

Blueberry Marketing Solutions & West & North Yorkshire Chamber of Commerce

LSIP Research Campaign

North Yorkshire Summary Report

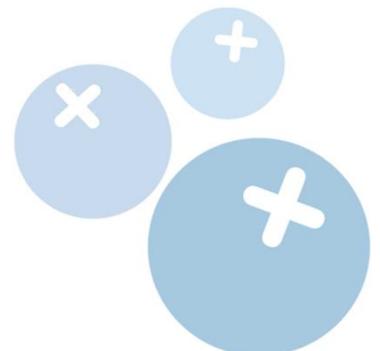
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Document control

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Client: West & North Yorkshire Chamber of Commerce

Title: LSIP Research Campaign Summary Report – North Yorkshire

Version	Date of Issue	Author	Reason for Issue
1.0	12/01/2026	Imogen Steiner	Completion of Campaign

1.0 Background to Brief

In partnership with the West & North Yorkshire Chamber of Commerce (W&NY), Blueberry undertook a comprehensive research campaign to support the development of the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) for the region. Our campaign was designed to place businesses at the heart of skills planning, ensuring that local training and development provision aligns with the real needs and priorities of employers. The research was split into two strands, focusing separately on West Yorkshire and York & North Yorkshire, with this summary report specifically pertaining to the North Yorkshire region.

The campaign targeted priority sectors identified by W&NY and explored key themes such as Net Zero, digitisation, transferable skills, innovation, and leadership & management. We collaborated closely to develop a structured survey, addressing current skills and workforce needs, training and development usage, engagement with the regional skills agenda, the benefits of upskilling, and future planning intentions. Our approach aimed not only to gather meaningful, actionable insights from local businesses, but also to foster ongoing relationships and create a valuable contact base for future engagement.

We were able to mobilise and begin campaign activity quickly across both West Yorkshire and North Yorkshire, ensuring strong progress within a relatively short timeframe. The majority of fieldwork was completed ahead of the Christmas period, allowing sufficient time to analyse results and prepare reporting in advance of the final report deadline in January. For North Yorkshire specifically, activity continued briefly into the New Year, as additional data from the Chamber was anticipated. When this did not materialise, focus remained on engaging with cold data to ensure the campaign could be concluded effectively, achieving the required response levels while maintaining data quality and momentum.

W&NY set a target of gathering a total of 100 survey responses for the North Yorkshire focus, and we **were able to achieve 102 survey completions.**

2.0 Data Strategy

We utilised a mixture of newly purchased and internally held data at W&NY for the purposes of this campaign.

We initially purchased GDPR-compliant data our side for the activity. This was profiled on SMEs based across the York & North Yorkshire region in the following priority sectors laid out by W&NY:

- Food & Farming Innovation
- Engineering, Biology & Life Sciences
- Clean Energy
- Rail Innovation & Security
- Creative Industries

W&NY were then also able to provide chamber member data based in the York & North Yorkshire region to supplement the campaign, however this was limited to just 75 records, and so the majority of the exercise to this region was done to non-member data (i.e. cold businesses).

It is worth noting that while the initial data selection was profiled around the priority sectors identified for North Yorkshire, these sectors proved relatively niche and therefore more challenging to target at scale. As a result, the profiling criteria were broadened slightly, while still remaining aligned with the core priority areas, to ensure sufficient data coverage and response volumes for the campaign. As part

of the survey, each business was asked to self-identify the sector in which they operate, and the final analysis reflects these self-reported responses. In some cases, businesses may operate across multiple sectors; however, for the purposes of this research, respondents were asked to select a single sector that best represented their primary area of activity.

