

Northern Skills Network Launch Conference – #NSNLaunch2020



On 13th February 2020, the NSN was officially launched with a conference held in Leeds. The conference was attended by over 130 people representing training organisations, colleges, universities, stakeholders, Government officials and sector support companies.

The conference was opened by Mike Smith, OBE, NSN Chair who presented the Networks key aims, vision and direction as well as playing the first showing of our showreel (see home page). Mike in addition announced the first NSN strategic partnership with NCFE, also the conference headline sponsor.

Roger Marsh, OBE, Chair of Leeds City Region Enterprise Partnership and NP 11 gave the opening address and discussed the importance of upskilling our economy to ensure UK productivity is improved. He also said skills should be seen in no different way than any central supply chain and its time for the government to take action. Roger informed the conference that *“if the north was a country in its own right, it would be in the top 25 countries in economic terms”* An impressive fact!

The next speaker was Henri Murison, Director of Northern Powerhouse Partnership, who gave an impressive, passionate and expressive presentation about the purpose of the Northern Powerhouse *“to close the North / South divide”* and explained the north has the opportunity to lead the next industrial revolution not to just follow it and that we ALL have a responsibility to deal with and sort the skills challenges of the North. Henri went on to say *“The education secretaries have had decades to close the gap in skills between the north and south and you’ve run out of time, it’s time to give control of skills to the north”*

Following the break, we heard from Sian Wilson, Executive Director, NCFE discussing the partnership with NSN and our plans to complete skills development & research across the North as well as urging the delegates to pledge support for NCFE’s Fully Functional & support for level 2 campaigns. More details can be found at - <https://www.ncfe.org.uk/fully-functional/pledge-your-support-for-fullyfunctional>

Up next was Chris Morgan, Deputy Director of Technical Education, Commercial, IfATE, who provided an update on the latest T-Level development and informed the room that wave 4 of the programme will be ready to go later this year.

Conference delegates then had the opportunity to ask questions to all the morning speakers, including Mark Dawe CEO of AELP who joined the panel. Much of the conversation was dedicated to the level 2 & degree level debate and the reality of progression opportunities for T-Levels.

Following the lunch break, 4 workshops were held – covering themes including ETF sector support opportunities, ESFA subcontracting, T-level professional development for Governors & NCFE Future skills needs.

Following the workshops, we heard from 2 further speakers – Chris Jones, HMI & Specialist advisor for Apprenticeships, Ofsted and Anthony Knowles, ESFA Head of National Accounts (North).

Chris presented the latest updated on the new Education Inspection Framework and the concerns that Ofsted has on the declining picture of apprenticeship starts for young people and at level 2, with higher & degree apprenticeship seeing a rise of 102% and in management apprenticeships. When discussing this issue relating to the ladder of opportunity, Chris said he had real questions about social mobility. Anyone who is talking about the ladder of opportunity *“is actually presenting us with a system where the first two rungs have been removed”*. Jones also stated that Higher level does not equal higher quality *“A good strong level 2 can be just as good, as challenging for learners as those apprentices at level 7”*

The final speaker of the day Anthony Knowles explained he works mainly with large employers and the conference today has been a great opportunity for him to hear from training organisations. Anthony thanked everyone for their hard work during National Apprenticeship Week, last week and said he hasn't seen anything like it before - the impact has been huge. He went on to say that he made no apologies for some providers being removed from the apprenticeship market, stating *“Some providers have fallen by the sword because they weren't delivering the right sort of things”*. Anthony then discussed apprenticeship starts in terms of working population across the country and said in the North we are punching above our weight in terms of starts. He stated *“We are the northern apprenticeship powerhouse. We are taking more out of the pot than the south east and it's our job to keep doing that”*.

The conference closed with Mike Smith thanking the exhibitors, sponsors and networks for supporting the conference.

All in all it was a great day, with really positive feedback on the number of informative, relevant and engaging speakers present

THANK YOU EVERYONE!