills priorities, providing a clear picture of the region's evolving labour market.

The report highlights cross-cutting challenges, including recruitment and retention difficulties, skills gaps, digital and Net Zero transition, and alignment between education, training providers, and employer needs. It also identifies opportunities to strengthen career awareness, improve access to training, and ensure the future talent pipeline is inclusive and well-prepared.

Purpose:
- Provide a consolidated view of skills demand across North Wales.
- Highlight recurring, cross-sectoral workforce challenges and emerging priorities.
- Support strategic planning, investment decisions, and programme development by Welsh Government, Medr, training providers, and other stakeholders.
- Ensure teachers, career advisors, and training providers remain aligned with evolving industry needs to improve guidance, training relevance, and learner outcomes.
- Keep the employer voice central to regional skills planning and workforce development.

3. Methodology

A range of engagement methods ensured both breadth and depth of insight:

Method	Description
RSP Employer Cluster Group Meetings	Focused sessions for Construction, Public Sector, Advanced Manufacturing and Energy, and Digital Skills. Real-time feedback captured via Mentimeter.
Direct Conversations and Interviews	One-to-one and informal consultations exploring workforce trends, skills gaps, and employer priorities with employers and stakeholders including employer and sector representatives.
Green Skills Workshop	In partnership with Adra and Grŵp Llandrillo Menai, over 50 employers and stakeholders explored skills needs in housing and built environment sectors.
Investment Zone Skills Strategy	In-depth interviews conducted with advanced manufacturing employers in Flintshire and Wrexham to assess workforce needs and growth opportunities.

4. Economic Drivers

North Wales is undergoing a significant economic transformation, driven by strategic investments and initiatives aimed at fostering innovation, sustainability and regional development. These economic drivers are pivotal in shaping the demand for skills and workforce development across the region.

The North Wales Regional Skills Partnership (RSP) plays a central role in ensuring that these investments translate into a skilled and resilient workforce. The RSP works closely with employers, sector representatives and sector experts to identify current and emerging skills needs, shape industry-led training programmes, and align workforce development with the demands of major projects. The RSP also promotes inclusive participation, supports apprenticeships and other upskilling opportunities, and helps to future-proof the North Wales labour market by ensuring that local talent is prepared for the evolving regional economy.

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REGIONAL INVESTMENT
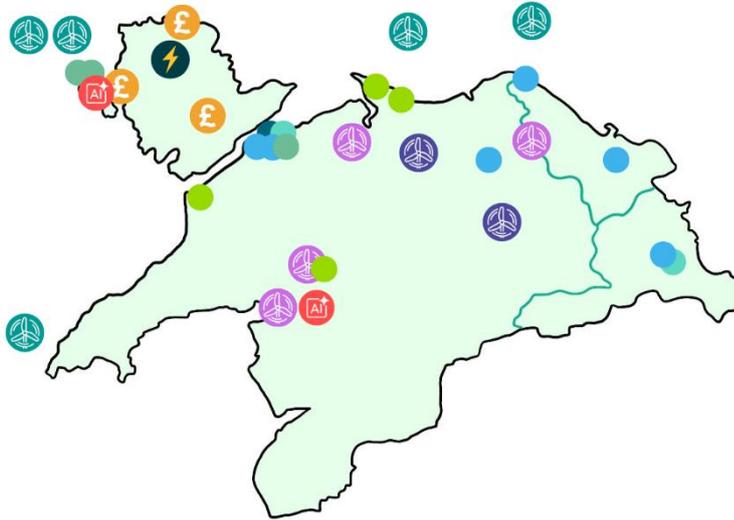
Prosiectau Bwyd-amaeth a Thwristiaeth*
Agrifood and Tourism Projects*

Prosiectau Cysylltedd Digidol*
Digital Connectivity Projects*

Prosiectau Arloesi mewn Gweithgynhyrchu Uwch*
Innovation in High Value Manufacturing Projects*

Prosiectau Tir ac Eiddo*
Land and Property Projects*

Prosiectau Ynni Carbon Isel*
Low Carbon Energy Projects*

Ynni gwynt y tir
Onshore Wind Energy

Ynni gwynt y môr
Offshore Wind Energy

Ardaloedd wedi'u rhag-asesu ar gyfer ynni'r gwynt
Pre-assessed Areas of Wind Energy

Ardaloedd Twf AI
AI Growth Zone

Porthladd Rhydd Ynys Môn
Anglesey Freeport

Parth Buddsoddi Sir Y Fflint a Wrecsam
Flintshire and Wrexham Investment Zone

Wylfa SMR (Adweithydd Modiwlar Bach)
Wylfa SMR

* Nid yw pob prosiect wedi'i rhestru
* Not all projects are listed

Programme/Project	Key Details
North Wales **Growth Deal**	The Growth Deal is an agreement that will generate a total investment of over £1 billion for North Wales in order to generate over 4000 new jobs and increase GVA by £2.4 billion. The programmes are: • Low Carbon Energy: Initiatives to develop renewable energy sources and promote energy efficiency. • Digital: Investments in digital infrastructure • Agri-food & Tourism: Enhancing the agri-food sector and promoting tourism. • Innovation in High-Value Manufacturing: Supporting advanced manufacturing technologies and processes. • Land & Property: Development of land and property to support economic growth.
Flintshire and Wrexham 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. The focus is on: • Advanced Manufacturing: Expansion of manufacturing capacity and capabilities. • Digital Technologies: Development of digital infrastructure and skills. • Logistics and Distribution: Enhancement of logistics and distribution networks.

