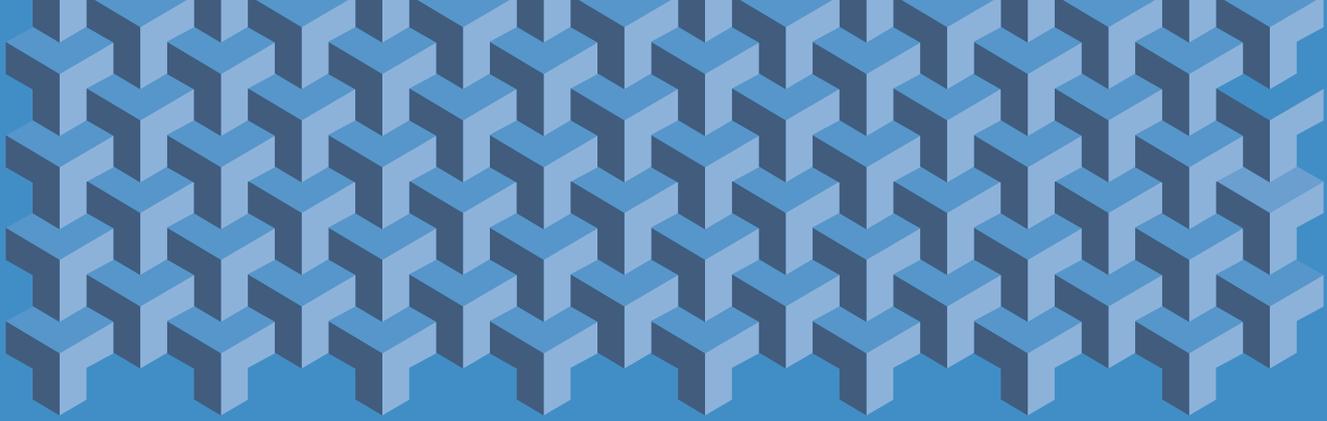


THE MAKER'S MANIFESTO

SENEDD ELECTIONS 2026





INTRODUCTION

Manufacturing plays a vital role in the Welsh economy. It accounts for 15.6% of Wales's national output, significantly higher than the UK average of 9.1%. Wales contributes 3.3% of the UK's total economic output, with Welsh manufacturing alone responsible for 0.5% of the UK total. Beyond its economic importance, the Welsh manufacturing sector also helps address major challenges such as climate change and the instability of global supply chains.

Across the length and breadth of the country, from Anglesey to Aberystwyth, from Cardiff to Clwyd, manufacturing businesses of all shapes and sizes are leaving their mark. They're not just factories churning out goods but engines of local prosperity, injecting life into communities and driving economies forward. The sector's heartlands are primarily in rural and regional areas that are often overlooked by the spotlight on London and the South East. These companies are the backbone of regions that are eager for growth.

But it's not just about jobs; it's about skill-building too. Manufacturers are nurturing the next generation of talent and keeping skills alive in communities. They're not just places of work; they're the heartbeat of towns, fostering a sense of belonging and opportunity. They attract investment, bring innovation, and shape the identity of the places we call home.

And they're not stopping there. Manufacturers have their eyes set on the horizon, aiming to ride the wave of a net-zero economy and embrace cutting-edge technologies like AI and digitalisation. Their goal? Nothing short of becoming the most innovative economy on the planet. They're not content with the status quo; they're striving for a future where sustainability and prosperity go hand in hand.

Looking ahead, it's evident that UK manufacturing must evolve to stay competitive on the global stage. Manufacturers across Wales are setting ambitious goals to spur growth while aligning with both national and international sustainability targets.

Together, through smart policy, strategic incentives, and collaborative partnerships, we can pave the way for a brighter, greener, and more prosperous future for all in Wales.

MANUFACTURING PRIORITIES

FOR WALES

The Welsh manufacturing sector accounts for

£12 BILLION OF OUTPUT



Providing 138,000 JOBS

AVERAGE WAGES 19% HIGHER



than the rest of the economy in the region

1.

Support manufacturers in the region to **deliver the jobs of the future** through the development of regional skills programmes. These initiatives provide manufacturers with the skills they need and can launch the career of students in a high paying exciting sector.

