



Partneriaeth Sgiliau Rhanbarthol
Gogledd Cymru
North Wales
Regional Skills Partnership

Flintshire & Wrexham Investment Zone Skills Strategy

2025-2035

Flintshire & Wrexham Investment Zone Skills Strategy

2025-2035

Produced by AMION Consulting on behalf of The North Wales Regional Skills Partnership

Produced June 2025



1. Introduction

AMION Consulting was commissioned to develop a comprehensive Skills Strategy for the Flintshire & Wrexham Investment Zone. This strategic piece of work forms a vital component of the broader Investment Zone programme, which aims to unlock economic growth and innovation in North East Wales. At its heart, the strategy seeks to ensure that workforce development keeps pace with – and actively supports – the region’s ambitions for economic transformation, with a particular focus on **Advanced Manufacturing**.

This document is accompanied by a more accessible summary, to allow broader use of the strategy.

The need for a dedicated skills strategy arises from the critical role that a skilled workforce plays in enabling sustainable economic development. The strategy provides an evidence-based rationale for targeted investment in skills and training, identifying the specific capabilities and qualifications required to support growth across the life of the Investment Zone. It ensures that efforts to enhance skills provision are both focused and responsive, aligned with the needs of employers, emerging technologies, and sectoral opportunities.

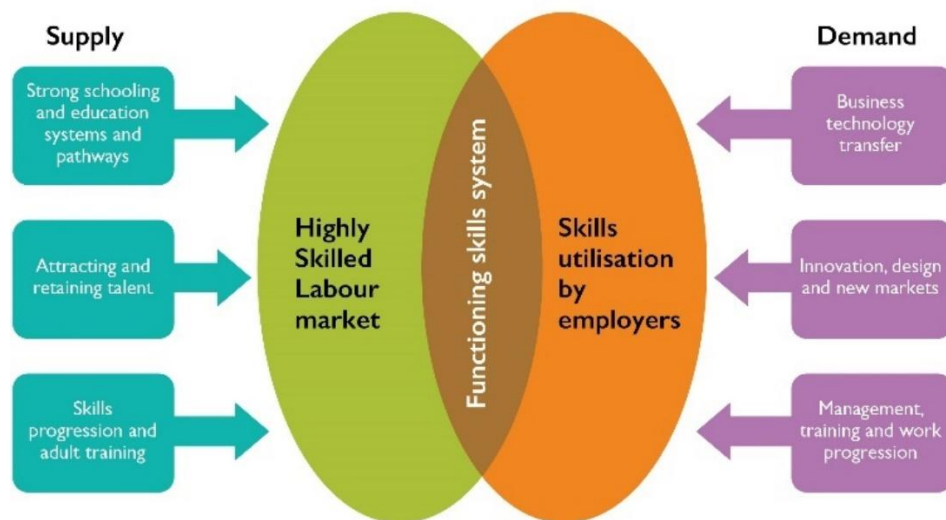
More broadly, the strategy supports a collaborative, place-based approach to workforce development. It brings together key stakeholders across the skills ecosystem – including businesses, local authorities, training providers, educational institutions, government agencies, and representatives from the third sector – to shape a shared vision for the future of skills in Flintshire & Wrexham.

1.1 Supply and demand of skills in Advanced Manufacturing

Advanced Manufacturing represents a cornerstone of the region’s economic potential and is a key sectoral focus for the Investment Zone. The development of a high-value, internationally competitive manufacturing cluster will require a workforce with the right blend of technical skills, industry knowledge, and adaptability.

A well-functioning skills system depends on the effective alignment of supply and demand, ensuring that training provision meets the current and future needs of employers while offering meaningful opportunities for learners. The strategy acknowledges this opportunity and responds directly to the workforce challenges that currently constrain growth in this area.

Figure 1: Aligning Supply and Demand



Source: Adapted from the OECD 2018

1.2 Methodology

This strategy has been shaped by a robust and inclusive process of stakeholder engagement and data analysis. AMION has undertaken an expansive programme of consultation, including a series of workshops with the Investment Zone Steering Group, local businesses, training providers, and other relevant organisations. One-to-one interviews were also conducted with representatives from Welsh Government, further and higher education institutions, local authorities, employers, and the third sector. The voices of young people were also sought to ensure that the future workforce is considered in today's planning.

This engagement has been underpinned by the development of a detailed evidence base, drawing on labour market data, economic forecasts, and insights from employers. The evidence base – available as an appendix – has been instrumental in identifying current and future skills gaps, and in shaping a strategy that is both grounded and forward-looking.

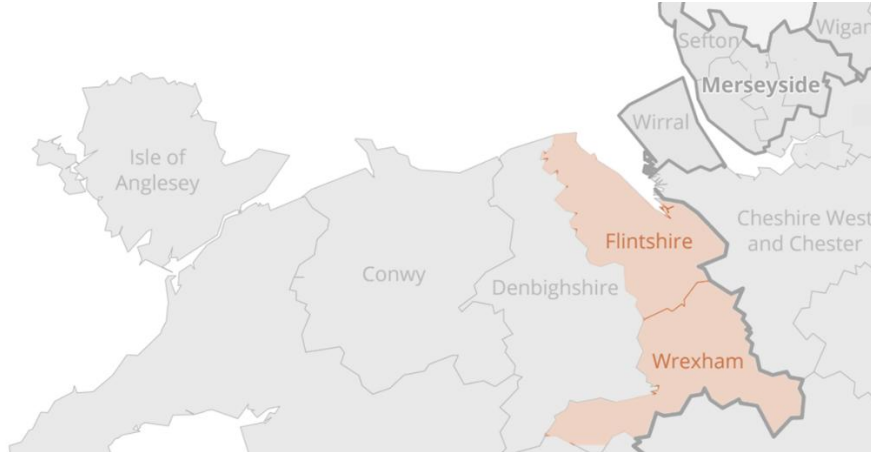
Geography

The strategy is explicitly focused on the geographies of Flintshire & Wrexham, reflecting the defined boundaries of the Investment Zone and the distinctive economic, social, and spatial characteristics of each area. While both counties share common ambitions around growth, skills, and innovation, they also possess unique assets, sectoral strengths, and demographic profiles that shape local priorities for workforce development.