4	This initiative aims to strengthen the region's manufacturing sector and create a competitive business environment. The North Wales Regional Skills Partnership (RSP) plays a central role in coordinating the development of the skills programme for the Investment Zone and monitoring its delivery, ensuring that workforce development aligns with the needs of local employers. For more information, see the Investment Zone Skills Strategy HERE
HyNet	HyNet is a low-carbon hydrogen and carbon capture project concentrated in Deeside, Flintshire, and Wrexham. It aims to decarbonise industry and power generation in North East Wales, supporting regional economic growth and the transition to Net Zero. Key aspects include: • Hydrogen production and distribution for industrial and energy use. • Carbon capture and storage from local industrial sites. • Industrial decarbonisation to create low-carbon jobs and upskill the workforce. The project is expected to create more than 2,000 skilled jobs across North Wales and Northwest England, including engineers, construction workers, and technicians.
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. Key aspects include: • Development and construction of the Rolls-Royce SMR to provide low-carbon, reliable electricity in partnership with, a leading developer of SMR technology. • Creation of high-skilled jobs in nuclear engineering, construction, project management, and technical operations. • Engagement of local businesses to strengthen supply chains and regional economic benefits. • Continuation of decommissioning and site remediation at Wylfa and Trawsfynydd.
Anglesey Freeport	Anglesey has been designated as a Freeport, a special economic zone offering tax incentives and customs benefits to attract investment. Key aspects include: • Renewable Energy: Focus on offshore wind, tidal energy, and hydrogen production. • Advanced Manufacturing: Development of high-tech manufacturing facilities. • Innovation Hubs: Establishment of research and development centres to foster innovation. • Expected 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.

5	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. The RSP is working closely with Isle of Anglesey County Council (IACC) and Stena on the development of the skills plan, with delivery taking place within this established governance structure.
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. Key aspects include: • AI, data science and digital innovation • Welsh language technologies and culture • Health, wellbeing and nature-based intelligence • Ethics, governance and responsible innovation • Consultancy, applied research and R&D collaboration • Graduate pipelines, skills development and interdisciplinary opportunities
Awel Y Mor	The Awel y Môr offshore wind project is a major renewable energy development off the north Wales coast, building on the success of the existing Gwynt y Môr wind farm. It is part of the UK's growing offshore wind sector and has recently secured support through the government's latest Contracts for Difference auction, marking a significant step in delivering clean energy and economic benefits for Wales. Key aspects include: • Development of the Awel y Môr Offshore Wind Farm west of the existing Gwynt y Môr site, with up to around 50 turbines capable of generating clean electricity to meet the needs of a large number of homes. • Secured Contracts for Difference (CfD) in the UK government's latest allocation round, boosting investment certainty and advancing the project toward delivery. • Anticipated creation of around 2,000 jobs during construction and additional roles supporting delivery with RWE and its partners. • Engagement with local supply chains and workforce development through apprenticeship and skills programmes linked to offshore wind. • Largest renewable energy investment in Wales this decade and a key component of the region's transition to Net Zero.

Renewable / Clean Energy Projects	North Wales is advancing a diverse range of renewable and clean energy initiatives that support the transition to Net Zero, create high-skilled jobs, and strengthen local supply chains. Other key projects include: • Gwynt y Môr Offshore Wind Farm – Operational since 2015 with 576 MW capacity, generating enough renewable electricity to power hundreds of thousands of homes and supporting long-term jobs and community investment initiatives. • Morlais Tidal Energy Project – A tidal stream initiative off Anglesey with potential to generate up to 240 MW of clean electricity, supporting local jobs, supply chains, and regional Net Zero objectives. • Decommissioning at Wylfa and Trawsfynydd – Continuing legacy nuclear site work ensures environmental remediation and workforce upskilling.
Retrofitting of Homes	Targeted programmes to retrofit homes across North Wales, improving energy efficiency and supporting the Net Zero transition. Key aspects include: • Installation of energy-efficient measures such as insulation, heat pumps, and low-carbon heating systems. • Upgrading existing housing stock to meet modern energy performance standards, including social housing and private homes. • Creation of skilled jobs and workforce development in construction, retrofit technologies, and project management. Welsh Government continues to invest heavily in the decarbonisation of social housing, with more than £466 million committed through the Optimised Retrofit Programme (ORP) since 2020. A further £98.75 million has been allocated for the current year, supporting thousands of additional energy-efficiency upgrades across Wales.

5. Overview of Current Workforce Dynamics

North Wales faces a tight and competitive labour market, with persistent difficulties in sourcing skilled staff, particularly in Construction, Advanced Manufacturing, and Health & Social Care. Labour shortages are intensified by an ageing workforce, rapid technological change, and the transition to a low-carbon economy. Rising costs, including business taxes and National Insurance limit employers' ability to offer competitive pay, recruit effectively, and invest in workforce training.

