

New Futures Four Nations Wales briefing paper

About L&W and our New Futures pilots

Learning and Work Institute is an independent policy and research organisation dedicated to lifelong learning, full employment and inclusion. Our flagship programme, New Futures, supported workers who were looking to change career and reskill as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. This work was funded by the Covid-19 Support Fund. New Futures pilots were delivered in all four UK nations, including one focused on the M4 corridor in South Wales, run by gender equality charity Chwarae Teg with the aim of supporting women into the emerging tech sector in Wales.

This briefing is an opportunity to share what we've learned around career change policy in Wales. It sets out why career change is important, what the current landscape looks like in Wales and potential policy options to improve it. This is important at a time when two in five adults say they want or need to change careers in the coming years. The briefing focuses on Welsh-specific programmes, with UK-wide programmes operating in Wales dealt with by our [broader reporting](#). This briefing is informed by our desk research, roundtable event and in-depth interviews with experts in employment and skills policy.

What is career change and why is it important?

Recent years have been turbulent for a number of reasons; the financial crisis in 2008, a changing global financial order and a pandemic, all of which have shaken the economic environment we live in. The future too, is uncertain, with an ageing population, a transition to net zero and the growing impact of technologies like artificial intelligence all to be navigated. These global shifts, along with significant local economic changes, can have a direct impact on how we as individual workers experience the labour market: they change the types of jobs available and reset the requirements for taking up those jobs.

For these reasons, career change is likely to be a significant factor in many of our working lives. Indeed, we have calculated that around six per cent of people switch career every year across the UK and 7.4 million people start a new job every year. In Wales, our Adult Participation in Learning Survey shows us that seven in 10 think people like them can change career, and two in five want or need to change career in the coming years. Of these, half are motivated to change career for financial reasons and a further third are motivated by new challenges or better job quality.

So, what is career change? Put simply, it is a change of broad industrial or occupational sector, or a change to the nature of one's work. Career change is important too for our economic aspirations as a nation, with the sectors of tomorrow needing the workers of today.

Our All Change report found that, while career change and reskilling may be in the best interests of both individuals and the economy in the long term, there are significant barriers that may prevent it from happening.¹ Primarily, these barriers are financial, with an individual facing lower earnings in the short term, earnings foregone in order to retrain, plus the cost of retraining. Moreover, people often report not knowing what their options might be or where to get support with career change, including whether any financial assistance might be available to them.

Analysis of career change in Wales

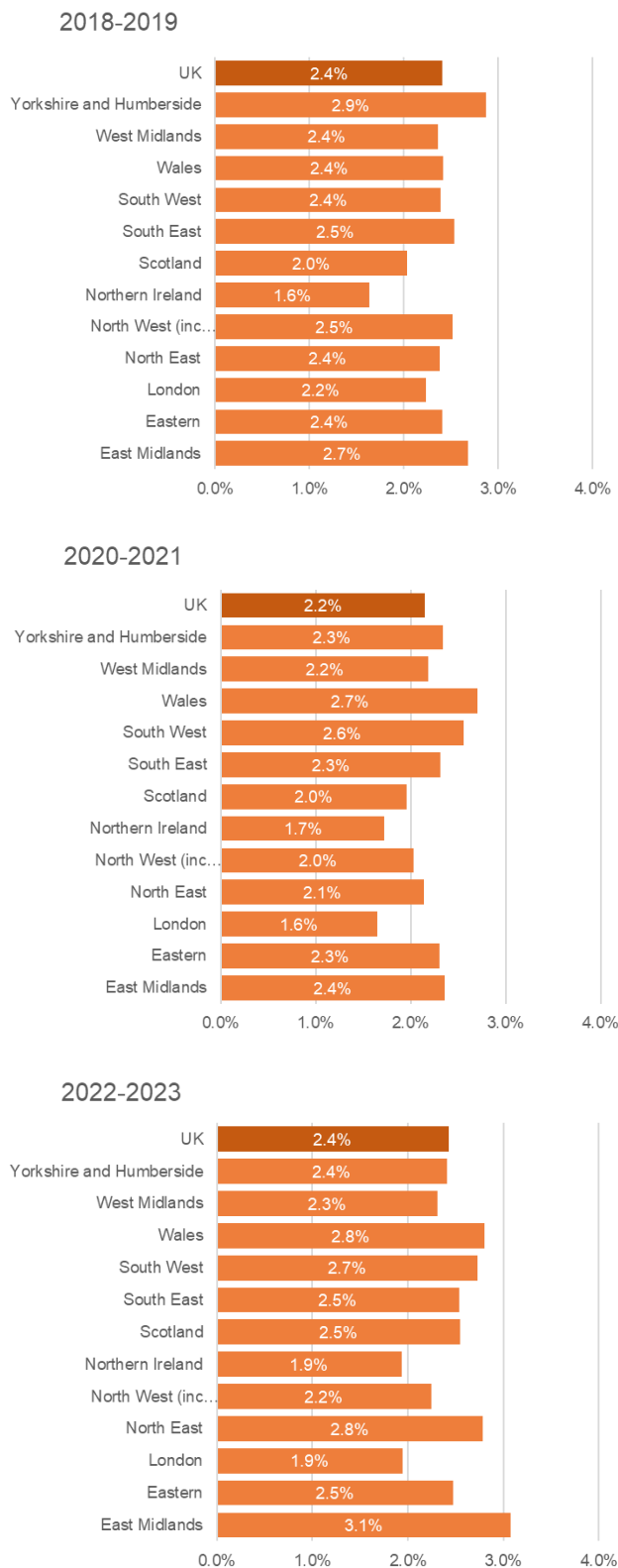
In Wales, the number of people moving jobs has increased since 2018-19. Figure 1 shows the percentage of people in work who change jobs by nation and region for time periods before the Covid-19 pandemic, during the pandemic and a year after.² It shows the proportion of people staying in the same sector against the proportion moving to a different sector. On average, 2.4% of workers moved job each quarter in 2018-19. This increased to 2.7% during the pandemic in 2020-21 and rose to 2.8% in 2022-23. There were fewer movements to a different sector after the pandemic in Wales than people changing jobs within the same sector, in line with most other regions and nations. The most recent data available shows that in 2022-23, 54.1% of job moves were within the same sector, while 45.9% involved a sector change.