To provide further spatial context, a map (Figure 2) is included that outlines the broad geography of the Investment Zone, encompassing the principal urban centres, key employment sites, and transport corridors across Flintshire & Wrexham. It also highlights the relationships with neighbouring local authorities in both Wales and England, recognising the cross-border flows of learners, workers, and businesses.

The geography and linkages is essential to understanding the dynamics of the regional labour market and ensuring that the strategy supports both local priorities and strategic connectivity with adjacent economic areas.

Figure 2: Map of Flintshire & Wrexham



Source: Adapted from ONS

This Skills Strategy is a proactive and timely response to the significant economic opportunity presented by the Investment Zone. It provides a clear framework to support the development of a skilled, agile, and resilient workforce – one that can power the region’s ambitions in Advanced Manufacturing and beyond.

1.3 Document structure

The document is structured as follows:

Section 2: Vision, principles and strategic context - Sets out the skills vision for the Investment Zone and how it aligns with regional and national priorities.

Section 3: Overview of evidence - Summarises current skills provision, sector strengths, and key challenges linked to Investment Zone sectors.

Section 4: Maximising opportunities through skills interventions - Outlines proposed interventions, with a summary table showing delivery partners and indicative focus areas.

Section 5: Delivery and governance - Covers governance, roles, funding alignment, and the approach to monitoring and evaluation.

2. Vision, principles and strategic context

2.1 Vision

The Flintshire & Wrexham Investment Zone aims to create a skilled, future-ready workforce that drives innovation and supports sustainable growth in advanced manufacturing. The skills strategy vision below outlines how the Investment Zone will build a skilled, resilient workforce to support sustained economic growth and high-quality job creation.

“The Flintshire & Wrexham Investment Zone will develop a skilled, future-focused workforce for advanced manufacturing, aligning training with industry needs to drive innovation and productivity. By fostering strong partnerships with local education and businesses, the zone will create high-quality, well-paid, and sustainable job opportunities. Tailored skills programmes will ensure that both current and future workers can thrive in a dynamic, high-tech sector. The Investment Zone will empower local talent to take advantage of career progression and support the growth of a competitive, innovative manufacturing hub.”

This corresponds with the Investment Zone vision which is to:

“Collaborate with industry to create high quality jobs that are well paid and sustainable and will provide career opportunities those both directly engaged and within associated support roles. The Investment Zone in Flintshire & Wrexham will support the growth of existing supply chains and attract new manufacturing operations into modern, efficient facilities in well-connected and accessible locations.”

The visions demonstrate that jobs in the Flintshire & Wrexham Investment Zone will primarily stem from the expansion of advanced manufacturing, innovation-driven industries, and the growth of local supply chains. As new businesses and operations are attracted to the area, there will be a growing demand for skilled workers across a range of technical and support roles. A targeted skills strategy is essential to equip the local workforce with the necessary expertise to meet these emerging opportunities and support sustainable economic growth.

2.2 Key principles

The Skills Strategy for the Flintshire & Wrexham Investment Zone is built around a set of core principles that provide a clear foundation for action. These principles ensure the strategy remains focused, inclusive, and responsive to the region’s evolving needs.

- **Collaboration** - The strategy will be delivered through strong partnership working, drawing on the expertise and input of Flintshire & Wrexham’s employers, training providers, local authorities, government bodies, and the wider community. Effective collaboration is essential to ensure that interventions are relevant, targeted, and impactful.
- **People and inclusion** - At the centre of the strategy is a commitment to Flintshire & Wrexham’s people. It aims to widen access to opportunities, remove barriers to participation, and ensure that skills development supports all residents – particularly underrepresented and disadvantaged groups – to engage, progress, and succeed.
- **Focus and prioritisation** - The strategy recognises the importance of prioritising action. It will focus on a defined set of high-impact areas, rather than attempting to address

every challenge simultaneously. This ensures that resources and efforts are concentrated where they can deliver the most value.

- **Flexibility and adaptability** - Given the fast-changing nature of the economy and labour market, the strategy must remain agile. It will be designed to evolve in response to emerging opportunities, technological change, and shifts in employer demand or policy direction.
- **Addressing core and common challenges** - The strategy will focus on shared challenges across Flintshire & Wrexham's (and North Wales') skills system – such as digital and technical skills gaps – supporting solutions that benefit multiple sectors and stakeholders.
- **Aligning funding and investment** - A key aim is to better coordinate funding streams across agencies and initiatives, ensuring that investment in skills is efficient, strategic, and aligned with wider economic and social objectives.

2.3 Strategic alignment

The Skills Strategy has been developed to align strongly at national and regional levels (Figure 5), ensuring that the principles (section 2.2), interventions (section 4) and delivery and governance (section 5) support wider economic, innovation, and decarbonisation priorities.

The Skills Strategy for the Flintshire & Wrexham Investment Zone has been developed to align with key national and regional policy frameworks, ensuring coherence with broader strategic ambitions and maximising the impact of investment in skills. This alignment helps position the Investment Zone as a key contributor to Wales's and the UK's wider economic, innovation, and decarbonisation objectives.

At the national level, the strategy supports the priorities set out in Welsh Government's Plan for Employability and Skills, particularly around delivering a more responsive and employer-led skills system, improving access to lifelong learning, and ensuring that people are equipped for the jobs of the future. It also complements the Innovation Strategy for Wales, which emphasises the importance of skills in fostering a more innovative economy and strengthening the links between research, business, and skills provision. Whilst strongly aligning with a number of areas of national activity such as Personal Learning Accounts and other Flexible Skills Programmes, this strategy has set out to ensure that the skills interventions delivered by the Investment Zone add genuine value to the skills landscape, and will not merely displace pre-existing areas of activity. This has also required engagement with Medr¹ to ensure alignment and compatibility with the ongoing work and five strategic aims of the arm's length body, which is responsible for funding, regulating and co-ordinating the tertiary education and research sector.

The strategy is also closely aligned with Wales's Net Zero Strategy and the associated Net Zero Skills Action Plan, recognising that the transition to a low-carbon economy will require a workforce equipped with new and evolving skills, particularly in energy, construction, and advanced manufacturing. By supporting reskilling and upskilling in these areas, the strategy contributes directly to national decarbonisation goals.

