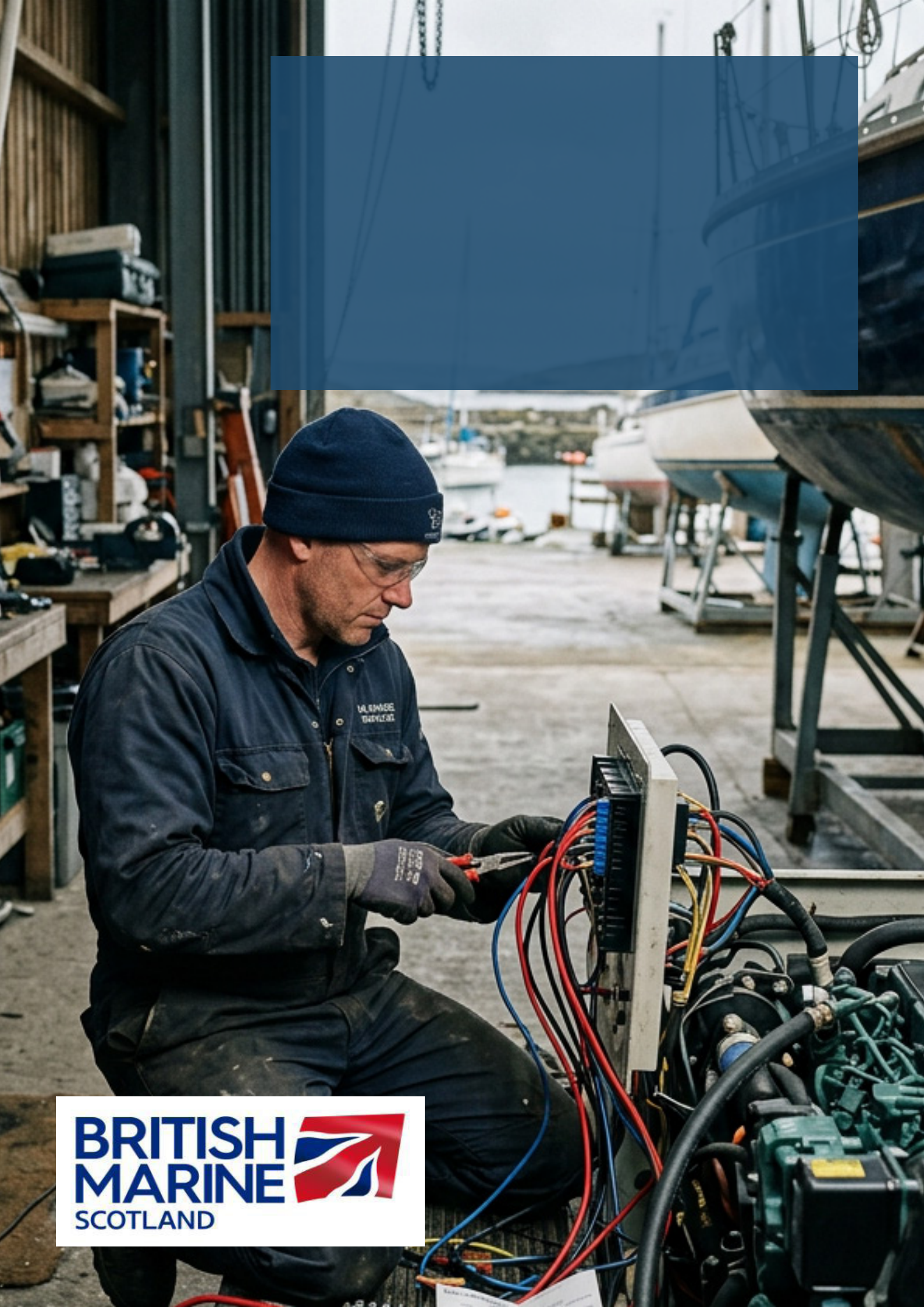




**BRITISH
MARINE** 
SCOTLAND



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Methodology

The study combined an online survey with face-to-face interviews to create a more comprehensive understanding of skills and training needs across the sector. While the survey offered key evidence on shortages, recruitment pressures, and barriers to upskilling, the interviews provided the richer qualitative insights needed to grasp the underlying structural issues. In a sector mainly made up of time-constrained small businesses, these realities are often overlooked by standard data collection, which masks the true extent of the need.