The need to upskill and reskill existing staff is growing, ensuring employees can meet evolving sectoral requirements, adopt new technologies, and support productivity. Between April and September 2025, **over 25,000 job postings were advertised across the region**, with median posting durations of 22 days and a posting intensity of 2:1, reflecting strong competition for limited talent. Median salaries have **risen more than 15% since 2022**, reinforcing structural recruitment pressures.

High-demand roles span **skilled trades, engineering, healthcare, and emerging green and digital occupations.** Recruitment challenges are structural rather than cyclical, highlighting the urgent need for coordinated action to strengthen training provision, align education with employer needs, and support regional workforce resilience.

6. Overview of Current and Emerging Workforce Issues Across Priority Sectors

The table below outlines the current and emerging workforce challenges across priority sectors in North Wales, structured around three key dimensions:

1. **Labour Challenges:** (whereby vacancies go unfilled due to poor pay, conditions and/or a lack of basic 'employability skills'). The latter tend to be more common in occupations that have low barriers to entry and where occupational competence can be reached quickly, usually by learning on the job.
2. **Skills Gaps:** Regional priority skills gaps where employers' existing staff lack the required skills to be fully competent.
3. **Occupational Demand/ Skills Shortage:** Regional priority occupations where employers have difficulties recruiting due to weak supply of skilled labour.

Sector	Labour challenges	Gaps	Occupational Demand/ Shortage

Advanced Manufacturing	• High replacement demand: Ageing Workforce.
	• Difficulty attracting young people and women - there is a need to raise the sector's profile in schools, colleges, and local communities to inspire interest and encourage career pathways into the industry.
	• Limited access to local talent in more rural sites, particularly in remote areas for example In Wrexham Industrial Estate, the lack of reliable public transport has been identified as a significant barrier to attracting staff.
	• Some roles attract fewer applicants due to limited awareness of career opportunities in the sector
	• Challenges to make the workforce inclusive across multiple dimensions, not just gender but also
		• Employers have identified gaps in current provision, particularly around some short courses. Further investigation and discussions with providers show that these courses are available but are delivered as part of bespoke, tailored packages. As a result, information about these courses is not always clearly presented and, in some cases, is not available on providers' websites. This means that unless an employer already has an existing relationship with a provider, they are unlikely to be aware that these courses are offered.
		• Basic engineering skills taught by providers needs to be reviewed particularly on the lower-level
			• High demand for semi-skilled workers to support manufacturing, production, and logistics operations, including assembly, machine operation, and basic technical maintenance.
			• Demand also for higher-level roles such as process engineering, quality control, project management, lean management, Advanced Digital IT.
			• Demand for skilled trades also:
			  o Manufacturing and Production Operations
			  o Warehouse and Logistics (e.g., forklift operation, manual handling, Class 1/2 driving, stock control)
			  o Electrical and Mechanical Engineering (including PLCs, hydraulics, and fabrication)- *potential gap in current offer*
			  o Technical Qualifications (e.g., HNC, City & Guilds)

	• of minority groups, neurodiverse individuals, and those with disabilities.
	• Operational pressures, including increasing energy costs and automation investment, adding strain to workforce planning.
	• Retention challenges in some areas due to wage competition with sectors offering hybrid work or perceived better work-life balance.
	• Ongoing need to upskill existing staff to keep pace with automation and digital transformation, creating internal pressures on time and resources. Some employers are reverting from automation due to cost to business.
	• Shortage of trainers and assessors with up-to-date industrial experience, limiting delivery capacity for apprenticeships and bespoke courses.
		courses such as L2 PEO. The apprenticeship review may help this cause.
		• Skills gaps:
		   o Soft skills: teamwork, problem-solving, and workplace communication for both new entrants and new existing staff members on a training programme.
		   o Advanced digital skills gaps, particularly in AI, robotics, and data analytics.
		   o Leadership and supervisory skills for mid-level technical staff.
		   o Gaps in health and safety training tailored to automated and high-tech environments.
			o Multi-skilled technicians capable of operating across mechanical, electrical, and digital disciplines.
			• Emerging Workforce Insights:
			   o Most employers report strong demand for skilled trades, technical engineers, and reliable production staff.
			   o Future investment will likely increase demand for industrial electricians, advanced manufacturing, automation, and logistics capabilities.
			• Shortage of trainers and assessors able to deliver hands-on technical courses, apprenticeships, and upskilling short courses.

