

Blueberry Marketing Solutions & West & North Yorkshire Chamber of Commerce

LSIP Research Campaign

West Yorkshire Summary Report

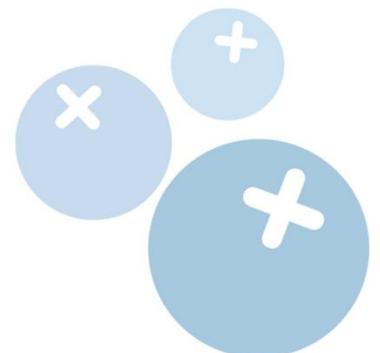
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Blueberry Contacts:

Faresh Maisuria & Andrew Welsh

faresh@blueberrymms.co.uk ; andrew@blueberrymms.co.uk

0113 200 5200



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Document control

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Client: West & North Yorkshire Chamber of Commerce

Title: LSIP Research Campaign Summary Report – West 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 West 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.

W&NY set a target of gathering a total of 120 survey responses for the West Yorkshire focus, and we **were able to achieve 135 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 West Yorkshire region in the following priority sectors laid out by W&NY:

- Financial & Professional Services
- Digital & Tech
- Life Sciences (with specialisms, including Health Tech)
- Advanced Manufacturing
- The Green Economy
- Creative Industries

W&NY were then also able to provide chamber member data based in the West Yorkshire region to supplement the campaign.

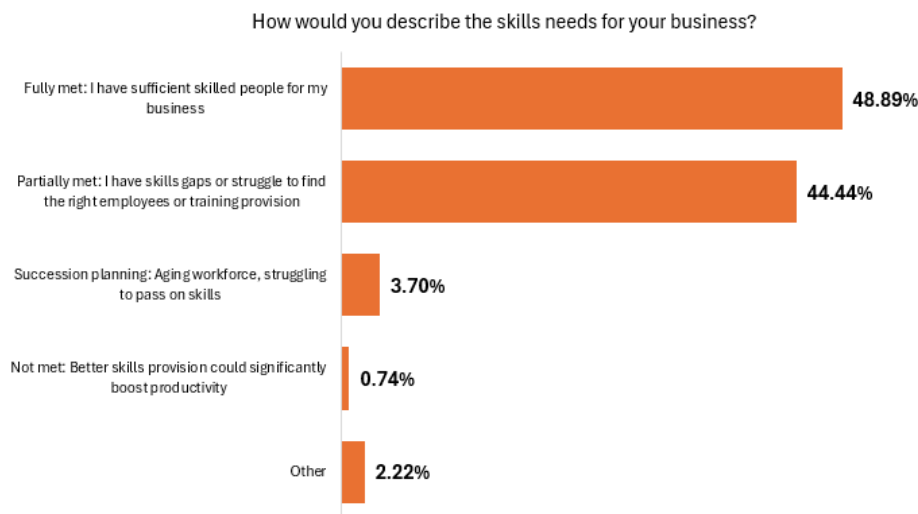
It's worth noting on the sector front that whilst we looked to profile the data selection based upon the above sectors, we asked each businesses as part of the survey what sector their business was in, with the final analysis reflecting their response to that. Further, some businesses may cross over across multiple sectors potentially, but they only provided one sector (i.e their main sector description) for the purposes of this research.

3.0 Survey Results, Analysis & Insights

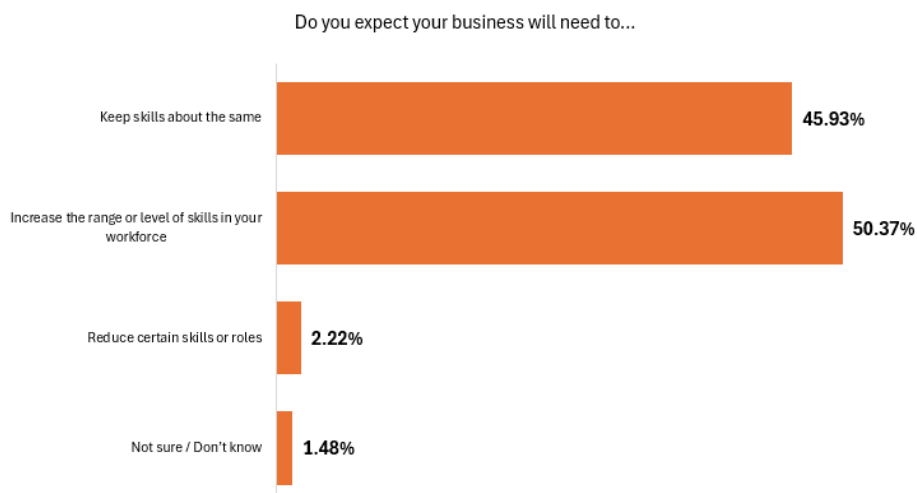
This section highlights the results and insights gathered from the West Yorkshire survey across the activity, which are broken down in the final Survey Dashboard we shared.

