

North West Wales Construction

Learning Network Project

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• Final Report •

North West Wales Construction Learning Network Project

Final Report

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Executive Summary

CRG was commissioned by ELW_a at the end of 2004 to undertake a review of the provision of learning in construction trades in North West Wales. The review had 5 objectives, namely:

- i. Describe and quantify the nature of the construction industry across the region.
- ii. To map current and future labour and skills demand within the construction industry in the locality.
- iii. To map the scope scale and quality of provision of vocational learning funded by ELW_a in construction trades.
- iv. To assess the future demand for learning and the capability of the learning network to meet it; achieved through the consultations, and workshop event.
- v. To make recommendations on establishing a learning network in construction in North West Wales by conducting a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis and initial recommendations, consulting again with training providers and stakeholders (to) ...form the basis for accurate, robust and achievable final recommendations.

Underpinning the project were local concerns that the sector is “*facing wide ranging changes to operating practices and skills requirements*” and is characterised by:

- A lack of available labour to meet current and, importantly, future industry demand.
- A historical under-investment in the learning infrastructure which will hamper attempts to close the growing gap between the demands of the industry and the demands of learners on the one hand, and the availability of learning on the other¹.

Data collected through desk research and initial consultation was analysed by the CRG research team and a SWOT analysis of learning provision for the construction sector in North West Wales drawn up (see below). The SWOT summary was deliberately simplistic and was the subject of further consultations with key informants, training providers and employers

¹ Taken from ELW_a Invitation to Quote.

SWOT Analysis

<p>STRENGTHS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reasonably wide mix of providers • Much existing provision is seen as good quality • Variety of courses available from NVQ level 1 through to degrees • Steady demand for “the right kind of” skills from employers • Good networking • Good communication within the industry • CITB – Broking/networking/linking • Many courses full: people showing interest in the sector 	<p>WEAKNESSES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employers reluctant to spend time on attending network meetings • Some employers’ skills/training demands not met • Too many networks: fragmented; lack clarity of role • Current networks – most don’t address construction specifically. • Not enough bite size programmes • Some provision old/out of date/out of area • College restrictions e.g. timetabling, number of places available, facilities • Many employers are very small: difficulty offering training/MA places, releasing staff etc
<p>OPPORTUNITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to some European money • Better programmes – linked to demand • Industry is generally buoyant • Quality of job is better • Better image=more recruits • New skills needed – Constructing Excellence, Just in Time etc • Increased interest in certification/accreditation: CSCS/OSAT etc • 14-19 curriculum allows young people to experience the industry • If the aerospace industry can create a skills hub then so could construction? • Some organisations, agencies willing to co-ordinate trainees’ employment and in college • Increased use of innovative learning provision: web based, CD ROM, distance learning etc. • Increased statutory requirements; health and safety, environment etc 	<p>THREATS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key skills requirements to enter courses such as Modern Apprenticeships are too high for many recruits • Insufficient foundation programmes for potential “good workers” not ready for MA • Too many trainees in some trades, not enough in others • Number of places offered by training providers and colleges limited • Recruits not learning what employers want: academic, not practical • Possible industry downturn • Anti industry teachers/careers advisors • Generation gaps: industry losing skilled people before trainees brought on • Businesses are “anti college” • Brain drain of young people away from the area • Small area – rurality, transportation issues hinder provision, networking • Who could create a new network: provide resources and leadership? • Uncertainties over ELWa funding requirements • Employer liability

The consultations – as anticipated - drew a number of responses. It seems fair to say that the majority agreed with the points made, but a number of specific issues were raised, and reflected in the final conclusions and recommendations. These centre on 4 main areas:

Construction Sector in North West Wales: Whilst tending to lag behind the performance of the industry in other regions, the construction sector in North West Wales can point to a period of appreciable growth in the recent past. Prospects for

the future **may** include a period of slackening demand, and much depends on overall economic performance on an all-Wales/All-UK level. Nevertheless most within the industry are positive about prospects: appreciable capital investments are anticipated, and major needs for refurbishment and small works readily identifiable. With around 6,000 employees, the sector is a major employer in North West Wales. High levels of self-employment and very small businesses do, perhaps, constrain growth opportunities, but support rural communities and offer a range of specialist skills and services.

Labour and Skills Demand: Projecting future labour market demands is notoriously challenging but there are indications that the construction sector in North West Wales may see a slight reduction in total employee numbers over the next 5 years or so. Significant needs for new recruits will remain, however, to meet current vacancies and replace those leaving the industry.

There have been large-scale skills shortages in recent years which may decline somewhat because of a possible slackening in overall demand, and what seems to be much-increased interest in new recruits joining the industry.

Continued needs for upskilling the workforce and accrediting existing skill levels should lead to a need for levels of skills development activity at least to the level of current provision, however.

Vocational Learning Provision: There is a good range of learning provision for the construction sector within North West Wales, but inevitably this fairly small area needs to draw on provision from outside the area too. Continuing this broad pattern seems inevitable. Where assessed, the quality of learning providers has usually been good – a view confirmed by consultation with employers, key informants and providers themselves.

Several courses are full which would tend to indicate the need for further investment to support expansion. This is a recent phenomenon, though, and might reverse, particularly if the sector experiences a down turn.

A number of facilities are widely seen as out dated however. On balance, the case for new investment in FE construction facilities seems significant – if only to upgrade what is available currently, but careful attention will be needed to ensure provision is not duplicated at different site within what is, after all, a relatively small region.

A recurring theme (challenged by several providers) is that the sector cannot source much of the flexible, bespoke, 'bit-sized' learning it needs, and particular attention will need to be given to resolving concerns here as effectively as possible within inevitable constraints of resourcing and overall demand.

Networks: In essence, establishing an entirely new network does not seem appropriate, but there are opportunities for enhancing the role played by existing arrangements. In particular:

- Some issues are not amenable to ‘general’ network discussions (e.g. major capital investments); in effect, strategic level assessments by WAG/ELWa, followed by careful consultations, are needed.
- There is a need for general information about learning and the labour market to be shared and broad-level coordination encouraged across the construction sector for North West Wales, but these needs might best be met through a more general ‘Forum’, meeting relatively infrequently, rather than a more operational-level Network.
- Local level coordination of learning providers has many attractions for the construction sector, as others. Overall, this seems best achieved through CCETs, and construction sector providers and employers might appropriately take a higher level of interest in these organisations.

Recommendations: We were required to make recommendations on establishing a learning network for the construction sector in North West Wales specifically. There does not seem to be support for the formation of new formal networks nor for enhancing the role of CCETs. As a result, meeting requirements for greater coordination and liaison for construction sector training provision in North West Wales become essentially matters for CITB ConstructionSkills, and for the North Wales Construction Training Group, and Ynys Mon and Gwynedd Construction Training Group.

Accordingly, we recommend that these bodies consider whether the two Training Groups may appropriately expand their roles to:

- Give a greater input into formal plans for training provision
- coordinate placements for trainees
- actively support the engagement of smaller employers in training
- supporting the provision of training programmes to meet employer needs
- and liaising with ELWa, CCETs and other bodies.

If CITB ConstructionSkills, the North Wales Construction Training Group, and the Ynys Mon and Gwynedd Construction Training Group are willing to take on extra responsibilities in these areas, discussions with ELWa should take place to:

- Review what may be appropriate resourcing for the two Training Groups
- agree terms of reference and membership
- consider opportunities for including employers and occupations outside the immediate scope of CITB ConstructionSkills (e.g. those covered by Asset Skills, construction-linked manufacturing and engineering)

- agree reporting arrangements
- consider how best to align with Sector Skills Agreements and other planning structures and processes
- consider whether there is a need for parallel provider groups to complement enhanced Training Groups
- agree coordination with CCETs and other bodies
- consider how best to arrange periodic 'Forum' events (say 6-monthly) to consider key issues for construction across the whole of North West Wales
- identify any needs for specialist sub-groups to address specific issues linked to skill needs for the industry (e.g. helping smaller employers become more involved with Modern Apprenticeships; giving a 'steer' to ensure providers' plans meet the industry's needs).

Experience elsewhere points to the importance of effective leadership from within the industry. The forthcoming merger of ELWa into the Welsh Assembly Government may have important implications for some of these arrangements, which makes it important for thorough monitoring and reviewing procedures to be set up from the outset.

1. Introduction

Aims and Context

1.1 CRG was commissioned by ELWa at the end of 2004 to undertake a review of the provision of learning in construction trades in North West Wales. For the purposes of this project North West Wales is defined as the counties of Gwynedd, Ynys Mon, Conwy and Denbighshire.

1.2 The overall aim of the review was to:

“Review the provision of learning in construction trades in North West Wales to assess its adequacy in meeting future industry and individual demand and develop proposals for solutions to any issues highlighted”

1.3 This review had 5 more detailed objectives, namely:

- i. Describe and quantify the nature of the construction industry across the region; to be achieved by conducting a desk based assessment to include a literature review of current policy documents along with current regional and national statistics for the construction sector.
- ii. To map current and future labour and skills demand within the construction industry in the locality; to be achieved, again, through a literature review but also to consult with employers, training providers and other relevant stakeholders to establish current trends in the supply and demand of construction related learning.
- iii. To map the scope scale and quality of provision of vocational learning funded by ELWa in construction trades; to be achieved through the consultation exercise and a workshop with training providers to test and refine outcomes from the consultation exercise.
- iv. To assess the future demand for learning and the capability of the learning network to meet it; achieved through the consultations, and workshop event.
- v. To make recommendations on establishing a learning network in construction in North West Wales; by conducting a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis and initial recommendations, consulting again with training providers and stakeholders from the previous consultation exercise to see if they thought it was a fair reflection what they saw in the region. This would then form a basis for accurate, robust and achievable final recommendations.