Creative & Digital	• Across all sectors - Difficulties keeping pace with evolving digital needs, particularly with SMEs, due to limited dedicated staff for training coordination and translating organisational digital requirements into actionable development plans. • Limited awareness of digital career pathways among young people and teachers.	• Shortage of digital Skills across all job roles/ levels. • Fewer pupils taking IT GCSE creating a weaker pipeline. • Lack of in-house expertise to integrate digital tools into business processes, innovate, or develop digital services. • Limited ability within organisations to identify their digital skills gaps	• High demand for advanced technical roles, including programmers, full-stack developers, cybersecurity specialists, AI engineers, data analysts, cloud engineers, and UI/UX designers. • Emerging demand for digital leadership roles capable of driving digital transformation. • High demand for skilled practitioners who can operate across multiple

	- Recruitment challenges for technically skilled digital roles. - Some SMEs face resource and capacity limitations to release staff for digital upskilling. - Low uptake of digital training programmes due to inconsistent promotion and limited employer awareness and engagement with available provision. - Limited transport links across the region, and between North and South Wales, restrict access to talent for creative roles. - Some specialised skills in the creative industry are not currently available in the region; individuals often leave to gain experience elsewhere, risking talent not returning. - Lack of clear career pathways and low awareness of creative roles among young people and their influencers limits the incoming talent pool.	and convert them into targeted training plans. - SMEs report insufficient guidance and support to access relevant training and funding opportunities. - Creative: - Employers report that existing training provision does not fully reflect current industry needs; course content often lags behind employer demands. - Knowledge transfer is a challenge, with some technical or specialist creative skills absent locally, creating gaps in practical expertise. - Soft skills gaps include project coordination across multiple employers, collaborative working, and adapting to varied creative projects. - Limited digital and technical skills in emerging areas (e.g., creative technologies, digital media production, UX/UI) restrict innovation capacity.	creative disciplines, including digital media, design, and production. - Regional demand for creative talent capable of collaborating with larger hubs, such as Liverpool and Manchester, to strengthen "creative corridors." - Employers seek graduates and trainees with up-to-date technical skills and practical experience aligned to local industry needs. - Demand for coordinated training solutions, placements, and degree apprenticeships that match employer schedules and project requirements.
Construction	Recruitment challenges, higher operating costs, and an uncertain flow of future projects continue to make forward planning difficult.	Employers have identified gaps in current provision, particularly around some short courses. Further investigation and discussions with providers show that the courses are available in	- Shortage of most skilled trades: - Carpenters, plumbers, electricians, plasterers, renders, groundworkers and engineers etc. - Roles in green construction: retrofit insulation, renewables installation.

• Time pressures, funding limitations, and poor transport also reduces the pool of available talent.
• Course length and cost can prevent employers from releasing staff for training or consider to recruit an apprentice.
• Upskilling and reskilling needs across the workforce but employers often lack awareness of provision.
• Provision for retrofit and green courses seem to be better available in Anglesey and Gwynedd (CIST, Ty Gwyrddfai) with gaps elsewhere across the region.
• Data show's low college-to-industry transition rates with reported limited or no work placement/site visit opportunities during college courses, this highlights weak links between education and employment and reduces the sector's ability to attract and retain new entrants.
• Reports on the quality of some college training is inconsistent and not aligned with industry needs, which may stem from limited funding by the colleges preventing competitive salaries for high quality skilled trainers and assessors, as well as insufficient upskilling of
	the Northwest but are delivered as part of bespoke, tailored packages. As a result, information about these courses is not always clearly presented and, in some cases, is not available on providers' websites. This means that unless an employer already has an existing relationship with a provider, they are unlikely to be aware that these courses are offered.
	• Digital skills for construction (BIM, CAD, digital planning) and monitoring, system integration, and managing energy efficiency technologies.
	• Supervisory skills: project management, compliance, regulation.
	• Technical gaps in PAS 2030/TrustMark-accredited retrofit installation, commissioning, and quality assurance, with only a few providers offering PAS 2030/TrustMark accredited routes.
	• Practical skills gaps in insulation, heat pump installation, PV systems, and low-carbon retrofit measures.
	• Coordination and project management skills for multi-site
		• Shortage of skilled installers and retrofit coordinators for insulation, heat pumps, and PV installation projects - Many SMEs are unaware of available retrofit training and funding, limiting their ability to upskill staff.
		• Demand for more skilled tradespeople, particularly:
		  o Electricians, plumbing, plastering, and carpentry and civil engineers
		  o Civil Engineers and project managers to support infrastructure development.
		  o Professionals skilled in low carbon construction and retrofit, including roles such retrofit installers, heat pump technicians, PV installers, and retrofit coordinators.
		  o Demand for technical and high-level roles:
		  o Surveyors, structural engineers, and BIM specialists, to support complex projects and ensure compliance with modern construction standards.
		• Shortage of multi-skilled operatives capable of working across several trades.
		• Scarcity of experienced project managers for mid- to large-scale infrastructure projects.
		• Shortage of trainers and assessors with up-to-date skills to deliver high-quality