Figure 4:

Manufacturing

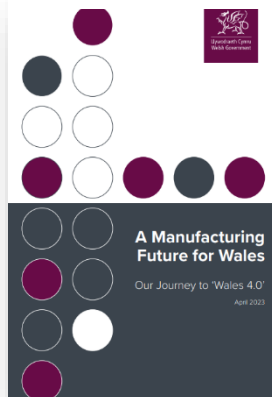
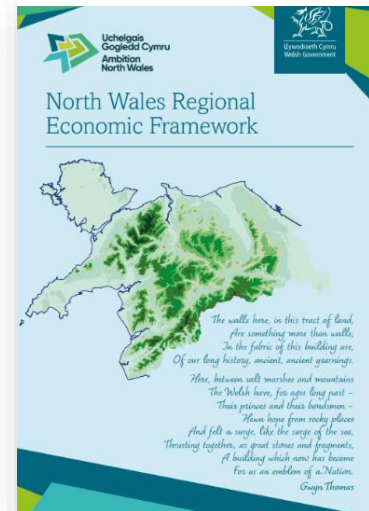


Figure 3: North Wales Regional Economic Framework



In terms of sectoral alignment, the strategy reflects the ambitions set out in the Manufacturing Action Plan for Wales (Figure 3), which identifies skills development as a key enabler for enhancing productivity, competitiveness, and resilience within the manufacturing sector. The focus on advanced manufacturing within the Investment Zone reinforces this shared commitment to modernising the sector and supporting high-quality employment.

Regionally, the strategy aligns with the North Wales Regional Economic Framework (Figure 3), ensuring that local skills development contributes to broader regional priorities, including

¹ Medr is an arm's length body of the Welsh Government responsible for funding and regulating the tertiary education and research sector in Wales. <https://www.medr.cymru/en/>

inclusive growth, innovation, and cross-border collaboration. This regional perspective is vital for building coherent pathways for learners and employers, and for maximising the impact of public and private investment across the wider North Wales economy. The strategy has also been developed in conjunction with the North Wales Skills and Employment Plan, drawing upon the identified Skills Blueprint and a number of emerging themes associated with the Advanced Manufacturing sector.

Figure 5: RSP Strategic Alignment



3. Overview of evidence

This section summarises the evidence measuring the ability of training provision to meet the needs of employers and support the development of an internationally competitive Advanced Manufacturing cluster.

This document is accompanied by a comprehensive evidence report, which identifies sectoral demand for skills, and the ability of the skills system to meet this demand.

3.1 Evidence overview

Demand

The Advanced Manufacturing sector employs almost 19,000 people in Flintshire & Wrexham, and accounts for approximately 15% of total employment. The Advanced Manufacturing specialism of Flintshire & Wrexham is clear by equating to almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of sectoral employment across North Wales, and over 20% of the entirety of Wales. The sectoral workforce is characterised by an ageing demographic and significant gender imbalances, whilst the most frequent occupations within the workforce are process, plant & machine operatives (36.1%) and those in skilled trades (21.2%).

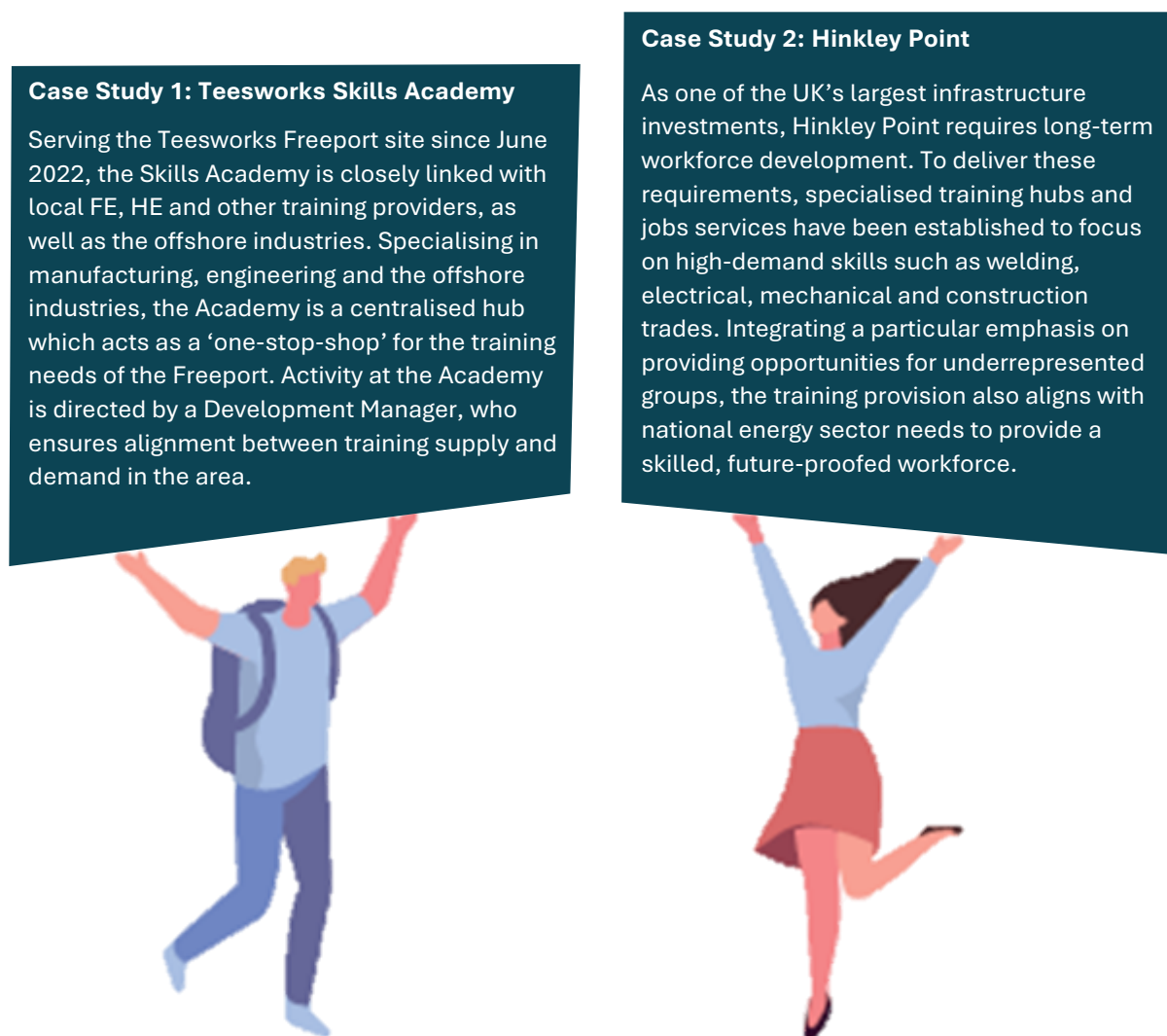
Similarly, those in possession of Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications account for approximately 50% of the workforce. In addition to the high levels of replacement demand associated with an ageing workforce, data suggests that the most prevalent skill requirements and qualification levels will evolve over the course of the Investment Zone period amidst ongoing and rapid technological change. These projected skills surpluses and deficits pose a significant challenge to Flintshire & Wrexham's existing skills-delivery landscape.