Between 2020 and 2023, 35% of job movements in Wales were in or into the public sector, which is the highest in the UK. Public sector workers that changed job tended to find another public sector job: 84% remained in the public sector, more than in any other region or nation. The public sector also attracted people from other sectors. The largest number of movements in or into the construction sector was in Wales (12%). Meanwhile, only 15% of those who worked in hospitality and moved job stayed within or moved into hospitality, which is the lowest of all UK nations and regions.

¹ Learning and Work Institute (2023) [All change: understanding and supporting retraining and career change](#)

² Data is drawn from the Labour Force Survey.

Figure 1: Percentage of people in work who change jobs by nation and region



Note: revisions by the ONS have introduced a discontinuity in the series from the July to September quarter of 2022 onwards. Therefore, any assessment of changes over time should be used with caution.

Looking forward, Figure 2 shows the projected employment change in Wales per year, by industry sector to the year 2035.³ Our analysis of the projections shows that Wales will see the largest percentage growth in those employed in the finance sector compared to any other nation or region in the UK.

Figure 2: Employment by sector, 2020 to 2035, Growth (% per annum)

	Eastern	East Midlands	London	North East	North West	South East	South West	West Midlands	Y&H	Northern Ireland	Scotland	Wales
Agriculture	0.2	-0.3	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.4	0.1	0.4	0.1
Mining and quarrying	-4.4	-3.2	-3.3	-1.7	-3.7	-1.5	-4.0	-4.7	-4.7	-0.4	-0.9	-2.8
Food drink and tobacco	0.9	1.2	0.0	-0.1	-0.7	1.3	-1.7	-0.1	-1.7	1.0	-0.1	0.0
Engineering	-1.1	-1.3	2.0	-0.3	0.3	-2.0	-1.5	-0.2	0.2	-2.5	1.2	-1.3
Rest of manufacturing	-1.2	-1.0	-1.5	-1.0	-0.9	-1.2	-0.5	-0.7	-1.3	-1.2	-1.1	-0.6
Electricity and gas	-0.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	-0.8	-0.1	-0.6	-0.4	-0.3	-0.6	-0.6	-0.6
Water and sewerage	1.0	0.6	1.5	0.3	0.3	1.2	1.0	0.4	0.6	1.3	0.4	1.0
Construction	1.2	0.4	1.6	-0.3	0.1	0.9	1.2	0.2	0.1	1.3	-0.1	0.1
Wholesale and retail trade	0.2	0.3	-0.1	0.0	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.1
Transport and storage	0.7	0.3	0.5	0.3	0.6	0.2	0.2	1.0	1.0	0.7	0.5	0.1
Accommodation and food	1.0	0.4	1.5	1.2	1.4	1.2	1.3	1.5	0.6	1.7	0.4	0.6
Media	-0.3	0.0	0.5	0.0	0.1	-0.4	-0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Information technology	0.6	1.0	1.1	1.2	1.1	1.1	0.7	0.8	0.8	1.0	1.2	0.9
Finance and insurance	-0.9	-0.5	0.2	0.2	-0.2	-0.7	-0.3	-0.3	-0.1	0.2	0.3	1.0
Real estate	1.1	0.3	0.0	0.9	1.1	0.7	-0.7	0.9	-0.4	-1.4	0.2	-0.4
Professional services	0.9	0.6	0.8	0.5	0.7	0.8	0.9	0.6	0.7	0.8	0.9	0.7
Support services	0.9	0.8	0.7	0.4	0.8	0.9	1.3	0.8	0.9	1.1	0.9	0.6
Public admin. and defence	0.8	1.0	0.1	-0.1	0.0	0.4	0.5	0.5	0.1	0.1	-0.2	0.0
Education	0.0	-0.1	0.0	0.6	0.8	0.1	0.5	0.6	0.1	1.0	0.5	0.6
Health and social work	1.2	0.8	0.4	0.9	1.1	0.3	1.4	0.7	1.1	0.9	1.5	1.1
Arts and entertainment	-0.1	-0.4	1.3	0.8	-0.1	1.1	2.0	0.0	-0.2	0.6	1.4	0.6
Other services	0.0	-0.5	1.2	-1.4	-0.1	-0.4	0.4	-0.2	-0.9	0.3	-0.3	-1.0
All industries	0.5	0.3	0.6	0.3	0.5	0.4	0.7	0.5	0.3	0.6	0.5	0.4