	college staff to keep pace with industry standards. • Difficulties in developing a skilled workforce due to limited access to structured training, removal of Level 2 apprenticeships forcing new entrants to start at Level 3 has reduced the pool of potential apprentices. • Extended duration of the Level 3 apprenticeship delays the availability of skills job-ready staff. • Limited employer involvement in co-designing training programmes reduces the relevance and uptake of retrofit skills initiatives. • New recruits often lack the practical skills and confidence needed for day-one productivity. • Apprenticeship system misaligned with industry needs; low wages and limited incentives make it difficult for employers—especially smaller firms—to offer placements.	retrofit projects are limited among existing staff. • The availability of retrofit and green courses is notably stronger in Anglesey and Gwynedd, while other areas across the region show significant gaps. • Soft skills gaps: communication, teamwork, and problem-solving etc. among new entrants and apprentices. • Gaps in managerial and supervisory skills among mid-level staff. • Knowledge gaps in emerging technologies: energy-efficient construction methods, renewable installation, smart building systems. • Health and safety compliance knowledge gaps, particularly for new entrants or staff transitioning between specialisms. • Limited opportunities for continuous professional development (CPD) for existing staff, leading to skills stagnation.	apprenticeships and upskilling programs. • Emerging demand for specialists in digital construction tools, such as BIM coordinators, 4D/5D planners, and construction data analysts.
Energy and Environment	• Limited awareness of career pathways within the sector among young people, teachers and other influencers, restricting the talent pipeline. More work is also needed to raise awareness/understanding	• Practical technical skills for renewable energy: welding, fabrication, electrical and mechanical engineering. • Technical skills for hydrogen roles: electricians, welders, pipefitters,	• The Offshore Wind Industry Council has identified 30 critical roles of need for a skilled workforce across a range of occupations, including project managers, welders and fabricators, lab technicians, geoscientists, geographers,

	of job roles within the sector, it's not just engineers that is needed. • Graduates and early-career entrants often lack practical experience and employability skills. • Low participation in STEM subjects, particularly among girls and underrepresented groups, reducing the future pool of technical talent. • Employers and SMEs have limited awareness of available training pathways, accredited courses, and flexible upskilling programmes. • Lack of diversity in the sector, limits potential workforce supply.	including system integration, storage, and safety protocols. • Project management and multi-disciplinary coordination for renewable energy projects. • Digital and analytical skills: energy monitoring, SCADA systems, data management, and modelling software. • Laboratory, geoscience, and environmental monitoring skills for tidal and offshore energy projects in particular. • Energy efficiency skills: conducting energy audits, implementing efficiency measures, monitoring energy use, and compliance knowledge. • Practical experience gaps among graduates and early-career entrants; need for work placements, internships and more graduate programmes as well as HE sandwich courses. • Fragmented provision and low uptake of available courses including the new apprenticeship framework in Energy Efficiency.	planning advisers, electrical and mechanical engineers, and data analysts. • High regional demand for electricians, welders, and pipefitters for hydrogen projects (HyNet). • High regional demand for electrical and mechanical engineers, welders, and fabricators for renewable energy projects (tidal, offshore wind). • Emerging need for project managers, lab technicians, geoscientists, planners, and data analysts in renewable energy.
Health & Social Care	• Ongoing difficulties filling care and support roles due to low pay, challenging working conditions in comparison to other occupations,	• Employers report that existing staff often lack specific skills required for complex or specialist care, including dementia care, end-of-	• High-Demand Roles: report of shortages in key roles including specialist roles where the local labour supply is weak, including:

	e.g. retail and limited candidate readiness. • Need to raise the sector's profile: Increased engagement with schools and colleges is needed to promote health and social care careers and attract more people into the industry. • High Turnover Rates: Employers report high turnover rates, particularly among entry-level positions, leading to increased recruitment and training costs. • Difficulties in recruiting international staff due to changes in immigration policies. This is particularly challenging for social care. • The ageing workforce contributes to high replacement demand. • Gender imbalance and limiting diversity across the sector. • Retention challenges in health and social care, regulatory, and professional roles due to funding constraints, limited progression, or more competitive opportunities elsewhere. •	life care, mental health support, and safeguarding. • Digital skills gaps across the workforce. • Welsh language skills across all levels. • Limited structured continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities restrict staff progression and retention. • Upskilling opportunities are inconsistent across the sector, leaving staff unable to meet evolving regulatory and clinical standards, in social care in particular. • Parity of funding for example Social Work students with the NHS Wales bursary scheme. • Qualification of the Health and Social Care pathway not aligned and creates duplication for the learner which impacts the candidate readiness and/or disengages the learners or lose learner to other sectors. • Funding streams to LA's via Social Care Wales Workforce Development Plan not increasing to enable successful training and development.	o Registered nurses and nursing assistants o Social workers o Occupational therapists o Mental health practitioners o Care assistants and domiciliary care workers o Speech and language therapists o Physiotherapists o Psychology Educational and Clinical • Skills shortage around regulatory compliance, patient care, digital record keeping and need for digital upskilling of workforce. • Shortages are particularly acute for entry-level care and support roles. • Shortage of Welsh language speakers across the sector. • Continual year on year shortage on the Welsh speaking MA Social Work degree highlight risk to labour supply.
Tourism & Hospitality	• Recruitment remains difficult due to low pay and seasonal instability,	• Employers have identified gaps in current provision, particularly	• Persistent shortages exist in core operational roles, including chefs,

especially in rural/coastal areas (Anglesey, Gwynedd, Conwy, Denbighshire).

