

### Northern Focused Skills

*To ensure that the UK skills system delivers an ambitious levelling-up programme, to help **people, places and businesses**, and maximise the North's overall contribution to UK PLC.*

#### Current challenges faced by the North include:

- **High levels of deprivation and long-term disadvantage heightened by the pandemic.** Multiple barriers need to be addressed to ensure young people are better supported. The Digital divide remains to be a barrier in areas of high deprivation and people may be digitally excluded for multiple reasons including not having access to the required infrastructure, and or devices, lack of skills, or lack of motivation to use technology.
- **Lack of provision for disadvantaged and under-represented groups.** Some allowances are being made to ensure apprenticeships are available to all, however this is not the case for every apprenticeship. Assessment practices should be revised to take into account each person as an individual. Functional Skills should be reviewed to remove barriers to achieving.
- **Apprenticeship numbers lower than pre-pandemic levels.** The apprenticeship minimum wage needs to be revised and government departments need to talk to each other to ensure that when a young person takes up an apprenticeship that their family does not lose any benefits and are then discouraged from taking up the opportunity because of the financial impact. Long term opportunities and career pathways could encourage young people into apprenticeships. However, with the lack of SME employers the numbers are unlikely to rise. The return of the employer incentives could encourage a larger proportion of employers to take on a 16-18 year old.
- **Level 2 and Access Routes minimised.** This leaves fewer opportunities for people to gain skills and to be provided with opportunities to experience different careers through experience of the workplace for example. A combined approach to ensure that young people are given a chance to shine and develop the right skills so they may prosper and achieve their lifelong career ambitions in their community.

### How will NSN help to meet these challenges?

We commit to the **identification of the regional challenges and issues** which prevent the North from achieving its full potential.

We will work in **partnership with our stakeholders** to share our challenges and raise the concerns of our regions to ensure the voice of the North is not only heard but acted upon and recognised as a vehicle for change.

We will provide an **evidence base for change** to ensure that the North can rise to the skills challenges and ensure that there are a wide range of opportunities to gain skills, upskill or reskill.

## Fit For Purpose Skills

*To ensure that the UK skills system continually evolves to meet the changing needs of **people, places and businesses**.*

### Current barriers to effective skills delivery include:

- **Funding levels** – reviews are too slow and there has not been enough reviews undertaken with unclear timelines.
- An **inflexible apprenticeship levy system** a sizeable unspent levy pot, a complete review of the Levy with an open and transparent look at the data and figures, combined with the under spend and the return to HMT. Levy needs to be more flexible with an emphasis on keeping unspent Levy in each region.
- **Recruitment and retention difficulties**, some sectors are now being heavily impacted upon therefore meaning that some providers will have to stop delivery. There needs to be a review of pay to address shortages and consider new ways to attract people into the sector, with attractive opportunities and paid closer to industry levels.
- **Inconsistent AEB procurement processes**. Many providers in the North lost existing contracts or had them significantly reduced.
- **Lack of EPAO availability**. Providers are experiencing long waiting times, lack of a clear and consistent approach from EPAO and rising costs.
- **Loss of EU Funding**. A number of areas in the North region having received EU funding in the past are now not under shared prosperity. This significantly reduces opportunities to help people into work.

## How will NSN help to remove these barriers?

We commit to **lobbying for the removal of significant barriers to effective skills delivery**.

Through our partners and members will **continue to share good practice in the North** in terms of recruitment and retention. We will continue to hold round tables to identify the gaps and collectively address the staffing crisis.

We will continue to **lobby and campaign the government** alongside our stakeholders to address the need for positive change, to ensure **people, places and businesses** are well placed in the future of skills.

## Future Skills Needs

*To ensure that the UK skills system equips **people, places and businesses** and communities with the necessary skills to tackle global challenges such as climate change, net zero and AI.*

### Current future skills development needs include:

- **Accelerated investment in skills** for the transition to **low carbon**, for construction, engineering, health and **digital skills**, including the use of AI.
- **Embedding of such skills in current apprenticeship Standards**, although there is a thread running through some standards this is not all and in order to promote discussion and awareness. This review should take priority otherwise we risk having some of our standards being outdated and not fit for purpose.
- **The risks and challenges of AI.** Broadly in Education this includes, Data Privacy, Cost and Access, Human interactions and support and Language and culture. But also **the opportunities that AI can bring to the skills sector**, including innovation and time saving.

## How will NSN help the development of future skills?

We commit to **future skills forecasting and development** through working in partnership with members, stakeholders, employers and educational establishments.

We will provide opportunities for members to take part in roundtables, webinars and projects to **highlight risks, challenges and opportunities, and ensure the voice of the North is heard.**

NSN **representation is key with stakeholders** ensuring that continued communication and participation aligns with our manifesto and vision for 2024.