- 1.4 Again for the purposes of the project, ELW_a also defined a learning network as *“an arrangement of post 16 providers co-ordinated on a locality or specialist or other basis which will enable seamless transition and progression through high quality learning routes”*.
- 1.5 Underpinning the project were local concerns, largely reflecting UK assessments in, for example, the “Rethinking Construction Agenda²,” that the sector is *“facing wide ranging changes to operating practices and skills requirements”* and is characterised by:
- A lack of available labour to meet current and, importantly, future industry demand.
 - A historical under-investment in the learning infrastructure which will hamper attempts to close the growing gap between the demands of the industry and the demands of learners on the one hand, and the availability of learning on the other³.

Methodology

- 1.6 The agreed work programme had 7 main elements:

Desk based review: Analysis of current policy documents, regional and national statistics for the Construction sector.

Initial Consultations: A mix of telephone and face-to-face interviews took place with employers (20), stakeholders (9, including representatives from the project steering group, CITB, JobCentre Plus and Careers Wales); and learning providers (10, with a mix of colleges and private-sector providers). Topic guides for these consultations are given in Appendix 1, and encouraged interviewees to provide their confidential views on current learning provision, collaboration and networking, learners, employers, barriers to learning, qualifications available, and the future training needs of the industry.

Provider Workshop: A lively and informative workshop took place at the North Wales Conference Centre in March 2005, at which 10 providers of construction related learning were represented. This allowed the research team to present a number of initial questions, linked to issues including collaboration and links, the current employment situation, drivers of skills change, support networks and future skills requirements. Feedback was used to feed in to later stages of the project.

² See www.rethinkingconstruction.org.uk

³ Taken from ELW_a Invitation to Quote.

SWOT: A SWOT analysis was completed to summarise the main characteristics of construction sector learning provision in North West Wales identified up to that point. This analysis was designed to prompt further responses, and final consultations: key learning providers and stakeholders contacted in previous stages were re-contacted to test and refine the points made in the SWOT.

Analysis and reporting: data produced through the various work programme elements was analysed and the production of a draft final report.

Final – Stage Consultation

The draft final report was circulated for comments and the subject of a workshop in St Asaph on June 20th, with representatives of ELWa, CCETs, WDA, providers and other interested parties. Following this event, the final report has been produced.

Project management, liaison: the research team held regular discussions with the ELWa project manager and are very grateful for the guidance and support these discussions provided. The role of key individuals from CITB ConstructionSkills Wales was invaluable in facilitating contacts with employers and other stakeholders, as well as providing extensive written material and suggestions for additional sources of information.

2. Construction in North West Wales

Literature review

- 2.1 There are several challenges to be faced when identifying and analysing data for the construction sector in North West Wales. To start with, the area of Ynys Mon, Gwynedd, Conwy and Denbighshire is 'non-standard': many datasets refer to the whole of North Wales, or to Wales as a whole. Second, the area is a small one: when information is based on sampled data – as most is – figures have to be rounded and confidence limits carefully noted.
- 2.2 Thirdly, and particularly important, are high levels of mobility within the sector. Individuals living in North West Wales may very well spend parts of their careers in other parts of Wales, England (particularly Merseyside), Ireland and further a field - and vice versa. The provision of training and education can show comparable patterns of mobility, with local people taking part in learning activities well away from North West Wales and people from outside the area taking advantage of, in particular, opportunities offered by North West Wales colleges.
- 2.3 All of this is in addition, of course, to well-known difficulties in forecasting almost any form of labour market characteristics with high levels of confidence.
- 2.4 To meet the project's requirements for identifying and mapping the sector in North West Wales – including patterns of labour and skills supply – we carried out a wide-ranging literature review, and also held discussions with a number of 'key informants' able to start processes of contextualising and 'getting behind' the broad patterns being described, later considered in more detail through the consultation exercises.
- 2.5 The main sources drawn on included:
- ConstructionSkills Strategic Overview 2004-2008.
 - Construction - Skills Foresight Report 2004 – Wales.
 - Construction - Skills Foresight Report 2003.
 - Construction - Skills Foresight Report 2003 – Wales.
 - Estyn Reports for specific providers.
 - Wales Construction Workforce Development Plan 2002.
 - CITB Business Plan 2003-2007: Addressing the Industry Skills – Challenges.

- An analysis of skills matches between training providers and the labour market in Ynys Mon and Gwynedd.
- ECITB Sector Workforce Development Plan.
- ELWa Future Skills Wales – Generic Skills Survey 2003, CITB ConstructionSkills.
- SSC Labour Market Information – CITB ConstructionSkills – 2005.
- Construction Skills in Mid Wales - Final Report to National Council for Education and Training for Wales March 2004.
- ELWa Regional Statement of Needs and Priorities 2005-2005 – North Wales.
- Denbighshire Annual Recommendations for Learning 2005-6.
- Conwy 14-19 Network Development Plan 2004-7.

2.6 In the rest of this section, we summarise a number of themes which emerged from this part of the overall programme, which were explored further through the consultation exercises and SWOT analysis.

2.7 Wherever possible, data referring to North West Wales specifically has been used, but inevitably some information covering North Wales, and sometimes the whole of Wales, has had to be drawn on as the best available. In this context, it is worth noting that the resident population of North West Wales (approximately 663,350) is around 58% of that of North Wales, and 13% of the whole of Wales⁴; the construction sector workforce in North West Wales represents about 50% and 11% of the North Wales and all-Wales figures respectively⁵.

Themes

Theme 1: Demand in the North West Wales Construction Sector is reasonably buoyant, but can be very volatile.

2.8 For Wales as a whole, construction output was estimated to have increased by around 20% between 2001-03, but this needs to be contrasted with an estimated decline of around 15% between 1999-2001⁶. This volatility is reflected in local-level employment data summarised in the figures from National Statistics⁷ given below.

⁴ 2001 Census

⁵ 2002 figures; from Labour Force Survey.

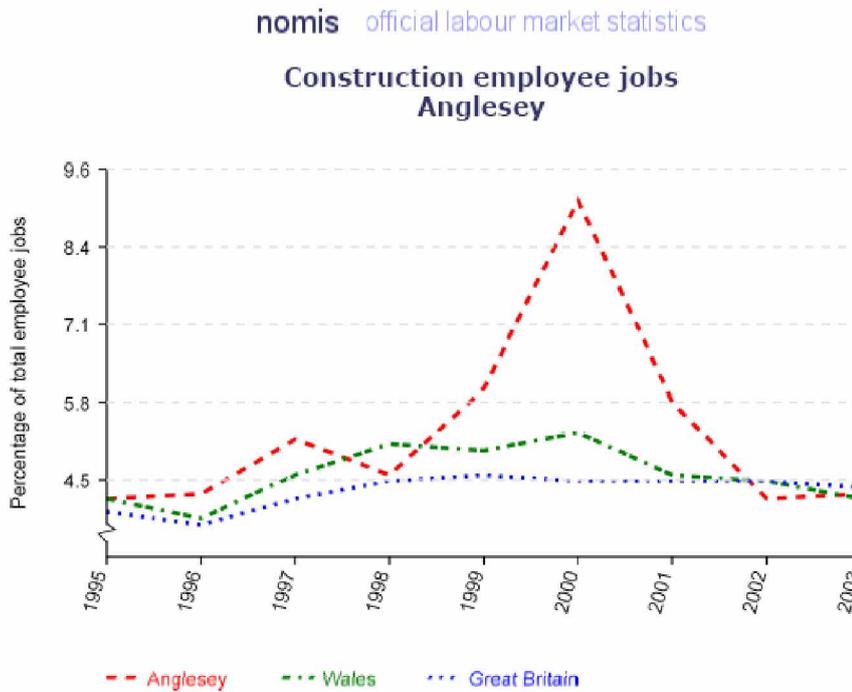
⁶ Source: Welsh Index of Production and Construction: StatsWales

⁷ Source: National Statistics (from Nomis website: www.nomisweb.co.uk)

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2.9 The industry in North West Wales is also heavily dependent on small firms; this partly reflects the UK picture, where 95% of firms employ fewer than 10 people⁸ but self-employment and micro-businesses are a particular feature of the industry in North West Wales⁹.

Figure 1: Construction employee jobs – Anglesey



The percentage figures represent the percentage of total employee jobs.