- Perception among young people that hospitality is low-status or "just a summer job" is still strong, despite many businesses now paying £12–£14/hr + tips + accommodation for the season.
- Rural and coastal areas (particularly Anglesey, Meirionnydd, and Llŷn Peninsula) face added recruitment barriers linked to limited public transport.
- Employers report increased operational costs due to rising national insurance contributions and the national minimum wage, impacting their ability to offer competitive wages.
- Post-Brexit loss of EU seasonal workers has never been fully replaced, the sector is still very short of reliable seasonal front-of-house, housekeeping, kitchen porters and chefs every summer.
- Work-life balance and long or irregular hours continue to deter potential recruits from entering or remaining in the sector.

around some short courses. Further investigation and discussions with providers show that most of the courses are available but are delivered as part of bespoke, tailored packages. As a result, information about these courses is not always clearly presented and, in some cases, is not available on providers' websites. This means that unless an employer already has an existing relationship with a provider, they are unlikely to be aware that these courses are offered.

- Digital skills and revenue management skills gaps (many small hotels, self-catering units and attractions still rely on owners or one over-stretched manager to do all social media, OTA management, pricing, etc.):
  - Digital tools and social media marketing
  - Basic computer literacy skills and advanced IT or software
- Leadership and management skills are lacking, particularly for small business owners who have progressed from operational to managerial roles without formal training.

kitchen assistants, front-of-house staff, housekeeping, and bar staff.

- Chef shortages remain acute, particularly for skilled and experienced roles in high-end or rural establishments. North Wales lost a lot of experienced chefs during and after Covid, and are now competing with much higher wages in larger cities and on cruise ships. It is probably the single biggest operational risk for many restaurants and hotels right now.
- Specialist roles such as event coordinators, tour guides, activity leaders, and heritage interpreters are difficult to fill, especially those requiring bilingual or specialist knowledge of local culture and environment.
- High turnover, particularly in entry-level and seasonal roles, increases recruitment and training costs for employers.
- Growing demand for digital marketing and e-commerce roles as businesses expand their online presence although businesses do struggle to release staff for day-long courses off site. Some alternative delivery models suggested by employers:
  - Deliver more training on-site or in clusters (e.g. a trainer comes to Betws-y-Coed or Abersoch

		• Basic employability skills—such as timekeeping, reliability, and teamwork—are often inconsistent among new entrants.
		• Sustainability and green skills are emerging needs, as businesses move towards environmentally responsible operations (e.g., waste reduction, energy efficiency, sustainable food sourcing).
			for a weekend and trains 15–20 staff from different businesses at once).
			  ○ Use pop-up training venues in tourist areas during the winter off-season when staff are available.
			  ○ Create a North Wales Tourism Skills Passport short, accredited modules that staff can collect over several winters and build into a full qualification without losing a whole season.
			• Increased interest in experience-led roles in tourism (adventure guides, heritage interpreters, wellness instructors, sustainable tourism coordinators), especially with the growth of Adventure Tourism (Zip World effect) and the new focus on regenerative/sustainable tourism.
			• Employers highlight the need for multi-skilled staff who can work flexibly across customer service, catering, and accommodation functions.

Food & Farming	• Recruitment difficulties in seasonal or rural roles; some positions are unattractive due to remote location, low pay, and long working hours. • Micro and small businesses dominate the sector, limiting capacity to offer training, career	• Gaps exist in process, plant, and machine operation; skilled trades; and professional occupations in agri-tech. • Increasing need for high-level skills including digitisation, precision	• Demand for process, plant, and machine operatives remains high, with shortages in both entry-level and more technical roles. • Elementary and routine roles are hard to fill, alongside higher-level technical and professional positions (QCF levels

	progression, or competitive employment conditions.
	    ○ Also limited awareness within the sector of regional training opportunities, including apprenticeships and short courses.
	    ○ Economic pressures, including rising input costs and market volatility, make it harder to invest in staff development or retention.
	• High turnover in seasonal or temporary roles increases recruitment and training burdens.
	• Difficulties attracting younger workers, who often perceive the sector as low-status or temporary work.
	• Rural locations face additional barriers due to limited public transport.
	• Low awareness of sector careers among young people with interest largely influenced by family background.
		farming, and sustainable/green farming practices.
		• Knowledge of evolving compliance requirements and ability to innovate are inconsistent across the workforce.
		• Digital skills gaps affect employees at all levels, limiting efficiency, data management, and adoption of new technologies.
		• Limited awareness of formal training programs and continuing professional development restricts skill progression.
		• Gaps in leadership and business management skills, impacting farm efficiency and strategic decision-making.
		• Reports of gaps in marketing expertise, affecting promotion, customer engagement, and business growth.
			4–6 and even 7–8) as farming becomes more technical.
			• Skilled trades in agricultural engineering, machinery maintenance, and technical operations are in short supply.
			• Agricultural technicians and machinery specialists are scarce, affecting adoption of precision farming and mechanisation.
			• Shortages in sustainable farming expertise, including knowledge of zero-carbon practices, soil management, and environmentally friendly techniques.