3.1 Skills Needs & Challenges

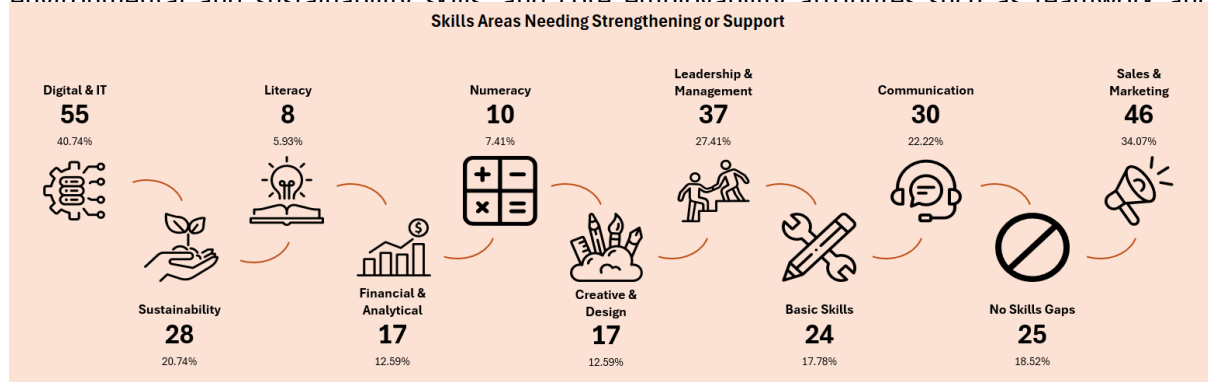
The survey results reveal a nuanced skills landscape. Nearly **half of respondents (49%) feel their current workforce skills fully meet their business needs**, while a significant portion (**44%**) report **partial skills gaps or difficulties finding the right employees or training provision**. It's worth noting though that when you take out those with less than 5 employees that the figure for those who said their needs are fully met drops to 46.1%, and then drops further to 45.2% when you remove all with less than 10 employees.



A small number highlighted challenges related to succession planning and an aging workforce, indicating some longer-term concerns around skills transfer. Looking ahead, **half of businesses anticipate needing to increase the range or level of skills within their workforce over the next 12 months**, reflecting ongoing pressures for growth and adaptation, with a further 46% expecting to maintain current skill levels.



When considering specific skills areas requiring development or support, **digital and IT skills stand out as the most frequently cited priority (41%)**, followed by sales and marketing (34%) and leadership and management (27%). Other notable areas include customer service and communication, environmental and sustainability skills and core employability attributes such as teamwork and



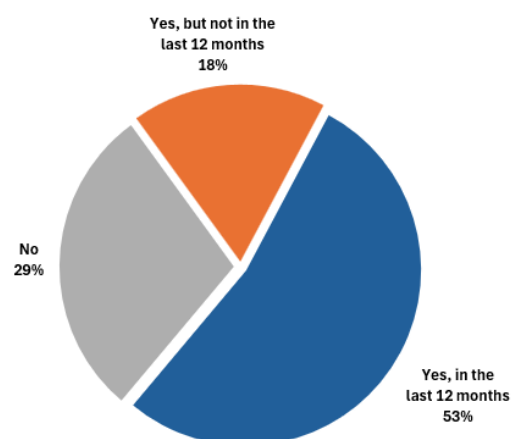
3.2 Accessing Skills

The responses indicate a **high level of awareness among businesses regarding where to seek advice or support for staff training and workforce development**, with nearly 83% confirming they know where to go. **More than half (53%) have actively used training or education providers in the past 12 months**, reflecting strong engagement with learning opportunities, while just under 29% have not used such services at all.