Supply

Despite Flintshire & Wrexham's proportion of individuals with no qualifications (8.0%) remaining comparable to both North Wales and the rest of Wales, a lower proportion of residents are qualified to Level 3 and above in relation to other geographies (60.8%). However, the area's strong FE and HE presence contributes to Flintshire & Wrexham containing the highest proportion of qualifications exceeding Level 4 across North Wales. GCSE attainment exceeds regional and national averages across numeracy and science, though there remain observable challenges in maintaining STEM-related exam entries beyond GCSE level. With over 14,500 learners enrolled at FE institutions such as Coleg Cambria, learning activities relating to engineering and manufacturing technologies account for approximately 8% of total activity. Similarly, almost $\frac{1}{4}$ of all apprenticeship starts in 2023/24 were onto programmes of direct relevance to the sector, with the take-up of such courses remaining significantly lower across other areas.

At HE level, many students study locally (over 35% study at Wrexham University or the Open University), with approximately 20% of enrolments in 2022/23 estimated to be across subject areas aligned with Advanced Manufacturing. However, there remain challenges in terms of the area's ability to retain graduates, with figures estimated to be up to 50% of young people with degrees leaving North Wales in pursuit of employment opportunities. There are also over 3,500 work-based learners in Flintshire & Wrexham, equating to almost 40% of total work-based learners across North Wales.

Figure 6: Learning from Elsewhere – Case Study Insights



3.2 Existing Strengths of Flintshire & Wrexham

Flintshire & Wrexham already possesses a number of significant strengths and assets which should support the sector’s development over the course of the Investment Zone programme. Identified through an extensive programme of engagement with private sector employers, training providers and the Steering Group, these existing strengths and areas of activity include:

- A network of localised expertise across key personnel and stakeholders including the North Wales Regional Skills Partnership, Flintshire County Council, Wrexham County Borough Council and Careers Wales. Collectively, the expertise of these public sector bodies can be leveraged to provide an impactful partnership-based resource.
- A cluster of local businesses which have already developed a strong and coherent business brand and act as proactive “anchors” within the local economy. For example, the sector contains several major employers including those represented in the Wrexham Leadership Alliance.
- The distinctive nature of the location as Welsh, without missing out on potential cross-border linkages due to proximity to the border. The strategically desirable location of the Investment Zone provides opportunities for mutual learning to support the identification

of potential areas of best practice through collaboration with parties involved across initiatives such as the Mersey Dee Alliance and the Anglesey Freeport, as well as the Liverpool City Region's Investment Zone and Freeport.

- A unique, time-constrained opportunity to explore synergies with other initiatives such as the Growth Deal, Wrexham's Long Term Plan for Towns and the growing brand of the area as a place to live, work and visit. Supported by existing areas of activity such as Xplore! Science and Discovery Centre, there is the potential to enhance the attractiveness of the area to prospective inward investors over the course of the Investment Zone programme.

3.3 Existing Activity within Flintshire & Wrexham

In addition to the existing strengths identified, there are several areas of existing skills-related activity which should provide the foundation for the skills programme delivered by the Investment Zone. Recognition of these areas of existing activity is central to the Strategy's key principles of 'focus and prioritisation' and 'aligning funding and investment', and also in ensuring that Investment Zone funding is being used to generate new, impactful activity rather than merely displacing it from elsewhere. For example, the area already contains a number of Higher Education, Further Education institutions and Independent Training Providers who are supporting sectoral workforce requirements and sitting at the forefront of industry-academia collaboration. This existing activity being delivered by academic institutions, other training providers and government bodies such as Careers Wales across complementary programmes should be leveraged to optimise skills outcomes without duplicating interventions.

3.4 Challenges identified by young people

This strategy engaged young people to explore views around the investment zone and some of the key themes explored in the evidence.

Career Aspirations

In terms of career aspirations, young people demonstrated a clear appetite to work within a role which allowed them to leverage and apply their existing skillsets. With specialisms ranging from organisation and administration to haulage, those consulted maintained a preference for their career choices to closely align with their skills and interests.

Barriers to Employment

However, a major challenge was identified to relate to the accessibility of skills, training and employment opportunities. Directly linked to the capability of young people to understand, pursue and access local opportunities, these barriers were identified to be both physical, in terms of a lack of conducive local infrastructure, and information-based. This informational challenge relates to the perceived lack of transparency and understanding surrounding the skill requirements often associated with job postings and advertisements, with young people often deterred by highly technical, and often ambiguous language. Similarly, young people outside of the labour market also expressed how they would benefit from a greater level of understanding of generalised professional etiquette to support their transition into the world of work.

Future Opportunities

Looking to the future and the Investment Zone, an identified enabler for young people was the provision of greater levels of information surrounding the major economic opportunity and how it may translate to the day-to-day lives of young people. The need for holistic, joined-up thinking was also identified to be crucial to ensure that the requisite infrastructure and institutions are in

place to allow for young people to benefit from newly-created opportunities across skills and training, work experience and fundamental social experiences.

3.5 Challenges identified by businesses

A series of interviews and business workshops identified a series of trends and evidence-based issues that the investment zone needs to consider.

Localised Skills Gaps

Independent of the Investment Zone in Flintshire & Wrexham, local businesses are already facing skills issues and gaps, which are particularly acute within the Advanced Manufacturing sector. Exacerbated by transport issues which prevent local people from accessing key employment sites, many local employers are required to recruit from afar and across the border, and often rely on financial incentives to attract workers into the area.

Lack of Work-Readiness

When local businesses are able to locate the personnel required to fill vacancies, there remain challenges in ensuring that these new workers are fully equipped to enter the workforce and “hit the ground running”. It is envisaged that this disconnect and gap between the education system and the workplace may be further complicated by the evolving education funding and curriculum landscape, and that greater levels of collaboration and transparency with bodies such as Medr are required.

