

Forth Valley Regional Skills Action Plan 2025-2028



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Foreword

The Forth Valley Regional Skills Action Plan is the first of its kind in our region and is a welcome opportunity for partners to come together around a shared set of missions to enable skills development for people and businesses across Forth Valley.

But while this plan may be a new and welcome step, it's important we acknowledge that we are not starting from scratch. Forth Valley is home to a well-developed further and higher education offer alongside an established network of other learning and training providers. We have a partnership approach supported by key anchor institutions including the three local authorities and the NHS, employability specialists, education leads and third sector representatives. We also have strong connections with our business community through the Chamber of Commerce, Developing the Young Workforce and Scottish Enterprise.

This plan brings these myriad elements together, providing a strong focal point for our future collaboration. In a climate of constrained public finances, we must work

together to add value to our own individual efforts and look for better, more effective ways to respond to skills needs across the region, both now and in the years to come.

We want people in Forth Valley to have the chance to develop their skills, unlock opportunities for lifelong learning, and secure meaningful, fair and well-paid employment.

We want our businesses, the backbone of our regional economy, to have access to the right mix of people and skills to flourish in an ever-changing environment. Demographic change, technology and automation and the transition to net zero are just some of the drivers that will impact the people and businesses in our regional labour market.

Such changes will bring both challenges and opportunities. However, with the right skills, the region will not only be able to navigate turbulent times but also capitalise on emerging opportunities.

This plan will act as the catalyst to embed our partnership approach to skills development across the region, helping to make the most

of the many significant investments being made in the region, including the City and Growth Deals and the Forth Green Freeport.

We must ensure that the benefits from these key projects reach far and wide across our communities, creating pathways for all whether it be those at the start of their career, those who are upskilling or reskilling as well as those rejoining the labour market.

If that can be achieved, the positive effects of this plan will be in evidence long beyond its lifespan.



A handwritten signature in white ink, appearing to read 'Lynn Harris', written over a dark teal background.

Lynn Harris
President and Chief Executive
Forth Valley Chamber of Commerce

Executive Summary

Background and approach

The Forth Valley Regional Skills Action Plan (FVRSAP) is a framework for collaboration around skills development in the region, informed by a review of evidence as well as employer and stakeholder consultation. The plan will support the skills elements of the Forth Valley Regional Economic Strategy (RES) (under development at the time of writing) and the [Grangemouth Industrial Just Transition Plan](#) which was published in June 2025.

Forth Valley's economy and labour market

Forth Valley's economy contributes significantly to Scotland's economic output and has above-average levels of productivity, driven by the presence of high-value manufacturing activity. In economic terms, the region's highest value sectors are human health & social work activities, manufacturing, and wholesale & retail trade. Forecasts indicate that the economy will continue to grow in the next decade, with growth slightly below the national average in the short-term (2024 - 2027).

In terms of **demand for labour**, there are currently 131,900 people in Forth Valley's workforce (2024). The workforce has grown over the past decade and forecasts point to continued growth of 1.8% between 2024-2027, a slightly slower rate of growth than at the national level (1.9%).

While there will be significant investment in the region through mechanisms such as the city and growth deals and the Forth Green Freeport, there are some factors which could limit the creation of jobs in the region such as a reported lack of business sites and space. Also, business density is lower in Forth Valley than for Scotland as a whole and this could indicate the need for a more vibrant entrepreneurial culture.

The largest employing industries are currently human health & social work activities, wholesale & retail trade, and education followed by manufacturing. Looking to the longer term (2027 - 2034), the greatest number of people (7,500) are forecast to be required in human health and social work activities, highlighting the need for strong awareness of careers, and clear pathways, in this sector.

In volume terms, the second greatest demand over this period will be in wholesale and retail trade (6,100). Very little of this is expected to be driven by expansion demand (i.e. new jobs) however there will be significant opportunities through replacement demand, i.e. jobs which are vacated by people leaving the labour market.

Between 2027 and 2034, the total requirement across the labour market will be 37,500, driven largely by replacement demand. Demand will be greatest for those with SCQF level 7-10 qualifications and higher-level occupations, reinforcing the importance of building a highly skilled workforce capable of competing for these jobs.

The region faces several **labour supply** pressures, indicating a need for skills interventions which can increase the supply of people and skills in the regional workforce. Proximity to Edinburgh and South East Scotland and Glasgow City regions means competition for people and skills, with data indicating that there is out-commuting from the region. This also provides an opportunity for the region to attract workers from neighbouring city regions to work in Forth Valley.

While the total population is forecast to grow at a faster rate than the Scottish average, it is also expected to age at a faster rate. The dependency ratio is expected to increase to 63% by 2043, meaning that for every 1,000 people in Forth Valley, 630 will be of non-working age. Over this period, there is also expected to be a decline in the number of working age people.

Unemployment and economic inactivity rates in the region are above the Scottish average and vary at local authority level. 19% of the economically inactive population indicate they would like a job, pointing to a latent talent pool which, with the right support to re-enter the workforce, could increase the supply of labour within the region.

Participation rates are below the Scottish average for different groups of people within the labour market, presenting an opportunity to raise workforce diversity and boost labour supply in the region. Compared to the Scottish average, Forth Valley has higher rates of youth unemployment (aged 16-24).

Skills challenges

Employer consultation identified recruitment as the number one challenge, with reports of hard-to-fill vacancies and tough trading conditions linked to cost-of-doing business. Businesses struggle to compete with the larger cities and a perceived lack of high-value jobs can make it difficult to retain graduate talent in the region.

Specific issues were highlighted in the recruitment and retention of health and social care workers, presenting a significant challenge given the scale of demand for workers in the sector, now and in the future. Attracting talent for trades and specialised roles was also reportedly difficult and included occupations such as welders, ladders, and scaffolders, some of which are supplied by contractors. The reliance on contractors can create challenges as it means if contractors leave the area, there will be fewer of these occupations available in the region.

From an inclusive growth perspective, there are inter-regional disparities with pockets of high and low-skill areas. This creates opportunities to provide targeted support to raise qualification levels in Forth Valley which are slightly below the national average, although this has been improving in recent years.

Manufacturing jobs have declined in recent years, but STEM skills will continue to be integral in the region, in particular supporting the transition to net zero and there will continue to be opportunities through replacement demand. Shortages have been reported so there is a role for partners to continue promotion of STEM jobs, and create pathways into these roles bringing together individuals, education providers and industry. In terms of skills needs, digital skills were the most frequently cited by employers, highlighting the importance of a continued focus on developing these skills in the region including digital literacy, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity and data science.

Employers reported barriers to workforce training including cost, lack of staff time and lack of internal training capacity. This highlights the importance of a flexible and accessible training offer in the region.

Finally, although not a skills issue per se, consultation identified other factors impacting on ability to recruit such as insufficient public transport, of particular concern in rural communities. Also, there was a reported shortage of premises which could limit job growth and employer expansion.

Opportunities

Opportunities are expected to flow from the significant investments being made through the Falkirk and Grangemouth Growth Deal, Stirling and Clackmannanshire City Region Deal, Forth Green Freeport and the Grangemouth Industrial Just Transition Plan. Other drivers of change will also create opportunities such as the transition to net zero.

Ensuring the region has the necessary skills to capitalise on these opportunities is a priority for partners in Forth Valley. Demand for people to fill high-value jobs in areas such as data science, clean technologies and advanced manufacturing will create opportunities for people working in the region along with the transition to net zero. Upskilling and reskilling the existing workforce will be key along with raising qualification levels in the region, future-proofing careers and giving businesses the skills to maximise opportunities.

Upskilling and reskilling activity should aim to raise participation rates of different groups across the labour market, improving equality, diversity and inclusion in the workforce and creating a wider talent pool for employers in the region. This is especially important in the

context of an ageing workforce and ongoing competition for talent with other regions.

Partners in the skills system will build on existing collaboration to enhance connections between industry, education and academia, exploring opportunities to improve pathways into areas of identified skills shortages.

The action plan

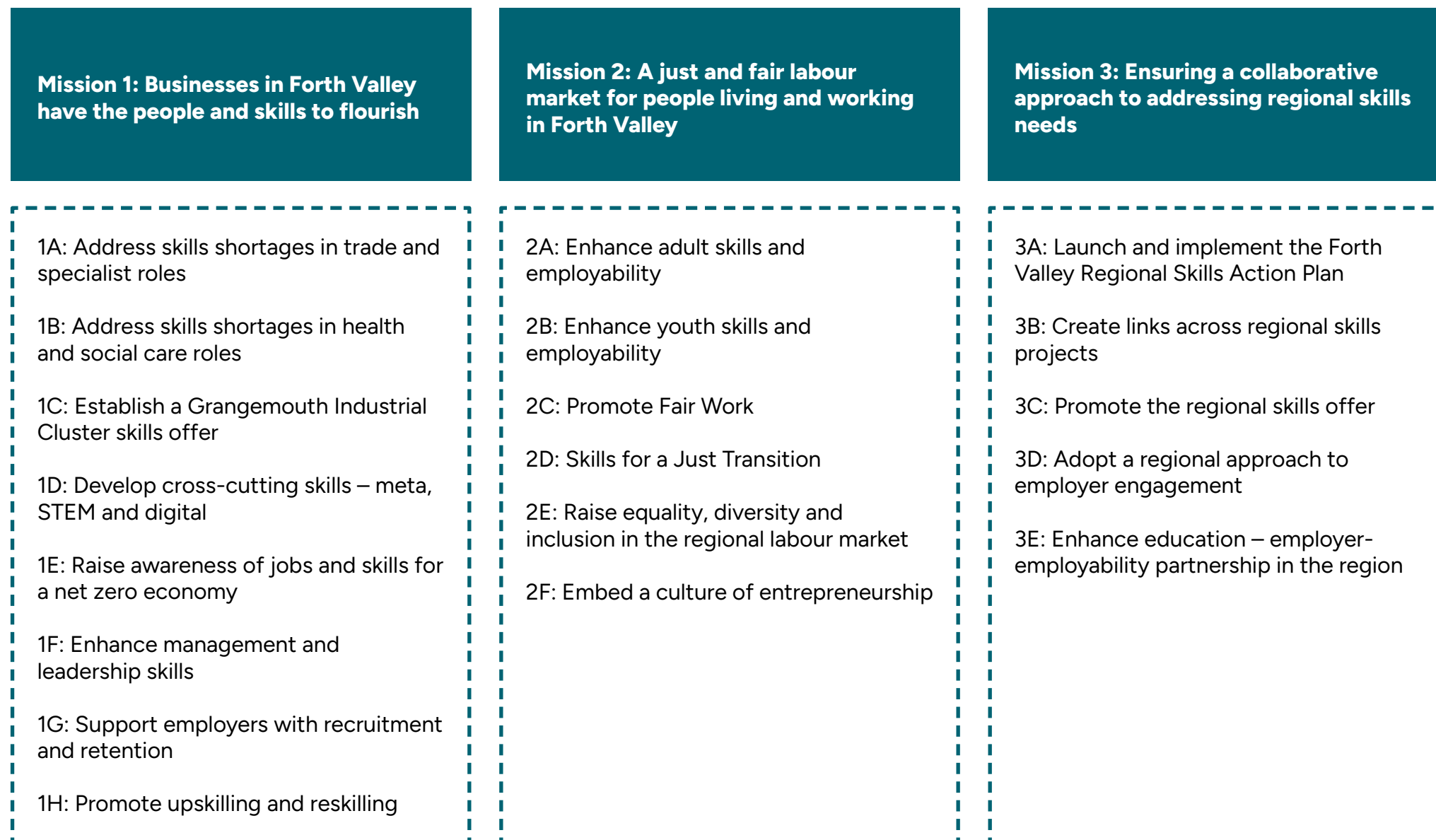
The plan was designed to provide an agreed, collaborative and focussed response to the skills needs identified through the evidence base review and consultation with employers and stakeholders. There was acknowledgement of the wealth of activity already underway in support of skills development in the region and the need to add value to individual efforts by providing a **focus for collaborative action**; a framework for partners to come together around a region-wide effort to align skills provision with the needs of businesses and the wider economy. It is formed around three central missions:

- Mission 1: **Businesses** in Forth Valley have the people and skills to flourish.
- Mission 2: A just and fair labour market for **people** living and working in Forth Valley

- Mission 3: Ensuring a **collaborative approach** to addressing regional skills needs.

Under each mission, the plan has a series of priority areas for action and activities that sit within each. Indicative timelines and lead/supporting partners are included in more detail later in section 6. Figure 1.1 sets out a summary of the priority areas for action under each mission.

Figure 1.1 – A summary of action plan missions and priority areas for action



Implementation, governance and monitoring

Implementation of the plan will be overseen by a steering group made up of partners listed in Section 7, which will meet quarterly to discuss progress and keep communication open between meetings through a dedicated Teams channel. A monitoring framework will be developed to track progress and there will be a communications plan to ensure proactive communication about the plan's progress. In terms of governance, the FVRSAP steering group will report into the proposed Forth Valley's Regional Economic Partnership (REP).



1. Introduction

Background

The Forth Valley Regional Skills Action Plan (FVRSAP) represents a commitment to collaborate around skills development across the constituent local authorities of Clackmannanshire, Falkirk and Stirling.

