

north wales economic ambition board

bwrdd uchelgais economaidd gogledd cymru

REGIONAL SKILLS PARTNERSHIP – NORTH WALES

SUMMARY BRIEFING FOR ECONOMY, INFRASTRUCTURE & SKILLS COMMITTEE (07.07.17)

Background to Regional Skills Partnership in North Wales

The established Skills and Employment workstream of the North Wales Economic Ambition Board (NWEAB) has been adopted and recognised by Welsh Government as one of the three Regional Skills Partnerships (RSP's), and continues its existing approach of economic and employer led engagement, to inform and drive the skills and employment agenda within North Wales.

The continued delivery and focus within a 'Team North Wales' approach has seen us be the only RSP in Wales to have been demonstrably nationally recognised for our work in collaboration with global and local employers on a completed project of national, regional, and local significance. In 2016, we were awarded the 'Construction Excellence Wales Award' for 'Leadership & People Development', for working in collaboration with our partners at the HMP Berwyn development in Wrexham. This approach based upon a bespoke programme of 'skills brokerage' championed at Wrexham to inform employment opportunities, apprenticeships, and work placements, has now been adopted by partners to support the promotion of opportunities for local labour at Wylfa Newydd on Anglesey.

With an existing employer as Chair of the RSP in North Wales, we maintain our innovative and transparent approach to partnership working, and sustain close working relationships with employers, education & training providers, and local & national government.

Our established work on the production of an annual Regional Skills & Employment Plan, directly aligns to, and supports the current development with partners on the Growth Bid for North Wales, as we continue to collaborate on the promotion and importance of skills development, mobility, and ambition, in a region whose current and future labour market influences, further extends beyond our traditional boundaries, into areas such as North West England and Mid Wales.

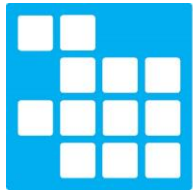
<http://regionalskillsandemploymentplan2016.co.uk/>

Overview of Apprenticeships in North Wales

Using the most current data available, the total number of apprentices across North Wales fell in 2015 compared to the previous year. Despite the total fall in numbers, there was an increase in those aged 20-24 taking up an apprenticeship within the region as more young people are staying on in education via school, FE and HE post the age of 16.

The promotion of apprenticeships within the region continues to be rigorous, with increased emphasis on the benefit of an apprenticeship to both the individual and the employer, being highlighted by RSP partners directly, and collectively through events and promotional materials supported and promoted by the Regional Skills Partnership in North Wales.





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Flagship companies within North Wales such as Airbus, continue to promote and offer an increasing number of apprenticeship opportunities across a variety of disciplines ranging from craft, technical, and business at different levels. With current and future apprentices recruited this Autumn, there could be in excess of 200 apprentices alone, based at Broughton.

The creation of 100 apprenticeships at the HMP Berwyn development, along with over 20 initial new apprenticeships in progress this year at the early development stage of Wylfa Newydd, cements the regional opportunities via apprenticeships that are currently promoted and offered within North Wales by flagship developments; whilst regionally based companies of significance such as Jones Brothers in Ruthin, continue to attract apprentices from all over Wales, due to their progressive skills development programme to support general and high level construction and plant machinery operations, in projects across the region and beyond.

5,565

FEMALE APPRENTICES IN
NORTH WALES IN 2015
COMPARED TO 6,710 IN 2014

4,190

MALE APPRENTICES IN NORTH
WALES IN 2015 COMPARED TO
4,795 IN 2014

9,755

TOTAL APPRENTICES IN NORTH
WALES IN 2015 COMPARED TO
11,460 IN 2014

With over 67% of businesses in North Wales employing less than five people, the reliance and emphasis on the micro and SME business sector within the regional economy cannot be underestimated, and many of these engage with our education and training providers to support and develop apprenticeships. However, there is still considerable work required to “sell” the benefits of apprenticeships to smaller businesses – the majority of whom do not have the comparable benefits of dedicated HR and training personnel, or applicable knowledge & skills themselves directly, to develop and support these programmes on their behalf.

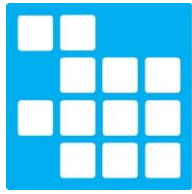
However, both our Further Education Institutions within North Wales, along with our private training providers, continue to provide bespoke and dedicated support to smaller employers specifically, in the sustainable benefits and outcomes generated to these employers and their businesses, of taking on an apprentice – be it through support for product development, expansion, and additional specific skills to benefit the business, amongst other criteria.

The introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy has caused confusion and concern amongst employers within the region – particularly those based closer to the English border, where employees are currently domiciled in both Wales and England, and therefore, subject to differing approaches.

Both FEI’s in North Wales have delivered promotional sessions on the impact of the Levy for employers and individuals based on the limited and emerging information provided, and both institutions have registered within England to support the delivery of the scheme for those affected by the disparity of approach, but also to provide competitive expertise based on experience to date, outside of perceived current geographic boundaries.

We as the RSP have also undertaken a full analysis of support for young people aged 16-24 within the region and published this online both as a key document, and bespoke searchable database to assist individuals and providers.