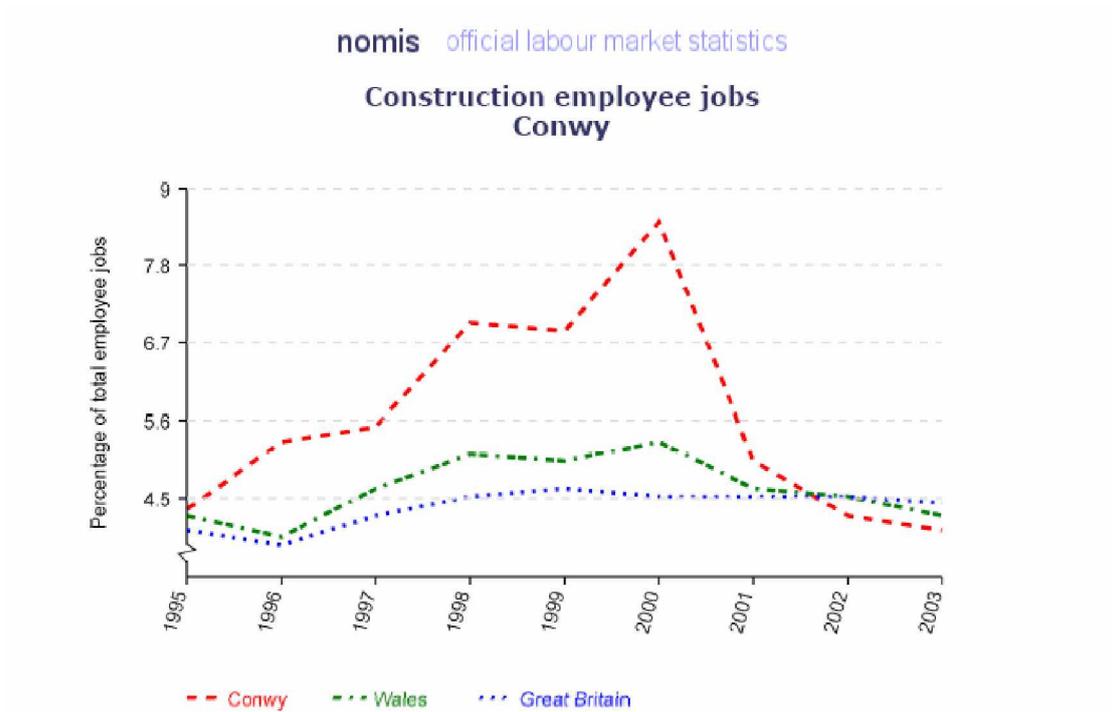
	Anglesey	Anglesey (%)	Wales (%)	GB (%)
1995	648	4.20	4.20	4.00
1996	651	4.30	3.90	3.80
1997	903	5.20	4.60	4.20
1998	763	4.60	5.10	4.50
1999	1,032	6.00	5.00	4.60
2000	1,467	9.10	5.30	4.50
2001	1,060	5.80	4.60	4.50
2002	715	4.20	4.50	4.50
2003	819	4.30	4.20	4.40

Source: annual business inquiry employee analysis

⁸ www.constructionskills.net/ssc/the-partners/default.htm

⁹ See 'An analysis of skills match between training providers and the labour market in Ynys Mon and Gwynedd' Report 2003.

Figure 2: Construction employee jobs – Conwy

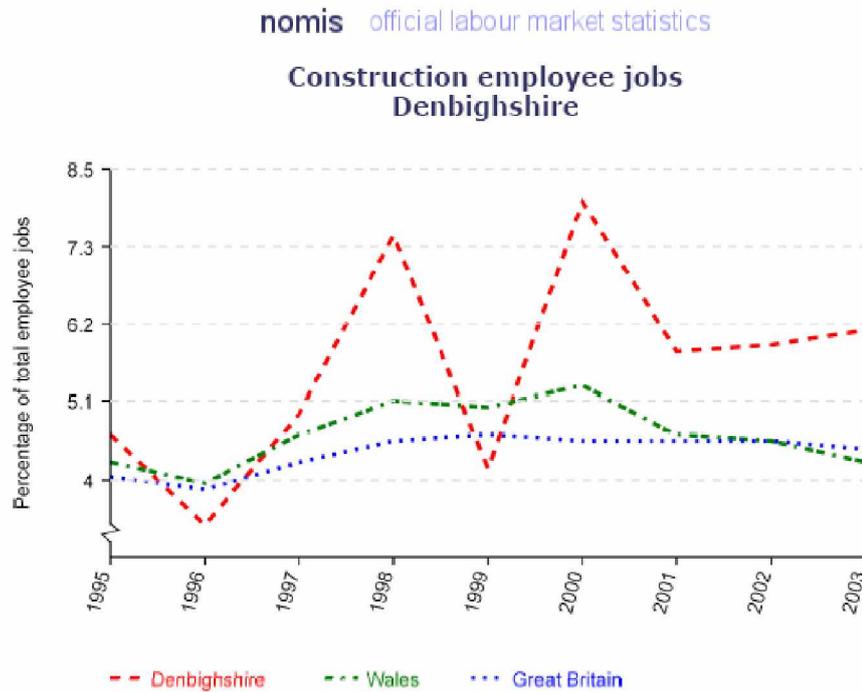


The percentage figures represent the percentage of total employee jobs.

	Conwy	Conwy (%)	Wales (%)	GB (%)
1995	1,254	4.30	4.20	4.00
1996	1,775	5.30	3.90	3.80
1997	1,893	5.50	4.60	4.20
1998	2,299	7.00	5.10	4.50
1999	2,290	6.90	5.00	4.60
2000	2,857	8.50	5.30	4.50
2001	1,721	5.00	4.60	4.50
2002	1,427	4.20	4.50	4.50
2003	1,440	4.00	4.20	4.40

Source: annual business inquiry employee analysis

Figure 3: construction employee jobs – Denbighshire

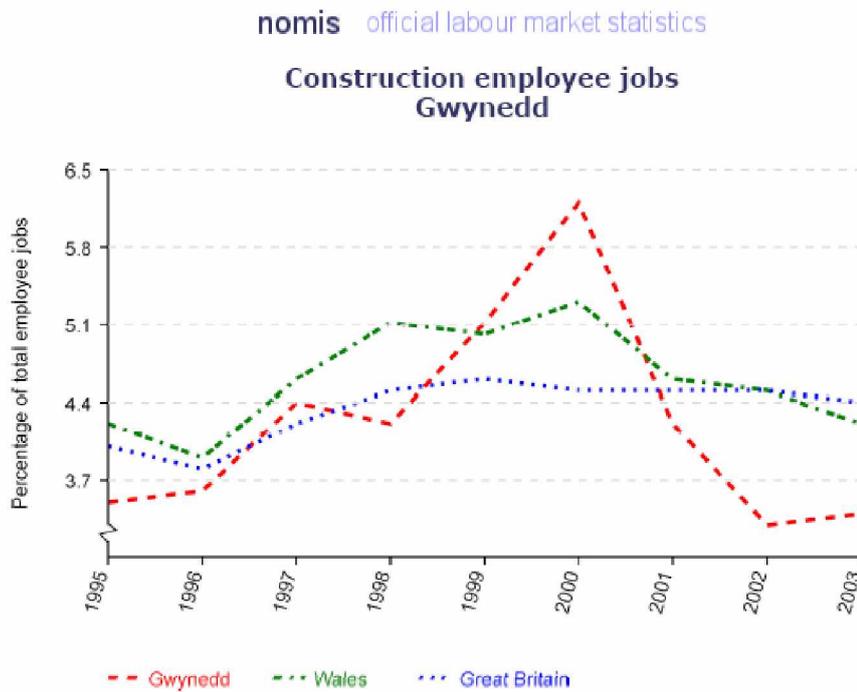


The percentage figures represent the percentage of total employee jobs.

	Denbighshire	Denbighshire (%)	Wales (%)	GB (%)
1995	1,308	4.60	4.20	4.00
1996	1,050	3.30	3.90	3.80
1997	1,606	4.90	4.60	4.20
1998	2,364	7.50	5.10	4.50
1999	1,325	4.10	5.00	4.60
2000	2,670	8.00	5.30	4.50
2001	1,885	5.80	4.60	4.50
2002	1,920	5.90	4.50	4.50
2003	2,057	6.10	4.20	4.40

Source: annual business inquiry employee analysis

Figure 4: Construction employee jobs – Gwynedd



The percentage figures represent the percentage of total employee jobs.

	Gwynedd	Gwynedd (%)	Wales (%)	GB (%)
1995	1,459	3.50	4.20	4.00
1996	1,330	3.60	3.90	3.80
1997	1,892	4.40	4.60	4.20
1998	1,650	4.20	5.10	4.50
1999	2,082	5.10	5.00	4.60
2000	2,414	6.20	5.30	4.50
2001	1,702	4.20	4.60	4.50
2002	1,406	3.30	4.50	4.50
2003	1,535	3.40	4.20	4.40

Source: annual business inquiry employee analysis

- 2.10 A number of indications that demand is likely to continue to be reasonably strong can be pointed to¹⁰, but much is likely to depend on the approval and pace of a small number of capital projects (e.g. retail redevelopments in Bangor; possible power generation investment).

Theme 2: Current Skill Shortages are a Concern for the Industry in North West Wales.

- 2.11 At a UK level, over recent years there have been widely reported recruitment difficulties and skills shortages - particularly for carpenters, electricians, bricklayers, plumbers and managers.
- 2.12 FSW projections suggest that over the period 2003-08 there could well be a contraction in the numbers employed by the construction sector in North Wales (perhaps by around 10% overall) but the ConstructionSkills Foresight Report indicates that, for the near future, the labour market industry is expected to remain tight, with continuing recruitment difficulties.
- 2.13 As well as appreciable shortages of a number of technical, managerial and trade skills, skills gaps have been reported in more generic areas too, notably team working, customer service.
- 2.14 At an all-Wales level, Future Skills Wales data indicates:
- Relative to the UK as a whole, Wales has a higher concentration of skilled construction & building trades.
 - Construction companies generally seemed to be finding vacancies harder to fill than previously, perhaps indicating particular problems in certain skilled trades.
 - For the construction & building skilled trade occupations, *ability to follow instructions* is considered the most important skill.
 - Unsurprisingly, skills gaps are most prevalent for skilled trades occupations in the construction sector, with 15 per cent of establishments in this sector reporting them. However, as skilled trade occupations and the sector they largely feed into are expected to see declines in their workforces over the next five years, it is likely that the prevalence of skills gaps will ease.
 - Skills gaps among skilled trade occupations rise to first place for establishments in the manufacturing and construction sectors.
- 2.15 Employers' concerns about skill levels are highest for new recruits. Skills Foresight data, for example, suggested that Welsh employers were largely

¹⁰ See: 'An analysis of skills match between training providers and the labour market in Ynys Mon and Gwynedd;' Y Gamfa 2003; also internal JobCentre Plus Labour Market Analyses

satisfied with the skills possessed by existing employees (84%), however this dropped to 64% for new employees (probably due to the intrinsic need for on-the-job training even after gaining formal qualifications)¹¹. The surveys are also able to highlight current vacancies in an organisation – for example 11% of companies in the 2003 Welsh survey have a long-term vacancy.