This research was undertaken by Margaret McCole, drawing on extensive industry engagement across Scotland, with input from David Tournay in relation to UK-wide training and qualification frameworks.

This document provides a summary of a wider body of research. The full report is available.



**the sector
has been
staring down
the barrel
of a gun for
decades.**



Executive Summary

Our research study has provided a clear evidence base as to the state of shore-based technical marine skills in Scotland, how training is currently delivered and funded. It has informed the report's recommendations as to what practical steps are now required to strengthen the system.

The findings are clear and consistent. Employers across Scotland report persistent difficulty in accessing practical, job-ready technical skills. While training activity exists, its provision is fragmented and structurally fragile, particularly in rural and coastal areas where most marine businesses operate. Small cohort economics, limited assessor capacity and the challenges of delivering provision in dispersed geographies mean that, in many areas, the system is failing.

A key structural issue is the disparity in apprenticeship funding between Scotland and England. Funding bands of up to £27,000 in England contrast with typical Scottish levels of £7,000 to £10,000. This differential materially affects the viability of technically intensive training, particularly in small-cohort coastal contexts, and is likely to require policy attention.

From the detailed evidence gathered it is clear that shore-based marine technical skills underpin far more than just Scotland's leisure marine sector. Marine engineering, electrical and composites skills provide the essential technical backbone which supports the aquaculture, workboats and marine tourism industries, as well elements of the offshore renewable sector. These skills underpin Scotland's wider coastal and marine economy and the erosion of this critical skills base poses a serious risk to the national economy.

The current system is surviving thanks to the commitment of individuals and through informal workarounds, as opposed to benefiting from structured, scalable delivery. Without urgent intervention, the growing shortage in these critical shore-based marine skills will reach a tipping point, beyond which irreversible damage could be done to Scotland's marine industries.

The evidence already shows that:

- Coastal businesses cannot access or develop the technical staff they need
- Training is not available in the locations or formats required
- Transferable skills are not being effectively utilised

The situation will not be resolved by a single training centre nor an isolated intervention but requires a national, coordinated approach that recognises marine skills as essential economic infrastructure and supports locally delivered training.

In addition to recommendations about funding alignment and training pathways, this paper outlines a proposed delivery model to transform the current system into one that is fit and resilient for the future. It starts with a national Marine Skills Delivery Lead to aggregate employer demand, strengthen links between industry and providers, improve sector visibility and to support targeted pilot interventions.

British Marine Scotland is grateful for the support partners have shown to date and urges all affected industries to back these recommendations.