The process of developing the plan identified much work already underway across the region in support of skills development for people and businesses across Forth Valley. Therefore, the plan is not necessarily about designing and implementing new activity, particularly given the current fiscal pressures facing the skills system. Instead, it aims to build on existing activity in the region, specifically to:

- provide an **agreed, collaborative and coherent response** to the skills issues and needs identified
- act as the platform to **elevate local innovation and best practice** in skills development and extend more widely across the region
- **leverage existing investment** in the skills system to best respond to the identified skills issues and needs

- **support and complement the skills elements** in the forthcoming Regional Economic Strategy (RES), the Grangemouth Industrial Just Transition Plan, the Forth Green Freeport, Stirling and Clackmannanshire City Growth Deal, Falkirk and Grangemouth Growth Deal and also align with skills activity delivered through Project Willow
- take an evidence-based approach to prioritising skills development in the region while also recognising the **potential role of skills in supporting broader policy ambitions** such as addressing inequality, supporting the transition to net zero and helping to tackle poverty (including in-work poverty).

Given the scale and pace of economic change, this plan will be a dynamic document for use with partners in the region and will include periodic review to ensure it remains relevant and fit-for-purpose in an ever-changing landscape.

Developing the Forth Valley Regional Skills Action Plan

The FVRSAP was developed in collaboration with partners and stakeholders in the region between December 2023 and December 2024. The process was overseen by a wide-ranging steering group – member organisations are listed in section 7.

27 individuals across 14 organisations were consulted to develop the action plan and there was also a wider range of engagement once the plan had been drafted to further refine the actions. Reflecting the importance of employer engagement in this process, an online employer survey was carried out which received responses from 80 employers, and a further 15 employers were interviewed on a 1-to-1 basis. Two focus groups with young people were also conducted – one with students at Forth Valley College, and the other with students at the University of Stirling.

Consultation – with employers, stakeholders, providers and young people – will remain ongoing during the implementation of this plan to maximise engagement and reach of the plan and continue to gather insight around skills needs in the region.

2. Economic and labour market context

Introduction

The development of the FVRSAP was informed by a series of consultations and a desk-based review of existing data, evidence and relevant literature including forecast data from the Forth Valley Regional Skills Assessment. This section draws on evidence gathered as part of this review to provide an overview of the regional economy and labour market, highlighting key points for the plan.

Economy

The value of Forth Valley's economy was estimated at £7.5 billion in 2024, representing 5.1% of all economic output across Scotland.¹ The highest value industries were human health and social work activities (£991 million), manufacturing (£944 million), wholesale and retail trade (£858 million) and real estate activities (£645 million).²

The region's top sectoral specialism was the manufacture of coke and refined petroleum products, with the percentage of employment in this industry estimated to be 12.6 times greater than across Scotland as a whole.³ This was followed by manufacture of motor vehicles, trailers and semi-trailers where the percentage of employment was 4.7 times greater than the Scottish average.

The regional economy has grown at a rate slightly below the Scottish average over the past decade, with the information and communication sector experiencing the largest average annual growth over the period. Looking to the future, between 2027 and 2034, the region's economy is expected to grow, although at a slightly slower rate (1.1%) than the wider Scottish average (1.3%).⁴

In 2024, productivity in Forth Valley (£53,200) was slightly above the national average of £52,000⁵ and this is likely due to the strong presence of high productivity sectors in the region such as manufacturing.

The structure of the regional business base is similar to Scotland, with a sizeable proportion of SMEs. 88% of Forth Valley's businesses are micro-businesses (between 0-9 employees) compared with 87% in Scotland.⁶

Forth Valley neighbours Edinburgh & South East Scotland (ESES) and Glasgow City Regions, both of which are characterised by strong, growing economies. In 2024, the ESES and Glasgow City Region economies accounted for significant shares of Scotland's total economic output at 30.8% and 31.8% respectively.⁷ Economic growth in these city regions is expected to outpace growth at a Scottish level and proximity to these regions

will have implications for Forth Valley's labour market as they offer a source of employment within travelling distance for Forth Valley residents.

Business expenditure on research and development (R&D) in Forth Valley increased by 10% between 2016 and 2020, but expenditure on R&D per head of population in the region remains below the Scottish average, with the gap widening in recent years.⁸ In 2023, business density – the number of businesses per 10,000 population – was lower in the region at 276 compared to 312 in Scotland.⁹ This varies across the region with rates lowest in Clackmannanshire (207) and highest in Stirling (409).

1 Skills Development Scotland (2024), Oxford Economics Forecasts

2 Skills Development Scotland (2024), Oxford Economics Forecasts

3 Skills Development Scotland (2024), Oxford Economic Forecasts

4 Skills Development Scotland (2024), Oxford Economics Forecasts

5 Skills Development Scotland (2024), Oxford Economics Forecasts

6 UK Business Counts (2024)

7 Skills Development Scotland (2024), Oxford Economics Forecasts

8 Office for National Statistics (2022), Business Enterprise Research & Development Scotland

9 UK Business Counts and Mid-Year Population Estimates (2021)

Implications for the Forth Valley Regional Skills Action Plan:

- Similar to Scotland, a large proportion of Forth Valley's businesses are SMEs, which might face challenges engaging in skills development activities. The action plan should aim to maximise opportunities for these businesses to engage with the skills system.
- The comparatively lower rates of R&D investment in Forth Valley could impact the region's competitiveness. The action plan should reflect the importance of upskilling the workforce to help businesses take advantage of opportunities to drive productivity.
- Both ESES and Glasgow City Regions have strong growing economies and are within commuting distance of Forth Valley, meaning that employers may have to compete for labour with these two large City Regions. The plan should look for opportunities to support employers with recruitment and retention of talent in the region.

Labour market demand

Over the past decade, Forth Valley's workforce increased by 9.8% (11,700 people) which was a significantly higher rate of growth than for Scotland as a whole (3.8%).¹⁰

In 2024 there were approximately 131,900 people in the regional workforce and the largest employing sectors were human health and social work activities (28,500), wholesale and retail trade (14,600), education (13,500), and manufacturing (10,600).¹¹

Analysis of demand in health and social work activities reveals that the sector has significant labour needs and will require a significant volume of people in the coming years. In 2024, of the 28,500 people employed in the sector, 19,600 were in health care, and 8,900 were in social care.¹² Over the mid-term (2024 - 2027), 2,300 people will be required in health care, 78% of which will be replacement demand and 22% will be through expansion demand. There will also be a requirement for 1,000 workers to fill roles in social care, 80% of which will be replacement demand. Over the longer-term (2027 - 2034), 5,200 workers will be required in health care and 2,300 in social care.

Analysis of demand in manufacturing reveals that there were 10,600 people working in the

sector in 2024.¹³ While this is expected to decline in coming years, there will continue to be demand for people to work in this sector due to replacement demand and engineering skills will continue to be integral to a successful climate transition.

The transition to net zero will require people with STEM skills at all levels, although there is some evidence of skills shortages in areas such as engineering, data science, IT, and roles such as welders and pipefitters.¹⁴ Across numerous sectors, there is a need for increased STEM awareness, flexible training and funding support. Forecasts indicate that there will be a need for 1,700 Science and Technology professionals in the mid-term (2024-2027), with a further 3,600 required in the longer term (2027- 2034).¹⁵

The climate transition will require upskilling and reskilling of the workforce. For example, existing staff will need to be upskilled around the use of renewable energy. Reskilling may be required if there are new tasks and job roles which arise as a result of decarbonisation.

¹⁰ Skills Development Scotland (2024) Oxford Economic Forecasts

¹¹ Skills Development Scotland (2024) Oxford Economics Forecasts

¹² Skills Development Scotland (2024), Oxford Economics Forecasts

¹³ Skills Development Scotland (2024), Oxford Economics Forecasts

¹⁴ Optimat (2023), Grangemouth Skills Demand Assessment (unpublished)

¹⁵ Skills Development Scotland (2024), Oxford Economics Forecasts

The Grangemouth Industrial Cluster has several significant employers relating to the petrochemicals industry, and although recent announcements suggest the closure of the oil refinery, Project Willow is looking at options on how to deliver a viable long-term future for the refinery site. The project is exploring how the region can build on its skilled workforce, local expertise and long heritage as a fuel leader in Scotland to forge a new path in clean energy production with emerging opportunities in green industries e.g. biotechnology, carbon capture and hydrogen.

Looking to the future, the regional workforce is expected to continue growing. Between 2024 and 2027, it is forecast to increase by 1.8% or 2,400 people and then by a further 0.9% (1,200 people) between 2027 and 2034.¹⁶ The anticipated rate of growth in the region is slightly below the national average.

Analysis of the total requirement over this period reveals that demand is expected to come from the need to replace workers leaving the labour market due to retirement or other reasons. Between 2024 and 2034, the forecast total requirement will be for 55,800 workers in Forth Valley: 6% of which will come from expansion demand (3,600)

while 94% will come from replacement demand (52,200), i.e. people leaving the labour market.¹⁷

In the mid-term (2024 - 2027), the forecast total requirement shows that higher level occupations are expected to account for 44.7% of the total requirement, followed by 28.1% in mid-level occupations and 27.2% in lower-level occupations.¹⁸ At a Scottish level, higher level occupations will account for a greater proportion of total requirement (50.4%) and lower-level occupations will account for a smaller share (24.6%). This trend will continue in the longer term, with higher level occupations accounting for a greater share of total requirement (46.9%) although this represents a smaller share than the national average (52.4%).

In both ESES and Glasgow City Regions, there will be a significant level of demand to fill job openings in coming years. In ESES City Region, there will be a total requirement of 100,600 people in the mid-term (2024-2027) and 219,000 in the longer-term (2027 - 2034). In Glasgow City Region, over the same time periods, the requirement will be for 133,000 people and 292,100 respectively.¹⁹ The greatest requirement in each of the city regions will be for people qualified to SCQF 7-10.

Like ESES and Glasgow City Regions, the greatest total requirement over the mid and longer term in Forth Valley will be for people qualified to SCQF levels 7 to 10 (45% for 2024-2027 and 46% for 2027 - 2034).²⁰

Qualification levels in the region are currently slightly below the Scottish average, using those qualified to SCQF Level 7+ as a proxy, although the gap has narrowed in recent years. In 2022, 53.6% of those aged 16-64 in Forth Valley were qualified to SCQF level 7+ compared to 54.2% in Scotland as a whole.²¹

There was significant variation in this measure at local authority level, with Stirling significantly above average (60.3%) and Clackmannanshire (48.9%) and Falkirk (51.1%) both below average.

Analysis of the 2011 Census data suggests there may be an insufficient volume of jobs for all of the residents in the region and that there are significant levels of out-commuting from Forth Valley.²²

16 Skills Development Scotland (2024) Oxford Economics Forecasts

17 Skills Development Scotland (2024) Oxford Economics Forecasts

18 Skills Development Scotland (2024), Oxford Economics Forecasts

19 Skills Development Scotland (2024) Oxford Economics Forecasts

20 Skills Development Scotland (2024) Oxford Economics Forecasts

21 Annual Population Survey (2023)

22 Please note that this analysis is based on data on place of work and residence from the Census 2011 and therefore may be significantly outdated so should be treated with caution. At the time of writing, outputs from Census 2022 had not yet been published.

Implications for the Forth Valley Regional Skills Action Plan:

- The workforce has grown over the past decade and is forecast to experience continued growth in the mid and longer term, although this is expected to be below the Scottish average. The plan should include actions to maximise the number of people joining - and staying in - the regional workforce.
- The foundational economy (health & social work activities, wholesale & retail and education) is large in terms of current total employment and future labour demand. The plan should consider opportunities to raise awareness and access to pathways and careers in these sectors.
- Reflecting the national situation, there are significant levels of labour demand now, and in the future, for the health and social care sector so a priority will be ensuring clear pathways into roles in this sector at a regional level.
- A significant proportion of forecast total requirement will be for workers to fill higher-level occupations, and more than half will require SCQF level 7+. A priority for the Forth Valley Regional Skills Action Plan will be in ensuring residents have the right level of skills and qualifications to access high quality jobs now and in the future.
- Both ESES and Glasgow City Regions are expected to experience high levels of labour demand in the future, particularly for skilled jobs. Whilst it is advantageous for Forth Valley residents to have the opportunity to access these skilled jobs, it may exacerbate recruitment challenges for employers in the region. The action plan should consider how to raise awareness of the pathways and high-quality job opportunities available in the region.
- STEM and digital skills will continue to be important requirements across many sectors and are amongst some of the core skills required to enable the transition to net zero. The plan should set out actions on how to further build these skills within the region.

