

NORTHERN SKILLS NETWORK (NSN) – ONE YEAR ON

It has been a year since NSN officially launched, with our first northern skills conference. It was an extremely well attended and positive event, establishing the network as a key voice for skills policy and development across the North.

The conference also launched NSN's first strategic partner, NCFE who have continued to work with the board of directors over the past year to further develop the networks presence.

The past year for NSN, much like everyone else, has been different to what we expected and with the regional networks rightly & importantly concentrating on supporting their local area providers and provision, the NSN activities planned for the year had to be rescheduled.

Although we could not complete as much of the work we wanted, we still maintained constant communication across the member networks and since March 2020, the NSN have held weekly meetings to share developments, responses, impacts and support for their regional network colleagues, to have a stronger voice when responding to COVID-19 across the North.

Through the first lockdown the NSN board developed a survey to gather as much impact data as possible across the members so this could be shared with officials, ESFA and stakeholders. This survey approach has continued throughout 2020 & is providing valuable insights into provider and employer responses and behaviors, allowing for the networks to support their members in the most effective way and leading to improved conversations with the local area authorities (LEP, CA's, MCA's).

The response of the regional networks throughout the pandemic & into 2021, with the support from the Northern Skills Network, has further cemented the relationships locally between skills providers & their LEP (CA, MCA) area and they are becoming, if not already, the first point of call when discussing skills needs, COVID-19 recovery and future developments.

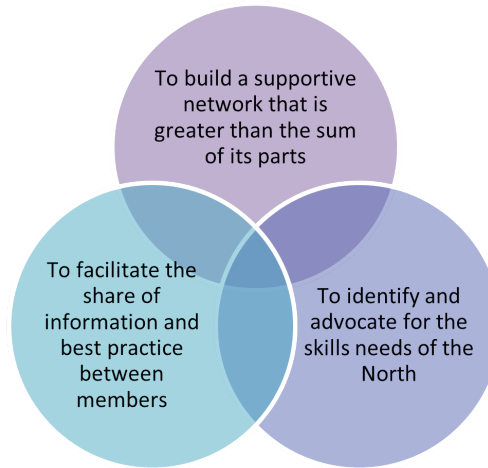
The Northern Skills Network has also further developed its presence as the voice for skills across the North, by having ongoing dialogue with NP11, ESFA Northern colleagues and attending each of the regional network meetings to discuss, share & raise awareness of the work being completed by the partnership on their behalf.

In November 2020 we held our first board strategy day and identified what had gone well over the year, where we would have liked to see improvements and our plans for the year ahead. Our projects and priorities for 2021 and beyond are extremely important to the network and our members and have led to a re-defined purpose and objective and a re-energized Northern Skills Network.



NSN Purpose

"To contribute to the improvement of education & skills across the north of England through advocacy, engagement and action."



What has gone well:

- Information sharing across the networks - particularly practical tips, identification of issues and the sharing of best practice
- Increased profile with key stakeholders (e.g. ESFA and NP11), in particular where dialogue at NSN Board meetings has led to direct engagement & action
- Growing consistency in having a 'single voice' for Northern skills
- The launch event – feedback & response extremely positive
- Collaborative training (on issues such as mental health)

2021 Priorities & projects (more details on each of these areas will be available from on the NSN website soon)

- ITP Value & Perception
- FE White Paper Response & call to action
- Digital poverty
- Green Economy & Green Skills
- SME Engagement & meeting ESFA priorities
- Apprenticeship future improvement support
- Northern Levy transfer support & NPH partners programme
- Review & analyze LEP / Chamber skills strategies across the North

We will also be arranging our next Northern Skills Summit later this year.

Mike Smith OBE, NSN Chair said:

"More than ever, the work of the NSN will prove crucial in supporting the government's 'levelling up' agenda, by promoting skills development across the North and helping to influence the region's economic recovery as we start to come out of the pandemic.

NSN's members already make a significant economic contribution in their own right and together support tens of thousands of employers across the North, to fulfil their recruitment and skills needs, by delivering high quality Traineeships, Apprenticeships and technical qualifications.

As employers across the North reshape their business models to adapt to new markets and opportunities presented by the need for more sustainable, digitally connected, and green industries, I am confident that NSN and its members will be at the forefront in ensuring that they can fulfill all of their talent needs."