



Northern Skills Network 2023 Manifesto

A dynamic strategic position of the Northern Skills Network

The aim of this manifesto is to take action across our identified priorities that lead to positive change. Action may include gathering real time evidence to underpin place-based responses to critical issues and challenges faced by our members, sharing practice and developments in order to understand a unified northern skills need, and using our united voice to advocate for change.

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NSN Achievements



Represented NSN:

- With key stakeholders and policy makers at ongoing and regular conversations e.g. DfE, Ofsted, AoC & AELP - recognising the value and contribution of regional networks
- At the Northern Skills Taskforce of the Northern Powerhouse Partnership (NPP)
- At the Northern Powerhouse Education, Employment and Skills Summit



- Represented member's views on national consultations
- Represented the voice of providers across the north – engaging and influencing stakeholders and policy makers
- Gathered intel and on the ground evidence via round tables and surveys
- Contributed to AELP's report - "Excellence for learners, value for employers - How independent training providers can deliver the workforce of the future"



In 2022, we held:

- A well-attended Skills Across the North Conference that gave clear steer and direction for the future of skills across the North - [view conference report](#)
- Our first "Green Skills Across the North" Online Conference



- Two of our networks are leading the DfE Engaging SMEs in Apprenticeships project
 - A number of our networks are supporting the Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs)
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Foreword



The Northern Skills Network (NSN), which represents over 350 education & skills providers across the North of England, welcomed the launch of the Government's Levelling up White Paper and supports its ambition to ensure that no region or community is left behind.

The NSN and the 8 regional skills networks that make up the partnership are committed to ensuring the challenge & opportunity raised within the white paper can be effectively fulfilled and we welcome the recognition that, whilst talent is spread equally across our country, opportunity is not. Levelling up is a mission to challenge, and change that unfairness. Levelling up means giving everyone the opportunity to flourish.

Across the North we are inherently aware of the critical need to improve productivity, boost economic growth, encourage innovation, create good jobs, enhance educational attainment, and renovate the social and cultural fabric of our northern regions to ensure equality in our nation's opportunity & success. We must highlight that skills development could and should be a much higher priority if we ever want to witness true equality across our country. This includes equal access to funding and informed knowledge of the unique needs and potential across the different regions within the North.

We are clear in the need to better align skills, education and health, and identify place-based investment in ensuring these services can be access by all who require them. The economic prize from levelling up is potentially enormous. If underperforming places were levelled up towards the UK average, unlocking their potential, this could boost aggregate UK GDP by tens of billions of pounds each year. Levelling up skills, health, education and wellbeing would deliver similarly sized benefits – A clear NSN priority is to keep a keen eye on the Government's action in this area and we will work with our regional networks to be a key partner in bringing this ambition to life.

The members of the NSN regional networks are primed to support the continued recognition of gaining greater employer involvement in skills programmes and we already work with the local skills improvement plan pilot areas to gain valuable insights into the current thinking around this. Our request to support this area of levelling up is to ensure local & national colleagues recognise the real face of the skills system, which is far greater than only handful of college & university institutions in local areas. It includes a vast array of high quality, responsive & flexible independent training providers, as well as community and voluntary providers. Through our wide membership based across the North including ITP, FE Colleges, HE, Adult & Community learning and 3rd sector our members have a focus on supporting local businesses, delivering skills provision to match local labour market need and support those furthest from the labour market.

The Northern Skills Network is uniquely positioned to promote and deliver skills training and will work to ensure the places, people & businesses we support across the North benefit from Government policy and the practice set out.

Anne Gornall MBE
Northern Skills Network Co-Chair
Executive Director | GMLPN

Alex Miles
Northern Skills Network Co-Chair
Managing Director | YLP

Acknowledgements



Henri Murison
Director | Northern
Powerhouse Partnership
Programme

"We welcome the development of the Northern Skills Network manifesto for 2023, and look forward to working with the team on the important priorities that NSN have identified. This is a critical time for the northern skills agenda, with the upcoming refresh of the Northern Powerhouse Independent Economic Review set to identify what the needs of a growing, more productive economy will be in terms of increasing the availability of higher level skills in particular, gained by those taking a wide variety of progression routes. We support all of the work NSN do all year round to ensure that the voices of northern skills providers are heard across these and other debates, and are grateful for the work NSN do in highlighting not just the challenges, but also the opportunities in the North of England – for learning providers, businesses and young people and those wishing to retrain."