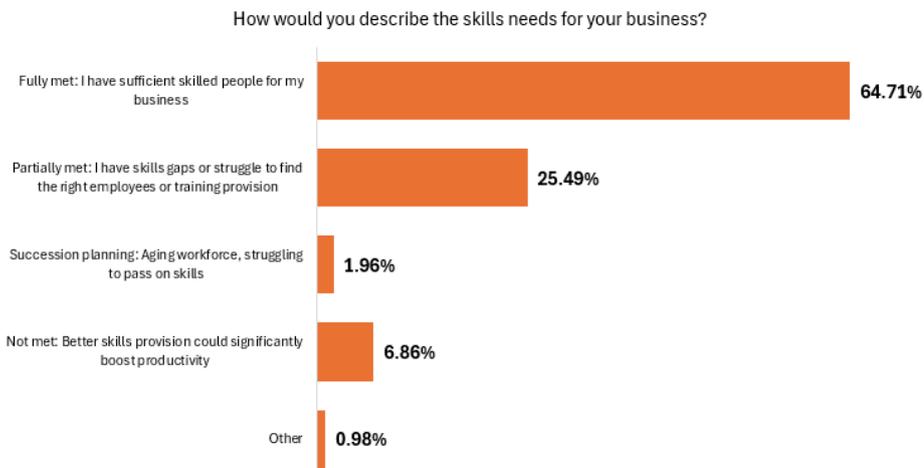
3.0 Survey Results, Analysis & Insights

This section highlights the results and insights gathered from the North Yorkshire survey across the activity, which are broken down in the final Survey Dashboard we shared.

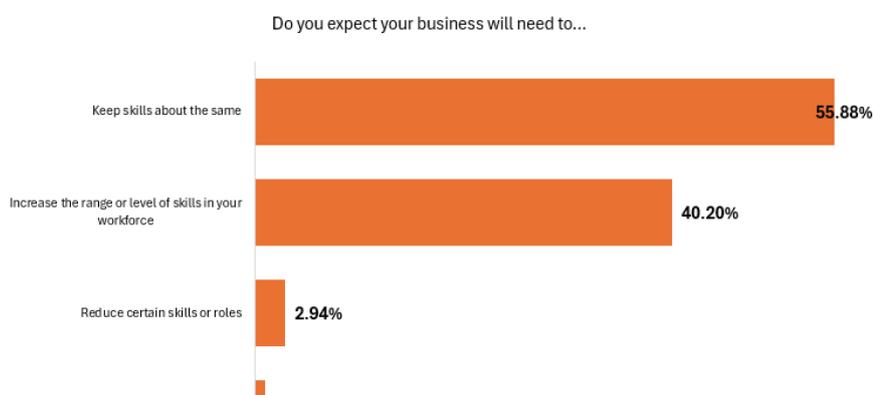
3.1 Skills Needs & Challenges

Overall, the findings suggest that many North Yorkshire businesses currently feel relatively well positioned in terms of skills, with **nearly two-thirds (64.7%) reporting that their skills needs are fully met**. It is worth noting though that when you take out those with less than 5 employees that this drops to 57.6%, and drops again to 47.1% when you exclude any organisation with less than 10 employees.

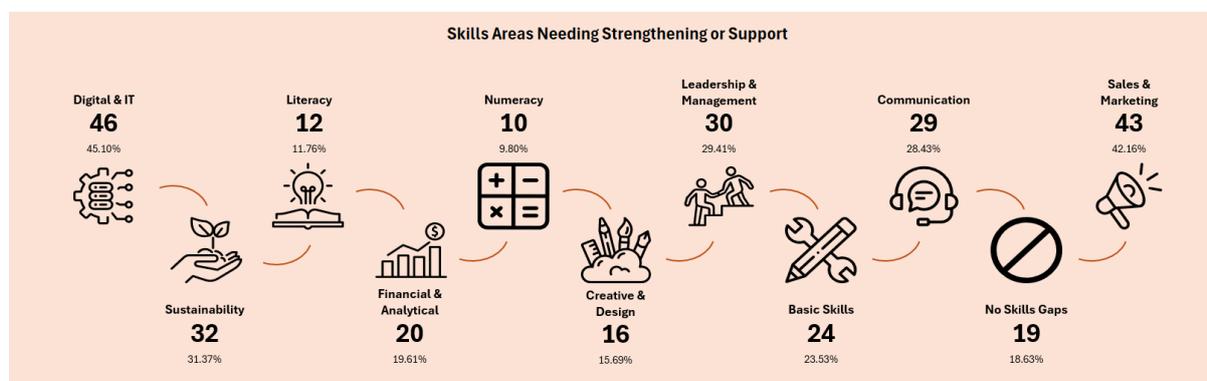
As a whole though, **there is still a significant minority who are experiencing challenges**: over a quarter of respondents (25.5%) stated that their skills needs are only partially met, citing skills gaps or difficulties in recruiting the right people or accessing appropriate training provision. While fewer businesses identified acute issues such as unmet skills significantly impacting productivity (6.9%) or succession planning challenges linked to an ageing workforce (2.0%), these responses highlight areas of risk that could intensify without targeted support.