Importance of Transferable and “Softer” Skills

Partially linked to the above, employers cited the importance of highly transferable and so-called “softer” skills which are often overlooked by providers. Likely to directly enhance the employability of those outside of the workforce, these skills were identified to be crucial across all different levels and occupations of roles, and a number of different sectors and sub-sectors.

3.6 Existing challenges with the alignment of supply and demand

Despite the strength of the existing skills provision across Flintshire & Wrexham and the reasons for optimism associated with the existing strengths and areas of activity highlighted above, there remain a number of challenges which need to be addressed to optimise the system’s ability to meet sectoral demand over the Investment Zone period.

To summarise these existing skills gaps, engagement with key stakeholders has established consensus regarding the primary skills-related challenges facing Flintshire & Wrexham over the course of the Investment Zone period. These primary challenges are shown below, within Figure 7. Further quantitative detail on these challenges is provided in the evidence report which accompanies this strategy.

Figure 7: Consensus areas in terms of main skill challenges



4. Maximising opportunities through skills interventions

The main intervention themes and areas have been identified through a collaborative process, to ensure that the themes remain aligned with the needs of the local Advanced Manufacturing sector and provide a targeted framework for skills-related investment over the course of the Investment Zone programme.

Across the identification of these intervention themes, it has been ensured that the skills programme remains broadly aligned and congruent with other areas of Investment Zone activity including innovation, business support, infrastructure and the significant development activity forecasted across the selected tax sites. It is also recognised that several intervention areas have the potential to add value to more than one aspect of the sectoral employment ‘pathway’, heightening the importance of effective engagement and co-ordination amongst key partners to ensure delivery remains coherent within and across the different intervention themes.

The process of identifying these primary intervention themes included the delivery of a workshop with the Steering Group, within which participants were invited to prioritise different areas of intervention. This exercise was supplemented by engagement with local businesses to identify the main skills challenges, and corresponding intervention areas with the potential to generate the most impact on the ability of the sector to meet its economic potential. This collaborative process uncovered a number of areas of consensus regarding the main intervention areas and themes, which are outlined in the table below.

Intervention Themes	Intervention Areas	Implementation Timeframe	Challenge(s) Addressed by Intervention	Key Stakeholders / Enablers	Impact	Areas of Existing Funding, Activity or Best Practice	Indicative Allocation (%)
Increased engagement with pre-16 and Schools	Co-ordinated careers, information and advice support and resource to increase pre-16 engagement with STEM and awareness of local career opportunities	Short Term (Years 1-3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need to increase diversity of the talent pipeline Lack of awareness for local opportunity across the sector Bridging the gap between GCSE attainment and 'work readiness' Expansion and upskilling of current stock of teachers and tutors Role of systemic deficiencies Communicating the opportunities to young people about the future job opportunities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Careers Wales North Wales RSP Local Authorities Schools Industry Partners 	Longer Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Careers Wales Airbus Schools Programme Young Person's Toolkit NW Skills Portal Youth Engagement and Progression Framework Xplore! STEM Gogledd Anglesey and Gwynedd Pathways Tailored Work Experience Children's University 	20-25%
	Delivery of a programme targeted at improving the diversity of the manufacturing workforce and talent pipeline, including the addressing of longstanding gender imbalances	Short Term (Years 1-3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identified need to increase diversity of the talent pipeline Existing recruitment challenges Lack of awareness for local opportunity across the sector Migration of skilled workers, often across the border 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> North Wales RSP Local Authorities Schools Industry Partners 	Intermediate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Manufacturing Action Plan 	
	Integration of Investment Zone opportunities into school curriculum and developed for to support the 'work-readiness' of young people	Medium Term (Years 4-6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lower generalised skill levels across workforce and wider population Need to increase diversity of the talent pipeline Lack of awareness for local opportunity across the sector Bridging the gap between GCSE attainment and 'work readiness' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Medr Careers Wales Welsh Government Schools Industry Partners 	Longer Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Curriculum for Wales Careers and work-related experiences toolkit 	

Intervention Themes	Intervention Areas	Implementation Timeframe	Challenge(s) Addressed by Intervention	Key Stakeholders / Enablers	Impact	Areas of Existing Funding, Activity or Best Practice	Indicative Allocation (%)
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expansion and upskilling of current stock of teachers and tutors 				
Support for learners aged 16 to 18	Use of incentives for employers to expand delivery of apprenticeships aligned to Investment Zone priorities to expand pathways in the key sector	Medium Term (Years 4-6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lower generalised skill levels across workforce and wider population Need to increase diversity of the talent pipeline Lack of awareness for local opportunity across the sector Rapidly evolving skill requirements Bridging the gap between GCSE attainment and 'work readiness' Expansion and upskilling of current stock of teachers and tutors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Medr North Wales RSP Coleg Cambria Industry Partners 	Intermediate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Welsh Apprenticeship Framework 	35-40%
	Use of incentives to expand opportunities for young people to build work-ready skills through internships and work placements	Short Term (Years 1-3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing recruitment challenges Need to increase diversity of the talent pipeline Lack of awareness for local opportunity across the sector Migration of skilled workers, often across the border Bridging the gap between GCSE attainment and 'work readiness' Role of systemic deficiencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> North Wales RSP Industry Partners 	Immediate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Careers Wales 	
	Infrastructure improvements to accommodate enhanced capacity (e.g. collaborative spaces).	Short Term (Years 1-3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing recruitment challenges Lack of awareness of, or ability to access local opportunity across the sector Migration of skilled workers, often across the border Role of systemic deficiencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CJC Industry Partners Local Authorities 	Longer Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Other Areas of Investment Zone Activity 	
	Improve transport links to enhance accessibility of education and training.	Short Term (Years 1-3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing recruitment challenges Lack of awareness of, or ability to access local opportunity across the sector Migration of skilled workers, often across the border 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CJC Industry Partners Local Authorities 	Longer Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Other Areas of Investment Zone Activity 	

