



News Bulletin

LATEST EDITION

Prepared by colleagues of the
Northern Skills Network

www.northernskillsnetwork.co.uk

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Introduction

The Northern Skills Network (NSN) is a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to representing and advocating for training and education providers across the North of England. We work to amplify the voice of our members, ensuring that FE and skills remain at the forefront of regional and national policy discussions.

Focus North has been at the forefront of our efforts for several months now, serving as the primary hub for research, analysis, and reporting on various challenges related to Further Education and skills. This includes NEET rates, unemployment, devolution, careers, tutor shortages, trailblazer programs, and employment connectivity. By bringing together key stakeholders, policymakers, and industry experts, Focus North continues to inspire and drive substantial change in skills provision throughout the region.

This bulletin brings key updates on regional developments, funding opportunities, and upcoming events. We remain committed to ensuring that regional perspectives shape national conversations, and we look forward to working with all of you to strengthen education and training across the North.

We welcome your input, insights, and success stories. If you have updates to share or wish to be involved in our initiatives, please reach out—we'd love to feature your work in future bulletins.

Thank you for your continued support in shaping a stronger skills and employment landscape in the North.

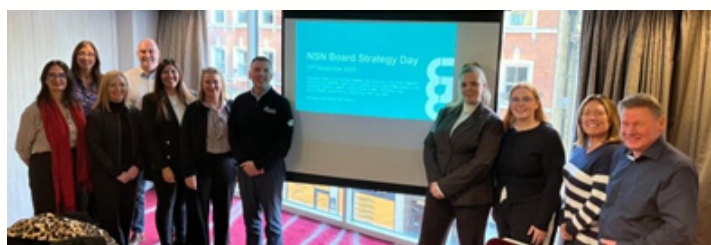
NSN Co-chairs

Alex Miles & Charlotte Jones

- **Green & Sustainable Development Showcase** – took place on the 30th September, bringing together different providers & organisations to share the work they are doing & their journey with greening up the curriculum & embedding sustainable development! Thank you to our speakers including, Education Training Foundation Heart of Yorkshire Education Group The Blair Project Dr Marilyn Comrie OBE Green Tech Innovator, Influencer DH Associates Limited

- **On the 13th November, we hosted our annual CEIAG Connect online event**, proudly sponsored by The Careers & Enterprise Company. We were delighted to welcome providers and key FE stakeholders from across the North of England to collaborate, share insight, and celebrate innovation in careers education.
 - **Our agenda included:**
 - Alison Sadler – an update on the support available from The CEC
 - Local Area Panel Discussion featuring Sophie Hope, Ian Iomas & Yvonne Emerson
 - Provider Practice Panel – insights from Ross Radford, Dean Coleman-Walker & Kirstie Battams on embedding CEIAG across provision and provider good practice
 - Alison Sadler & Alex Miles FIEP – exploring CEIAG through a quality lens
 - A huge thank you to all our speakers, attendees, and partners for contributing to such an engaging and insightful session!

- **November saw the NSN Board Strategy Day taking place in Leeds** The session was a great opportunity to align on our vision, reflect on progress, and set out our key priorities for the year ahead. We're excited for what's to come and confident that, together, we'll continue driving meaningful impact across the North of England. Here's to a strong, ambitious, and purpose-driven 2026 for NSN.



Focus North

This single, unified hub will drive forward critical discussions and action on skills development, employment, and education across the North.

ADDRESSING POLICY
& IMPACT REVIEWS

THOUGHT
LEADERSHIP



LOBBYING &
ADVOCACY

UNIFIED VOICE

Northern Skills Network Reach & Impact

www.northernskillsnetwork.co.uk/reachandimpact

PROVIDER REPRESENTATION

OVER 500 FE & SKILLS ORGANISATIONS REPRESENTED
PAN-NORTHERN

EVENTS & CONFERENCES

THE NORTHERN SKILLS NETWORKS HOLDS
CONFERENCES ANNUALLY
(INTERCHANGING ACROSS THE PENNINES
EVERY YEAR) FOR OUR MEMBERS AND OUR
MEMBERS' MEMBERS.