Patrick Flockhart

Vice Chair
British Marine Scotland

Chairman
Eyemouth Marine Limited

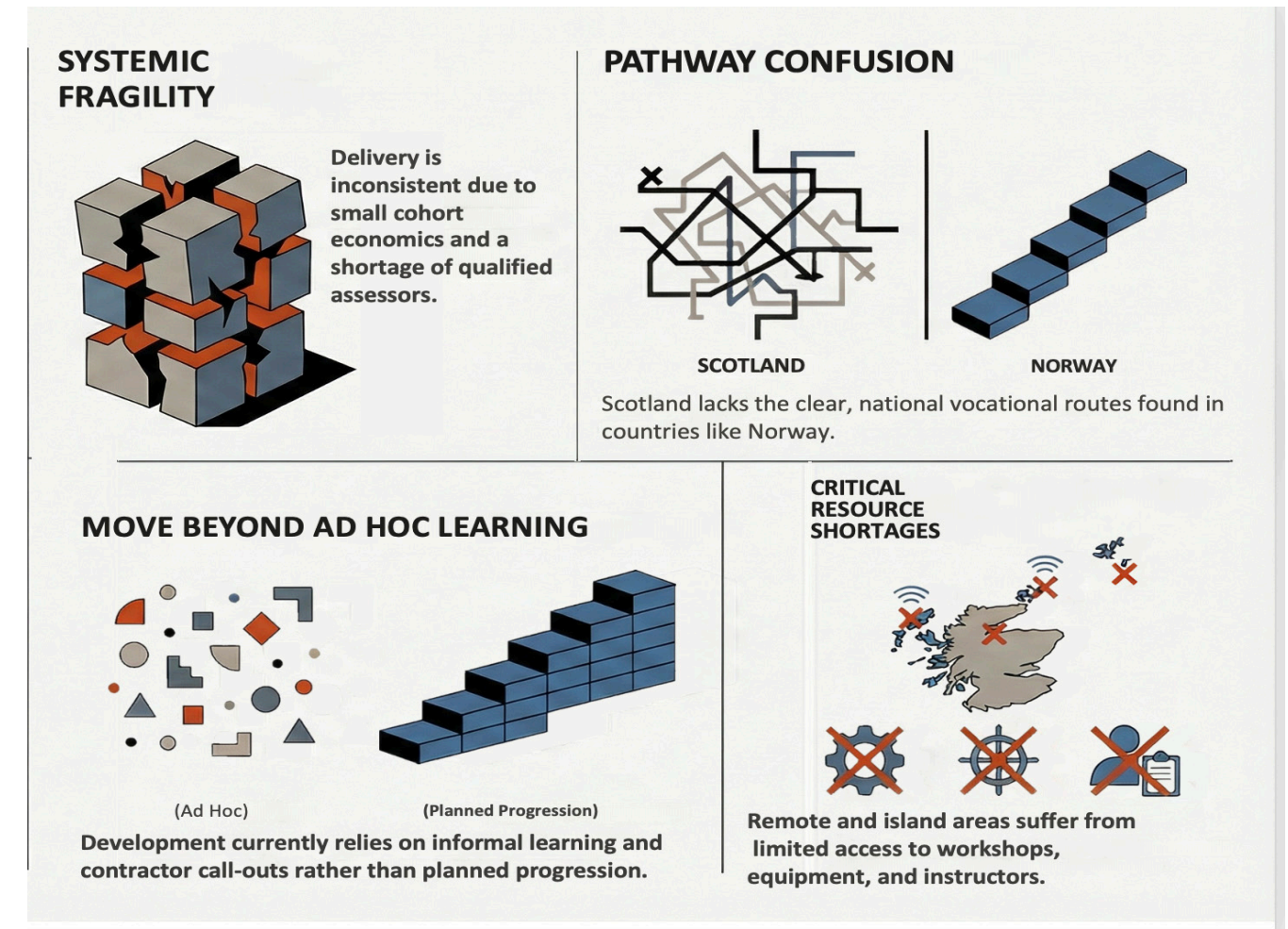
Current Situation

Scotland’s current shore-based marine training landscape is active, but it does not yet function as a coherent or dependable system.

