

# The latest in Skills & Talent across Southeast Wales



Last week saw major anniversaries reached - and important new horizons set - on the Welsh talentscape.

The **University of Wales Trinity St David** celebrated its bicentenary, and with it the 200 year anniversary of higher education in Wales. The past two centuries have seen the HE sector serve Wales with distinction, helping establish our reputation as a modern economy renowned for a free-thinking and creative spirit - and this approach has been mirrored in the growth of the **Open University**, which last week celebrated the 15th birthday of its revolutionary *OpenLearn* free learning site: a groundbreaking platform that has clocked up an incredible 100 million visitors in the decade and a half since it was launched.

Over a half a million OpenLearn visits have come from Welsh audiences in the last two years, bolstered by a surge in traffic during the first COVID-19 lockdown. Collaborating with the **Welsh Government** and **Careers Wales** at the start of the pandemic, the Open University quickly created relevant and topical content to help furloughed workers looking to upskill, students wanting to support their studies, children who were adapting to home-schooling and healthcare professionals seeking advice - and Welsh Government has continued to build on the partnership, recently choosing this trailblazing open education resource as the channel to support initiatives such as '*University Ready*', a package of free resources geared to preparing students for their first steps into higher education.

## USW awarded Fast-Track Data & AI Graduate Programme, meeting employers specific needs.

Another pioneering HE institution - the **University of South Wales** (USW) - was also in the news last week, with USW winning the tender to deliver the *Fast-Track Data and AI Graduate Programme* led by the Welsh Contact Centre Forum and a consortium of leading financial services and technology businesses.

This innovative postgraduate accelerated programme will equip 14 handpicked STEM graduates with the latest data science and AI skills and knowledge - through an intensive 10-month fast-track programme that provides work-based learning and development, combining industry placements and academic modules, enabling applied learning to be fed back into the graduates' employer work placements across Southeast Wales.

The programme begins this month, with modules - which include data analytics, programming, machine learning, time series analysis and forecasting, text mining and natural language processing, deep learning and professional skills for data - specifically designed by the course team at USW to reflect the most recent developments and advances in AI, Robotics and Data Science, with a core focus on the specific needs of employers.

This award-winning programme is aimed at tackling a national data and artificial skills shortage - and shows how our region can create stronger employment and development offerings, helping businesses in all sectors unlock the potential of big data and artificial intelligence.

In many ways it sets the example for future skills initiatives - bringing together employer partners and academic experts to create a course that meets employers' critical requirements - with a programme structure that includes a bespoke two-week bootcamp, paving the way for careers with some of Wales' most recognisable brands, including Admiral, Atradius, Empirysis, Hodge Bank, Opel Vauxhall Finance, Pepper Money, Principality Building Society and sa.global.

## 'Season 2' Cohort announced by FinTech Wales ....

Admiral Financial Services and Principality Building Society (along with the CCR City Deal) are also key sponsors of **FinTech Wales** - which last week announced the second cohort for its flagship accelerator, the FinTech Wales Foundry.

Following on from the hugely successful 2021 FinTech Foundry Programme, 'Season 2' has accepted nine FinTech startups onto the 12 week no equity programme, titled The Foundry: Validate, Raise & Scale - with an explicit focus on helping founders overcome the challenges of validating, fundraising and scaling a new venture successfully.

Beginning on 26th of January, the accelerator format will safely combine intensive digital and in-person mentoring sessions with experienced industry leaders at the programme's Cardiff hub - Covid restrictions allowing - before culminating in an event showcasing cohort progress at the accelerator's end in mid-April.

This year's cohort welcomes startups from the fields of financial literacy, data management, blockchain and AI - looking to emulate last year's performance which raised more than £9 million in investment and created over 20 jobs. One of the 2021 alumni, Cardiff-based energy technology and services company Sero, last week secured a £5.5m investment to help support the residential housing sector in Wales transition to net zero.

## Words of warning on the Physics Skills shortage from the IOP ...

With so much positive STEM-skill-based news all around us, it's worth heeding the warning of the **Institute of Physics** (IOP), which last week cautioned that without greater investment in physics skills, Wales and the rest of the UK will miss out on many future economic and employment opportunities.

The IOP report showed that physics skills already support nearly two million jobs across the UK and Ireland, with a strong and growing employer demand for these skills making it difficult for many employers to hire new people. The IOP says that without concerted action, the existing shortfall in physics skills is only set to worsen - limiting the opportunity for our economies to take advantage of new developments in physics-powered industries such as major project construction, nuclear energy, transport, manufacturing, medical, engineering and the whole green transformation towards a net zero world.

The report concludes that "strengthening the provision of physics is central to improving economic growth, prosperity and living standards". Given this crucial role played by physics in driving innovation, the IOP is calling for more investment in specialist physics teachers to make available a variety of physics education and training pathways - as well as incentivising employers to invest in upskilling and reskilling employees.

With physics skills so central to our new world of work - offering many different routes to productive and rewarding employment - we would do well to encourage more young people to fulfil their potential through physics; and make sure that everyone with an interest in this critical science has access to a specialist physics teacher.

For more Skills & Talent updates, visit the Venture hub at [www.venturewales.org](http://www.venturewales.org)