COMBINED AUTHORITY ALIGNMENT

THE NORTHERN SKILLS NETWORK MANIFESTO
OUTLINES STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AIMED AT
ENHANCING SKILLS DEVELOPMENT ACROSS THE
NORTH OF ENGLAND. THESE PRIORITIES ALIGN
CLOSELY WITH THE NORTHERN COMBINED
AUTHORITY'S OBJECTIVES.

SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT

THE APPRENTICESHIP SUPPORT & KNOWLEDGE FOR
SCHOOLS PROGRAMME (ASK), IS A NATIONAL
SCHEME. FOUR OF THE REGIONAL NSN NETWORKS
DELIVER ASK ACROSS THEIR RESPECTIVE REGIONS.

EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

THE CO-CHAIR NETWORKS OF THE NSN WERE BOTH
CONTRACTED AN SME ENGAGEMENT PROJECT FROM
THE DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION FROM OCTOBER
2022 - OCTOBER 2024.



Update from our Regional Networks





The B-Skill Commitment to a Greener Future

Partnering with Trees Not Tees for a Sustainable UK Our partnership with Trees Not Tees — an organisation combatting the climate crisis by planting trees and avoiding the environmental costs of t-shirt production.

B-Skill pledges to donate to Trees Not Tees for every apprentice onboarded, helping create a positive impact on the UK's environment — one tree at a time!

By joining the B-Skill Apprenticeship Academy, the apprentice not only invested in their career but also contributed to a greener planet.





North East Learning Providers (NELP) continues to stand as a strong and collaborative network supporting education, skills, and training across the region. Bringing together colleges, independent training providers, local authorities and awarding organisations. NELP works to help raise standards, share best practice, and champion high-quality learning opportunities for communities and employers throughout the North East.

A Fond Farewell and a Warm Welcome

After a couple of years of great leadership, Sue Outhwaite has now passed over her NELP responsibilities to Jo Gillette. Sue's contribution to the network has been nothing short of outstanding—her commitment, project management skills, and ability to bring providers together have left a lasting mark. She has done a fabulous job, strengthening the network, guiding members through challenges, and helping NELP remain a respected voice for skills development in the region.

Her shoes will not be easy to fill, but the transition marks an exciting new chapter.

Jo Gillette steps into the role with energy, experience, and a strong vision for the future. With a deep understanding of the sector and a passion for collaborative working, Jo is well-placed to continue the momentum. Members welcomed Jo at the membership conference held at the Britannia Hotel, Newcastle airport on 2nd October.

A Growing and Engaged Membership

The network represents a wide range of learning providers—from large FE colleges to community organisations, niche specialists, and local and national training companies with a local presence. This diversity ensures that members benefit from broad perspectives, shared expertise, and high-quality support.

Regular engagement keeps members informed about regional priorities, funding developments, policy changes, and opportunities for partnership work. The collaborative culture within the membership remains one of NELP's defining characteristics.

What's Coming Up for NELP

There is plenty on the horizon for NELP and its members. The next two meetings are:

- 3rd December at East Durham College, Peterlee Campus – focus on Ofsted requirements
- 17th March at Holiday Inn, Washington – focus on regional skills strategy and funding.

We have member spotlight features coming up so keep a look out on our social media sites!

For more information visit our website nelp.co.uk or email jo@nelp.co.uk.



TEES VALLEY
LEARNING PROVIDER NETWORK

Apprenticeship Link Launch

Following the end of the ASK Programme, TVLPN launched Apprenticeship Link in September. Apprenticeship Link is a dedicated apprenticeship engagement service, designed to support schools across the region in guiding students toward real post-16. Their aim is to bridge the gap between education and employment by delivering high-quality, up-to-date apprenticeship information and guidance (IAG). All activities are aligned with the Gatsby Benchmarks and meet Provider Access Legislation (PAL) compliance requirements. They offer structured support for careers leaders, teaching staff, students, and parents through expertly delivered workshops, resources and events.