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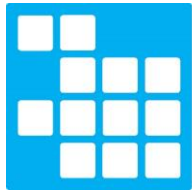
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Challenges for the future of Apprenticeships in North Wales

Whilst providers and partners continue to welcome the overall support and guidance from national partners and politicians on the role and promotion of apprenticeships, and wish to continue this as appropriate for North Wales, there are still a number of challenges which the region faces in terms of promotion, accessibility, and up-take of apprenticeships generally. Without preference of order, the main challenges are collated and highlighted below:

- ✓ Perception amongst smaller employers that the larger 'flagship' employers get the best quality of apprentices, as they can offer greater security and additional benefits. This adds to the reluctance of some smaller employers to engage with providers and take on apprentices
- ✓ Apprenticeships need better promotion within schools as a viable pathway – both teachers and parents need greater support and information in a consistent coordinated approach on the regional benefits and opportunities that an apprenticeship can offer a young person in North Wales
- ✓ Careers Wales promotes pathways and opportunities around apprenticeships, but as in the rest of Wales, we have seen a 50% reduction in resources with only 67 careers advisors who are now each responsible for on average three schools based on a partnership agreement with the schools directly, and are only able to focus on specific cohorts and not broader year groups
- ✓ Whilst we continue to work with Careers Wales, and have collaborated on the first ever "Spotlight" regional resource which has now been copied by others, the messages on opportunities for apprenticeships within key and growth sectors, does still not appear to be taken up in larger numbers
- ✓ Whilst support and promotion for apprenticeships from Welsh Government is welcome, employers and individuals feel that it can be too Cardiff and South Wales biased and focused
- ✓ We as the RSP in North Wales have excellent working relationships with WG colleagues directly involved in skills and the economy, but those colleagues responsible for apprenticeships, due to their South Wales base, often have a lack of understanding of the regional variations applicable to North Wales and our labour market, which can frustrate and hinder progressive developments as part of a wider North Wales and cross-border approach to support our current and future labour market
- ✓ To effectively promote and sustain a regionally coordinated approach to skills and apprenticeships, responsibility should be considered to be devolved to the region as part of the North Wales Growth Deal, to continue to work effectively with national partners, but have a clear and distinct regional knowledge and delivery mechanism directly aimed at individuals and employers within North Wales that is devolved of a potential South Wales bias in terms of project and product development seen to date
- ✓ Regional coordination and promotion of apprenticeships can better engage local and regional employers based on the fact that 67% of businesses within North Wales employ less than 5 people, and local FEI's, training providers, and others have a more direct and purposeful ability to engage with these businesses directly, and therefore support and promote individuals appropriately to these opportunities





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- ✓ Promotion of work placements to date has been a positive precursor to supporting those from low income backgrounds into apprenticeships – evidenced in North Wales by experiences gained from the development at HMP Berwyn, and our work collectively with partners including DWP, Princes Trust, Chwarae Teg, FEI's, and tiers 1 & 2 contractors on-site, alongside supply chain companies. This approach and transparency of offer needs to continue if we are to continue to drive upwards the skills and qualifications of all of our workforce at all levels.
- ✓ There is evidence of a concentration of greater numbers of higher level apprenticeships (L4+) in the east of the region compared to the west (e.g. 140 in Anglesey compared to 300 in Wrexham), and whilst density of population is a factor, there is a need to promote progression into higher levels, to address employer needs and demands. This will also assist with wider succession planning and creation of new entry talent, particularly in established industry sectors whose aging workforce will need to be replaced in large cohorts within the next 5-10 years
- ✓ North Wales already demonstrates good example of the promotion of female apprenticeship opportunities within STEM focused industry cluster sectors – be it IT & Communications in Gwynedd, engineering in Flintshire, pharmaceuticals in Wrexham, and energy in Anglesey. However, the promotion of gender balanced opportunities is still a challenge for some employers, and the promotion of females into apprenticeships within traditionally male dominated industries, needs to be continued to addressed, and also vice versa with males being promoted to enter apprenticeships within those industries incorrectly classified as female dominated such as Health, Social Care, media, and the arts
- ✓ To assist the development and retention of current and future skills, we need to place a greater regional focus of the promotion of apprenticeships for our domiciled population, and the opportunities we as a region can offer. This would include an emphasis primarily on those employers and businesses within our three key sectors (*Energy; Manufacturing, Construction*), and four growth sectors (*Creative & Digital; Health & Social Care; Tourism & Hospitality; Food & Drink*) for the region, and the pathways offered here by them collectively via common transferable skills, and also bespoke industry specific skills that apprenticeships in North Wales can offer. These would then also be supported by apprenticeships for sustainable employment within our other foundation economy sectors such as retail and public services, who continue to employ the largest numbers of individuals collectively within North Wales.

NOTES:

Chair of the Regional Skills Partnership for North Wales is **Sasha Davies** (Head of Strategic Development Wales for Horizon Nuclear Power).

The Vice Chair of the Regional Skills Partnership for North Wales is **Sioned Williams** (Head of Economic Development for Cynfor Gwynedd).

The NWEAB Regional Programme Manager for Skills & Employment is **Iwan Thomas**

WEB: <http://www.northwaleseab.co.uk/jobs-and-skills/>

Twitter: @SkillsNWales

YOUTUBE: <https://www.youtube.com/user/skillsnorthwales>