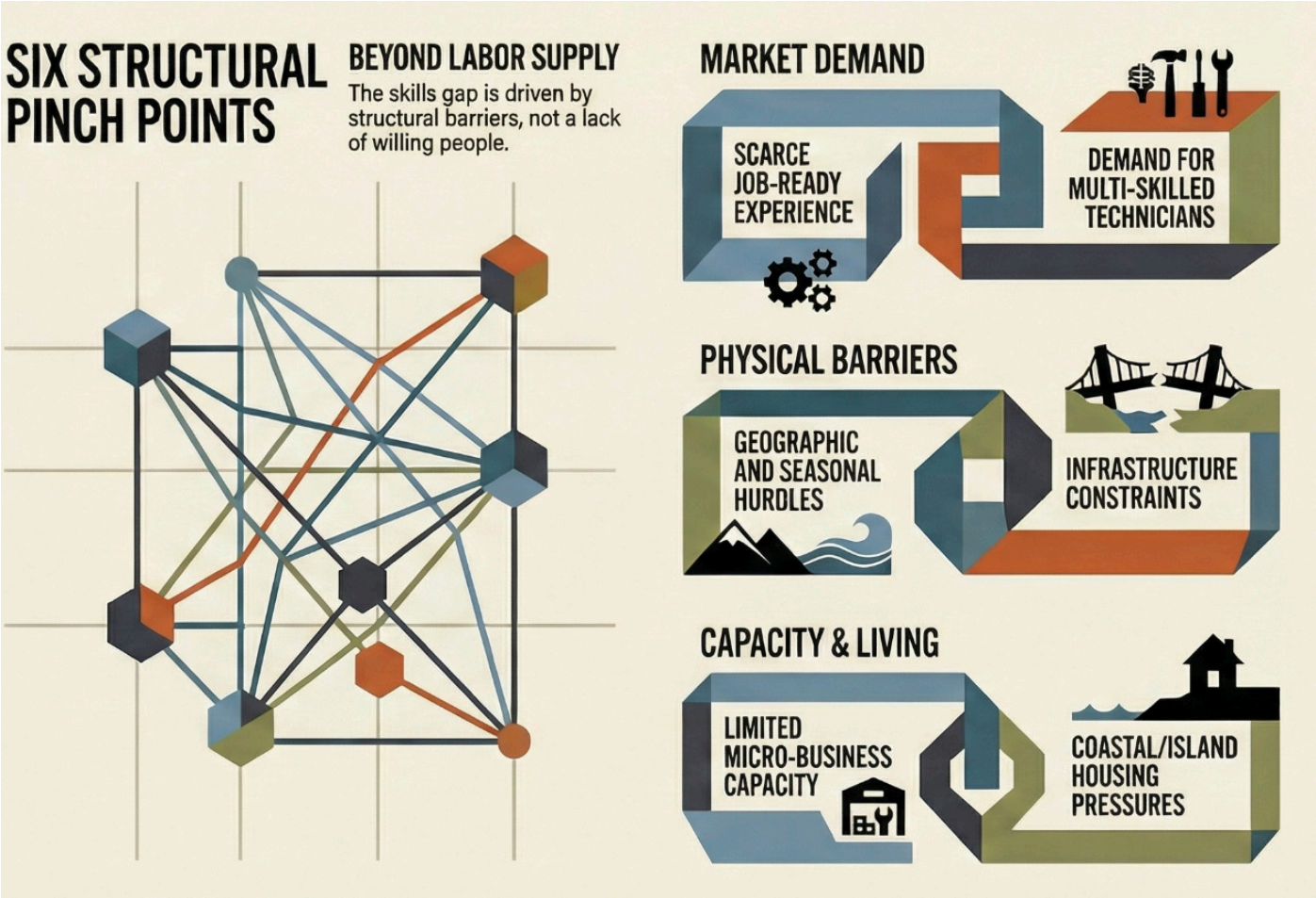
Provision exists through colleges and UHI partners, private and mobile providers, and learning within workplaces, but these routes are unevenly available, difficult to navigate, and variable in how consistently they support progression. Where formal provision is limited, particularly for specialist and advanced skills, the sector often falls back on informal learning, contractor call-outs and the commitment of individual employers, meaning development is too often ad hoc rather than planned.

Compared with Norway’s clearer national vocational route, Scotland offers a broader mix of pathways, but with less clarity and consistency about the main route into skilled marine trades.

The deeper issue is not the total absence of training activity, but the lack of reliable, year-round pathways that employers and learners can count on. Small cohort economics, shortages of assessors and instructors, and inconsistent access to workshops, equipment and local hub functions all make delivery fragile, especially in remote, coastal and island areas. The overall picture is of a system that exists in pieces, but not yet with the scale, visibility or reliability needed to renew the workforce and support the sector with confidence.



The Pinch Points



The evidence points to six main pinch points: scarce job-ready experience, growing demand for multi-skilled technicians, geographic and seasonal barriers, limited micro-business capacity, infrastructure constraints, and housing pressures in coastal and island areas.

Together, these factors show that the skills gap is driven not simply by the supply of people, but by wider structural barriers that make recruitment, training and progression harder.

Cross-Sectoral Impact and the “Ripple Effect”