TVLPN Apprenticeship Directory

The Tees Valley Combined Authority will be once again sponsoring their Apprenticeship leaflet. The TVLPN Apprenticeship leaflet is a guide showcasing the wide range of level 2 and level 3 apprenticeships offered by TVLPN members. Designed specifically for young people exploring their next steps after school, the leaflet highlights key sectors, training providers and career pathways available. It is distributed to school across the Tees Valley region, ensuring that students, parents/carers and teachers have a clear, accessible information about local apprenticeship opportunities.

TVLPN have launched a new Support group - AI & Digital Forum – focusing on innovation and AI in education. Other Themed peer support groups include: Safeguarding, Quality, Careers, Functional Skills. Their forums offer a space for members to come to together to discuss challenges and opportunities, support one another and the sharing of resources.



**Apprenticeship
Link**

Your schools bridge to
apprentice success

GMLPN Annual Report 24/25 - A Year in Summary

GMLPN has launched its 2024/25 Annual Report, highlighting a year of progress in strengthening skills, collaboration, and opportunities across Greater Manchester. The report showcases our work supporting providers through policy engagement, high-quality CPD, and a diverse programme of events, as well as our efforts to tackle youth disengagement and champion vocational and technical education. It also reflects on the continued growth of our network and the impact of partnerships across the city region. Looking ahead, the report outlines our priorities for the coming year and our commitment to further supporting learners, providers, and employers.

Read the full report: [GMLPN Annual Report](#)

View the summary video: [GMLPN - A Year in Summary - 24/25 - YouTube](#)

Launch of Youth Employment Exchange

We are pleased to launch the Youth Employment Exchange, in partnership with Gateway Qualifications, building on the recent GM NEET Position Paper ([Greater-Manchester-NEET-Position-Paper-September-2025.pdf](#)) and our shared commitment to improving outcomes for young people across Greater Manchester. The Exchange brings ITPs, FE Colleges, Community Providers, Local Authorities, the GMCA and other key stakeholders together to strengthen collaboration, share best practice, and develop practical solutions that support young people into education, employment and training. We look forward to continuing this joint effort to drive positive change across the city region.



GM Skills Awards Nominations

We're excited to announce the launch of the GM Skills Awards 2026, building on the success of our inaugural event in 2025 ([View the 2025 recap here](#)).

Nominations opened on 26th November across our wide-ranging categories celebrating excellence in FE & Skills from apprentices and learners, to employers, providers and sector partners. This is your opportunity to recognise outstanding contributions across Greater Manchester. Visit the link below to nominate someone deserving: [Award Categories](#) | [GM Skills Awards](#)

Campaign Collaboration

We're proud to support the national drive behind the [Get the Nation Learning Charter](#) - advocating lifelong learning for all ages and fostering skills, opportunity, and community growth. Alongside this, we've signed up to [Apprenticeships Work](#), championed by the Edge Foundation, which calls on SMEs to open up high-quality apprenticeship paths - vital for young people and crucial for levelling up local economies. Through both campaigns, we reinforce our commitment: to learning, inclusion, and real-world opportunity.

Looking Forward

Looking ahead, GMLPN is excited to transition to a Community Interest Company, strengthening our commitment to the sector and community. We will continue working closely with GMCC on LSIP Phase 2, including a webinar in December to engage members. In 2026, we celebrate our 25th birthday - a milestone reflecting a quarter-century of impact and collaboration. We remain dedicated to supporting our members, championing their voices, and driving positive change across Greater Manchester

Growing Support Services

YLP continues to expand and diversify its support offer for members through guidance, research, regional insights, and peer collaboration. This includes strengthening support for providers working with NEET learners.

The Leeds Post-16 Directory has been developed to address this NEET crises across Leeds, ensuring young people and providers have clear access to opportunities, pathways, and referral information - the search directory works alongside this.

Funding, Grants & Research

YLP is engaged in significant funded projects that support provider development and regional skills priorities, including:

- **WYCA Employer Research** – November to March, providing employer insight and supporting local skills planning.
- **CTEC Provider Directory** – November 2025 to December 2026, enhancing visibility and navigation of skills provision.
- **ITP Capacity Building Fund** – launching December 2025 for 12 months, supporting independent training provider resilience and development (with a 15% management fee).
- **WY Boosting Skills Pathways** – supporting improved access and progression across core skills routes.
- **Misogyny in Apprenticeships Research** – contributing evidence to address gender-based barriers and improve inclusion across apprenticeship programmes.

