



# Northern Skills Network 2024 Manifesto

A dynamic strategic position of the Northern Skills Network

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## NSN Achievements



### Represented NSN:

- With stakeholders and policy makers at ongoing and regular conversations e.g. DfE, IfATE, Ofsted, AOC & AELP – recognising the value and contribution of regional networks
- The voice of providers across the north – engaging and influencing stakeholders and policy makers



### In 2023, we held:

- A well-attended Skills Across the North Conference in 2023, with the Skills Minister Robert Halfon, that gave clear steer and direction for the future of skills across the North and helped shape the direction of our manifesto for 2024
- Our 2nd “Green Skills Across the North” Online Conference, which showcased members from across the different regions of the North on their developments with greening up the curriculum
- Roundtable discussions and sharing’s from consultations, events, surveys and member roundtables e.g. FE Recruitment, Green Skills, EPA, Accountability Framework



- ASK Analysis report to analyse school engagement across the North – 4 networks delivering
- LSIP & LSIF representation at regional level and pan-Northern analysis



- Received our first pan-Northern grant project ‘Championing sustainability through Apprenticeships’, ETF funded, delivered by the regional networks

# Foreword



As we enter 2024, both chairs are committed to continue the development of the NSN, the northern voice and the skills agenda.

The NSN represents over 350 education & skills providers across the North of England, through its 8 regional skills networks and as a partnership our aim is to ensure the policy developments are shared, the challenges & opportunities across FE & skills are raised & discussed and a pan-Northern response and consensus is developed.

We recognise 2024 will bring challenges and opportunities for the FE Sector including a General Election, further devolution of Northern areas, futureproofing provider sustainability and protecting the skills offer. Levelling up will continue to be our core mission... to challenge, and change, celebrate, showcase, and ensure people, places and business in the North have 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 & 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 and 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 great 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 the wide membership based across the North including ITP, FE Colleges, HE, Adult & Community learning and VCSE sector our members have a focus on supporting local businesses and 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 advocate and influence ... We will work to ensure the people, places & businesses we support across the North benefit from Government policy and the practice set out.

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

Nina Dixon  
**Northern Skills Network Co-Chair**  
Forum Manager | Lancashire WBL Executive Forum

# The Northern Skills Network

## Values & Priorities

### Values



**Access & Inclusion**



**Careers for All**



**People, Places & Businesses**

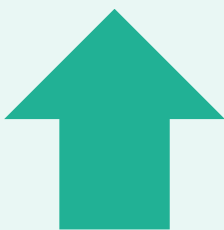
### Priorities



**Future Skills Landscape**



**Future Proofing the Provider Base**



**Demand for Skills across the North**



**Advocate, Exchange & Meet**

# The Northern Skills Context

The NSN and the 8 regional provider 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 post-16 offer - and ensuring people, places and businesses across the North are well positioned to meet 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 2023, including:

- NSN Skills for the North Conference
- NSN Green Skills Conference
- DfE funded LSIP reports across the Northern regions
- Next steps for careers guidance in England
- Ofsted annual report

In the annual Ofsted report 22/23 they identified that overall apprenticeship starts have decreased in 2022/23, with a similar pattern of declines in starts at levels 2 and 3 and increases at levels 4 to 7.69. They state that the reduction in starts comes from a variety reasons but many are narrowing their offer because of challenges recruiting and retaining high-quality trainers, or because costs have risen ahead of funding rates for some apprenticeships.

Ofsted found Most FE and skills providers are aware of the importance of an effective career guidance programme. However, many report that time and resource limit their careers programme.

Using feedback from our members and the above conferences and reports we will adapt our Areas of Focus so we can provide impactful support, guidance and advocacy.

We will keep a keen eye on the developing Political landscape, for example the pending general election and further northern devolution and ensure our skills perspective is developed using member consultation and network representation.

Whilst we have identified four core priorities, which have evolved from 2023, we also want to focus on an ethos that support Access, inclusion and Careers for all as across the North we feel these are the critical success factors that support Social mobility & levelling up.

We will continue to showcase and share our commitment to the skills sector across the north through our Comms strategy and continued brand development, to further position the Northern Skills Network as the voice for the North.

# NSN Priorities 2024

## 1 Future Skills Landscape - Challenges and Opportunities

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

### This includes:

- An upcoming General Election
- Further Devolution
- Apprenticeship Review
  - Apprenticeship Levy
  - EPA challenges - consistency and access
  - Functional Skills
- Access and Inclusion
  - Unintended consequences of policy decisions
  - Accessing Level 2 Provision
  - ESOL
  - Underrepresented Groups
- Nuances between the North & South of England

## 2 Future Proofing the Provider Base

The FE Further Education Sector is currently facing 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 FE Sector to recruit and retain high quality staff. The best practice and learnings will be shared through NSN.

### We aim to:

- Look at the future viability of training providers
- Support NSN members with Recruitment and Retention of quality provider staff
- Understand real workforce development needs of the FE and Skills Sector
- Build capacity of the Northern provider base to effectively embed and future proof curricula, including:
  - Industry Alignment
  - Sustainable Development and Net Zero
  - Digital and AI
- Share best practice across the North from initiative of NSN regional networks and their members

# NSN Priorities 2024<sub>(cont...)</sub>

## 3 Demand for Skills Across the North - People, Places and Businesses

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.

LSIPs and Provider Networks will continue to work together to identify skills demand and ensure appropriate supply that meets local and regional need. We will share these across the Northern regions to analyse trends, share with cross-regional providers and ensure we showcase the great work of skills programmes to meet economical and business growth.

The regional networks continue to commit to supporting school engagement, ensuring technical and vocational education is offered and accessible to all. We will work with delivering ASK & Provider access legislation activities across the regions, sharing good practice and supporting the knowledge growth of apprenticeships and post-16 education pathways.

Across the North we are also committed to promoting apprenticeship and skills based programmes to businesses. We are working with the DfE to support the SME Engagement priorities and the Northern Powerhouse skills taskforce.

The Northern Skills Network and its regional partners are uniquely positioned to support devolution and greater local skills based programmes and demand. We will complete provider consultation on greater devolved needs, the future of local skills provision and supporting MCA colleagues with the roll out of existing and new skills programmes

The Northern Skills Network strongly supports a Careers education system all ages, and is committed to further developing the local, regional and pan northern access to robust, impartial and developmental careers education. We are hosting the first Northern careers summit in 2024 in partnership with UCAS and the CEC, to cement our commitment and provide our members with tangible, useful resources and helpful guidance.

## 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 aim to:

- **Relaunch of the NSN website**
- **Continue to establish the NSN brand and position with key stakeholders**
- **Advocate for our members with key stakeholders to encourage positive change**
- **Host events and roundtables to promote pan Northern collaboration**
- **Encourage the re-formation of the Northern Skills Taskforce - to ensure the training provider community are a key ally of the Northern Powerhouse Partnership**