Looking ahead, **demand for upskilling remains strong**. Over 40% of businesses expect to increase the range or level of skills in their workforce over the next 12 months, indicating a proactive approach to future-proofing despite more than half anticipating that skills needs will remain broadly stable.



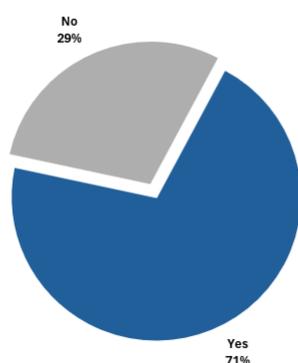
When asked about specific areas for support, **digital and IT skills (45.1%) and sales and marketing (42.2%) emerged as the most pressing priorities**, reinforcing the importance of digitisation and commercial capability across the local economy. Environmental and sustainability skills (31.4%), leadership and management (29.4%), and customer service and communication (28.4%) were also commonly identified, **suggesting a broad need for both technical and transferable skills development**. Notably, fewer than one in five businesses (18.6%) reported no skills gaps at present, underlining the ongoing relevance of targeted skills and training interventions to support productivity, growth and resilience in North Yorkshire.



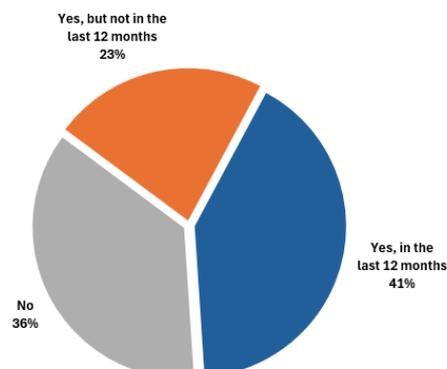
3.2 Accessing Skills

The survey responses reveal that a **strong majority of businesses (over 70%) are aware of where to seek advice or support for staff training and workforce development**, indicating a solid baseline of engagement with skills resources in the region.

Do you know where your business could go for advice or support with staff training or workforce development?

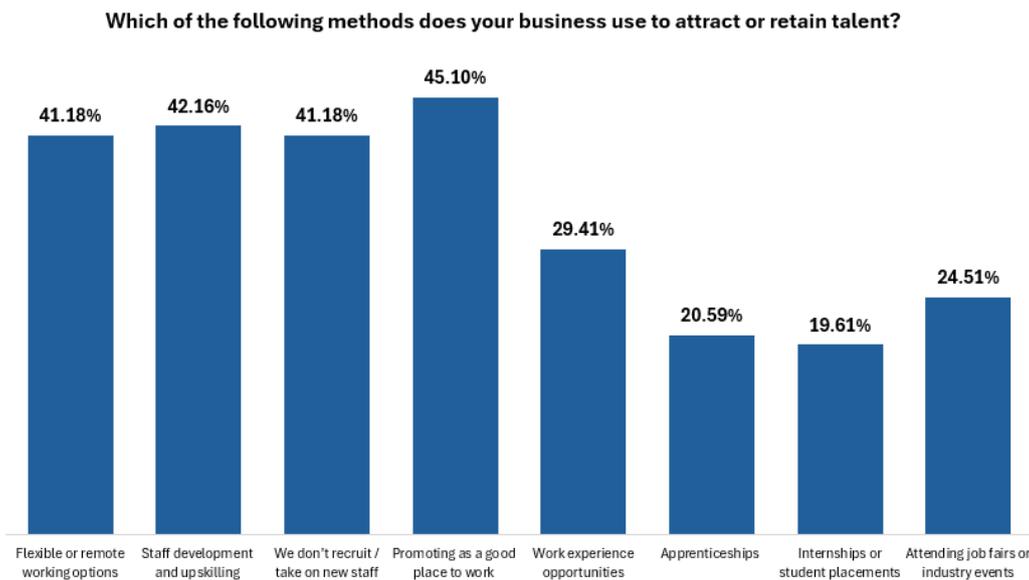


Has your business used the services of any training or education providers?