Financial & Professional	• Smaller practices and firms struggle to recruit for accounting, audit, legal, and financial analytics roles due to a limited local talent pool. Reports of employers looking outside of the region even internationally for staff.	• Gaps in digital finance skills, including data analysis, financial modelling, coding, regulatory compliance and cyber security. • Leadership and management skills are particularly weak in small to medium-sized enterprises.	• High demand for financial analysts, accountants, auditors, compliance officers, and risk management professionals. • Shortages exist for legal professionals with digital or regulatory expertise.

	• Basic employability skills, such as time management, communication, and teamwork, are sometimes lacking among new young recruits. • Digital literacy gaps among candidates limit the ability to adopt new software and financial tools. • Remote or rural locations reduce the attractiveness of some roles, making recruitment more difficult. • High demand in larger cities across the border draws talent away, increasing competition for qualified candidates. • Retention challenges exist in junior roles due to lack of career progression opportunities being limited in smaller organisations. • Limited awareness of training opportunities to upskill the workforce, including through the apprenticeships programme and PLA's for individuals to access.	• Soft skills gaps include communication, project management, and stakeholder engagement. • Knowledge of emerging technologies such as AI, automation, and digital reporting is limited among current workforce. • Limited upskilling opportunities and structured professional development reduce the ability of staff to progress into higher-level roles. • Some gaps in specialist legal and compliance knowledge, especially in relation to evolving regulatory frameworks.	• Management and professional-grade roles in finance, legal, and consultancy services are difficult to fill, particularly in rural areas. • Specialist roles in digital finance, cyber security, and regulatory compliance are increasingly hard to recruit. • Competition from larger cities across the border and financial hubs intensifies local skill shortages.
Public Sector	• Recruitment difficulties in key roles such as teaching, social services, local government, housing, environmental health, planning, mechanics, HGV / LGV drivers and legal. • Retention challenges in health and social care, regulatory, and professional roles due to funding constraints, limited progression, or	• Gaps in provision of higher education courses, including Environmental Health and Planning degrees. • Insufficient funding for staff development and upskilling, with public sector employers often ineligible for Welsh Government initiatives such as the Flexible Skills Programme.	• High demand for teachers, social workers, healthcare workers, learning support assistants, housing staff, and regulatory officers (environmental health, planning, building control). • Demand for professional roles including lawyers, HR, accountants/finance staff, surveyors, and professional Environmental Health Officers.

	more competitive opportunities elsewhere. • High turnover in entry-level or administrative roles due to limited progression or more competitive opportunities elsewhere. • Limited awareness of public sector career pathways, particularly among young people, making attracting young people into the sector challenging.	• Digital skills gaps, including record-keeping, data management, use of modern software, and readiness for future technologies and AI applications. • Welsh language skills gaps limited across the sector with a need to upskill existing workforce and continued challenges to recruit new staff with the right level of Welsh language skills • Leadership, management, and governance skills gaps, including the development of aspiring managers. • Sector-specific technical skills gaps in social work, health care, environmental health, building regulation, and planning. • Soft skills gaps: coaching, behavioural management. • Knowledge gaps for emerging priorities, including net zero, green energy, and AI integration. • Limited capacity among managers to identify current and future skill needs within teams.	• Specialist technical roles in short supply, including electricians, net zero/green energy engineers, plumbers, and digital/AI specialists. • Emerging demand for roles supporting Freeport and Investment Zone operations, sustainability initiatives, and future technologies. • Persistent shortages in leadership, management, and coaching capabilities to support a multi-generational workforce.

6.1 Cross-Sector Skills Priorities

While North Wales's priority sectors face distinct workforce challenges, engagement with employers and labour market analysis highlights a series of cross-cutting skills and workforce issues that affect multiple industries across the region.

Key Cross-Sector Skills Needs:

1. **Digital Skills**
   - Demand spans all sectors, from basic IT literacy to advanced capabilities in AI, robotics, data analytics, digital production, and sector-specific software.
   - SMEs, in particular, report limited capacity to release staff for digital upskilling and lack awareness of available training provision as well as the ability to articulate the type of training required.

2. **Leadership and Management**
   - Supervisory, team management, strategic, and multi-generational leadership skills are consistently required across sectors.
   - Gaps are most evident at mid-level management, where technical expertise often exceeds managerial capability.

3. **Welsh Language Skills**
   - Recruiting staff with appropriate Welsh language proficiency is a widespread challenge, particularly in public-facing roles within Health & Social Care and the public sector as well as Tourism and Hospitality sector in Anglesey and Gwynedd where employer demand is greater in these areas.
   - Upskilling the existing workforce is essential to meet statutory obligations and community expectations.

4. **Net Zero and Green Skills**
   - The transition to a low-carbon economy affects multiple sectors, including Construction, Energy & Environment and Advanced Manufacturing.
   - Key skills gaps include renewable energy technologies, energy efficiency, retrofitting, sustainable practices, and project management.

5. **Soft Skills**
   - Communication, teamwork, problem-solving, adaptability, and customer service skills are critical for operational effectiveness across all sectors.
   - Employers report that deficiencies in these skills particularly affect new entrants, apprentices.