Collaborative work continues with WYCA, YNYCA, CTEC, the Community of Practice (CoP), and the National Skills Network (NSN) to ensure provider perspectives shape policy and investment.

Prison Support & Yorkshire-Wide Events

YLP is expanding its involvement with the regional prison estate, helping strengthen education access and delivery. A Yorkshire-wide event is in development to share best practice, connect providers, and align regional priorities across justice and skills sectors.

Strategic Partnerships

YLP continues to build strong, influential partnerships with local authorities, combined authorities, national networks, employer groups, and wider sector bodies, ensuring members are represented and well-positioned for future opportunities.



Update from our Northern Combined Authorities



A decade of good growth in Greater Manchester

Mayor Andy Burnham has launched a £1bn Greater Manchester Good Growth Fund to drive a decade of fair, widespread economic growth across all 10 boroughs.

The fund will unlock major regeneration projects, support key industries, create thousands of jobs, and ensure investment benefits are recycled back into local communities.

Burnham said Greater Manchester has grown strongly since devolution but needs a new model to tackle uneven development, struggling town centres, and low-paid work.

Stockport's public-backed regeneration was highlighted as the template. The plan includes 30 initial regeneration schemes, new Mayoral Development Corporations, and links to employment, housing, and skills initiatives.

Burnham urged the Government to support the strategy with infrastructure commitments, fiscal devolution (including a visitor levy), and greater powers over essential services like transport, energy, and housing.



READ MORE



The Great North mayors and leaders call on Chancellor to back North of England in the Budget

Northern mayors and leaders are urging the Chancellor to use the Autumn Budget to boost opportunity and growth across the North.

In a joint letter, The Great North calls for major investment in transport - especially delivering Northern Powerhouse Rail in full. This would include a new Liverpool-Manchester-Leeds line via a central Bradford station, key upgrades across Yorkshire and the North East, and electrification of routes such as Hull-Selby, which Hull and East Yorkshire Mayor Luke Campbell MBE says is essential for unlocking local growth.

The leaders are also calling for a new funding settlement with devolved, long-term business growth support, simplified local business services, and a stronger focus on entrepreneurship.

Their third ask is action on child poverty, including lifting the two-child benefit cap, which would take 100,000 Northern children out of poverty. Mayor Kim McGuinness said the North stands ready to deliver growth, jobs and opportunity if given the tools and investment.

[READ MORE](#)



Police award for ‘outstanding’ work to make women and girls safer on Liverpool City Region transport

Nikki Swanson, TravelSafe Partnership Manager at the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, has received the Police and Crime Commissioner’s Award for her exceptional work improving safety for women and girls on local transport.

Recognised at the Merseyside Police Community First Awards, Nikki was praised by PCC Emily Spurrell for her pivotal role in the Safer Streets Merseyside campaign, helping strengthen police presence, improve CCTV, promote reporting of concerns, and tackle sexual harassment across public transport.

Nikki has also championed the Domestic Abuse Workplace Champion Scheme, introduced new staff policies, and supported Safe Spaces at transport hubs.

She said the award was an “incredible honour” and credited colleagues and partners for their shared commitment to creating a safer, more inclusive transport network.



[READ MORE](#)



Mayor backs North East business in Japan

North East Mayor Kim McGuinness is backing regional businesses during her first trade mission to Japan, meeting major firms including Hitachi, Nissan, Tokyo Gas, and others in green energy, shipping, solar tech, gaming and music.

The Mayor has been promoting North East companies such as solar innovator Power Roll and maritime insurer North Standard, helping connect them with Japanese investors.

She announced two new deals with Hitachi: one to support a zero-emission bus network within the next decade, and another to create a green energy hub with the Port of Tyne.

Tokyo Gas is exploring investment in Power Roll's next-generation solar technology, while NorthStandard highlighted the North East's global role in maritime trade.