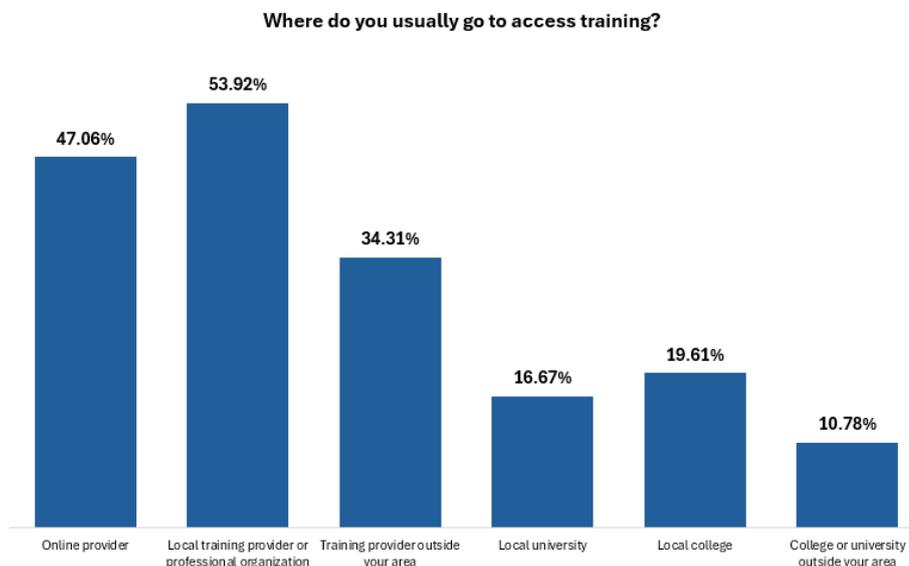


However, less than half of the respondents (41%) have actively used training or education provider services within the last 12 months, while a notable portion (36%) have not engaged with such services at all, **suggesting potential barriers or unmet needs in accessing or utilising training opportunities.**

When it comes to talent attraction and retention strategies, **businesses appear to prioritise flexible working options, staff development, and promoting themselves as good employers**, each cited by around 40-45% of respondents. Traditional routes such as apprenticeships, internships, and attendance at job fairs show more moderate uptake, highlighting opportunities to further promote these channels.