Intervention Themes	Intervention Areas	Implementation Timeframe	Challenge(s) Addressed by Intervention	Key Stakeholders / Enablers	Impact	Areas of Existing Funding, Activity or Best Practice	Indicative Allocation (%)
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role of systemic deficiencies 				
	Creation of a mentorship (and if possible reverse mentorship) scheme to drive bi-directional knowledge transfer and mutual learning within the Investment Zone sector	Medium Term (Years 4-6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to increase diversity of the talent pipeline • Lack of awareness for local opportunity across the sector • Rapidly evolving skill requirements • Bridging the gap between GCSE attainment and 'work readiness' • Expansion and upskilling of current stock of teachers and tutors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Industry Partners 	Intermediate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business Wales 	
Enhanced pathways for those aged 18+	Support for the recruitment and retention of apprentices in Advanced Manufacturing, as well as the creation of new degree apprenticeships alongside new MSc, PhD and MRes programmes	Short Term (Years 1-3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower generalised skill levels across workforce and wider population • Existing recruitment challenges • Need to increase diversity of the talent pipeline • Lack of awareness for local opportunity across the sector • Rapidly evolving skill requirements (including skills for R&D and innovation) • Migration of skilled workers, often across the border • Bridging the gap between GCSE attainment and 'work readiness' • Expansion and upskilling of current stock of teachers and tutors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wrexham University • Coleg Cambria • Open University • Bangor University • Industry Partners • North Wales RSP 	Intermediate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welsh Apprenticeship Framework • Existing Medr funded Degree Apprenticeship Programmes • Collaborative Masters and PhD provision modelled on previous ERDF supported KESS programme 	20-25%
	Use of incentives to expand opportunities for individuals aged 18+ to build work-ready skills through internships and work placements	Short Term (Years 1-3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing recruitment challenges • Need to increase diversity of the talent pipeline • Lack of awareness for local opportunity across the sector • Migration of skilled workers, often across the border • Bridging the gap between GCSE attainment and 'work readiness' • Role of systemic deficiencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • North Wales RSP • Industry Partners 	Immediate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Careers Wales 	

Intervention Themes	Intervention Areas	Implementation Timeframe	Challenge(s) Addressed by Intervention	Key Stakeholders / Enablers	Impact	Areas of Existing Funding, Activity or Best Practice	Indicative Allocation (%)
	Co-designed education and training with employers such as skills bootcamps or sector-based work academy type models targeted at those furthest away from the labour market	Short Term (Years 1-3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lower generalised skill levels across workforce and wider population Existing recruitment challenges Rapidly evolving skill requirements Bridging the gap between GCSE attainment and 'work readiness' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Independent Training Providers Industry Partners 	Immediate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SPF-funded NEWSA Personal Learning Accounts Flexible Skills Programme 	
	Development of approved or recognised micro-credentials and short courses to grow higher-level, and technical skills	Medium Term (Years 4-6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lower generalised skill levels across workforce and wider population (addressed through competence-based workforce upskilling) Existing recruitment challenges Rapidly evolving skill requirements Bridging the gap between GCSE attainment and 'work readiness' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wrexham University Bangor University Coleg Cambria Open University Independent Training Providers Industry Partners North Wales RSP 	Intermediate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal Learning Accounts Flexible Skills Programme Medru: Skills Factory 	
	Expansion of Skills Portal to include Investment Zone specific careers, pathways, opportunities and events	Short Term (Years 1-3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing recruitment challenges Lack of awareness for local opportunity across the sector (also promoted awareness at a regional level) Migration of skilled workers, often across the border Role of systemic deficiencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> North Wales RSP Careers Wales Industry Partners 	Immediate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NW Skills Portal 	
Upskilling and reskilling of the existing Workforce	Retraining initiatives to allow for career transitions into Investment Zone sector through targeted programmes (including recognition of prior accredited / experiential	Long Term (Years 7-10)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing recruitment challenges Rapidly evolving skill requirements Migration of skilled workers, often across the border Role of systemic deficiencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wrexham University Coleg Cambria Open University Independent Training Providers 	Longer Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal Learning Accounts Flexible Skills Programme Working Wales Mid-Career Reviews 	15-20%

Intervention Themes	Intervention Areas	Implementation Timeframe	Challenge(s) Addressed by Intervention	Key Stakeholders / Enablers	Impact	Areas of Existing Funding, Activity or Best Practice	Indicative Allocation (%)
	learning and development of transferable skills)			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Industry Partners North Wales RSP 			
	Integrate entrepreneurial and innovation-focused content into provision	Medium Term (Years 4-6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lower generalised skill levels across workforce and wider population Existing recruitment challenges Rapidly evolving skill requirements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wrexham University Industry Partners 	Longer Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SPF-funded Essential Professional Skills Training Programme 	
	Establishment of a skills charter	Short Term (Years 1-3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lower generalised skill levels across workforce and wider population Existing recruitment challenges Rapidly evolving skill requirements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> North Wales RSP Industry Partners Education delivery organisations 	Intermediate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Electrical Contractors' Association Future Electrical Skills Alliance ECITB Skills and Training Charter 	
	Exploration of procurement mechanisms to enhance skills and careers engagement for suppliers	Long Term (Years 7-10)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lower generalised skill levels across workforce and wider population Existing recruitment challenges Rapidly evolving skill requirements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public Sector bodies Local authorities North Wales RSP Industry Partners 	Longer Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wales Infrastructure Investment Plan Wales Procurement Policy Statement 	

4.1 Pathways into employment at the Investment Zone

Skills pathways are a critical component of strategy implementation. By aligning education, training, and workforce development with the Zone's priority industries, these pathways help build a talent pipeline that supports both inclusive growth and inward investment.

Young People in formal education

1

In order to support young people in formal education into employment opportunities in the Advanced Manufacturing sector, there is a requirement to ensure that sub-regional GCSE attainment is to a desirable standard. In the first instance, this will provide employers with an enhanced pool of potential members of the workforce who are educated to the minimum level. Also crucial is enhancing awareness amongst young people of the careers, roles and significant opportunities that exist within the sector by prioritising engagement with parents, schools and other information providers to ensure consistent messaging regarding the Investment Zone itself, as well as the localised opportunities. By raising the profile of opportunities associated with the Investment Zone and ensuring that generalised GCSE attainment is to a sufficiently high level, young people in formal education will be in much improved position to seek labour market entry.

Young people in education (FE/HE)

2

Similar to the above, the engagement of young people in FE or HE and the raising of awareness of employment opportunities is a key component of the pathway into the sector. In addition, provision will need to be tailored and adapted to ensure alignment between the content being taught and the current, and future needs of the sector. Beyond this direct emphasis on what is being taught, young people will also benefit from access to a wider package of employability support. Including the development of 'soft' skills and access to work experience and placements, this stage of the pathway should provide young people with a blend of the technical expertise and workplace-skills needed to build confidence and enter the workforce on a full-time basis.

