

Shaping the Future of the North East

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In a recent roundtable discussion hosted by Rt Hon Justine Greening, Chair of the Purpose Coalition, in partnership with International defence and security company Leonardo UK and food and facilities management services provider [Sodexo UK & Ireland](#), key stakeholders gathered to outline a visionary plan for the future of the North East's economy and skills landscape.

The event focused on three pivotal themes:

- adapting to the current economic climate
- making strategic investments
- implementing actionable strategies for sustained economic growth and skills development.

The North East is at a critical juncture, facing both challenges and opportunities in its economic landscape. For the North East to thrive, strategic investments in sectors poised for long-term growth, such as renewable energy and digital infrastructure, are essential.

Collaboration across academia, government, and industry is vital to creating a supportive ecosystem that promotes innovation and facilitates sustainable economic progress. By harnessing the region's collective expertise and resources, we can make the North East a leading example of how strategic collaboration fosters substantial economic growth.

The shift towards sustainable practices and the rapid advancement of technology have significantly increased the demand for digital and green skills. To keep pace with these changes, there is a pressing need to invest in advanced training programmes and education that focus on these areas. Adapting our workforce to meet the demands of tomorrow starts today.

Rt Hon Justine Greening, Chair of the Purpose Coalition and former Secretary of State for Education added,

“As we chart the future of the North East, we must ensure that strategies not only drive economic growth but also enhance social mobility. By aligning educational initiatives with market needs, we can provide every individual in the region, regardless of background, with the opportunity to thrive in this evolving economic landscape. It’s about building a foundation that uplifts everyone.

“Partnership is key in driving forward these initiatives. Working in collaboration to coordinate efforts across various sectors will ultimately ensure that educational programmes are precisely tailored to meet evolving industry requirements, thereby maximising employment opportunities and regional economic benefits.”

The roundtable marks a significant step towards mobilising the North East’s potential through collaborative efforts and innovative solutions. As the region prepares to navigate its promising yet challenging future, the insights gained from this discussion will play a crucial role in shaping its trajectory towards a robust, skill-driven economy.

Sarah Bastida, Client Relationship Director at Sodexo UK & Ireland, adds: “The scale of our operational footprint makes us an intrinsic part of many communities including the North East. We provide accommodation services to students at Northumbria University, deliver workplace services, and solutions, to clients from a range of sectors including FMCG, aerospace and defence, and we also manage HMP Northumberland. As a purpose-led business we understand that tangible actions and daily interactions drive real improvements to people’s lives, to communities and the planet. Through this roundtable and the collaboration it will drive, we look forward to making a positive social impact on the local communities within the North East and its economy.”

Wendy Allen, People Director at Leonardo UK, emphasised the significance of aligning skills development initiatives with the dynamic demands of the defence and digital sector.

“The North East holds untapped potential that, with the right investment and collaborations, can support the region’s emergence as a powerhouse of innovation and economic resilience.”

“At Leonardo UK, we are fostering a culture of continuous learning and adaptation, ensuring our workforce is equipped to meet and exceed the challenges of tomorrow. Our investment in Newcastle is part of our strategic approach to sustainable growth, whereby we look to draw on as well as grow the skills of the local workforce wherever we operate. We aim to set the benchmark for regional partnerships.”

Employers represented at the roundtable included First Open Access Operations, HMP Northumberland, Home Group, Karbon Homes, Leonardo UK, NCG, Newcastle United Foundation, Northern Powergrid, NUFC, Reed in Partnership and [Sodexo UK & Ireland](#).