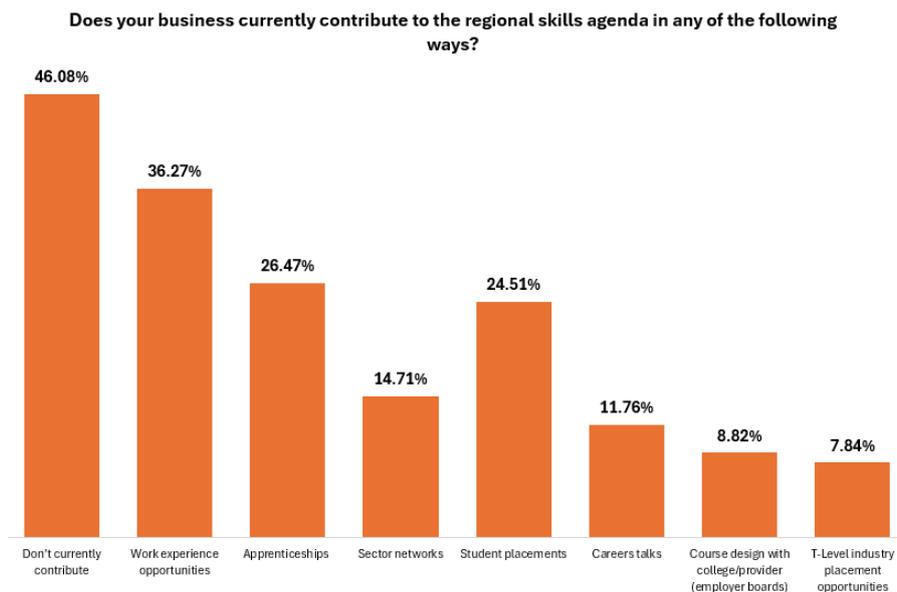


Regarding training access, **the preferred sources are local training providers or professional organisations (54%) and online providers (47%),** followed by training providers outside the local area (34%). Local universities and colleges are used less frequently, indicating that businesses may value more flexible or specialised training options over formal education institutions. These insights suggest **a need to enhance awareness and accessibility of local training offerings** while continuing to support flexible, employer-focused development approaches.



3.3 Skills Agenda & Benefits

The findings indicate that nearly half of the businesses surveyed (46%) currently do not contribute to the regional skills agenda, **highlighting a significant opportunity to increase employer engagement in skills development initiatives.** Among those who do contribute, work experience opportunities (36%) and apprenticeships (26%) are the most common forms of involvement, followed by student placements and sector networks. More specialised contributions, such as participation in course design or T-Level industry placements, are less prevalent, **suggesting room to raise awareness and encourage broader participation in shaping local skills provision.**



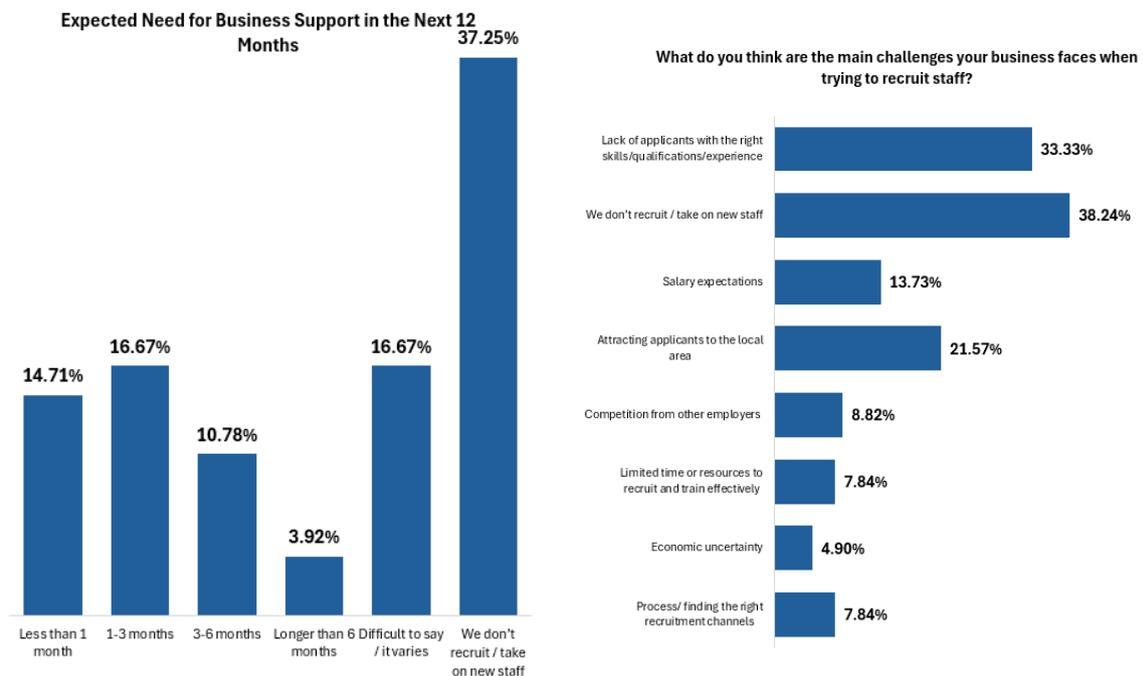
When considering the benefits of improving employee skills, **businesses overwhelmingly recognise the positive impact on productivity (45%), sales and profitability (43%), and quality (39%).** Recruitment and retention, as well as reputation and brand enhancement, are also seen as important but slightly less frequently cited benefits.



This underscores that while **operational and financial gains are primary motivators for skills development**, wider organisational advantages related to talent management and brand perception are also valued by a notable portion of respondents.