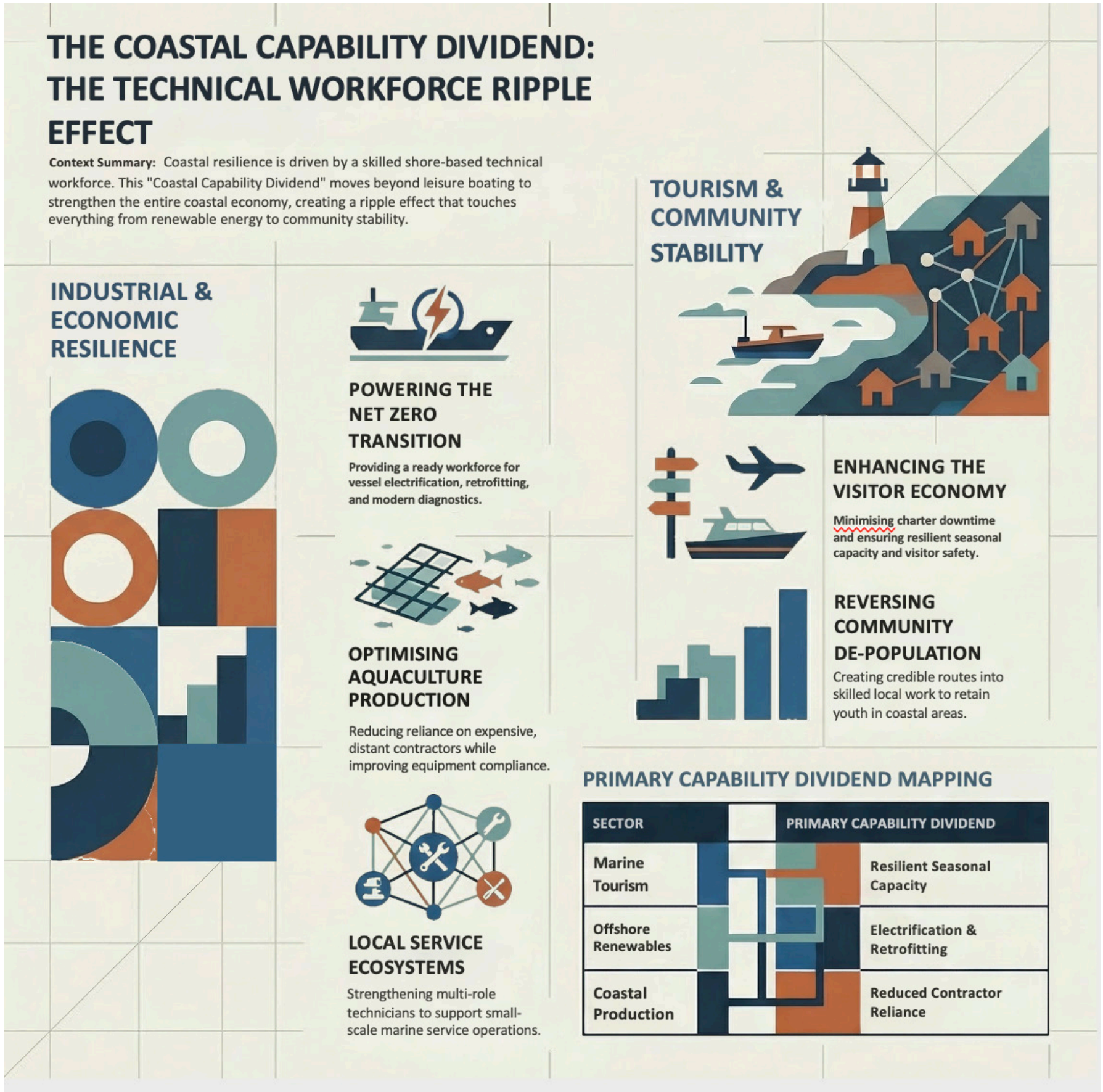
A practical shore-based marine skills strategy would deliver benefits well beyond the immediate leisure and light commercial marine sector.

By strengthening technical pathways in areas such as mechanical, electrical and electronic systems, composites, rigging, safety and environmental compliance, it would support a wider range of coastal industries that depend on similar capabilities. The result would be a broader coastal capability dividend: safer operations, stronger local supply chains, improved service capacity and a workforce better able to move between sectors as demand changes.

The report also suggests that this agenda should be understood within a wider policy and delivery environment, where skills, workforce development and regional resilience are increasingly shared concerns across multiple sectors. In that context, shore-based marine skills can be positioned not as a narrow sector issue, but as a practical, place-based contribution to economic resilience, community benefit and coastal delivery. This also strengthens the case for a more active and consistent sector voice, working across policy and sectoral boundaries to ensure marine workforce needs are recognised within wider skills and investment discussions.

A particularly important opportunity lies in developing a shared coastal workforce case with sectors drawing on the same local labour pool. Better alignment between skills provision, work-based learning and employer need would benefit marine alongside tourism and other coastal industries, while also improving routes for career changers and those currently outside the labour market.

In places where employment options are limited, marine activity can have a disproportionate impact by supporting stable jobs, local spending and the retention of young people in coastal communities.



SCOTLAND'S MARINE SKILLS ROADMAP



FRAGMENTED SYSTEM

Fragmented training into a unified national marine skills system.



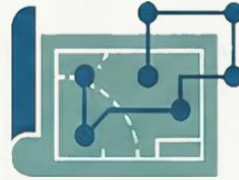
BMS: THE CENTRAL STRATEGIC HUB

BMS leads, convenes, and coordinates delivery between employers, government, and local partners.