Within the workforce

3

To ensure that the existing workforce is sufficiently incentivised to remain in employment within Flintshire & Wrexham, a key requirement is safeguarding access to upskilling opportunities to support career progression. Requiring employers within the sector to take a proactive approach to the professional development of their workforce and engaging with the wider skills delivery ecosystem where required, this aspect of the pathway also aligns with the potential for retraining. As a sector with close linkages and interdependencies with other evolving industries, Advanced Manufacturing is also well-positioned to benefit from influxes of new workers from potentially declining sectors. The enhancement of opportunities for existing workers should also be supplemented by a more holistic, place-based approach to developing the area as a desirable, liveable location.

Inclusion

4

A further key consideration in augmenting and future-proofing pathways into the sector relates to the importance of diversity, equality and inclusion. In a sector marked by longstanding gender imbalances and an ageing workforce, emphasis is required on providing traditionally underrepresented groups within the sector with access to employment opportunities. As well as targeting increased engagement across different genders and ages, the Investment Zone should

also prioritise the boosting of participation amongst ethnic minorities and those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Where appropriate, opportunities for engagement with formerly incarcerated individuals may also be explored through potential partnerships with Berwyn Prison.

5. Delivery and governance

Effective delivery of this Skills Strategy will rely on the coordinated leadership of the North Wales Regional Skills Partnership (RSP), supported by strong collaboration across a range of stakeholders captured within the broader governance structure of the Investment Zone. Building upon the existing roles and responsibilities of the RSP, this collective endeavour will ensure that the strategy remains flexible, responsive, and embedded within the wider programme of activity being delivered as part of the Flintshire & Wrexham Investment Zone.

Central to the approach is the commitment to place-based delivery, leveraging both homegrown growth and inward investment opportunities. The principles of inclusivity, evidence-based intervention, and long-term sustainability will underpin all delivery activity. Where possible, this work will build upon and align with existing local and regional initiatives, creating added value through collaboration rather than duplication.

A phased approach will be taken to delivery, structured around short-term, intermediate, and longer-term priorities, in line with the timing and resourcing of the Investment Zone programme. A detailed delivery plan will be developed to accompany this strategy, setting out:

- Key actions and milestones, including delivery timeframes for interventions;
- Indicative responsibilities and delivery leads for each area of activity;
- Opportunities for alignment with other relevant funding streams and strategic programmes (e.g. Shared Prosperity Fund or Growth Deal). This also includes the exploration of complementary and potentially beneficial cross-border opportunities including Local Skills Improvement Plans and the use of degree apprenticeships.

5.1 Governance

Whilst the skills programme will have its own set of governance structures, there will remain a requirement for all arrangements to remain closely aligned and integrated with those of the wider Investment Zone programme. As shown by the figure below, the governance structure for the programme illustrates the role of the RSP in advising the Investment Zone Advisory Board (and thus the Economic Wellbeing Sub-Committee) on skills delivery. The RSP will also be supported by a sub-Group focused on implementation of the skills interventions.

Figure 8: Investment Zone Governance Structure



Governance will be driven by a clear structure of leadership, accountability, and collaborative oversight, ensuring that all partners remain engaged and empowered to support delivery. The following arrangements are proposed:

- Leadership and accountability will continue to sit with the North Wales RSP, which will act as the principal coordination body for skills-related activity linked to the Investment Zone. The RSP will maintain strategic oversight of the implementation plan and be responsible for monitoring progress against agreed objectives. The RSP will also hold ultimate responsibility for ensuring that the skills interventions remain aligned and congruent with the other areas of activity being brought forward across the Investment Zone programme through effective communication with key delivery partners. For example, this may include engagement with Medr to ensure that all interventions of relevance to tertiary education and research remain congruent and compatible with existing priorities.
- To drive delivery, the RSP will coordinate a dedicated Investment Zone Skills Steering Group. This group will bring together key stakeholders, including further and higher education providers, local authorities, employers, sector representatives, and relevant government agencies. Building on existing partnerships, the group will ensure a collaborative and evidence-based approach to developing and implementing targeted skills interventions. It will also support the identification of emerging labour market demands, help shape curriculum development (alongside Medr), and align provision with the needs of priority sectors within the Investment Zone. Regular reporting and engagement with the wider governance structure of the Investment Zone will ensure transparency, integration, and accountability throughout the delivery process.
- A partnership-based approach will be maintained throughout, building on existing collaborations and enabling new alliances to emerge. These partnerships will include local authorities, further and higher education providers, independent training providers, industry representatives, Careers Wales, Medr, and others. Where key partners are also potential funding recipients, additional consideration will need to be granted to the management and mitigation of any potential conflicts of interest.
- The RSP will adopt a task and finish group model to deliver priority interventions. This will involve delegating specific actions to identified “action owners” drawn from across the partnership, with these groups responsible for co-designing and implementing targeted workstreams.
- Defined roles and responsibilities will be agreed for all partners involved in delivery, including the identification of a lead stakeholder across all intervention areas. Each organisation will be engaged as appropriate in the development, design and delivery of interventions aligned with their remit, expertise, and reach.
- To support continuous improvement, a monitoring and evaluation framework will be embedded into the governance structure, ensuring interventions are regularly assessed for impact and adjusted where needed.

Throughout delivery, engagement with Medr and the Welsh Government is important. This is particularly the case as Medr’s strategic remit around tertiary education, research and innovation and responding to needs of employers.

5.2 Delivery Plan

Given the long-term nature of the Investment Zone programme and the uncertainty around the precise timing of future inward investment, the delivery of the Skills Strategy must remain agile and responsive. Activities will therefore be phased to allow early momentum while maintaining flexibility to align with emerging investment opportunities and sectoral developments. A number of key, shorter-term milestones associated with the 10-year programme are highlighted in the table below.