Regional business leaders say the mission is helping attract investment, open new markets, and strengthen the North East's reputation in green energy, advanced manufacturing and shipping.



READ MORE



£1.6 million boost for walking, wheeling and cycling in South Yorkshire

South Yorkshire leaders have approved £1.64 million for new walking, wheeling and cycling schemes, delivering safer streets, better crossings and improved routes across Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham and Sheffield.

Mayor Oliver Coppard said the investment will help create healthier, safer neighbourhoods and give people more choice in how they travel. The funding will deliver nine projects, including school-route improvements in Barnsley, route upgrades in Doncaster, pedestrian improvements in Rotherham, and a new crossing plus a permanent School Street in Sheffield.

Active Lives Commissioner Ed Clancy OBE said the goal is to ensure everyone feels safe and confident to walk, wheel or cycle, with high-quality routes that remove barriers to active travel.

The programme is funded by Active Travel England and will be completed by April 2027.



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TEES VALLEY

Start-Ups Get Focussed Advice as Popular Lab Programme Builds Momentum

Twenty-four founders have joined the latest cohort of the Tees Valley Labs Stable programme – a six-month incubator funded by the Tees Valley Mayor and Combined Authority to help start-ups move from early ideas to market traction.

Participants include innovators such as Claire Budge, creator of The Orbitor multi-sport ball launcher; Ajibola Agbaje, founder of hyperlocal social app Japaflex; Ryan Watson of pickleball brand Voodink; and chemist Lynn Chikosha, developing sustainable coatings for the wind energy sector.

Claire said the programme's support is "second to none," adding: "For the first time, I think it's going to become a reality." Ajibola said the Stable "opens your eyes to things you would not naturally think about," while Lynn said it has given her business "structure" for the next six months.

The Stable offers founders expert mentorship, workspace at FLOK, and grants of up to £2,200 a month, with a £4,800 top-up on completion. Run by Alt Labs, it sits alongside The Forge accelerator, with both programmes supporting more than 30 Tees Valley businesses so far.

Tees Valley Mayor Ben Houchen said: "Our job is to give local people the backing, funding and expert support they need to grow and thrive – and it's fantastic to see the difference Tees Valley Labs is making."

Applications are now closed, but businesses can register interest for future support.

READ MORE





West
Yorkshire
Combined
Authority

Mayor & NHS Leaders kickstart £37 million plan for Healthy Working Life

West Yorkshire Mayor Tracy Brabin will today urge the Government to give UK public service broadcasters stronger national rules and support so they can better represent working-class and Northern communities.

Speaking alongside senior industry leaders, she will argue that improved representation is vital to maintaining trust in public service broadcasting and to accelerating creative industry growth outside London. Her comments follow the launch of the Great North Creative, a partnership between Northern Mayors, broadcasters and industry bodies focused on fairer representation and regional growth.

Mayor Brabin will describe public service broadcasters as the “backbone” of the UK’s creative strength, but warn that around 70% of the industry remains concentrated in London and the South East. She will say empowering broadcasters to invest more widely is essential to addressing this imbalance.

Brabin will stress that genuine representation means creating meaningful opportunities for people from a range of backgrounds on and off screen- not treating diversity as a “tick-box exercise.”

She will say:

“Our public service broadcasters are the backbone of Britain’s creative strength... But if we want a creative sector that truly reflects the whole country, we must ensure that public service broadcasters do more, because too much of the industry is still concentrated in London and the South East.”

She will call for clearer regional requirements, updated rules, and tax changes aligned with the Government’s Modern Industrial Strategy to give broadcasters the certainty to invest beyond London.

The Mayor will also highlight the essential role of public service broadcasters in supporting local democracy and high-quality local journalism, adding that the BBC’s new leadership offers “an opportunity to demonstrate how a modern public broadcaster can serve every community, including those across the North.”

READ MORE





YORK
& NORTH
YORKSHIRE
COMBINED AUTHORITY

DAVID
SKAITH
MAYOR

New £10,000 Grants As Businesses Set Out On Export Missions

Businesses preparing trade missions to Germany, Dubai, Hong Kong and New York are encouraging others to apply for York and North Yorkshire's Get Exporting fund, which reopened for applications this week.