Theme 3: The Industry is Changing; Past Patterns may not be an Accurate Guide to Future Requirements.

- 2.16 The industry is continuing to see appreciable technical change relating to new materials as well as new ways of contracting - with much more partnership between customers and new contracts following the Egan¹² and Latham¹³ reports and the establishment of Construction Excellence.
- 2.17 CITB ConstructionSkills are making concerted efforts to respond to these changes. Three main key skills challenges have been identified for the industry, namely:
- Image and Recruitment.
 - Qualifying the Workforce.
 - Improving Performance.¹⁴
- 2.18 Priorities for meeting the industry's "*huge skills and training challenges*"¹⁵ in the period 2002-2007 centre on:
- Maintaining momentum towards qualifying the existing workforce in Wales, by engaging employers and improving NVQ achievements.
 - Improving the competitiveness and performance of the industry, by encouraging the launch of a supply chain cluster project.
 - Developing programmes 'to change the way the industry does business', particularly increasing competitiveness and creating sustainable development.
 - Working to increase the diversity of the workforce in the industry.¹⁶

¹¹ Construction - Skills Foresight Report 2003

¹² Rethinking Construction: The Report of the Construction Task Force. DTI 1998.

¹³ Constructing the Team (The Latham Report) DTI 1994.

¹⁴ CITB Business Plan 2003-2007: Addressing the Industry Skills - Challenges

¹⁵ Wales – Construction Workforce Development Plan 2002

¹⁶ Construction - Skills Foresight Report 2003 – Wales

- 2.19 Accordingly, CITB ConstructionSkills has four key goals as a measure of success:
- Reducing skills gaps and shortages / anticipating future needs.
 - Improving productivity and performance.
 - Increasing opportunities to develop and improve productivity of the workforce.
 - Improving learning supply. ¹⁷
- 2.20 Increased attention to diversity in the workforce has pointed to an area where Welsh performance is not currently good: 3% of employees in the sector were female in Wales compared to 9% in the UK, for example. At 3% the proportion of female trainees is the same but at 1%, the proportion of ethnic minority trainees is less than the GB figure. In terms of numbers of trainees in Wales, totals in the 2002/3 academic year remained about the same for the previous academic year (2,567 compared to 2,578). The percentage of trainees on Modern Apprenticeships within the construction sector in Wales is appreciably higher (45%) than for Great Britain overall (37%)¹⁸.
- 2.21 Recent evidence however, suggests these trends may be changing, for example many training programmes report high levels of interest from potential students.

Theme 4: There are Going to be Significant Needs for New Recruits to the Industry for the Immediate Future.

- 2.22 New recruits to any industry are needed either to meet rising overall demand, or to replace workers leaving the industry. As we have pointed out already, total numbers of construction sector staff may well decline over the next few years, but estimates of 'replacement' needs for staff show appreciable net recruitment needs, however. One influential projection is given in Figure 5 overleaf.

¹⁷ ConstructionSkills Strategic Overview 2004-2008

¹⁸ Construction – Skills Foresight Report 2003 - Wales

Figure 5: North Wales – Total employment and annual requirement by occupation 2004-2008

Occupation	2004 total employment	2008 total employment	2004-08 annual average requirement	2004-08 cumulative requirement	Absolute % increase (2004-08)
Managers	1,830	1,871	105	526	29
Clerical	1,512	1,403	78	389	26
Professionals	1,509	1,553	80	401	27
Technical staff	522	540	29	146	28
Wood trades	3,511	3,473	179	896	26
Bricklayers	2,393	2,270	125	623	26
Painters and decorators	1,524	1,459	79	393	26
Plasterers	421	352	21	106	25
Roofers	778	769	41	207	27
Floorers	322	319	17	87	27
Glaziers	771	763	39	196	26
Other specialist building ops	706	658	39	197	28
Scaffolders	239	237	13	64	27
Plant operatives	1,140	1,154	57	286	25
Plant mechanics/fitters	266	264	14	72	27
Steel erectors/structural	310	343	16	78	25
Other civil engineering ops	1,283	1,286	66	330	26
General operatives	1,168	1,113	61	305	26
Maintenance workers	191	209	11	53	28
Electricians	2,277	2,253	121	607	27
Plumbers	1,700	1,777	92	459	27
Non-construction operatives	377	372	-	-	-
Total	24,753	24,439	1,284	6,420	26

Source: CITB Employment Model, Sept 2004, Experian Business Strategies.

2.23 The occupation requiring the highest average annual change in employment across Wales as a whole is Steel erectors, where a 3.6% increase is required annually compared to 4% for Great Britain (Skills Foresight 2004). There is also a marked need for an increase in the number of Maintenance Workers and Plumbers in Wales - this is the same for Great Britain with 4% and 3% more respectively, required annually. Plastering is the occupation with the greatest annual decrease in employment (-3%) in Wales and -3% for Great Britain¹⁹.

2.24 These projections also suggest that a great proportion of people are expected to leave the industry in Wales than across Great Britain as a whole. This result in larger shortfalls throughout Wales in all professions compared to the

¹⁹ Skills Foresight 2004

rest of Great Britain, with every single profession requiring a greater absolute percentage increase by 2008 than the national average.

2.25 Total construction employment in North Wales is actually set to decrease by 0.3% annually, making it the only region in Wales where construction employment is expected to fall. Despite this, once industry outflows are taken into account, the area still requires a further 6,420 construction workers by 2008 if needs are to be met. Managers are the profession with the highest absolute percentage increase needed, with a 29% rise required in North Wales between 2004 and 2008. Technical staff and other site based (SB) operatives are also high up on the list in terms of absolute percentage increase required with figures roughly in line with the levels needed in Wales as a whole. Overall North Wales requires the current construction workforce to expand by 26% to meet needs in 2008.

2.26 Wales is one of 8 regions in Great Britain currently suffering a shortfall between the numbers of trained individuals required by the construction industry and the number of trained individuals actually entering the industry. For Wales there is a 28% (or 1,554 worker) deficit.

Theme 5: There are Going to be Significant Needs for Upskilling Staff Within the Industry for the Immediate Future.

2.27 Key priorities for CITB ConstructionSkills include continuing to qualify and upskilling the workforce. Initiatives such as OSAT²⁰ and the CSCS²¹ card are making rapid progress, but significant extra work is needed here to meet targets – even before aiming for the much higher levels of competence envisaged if the ‘Rethinking Construction’ aspirations are to be met.

2.28 Training and development is still seen as being “*weak*” within the industry compared with other sectors, with indications that FE provision is unlikely to meet demand for skilled workers at the level of the UK as a whole²². However, Wales appears to have a better supply of construction training than England, but there are still serious issues, with 50% (compared with 80% in England) of colleges having to turn away applicants due to lack of capacity²³.

2.29 Wood trade occupations and painters/decorators were seen as having a bigger overall skills shortage according to CITB Wales research, with

²⁰ On-site Assessment and Testing

²¹ Construction Sector Certification Scheme.

²² Construction - Skills Foresight Report 2003.

²³ Construction - Skills Foresight Report 2003. Page 111

numbers including partially trained recruits still well below estimated demand. For plasterers, the output of trained craftspeople meets the demand²⁴.

- 2.30 The proportion of people within the construction sector who have no qualifications has been falling over time but CITB ConstructionSkills indicate more needs to be achieved: there are going to be continuing needs to train and accredit the remaining staff currently without qualifications, together with a need to develop and promote higher-level qualifications: currently most Further Education (FE) training in construction is at NVQ level 2 and below.

Theme 6: Overall, a Good Range of Training Opportunities are Available for the Construction Sector in North West Wales.

- 2.31 There are 3 FE Colleges in North West Wales (Coleg Llandrillo, Coleg Menai, Coleg Merion Dwyfor); Higher Education (HE) provision comes mainly through University College North Wales (UCNW) at Bangor. A wide network of private and voluntary sector providers meet needs for specialist training, and support publicly-funded programmes in various ways – and employers themselves provide extensive training, practical experience, and sometimes accreditation too.
- 2.32 In practice, the main providers of formal training programmes are the colleges at Llandrillo and Menai. The main programmes offered are given below.

²⁴ Construction - Skills Foresight Report 2003 – Wales

Figure 6: Courses and Qualifications Offered by Institution

College	Course	Qualification	Number of Places Available 2004/05	Number of Places Filled 2004/05
Coleg Lladrillo	Construction	HNC/HND	20	15
	Building services Engineering	HNC/HND	15	15
	Brickwork Part time day	NVQ 2	16	14
	Brickwork	NVQ 3	12	10
	First Diploma in Construction	BTEC	32	32
	Construction with Welsh Baccalaureate	BTEC National	18	14
	Building Craft	Foundation	90	104
	Construction and the Built Environment	Foundation GNVQ (this is to be replaced by the Btec Introductory certificate)	32	32
	Construction Contracting	NVQ's	20	10
	Construction Design	NVQ's	0	
	Trowel Occupations	Intermediate Construction Award	16	15
	Wood Occupations	Intermediate Construction Award	18	18
	Building Site Management	NVQ 4	10	2
	Technical Design (built environment)	NVQ 3	0	
	Architectural Technology	NVQ 4	0	
	Plastering		32	30
	Fitted Interiors	NVQ 2	0	
	Painting and Decorating	Intermediate Construction Award	16	10
	Painting and Decorating	NVQ 3	10	5
	Plumbing Certificate	City and Guilds	32	32
Plumbing Craft	NVQ 3	10	7	
Plumbing	NVQ 2	18	16	
AutoCAD for Construction		0		
Coleg Menai	Building Studies	HND	14	0
	Brickwork	Foundation Construction Award	30	30
	Carpentry and Joinery	Foundation Construction Award	30	30
	Plastering	Foundation Construction Award	20	20
	Bricklaying	Intermediate Construction Award	30	30
	Stonemasonry	Intermediate Construction Award	8	6
	Plastering	Intermediate Construction Award	30	30
	Wood Occupations (Site or bench work)	Intermediate Construction Award	30	30
	Mechanical services	Intermediate Construction Award	50	50
	Bricklaying	NVQ 2	30	30
	Stonemasonry	NVQ 2	8	6
	Plastering	NVQ 2	30	30
	Wood Occupations (Site or bench work)	NVQ 2	30	30
	Mechanical services (Plumbing)	NVQ 2	50	50
	Construction	EdExcel First Diploma	14	0
	Construction (supported by construction scholarship)	EdExcel National Diploma	16	12

Theme 7: The Quality of Most Training Opportunities for the Construction Sector in North West Wales is Satisfactory or Better.