VOICE: INFLUENCING POLICY AND FUNDING

Creating a stronger sector voice to drive apprenticeship reform and evidence-based delivery decisions.



PLAN: VISIBLE MARINE CAREER PATHWAYS

Mapping qualifications and blueprints to make Scotland-wide marine progression routes visible and coherent.



PIPELINE: VIABLE LOCAL TRAINING DELIVERY

Pooling employer demand to ensure training is feasible in coastal, rural, and island settings.

FROM FRAGMENTED TO COORDINATED SYSTEM

Shifting the sector toward a national model that delivers clarity, viability, and modern talent.

Recommendations

The recommendations are organised around three interconnected pillars: Voice, Plan, and Pipeline. These are designed to strengthen sector influence, establish a clearer and more consistent training and progression system, and ensure feasibility of delivery in rural, coastal, and island settings. Instead of treating recruitment, training, and policy as separate issues, the recommendations view them as part of one cohesive system that should be improved collectively.

Under Voice, the report recommends that BMS should become the recognised route for employers to gain insight into shore-based marine skills and play a more consistent role in shaping skills policy, apprenticeship reform and funding decisions. This involves maintaining a visible role in key decision-making forums, turning evidence into a few practical requests for the sector, forming a sustainable coalition (Shore-Based Marine & Coastal Skills Coalition) with providers and nearby

sectors, and creating a shared model for SME-friendly and rural training delivery. The aim is to move marine from being treated as a niche concern to being seen as a credible, organised and solutions-focused sector voice.

Under Plan, the report recommends developing a Scotland-wide training and qualifications blueprint that maps pathways into and through the sector, including routes for individuals transferring from related industries. It also suggests a national marine careers programme to enhance visibility, modernise perceptions of the sector, and make career progression easier for young people, career

changers, and intermediaries such as schools and careers advisers. Additionally, it advocates for better utilisation of existing non-marine-labelled provision, enabling businesses to access relevant technical training already available instead of waiting for bespoke solutions. These measures would create a clearer structure for the sector, strengthen its recruitment narrative, and provide more accessible routes into skilled employment.

Under Pipeline, the report recommends practical support to help employers find the right training, organise take-up, and fill gaps where suitable provision does not already exist. It also proposes partnership models that bring employer demand together, making

specialist training more viable where learner numbers are small. Alongside this, employer-led consortia would help build local capacity and share expertise. Finally, it highlights the need for stronger links with community and charity organisations to widen local entry routes. The combined intention is to create a more reliable, place-based training system that works in coastal conditions.

Together, the recommendations are designed to strengthen the sector's voice, clarify skills planning and build a more dependable training pipeline. This would improve resilience, reduce skills gaps and support a stronger local talent base to benefit multiple sectors.

Strategic Options

A NEW MODEL FOR MARINE SKILLS

CENTRALISED LEADERSHIP: THE DELIVERY LEAD

A dedicated role to coordinate partners, ensure employer alignment, and manage quality across dispersed coastal areas.

ACCELERATOR: FAST-TRACK URGENT TECHNICAL GAPS

Intensive, employer-led programs designed for SMEs to upskill current workers and transition new entrants quickly.

MICRO-CREDENTIALS: FLEXIBLE, STACKABLE LEARNING

A suite of short, quality-assured modules that build into long-term career pathways as time and finances allow

FROM STOP-START TO SCALABLE GROWTH

Combining immediate action with long-term infrastructure to create a reliable and sustainable skills ecosystem.

The strategy establishes a practical, fundable pathway to move from recommendations to implementation.

The strategic options outline a practical delivery model for transforming the report’s recommendations into action. It suggests appointing a dedicated Marine Skills Delivery Lead to coordinate employers, providers, hubs, quality assurance, and evaluation, along with two testable pilot interventions. Together, these strategic options aim to establish a clear and fundable pathway from recommendation to implementation, while also generating the evidence needed for long-term investment and broader roll-out.

The report shows that the identified challenges cannot be solved solely through more training. Any developed training activity needs clear coordination, consistent standards, and a practical delivery framework that can function across dispersed coastal and island areas. Therefore, the primary strategic option is not a course or programme, but a Marine Skills Delivery Lead role. This role would oversee the coordination of partners, ensure activities align with employer needs, shape pathways and standards, manage pilot

implementations, and develop the evidence base for future investment. Success would mean the two pilots are operational, delivery partnerships are established, quality assurance is maintained, and a costed case for expansion has been prepared.