3.4 Recruitment

The recruitment landscape for businesses in North Yorkshire reveals a mixed picture. **Over a third of respondents (37%) indicated that they do not recruit or take on new staff**, while just **under a quarter (24%) are currently recruiting or expect to do so** within the next six months. Among those seeking recruitment support, the timing varies, with the largest group anticipating a need within 1-3 months, but a **notable 17% found it difficult to specify when support might be required**, reflecting uncertainty in recruitment planning.



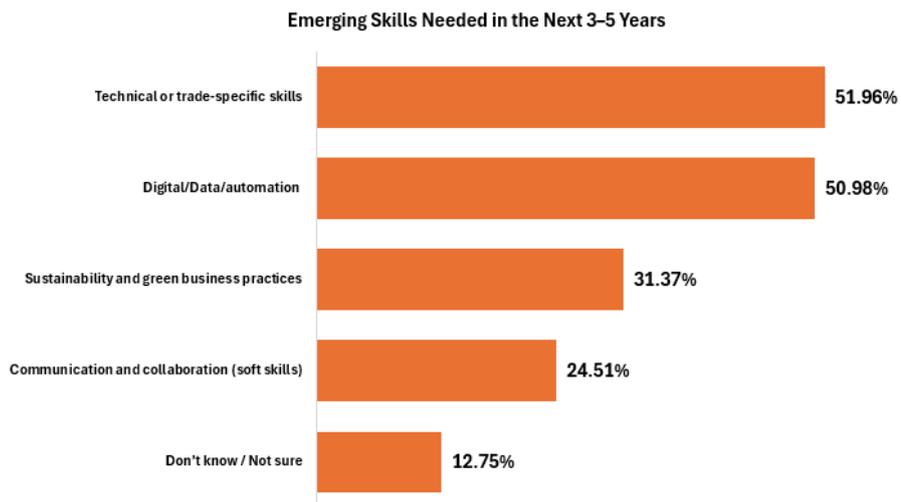
Key challenges in recruiting staff include attracting applicants to the local area (22%) and a lack of candidates with the right skills, qualifications, or experience (33%). Other factors such as salary expectations and competition from other employers also present barriers, though to a lesser extent. When looking ahead, confidence in recruiting the necessary skills over the next three to five years is moderate, with just over half of businesses feeling somewhat or very confident, while 12% express a lack of confidence.

This suggests that while many businesses are optimistic, a significant portion remain cautious about future recruitment prospects, underlining **the importance of targeted support to address local skills gaps and improve recruitment outcomes.**

3.5 New & Emerging Skills

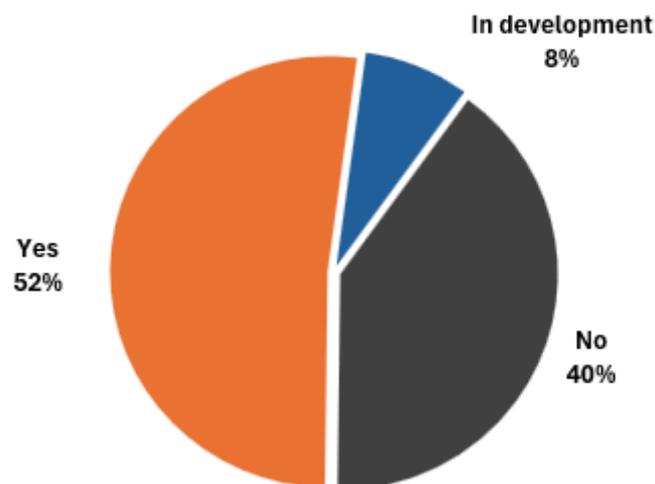
Looking ahead, businesses in North Yorkshire identify a clear demand for new and emerging skills to support future growth. **Technical or trade-specific skills (52%) and digital, data, and automation capabilities (51%) are the most commonly anticipated areas of increased need**, reflecting the ongoing impact of technological advancement and industry-specific requirements. Sustainability and

green business practices also feature prominently, with nearly a third of respondents (31%) recognising the growing importance of environmental considerations. Soft skills like communication and collaboration remain relevant, cited by about a quarter of businesses, highlighting the continuing value of interpersonal capabilities alongside technical expertise.