The scheme offers grants of up to £10,000 to support trips to international trade shows or marketing in new global markets. So far, it has backed 43 businesses with almost £360,000 in support, following export roadshows that reached more than 100 firms across the region.

Pickering-based If Cardboard Creations will use its grant to exhibit at the world-leading Ambiente trade show in Germany. Sales director Stephen Mumford said the support gives the company "confidence to take these opportunities" and will help create new rural jobs as exports grow.

Thirsk furniture maker Treske used its grant to strengthen networks in Hong Kong and Melbourne after completing a major project at St Peter's Seafarers' Church. Managing director Justin Bartlett said the funding helped showcase their craftsmanship to senior church leaders from around the world.

The Get Exporting fund sits within the wider Business Innovation Fund, which includes programmes for sector innovation, spin-outs, start-ups, and upcoming 'Great Ideas' and 'Get Funded' schemes. It is part of a broader package launched by Mayor David Skaith, including challenge funds for high streets, carbon reduction and skills. Jennifer Wood, Chair of the Business Board, urged more firms to apply, saying exporting is "key to the economic success of York and North Yorkshire" and brings rewards that "are more than worth the effort."

READ MORE





Upcoming Events from our Regional Networks





Upcoming Cheshire & Warrington Learning Provider Network meetings

FEBRUARY 2026 CWLPNN
NETWORK MEETING

Feb 11 from 9:30am to 1:30pm
GMT - HM Prison Thorn Cross

Upcoming Greater Manchester Learning Provider Network Meetings

MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING EXCHANGE

4 DECEMBER 2025

10:00 AM - 12:00 PM

ONLINE EVENT

**GM MATHS AMBASSADOR EXCHANGE – FRIDAY 5TH
DECEMBER, HOSTED BY ROCHDALE TRAINING**

**FOUNDATION APPRENTICESHIPS ROUNDTABLE –
TUESDAY 9TH DECEMBER, ONLINE**

**INTRODUCING THE LSIP PHASE 2 WEBINAR, IN
PARTNERSHIP WITH GMCC, THURSDAY 11TH
DECEMBER, ONLINE**

**POST 16- LEVEL 3 AND BELOW CONSULTATION
ROUNDTABLE – TUESDAY 16TH DECEMBER, ONLINE**



North East
Learning
Providers

Upcoming North East Learning Providers meetings

The background image shows a woman in a dark blazer speaking into a microphone on a stage. In the foreground, the backs of several audience members' heads are visible, with many of their hands raised in the air, suggesting an interactive session or a Q&A period.

**NELP DECEMBER MEMBER'S
MEETING**
DEC 3 FROM 8:30AM TO 11AM
GMT
EAST DURHAM COLLEGE

Upcoming South Yorkshire Provider Network meetings

A man in a brown and white sweater is smiling and presenting to a group of people seated at a table. A presentation screen behind him displays the number '01' and the text 'Your fonts, logos, colors and images form a visual identity for your brand.'

**AI & TECH CONFERENCE, 22ND
OCTOBER, TIME & LOCATION TBD**

Upcoming Yorkshire Learning Providers meetings

YLP OFSTED TOOLKIT WEBINAR - L&M FOCUS - ONLINE EVENT
DEC 1 FROM 11AM TO 12PM GMT

END OF YEAR ROUNDUP CONFERENCE - YLP - HOLY TRINITY
BOAR LANE - DEC 3 FROM 9:30AM TO 1PM GMT

YLP OFSTED TOOLKIT WEBINAR - INCLUSION FOCUS - ONLINE
EVENT DEC 9 FROM 12:30PM TO 1:30PM GMT

STUDY PROGRAMME ROUNDTABLE - SAFEGUARDING, WELL-
BEING & PSHE YLP - LOCATION TBD
JAN 27 FROM 10AM TO 12PM GMT

TRAUMA INFORMED AND RESTORATIVE PRACTICE WORKSHOP
YLP - LEEDS CITY COLLEGE - PRINTWORKS CAMPUS FEB 17 FROM
9:30AM TO 12PM GMT



Contact Us!

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