2.

Support the ever growing industrial diversification of the region through policies which allow the transformation of the manufacturing sector to take advantage of the vibrant new and emerging industries throughout Wales, embracing Net Zero, digitalisation and upskilling employees.

3.

Upgrade transportation networks including roads and public transit. The quality of infrastructure can be a large barrier to accessing labour and skills, the lifeblood of the manufacturing sector. As well as this manufacturers more than other make use of road and rail networks for logistical purposes.

MANUFACTURING IN WALES

TRANSPORT EQUIPMENT **18%**

FOOD & DRINK **15%**

METAL PRODUCTS **11%**

OTHER
MANUFACTURING*
56%

*The sum of subsectors not included in the top 3

Source: ONS (2025)

WALES
ACCOUNTS FOR
6%
OF THE UK'S
TOTAL GOODS
EXPORTS



THE NATION SEES
61%
OF ITS EXPORTS
GO TO THE EU
WELL ABOVE THE
UK AVERAGE
OF 50%

This makes Wales the most dependent on the EU for exports (when excluding Northern Ireland)


THE NEXT
LARGEST DESTINATION
FOR WALES' GOODS IS
NORTH AMERICA

ACCOUNTING FOR
15%
OF GOODS EXPORTS


Followed by
Asia & Oceania which accounts
for 13% of goods exports

MANUFACTURING
ACCOUNTS FOR
15.6%
OF WELSH
TOTAL OUTPUT

WELSH
OVERALL
PRODUCTIVITY
IS THE
9TH BEST
IN THE UK AT
83.7%

OBJECTIVES FOR THE NEXT WELSH GOVERNMENT

In our Maker's Manifesto, we have outlined 5 areas that the next Welsh Government should prioritise

1. An evolving Strategy for Wales

Ensuring that the Welsh Manufacturing Action Plan is working effectively in line with the UK Government's Industrial Strategy.

2. A Skills agenda that works for Wales

39% of UK manufacturers say labour shortages/ access to skills are the biggest challenges facing them in the next 24 months.

3. A long-term investment in Infrastructure

Infrastructure is the backbone of the economy. Well-developed infrastructure attracts investment and people and enriches communities.

4. A Planning System to Encourage Growth

44% of manufacturers say that delays in planning process for business expansion is the biggest challenge facing manufacturers in Wales.

5. A Plan to Unlock innovation and accelerate digital adoption and automation

56% of manufacturers say that investment in digitalisation and AI adoption would help grow the manufacturing sector in Wales.



AN EVOLVING STRATEGY FOR WALES

Wales has led the way in providing their manufacturers with a comprehensive strategy for industry. The Welsh Manufacturing Action Plan has provided stability and direction for the sector in Wales.

This support has been strengthened further with the UK Government's Industrial Strategy, which will provide Welsh manufacturers with a robust, long-term strategy that has manufacturing at its heart.

Manufacturers are now looking at how the Industrial Strategy will be implemented. The Industrial Strategy must keep its focus on skills, energy costs and access to finance.

However, with two strategies in use to help Welsh manufacturers, it is crucial that the Welsh Manufacturing Action Plan is able to adapt to the UK Government's Industrial Strategy to provide Wales with the unique opportunity of two robust strategies, providing support for Welsh manufacturers to grow.

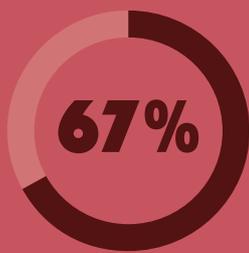
RECOMMENDATION

Commit to a full review of the Welsh Manufacturing Action Plan every year, to ensure that it works alongside the UK Government's Industrial Strategy.

A SKILLS AGENDA THAT WORKS FOR WALES

Despite positive intentions in Wales, skills reforms over the last decade have not enabled manufacturers to recruit and train the people they need. 61% of manufacturers say that a focus on apprenticeships and entry level training would help grow the manufacturing sector in Wales and 36% of manufacturers say that workforce upskilling and training programmes would help growth.