Despite this awareness, **just over 40% of businesses currently do not have a strategy in place to identify and develop these future skills, while around 52% have implemented such strategies, and a small percentage are still developing them.**

Strategy for Identifying & Developing Future Skills

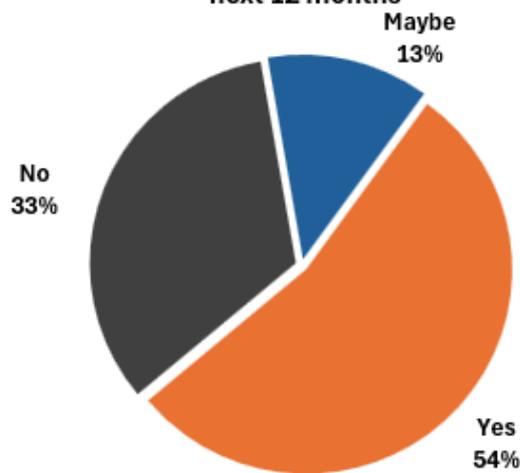


This split suggests that while many businesses are proactively planning for workforce development, **there remains a significant portion that could benefit from greater support and guidance in future skills planning** to stay competitive and resilient.

3.6 Future Skills Intentions

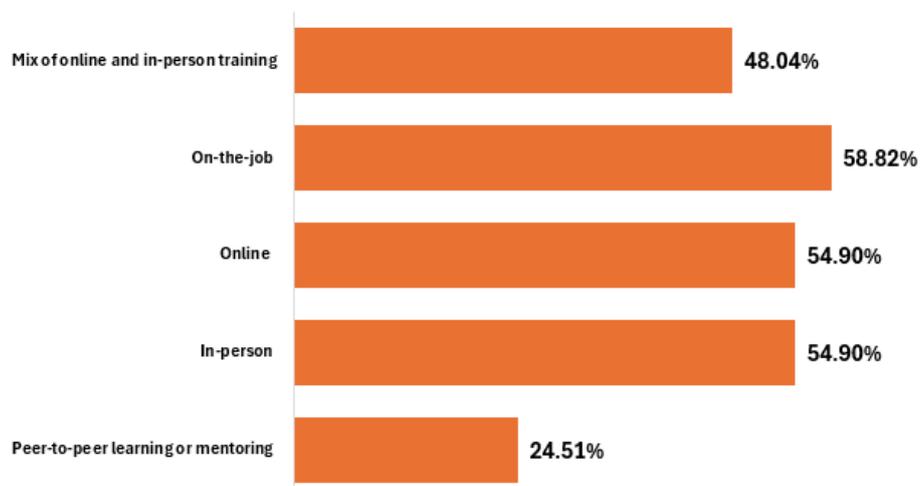
More than **half of businesses in North Yorkshire (54%)** indicated that they are likely to invest in **reskilling or upskilling their employees over the next 12 months**, reflecting a strong commitment to workforce development. However, a significant portion (33%) currently do not plan to invest, with a smaller group remaining uncertain, **highlighting some variability in future training intentions** across the region.

Likelihood to invest in reskilling or upskilling employees over the next 12 months



In terms of training delivery preferences, **on-the-job training is the most favoured method (59%)**, closely followed by in-person and online training options, both selected by approximately 55% of respondents. **Nearly half of the businesses expressed interest in a blended approach combining online and in-person learning**, while peer-to-peer learning or mentoring is less commonly considered (25%).

Training Types Considered for Future Skill Development



These results suggest that **businesses value practical, flexible, and varied training approaches** to meet their workforce development needs, with an emphasis on hands-on experience and accessible formats.

3.7 Qualitative Responses – Summary of Recruitment Challenges & Skills Gaps

The survey conducted mainly gathered quantitative responses with pre-formatted answers, however, there was a qualitative question in the survey (*Are there any job roles or specific skills that you have had difficulty recruiting? For example, any skills gaps that you are having difficulty filling?*), with the findings from this outlined below.