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

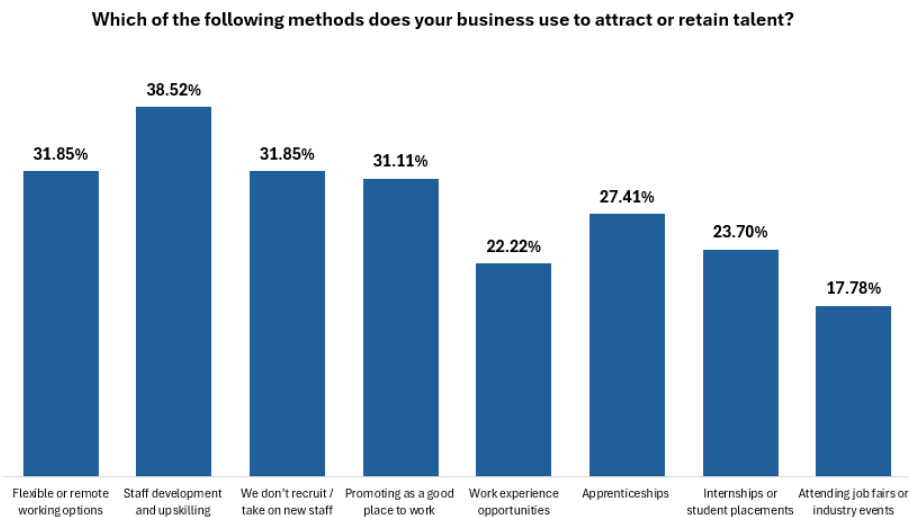


Has your business used the services of any training or education providers?

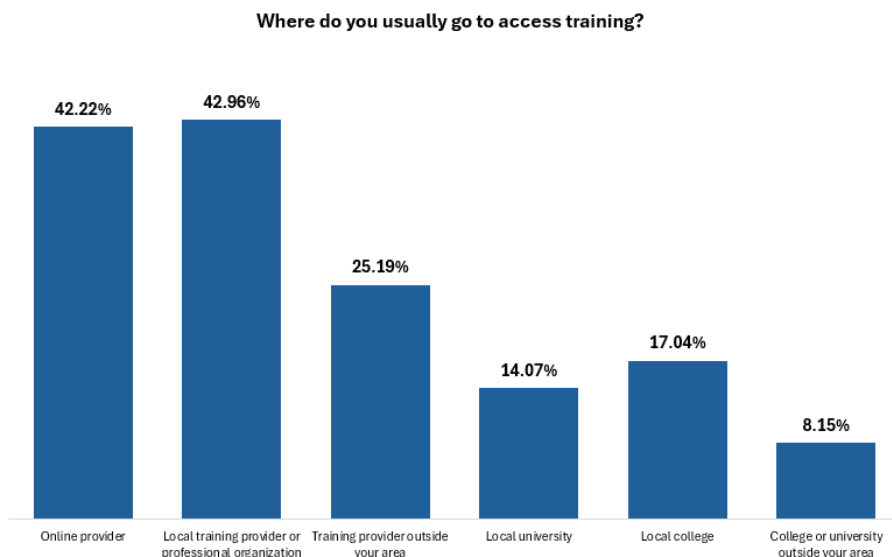


In terms of talent attraction and retention, **businesses most commonly use staff development and upskilling (39%) as a strategy**, alongside flexible or remote working options and promoting themselves as good employers, each cited by around 31% of respondents. Apprenticeships and

internships are also reasonably well utilised, suggesting an ongoing focus on developing early-career talent.