Labour market demand

The region's population is ageing, and the working age population has been declining in recent years. Between 2013 and 2023 the size of the 16 to 64-year-old population in Forth Valley decreased by 0.4%, in comparison to the growth of 0.6% at a Scottish level.²³ Forecasts suggest that this trend will continue in the future with the working age population expected to decline by 1.7% between 2018 and 2043.²⁴

The dependency ratio in the region – which was 57% in 2018 – is slightly higher than the equivalent for Scotland (56%).²⁵ This means that for every 1,000 people of working age in Forth Valley there are 570 of non-working age. This is set to increase significantly to 63% in 2043 where it will be even higher than the Scottish average of 60%.²⁶

Labour market participation rates vary across the region. In 2024, the employment rate in Forth Valley (71.4%) was below the Scottish average (74.5%).²⁷ This varies further at local authority level – for example, the employment rate in Stirling was broadly in line with the Scottish average (74.3%) while in Clackmannanshire it is somewhat below, at 62.6%.

23 National Records of Scotland (2024)

24 National Records of Scotland, 2018 based

25 SDS analysis of Population Projections (National Records of Scotland – 2018 based)

26 SDS analysis of Population Projections (National Records of Scotland – 2018 based)

27 Office for National Statistics (2024). Annual Population Survey, Jan – Dec 2024

In 2024, rates of economic inactivity were higher in Forth Valley (24.7%) than across Scotland as a whole (23.0%).²⁸ Again, this varies within the region with inactivity rates highest in Clackmannanshire (32.1%) and lowest in Stirling (20.3%).²⁹

27.7% of Forth Valley's economically inactive were students compared to 23.8% for Scotland, and 26.7% were inactive due to long-term sickness, compared to 33.7% for Scotland.

In 2024, a significant proportion (19.0%) of the economically inactive in Forth Valley wanted to work, suggesting there is scope to improve labour market participation by supporting these people into employment.³⁰ However, there may be barriers to work for this group.

It is also important to consider differences in participation rates for groups of people across the region and identify opportunities to increase workforce diversity while also boosting labour supply in the region. Table 2.1 shows how participation in the Forth Valley labour market compares to the wider Scottish average.

■ **Disability** – employment rates are lower for disabled people in the region when compared to the average for Scotland. In 2024, the employment rate for those who are Equality Act (EA) core or work-limiting disabled was 51.0% in Forth Valley compared to 52.7% for Scotland.³¹ This varied significantly within the region, with rates lowest in Clackmannanshire (43.4%) and highest in Stirling (54.6%). Overall, employment rates for this group are significantly below the overall employment rate both in the region (71.4%) and nationally (74.5%).

■ **Gender** – in 2024, the employment rate for females in the region (69.4%) was slightly below the equivalent Scottish average of 72.1% but further below in Clackmannanshire (63.5%).³² The employment rate for females in the region falls below the equivalent rate for males in Forth Valley (73.5%).

■ **Ethnic minorities** – in 2024, the employment rate for ethnic minorities in Forth Valley was 68.7%; below the overall employment rate in the region (71.4%). This was above the equivalent national employment rate for ethnic minorities (64.9%).

■ **Young people** – in 2024, youth unemployment (16-24) was higher in Forth Valley at 19.1%, than in Scotland (10.4%).³³ The annual participation measure for 16 to 19 year-olds was slightly below the Scottish average in 2024 – 92.4% in Forth Valley compared to 92.7% in Scotland, with lowest participation rates in Clackmannanshire (90.3%).³⁴

28 Office for National Statistics (2024). Annual Population Survey, Jan – Dec 2024

29 Office for National Statistics (2024). Annual Population Survey, Jan – Dec 2024

30 Office for National Statistics (2024). Annual Population Survey, Jan – Dec 2024

31 Office for National Statistics (2024). Annual Population Survey, Jan – Dec 2024

32 Office for National Statistics (2024). Annual Population Survey, Jan – Dec 2024

33 Office for National Statistics (2024). Annual Population Survey, Jan – Dec 2024

34 Skills Development Scotland (2024) Annual Participation Measure

Table 2.1 – Labour market participation rates for different groups³⁵

Indicator	Forth Valley	Scotland	Region compared to national average
Employment rate	71.4%	74.5%	↓
Employment rate – female	69.4%	72.1%	↓
Employment rate – ethnic minority	68.7%	64.9%	↑
Employment rate – EA core or work limiting disabled	51.0%	52.7%	↓
Unemployment (16-64)	5.2%	3.3%	↑
Youth Unemployment (16-24)	19.1%	10.4%	↑
Economic Inactivity	24.7%	23.0%	↑
% economically inactive long- term sick	26.7%	33.7%	↓

Also, in relation to labour supply, data from the Scottish Employer Skills Survey (2022) provides insight into the incidence of skills shortages in the region. The data reveals that 9% of Forth Valley employers reported a skills shortage vacancy which is a specific type of hard-to-fill vacancy that occurs when an employer cannot find applicants with the required skills, qualification or experience to do a job. This is below the equivalent Scottish rate (10%).

The survey also shows that 27% of vacancies were skills shortage vacancies in Forth Valley, compared to 31% in Scotland. While the regional average is below the national equivalent the data highlights that skills shortages do exist and account for more than one quarter of vacancies in the region.

Implications for the Forth Valley Regional Skills Action Plan:

- The region's population is ageing, and the working age population has declined in recent years. The plan should look for opportunities to increase the economically active population in the region and help retain talent within the local workforce.
- Labour shortages could affect employers, and some may respond by implementing measures such as automation or new technologies. The plan should reflect the importance of upskilling and reskilling to ensure that workers are well placed to adopt new innovative approaches and implement new technologies.
- There is a case for targeted, tailored interventions at a sub-regional level to address pockets of deprivation, inactivity and low skills attainment to increase labour market participation, education and skills levels. Addressing these issues may require long-term, more intensive support.
- There are disparities in the levels of participation amongst different groups in the region so the plan should identify opportunities to engage these groups, raise participation rates and create more diversity in the workforce.
- The presence of skills shortage vacancies indicates a shortage of people with the skills required to fill jobs in the region and the plan should look for opportunities to address existing skills shortages.

Participation in education and training

The desk review included analysis of data on current provision including apprenticeships, further and higher education. The main findings are summarised as follows:

College enrolments:

- Further Education (FE) college enrolments increased by 2,815, from 13,920 in 2017/18 to 16,735 in 2021/22.
- Engineering, construction and care were the most popular FE courses at Forth Valley College.

University enrolments:

- The number of people enrolling in higher education at University of Stirling was 12,510 in 2018/19. This increased to 13,390 in 2022/23, representing an increase of 7%.
- The most popular subjects were business and management; subjects allied to medicine; and social sciences. For postgraduates, the most popular course is business and management.

Apprenticeships:

- Modern Apprenticeships (MAs): In 2023/24, there were a total of 1,512 MA starts in Forth Valley, accounting for 6% of all MAs in Scotland.³⁶ The most common frameworks were construction (273)³⁷, social services and healthcare (137), freight logistics (125), social services (children and young people) (99), engineering (88), and automotive (91).³⁸

While MA starts declined nationally and across Forth Valley in 2020/21, due to delivery challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, the data shows that the number of MA starts in the region has been increasing, with a peak of 1,630 in 2022/23. Forth Valley College reported that the volume of MA starts offered through the college in 2024/25 exceeded previous years by almost 20%.

- Foundation Apprenticeships (FAs): Enrolments in SCQF Level 6 FAs increased steadily from 31 in 2016³⁹ to 348 in 2019 but had fallen to 140 in 2021.⁴⁰
- Graduate Apprenticeships (GAs): The

number of GAs registered has grown from 14 in 2017/18 to 70 by 2021/22.⁴¹

Work-related training:⁴²

- In 2020, 61.1% of establishments had funded or arranged training for staff over the past 12 months – above the Scottish average (58.8%).
- The main types of training funded/arranged by the region's employers in 2020 included job-specific training, health and safety/first aid training, and basic induction training for new staff.
- Online training and self-learning increased in prevalence.
- The biggest barriers to training for employers were COVID-related challenges, followed by lack of funds and inability to spare staff time.

Implications for the Forth Valley Regional Skills Action Plan:

- Engineering, construction and care college course enrolments align with existing regional sector skills needs and future job forecasts indicate that there will continue to be demand in these curricular areas in the future. The plan should reflect the upcoming demand in these sectors and the need to ensure a continued pipeline into the region's key sectors.
- Apprenticeship frameworks in the region also offer pathways into employment in sectors such as construction, health & social care, transport and engineering. There will continue to be demand in these sectors and the plan should look for opportunities to promote work-based learning routes and continue to engage employers around apprenticeships.
- Online training and self-learning are increasing in prevalence, with employers recognising the benefits of alternative and flexible training methods. The plan should look for opportunities to provide flexible learning provision for learners in the region.

³⁶ Skills Development Scotland (2024) Modern Apprenticeships

³⁷ Please note that this is a cumulative total for several construction MA frameworks – Construction (Building), Construction (Civil Engineering), Construction (Professional Apprenticeship) and Construction (Technical).

³⁸ Skills Development Scotland (2024) Modern Apprenticeships

³⁹ Please note that the enrolment figure for 2016 does not include the number of enrolments for

⁴⁰ Clackmannanshire as this was not available due to disclosure control being applied to values less than five.

⁴¹ Skills Development Scotland (2023) Graduate Apprenticeships. Please note that the enrolment figure for 2017/18 does not include the number of enrolments for Clackmannanshire as this was not available due to disclosure control being applied to values less than five.

⁴² Office for National Statistics (2024), Annual Population Survey

Transition to net zero

Stakeholder consultations highlighted the need to clarify the nature of skills required for the transition to net zero, sometimes referred to as ‘green’ skills, and understand the implications for the regional labour market. This section includes information from the Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan (CESAP)⁴³ and the Green Jobs in Scotland report⁴⁴ to provide insight about approaches to identifying green jobs and skills. It then goes on to present available evidence on the jobs and skills required to support the transition to net zero in Forth Valley.

[Green Jobs in Scotland: An inclusive approach to definition, measurement and analysis](#) is a report which was commissioned by Skills Development Scotland to help develop a better understanding of green jobs.⁴⁵ It uses an evidence-based approach to create an inclusive definition of three different categories of green jobs: **new and emerging jobs, jobs with enhanced skills and knowledge, and jobs where there is increased demand.**

Figure 2.1 sets out the definition and description of the three green jobs categories as presented in the Green Jobs in Scotland report. [The Forth Valley Regional Skills Assessment](#) uses these categories to estimate the number of people employed in these roles at a regional level and is set out later in Figure 2.2.⁴⁶

Figure 2.1: The three categories of green jobs

1. NEW AND EMERGING	The impact of green economy activities and technologies creates the need for unique work and worker requirements, which results in the generation of new occupations . These new occupations can be entirely novel or ‘born’ from an existing occupation. An example is solar system technicians who must be able not only to install new technology but also to determine how this technology can best be used on a specific site.
2. ENHANCED SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE	The impact of green economy activities and technologies can result in significant change to the work and worker requirements of existing occupations . This impact may result in an increase in demand for these occupations. The essential purposes of the occupation remain the same but tasks, skills, knowledge and external elements, such as credentials, have been altered. An example is architects, an occupation in which greening has increased knowledge requirements pertaining to energy efficient materials and construction, as well as skills associated with integrating green technology into the aesthetic design of buildings.
3. INCREASED DEMAND	The impact of green economy activities and technologies can increase employment demand for some existing occupations . However, this impact does not entail significant changes in the work and worker requirements of the occupation. The work context may change but the tasks do not. An example is the increased demand for electrical power line installers and repairers related to energy efficiency and infrastructure upgrades.

43 Skills Development Scotland (2020) [Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan \(CESAP\) 2020 - 2025](#)
44 Jeisson Cardenas Rubio, Chris Warhurst & Pauline Anderson (2022) Green Jobs in Scotland: An inclusive approach to definition, measurement and analysis, Warwick Institute for Employment Research, University of Warwick.
45 Jeisson Cardenas Rubio, Chris Warhurst & Pauline Anderson (2022) Green Jobs in Scotland: An inclusive approach to definition, measurement and analysis, Warwick Institute for Employment Research, University of Warwick.
46 Skills Development Scotland (2024) [Forth Valley Regional Skills Assessment](#)

The [Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan \(CESAP\) 2020 - 2025](#), launched in 2020 set out a clear direction for the skills needed to support Scotland in its just transition to net zero. It identified five broad areas of economic activity that will make a significant contribution to the net zero transition and set out the opportunities and skills implications arising from this, much of which will be driven by the need to adapt to new technologies and approaches. This section summarises information on these five broad areas of economic activity:

1. **Energy transition:** This sector encompasses oil & gas, on and offshore wind, electricity, hydrogen and carbon capture and storage. Energy transition involves a move away from reliance on fossil fuels to zero emission energy sources as well as efforts to reduce and conserve energy use.
2. **Construction:** Activity in this sector includes design, build and retrofit of residential and non-residential properties to reduce the emissions from heating of buildings. The sector has a high carbon footprint, as a consumer of natural resources, and there are opportunities to reduce emissions by adopting circular approaches and investing in infrastructure such as heat networks etc.

3. **Manufacturing (with a focus on engineering):** This sector will play a significant role in the transition to net zero, with targets set for a reduction in industrial emissions. It is expected that technological innovation will play a key role by helping to reduce waste and improving the efficiency of manufacturing processes.