The qualitative responses reveal a mixed landscape regarding recruitment and skills challenges among businesses in North Yorkshire. Many **small businesses and sole traders reported minimal recruitment activity or no current intention to recruit**, often citing a stable workforce or reliance on external resources. However, for **those actively recruiting or planning to do so, there are clear difficulties in sourcing candidates with the right skills, especially for technical, trade-specific, and specialist roles.**

Commonly mentioned skills gaps include engineering (civil, service tech, and agricultural), construction trades (joinery, bricklaying, scaffolding), and digital or technical skills such as software development and automation. Several respondents noted the **challenge of attracting candidates to the local area and a broader issue around work ethic and motivation among applicants.** Some businesses also highlighted sector-wide shortages, for example in qualified surveyors and watchmaking skills.

Example Comments:

- *"We have difficulty recruiting qualified surveyors."*
- *"The main issue is getting skilled people wanting to come work in Harrogate. Most people prefer Leeds or York as business hubs, but very difficult to keep skilled workers within Harrogate."*
- *"There is a recurring, industry-wide difficulty in hiring Agricultural Engineers, for us this role is the core."*
- *"We struggle to find people with a good work ethic - actually motivated to work."*
- *"Trade specific roles for example: joinery, bricklaying and plastering."*

These insights underscore the **importance of targeted local support to help businesses address skills shortages and recruitment barriers**, particularly in specialist technical roles and sectors experiencing regional retention challenges.

4.0 Conclusion & Recommendations

The research conducted with North Yorkshire businesses highlights a varied but clear picture of current skills, recruitment, and workforce development challenges. While many businesses are engaged with local training providers and recognise the benefits of upskilling, a significant number do not currently contribute to the regional skills agenda or have formal strategies for future skills development. Recruitment challenges remain a key concern, particularly in attracting skilled candidates for technical, trade-specific, and specialist roles, compounded by difficulties in drawing talent to certain local areas. Despite these challenges, over half of businesses intend to invest in workforce development over the next year, with preferences for practical, flexible training formats such as on-the-job and blended learning.

Key findings:

- **Skills Gaps:** Approximately 44% of businesses report existing skills gaps, particularly in technical, digital, and sustainability skills.
- **Training Access:** Over 70% know where to seek support for workforce development, but only 41% have used training or education services recently.
- **Talent Attraction:** Flexible working, staff development, and employer branding are the most common methods used to attract and retain staff; apprenticeships and internships are less prevalent.
- **Regional Skills Agenda Engagement:** Nearly half of businesses (46%) do not currently contribute to the regional skills agenda; work experience and apprenticeships are the most common forms of engagement.
- **Recruitment Challenges:** Key barriers include lack of candidates with appropriate skills, difficulties attracting applicants locally, and competition from other employers.
- **Future Skills Needs:** Demand is strongest for technical / trade-specific skills, digital / data capabilities, and sustainability knowledge.
- **Skills Strategy:** Just over half of businesses have a strategy to identify and develop future skills, while a significant number remain without such plans.
- **Training Investment Intentions:** More than half plan to invest in reskilling or upskilling over the next 12 months, with preferences for on-the-job, online, and blended learning models.
- **Qualitative Insights:** Specialist roles such as engineers and surveyors remain difficult to recruit, alongside broader issues like candidate motivation and work ethic.

Recommendations:

- **Enhance Training Awareness and Access:** Improve communication about available training and support, with particular focus on reaching smaller and micro-businesses.
- **Increase Employer Engagement:** Encourage greater business participation in the regional skills agenda via targeted campaigns and incentives.
- **Support Future Skills Development:** Assist businesses in developing strategies to address emerging skills needs, especially in digital, green, and technical areas.
- **Address Recruitment Barriers:** Deliver tailored support to overcome local talent attraction challenges and skill shortages, including promotion of employment opportunities in less central locations.
- **Promote Flexible Learning Models:** Expand access to blended and on-the-job training options that accommodate business realities and preferences.
- **Strengthen Collaboration:** Foster partnerships between employers, training providers, and local authorities to tackle sector-specific shortages and promote apprenticeships and work experience.

By focusing on these priorities, the region can build a more resilient, skilled workforce aligned with evolving business needs and economic opportunities.