- 2.33 Desk research into Estyn assessments of construction sector training provision in North West Wales is complicated by the varied dates at which inspections have taken place. The 2005 inspection of Coleg Llandrillo pointed to standards which “are often very good or outstanding”²⁵ (overall inspection grade 1). Inspections of Menai and Meirion Dwyfor construction programmes were somewhat less positive (grades 2 and 3 respectively) but both date from 2002.
- 2.34 Inspection reports of non-FE provision in North West Wales are too few to draw any robust conclusions²⁶. Other assessments include: *“In broad terms local education and training provision meets the area’s needs. However there are clear areas where improvements can be made. These relate either to specific occupations/ skills or the responsiveness of the institutions ... Some specific examples are: ... emerging shortage of skilled construction workers ...”*

Theme 8: Additional Points

- 2.35 Since 98% of employers predict that workload in the industry in Wales will either carry on rising (38%) or stay the same (60%), there is little optimism that the skills gap is likely to ease in the next few years²⁷. In terms of overall student numbers, Figure 7 summarises the area of training for first year trainees in Wales as a whole. The table also points out relatively poor performance in relation to recruiting trainees from ethnic minorities and women – points we also consider elsewhere.

²⁵ Estyn - A report on the Quality of Further Education at Coleg Llandrillo – page 3

²⁶ They are available from Hyfforddiant Môn, Hyfforddiant Gwynedd.

²⁷ CITB Business Plan 2003-2007: Addressing the Industry Skills – Challenges.

Figure 6: Number of first year trainees: Wales 2003/04

Course	Under 18		Over 18		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Technical	56	6	254	29	345
Wood Trades	467	1	597	1	1066
Bricklayers	401	2	427	0	830
Painters and Decorators	92	6	115	13	226
Plasterers	24	0	117	0	141
Roofers	2	0	74	0	76
Floorers	14	0	108	1	123
Glaziers	0	0	0	0	0
Other SB operatives	7	0	124	0	131
Scaffolders	0	0	0	0	0
Plant Operatives	0	0	440	4	444
Plant Mechanics	8	0	20	0	28
Steel Erectors/Structural	0	0	0	0	0
Other CE Operatives	11	0	10	0	21
General operatives	6	0	350	0	356
Maintenance Workers	13	0	110	0	123
Mechanical Engineering	53	0	184	0	237
					4,147
No. of trainees from an ethnic minority					125

CITB ConstructionSkills Trainee Numbers Survey 2003

2.36 The student qualification aims for all students were 5,516 for Built environment courses in North Wales for 2002/3 compared to 876 for mid Wales, 3,955 for South West Wales and 8,746 in South East Wales.

3. Initial Consultations

Consultation Programme

- 3.1 Following the agreed methodology, and drawing heavily on information being gathered through the desk research programme, a series of face-to-face and telephone interviews were carried out with a group of 'key informants' (9, from organisations including CITB ConstructionSkills, JobCentre Plus, WAG, ELWa); employers (20, from a mix of organisation sizes, locations and specialisms within the sector); and training providers (10, covering both the FE and private sectors).
- 3.2 We were particularly grateful to staff from CITB ConstructionSkills Wales for helping us contact appropriate employers and achieve their agreement to participate.
- 3.3 'Emerging themes' from the project up to that point were then explored through a workshop with a mix of 12 providers at the North Wales Conference Centre on March 17th.
- 3.4 All data collection was structured through the use of topic guides given in Appendix 1, and issues explored centred on the current employment situation for the sector in North West Wales, skills of current employees and new recruits, views on learning provision in the North West Wales area and close to it, learning networks and networking, and anticipated future trends. Information gathered covered both qualitative and quantitative responses; information was collected under the assurance that no data relating to a particular individual or organisation would be identifiable through this report.
- 3.5 For the rest of this section, we summarise the responses to this part of the overall programme in relation to key informants, employers, training providers and the workshop. In many cases responses confirmed the broad picture revealed through the desk research, but important additional details were presented which played an important part in developing more specific analyses for later stages of the overall project..

Key Informants

- 3.6 This was a varied group, with a variety of responsibilities encompassing support for learning provision (e.g. ELWa, CITB ConstructionSkills), advice and guidance in different guises (JobCentre Plus, Careers Wales), and various other interest groups (local authorities, etc).

i. Sector employment position

- 3.7 Most consultees described a long recent period characterised by high levels of demand for qualified staff, with demand exceeding supply for a range of occupations more or less throughout the whole range of skilled crafts/technical/professional-level workers.

- 3.8 A number of important additional points were made, however: first, this group included individuals most aware of what seems to be a very recent 'slowdown' in industry activity with *"fewer housing starts, some of the bigger contracts coming to an end"* and the like. This prompted discussions about the possibility of increased reported interest in young people training for particular trades leading to them *"ending on the market just in time for demand to plummet"*.

- 3.9 Key informants are also well aware of, for example, the mobility in the sector (*"a long tradition of working in Liverpool - now the same sort of thing in Dublin"*) and the impact a small number of big contracts can have (*"the A55 followed by the A470 – brought an awful lot of work to the area"*).

ii. Skills: Current Employees

- 3.10 Key informants described a particular skills gap for casual workers and those without formal qualifications: *"there's a lack of trained people but a lot of unskilled workers that want to get into the industry"*.

- 3.11 Concerns about numeracy and communication skills were the most commonly expressed generic skill needs, along with needs in particular posts for IT, technical skills and 'softer skills' (taking responsibility, customer orientation etc).

iii. Skills: New Recruits

- 3.12 Consultees expressed concerns about mismatches between what the industry needs (often people with fairly highly developed qualifications, training, and skills for continued progression and longer-term development) and those of would-be entrants (who are often *"a good way off"* these kinds of requirements) There is seen to be a problem in literacy and numeracy across the whole of Wales, and this has implications for new recruits' abilities to meet the requirements of Modern Apprenticeships in particular. As well as greater

investment to support Modern Apprenticeships generally, there is seen to be an important need for more foundation–level support for those not ready for Level 2+. This would not only help those who might seek to achieve a Modern Apprenticeship place in due course,, but also *“those who won’t ever get onto a full MA, but who can do a good job for employers – particularly the smaller ones”*. This point was seen as applying to young people and older entrants to the sector. A further concern arose over *“full-time trainees who don’t end up with the skills the employers need – they don’t have proper hands-on experience by comparison with people who’ve been sponsored by an employer”*.

iv. Future Trends

- 3.13 There was much discussion over whether the industry really has started to see a slowdown in recent months. For some interviewees *“there could be a danger that the people we’re training now could have a problem getting the kinds of work they’re seeking”*. For most, however, this applies to only parts of the sector, and longer-term prospects remain *“at least OK”*. Particular mention was made of plumbing where numbers of trainees *“may be not only have hit capacity but also the demand out there ... it might actually be that the supply - numbers of training places - is already pitched at the right level”*.
- 3.14 Having said this, continued challenges in recruiting *“the right sort of”* worker are expected to remain, along with needs for continued up-skilling and accreditation. The main causes of changed skills requirements in the future are expected to be continuations of present trends - increased statutory legislation, health and safety, the growing need for accreditation/certification (including CSCS cards) and rising technical standards in most trades. More employers are seen as demanding higher level skills/qualifications, but many employers (particularly the smaller ones) are reluctant to train and expect to take on already skilled, ready-to-work people.

v. Learning provision

- 3.15 Key informants pointed to problems for would-be entrants *“now that quite a few college courses are full, with a waiting list”*. Several indicated imminent needs for *“shorter, update training – when employers need it, not when it suits providers”* – to support craft trades, but particularly specialist repair/renovations. Reflecting current interest from young people in getting training places in construction, several indicated a need for more training places overall, but also a need for facilities (particularly at Coleg Menai) to *“keep on getting the investment they need to keep up-to-date, attract the people the industry needs”*.

vi. Learning Networks

- 3.16 The existence of a number of collaboration arrangements in North West Wales already made consultees reluctant to suggest new networks (examples included “*CCETs, work experience arrangements, 14-19 networks, CITB groups, CLAW²⁸*”). The general view was that “*it would be better to concentrate on improving what is already there, like the 14-19 network and CCETs before considering any new structure*”
- 3.17 Some mentioned specific topics they would want to see addressed in either an existing learning network or any new ones, including “*to safely offer experiences for young people - at the moment because of health and safety it is difficult getting under 16’s onto construction sites;*” “*Raising the profile of construction, focus on improving vocational capacity and achieving parity of esteem...;*” “*Sort out a scheme for placing year out students – perhaps some kind of support to take students on or students in holidays as work experience is an essential part of their training.*”

vii. Other issues

- 3.18 An important issue for current and potential employees in the area is seen as transport/rurality – “*this is a real issue for young people in the area – they can’t easily travel*”.
- 3.19 Concerns about future funding patterns are said to be inhibiting planning on the part of providers and employers.
- 3.20 Although a range of initiatives are underway (particularly from Careers Wales and JobCentre Plus) there are still many concerns that “*bright youngsters are being steered well away from the industry*”.