Key Milestone	Indicative Date
Approval of Skills Strategy by RSP Board	June 2025
Advisory Board Programme Established	June 2025
Agreement of Memorandum of Understanding between CJC, UK Government and Welsh Government	July 2025
Submission and Agreement of Year 1 Delivery Plan	August / September 2025
Year 2 Delivery Plan Agreed	December 2025
Year 2 Delivery Plan Approved by Economic Wellbeing Sub-Committee	Q1 2026

As shown for Year 2 of the programme in the above milestone table, it is envisaged that annual resource allocations will be determined by Annual Delivery Plans formulated in December of each year prior to final approval by the Economic Wellbeing Sub-Committee. In order to remain compatible with this proposed arrangement, it is envisaged that the phasing of the skills programme will be broadly structured around three key horizons:

- **Short Term (Years 1–3):**
The focus will be on launching the skills programme and delivering immediate and high-impact interventions, particularly those that build on existing infrastructure and relationships. This includes the expansion of pre-16 STEM engagement, early apprenticeship incentives, and the development of sector-focused careers portals. Early wins will demonstrate progress and build confidence across partners.
- **Medium Term (Years 4–6):**
This phase will focus on scaling up activity, informed by initial delivery outcomes and emerging employer needs. It will include the introduction of advanced and degree apprenticeships, support for industry-led curriculum co-design alongside Medr, and the development of collaborative training infrastructure to support a growing pipeline of inward investment.
- **Long Term (Years 7–10):**
This phase is intended to consolidate impact and ensure that the local skills ecosystem is fully aligned with the mature Investment Zone economy. Activities will include targeted upskilling and reskilling for career transitions, deeper integration of innovation skills, and long-term mentoring schemes. At this stage, workforce development will also be integrated more closely with broader place-making and housing strategies to support retention.

This phased approach allows the Strategy to remain grounded in current activity while being adaptive to the timing and scale of future inward investment. Across all phases of the skills programme, specific and bespoke delivery plans will need to be prepared to confirm the finalised arrangements for the implementation of different interventions. Key considerations within these

delivery plans may include the defining of planned strategies for engagement, and the mapping of proposed interventions against existing activity to ensure additionality.

5.3 Communications

Clear and consistent communication will be essential in the next steps of delivery. Positively framing the opportunities available will help raise awareness among the existing workforce, employers, and the wider community. Communications should highlight the practical benefits to individuals and businesses (e.g. improved access to career progression, greater job security, and opportunities to transition into higher-value roles in priority sectors).

Effective communication between delivery partners including employers, training providers, universities, and the North Wales Regional Skills Partnership will also play a vital role in ensuring activity is joined up, responsive, and targeted. Coordinated messaging should be inclusive and accessible, helping to reach underrepresented groups and build understanding of the full range of available support.

Positive communications will help foster a shared sense of purpose and commitment, supporting long-term engagement with the skills programme and contributing to a stronger, more adaptable workforce for the Investment Zone.

5.4 Other Funding and Resources

The successful delivery of this Strategy will rely on a blended funding model, drawing upon both existing and new sources of investment. It is imperative that the Investment Zone designation acts as a catalyst, not a replacement, for skills development activity across Flintshire & Wrexham.

Key principles include:

- **Leveraging Existing Programmes:**
Ongoing programmes funded through Welsh Government, UK Government (e.g. Shared Prosperity Fund), and sector-specific bodies (e.g. ECITB, ECA) should be aligned with Investment Zone objectives. Where possible, delivery should be reprofiled to maximise synergy and avoid duplication.
- **Unlocking Growth through Targeted Investment:**
Investment Zone-specific funding should be used strategically to unlock additional value—either by accelerating delivery, enabling innovative models of provision, or de-risking private sector involvement in training. These funds can act as a lever to attract further investment, whether through co-funding, in-kind support, or direct employer contributions.
- **Building Institutional and Industry Partnerships:**
By deepening collaboration between public and private stakeholders, the Strategy can tap into a wider ecosystem of support—ranging from philanthropic investment to innovation-focused grants, and partnership-led delivery consortia.

Through this mixed approach, the Strategy aims to ensure that resources are deployed efficiently and that the impact of the Investment Zone is amplified across the sub-region.

5.5 Evaluation & Monitoring

Monitoring and evaluation will be essential in understanding the effectiveness of interventions and ensuring accountability. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) will be used to track delivery progress, aligned with Gateway 4 metrics and reflecting both outputs and outcomes.

Suggested Outputs:

- Number of sectorally relevant training programmes delivered;
- Number of individuals participating in sectoral learning activities (e.g. apprenticeships, skills bootcamps, degree apprenticeships, HE programmes);
- Number of schools engaged by industry partners;
- Number of local employers co-designing provision;
- Number of employers accessing incentive payments for new apprenticeships;
- Number of existing workers upskilled or engaged in further learning.

Suggested Outcomes:

- Increased engagement with STEM subjects pre-16;
- Increased number of individuals gaining employer-required skills;
- Reduced incidence of reported skills shortages among employers;
- Growth in the number of individuals with Level 2+, Level 3+, and Level 4+ qualifications;
- Increased number of intervention participants achieving positive labour market outcomes.

These indicators will be reviewed and refined over time to ensure continued relevance. Evaluation will be embedded across all stages of the programme, ensuring that feedback loops are in place to inform responsive delivery and future policy development.

5.6 Next steps

Immediate next steps will include:

- Formalising the establishment of the Investment Zone Skills Steering Group to unlock delivery of the skills interventions. Relating to this sub-group, specific actions include:
 - Prioritising rapid mobilisation to facilitate the launch of the Investment Zone skills programme;
 - Developing an action plan for all specific interventions clearly outlining projects, outputs, measurables and outcomes;
 - Establishing specific task and finish groups to allow for the implementation of priority interventions to begin;
 - Ensuring that all relevant stakeholders are fully integrated into the group and engaged with the purpose and responsibilities of the group; and
 - Emphasising the importance of collaboration between key partners.
- Defining shared outcomes and investment principles for future skills interventions.

- Developing detailed Delivery Plans whereby organisations collaborate around the key intervention areas.
- Continuing business engagement to ensure alignment with sectoral needs.
- Strengthening communication with stakeholders and partners to support collaboration;

By maintaining a strong commitment to collaboration, evidence-led practice, and inclusivity, the Flintshire & Wrexham Investment Zone will be well positioned to create a resilient, skilled workforce capable of driving long-term regional prosperity.



FOR MORE INFORMATION
info@rspnorth.wales



**Partneriaeth Sgiliau Rhanbarthol
Gogledd Cymru
North Wales
Regional Skills Partnership**

AMION
CONSULTING