Note: Red is the lowest growth in a sector for that region and green is the highest growth sector.

The current support landscape in Wales

For some people, changing careers is an active choice that suits their skills, ambitions and circumstances. For others, it is a decision forced by the loss of their current job, lack of similar opportunities or a change in circumstances such as caring responsibilities. The biggest barriers are often financial: not being able to afford to retrain or a loss of earnings. However, low self-confidence can also be a barrier, with many struggling to make a decision that would lead to a change in career.

Most people will change career or find a new job themselves. Others will need more support or guidance. However, the support or guidance is currently mixed, with a wide range of programmes supporting some of the objectives around career change, but few clear strategic programmes of delivery.

Our previous research has highlighted how Wales has a fractured environment in terms of employment support, with Welsh, UK and local governments all having good intentions but with often competing or overlapping programmes of support.⁴ Our research also shows how employment support is often inadequate, not reaching

³ Department for Education (2023) [Labour market and skills projections: 2020 to 2035](#)

⁴ Learning and Work Institute (2024) [Which way now for employment support in Wales?](#)

large proportions of the population that are economically inactive but want to work, and engaging sparingly with those in work.⁵

Indeed, there is no single strategy aimed at supporting career change in Wales. That said, Welsh Government's employability plan *Stronger, Greener, Fairer Wales* does include several policies that support this area. For instance, there is a recognition of initiatives such as the Personal Learning Accounts that support career change and a commitment to introduce mid-career reviews for those aged 50 and over as part of the Working Wales service.⁶

Turning to specific policies currently in place in Wales, there are a number that can aid career switching. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is responsible for mainstream employment support, with Jobcentre Plus providing targeted support for jobseekers who face barriers to employment through programmes such as the current Restart Scheme and Work and Health Programme. In general, support is focused on getting people into jobs, which might or might not involve a change in career. These programmes are planned to be superseded by Universal Support which is planned to begin roll out in the second half of 2024, encompassing people who are economically inactive and involving 'place and train' support. Again, there is no explicit focus on supporting people to change career at the outset.

Low earners on Universal Credit in the 'Intensive Work Search Group' are mandated to In-Work Progression Support delivered by Jobcentre Plus. This involves help with CVs and signposting to skills provision through 'Progression Leads'. In addition, the In Work Progression offer is available on a voluntary basis to the 'Light Touch' work group, with a view to making this mandatory. This in-work support could involve support to change career but is predominantly focused on increasing an individual's hours or pay.

Working Wales acts as the central space for Wales' employment support policies. The service, run by Careers Wales, is a free service available to anyone aged 16 and over and living in Wales to access expert advice and coaching to overcome any obstacles to getting a job and progressing their career.

Working Wales has a dedicated career change section that includes signposting to other support services such as **ReAct+**, which is targeted at those who are facing or have recently experienced redundancy. The Working Wales career change pages also include opportunities to speak to advisors for a career review and highlights learning opportunities as part of Adult Learners' Week.

⁵ Learning and Work Institute (2024) [Which way now for employment support in Wales?](#)

⁶ Welsh Government (2022) [Stronger, fairer, greener Wales: a plan for employability and skills](#)

Communities for Work Plus provides specialist employment advisory support and intensive mentoring to people who are under-represented in the labour market including young people; older people; disabled people; people belonging to Black, Asian and other ethnic minority backgrounds; and those with caring responsibilities.