Wales finds itself in a difficult situation when it comes to skills funding. Money that manufacturers pay in the apprenticeship levy, goes back to the UK Government and not into the devolved skills department in Wales. Welsh manufacturers must see more funding for apprenticeships and skills in Wales that is ringfenced by Welsh Government.



67% of manufacturers say that a lack of technical and vocational skills is the biggest challenge in Wales

RECOMMENDATION

Ringfence apprenticeship funding in Wales to ensure that money paid by Welsh manufacturers into the apprenticeship levy, is returned to Wales to be used on apprenticeships and skills.



A LONG-TERM INVESTMENT IN INFRASTRUCTURE

Infrastructure is the backbone of the economy. Well-developed infrastructure attracts investment and people and enriches communities.

In Wales, 44% of manufacturers say that investment in physical infrastructure should be the top priority to encourage manufacturing growth in Wales. 67% of manufacturers say that transport infrastructure is poor in Wales, compared with 33% who say transport infrastructure is good.

Transport capacity also needs significant improvement – particularly along the M4 corridor. 67% of manufacturers support the building of the M4 Relief Road. Significant investment in infrastructure would see a re-balance in the economy and enable industrial growth.

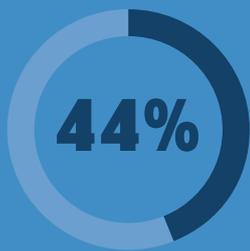


of manufacturers say that investment in physical infrastructure should be the top priority to encourage manufacturing growth in Wales

RECOMMENDATION

Work with the UK Government to fund the building of the M4 Relief Road, to provide better transport infrastructure for manufacturers in South Wales and support for employees to access workplaces with ease.

A PLANNING SYSTEM TO ENCOURAGE GROWTH



of manufacturers say that delays in planning process for business expansion is the biggest challenge in Wales

RECOMMENDATION

A full review into planning processes in Wales at a local and national level, with the view to ease planning regulation to encourage manufacturers to invest and grow their sites and businesses to increase productivity.



A PLAN TO UNLOCK INNOVATION AND ACCELERATE DIGITAL ADOPTION AND AUTOMATION

Through our world-leading universities and top-class industry-led research and development (R&D), science and innovation play a central role in encouraging prosperity and economic growth in the UK. Our expertise in innovation and creativity stands out, but when it comes to bringing these innovations to market, we find ourselves falling behind.

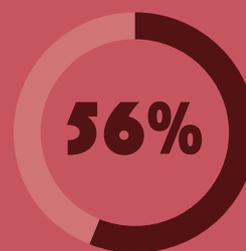
The manufacturing sector is in the midst of transformative change, with technologies powered by the Fourth Industrial Revolution reinventing its products and production processes. Through automation and new digital technologies, UK manufacturers are reshaping our economy for the better. While some businesses are already reaping the rewards, many manufacturers are yet to embark on their digital journey.

With 67% of manufacturers stating that AI is the largest market opportunity in Wales, the potential benefits of such investment are substantial. AI adoption can significantly increase productivity while reducing operational costs. However, the greatest productivity gains from digital adoption are expected to occur within small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

RECOMMENDATION

Expand the Welsh Industrial Clusters remit to provide support for digitalisation and AI adoption.

Provide a business rate relief for manufacturers who invest in digitalisation and artificial intelligence.



56% of manufacturers say that investment in digitalisation and AI adoption would help grow the manufacturing sector in Wales

Make UK is a powerful voice at local, national and international level for all companies from small to large in the manufacturing and engineering sector.

We create the most supportive environment for UK manufacturing growth and success, and we represent the issues that are most important to our members, working hard to ensure UK manufacturing remains in the government and media spotlight.

Our services help manufacturers increase efficiency, productivity, and capability across areas such as HR & legal support; health, safety & sustainability; compliance; and training & skills.

Our HR experts are on hand to support you through the entire employment cycle, from challenges around recruitment, retention and employee engagement to broader strategic issues involving your workforce.

MakeUK.org

To find out how we can support you, speak to one of our HR consultants by calling **0808 168 5874** or email **HRenquiries@MakeUK.org**

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#BackingManufacturing
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