²⁸ Consortium of Local Authorities Wales

Employers

3.21 With CITB ConstructionSkills support, the CRG Research team were able to gather views from a wide range of employers, covering main contractors and a wide range of specialist subcontractors, and sizes of organisation which ranged from very small (less than 10 employees) up to organisations with in excess of 250 staff.

3.22 Understandably, many views were highly organisation-specific: depending somewhat on very detailed characteristics (location, nature of markets served, levels of competition, etc) firms could describe themselves as relatively short of essential skills (or not); satisfied with local training (or not) and so on.

i. Sector employment position:

3.23 Reflecting the very varied mix of employers consulted, a variety of levels of underlying industry demand and employment experiences was described. Overall indications were of continued buoyancy in demand, and almost all described significant recent problems in recruiting many kinds of skilled staff (depending on the firms in questions, most established trades were mentioned, along with specialists (e.g. stonemasons for restoration), managers, technicians and professionals.

ii. Skills: Current employees, new recruits:

3.24 Employers typically reported "*relying on a good team of people*" – often remaining with that firm for some time but problems '*getting more like that*'. Skills of actual or potential recruits are much more of a concern – with many mentions of low literacy/numeracy skills, 'attitudes' and limited awareness of the requirements of construction. As with some of our key informants, there are concerns that "*teachers tend to send students who aren't doing well at school onto construction courses*".

iii. Future Trends:

3.25 This varied group of employers inevitably see the future in different ways: for many "*its hard to see too far ahead*" but they have managed effectively through down turns in the past and still seemed keen "*to get more of the right kinds of workers if we can*". Familiar points about the need for staff to "*keep up to date.... get their (CSCS) cards.....understand new techniques.....*" were reinforced. Perhaps because we contacted many employers via CITB ConstructionSkills, most saw an important role for this organisation in areas like '*letting us know what's going on.... "Making sure training is up to scratch....."*'.

iv. Learning Provision and Networks:

- 3.26 Employers reported already using a wide range of learning providers - as well as local colleges and private sector providers. Some are gladly using “specialists from more or less anywhere; our own people – training people in all sorts of ways”. Perhaps because of this varied set of providers, most reported the training provision they were using as ‘ok’ or better. Views about Modern Apprenticeships including basic awareness of what they cover and how they operate – were very varied, with several expressing concern about young people “being taught the theory – not what we really want them to do.....”, an underlying need for “short, specific training –when **we** need it” could be detected, with local providers sometimes said to be “reluctant to put it on without big numbers..... or on our site..... or out-of-regular hours.....” It was accepted, though, that the total level of demand for these kinds of specialist programmes in North West Wales “makes it difficult to do things cost effectively”.
- 3.27 Overall, employers value experience and “doing the job” much more highly than formal qualifications: the benefits of CSCS cards are accepted, however. Awareness of the potential benefits of NVQs seems to be rising. Particularly for small employers, however, multitasking is essential. “Soft skills” like “team working”; “eager to learn” and ‘following instructions’ are increasingly being sought.
- 3.28 As for networks of provision, employers – understandably - usually showed limited interest only in **how** learning providers make arrangements like these. For most, “it’s probably something for the CITB – not a single firm”.

Learning Providers

3.29 Consulting a mix of FE (large) and private sector (mainly small) providers led to considerable divergence in views experienced. This seems to have important implications, particularly for possible future networking.

i. Sector employment position:

3.30 Providers are, of course, in very regular contact with employers and actively plan future provision, but the main points raised in relation to the sector as a whole paralleled those made by key informants and employers: there maybe something of a downturn at present, but only by comparison with recent high levels of demand, and in any event patterns vary according to specific trades, locations and categories of employer.

ii. Skills: employees and new recruits

3.31 Again, key points parallel those made by other consultees. Providers accept that existing employees are often highly skilled but need periodic updating: their concerns are rather that *“employers don’t use us as they should – we could easily do more.....”*. Problems like difficulties *“finding cover, taking time off the job”* are accepted, but *“it’s often an attitude.....”*.

3.32 Equally, the issue of many school leavers’ poor literacy and numeracy is fully appreciated – but again *“ we have programmes to do something about it..... People often don’t realise.....”*.

iii. Provision

3.33 A very wide range of formal courses are available and many ‘bespoke’ programmes can be provided to meet demand, including and increasing range using distance learning and often ‘new’ techniques. Understandably, providers spoke of quality being good, although some facilities *“need investment, upgrading.....looking the part....”*.

3.34 Capacity is accepted as an issue, particularly in FE where several courses due to start in September 2005 are already full. Some concerns about uneven levels of interest were experienced with, for example, suggestions of *“at least potentially, too many plumbers, not enough bricklayers.....”*.

3.35 Many constraints can be pointed to. Employers, particularly small ones *“want trained people – but won’t support training....”* Attracting good-quality lecturing staff can be a perpetual challenge: *“they need theory and practise and the ability to teach..... if they are really good, they will get paid a lot more as managers in the industry”*.

- 3.36 Inevitably funding plays a part: detailed arrangements with ELW_a and CITB may “*suit some providers, not other*”, and future funding uncertainties may constrain planning for some providers.

iv. Networks

- 3.37 Providers are often part of networks already (CCETs, CITB groups, etc) but accept there is no single route through which they can all meet and coordinate activities for the construction sector in North West Wales. The problem, for most, is that levels of mutual interest in particular topics are often limited: individual colleges for example, are very interested in working with employers and the CITB but, perhaps, less interested in links with other colleges and private providers. Private providers would often like to see more ‘partnership’ working with colleges – (e.g., linked to accreditation) but colleges may well be more cautious.

vi. Future trends

- 3.38 Recent increased levels of interest in trades courses are important for providers, who hope this is the start of a longer term trend which will address a number of important policy issues, varying from meeting what have been significant labour market shortages to achieving somewhat higher ‘parity of esteem’ between vocational and academic learning.
- 3.39 Again there are hopes/expectations that continuing needs for accreditation and upskilling the workforce will remain high – “*but it all depends on employers*”.
- 3.40 With Modern Apprenticeships requiring significant attention to key skills, and other requirements being “*very challenging for some people*” increased interest in foundation level learning is apparent – both in response to interest from people “*not quite up to MA requirements*” but also “*to respond to what employers are telling us about needing people who can cover a lot of different jobs*”

Work Shop

3.41 The workshop took place on 17th March and was attended by 10 providers from a mix of backgrounds. Members of the CRG research team explained the background to the project and introduced a number of 'emerging themes' from work carried out up to that point, including:

- *Is there a need for additional learning networks? (It may be better to concentrate on improving what is currently in place).*
- *What are the main skills needs employers describe? (Typically limited basic and key skills; shortages of many trades; needs for 'good workers with the right attitude').*
- *What needs for training do employers describe? (Very varied, but including 'bite-sized,' flexible, on employer premises, practical).*
- *Do the main patterns of FE provision meet the demands of industry and trainees? (Several courses are now well over-subscribed; colleges are more flexible than ever before; some facilities now need upgrading).*

3.42 Discussions at the workshop confirmed a number of the points presented as 'emerging themes' but pointed out a number of practical factors providers need to work within, including continued problems getting employer engagement; strong pressures for 'bright youngsters' to 'avoid' the industry from parents and some teachers and advisers; and the practical problems of delivering programmes which may attract limited funding, specialist interest only, and challenging to find appropriate lecturers and teaching space.

4. Findings: SWOT & Initial Recommendations

- 4.1 All the data collected through desk research and initial consultation was analysed by the CRG research team and a SWOT analysis of learning provision for the construction sector in North West Wales drawn up (see below). The SWOT summary was deliberately simplistic and was the subject of further consultations with the main key informants and training providers who took part in the initial evaluation, along with a small number of employers

SWOT Analysis

<p>STRENGTHS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reasonably wide mix of providers Much existing provision is seen as good quality Variety of courses available from NVQ level 1 through to degrees Steady demand for “the right kind of” skills from employers Good networking Good communication within the industry CITB – Broking/networking/linking Many courses full: people showing interest in the sector 	<p>WEAKNESSES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employers reluctant to spend time on attending network meetings Some employers’ skills/training demands not met Too many networks: fragmented; lack clarity of role Current networks – most don’t address construction specifically. Not enough bite size programmes Some provision old/out of date/out of area College restrictions e.g. timetabling, number of places available, facilities Many employers are very small: difficulty offering training/MA places, releasing staff etc
<p>OPPORTUNITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to some European money Better programmes – linked to demand Industry is generally buoyant Quality of job is better Better image=more recruits New skills needed – Constructing Excellence, Just in Time etc Increased interest in certification/accreditation: CSCS/OSAT etc 14-19 curriculum allows young people to experience the industry If the aerospace industry can create a skills hub then so could construction? Some organisations, agencies willing to co-ordinate trainees’ employment and in college Increased use of innovative learning provision: web based, CD ROM, distance learning etc. Increased statutory requirements; health and safety, environment etc 	<p>THREATS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Key skills requirements to enter courses such as Modern Apprenticeships are too high for many recruits Insufficient foundation programmes for potential “good workers” not ready for MA Too many trainees in some trades, not enough in others Number of places offered by training providers and colleges limited Recruits not learning what employers want: academic, not practical Possible industry downturn Anti industry teachers/careers advisors Generation gaps: industry losing skilled people before trainees brought on Businesses are “anti college” Brain drain of young people away from the area Small area – rurality, transportation issues hinder provision, networking Who could create a new network: provide resources and leadership? Uncertainties over ELWa funding requirements Employer liability

- 4.2 The consultations – as anticipated drew a number of important responses. It seems fair to say that the majority agreed with the points made, but a number of specific issues were raised. These included:

Strengths:

- Whilst a wide range of courses is available, the suggestion of being able to progress “*through to Masters Degrees*” is probably misleading.
- Employer demand for learning programmes is seen, by some providers as “*lower than it should be – an area where more should be done: employers must accept the need to support training*”.
- “*Good communication within the industry*” is not uniform – more could be done – particularly to engage the smaller employers.