There are also a number of programmes relating to the development of skills. Some of these have direct links to career switching, for instance the **Personal Learning Accounts** (PLA) provides support for eligible individuals to gain higher level skills which will enable them to access a wider range of job opportunities and gain employment at a higher level within priority sectors. This novel provision had a specific aim around career switching, supporting those earning below £30,596 to upskill and improve their wages. Specific funding for PLAs is currently being withdrawn and mainstreamed in FE provision.

Beyond the PLA, there are several other programmes that support routes into new sectors such as the Welsh **apprenticeship and degree apprenticeship** system, that operate across 23 sectoral based frameworks. There are also a number of **Access to Higher Education Diploma qualifications** such as the Access to Nursing courses run by FE colleges in Wales.

The **Wales Union Learning Fund** (WULF) is provided by Welsh Government to help support union led adult learning in the workplace. Trades unions bid for funding for up to three years to run projects that help the workforce to upskill and progress, which meet the needs of industry, government and individuals. All Welsh workers, including non-union members, can access the fund to take advantage of the support, advice and guidance and training offers provided through WULF projects. The most recent analysis of WULF found that the union learning model is effective in supporting workers to progress both in learning and in work.⁷

Beyond Welsh Government provision, local authority support for career change is also available. The support available varies depending on how local authorities use their Shared Prosperity Fund allocations. This is a topic of debate with previous EU funds having been subject to Welsh Government oversight and control.

Policy priorities to help people change career

We held roundtables with key stakeholders across the employment and skills sector in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland to discuss policy solutions to improve the current landscape for career changers. These discussions highlighted that many programmes are, or were previously, available across the UK, with a different offering from each nation. However, while there are some positive policies in place in all four nations, these often have not been robustly evaluated, or are not designed specifically to support career change. For Wales, this is a missed

⁷ TUC (2022) [WULF works: Wales Union Learning Fund is still the right model to deliver fairness and progression in the workplace](#)

opportunity and means that the dynamic changes in the labour market are happening ad hoc, without a clear economic development intention in mind centred around Wales' future skills and sectoral needs.

In our UK report, we have made overarching recommendations that apply to all four UK nations. In Wales, the following additional policy priorities should be considered:

- **Demystify career change** by initiating a public campaign highlighting positive case studies and tackling the perceived barriers to career change. Most people change careers without government help, but need access to the right information, advice and guidance to do so. This should include campaigns to raise awareness, focused on key transition points in people's lives, and should be backed by high quality information, advice and guidance including expanding Career MOTs. This will enable people to self serve and provide the tools they need to change careers.

The support people may need to change jobs or switch sectors will depend in part on whether the move is a choice or a necessity. People may also need more support if they are looking to make a bigger change, particularly if there are significant costs associated with this, or if they have more limited networks to help them identify options. The focus of public intervention should target people who need more help to change career or who are at greater risk of falling out of work, alongside better financial support to reduce the costs and risks of career changing. To do so in Wales, we argue the government needs to:

- **Make career change a strategic part of policy in Wales** through the next iteration, or a review of, the current employability plan. This should aim to see career change not as a process that happens despite government, but one that helps government achieve its economic development aims. For instance, this would include a clear definition of career change, an assessment of the policy levers available and an articulation of sectoral flows in employment needed for Wales' future economic prosperity.
- **Maintain and expand the Working Wales career change theme.** The current provision is a good starting point and has some useful static resources, signposting and telephone support. A more active advice and guidance service could provide mid-life career MOTs at age 50, or at key transition points such as redundancy, leaving education, or having children. This would require a shift from a responsive service, to one that is more proactive in promoting its offer.
- **Continue to provide ReAct funding for those facing redundancy.** ReAct has a long history of providing active support to those facing redundancy. This should be continued as a key policy programme supporting individuals to change career at a key transition point.

- **Create designated career change support.** Create a designated career change support programme, learning from the recent experiences of the Personal Learning Accounts, to provide skills and training for those looking to switch careers while currently in employment. Considerable experience has been gained from the Personal Learning Account programme, which is currently under financial threat. The PLA shifted from its original intent of providing adults with a fund to choose their own learning to one of supporting key economic sectors. This should be made explicit in future, with the new designated career change support targeting sectoral change in the economy, allowing government to support people into new sectors that are growing, are more productive and pay higher wages, and away from those heading in the opposite direction. This could be aligned with business support in growth sectors, with clear asks of employers on co-investment.

Moving forward

Career change is an important part of economic change in Wales. Be it because of redundancy, changing individual circumstances or a broader sense of ambition, many in Wales will change job this year. This could be a force for good in the Welsh economy, but only if we are serious about thinking strategically about Wales' economic future and how we as individuals contribute to that future. This paper starts a discussion which needs to continue with relevant stakeholders across Wales, helping create opportunities for career change to better support Wales' future skills needs.