The first pilot, the Marine Skills Accelerator, is the report’s fast-start response to urgent skills shortages. It is designed as a short, intensive, employer-led programme focused on priority technical gaps such as marine engineering, electrical and electronics, and boat repair. It is aimed not only at new entrants, but also at existing workers who need additional skills and at people from adjacent sectors who could move into marine roles through practical transition routes. The model is designed to work around SME realities, using blended learning, weekend practical blocks and geographically distributed hubs so that participation is possible without excessive disruption to day-to-day business.

What Norway Shows

A recent discussion with Norboat in Norway reinforced that Scotland’s marine skills challenges are not unique. Norway faces some of the same pressures, including an ageing workforce, competition for talent and weak visibility of marine careers among young people.

However, the comparison is also instructive: Norway operates within a more established vocational education and training route, where the principal challenge appears to be attracting enough young people into the pathway, rather than the kind of apprenticeship funding constraint seen in Scotland. In response, Norboat has developed industry-led short courses and micro-credentials

in areas such as marine electrics, composites, engines and LPG, backed by an authorisation model and targeted recruitment activity.

For BMS, this offers a practical international example of how employer-led, modular training can complement formal pathways, strengthen quality, and improve sector visibility where recruitment into marine careers remains weak.



The second pilot, the Marine Micro-Credentials Suite, is the longer-term option and can be taken up by those new to the sector. It proposes a flexible set of short, stackable modules that employers and individuals can take up as time and finances allow, rather than committing immediately to longer programmes. The modules would be linked directly to priority skill needs, quality-assured through standardised assessment, and capable of being built into wider progression pathways over time.

recommended to move the sector away from stop-start provision and towards a more reliable and scalable training system.

The strategic options turn the report’s recommendations into a practical delivery model: one that combines clear leadership, short-term action, and long-term infrastructure to build a more coordinated and sustainable marine skills system.

The two pilots are intended to work as a connected package. The Accelerator provides the immediate mechanism for closing urgent gaps quickly and maximising transferable skills in the labour market. The Micro-Credentials Suite creates a more flexible and repeatable training offer for the longer term. They are

“
**an aging
craftsperson
is like a burning
library.**
”

Next Steps

From fragmented provision to coordinated delivery

Scotland's shore-based marine skills challenge should not be understood as a narrow workforce issue affecting only one part of the marine sector. The report makes the case clearly that the technical capabilities involved including marine engineering, electrical and electronic systems, composites and other specialist practical skills underpin not only leisure and light commercial marine activity, but also aquaculture, workboats, marine tourism and elements of offshore renewables. These are shared technical foundations across Scotland's coastal economy, which means their erosion carries wider consequences for productivity, resilience and business continuity.

The evidence also shows that the central problem is not the total absence of training activity, but the weakness of the system as a joined - up system. Provision exists through colleges, UHI partners, private and mobile providers, and learning in the workplace, yet access remains uneven, progression routes are often unclear, and delivery is especially fragile in coastal, rural and island settings. Small cohort economics, shortages of assessors and instructors, infrastructure constraints, housing pressures and limited micro-business capacity all combine to make provision harder to sustain. The result is a landscape that too often depends on informal workarounds and individual commitment rather than a reliable, visible and scalable pipeline.

Set in that context, the importance of the roadmap is that it does not treat recruitment, training and policy as separate problems. Its recommendations are structured around

- **Voice**
- **Plan**
- **Pipeline**

because the challenge is interconnected: the sector needs stronger influence in skills and funding discussions, clearer training and career pathways,

and more viable local delivery models that reflect the realities of dispersed coastal economies. These are intended to build a more dependable talent base, reduce skills gaps and strengthen resilience over time.

The strategic options then translate that direction into a practical delivery model. The proposed **Marine Skills Delivery Lead** is important because the report argues that the challenge cannot be solved simply by adding more courses. What is needed is coordination: aligning employer demand, linking providers, supporting quality and standards, shaping pathways, and testing workable delivery models through pilots. In that sense, the Delivery Lead and the two pilot interventions are not an add-on to the recommendations; they are the mechanism through which the recommendations become operational, testable and investable.