"The manifesto of the Northern Skills Network is important for so many reasons, but not least the significant part it will play in making the levelling up agenda a reality, helping to rebalance the UK economy. There continues to be seismic shifts in the economic landscape and regional labour markets, and while the Government is making important strides to make things better across the country, we need to address the skills supply side in the north, ensuring it provides opportunities for northern people. Independent Training Providers are an important part of that solution as they are unequivocally placed to understand the local economy, towns and cities, people and employers. They know their communities and have the agility and responsiveness to meet their specific needs and to deliver a highly skilled workforce that meets the needs of businesses. Through the Northern Skills Network, they are able to come together and work in a cohesive way to provide the diverse skills needed to address a challenging economy and labour market but importantly, to help both people and businesses to realise their untapped potential."



David Gallagher
CEO | NCFE

The Northern Skills Context

The NSN and the regional skills networks that make up the partnership are committed to ensuring that existing and emerging challenges faced by our sector and members are collectively minimised for the benefit of learners, employers and related skills and post-16 education. We are also committed to showcasing the opportunities, promoting our members offer including Apprenticeships, Adult Education and Community Learning - and ensuring skills across the North are well positioned to meet businesses skills gaps and grow our economy.

We have drawn our priorities and set the context of our manifesto based on a number of key documents & events from 2022, including:


- NSN Skills for the North Conference
- NSN Green Skills Conference
- Ofsted Annual Report
- Ofsted Research on Education Recovery
- NSN Levelling up paper
- NPP Regional Rebalancing Report

Challenges facing education that originated through the pandemic have become even greater in scale as we have emerged and continued to offer quality education services. NSN welcomed and supports Ofsted's Research and analysis on Education recovery in further education and skills providers: spring 2022, highlighting the issues we faced then, and continue to be in crisis now (2023).

It was also highlighted in the Ofsted (December 2022) annual report, that the challenges in FE are not set to diminish any time soon and there is more we collectively need to address to ensure our sector remains high quality and impactful. We see the role of the NSN being pivotal in supporting Ofsted's areas for development, to secure a stronger northern post 16 education system that positively contributes to levelling up.

Ofsted have highlighted that FE continues to struggle with the challenges from the disruption to learners' and apprentices' education in 2020/21, which include furlough and breaks in learning, and that is now transpiring in 2022/23 as missed or lost learning, learning gaps in knowledge, skills or behaviors and particularly in practical skills, English and mathematics.

The North of England has been hit hardest with apprenticeship reductions, highlighted by the recent DfE Engaging SMEs in Apprenticeships project, which only provided funding to encourage greater employer engagement in the local authority areas that have received the biggest fall in starts. As regional networks and NSN collectively, we have a responsibility to ensure our members provision and the curriculum offer is strong, high quality and promoted throughout the regions and critically that apprenticeship generally are better understood by key stakeholders, schools, parents, teachers and job centres.



In 2021, people starting an apprenticeship dropped by 19% compared to the previous 2 years.

The impact was worse in the North of England, with a drop of 22%.

Northern Coalition on Skills, 2021

NSN Priorities 2023

1 Future Skills Landscape - Challenges and Opportunities

This priority area allows the NSN to address any and all challenges that effect our regional networks, members and post-16 education system across the North. There are activities we know that will affect the sector and elements we are not yet aware of. The NSN responsibility is to identify, collaborate and respond on the key areas of affect. This priority includes, but not exclusive to:

- Apprenticeship Levy
- End Point Assessment
- Sustainable Development
- Accountability & Simplification
- Access Routes, Addressing Inequalities and Social Mobility e.g.
 - The removal of Traineeships - [Click here to view our current position statement on the removal of Traineeships](#)
 - 16-18 year olds being discouraged from taking up apprenticeships due to impact on parent/carers benefits

Skills and the future workforce is most commonly selected as one the top challenges for businesses across the North (45%), followed by inequalities (38%).