4. **Transport (including road transport, railways, domestic aviation, shipping and aircraft support vehicles):** CESAP set out how this sector was responsible for more than one quarter (28%) of greenhouse gases in 2018. The decarbonisation of transport may present a number of opportunities in areas such as Ultra Low Emission Vehicles and the electrification of railways.

5. **Agriculture and land-use (including Forestry):** The CESAP recognised the dual role that this sector can have in supporting net zero ambitions by reducing emissions from agriculture while also mitigating emissions through activities such as peatland restoration and adopting approaches such as precision farming.

Transition to net zero in Forth Valley

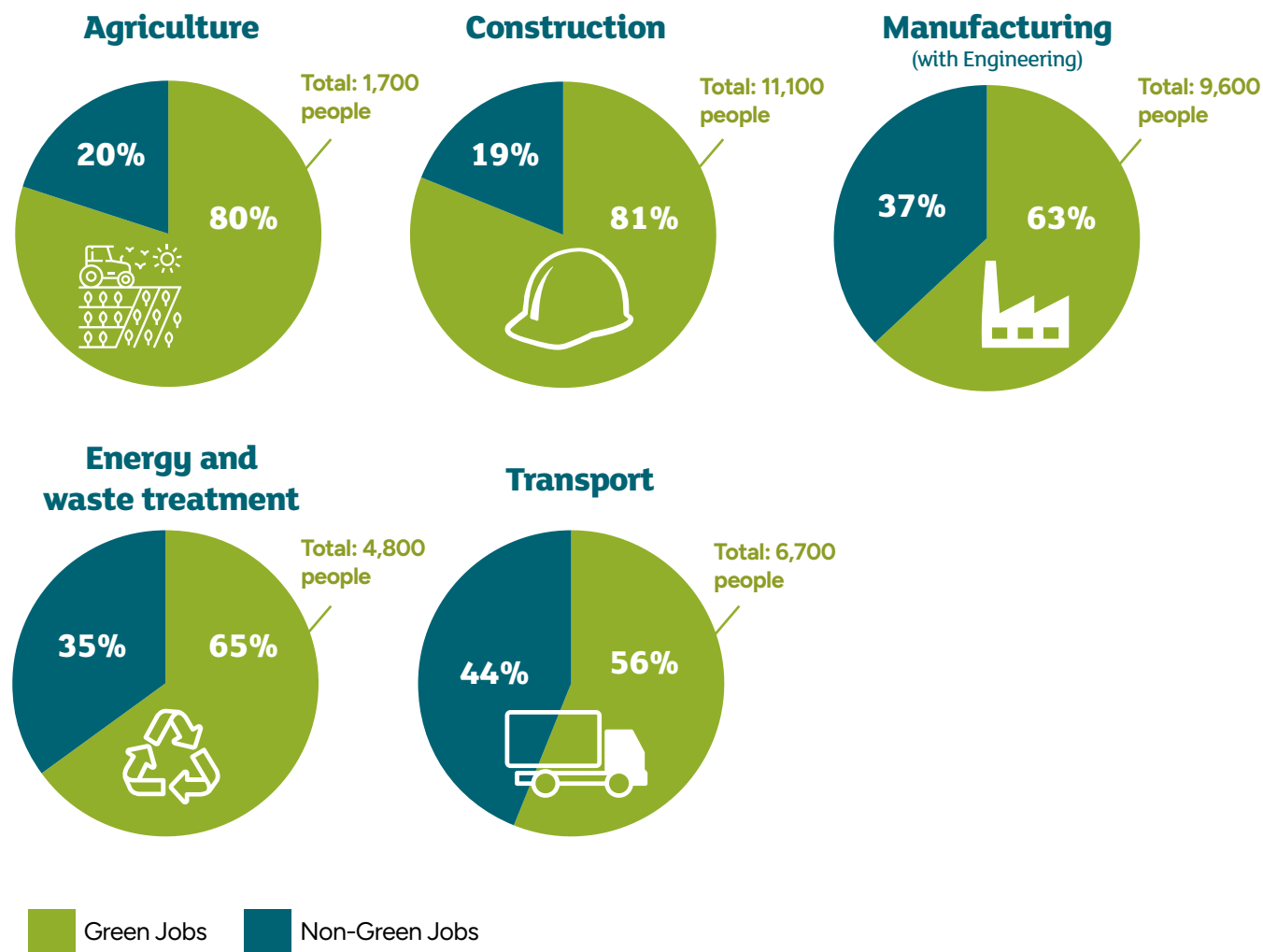
The [Forth Valley Regional Skills Assessment](#) provides information about the number of people employed in each of the five CESAP sectors mentioned above split into green

jobs and non-green jobs.⁴⁷ It notes that, at a Scottish level, there are 679,200 employed in the sectors that make a significant contribution to the transition to net zero. **In Forth Valley, around 34,000 people are employed in these sectors, equating to 5% of the Scottish total.**

Figure 2.2 presents an overview of employment in CESAP sectors in Forth Valley, revealing that:

- Forth Valley's construction sector employs the greatest volume of people of the five CESAP sectors at 11,100, the majority of which (81%) are considered to be green jobs
- the agriculture sector employs the smallest volume of people of the five CESAP sectors (1,700) but a high proportion of these (80%) are green jobs
- manufacturing (with engineering) and energy and waste treatment employ a total of around 14,400 people across the two sectors and have a similar share of green versus non-green jobs. Approximately two in three are green jobs in each sector (63% in manufacturing with engineering and 65% in energy and waste management)
- in transport, 6,700 people are estimated to work in jobs in this sector. The split between green jobs and non-green jobs is more equal than the four other sectors, at 56% and 44% respectively.

Figure 2.2: Employment in forth valley CESAP sectors (2024)



As well as providing an overview of employment in the CESAP sectors, the Forth Valley Regional Skills Assessment also includes an analysis of 12,100 job postings in the region between January and June 2024. Analysis of these job postings reveals that more than one-third (39.3% or 4,800) were for green jobs and that these green job postings have the following split across the three categories set out in the Green Jobs in Scotland report.⁴⁸

- **14%** of green job postings required **new and emerging skills** – new occupations which are created because of the need for unique work and worker requirements due to green economy activities.
- **57%** of green job postings were for **enhanced skills and knowledge** – existing occupations which will require significant change to the work and worker requirements due to green economy activities.
- **29%** of green jobs postings were for roles which will experience **increased** demand – existing occupations which will be needed in higher numbers due to green economy activities.

3. Policy and strategy context

In developing the Forth Valley Regional Skills Action Plan, an analysis of a range of local, regional and national strategy and policy documents was undertaken alongside the desk-based review of evidence.

This section provides a high-level summary of the main themes identified from the review of relevant policy and strategy documents.

National: Six main policy themes

For skills and employment, the key priorities set out in the national-level policies and strategies are summarised in six major themes:

1. Creating a more sustainable and inclusive economy
2. Reducing inequality
3. Improving skills and education
4. Tackling climate change
5. Supporting young people
6. Creating a more fair and just society

These six themes or missions are not mutually exclusive - they are all affected by common trends and specific local circumstances.

Local and regional: Four main policy themes

For skills and employment, local and regional policies and strategies can be summarised in four main themes:

- the low carbon and climate change transition
- the skills and employment needs of the local economy and local employers and industries
- just and fair access to skills and work
- labour market exclusion, poverty and low pay.

Evidence: Priorities

Analysis of the existing evidence set out in section 2 as well as the review of local, regional and national strategy and policy documents, points to several priorities for consideration in the development of the Forth Valley Regional Skills Action Plan:

- increasing the regional labour supply and worker retention to help address a shrinking workforce and demand for workers from both city regions

- ensuring local residents get access to the highly skilled jobs that will be created
- meeting the labour and skills needs of the foundational economy
- providing the STEM and digital skills needed to meet future job opportunities, including job transition and growth from climate change
- addressing the pockets of deprivation, low qualifications and skills attainment, and high unemployment in the region.

This review of evidence is further supplemented with insight from employers and stakeholders, which is set out in more detail below in sections 4 and 5.

4. Employer insights

Introduction

The development of the Forth Valley Regional Skills Action Plan included employer consultation to gather views on a range of topics including challenges facing employers, current and future skills needs and engagement with the skills system. Members of the steering group supported this process by facilitating contact with their employer networks across the region and inviting them to take part. This section summarises the insight gathered through employer consultation.

Employers participated either via an online survey or by taking part in a 1:1 discussion. 95 employers shared their views in total, with 80 through the survey and 15 taking part in more detailed discussions. Characteristics of the participating employers are set out below:

- **Size** – Micro businesses (1-9 employees) and small businesses (10-49 employees) accounted for the largest share of respondents at 43% and 42% respectively. A further 10% were medium sized with between 50 and 249 employees. The remainder, around 5%, were large employers with 250+.

- **Location** – 54% of respondents were based in the Falkirk local authority area, 34% were in Stirling and 13% in Clackmannanshire.
- **Employer type** – 75% were a private company or limited partnership, 17% were non-profit organisations, 5% were self-employed or freelancing and 3% were government organisations.
- **Industry sector** – survey respondents operated across a wide range of industrial sectors.
- **Future outlook** – 48% of employers expected their organisation to experience moderate growth (1-5% increase in sales or employment) followed by 25% who expected strong growth (10% or more increase in sales or employment). 15% expected no change, 5% expected contraction and 8% were unsure.

Current challenges

The survey asked employers about the challenges they were currently facing and Figure 4.1 shows responses, highlighting recruitment as the number one challenge, followed by labour costs and operating costs. In the qualitative survey responses, many employers cited the tough trading conditions, rise in energy and material costs, and decrease in consumer spending as particular challenges.

Figure 4.1 What are the current challenges facing your organisation or business?



Recruitment behaviour and challenges

84% of respondents had recruited staff in the previous 12 months. 85% of those who had recruited reported that some of these vacancies had been hard-to-fill. Where vacancies were reported as being hard to fill, the survey sought to find out more about the reasons behind this. Figure 4.2 shows that the main reasons for vacancies being reported as hard-to-fill were applicants not having the right skills, reported by 68% of recruiting employers, and a lack of applicants in general, also reported by 68%.

The survey also enquired about the types of qualities employers were looking for in candidates. Figure 4.3 shows that the qualities most frequently cited by employers were: a good attitude, followed by relevant work experience and then communications skills, highlighting the importance of soft skills and experience of the workplace.

Employer insight also showed the value placed on willingness to learn and adaptability along with problem solving, particularly where this can be demonstrated through previous experience.

Figure 4.2: Reasons why vacancies have been hard-to-fill

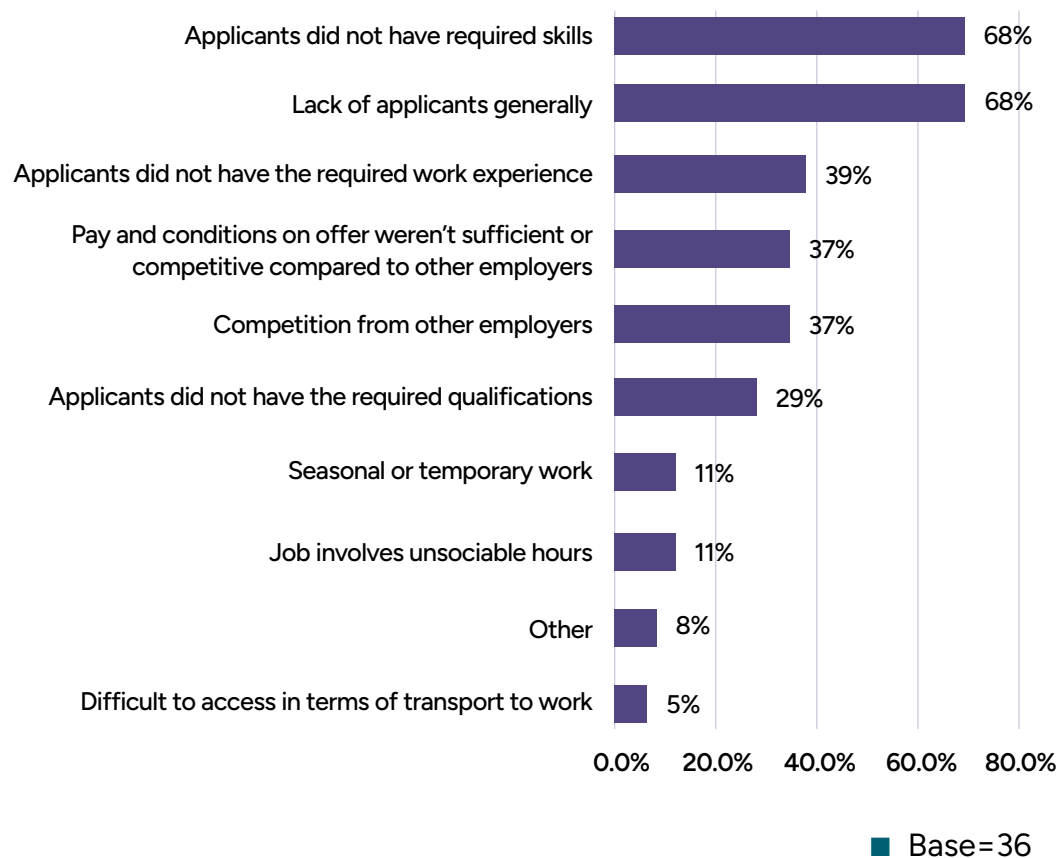
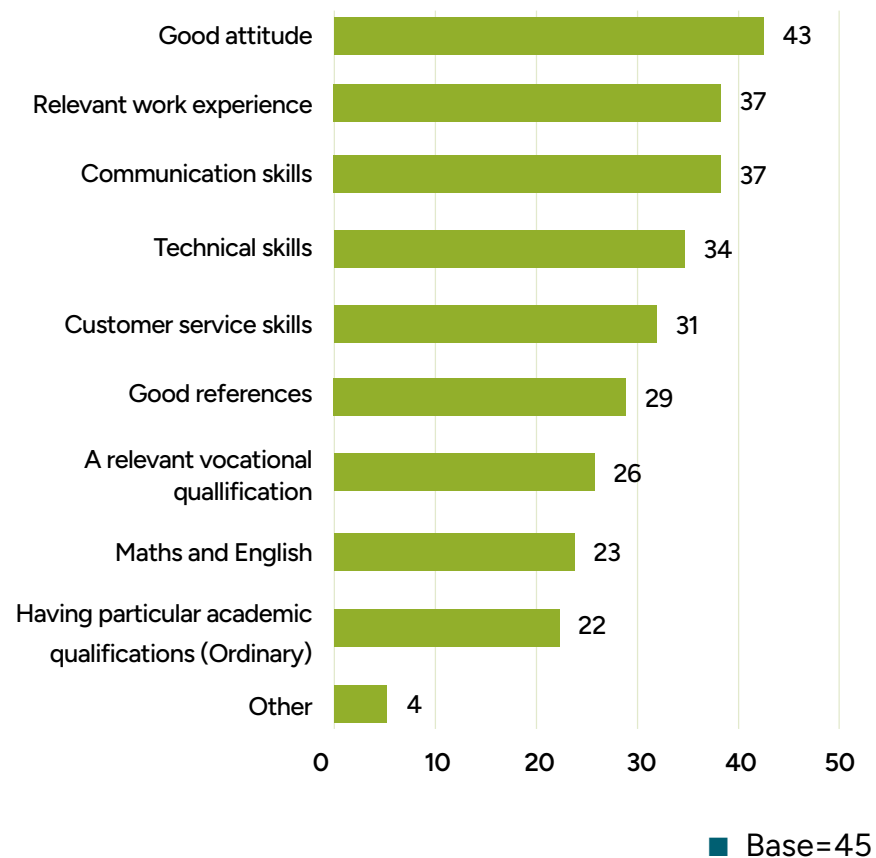


