

Apprenticeships created through Swansea Bay City Region City Deal lower than expected

The number of apprenticeships being created as part of the City Deal for the Swansea Bay City Region is lower than anticipated, but leaders still aim to meet a target of 3,000. The £1.3bn deal (which includes leveraged private sector finance) consists of nine projects, eight of which focus on the digital sector, construction, energy, smart manufacturing, and life science and well-being.

It covers Neath Port Talbot, Swansea, Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire. The ninth project, called skills and talent, is about raising awareness of the city deal, providing skills training to prospective employees, and creating new courses and apprenticeships.

A meeting of public- and private- sector leaders who form a joint committee overseeing the City Deal heard that 184 out of 3,000 apprenticeships have been created to date. Samantha Cutlan-Dillon, skills and talent project manager, said this was due to delays affecting some of the other eight projects, the ever-evolving nature of future skills needs, and a drop in Welsh Government degree- level apprenticeship funding.

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Ms Cutlan-Dillon explained that the 3,000 apprenticeship figure had been derived from the eight other projects but that the target had now been removed from them following updates to their business cases. She added: “We are still keeping that legacy figure, and we plan to achieve that.”

The skills and talent project was meant to run until 2025-26 but is to be extended to March 2028.

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Ms Cutlan-Dillon said the project had “completely smashed” a target to raise awareness among young people, teaching staff, parents, industry and “the man on the street” about new city deal opportunities.

A report before the joint committee also said 22 pilot projects have progressed through approval and were in delivery. Another target is to support 14,000 people with higher-level skills. The figure attained thus far is 3,217.

The skills and talent project also aims to create two centres

of excellence, which Ms Cutlan-Dillon said wouldn't require new buildings but would instead be an "amalgamation of activity around a key sector in a key local authority area", with energy in Pembrokeshire and manufacturing and low-carbon schemes in Neath Port Talbot both contenders.

Joint committee chairman Cllr Rob Stewart said apprenticeships and skills training was a national and international challenge and that some great progress had been made by the skills and talent project.

Cllr Steve Hunt said he was excited about opportunities in the Neath Port Talbot area, including ones outside the 15-year city deal such as the newly created Celtic Freeport and a potential floating offshore wind industry based partly at Port Talbot's port.

Cllr Hunt described the 184 apprenticeships created to date as "a little bit disappointing," and said "there's got to be a job" at the end of them. Cllr Stewart, who is leader of Swansea council, said the challenge was "creating the economy of tomorrow" and then aligning people to it and convincing the private sector to make necessary investments. "It's really about getting ahead of the curve," he said.

Ms Cutlan-Dillon said: "We're constantly forward-looking in what we're doing. Timing is everything, and maybe the employer demand is not there yet."