Weaknesses:

- Providers indicated they can and do provide “bite sized out-of-hours” programmes: their concern is over employer demand. One FE College in particular ensures staff employment contracts make it plain they are not just a ‘term time’ provider.
- The need for significant capital investment to overcome “outdated facilities” was pointed to as an important area for attention.
- Although the importance of accreditation was accepted, it can be a challenge in rural areas “travelling for hours to accredit one learner, which isn’t cost effective”.

Opportunities:

- Broadly supported.

Threats:

- Major efforts by Careers Wales and others to encourage many people to consider a career in construction were outlined. For some consultees, therefore, the entry “*Anti industry teachers/careers advisors*” is now seriously out of date. Others, however, made a point of stressing their view that “*problems still remain*”.

Networks

- 4.3 The consultation on the SWOT analysis was also used to test our understanding of views about learning networks for the construction sector in North West Wales.
- 4.4 Key findings can be summarised as:
- A strong belief that “*existing networks should be sorted out before new ones are set up*”; important current networks clearly include CCETs and the CITB training groups.
 - Some major decisions (notably possible investment in upgraded FE provision) are **not** amenable to ‘general’ network discussions; in effect, strategic level assessments by WAG/ELWa, followed by careful consultations, are needed.
 - There is a need for general information about learning and the labour market to be shared and broad-level coordination encouraged across the construction sector for North West Wales, but these needs might best be met through a more general ‘Forum’, meeting relatively infrequently, rather than a more operational-level Network.
 - Local level coordination of learning providers has many attractions for the construction sector, as others. Overall, this seems best achieved through CCETs, and construction sector providers and employers might appropriately take a higher level of interest in these organisations.

Final – Stage Consultations

- 4.5 The draft final report received generally positive feedback and was the subject of a workshop at ELWa’s St Asaph offices, on June 20th, attended by representatives of ELWa, WDA, providers and other s with an interest in the sector.
- 4.6 Discussions addressed a number of well established constraints (e.g. how to engage local SMEs) but were essentially forward looking and considered the most appropriate roles for CCETs and other bodies. In essence, the most appropriate routes for ensuring good coordination and effective engagement were seen as coming from within the industry itself, almost certainly centring on the 2 local training groups – although issues including resourcing constraints and the exact remit of the group might well need further attention. Industry representatives subsequently gave more detailed references o these proposals leading to the recommendations given in section 5.

5. Conclusions & Recommendations

- 5.1 The objectives for the project centre on:
- Describing and quantifying the construction sector in North West Wales.
 - Mapping current and future labour and skills demand within the construction sector in North West Wales.
 - Mapping the scope, scale and quality of provision of ELWa-funded vocational learning.
 - Assessing future demands for learning and capacities for meeting these demands.
 - Making future recommendations on establishing a learning network.

Conclusions

Key conclusions include:

- 5.2 **Construction Sector in North West Wales:** Whilst tending to lag behind the performance of the industry in other regions, the construction sector in North West Wales can still point to a period of appreciable growth in the recent past. Prospects for the future **may** include a period of slacking demand, and much depends on overall economic performance at an all-Wales/all-UK level. Nevertheless most within the industry are positive about prospects: appreciable capital investments are anticipated, and major needs for refurbishment and small works readily identifiable. With around 6,000 employees, the sector is a major employer in North West Wales. High levels of self-employment and very small businesses do, perhaps, constrain growth opportunities, but support rural communities and offer a range of specialist skills and services.
- 5.3 **Labour and Skills Demand:** Projecting future labour market demands is notoriously challenging but there are indications that the construction sector in North West Wales may see a slight reduction in total employee numbers over the next 5 years or so. Significant needs for new recruits will remain, however, to meet current vacancies and replace those leaving the industry.
- 5.4 There have been large-scale skills shortages in recent years which may decline somewhat because of a possible slacking in overall demand, and what seems to be much-increased interest from new recruits in joining the industry.

- 5.5 Continued needs for upskilling the workforce and accrediting existing skill levels should lead to a need for skills development activity at least to the level of current provision, however.
- 5.6 **Vocational Learning Provision:** There is a good range of learning provision for the construction sector within North West Wales, but inevitably this fairly small area needs to draw on provision from outside the area too. Continuing this broad pattern seems inevitable. Where assessed, the quality of learning providers has usually been good – a view confirmed by consultation with employers, key informants and providers themselves.
- 5.7 Several courses are full (with waiting lists), which would tend to indicate the need for further investment to support expansion. This is a recent phenomenon, though, and might reverse, particularly if the sector experiences a down turn.
- 5.8 A number of facilities are widely seen as outdated however. On balance, the case for new investment in FE construction facilities seems significant – if only to upgrade what is available currently - but careful attention will be needed to ensure provision is not duplicated at different sites within what is, after all, a relatively small region.
- 5.9 A recurring theme (challenged by several providers) is that the sector cannot source much of the flexible, bespoke learning it needs, and particular attention will need to be given to resolving concerns here, within inevitable constraints of resourcing and overall demand.
- 5.10 **Networks:** In essence, establishing an entirely new network does not seem appropriate, but needs for coordination, liaison and construction sector involvement in decision-making arise at several levels. In particular:
- Periodic strategic decisions, e.g. about investment in new or upgraded facilities. Overall, it seems that ‘general’ discussions and explorations of ideas through relevant networks will be very valuable, but in practice, project-specific assessments by WAG/ELWa, associated with careful consultations, are going to be needed.
 - There is a strong view that the main focus for sharing general information about learning and the labour market for the construction sector in North West Wales should centre on the industry itself. The existing North Wales Construction Training Group, and Ynys Mon and Gwynedd Construction Training Group, are obvious candidates to fulfil these roles, but currently cover a fairly wide range of topics of interest to employers (over and above direct training provision issues) and have limited resources to support any wider role. Additional issues which might best be addressed from within the

industry itself include engaging small employers in training, supporting the provision of work placements, and giving inputs to shape the plans of colleges and other providers. The 2 Training Groups **might** consider an infrequent (say 6-monthly) more general 'Forum' event to address more strategic issues for North West Wales as a whole.

- Much local-level coordination of learning provision in Wales currently rests with CCETs. In other areas CCETs have taken a more active role in addressing the needs of the construction sector specifically. For a variety of reasons in North West Wales²⁹, however, it seems probable that CCETs would work most effectively with the construction sector if the industry itself provides a strong lead, and appropriate channels for consultation and liaison are put in place.

Recommendations

5.11 We were required to make recommendations on establishing a learning network for the construction sector in North West Wales specifically. There does not seem to be support for the formation of new formal networks nor for enhancing the role of CCETs. As a result, meeting requirements for greater coordination and liaison for construction sector training provision in North West Wales become essentially matters for CITB ConstructionSkills, and for the North Wales Construction Training Group, and Ynys Mon and Gwynedd Construction Training Group.

5.12 Accordingly, we recommend that these bodies consider whether the two Training Groups may appropriately expand their roles to:

- give a greater input into formal plans for training provision
- coordinate placements for trainees
- actively support the engagement of smaller employers in training
- supporting the provision of training programmes to meet employer needs
- liaising with ELWa, CCETs and other bodies
- working together to promote periodic 'Forum' events (say 6-monthly) to consider key issues for construction across the whole of North West Wales.

5.13 If CITB ConstructionSkills, the North Wales Construction Training Group, and the Ynys Mon and Gwynedd Construction Training Group are willing to take on extra responsibilities in these areas, discussions with ELWa should take place to:

²⁹ It is worth noting that CCETs in the area are fairly small, and have limited resources for addressing just one sector at a local level.

- review what may be appropriate resourcing for the two Training Groups
- agree terms of reference and membership
- consider opportunities for including employers and occupations outside the immediate scope of CITB ConstructionSkills (e.g. those covered by Asset Skills, construction-linked manufacturing and engineering)
- agree reporting arrangements
- consider how best to align with Sector Skills Agreements and other planning structures and processes
- consider whether there is a need for parallel provider groups to complement enhanced Training Groups
- agree coordination with CCETs and other bodies
- consider how best to arrange periodic 'Forum' events (say 6-monthly) to consider key issues for construction across the whole of North West Wales.
- identify any needs for specialist sub-groups to address specific issues linked to skill needs for the industry (e.g. helping smaller employers become more involved with Modern Apprenticeships; giving a 'steer' to ensure providers' plans meet the industry's needs).

5.14 Experience elsewhere points to the importance of effective leadership from within the industry. The forthcoming merger of ELWa into the Welsh Assembly Government may have important implications for some of these arrangements, which makes it important for thorough monitoring and reviewing procedures to be set up from the outset.

Appendix I

Employer Topic Guide

Employer Topic Guide

My name is..... and I work for CRG. We are an independent research company who have been commissioned by ELWa (with CITB-ConstructionSkills support) to review the effectiveness of learning support for the construction industry in North West Wales.

I would very much like to talk to you for around 10 minutes to discuss your perceptions of the industry and what might help to improve the training available to you and the people with whom you work.

