

# EMPLOYABILITY IN WALES

A MANIFESTO FOR 2026 AND BEYOND



**ersa**  
Employment Related  
Services Association

Published by the Employment  
Related Services Association

April 2026

# EMPLOYABILITY IN WALES

## A MANIFESTO FOR 2026 AND BEYOND

The Employment Related Services Association (ERSA) is calling for everyone in Wales to have the right to access high-quality employment support, delivered through a system that works effectively for individuals, employers, and providers.

Our members in Wales have delivered employability programmes for decades. Today, they deliver a wide range of provision, including Restart, Jobs Growth Wales+, Connect to Work, the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, the Out of Work Service, and the In Work Support Service. Collectively, they bring deep expertise in supporting people into work and engaging employers across the country.

Good work is fundamental to people's wellbeing, while being out of work is associated with poorer social and economic outcomes. An effective employability system not only supports individuals into jobs but also reduces pressure on public services and contributes to wider economic growth.

If Wales is to match the UK average employment rate (75.1%), an additional 62,500 people will need to be supported into work.

However, there are some stubborn labour market challenges that the next government needs to tackle to achieve this:

- Economic inactivity is higher in Wales than in the rest of the UK.
- There are stark regional disparities in labour market outcomes, particularly in former industrial and rural areas.
- Women and people from ethnic minority groups are more likely to be economically inactive than men.
- Seventeen per cent of 16- to 24-year-olds (around 57,500 young people) are not in education, employment or training.

The next Senedd term presents a clear opportunity to build a more joined-up and accessible system that works better for individuals, employers, and providers alike.

This manifesto sets out ERSA's priorities for achieving that ambition. Our asks for the next Welsh Government are:

### 1 ACCESS AND ENTITLEMENT

No one in Wales should miss out on employment support because they do not know where to go or do not meet certain eligibility rules. A single, clearly navigable system that feels joined up to users is essential.

- Open referral routes across employability programmes, including self-referral and referrals from health services, housing associations and the voluntary sector
- Expand and simplify eligibility criteria so people do not miss out on support based on age or benefit status
- Deliver a "no wrong door" approach so people can enter through any public service and be seamlessly routed to the right support

### 2 LOCALLY DELIVERED, NATIONALLY DRIVEN

National ambition must be matched by a stable, well-coordinated delivery system that enables local areas to plan and invest with confidence.

- Commit to multi-year funding settlements to provide stability and enable long-term investment
- Embed engagement with employability programmes within public procurement across national and local government
- Ensure local commissioners are supported to design high-quality provision that complements national programmes, avoids duplication and delivers value for money to taxpayers
- Enable local areas to shape delivery around their communities and labour markets

### 3 PREVENTION AND EARLY INTERVENTION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

No young person should fall out of education or employment without timely support. Early intervention is critical to preventing long-term disengagement.

- Begin identification, tracking and intervention for young people at risk of becoming NEET from ages 13–14
- Ensure access to trusted adults and organisations that can support young people through key transition points
- Provide continuity of support through education, training and into employment

### 4 A SYSTEM THAT WORKS FOR EMPLOYERS AND THE ECONOMY

Employability support must be driven by current and future labour market demand, supporting economic growth and the transition to net zero.

- Embed employers as co-design partners in shaping provision
- Create a single, accessible “front door” for employers to recruit, upskill and develop their workforce
- Deliver a clear, inclusive skills and employability offer linked to net zero, ensuring disadvantaged groups can access pathways into emerging green jobs

### 5 A MODERN, LEARNING SYSTEM

The system must continuously improve, using data, evidence and experience to adapt over time.

- Develop shared data infrastructure across services so information follows the individual
- Reduce duplication and administrative burden on providers and participants
- Establish clear mechanisms for providers and partners to shape ongoing system design
- Invest in test-and-learn approaches throughout the lifecycle of programmes



**ersa**  
Employment Related  
Services Association

The Employment Related Services Association (ERSA) is the representative body for the employment support sector. Established in 2005, it exists to help its members achieve their shared goal: to help people gain sustainable good employment and to progress in work. ERSA represents organisations that deliver, or have an interest in the delivery, of employment related services. The scope of its reach includes skills provision, self-employment, offender related services, youth employment services, welfare reform and disability-related issues, as well as the design and delivery of employment programmes. Its membership spans the private, voluntary and public sectors and it is this diversity that gives ERSA the authority to speak on behalf of the entire related services sector. ERSA’s members range from multinationals through to small specialist charities operating in their local communities and include housing associations and local authorities. ERSA has over 200 members in total, two thirds of which are not for profit.



**ersa**

Employment Related  
Services Association

[ersa.org.uk](http://ersa.org.uk)