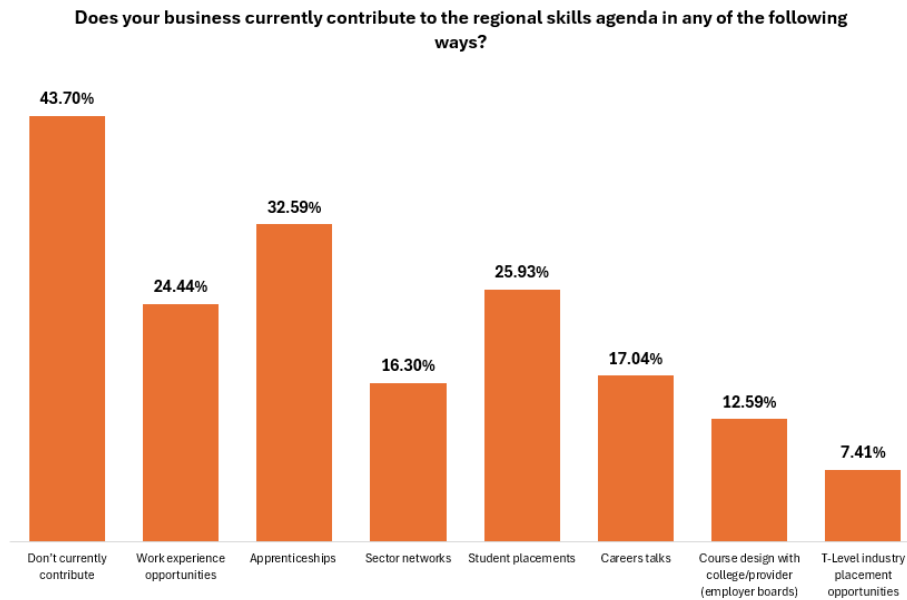
When accessing training, **businesses show a near-equal preference for online providers (42%) and local training organisations (43%)**, with a smaller proportion accessing providers outside their area or higher education institutions. This highlights a **demand for accessible, locally relevant training solutions**, balanced with the flexibility and range offered by online learning.



3.3 Skills Agenda & Benefits

The data shows that **just under half of businesses (44%) currently do not contribute to the regional skills agenda**, similar to North Yorkshire, indicating a significant opportunity to deepen employer involvement. Among contributing businesses, **apprenticeships (33%), student placements (26%), and work experience opportunities (24%) are the most common ways of engagement**. Participation in

sector networks, careers talks, and course design is less prevalent, suggesting potential areas to expand employer input into skills development.



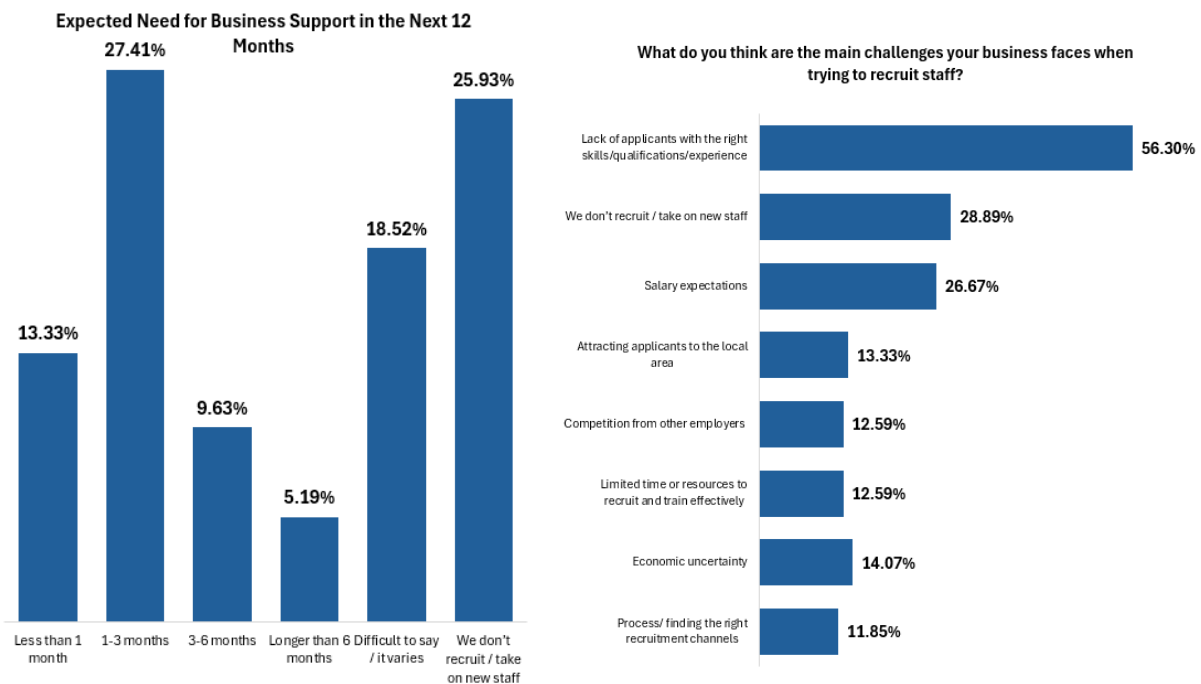
When considering the benefits of improving employee skills, **businesses overwhelmingly recognise gains in productivity (56%) and quality (54%)**, with nearly half also citing improvements in sales and profitability (46%) and reputation or brand (45%). Recruitment and retention benefits are noted by over a third (37%), reflecting the importance of workforce development not only for operational performance but also for attracting and keeping talent.