All individual replies will be treated confidentially.

Would now be a good time or shall we book a slot that is more convenient for you some other time?

(We expect findings to be available on the ELWa website in spring 2005)

Name	
Job Title	
Employer name	
Location	
Postcode	
Interview date	
Interviewed by	
Interviewed in	English/Welsh

A. The Business/ Organisation

1. What is the main focus of your business?

2. Is the business part of a larger organisation?

Yes	
No	

(if yes, not location of head office; total number of staff)

3. How many staff do you have?

Part time	
Full time	
Temporary/contracted	

4. What types of job do your staff have? (please state numbers)

Managerial	
Clerical	
Technical	
Labourers	
Bricklayer	
Carpentry & Joinery	
Painters	
Plasterers	
Roofers	
Floorers	
Electricians	
Plumbers	
Glaziers	
Structural fitters	
Other	

5. **Has the number of permanent positions increased, decreased or stayed the same in the last 5 years?**

Increased	
Decreased	
Stayed the same	
Don't know	

(give approximate % change if possible)

6. **Over the next 12 months do you think you will be:**

Increasing staff numbers	
Reducing staff numbers	
Staying the same	
Don't know	

(give approximate % change if possible)

7. **During the past 12 months have you sub-contracted labour to other companies/from other agencies? If so how many and in what type of work?**

Managerial	
Clerical	
Technical	
Labourers	
Bricklayer	
Carpentry & Joinery	
Painters	
Plasterers	
Roofers	
Floorers	
Electricians	
Plumbers	
Glaziers	
Structural fitters	
Other	

8. Do you expect to use more/use less sub-contracted workers over the next 5 years?

More	
Less	
Stay the same	
Don't know	

9. Are you committed to/ recognised as an Investor in People?

Committed	
recognised	
Other (e.g. de-recognised)	
No	.

Please describe any benefits/ disbenefits you have experienced from becoming involved with liP.

B. Employment

10. How do you advertise jobs?

National paper	
Local paper	
Construction papers/magazines/journals	
Job Centre	
Word of mouth	
Other	

11. Overall, do your current staff (construction sector only) have the right kinds of skills and abilities?

What areas are relatively strong/ weak?
In particular, do they have satisfactory levels of basic/ key skills?

12. Overall, do your current staff (construction sector only) have the right kinds of qualifications?

Yes	
No	

b. What areas are relatively strong/ weak?

Prompt: cover industry-specific qualification (e.g. CSCS) particularly.

13. Do you have a Company Learning Account?

Yes	
No	

If yes, what have you used CLA funds to support; what were the benefits?

14. Do you currently have vacancies?

Yes		Answer b and c
No		

b. If so how many?

c. what type of vacancy?

15. Are you experiencing or have you experience over the past 12 months any difficulty in filling any vacancies?

16. In what types of vacancy have you found difficulty recruiting?

Type of vacancy, full or part time

17. What particular skills, qualifications or experience did applicants lack?

C. Training and development

18. Overall, what percentage of your staff has received training in the past year? (please also describe differences by category of employee; note issues linked to diversity – e.g. training in diversity; training specifically for minority groups, etc)

19. What sorts of training have they received; who has delivered it?

In house	
external trainer	
on the job	
off the job	
OSAT centre	
technical	
generic	
ICT	
managerial	
Basic/ key skills	
Other	

20. Is the training based locally?

Yes		
No		Answer b.

b. If not how far do the trainees have to travel?

21. Are there any factors which limit or present a barrier to the amount of training your organisation does? Cost of training, sourcing problems, lack of advice, don't know the benefits of training

22. Have you experience of/ what are your views of: NVQ, CSCS, MA, OSAT

23. What aspects of provision do you see as being of particularly good/ less good quality? Colleges, private trainers, etc

24. **Is there enough training capacity for the construction sector in (or convenient for) North West Wales?**

25. **Do you think training providers (and maybe employers) work together as effectively as they should in relation to providing training for people working in the construction sector?** (should there be, e.g. an enhanced learning network)

26. **Do you use facilities like CITB-ConstructionSkills support, ELWa, CCETs, college outreach: what do you think of their effectiveness?**

27. **If training and skills support for construction in North West Wales is to be improved, what ought to be done?**

28. **Should any provision be expanded?**

29. **Should any provision be closed down/ scaled down?**

30. **Have you any other comments at all, please about training and skills development in North West Wales – and how it might be made even more cost-effective in the future?**

Appendix II

Provider Topic Guide

Learning Provider Topic Guide

My name is..... and I work for CRG. We are an independent research company who have been commissioned by ELWa (with CITB-ConstructionSkills support) to review the effectiveness of learning support for the construction industry in North West Wales.

I would very much like to talk to you for around 10 minutes to discuss your perceptions of the construction industry and to find out a little more about what training and other support you provide.

All individual replies will be treated confidentially.

Would now be a good time or shall we book a slot that is convenient to you some other time?

(We expect findings to be available on the ELWa website in spring 2005)

Name	
Job Title	
Provider name	
Location	
Postcode	
Interview date	
Interviewed by	
Interviewed in	English/Welsh

A: Current Provision

1. **What types of construction courses do you offer?**
(please give routes, approximate numbers for current year)

2. **What area(s) do you cover?**

3. **How do you provide this training?**

Full time	
Part time	
Work based	
Bite-sized	
Bespoke/ Tailored	
Web based	
Distance	
Other	

4. **How are your courses funded?**

5. **Do you offer basic/ key skills training?**

Yes	
No	

(If so, please describe level; skills addressed; type of provision (embedded/ ICT-based, etc)
(Do you accredit basic/ key skills learning; if so, what standards / techniques)

6. What types of qualification do you offer?

a	OCN Level 1	
b	OCN Level 2	
c	OCN Level 3	
d	NVQ level 1	
e	NVQ Level 2	
f	NVQ Level 3	
g	NVQ Level 4	
h	GNVQ	
i	A-levels	
j	GCSE's	
k	Diplomas	
l	Modern Apprenticeships	
m	Degrees	
n	Other	

7. What are the most popular courses –

a. with employers?

b. with students?

(Why do you think this is?)

8. Who mainly organises/books the courses?

Employers for employees	
Students Directly	
Other	

B. Learners

9. Who attends your programmes?

a	Full time employees	
b	Part time employees	
c	Full time students	
d	Part time students	
e	Unemployed	
f	Others	

10. Where do they come from?

	From North West Wales:	
a	Gwynedd	
b	Ynys Mon	
c	Conwy	
d	Denbighshire	
e	From North East Wales	
f	From Mid Wales	
g	From South Wales	
h	From outside Wales	

11.

After training, Are you aware of where the learners go?

Yes		Answer 11a
No		

a. Do they:

a	Stay with the same employer	
b	Go to a new employer in NWW	
c	Go to a new employer outside NWW	
d	Go into full-time training/ education	
e	Go from not working to working	
f	Stay not working	
g	Stay living where they were	
h	Move within NWW	
i	Move to other parts of Wales	
j	Move out of Wales	
k	Other	

12. What do you think about the skills and capabilities of current construction sector learners - What levels of skills do they tend to have when they come to you?

(Separate different categories – e.g. Modern Apprentices, older returners, within employment staff, etc if appropriate)

Good levels of overall skill	
Limited basic skills	
Limited key skills	
Limited technical skills	
Limited awareness of the requirements of construction	
Other skills issues – please describe	

13. What skills and qualifications do employers tend to look for in:

a) existing employees;

Accredited qualifications (which?)	
Interpersonal skills	
Customer service skills	
Negotiation skills	
Team working skills	
Basic skills	
Key skills	
Technical skills (which)	
Awareness of the requirements of working in construction	
Other skills issues – please describe	

b) new recruits

Accredited qualifications (which?)	
Interpersonal skills	
Customer service skills	
Negotiation skills	
Team working skills	
Basic skills	
Key skills	
Technical skills (which)	
Awareness of the requirements of working in construction	
Other skills issues – please describe	

14. Do you think this position (employer requirements) will change in the future?

Yes	
No	

In which ways?
Why?

15. Are you aware of any barriers to learning in the construction industry for potential trainees?

Cost of training	
People can't afford to take time off work	
Potential learners cannot see the benefit of training and educating staff	
Not enough support available from relevant agencies	
Barriers for particular groups (e.g. people with disability; older people; women ...) (diversity question)	
Other	

16. Are you aware of any barriers for employers?

Cost of training	
Problems sourcing appropriate training	
Employers not able to release staff	
Employers cannot see the benefit of training and educating staff	
Not enough support available from relevant agencies	
Other	

C. Learning Provision (stress confidentiality)

17. What do you see as areas where your own organisation is particularly strong/ less strong when it comes to providing training and skills development for the construction sector?

22. Do you collaborate/network with anyone? who? what do you collaborate on?

Employers	
Other providers	
Other relevant bodies (please state)	

23. Do you have any views on developing/ further developing a formal learning network for construction?

24. Do you have any interesting case studies of best practice in provision?

25. Have you any other comments about issues linked to construction skills and training in North West Wales?

Thank interviewee; close.

Appendix III

Stakeholder Topic Guide

Stakeholder Topic Guide

My name is..... and I work for CRG. We are an independent research company who have been commissioned by ELWa (with CITB-ConstructionSkills support) to review the effectiveness of learning support for the construction industry in North West Wales.

I would very much like to talk to you for around 10 minutes to discuss your perceptions of the construction industry and learning provision.

All individual replies will be treated confidentially.

Would now be a good time or shall we book a slot that is more convenient for you some other time?

(We expect findings to be available on the ELWa website in spring 2005)

Name	
Job Title	
Organisation	
Location	
Postcode	
Interview date	
Interviewed by	
Interviewed in	English/Welsh

