



## SKILLS FOR THE FUTURE

Skills, along with infrastructure, is at the very top of the county's agenda. The challenge of an ageing workforce coupled with high numbers of young people taking flight presents a massive gap that is predicted to get bigger.

Many sectors simply struggle to fill roles. When it comes to nuclear, there are unquestionably well skilled people working in Cumbria, which is no surprise given the complex nature of the work on offer and the fact it is home to the vast majority of the UK's civil nuclear workforce.

But, then again, only around 20 per cent of the skills needed at Sellafield, for example, are specifically nuclear-related – the rest are generic. Think construction, project managers, welders. The kind of skills other industries need.

The skills question cannot be segmented to just nuclear. But there is a lot of positivity around Cumbria's ability to develop the skills it needs to support the nuclear sector. The conundrum is having them at the right level, in the right place, at the right time.

"There is a strong skills pipeline locally, especially around developing skills for the nuclear sector as the dominant employer," says Mike Starkie. "It includes the Dalton Cumbrian Facility (The University of Manchester), Energus, Gen2, Nucleargraduates, National College

for Nuclear, UCLan and University of Cumbria. The challenge is enabling the people with the skills to move around."

John Grainger adds: "We must continue to provide an environment where relevant skills for now and in the future are being offered to all of our young people as a legacy opportunity. The recent award of 'Outstanding in all Categories' to the Energy Coast University Technical College at Lillyhall is a true testament to the abilities of students and trainers alike.

"The fantastic Gen 2 training programmes that have been developed over decades now show that they are still fit for purpose and relevant. We must never train for stock – it has to have a purpose."

And while Henri Murison agrees the infrastructure is there to "give the next generation the best chances", Kurt Canfield's concern is where they will end up.

"My worry is that we will have nowhere to place them. It's a timing issue in that we planned for major projects to occur such as Moorside, but with cancellations and potential delays on GDF and SMRs it may be a real challenge for us locally.

"Tiers 2s are well connected in the UK and overseas and can aid in this area but we need other inward investment strategies from local businesses to assist in bridging the gap due to losing these key projects and take the opportunity of



Above: Northern Powerhouse Partnership director Henri Murison

Right: Kurt Canfield, managing director of Delkia

supporting the next generation.

"We have to enable this at all levels of the supply chain, including micro-businesses, to have a sustainable healthy business eco-system here in Cumbria."

Rob Johnston says, ultimately, clarity is needed on where the county's nuclear – and wider economic – ambitions are heading.

"Given that Sellafield is shrinking, and new build is off the table for the time being, we need to a new vision of what the future will be," he says. "The transition that West Cumbria will go through requires a rethink of what we want the skills system to deliver.

"For example, are there opportunities in moving from a carbon-based economy to a zero-carbon economy that we could be skilling people for? We need a clearer vision of where we're going.

"It's incumbent on all of us with some level of responsibility for Cumbria's economy to think about these broader issues. We can't leave it to Sellafield, which is focused on the day job of decommissioning.

"The chamber is doing its bit. We've secured funding from Sellafield for our Growth Hub to support start-up and early-stage businesses in West Cumbria to include adviser time, a three-day business course, grants and free training."

Indeed, so many more organisations need to do "their bit" to tackle the issue. It is crucial to Cumbria's future, let alone its nuclear one.

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