Northern Powerhouse Partnership (2022)

Opportunities

- Vital for LSIPs and Provider Networks to work together to identify skills demand and ensure appropriate supply
- Capacity building for all types of skills providers focused on net zero and digital to effectively embed within and future proof curricula
- Testing a new approach to engaging SMEs in apprenticeships
- A visible Northern Skills Campaign – promoting all types of vocational & technical education

2 Recruitment and Staffing Crisis in Further Education

The FE Further Education Sector is currently facing a staff recruitment and retention crisis, FE Providers are struggling to recruit new staff to the sector and retain them when in role. In order to deliver high quality vocational education and training, FE providers need high quality staff to be able to do so. There is also a need for greater alignment between industry and further education. NSN members are working on local initiatives to support the Further Education Sector to recruit and retain high quality staff. The best practice and learnings will be shared through NSN.

An initial survey conducted with NSN members in 2022 demonstrated:

- Every respondent was having problems with recruitment
- Each respondent had vacancies they are struggling to fill, with many of them over 6 months and in some cases over 12 months
- Whilst there is a national Department of Education's "Share your Skills" campaign to promote teaching in the FE sector, minimal benefit has been felt locally
- Recruitment issues were having impacts on staff caseloads – causing concerns over staff wellbeing
- Staff are leaving to go to work in industry, or to larger providers, for higher pay

NSN Priorities 2023 (cont...)

3 Demand for Skills Across the North - Employers, Young People & Adults

Across the North we are inherently aware of the critical need to improve productivity, boost economic growth, encourage innovation, create good jobs, enhance educational attainment, and renovate the social and cultural fabric of our northern regions to ensure equality in our nation's opportunity & success.

Two regional networks across the NSN are delivering the Engaging SMEs in the apprenticeship project, with funding from DfE. This project is designed to help inform SMEs of the benefits of employing apprentices and support them to do so. Knowledge gained from this project will be shared across the North.

Several NSN regional networks are supporting their Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) which have to truly represent the views, experience and problems that employers are facing when it comes to recruiting staff, as well as upskilling their existing workforce. There are a range of issues and collectively we know that things can improve. The LSIPs are the best way yet that these issues can be resolved. By working with both employers and providers together we can, with the use of data, intelligence and evidence, iron out the problems, identify the areas that need to be improved and plan ahead for the future.

Four of our regional networks deliver the DfE funded Apprenticeship Support and Knowledge (ASK) Programme, which provides impartial apprenticeship and T Level information to students in years 10-13, teachers and parents in schools and colleges across the North.

- Too many young people are vocationally undecided & confused
- The apprenticeship recruitment process is too complex
- Adult education accounts for 3% of total education budget – currently employers and adults are spending a tiny fraction of what is needed to meet the growing skills gaps

Feedback from DfE Youth Engagement Group & CBI Head of Skills



80% of the 2030 workforce are in work – so upskilling & reskilling is imperative

Industrial Skills Council (2019)

4 Advocate, Exchange and Meet

The NSN will lead, utilising regional networks and partners, in a series of policy pieces as set by the board, covering key priorities and addressing skills needs, gaps, analysis and developments to ensure our network & its members are a key partner in developing & influencing skills for the North. We are delighted to join the Northern Powerhouse Partnership, Northern Skills Taskforce to ensure the training provider community across the Northern Powerhouse is a critical ally in the work they do to support apprenticeships, and the wider vocational skills agenda. We also look forward to continue growing our relationship with strategic partner, NCFE, and working collaboratively to arrive at solutions which will benefit our member providers, employers and the wider FE landscape.

We aim to host an online Green Conference in the Summer of 2023 and a Northern Skills Network face to face conference in the Autumn of 2023.