Figure 4.3: Qualities that employers look for in candidates (count)



As well as enquiring about the types of qualities that employers were looking for, they were also asked if there were specific skills or qualities that were difficult to either recruit for or train their staff in. Figure 4.4 below provides an overview of employer responses. In terms of recruitment difficulties, some of the most frequently mentioned skills which were challenging to recruit for included:

- knowledge of products and services
- people management
- computer literacy/IT skills
- communication and presentation skills, including foreign language skills.

It also provides insight into the skills most frequently mentioned as being difficult to train staff and this included:

- computer literacy/IT skills
- problem solving
- following guidance to use new equipment or materials.

Employers provided more detail about some of the concerns they currently had about recruitment conditions in the region, and this included:

- work ethic: some employers reported a lack of work ethic among candidates
- limited experience in the workplace: many job applicants lack sufficient work experience
- shortage of candidates: there was a perception that there are not enough qualified applicants for available jobs
- wage competition: rising wages make it difficult to attract and retain workers.

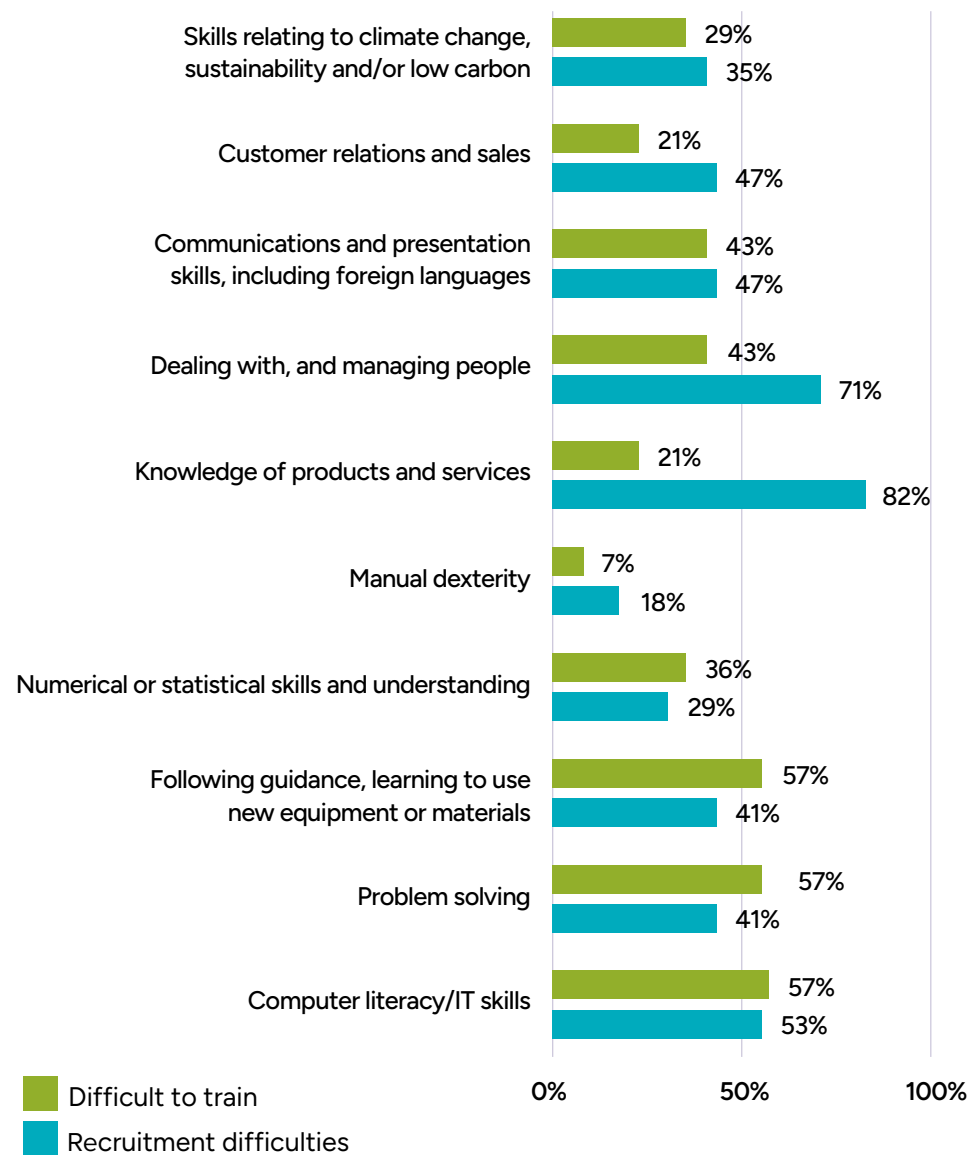
Employer responses also highlighted that individual employers are responding to some of the recruitment challenges listed above. An example of this is an employer noting that they recruit on potential rather than experience.

Employers also raised issues relating to preparedness for work and adaptability of their existing workforce. Some of the feedback included:

- job readiness: there was a perception that people leaving schools and colleges are not always adequately prepared for the workforce
- qualities in new candidates: employers mentioned communication skills and the fact that new candidates can have unrealistic expectations of work

- adaptability challenges: existing staff (including older workers) can sometimes struggle with change, especially regarding technology and flexible work arrangements
- experience gap: younger workers often lack experience compared to mid-career individuals (25-49) and some young people also lack confidence
- socioeconomic background: there are a range of different factors which can result in individuals being further removed from the labour market
- engagement difficulties: there can be challenges in engaging with and training those who are furthest from the labour market.

Figure 4.4 Qualities employers look for in candidates which have been difficult to recruit or train for



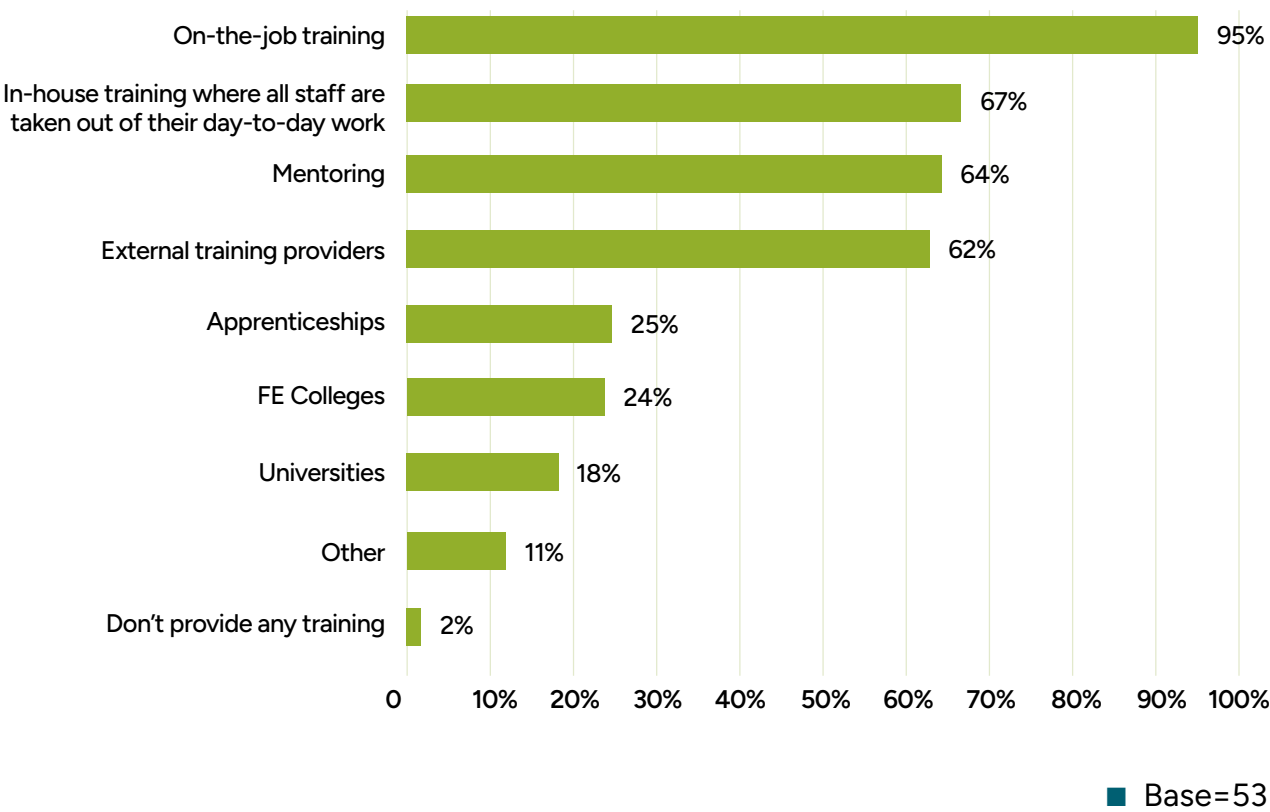
Employer training of existing staff

Referring to skills gaps, 60% of respondents reported that they had existing members of staff who do not have all the skills or experience required to do the job.

90% of respondents reported having existing members of staff who are capable of learning new skills and progressing into other roles.

Figure 4.5 provides a breakdown of the types of training delivered by employers who were consulted. This shows that 95% of respondents undertook on-the-job training, 67% did in-house training where staff were taken out of their day job, and 64% did mentoring. Only 2% of respondents didn't do any training at all.

Figure 4.5: Types of training delivered by employers



The biggest barriers to training were reported to be:

- cost and affordability (76%)
- lack of staff or management time (65%)
- lack of internal training capacity (29%)
- a need for specialised training that cannot be done locally (25%)

In addition, 24% found that the lack of flexibility of training to fit with day-to-day operations was a barrier to engaging in training.

Key issues mentioned by employers in relation to training, included the following:

- a concern that employers will lose trained staff: a perception that those companies which invest in training risk losing employees to other employers.
- inadequate funding: businesses feel that there is inadequate funding in the system, for example, removal of the Flexible Workforce Development Fund
- shortage of craft skills training: lack of training programs for traditional craft skills leads to skill gaps.
- training barriers: limited budgets and staff workloads make it difficult for companies to train employees.

Employers reported some of the ways in which they were engaged in workforce development and this is summarised below:

- 62% offer work experience to young people
- 52% use HR and management consultants
- 48% work with educators, careers advisors and local DYW groups
- 44% offer apprenticeships
- 58% seek advice and help from organisations within the skills system.

Current and future skills needs

Table 4.1 sets out an overview of the current skills and competency needs reported by survey respondents, covering a wide range of capabilities from digital skills to knowledge of products and services, at both basic and advanced levels.