These findings **emphasise the broad business value placed on upskilling and highlight the need to encourage wider business contribution to the regional skills agenda.**

3.4 Recruitment

Recruitment focus is relatively split in West Yorkshire, with 45% currently **recruiting or expecting to recruit within the next six months**, while around half (**50%**) are **not recruiting at present**. In terms of support needs, the largest group (27%) anticipate requiring recruitment assistance within 1-3 months, though a notable proportion (19%) find the timing difficult to predict, reflecting variability and uncertainty in workforce planning.

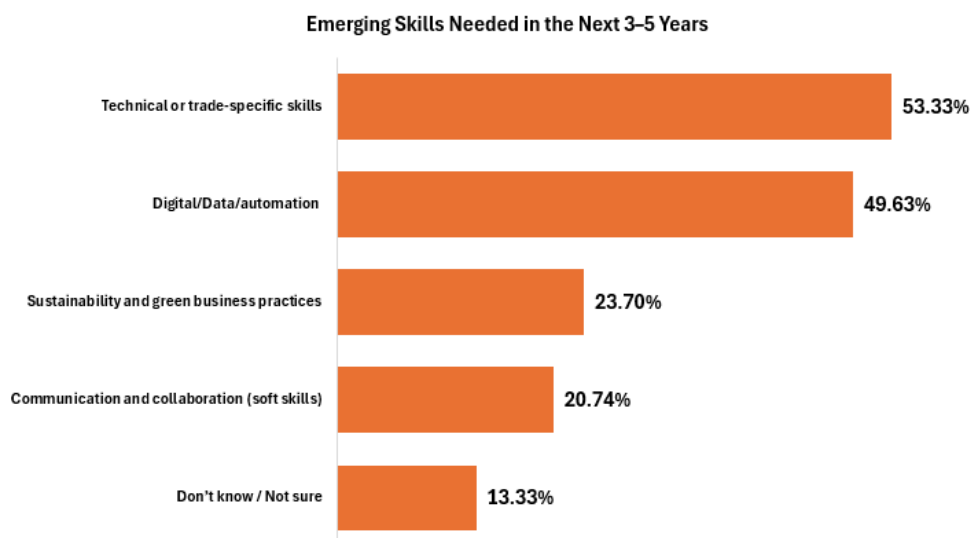


The **most significant recruitment challenge identified is the lack of applicants with the right skills, qualifications, or experience, cited by over half of respondents (56%)**. Salary expectations (27%), economic uncertainty (14%), and competition from other employers (13%) are also notable barriers. Attracting applicants to the local area is a challenge for 13%, while limited time and resources for recruitment and training affects around 13% of businesses.

Looking ahead, **confidence in recruiting the necessary skills over the next three to five years is relatively strong**, with over 66% feeling somewhat or very confident. However, **around 21% have no intention to recruit**, and a small minority express a lack of confidence, underscoring the diverse recruitment outlook across the region.