Systemic Workforce Challenges:

- **Recruitment and Retention Pressures:** Persistent vacancies exist across multiple sectors, intensified by ageing workforce demographics, migration trends, and competition across the border.
- **Training Access and Awareness:** Employers, especially SMEs and micro-businesses, often lack knowledge of training provision or struggle to release staff due to operational pressures.
- **Alignment Between Education and Employment:** Limited coordination between training providers and employers' results in courses that are sometimes outdated or misaligned with sector needs with provision gaps also identified.
- **Future Skills:** Rapid technological change, digital transformation and Net Zero requirements demand flexible, modular, and industry-led training approaches to ensure the workforce remains future-ready.

Strategic Implications:

Addressing cross-sector skills needs provides an opportunity for coordinated region wide interventions that:

- Ensures training programmes are accessible and relevant across all sectors.
- Promotes inclusive participation, targeting underrepresented groups and ensuring career pathways are clear.
- Strengthens collaboration between employers and providers to future-proof the regional workforce.

7. Conclusion

North Wales faces persistent skills shortages, recruitment pressures, and some gaps in training provision across priority sectors. Cross-cutting needs in digital, leadership and management, Welsh language, Net Zero, and soft skills are particularly urgent, while employers face additional barriers to workforce development.

Implementing the recommendations outlined in this report will strengthen regional workforce resilience, reduce sectoral skills gaps, enhance career pathways for young people as well as underrepresented groups, and will support North Wales' economic growth and the transition to a low-carbon economy. Coordinated, industry-led action is essential to ensure accessible, flexible, and inclusive training aligned with regional labour market needs.

8. Recommendations

No	Recommendation	Rationale / Employer Insight	Stakeholders
1	RSP to undertake coordinated demand mapping for major investment projects	North Wales is entering a period of significant investment and economic growth. Employers across Construction, Advanced Manufacturing, Energy & Environment, and the Public Sector report increasing competition for the same skilled labour, with shortages already evident in engineering, project management, skilled trades, digital roles and Net Zero-related occupations. A coordinated, region-wide approach to demand mapping will enable the RSP and partners to identify future pinch points, quantify workforce requirements, and support proactive planning with training providers. This will help ensure that local talent pipelines are aligned with the timing and scale of major projects, reduce recruitment pressures and maximise the regional economic benefits of upcoming investments.	RSP, Welsh Government, Medr, Local Authorities, Project Leads/developers, Supply chain Training Providers
2	Expand geographic coverage of skills provision	Provision for retrofit is patchy across North Wales; some areas lack access to relevant courses.	RSP, Training Providers, Welsh Government, Medr

3	Improve provider-employer communication and marketing of courses	Many employers, particularly SMEs, have limited awareness of available training, funding and support, leading to low uptake of courses in digital, Net Zero, and some sector-specific technical skills. In addition, some training is delivered only through bespoke or tailored packages and is not marketed as stand-alone provision or clearly advertised on provider websites. As a result, employers without an existing relationship with providers are often unaware that these courses are available, creating a perceived skills gap despite provision existing.	RSP, Welsh Government, Medr, Training Providers, Employers
4	Co-design industry-led, modular training courses and foster flexible and modular training delivery	Employers have report that current training provision does not consistently reflect real-time industry needs, with course content often lagging technological change, regulatory requirements, and emerging skills demands. SMEs in particular struggle to access training due to rigid delivery models, long course durations and limited flexibility to release staff. Co-designing modular, industry-led training will ensure that provision is responsive, practical, and aligned with the skills employers need now and in the near future.	RSP, Medr, Training Providers, Employers
5	Embed soft skills within training programmes as an optional bolt on	Communication, teamwork, problem-solving, adaptability, and supervisory skills are critical across sectors and needed to support multi-generational workforces.	Welsh Government, Medr, Training Providers
6	Support Welsh language development	Difficulty recruiting Welsh-speaking staff, particularly in Health & Social Care and the public sector; upskilling existing staff is essential to meet statutory and service delivery requirements.	RSP, Training Providers, Employers, Welsh Government, Medr, Employers
7	Target engagement and support for SMEs and micro businesses	Smaller employers are less connected to the skills system and have limited capacity to engage with training providers.	RSP, Training Providers, Medr, Employers, Welsh Government
8	Strengthen awareness of opportunities across priority sectors	Employers highlight that many individuals, including young people and career influencers including teachers have limited awareness of the full range of	RSP, Careers Wales, Local Education Authorities, Schools, Colleges,

	including pathways into jobs	opportunities across sectors and may not always have access to up-to-date information on local or emerging opportunities.	employability providers, Welsh Government, Medr, Employers
9	Maintain up-to-date knowledge and capability of tutors/trainers and assessors.	Tutors/trainers and assessors need ongoing professional development to keep pace with digital, Net Zero, and technical sector changes; this ensures course relevance and quality delivery.	RSP, Training Providers, Welsh Government, Employers, Medr
10	Develop inclusive pathways for underrepresented groups	Employers report gaps in attracting women, neurodiverse individuals, minority groups and people with disabilities.	RSP, Careers Wales, Schools, employability providers, Welsh Government, Medr, Employers