In terms of basic skills, digital skills were identified as the greatest area of need for employers. The next greatest areas of need were following guidance/learning to use new equipment and then people skills. In terms of more advanced skills, management and leadership and people skills were amongst the greatest needs identified.

Key issues raised by employers in relation to current and future skills needs included the following:

- digital skills: this is the most common need across various industries, encompassing design, cybersecurity, AI, social media, and data literacy
- business skills: management, leadership, project management, sales, fundraising and business development are in high demand
- sustainability skills: skills related to ESG (environmental, social, and governance) factors, carbon accounting, and green finance are increasingly important

- skills for a range of different roles: some of the needs identified included administration, manual labour, trades (craft skills), and accounting
- soft skills: communication, interpersonal skills, problem-solving, adaptability, and resilience are valued across sectors.

■ Base=38

Table 4.1: Current skills and competency needs of employers	Basic	Advanced
Digital skills / Computer literacy / IT	76%	43%
Management / leadership	41%	57%
Problem solving	43%	32%
Following guidance, learning to use new equipment or materials	54%	19%
Numerical or statistical skills and understanding	46%	11%
Manual dexterity	38%	14%
Knowledge of products and services	46%	16%
Dealing with, and managing people	35%	54%
Communication and presentation skills, including foreign languages	49%	32%
Customer relations and sales	41%	30%
Skills and knowledge relating to climate change	46%	19%

Engagement with the education and skills system

There are high levels of satisfaction with colleges, universities, apprenticeship providers and private training providers but there were some concerns about the work readiness of people leaving school.

Comments from employers in relation to engaging with the education and skills system included the following:

- collaboration between organisations: businesses collaborate with local councils, colleges, DYW (Developing the Young Workforce) groups, Scottish Enterprise, and universities to design training programs and support job seekers
- sharing resources: businesses participate in events and use training facilities offered by colleges and local authorities
- government programmes: businesses have utilised government programs like Kickstart (temporary job placement for young people) and Parental Employability Support Fund.

Challenges included:

- shrinking college budgets which limit the availability of suitable training programmes
- withdrawal of government funding programmes such as the Flexible Workforce Development Fund reduces flexibility in training approaches
- difficulty finding qualified candidates through existing programmes.

5. Stakeholder insights

In addition to gathering employer insight, the consultation process also engaged 27 stakeholders to establish their views and experience of skills and labour market conditions in Forth Valley and some of the challenges and opportunities facing the region. This section presents a summary of the views gathered through stakeholder consultation.

The Forth Valley labour market

The consultations highlighted the need for a clear vision and strategy for economic development in the region and went on to identify several challenges which could have an impact on the region's labour market. More detail is provided below:

- **reskilling the workforce:** recognising the shift in demographics towards an older workforce, there is a need to reskill the existing workforce, while at the same time ensuring that new entrants have the right entry-level skills
- **socioeconomic disparities:** the legacy of long-term deindustrialisation still affects parts of Forth Valley and there are concentrations of high-skill and low-skills areas within the region
- **adopting new technology:** businesses in some sectors are struggling to scale or adopt digital advancements
- **talent retention:** it can be difficult to retain university graduates due to a perceived lack of high-value job opportunities and a less attractive environment compared to larger cities
- **skills mismatch:** an example of this includes difficulty aligning university expertise with regional skills needs, especially in areas such as green skills and data science
- **job opportunities:** the area has a below average jobs density, a lack of sites and premises, lower employment levels and there are some concerns around opportunities to grow jobs
- **competition for talent:** businesses in Forth Valley face competition from larger companies which may offer more attractive salaries, benefits, and remote work options
- **limited talent pool:** attracting talent, particularly for specialised roles or from disadvantaged groups, remains a challenge within the region
- **impact of COVID-19:** this has led to a loss of skilled workers due to career changes or relocation which further exacerbates skills gaps
- **trade and specialist roles:** additional consultation to refine the action plan also noted that attracting talent for trades and specialised roles was also reportedly difficult and included occupations such as welders, ladders, and scaffolders, some of which are supplied by contractors. The reliance on contractors can create challenges as it means if contractors leave the area, there will be fewer of these occupations available in the region.

While the consultations identified challenges facing the region, there was also discussion around some of the opportunities which could have a positive impact for people and businesses in Forth Valley. The key points are summarised below:

- **clean growth sectors:** the region has the potential to become a leader in clean technologies and sustainable business models across various sectors
- **innovation and enterprise:** one of the examples given here was the Growth Deal projects which focus on stimulating innovation and creating more innovative companies. However, there was some uncertainty about how the deal projects can be complemented or what gaps may need to be filled that are not being addressed
- **demand for data science skills:** there is growing demand for data science skills across all sectors, and this presents an opportunity for skills development in this area
- **collaboration:** there are opportunities to work with neighbouring city regions to provide access to a wider job market and pool of talent

- **upskilling and reskilling:** presents an opportunity to address the needs of diverse groups such as young adults, adults with learning disabilities, and older adults seeking career changes through upskilling and reskilling.

There were a number of comments regarding demand conditions. Skills gaps emerged as a discussion point amongst many stakeholders:

- **lack of alignment between industry needs and skills development:** noting that businesses can struggle to communicate their skill requirements effectively to providers and other relevant supporting bodies
- **un-coordinated support offer:** it was noted that many organisations offer support to businesses, but that this lacks proper alignment and oversight which leads to fragmented and inefficient assistance
- **difficulty meeting employer demands:** existing initiatives may be falling short of addressing all skill gaps and employer needs.

The consultations also provided insight into stakeholder views on factors relating to labour supply and this included:

- **demographic factors:** this includes an ageing population, declining workforce and a shortage of young people have an impact on the labour market
- The importance of the **single university and college** in the region and their strong working relationships with other stakeholders
- **a focus on academic attainment over workforce preparation** with views that the school system prioritises qualifications over practical skills and vocational opportunities
- **sector attractiveness issues:** the health and social care sector, for example, can face challenges attracting young people due to lower wages and challenging working conditions
- **short-term funding hinders upskilling:** current funding models limit the colleges' ability to provide long-term, transformative training programmes
- **a view that transformational funding is needed for curriculum shift:** traditional classroom learning is inadequate for developing future-proof skills, but colleges lack necessary funding to adapt
- **leveraging existing workforce for new skills:** upskilling and retraining the current workforce needs effective planning and resource allocation.

Industry structure

There was some feedback that there may be some labour market challenges which were related to the business structure in Forth Valley and this included:

- **industry structure:** tourism, retail, and hospitality offer significant employment opportunities in the regional economy but can be perceived to offer lower wages
- **skills mismatch:** existing sectors were considered to require different skills than emerging industries like green tech and data science, leading to a gap between workforce capabilities and business needs
- **lack of strong clusters:** difficulty identifying clear and distinctive areas of strength within the regional economy, hindering growth and investment potential
- **low business density:** the region struggles with a relatively small number of established businesses, limiting job creation and economic dynamism.

To overcome these hurdles, there needs to be a focus on modernisation, talent development, and fostering a more vibrant

entrepreneurial culture in the region. There were also several points made in relation to challenges facing specific industry sectors and this included:

- **health and social care:** major recruitment and retention challenges, with significant labour demand in the future. NHS Forth Valley continues to make significant efforts in working with partners and young people, and is working with the University of Stirling to explore new models of social care that are less labour intensive
- **construction:** employers are struggling to find sufficient trade skills. It is a challenge for firms to find trade skills and find apprentices. There is a perception that young people are not attracted to trade or construction jobs
- **higher education:** the university is struggling to recruit international talent after Brexit.

Skills for the transition to net zero

The transition to net zero, and the skills required as part of this, were a point of discussion for most stakeholders. While the need for a skilled workforce to transition to a sustainable economy is evident, challenges

like lack of clarity around green skills, employer communication, and the dynamic nature of skills make preparing the workforce a complex task. The main points emerging from discussions included:

- **unclear definition of green skills:** confusion exists about what specific skills constitute green jobs and how they differ from traditional skills
- **differentiation between technical skills and soft skills:** while demand for technical skills like engineering might remain stable, employers increasingly emphasise that soft skills such as adaptability and collaboration are important in a green economy
- **transitional skills:** existing workforce needs training to adapt to new technologies and processes used in greener industries
- **lack of employer clarity:** there was concern about employers not clearly defining the specific skills needed for green jobs, making it difficult for individuals and training providers to prepare
- **evolving nature of green skills:** the definition of green skills is expected to change over time as technologies and industries evolve, demanding continuous adaptation and learning.

Rurality

Forth Valley has a large rural land area and there are some challenges which may impact people living in the region's rural communities, such as limited public transport provision. Some of the issues which were mentioned in relation to rurality included:

- **future needs:** significant change is expected in the agriculture sector affecting the skillsets required for roles in this sector
- **agriculture and technology:** linking advancements in agricultural technology with the region's rural workforce is crucial
- **sustainable land use:** balancing land use stability and productivity through the transition to green practices requires planning and skilled professionals.
- **uncertainty about the skills required to support the transition to net zero:** the specific skills which will be required for the upcoming rural and agricultural transformations are still unclear
- **urban-rural mix adds complexity:** the diverse landscape of the region, with both urban and rural settings, poses additional challenges in planning for skills development

- **cost of delivering training:** it can be more expensive to deliver skills provision in rural areas
- **access to support:** issues raised about refugees settling in rural areas with little access to jobs, education or training or support.

Existing collaboration

The consultations revealed positive feedback on some of the existing collaborations across the region, indicating that partnership working is already underway and that this provides a strong foundation to build on through the implementation of the Forth Valley Regional Skills Action Plan. The discussions highlighted the following points, demonstrating the existing collaboration which can be built upon:

- **Fair Start Scotland contract:** this was delivered jointly between the three local authorities - Clackmannanshire, Falkirk and Stirling Councils - to support people with long-term health issues and disabilities
- **No One Left Behind:** with potential collaboration in the next phase, focusing on specialist employability support

- **joint procurement:** with positive examples from the Kickstart consortium, demonstrating appetite for further collaboration
- **strong university-college-NHS partnership:** which was seen as a positive factor for the region
- **integrated degree programmes:** delivered in collaboration between University of Stirling and Forth Valley College in specific areas
- **collaboration with other regional providers:** working with organisations such as Chamber of Commerce, CETERIS, and STEP, to offer a comprehensive and collaborative approach
- **emphasis on future collaboration:** recognising the potential and benefits of continued partnerships within the region.

Stakeholder views on future labour market skills priorities and delivery

Stakeholders shared their views on future labour market priorities in the region, highlighting the following areas of need:

- focus on upskilling in trades and sectors relevant to regional needs
- develop AI skills to prepare for future job demands
- focus on skills provision in critical sectors like health and social care
- building a workforce with advanced data science capabilities but also prioritising skills required by local businesses
- responding to employer demand for soft skills along with the required technical skills
- a need for precision in skills planning based on regional strengths and demands (for example the NHS Forth Valley Workforce Plan 2022-2025)
- entrepreneurial skills are important and in particular, building these skills with women, through community outreach
- community outreach and skills building by empowering local residents.

Stakeholder views on priorities for the Forth Valley Skills Action Plan

Consultation discussions provided some insight on the priorities which were highlighted by stakeholders for the Forth Valley Regional Skills Action Plan. This is summarised below:

- shifting towards high-value jobs with a focus on creating attractive employment opportunities in emerging sectors like data science, clean technologies, and advanced manufacturing
- investing in the development of data science skills, recognising the need for data science expertise across all sectors and prioritising workforce development in this area
- skills development with an emphasis on practical skills to enter the workforce. Insight from the college student workshop session indicated that students would be keen to have greater access to work experience opportunities in the region
- job-focused training that leads to sustainable employment, particularly for specific groups like adults with disabilities and older individuals

- building business density by encouraging the growth of new businesses and fostering a more vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem
- utilising digital technologies like smart systems and data analytics to optimise skills development
- promoting the region as an attractive location for businesses and young professionals. Insight from the college student workshop session revealed that students would be interested in hearing more from – and interacting with – local employers about career pathways and jobs in the region
- improving integration and alignment through better co-ordination between government initiatives and training programmes to offer cohesive pathways into jobs in the region
- flexibility and accessibility in provision through adaptable training that caters to individual needs and reaches rural communities where travel might be a barrier
- diversity of pathways by offering various routes into work beyond traditional apprenticeships, considering individual preferences, needs and learning styles
- focus on long-term employment by prioritising training that leads to secure job opportunities.

6. Missions and priority areas for action

This plan has been developed through extensive engagement with partners in the region and provides a framework for region-wide collaboration around identified skills needs in Forth Valley. There are three mission statements which set out the broad structure for action:

- **Mission 1** – Businesses in Forth Valley have the people and skills to flourish
- **Mission 2** – A just and fair labour market for people living and working in Forth Valley
- **Mission 3** – Ensuring a collaborative approach to addressing regional skills needs

The development of the plan has recognised that skills are a derived demand, driven by employers with a need for particular skills and the plan responds by setting out actions to address identified skills needs in the region. However, the plan also reflects the role of skills as a lever in supporting broader ambitions around priorities such as in-work and child poverty and inequalities in the workforce.