The wider opportunity is significant. A stronger shore-based marine skills system would help employers maintain and grow capacity, support safer and more efficient operations, improve local service ecosystems and create better routes into skilled employment for young people, career changers and those currently outside the labour market. In coastal communities where employment options are often constrained, that has implications far beyond the sector itself: for local spending, population retention and wider community sustainability.

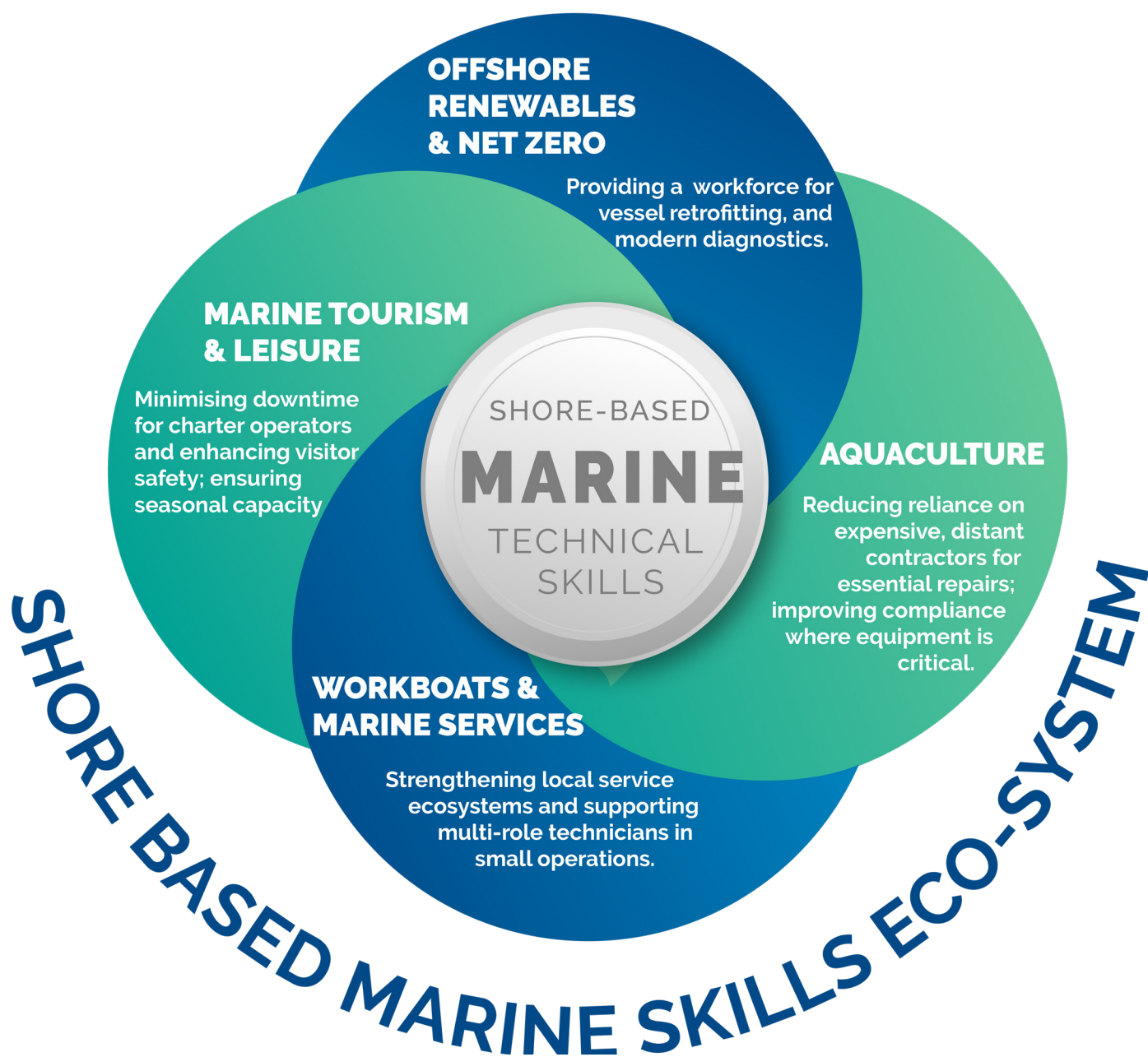
**The priority now
is not further
diagnosis, but
coordinated delivery**



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The views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of Crown Estate Scotland.

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