

Get Britain Growing:
North West Conference



***Sprint Two
Workshop Report:***
**Building Skills,
Building Britain**

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Contents

Foreword	2
Attendees	4
Executive Summary	5
Government and Industry Recommendations	8
Building Skills, Building Britain	9
Strategic Enablers: What Needs to Change on a National Stage	10
Examples of Innovation	12
Draft Implementation Strategy: Pathways to a Better Britain	14
Implementation Plan	16
Conclusion	18
About Us	19



Patrick Hurley MP addressing attendees at the North West Conference

Foreword

The North West's future is increasingly bright. As MP for Southport, my ambitions for the town and the wider region know no bounds, and the same is true of my colleagues. The North West is in a strong place, and also at a tipping point – poised on the brink of situating ourselves as a national leader in artificial intelligence (AI) and technology.

But the UK is facing significant regional inequalities. In some areas, the North West has fallen far behind London and the South East. The ambition to level up the country, while not always enacted or delivered by politicians, has always been there, and it is now more important than ever.

The *Get Britain Growing: North West Conference* skills sprint workshop brought together educators, employers, and regional leaders to deliberate over one of the most urgent questions facing the North West's economy: how can skills provision keep pace with innovation, industry transformation, and local growth ambitions?

Under the theme *Building Skills, Building Britain*, participants joined an insightful discussion, exploring how to align education, training, and business investment to create a workforce capable of meeting the North West's evolving needs – from low-carbon construction and retrofitting to digital technologies and advanced manufacturing.

Opening the session, I reminded participants that the sprint methodology is designed to move from diagnosis to action. Each sprint is not simply a forum for identifying challenges but a space to co-design practical, locally driven solutions that can inform regional strategy, employer practice, and national skills policy. The emphasis is on pragmatism, working through and reaching productive solutions to issues raised.

I was pleased to help convene this conversation, which acknowledged that skills are the connective tissue between innovation and opportunity. Across the North West, businesses are striving to adopt new technologies while education providers face constraints in adapting curricula quickly enough to meet demand. Participants identified a shared need for a more agile system, linking employers, colleges, and learners through clear, trusted pathways.

I am also interested in the Government's strategy around devolution and how that could feed into improving skills and boosting economic growth. Strategic authorities are increasingly paving the way for to embed far more power than the county council in Lancashire currently has, for instance. Delegating leadership and development to smaller authorities could cut bureaucracy and more rapidly supercharge growth. Other plans in the works that could bring about a similar effect include those to increase the power and capacity of the current metro mayors in the North West.

A recurring theme was the gap between traditional further education models and the realities of modern industry. Outdated curricula and fragmented funding mechanisms were criticised for being obstructive and major barriers to innovation. Participants called for a new approach to curriculum design, suggesting an increased focus on emerging technologies, green skills, and the interdisciplinary nature of future work. The conversation also highlighted cultural barriers: the need to reframe apprenticeships, vocational training, and adult reskilling as routes of equal value to academic progression.

One area broached in our panel discussion was transport and mobility. A real game changer in this realm of growth would be to transform links, not just between Liverpool and Manchester, but also across the smaller conurbations, linking up the rural with urban. Enhanced mobility such as this can generate huge growth, increasing access for free and ready movement around the region, which would feed back into the economy through employment, the more broad, balanced spread of skills, and education.

The workshop concluded with the agreement that skills are infrastructure. As technology reshapes each and every industry, the North West's competitiveness will depend on its ability to connect learning with labour market need, empower people at every stage of their careers and ensure that opportunity and innovation grow together. Convening and speaking at this skills sprint was an affirming, positive experience, and sharing ideas with like-minded thinkers – all of whom are united in the pursuit of collaborative, equal, and sustainable growth – bodes very well for the region's future.

Patrick Hurley MP
Member of Parliament for Southport
Chair, Social, Cooperative,
and Community Economy





Attendees at the workshop included representatives from the NOCN Group

Executive Summary

The *Get Britain Growing: North West Conference*, held on 11th September 2025 in Liverpool, brought together parliamentarians, regional leaders, academics, investors, and industry experts to discuss strategies for driving sustainable growth across the North West.

Keynote speakers included Mayor of the Liverpool City Region, Steve Rotheram, and Chair of the Energy Security and Net Zero Select Committee, Bill Esterson MP, who shared insights on regional investment, clean energy, and innovation.

Through a series of keynote addresses, panel discussions, and interactive sprint workshops, the conference promoted collaboration between public, private, and academic partners, highlighting practical, forward-looking solutions to unlock the North West's full economic potential.

This workshop explored how to develop the skills, systems, and local leadership needed to address the UK's workforce challenges and support economic growth. With demand rising across various sectors – from construction and housing to green technology and digital infrastructure – the session focused on how local actors could collaborate to shape a more agile, inclusive, and responsive skills system.

Discussion centred on practical barriers to skills delivery, including fragmented funding, variable recognition of qualifications, and misalignment between employer demand and training provision. Participants also considered the potential of innovations such as skills passports, modular learning, and devolved commissioning to create more place-based, employer-led solutions.

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NOCN Group is an international charity which delivers future-fit skills solutions with social impact for Colleges, training providers, employers and individuals.

As a truly independent, charitable organisation, NOCN Group seeks to influence policy and champion lifelong, vocational learning. Their aim is to enable people to reach their potential and organisations to thrive for improved productivity, sustainability, social mobility, and inclusivity. Their industry and subject matter experts provide a high quality, robust and responsive service, adapting to the ever-evolving needs of their customers and stakeholders.

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