As such, the missions and actions have been specifically designed to:

- **respond directly to evidence of need** highlighted through data analysis and consultation with employers and stakeholders
- **align with the skills elements set out across the many regional investments** underway including the Deals, Just Transition and other priorities set out through the regional economic strategies
- **support the delivery of broader policy ambitions including eradicating poverty and moving towards a wellbeing economy.** For example, raising people's skillsets to help improve their work prospects and address in-work and child poverty and providing targeted support to those in protected groups
- **position the region to make the most of current and future opportunities,** reflecting the need for a highly skilled workforce, by upskilling the people living and working in the region and giving businesses the skills that they need.

The priority areas for action outlined in the tables for Missions 1, 2 and 3 provide some high level actions and potential headline outcomes. More detail has been worked up around some of these actions, with more to be developed through the implementation for the plan. The plan identifies potential supporting partners across the actions areas but this is not exhaustive and others may be identified as the plan progresses.

Figure 6.1 below presents a high level summary of key findings from the evidence review and consultation insight which were set out earlier and shows the broad response areas that are set out within the action plan.

Figure 6.1 – Responding to evidence

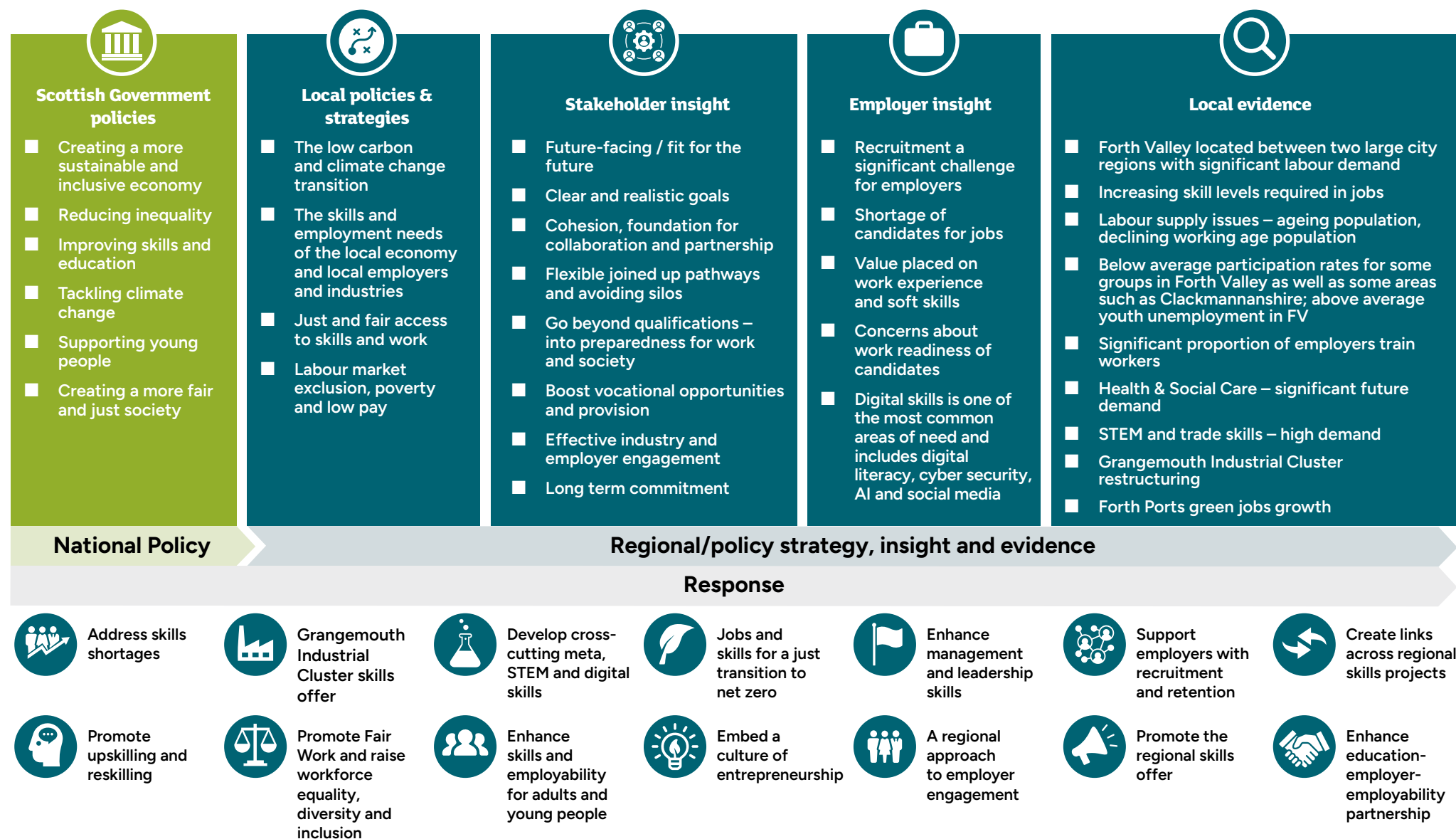


Table 6.1 builds on figure 6.1 and sets out the three missions and the broad priority areas for action which sit within each of these. It also provides an overview of potential headline outcomes which will be considered for inclusion in the monitoring of the plan.

Table 6.1 – A summary of the missions and the priority areas for action

MISSION	PRIORITY AREAS FOR ACTION	POTENTIAL HEADLINE OUTCOMES (the monitoring framework will consider the inclusion of the following outcomes and explore how to quantify progress against actions)
Mission 1: Businesses in Forth Valley have the people and skills to flourish	1A: Address skills shortages in trade and specialist roles 1B: Address skills shortages in Health and Social Care roles 1C: Establish a Grangemouth Industrial Cluster skills offer 1D: Develop cross-cutting skills - meta, STEM and digital 1E: Raise awareness of jobs and skills for a net zero economy. 1F: Enhance management and leadership skills 1G: Support employers with recruitment and retention 1H: Promote upskilling and reskilling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Improve labour market indicators for the workforce ■ Improve labour market indicators for protected characteristic groups ■ Increase supply of labour/economically active ■ Improve participation rates for 16-19-year-olds ■ Improve qualification levels ■ Improve awareness of careers ■ Improve awareness and uptake of apprenticeship pathways ■ Improve awareness of jobs and skills for a net zero economy ■ Improve awareness of management and leadership offer ■ Improve awareness of meta skills ■ Enhance STEM skills in the region ■ Enhance Digital skills in the region ■ Increase in employers paying living wage ■ Improve partnership working ■ Improve awareness of meta skills in the region ■ Improve employer engagement ■ Greater levels of entrepreneurship ■ Reduce skills shortages ■ Reduce recruitment challenges ■ Reduce inequalities ■ Reduce poverty ■ Reduce gender pay gap
Mission 2: A just and fair labour market for people living and working in Forth Valley	2A: Enhance adult skills and employability 2B: Enhance youth skills and employability 2C: Promote Fair Work 2D: Skills for a Just Transition 2E: Raise equality, diversity and inclusion in the labour market 2F: Embed a culture of entrepreneurship	
Mission 3: Ensuring a collaborative approach to addressing regional skills	3A: Launch and implement FVRSA 3B: Create links across regional skills projects 3C: Promote the regional skills offer 3D: Adopt a regional approach to employer engagement 3E: Enhance the education-employer-employability partnership in the region	

Building on this, the following tables set out the action plan in more detail including the headline activities that sit within each, the delivery partners who are expected to be involved and the potential headline outcomes for each of these.

Mission 1 – Businesses in Forth Valley have the people and skills to flourish

Priority area for action	Headline activities	Delivery partners	Potential headline outcomes
1A: Address skills shortages in trade and specialist roles Completion timescale: long-term (by 2028)	1A.1 Raise awareness of careers in trades and specialist roles 1A.2 Strengthen pathways into trades and specialist roles and focussed provision to address identified skills issues.	Lead: Forth Valley College Supporting: Civil Engineering Contractors Association (CECA), Clackmannanshire Council, Construction Industry Training Board (CITB), Developing Young Workforce (DYW), Engineering Construction industry Training Board (ECITB), Falkirk Council, Forth Valley Chamber of Commerce, Industry, MCR Pathways, NHS Forth Valley, Opito, Skills Development Scotland, Training Providers.	Improve awareness of careers Reduce skills shortages
1B: Address skills shortages in health and social care Completion timescale: long-term (by 2028)	1B.1 Raise awareness of careers in health and social care and offer industry supported work experience opportunities to maximise work readiness 1B.2 Strengthen pathways into health and social care roles 1B.3 Targeted support for individuals moving into health & social care careers 1B.4 Coordinate the provision of employer engagement, work placements, CV and mock interview support.	Lead: NHS Forth Valley Supporting: Clackmannanshire Council, Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), DYW, Falkirk Council, Forth Valley College, Health and Social Care Partnerships, Industry, Skills Development Scotland, Stirling Council, University of Stirling.	Improve awareness of careers Reduce skills shortages

<p>1C: Establish a Grangemouth Industrial Cluster skills offer</p> <p>Completion timescale: short-term (by 2026)</p>	<p>1C.1 Develop and promote a programme of flexible and digitally enabled skills delivery focussed on the changing needs of the Grangemouth Industrial Cluster</p> <p>1C.2 Enhance partnership with FE, HE and awarding bodies to ensure qualifications continue to meet the needs of the transitioning economy (link to 3E)</p> <p>1C.3 Co-ordinate and develop existing STEM outreach programmes highlighting career opportunities and pathways into STEM.</p>	<p>Lead: Forth Valley College</p> <p>Supporting:</p> <p>DYW, Forth Valley Regional STEM hub, Grangemouth Future Industry Board (GFIB), Opito, Skills Development Scotland.</p>	<p>Improve partnership working</p> <p>Enhance STEM skills in the region</p>
<p>1D: Develop cross-cutting skills – meta, STEM and digital.</p> <p>Completion timescale: medium-term (by 2027)</p>	<p>1D.1 Embed meta skills through schools in the region and raise awareness of this with employers</p> <p>1D.2 Promote STEM skills and link individuals with existing employers and opportunities in the region</p> <p>1D.3 Promote development of digital skills and pathways into careers requiring digital skills.</p>	<p>Lead: Skills Development Scotland</p> <p>Supporting: Clackmannanshire Council, DYW, Falkirk Council, Forth Valley College, Forth Valley Regional STEM hub, Industry, Stirling Council, University of Stirling</p>	<p>Improve awareness of meta skills</p> <p>Enhance STEM skills in the region</p> <p>Enhance digital skills in the region</p>
<p>1E: Raise awareness of jobs and skills for a net zero economy.</p> <p>Completion timescale medium-term (by 2027)</p>	<p>1E.1 Scale up and replicate existing green skills event in Clackmannanshire to raise awareness of green jobs and skills requirements across the Forth Valley region</p> <p>1E.2 Promote existing net zero support for business and explore opportunities to expand to other local authorities</p> <p>1E.3 Create a calendar of relevant net zero events in the region for partners to support with green jobs and skills messaging.</p>	<p>Lead: Clackmannanshire Council, Falkirk Council, Stirling Council</p> <p>Supporting: DYW, Forth Valley College, Industry, Local Employability Partnerships (LEPs), Scottish Enterprise, SIEC, Opito, Skills Development Scotland, University of Stirling.</p>	<p>Improve awareness of jobs and skills for a net zero economy</p> <p>Improve employer engagement</p>

<p>1F: Enhance management and leadership skills</p> <p>Completion timescale: medium-term (by 2027)</p>	<p>1F.1 Improve management and leadership skills in companies to help them exploit business opportunities.</p>	<p>Lead: Scottish Enterprise</p> <p>Supporting: Business Gateway, employability agencies, Industry, Institute of Directors (IOD)</p>	<p>Improve awareness of management and leadership offer</p> <p>Reduce gender pay gap</p>
<p>1G: Support employers with recruitment and retention</p> <p>Completion timescale: medium-term (by 2027)</p>	<p>1G.1 Deliver workshops and webinars to raise awareness of practices to improve recruitment and retention within the workplace.</p> <p>1G.2 Identify – and capitalise on – opportunities to enhance links between local businesses and students at Forth Valley College and University of Stirling.</p> <p>1G.3 Effective promotion of the wide range of existing business support in the region and development of pre-recruitment training programmes.</p>	<p>Lead: Forth Valley Chamber of Commerce</p> <p>Supporting: Business Gateway, DWP, Forth Valley Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Local Employability Partnerships, Scottish Enterprise, Skills Development Scotland.</p>	<p>Reduce skills shortages</p> <p>Reduce recruitment challenges</p>
<p>1H: Promote upskilling and reskilling</p> <p>Completion timescale: medium-term (by 2027)</p>	<p>1H.1 Maximise upskilling and reskilling offer through existing sectoral employer-education forums and facilitate new groups as appropriate (ACTION 3E). Use these groups to scope current upskilling and reskilling offer in the region.</p> <p>1H.2 Identify and seize opportunities to increase flexibility of upskilling and reskilling offer.</p> <p>1H.3 Raise awareness of regional short course offer in areas of identified need, e.g. Data Science.</p> <p>1H.4 Up-skilling for future technologies through targeted training programmes and industry partnerships.</p>	<p>Lead: Forth Valley College</p> <p>Supporting: Industry, Opito, Skills Development Scotland, University of Stirling.</p>	<p>Improve qualification levels</p> <p>Improve employer engagement</p>