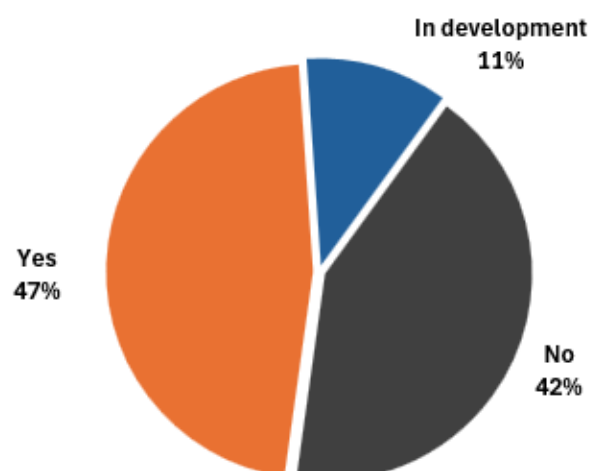
3.5 New & Emerging Skills

Looking ahead, businesses in West Yorkshire clearly anticipate **increasing demand for a range of new and emerging skills over the next three to five years**. Technical or trade-specific skills (53%) and digital, data, and automation capabilities (50%) are identified as the top priorities, underscoring the **importance of both sector-specific expertise and technological proficiency**. Sustainability and green business practices (24%) and soft skills such as communication and collaboration (21%) also feature prominently, reflecting growing environmental considerations and the ongoing need for strong interpersonal abilities.



Despite this recognition, **42% of businesses currently do not have a formal strategy to identify and develop future skills**, while just **under half (47%) have such strategies in place**, with an additional 11% developing them.

Strategy for Identifying & Developing Future Skills

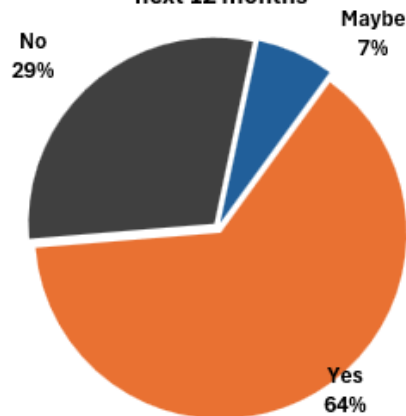


This split indicates room for improvement in future workforce planning, **highlighting an opportunity for greater support to help businesses systematically prepare for evolving skills demands and build resilience.**

3.6 Future Skills Intentions

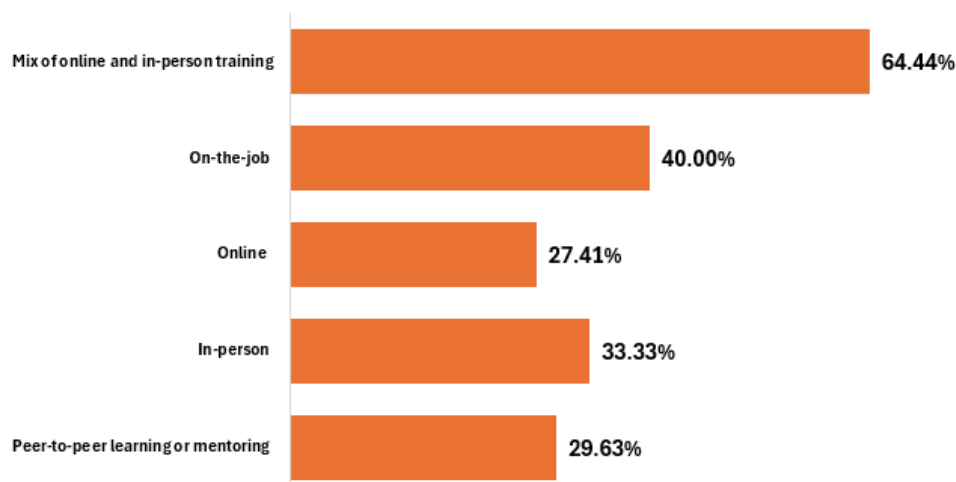
A strong majority of West Yorkshire businesses (64%) plan to invest in reskilling or upskilling their employees within the next 12 months, **demonstrating a clear commitment to workforce development.** Around 30% currently do not plan to invest, with a small proportion still undecided, **indicating some variation in readiness or capacity to prioritise training.** With the ~30% who do not plan to invest, it's worth bearing in mind here though that the majority of these (60%) had less than 5 employees – a number of these being sole proprietors.

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



Regarding preferred training methods, a **blended approach combining online and in-person learning is most popular**, chosen by nearly two-thirds of respondents (64%). On-the-job training also features prominently (40%), reflecting the value placed on practical, hands-on development. In-person training and peer-to-peer learning or mentoring are considered by roughly a third of businesses, with online-only training less favoured but still relevant for over a quarter of respondents.

Training Types Considered for Future Skill Development



These preferences **highlight the importance of flexible, varied training options to meet diverse organisational needs and learning styles.**

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 picture regarding recruitment challenges in West Yorkshire. Many businesses reported **no current difficulties in recruiting, with some citing their small size or stable workforce as reasons for limited recruitment needs.** However, a significant number highlighted **specific skills gaps and recruitment challenges, particularly in technical and specialist roles such as engineers, legal professionals, precision engineers, and technicians.** Some also noted difficulties sourcing candidates with strong soft skills like communication and work ethic, especially at entry-level positions.

Several respondents mentioned **challenges related to niche industries or roles requiring very specific expertise, such as AI, digital skills, or civil engineering.** Others pointed to broader issues including high salary expectations, limited recruitment budgets, and difficulty attracting staff to certain locations. Notably, a few businesses expressed concerns about the cost and availability of specialised training, especially for sectors like charity work or highly technical roles.

Example Comments:

- *"We struggle with covering for absences, as the jewellery design service I offer involves specialised technical skills, which are not easy to come by."*
- *"Lack of applicants with the right 'soft skills' like proactive communication, especially at entry level... the foundation is increasingly missing."*
- *"There is a shortage of skilled machinists. We are a growing business, but we're also trying to keep our overheads low from salaries although we do need more hands."*

These insights suggest that while many West Yorkshire businesses currently manage recruitment effectively, there are **clear and ongoing challenges in sourcing specialised technical skills and foundational soft skills, highlighting the need for targeted training and improved talent pipelines to support future growth.**

4.0 Conclusion & Recommendations

The survey responses from West Yorkshire businesses highlight a workforce landscape that is broadly stable but facing specific skills challenges. While nearly half of businesses feel their current skills needs are met, over 44% acknowledge existing skills gaps, particularly in technical, digital, and leadership areas. Many businesses anticipate increasing skill requirements over the next year, especially around digital and trade-specific capabilities. There is a strong awareness of where to access training, with many businesses actively engaging with providers and favouring a blended approach to learning. However, nearly half do not currently contribute to the regional skills agenda, presenting an opportunity to deepen employer involvement. Recruitment challenges remain centred on finding candidates with the right skills and experience, alongside salary expectations and competition for talent. Encouragingly, most organisations express confidence in future recruitment and intend to

invest in upskilling, favouring flexible, blended training methods. Qualitative feedback confirms ongoing difficulties in recruiting for specialist technical and soft skills roles, alongside some barriers linked to niche sectors and location.

Key Findings:

- **Skills Gaps:** 44% of businesses report skills gaps, particularly in digital, technical / trade, and leadership & management skills.
- **Training Access:** 83% know where to get workforce development support and over 53% used training providers in the last year.
- **Recruitment Challenges:** Main barriers include lack of applicants with suitable skills (56%), salary expectations (27%), and economic uncertainty (14%).
- **Future Skills Needs:** Growing demand for digital/data skills (50%) and technical expertise (53%), with sustainability and soft skills also important.
- **Training Investment:** 64% plan to invest in reskilling/upskilling within 12 months, favouring blended (online + in-person) and on-the-job training.
- **Regional Skills Agenda:** 44% do not currently contribute, apprenticeships and student placements are the most common forms of engagement.
- **Qualitative Insights:** Specialist technical roles and soft skills remain difficult to recruit and some sectors face niche recruitment barriers and training cost issues.

Recommendations:

- **Enhance Employer Engagement:** Encourage greater business participation in the regional skills agenda through sector networks, employer boards, and co-design of training programmes.
- **Target Skills Development:** Prioritise support for digital, technical, leadership, and sustainability skills development aligned to local business needs.
- **Promote Flexible Training Models:** Expand blended learning and on-the-job training options to meet diverse preferences and increase accessibility.
- **Address Recruitment Barriers:** Develop targeted initiatives to tackle salary expectations, local talent attraction, and awareness of recruitment channels.
- **Support Soft Skills Development:** Work with education providers and employers to embed foundational soft skills training, especially at entry level.
- **Increase Awareness of Training Support:** Improve communication about available workforce development resources and how businesses can access them.
- **Support Niche Sectors:** Provide tailored assistance and funding guidance for businesses in niche or specialist industries facing unique recruitment challenges.

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