Mission 2 – A just and fair labour market for people living and working in Forth Valley

Priority area for action	Headline activities	Delivery partners	Potential headline outcomes
2A: Enhance adult skills and employability Completion timescale: long-term (by 2028)	2A.1 Develop partnership approaches to the promotion/delivery of adult learning and employability related training opportunities 2A.2 Promote upskilling/reskilling and career pathways for existing workers into areas of need such as the foundational economy 2A.3 Target employability support on economically inactive adults, parents and long-term unemployed in the region 2A.4 Develop opportunities to support older workers to upskill/reskill and move into sustainable employment.	Lead: Local authority employability teams across Clackmannanshire, Falkirk and Stirling Supporting: Adult learning sub-groups, CLD, Community Planning Partnerships (CPP), Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), DYW, Forth Valley College, Opito, Skills Development Scotland, University of Stirling.	Improve labour market indicators for the workforce Improve labour market participation rates of protected characteristic groups Increase supply of labour/economically active Improve qualification levels Reduce poverty
2B: Enhance youth skills and employability Completion timescale: long-term (by 2028)	2B.1 Maximise skills and employment opportunities for young people living and working in Forth Valley, particularly those arising from regional recruitment projects 2B.2 Establish apprenticeship steering group and support activity such as Scottish Apprenticeship Week, "MA for a day" and other innovative pathways in the region such as SIEC Young Pathfinders Programme and the APTUS programme 2B.3 Improve collaboration and information sharing around youth employability actions in the region (links to Mission 3) 2B.4 Support a focus on the development of opportunities for young people with additional support needs.	Lead: Local authority employability teams across Clackmannanshire, Falkirk and Stirling Supporting: Camphill Blair Drummond, Career Ready, DYW, ECITB, Forth Valley College, Industry, MCR Pathways, Opito, Skills Development Scotland, Training Providers.	Improve participation rates for 16 to 19 year-olds Increase supply of labour/economically active Improve awareness and uptake of apprenticeship pathways Reduce inequalities

<p>2C: Promote Fair Work</p> <p>Completion timescale: medium-term (by 2027)</p>	<p>2C.1 Enhance region-wide approach to Fair Work in Forth Valley by supporting the development of employment Charters across the region</p> <p>2C.2 Raise awareness of the value and benefits of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and Fair Work with employers in the region.</p>	<p>Lead: Clackmannanshire Council, Falkirk Council, Stirling Council</p> <p>Supporting: DWP, Construction Accord, Industry, Scottish Enterprise, Scottish Futures Trust, Skills Development Scotland.</p>	<p>Increase in employers paying living wage</p>
<p>2D: Skills for a Just Transition</p> <p>Completion timescale: Long-term (by 2028)</p>	<p>2D.1 Identify and promote skills and job opportunities through the climate change transition to maximise opportunities for Forth Valley residents</p> <p>2D.2 Promote Pathfinder programme being delivered through University of Stirling</p> <p>2D.3 Promote pathways and provision in the region.</p>	<p>Lead: Forth Valley College and University of Stirling</p> <p>Supporting: Local authorities, DWY, Industry, SIEC, Opito.</p>	<p>Increase awareness of jobs and skills for a net zero economy</p> <p>Improve partnership working</p>
<p>2E: Raise equality, diversity and inclusion in the regional labour market</p> <p>Completion timescale: long-term (by 2028)</p>	<p>2E.1 Targeted activity to address inequalities in the region through support for those from different protected characteristic groups</p> <p>2E.2 Raise awareness of resources for employers such as the SDS inclusive recruitment guide and the Modern Apprenticeships and DFN Project Search guide with employers and providers in the region</p> <p>2E.3 Research to better understand skills needs and opportunities for different groups including refugees and those who are unemployed/economically inactive.</p>	<p>Lead: Clackmannanshire Council, Falkirk Council, Stirling Council</p> <p>Supporting: Camphill Blair Drummond, DWP, DYW, DFN Project Search, Enable, Forth Valley College, NHS Forth Valley, Scottish Action for Mental Health (SAMH), Skills Development Scotland.</p>	<p>Reduce inequalities</p> <p>Improve employer engagement</p>

<p>2F: Embed a culture of entrepreneurship</p> <p>Completion timescale: medium-term (by 2027)</p>	<p>2F.1 Engage regional partners to map existing entrepreneurial education and self-employment pathways in the region</p> <p>2F.2 Identify opportunities to expand entrepreneurial skills and education across the region.</p>	<p>Lead: University of Stirling</p> <p>Supporting: Business Gateway, DYW, Forth Valley College, STEP, Ceteris, Codebase, Skills Development Scotland, Social Enterprise Scotland.</p>	<p>Greater levels of entrepreneurship</p> <p>Improve awareness of careers</p>
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Mission 3 – Ensuring a collaborative approach to addressing regional skills needs

Priority area for action	Headline activities	Delivery partners	Potential headline outcomes
3A: Launch and implement the Forth Valley Regional Skills Action Plan Completion timescale: short-term (2026)	3A.1 Establish FVRSAP steering group to feed into Regional Economy Partnership (REP) as well as governance framework and reporting mechanisms.	Lead: Skills Development Scotland Supporting: Steering group.	Improve partnership working
3B: Create links across regional skills projects Completion timescale: long-term (by 2028)	3B.1 Better link the skills elements of the Falkirk and Grangemouth, Stirling and Clackmannanshire Regional Deals, Forth Green Freeport and Grangemouth Industrial Just Transition Plan by using relevant forums to share information, progress, best practice and the skills elements of regional projects 3B.2 Extend and develop skills pathways plans currently under development as part of the Stirling and Clackmannanshire City Region Deal.	Lead: Skills Development Scotland Supporting: Steering group.	Improve partnership working
3C: Promote the regional skills offer Completion timescale: medium-term (by 2027)	3C.1 Articulate and signpost to the skills, education and training offer to support inward investment and attracting talent to the region 3C.2 Produce an online regional skills prospectus, in collaboration with partners, to clearly set out the education and training offer in the region for use with potential inward investors and other audiences considering locating in the region.	Lead: Clackmannanshire Council, Falkirk Council, Stirling Council Supporting: Forth Valley College, Skills Development Scotland, Scottish Enterprise, Training Providers, University of Stirling.	Improve partnership working

<p>3D: Adopt a regional approach to employer engagement</p> <p>Completion timescale: short-term (by 2026)</p>	<p>3D.1 Map existing employer engagement activity to understand current approaches, share best practice and inform the development of enhanced regional approach to engaging employers in the skills system.</p>	<p>Lead: Skills Development Scotland</p> <p>Supporting: Steering group.</p>	<p>Improve partnership working</p>
<p>3E: Enhance education-employer-employability partnership in the region</p> <p>Completion timescale: short-term (by 2026)</p>	<p>3E.1 Establish employer-education-employability forum to enhance coordination and provision of curriculum development, school engagement, employer engagement and work placements.</p>	<p>Lead: Forth Valley Chamber of Commerce</p> <p>Supporting: Clackmannanshire Council, DYW, Falkirk Council, Forth Valley College, Stirling Council, University of Stirling.</p>	<p>Improve partnership working</p>

7. Consultation

Steering group

A Steering Group was convened to inform and oversee the development of the FVRSAP. The members of the Steering Group were:

Clackmannanshire Council	Clackmannanshire Third Sector Interface (CTSI)	DYW Forth Valley	Falkirk Council
Forth Valley College	Forth Valley Chamber of Commerce	NHS Forth Valley	Scottish Funding Council
Skills Development Scotland	The University of Stirling	Stirling Council	

The group met initially towards the end of 2023 to begin the process of developing the plan and there was much engagement throughout 2024 to build and refine the action plan.

Consultation

Consultation interviews were undertaken with 27 people in 14 organisations between December 2023 and February 2024. The organisations included: Clackmannanshire Council; DYW Forth Valley; Falkirk Council; Forth Valley Chamber of Commerce; Forth Valley College; Forth Valley NHS Youth Academy; Local Policy Improvement Partnership; NHS Forth Valley; Powering Futures; Regional Economic Advisory Board; Scottish Enterprise; Scottish Government; Skills Development Scotland; University of Stirling and Stirling Council.

Throughout 2024, there was also a series of engagements with a wider range of partners through 1:1 discussions or attendance at meetings. The aim was to share the emerging plan, further refine the detail and identify opportunities for broader partnership working across the region. Engagement included: Opito, Grangemouth Future Industry Board (GFIB), Forth Valley STEM hub, CVS Falkirk & District Employability Forum, FEL Scotland, local authority education leads and DYW school leads and school coordinators.

The plan identifies potential supporting partners across the actions areas but this is not exhaustive and others may be identified as the implementation of the plan progresses.

Business survey and 1-to-1 consultations

95 employers submitted their views, 80 through the online survey and 15 through 1:1 interviews.

Youth focus groups

Two focus groups with young people were conducted – one with students at Forth Valley College, and the other with students at the University of Stirling.

Appendix A

As mentioned earlier, the development of the Forth Valley Regional Skills Action Plan recognises the significant activity underway in the region to drive skills development. This table provides a short overview of some of these projects.

Key Forth Valley skills projects with investment			
Project	Associated investment	Activity	Partners
Transportation, Renewables and Career Exploration Hub (TRACE)	Falkirk and Grangemouth Growth Deal	A hub showcasing advanced simulation, virtual reality and augmented reality for young people to explore new careers with access to local employment opportunities. Provide upskilling opportunities to those employed in transitioning industries with a focus on maritime, logistics and hydrogen.	Forth Ports and Forth Valley College
Skills Transition Centre	Falkirk and Grangemouth Growth Deal	Focused on future-proofing skills delivery for the Just Transition to Net Zero. Supporting businesses, individuals and communities to upskill, reskill and learn new skills. Investment in state-of-the art kit, equipment and associated programme development. Accelerating the use of virtual reality, augmented reality, simulation, digital classrooms for skills/training delivery. Promoting accessibility and inclusive growth.	Forth Valley College
Scotland Centre of Excellence for Canals and Traditional Skills (Lock 16)	Falkirk and Grangemouth Growth Deal	The Lock 16 Activity Strategy and Plan (November 2024) notes that “Lock 16 – Scotland’s Centre of Excellence for Canals and Traditional Skills will radically transform a neglected area of the Forth and Clyde Canal into a thriving waterside centre focussed on community, heritage skills training and local employment.”	Scottish Canals Historic Environment Scotland
Flexible Skills Pathways	Stirling and Clackmannanshire City Region Deal	Five thematic Skills Pathway Plans (SPPs), each one outlining how it will improve access to jobs and training opportunities created by deal projects for people facing disproportionate exclusion from the regional labour market.	Clackmannanshire Council

Scotland's International Environment Centre (SIEC)	Stirling and Clackmannanshire City Region Deal	Youth pathfinder programme to raise awareness of green skills, knowledge and careers. Regional green entrepreneurship and enterprise pathways.	University of Stirling
The National Aquaculture Technology and Innovation Hub (NATIH)	Stirling and Clackmannanshire City Region Deal	NATIH will design and deliver a skills portfolio that supports the national priority areas outlined within the Skills Review for the Aquaculture Sector in Scotland. The portfolio will create pathways into a range of enhanced opportunities within the aquaculture sector at various entry points including: Postgraduate, Masters, Graduate Apprenticeships and Industry driven CPD.	University of Stirling
Forth Valley NHS Skills Academy	University of Stirling, Forth Valley College & NHS Forth Valley Partnership	Attracting the future workforce to ensure they are equipped with the skills and experience they need to meet the current and future healthcare needs of local people across Forth Valley. Focus on health and care, physiotherapy (pre and post registration) and clinical Skills and Simulation infrastructure.	NHS, Forth Valley College, University of Stirling
Forth Green Freeport (FGF) Skills and Fair Work	Forth Green Freeport	FGF fair work charter to ensure workers and employers have meaningful employment. FGF skills plan to address skills gaps. Active outreach to underrepresented groups. A skills fund to help access jobs and training.	Falkirk Council, Edinburgh Council
Grangemouth Industrial Just Transition plan jobs and skills	Grangemouth Industrial Just Transition plan	Support a Just Transition to Net Zero for the Grangemouth industrial cluster through a partnership approach across HE, FE and industry. Promotion and development of a flexible skills programme for the existing and future workforce. Bespoke programme of STEM activity that incorporates specific needs as identified for the Grangemouth industrial cluster. It will engage a wide range of audiences, including those currently under-represented in STEM subjects and careers.	Skills Development Scotland, Forth Valley College
Project Willow	Grangemouth Industrial Just Transition plan	A range of proposals to deliver a viable long-term future for the Grangemouth refinery site have been shortlisted by the UK and Scottish Governments, as part of a feasibility study. The project is exploring how the region can build on its skilled workforce, local expertise and long heritage as a fuel leader in Scotland to forge a new path in clean energy production.	UK and Scottish Governments

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