

WE ARE  
TECH NORTH

# Unleashing the northern tech powerhouse

The digital space is growing in the northern region. **Paul Lancaster**, community engagement and partnerships manager of Tech North, explains

The north of England's tech community sits front and centre of the Northern Powerhouse. Our tech and digital businesses are driving economic growth. Our technology and networks are enabling connectivity, collaboration and movement of people, capital and ideas. Our founders, entrepreneurs and innovators are leading the charge fearlessly.

Last year's *Tech Nation* report from our colleagues at Tech City UK reported a staggering 57 per cent rise in new digital companies across the north over the past three years, with 170,000 people employed in the north's tech sector.

Tech North exists to accelerate development of the north's digital economy, attracting investment, increasing the inflow and availability of capital, promoting entrepreneurship, supporting talent, growing start-ups and scale-ups and generating jobs.

It works right across the arc of seven cities that form the vanguard of the Northern Powerhouse: Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield, Leeds, Hull, Sunderland and Newcastle.

More than anything, Tech North is about people, with the success of the northern digital economy ultimately

Tech North has a crucial role in presenting a coherent external brand for the north's tech and digital community; Tech North can raise visibility and profile among investors and other industry players for the benefit of all, attracting private and public investment into the community to further drive its growth. Only an independent body such as Tech North, without vested interests in any one sector and with the support of UK government, is likely to be able to achieve this. Given our focus on innovation in the north-east, we look forward to working with the Tech North team on delivering their agenda over the coming years.

**Simon Green**  
(Executive director,  
Venturefest NE and Information  
Supernetwork NE)

determined by the richness and connectivity of its relationship networks. The front-line experience of the hundreds of founders, businesses, investors and accelerators we have spoken to has helped shape our mission and helped us understand better how Tech North can change the game.

Our delivery programme has been crafted in response to their calls: from the founders struggling to find the capital and support needed to scale, to young people looking for mentors with experience, and the innovators looking to access global markets.

Already, in only our first six months of operation, we've helped to launch the "Tech Nation Visa Scheme", offering one-to-one advice surgeries and fast-track visas to help match businesses with exceptional tech talent from outside the EU. We've launched the "Tech North Founders' Network" as a peer-support service for the region's founders and entrepreneurs. We have led discussions around a pan-northern co-investment fund and represented our tech community nationally, and internationally in Berlin, Tallinn, Boston and New York. In our "Northern Stars" competition, close to a thousand

"I've been seriously impressed with the Tech North team that's been assembled. I have no doubt that they're going to make a real difference to the northern tech scene."

**Tom New**  
(Founder, Formisimo  
and Northern Stars winner)

"I can't believe how much Tech North has achieved already! What they've done is tangible. It's not just a fluffy marketing play. They're really making a difference."

**Hannah Chaplin**  
(Founder, Receptive.io  
and Northern Stars winner)

people come together to celebrate and support almost 60 tech start-ups at seven pitch events across the north, bringing them face to face with expert mentors, influencers, investors and the media.

These brilliant start-ups and businesses are our next generation of talent. They join a primed, thriving and electrified northern tech ecosystem that is on the cusp of its global potential: tech companies such as Sage and UKFast dominate their respective markets both in the UK and globally; Durham-based Atom Bank (a digital-only "challenger bank") is ranked eighth in the Fintech 100; Manchester-based market research technology company Reality-Mine has secured £11.4m investment; and Hull's state-of-the-art Centre for Digital Innovation (C4Di) recently opened, arising like a golden beacon to the world.

When launching the government's call for ideas toward its five-year UK Digital Strategy, the Minister of State for Culture, Communications and Creative Industries, Ed Vaizey, acknowledged the pivotal role Tech City UK has played in growing the digital economy, but called for further ex-

pansion outside London. He challenged the new generation of tech innovators to act as the driver for proactive citizenship that will lead to improved public services – better schools and housing, and more effective crime prevention and health care.

In response, Gerard Grech, CEO of Tech City UK, issued a rallying call to the sector, urging for "a big, collective mind [that's] unafraid to imagine", particularly in approaches to skills, funding and procurement. He stressed the need to develop deep technology, and called for "the UK to do all it can to foster growth in companies specialising in data science, artificial intelligence and machine learning", core specialisms for many of our northern cities.

Tech North's programme of work aims to support this innovative and transformational thinking. Working with our community of founders, entrepreneurs, thinkers and doers, we are providing thought-leadership and support for our northern tech community in championing positive change, promoting diversity, gender balance and equality of opportunity. We are supporting innovative approaches to funding and procurement,

"Tech North is showing the world what the north is capable of!"

**Gilbert Corrales**  
(Founder, Leaf.fm)

infrastructure and enterprise, skills and talent development. We are transforming the mindset of national and global investors from "Why are you investing in northern tech?" to "Why not?"

If we are serious about our positioning in global markets and attracting top tech talent, we need to abandon our tendency to modesty and become more visible – and more audible – about what we have already got. Our pioneering work around digital skills and talent through initiatives such as "Career Hacker" by Geek Talent is helping to reframe the debate away from the self-fulfilling "skills gap" and towards

the "skills opportunity" created by the extraordinary depth of talent available across the north.

Our forthcoming report on innovation, produced in partnership with the RSA, will promote new thinking around how the north's existing and future public, private and corporate assets, resources and infrastructure can be better exploited to support innovation, increase productivity and drive growth.

Even more fundamentally, we are seeing a change in thinking around what it means to be part of the Northern Powerhouse. Our entrepreneurs are global thinkers, who work beyond boundaries and look outward for inspiration, collaborators, markets and – often – investment. For the northern tech community, the Northern Powerhouse is less about north versus south, and more about the immense global potential of the northern cities as a combined, collaborative and cohesive offer with support from London.

It is about our place in the world. We are on the cusp of a new global economic model – one that acknowledges and builds on the successes and failures of those that have gone before, one that values humanity, understanding, emotions and relationships, which promotes knowledge and ideas, encourages trade and enterprise, and that centres on commercially oriented solutions to social problems. This is the size of our opportunity.

Tech has the potential to address some of the world's biggest problems – climate change, migration, cheap labour, sustainable energy – and we take great heart in how many northern founders are using "Tech for Good". With a £10bn life sciences industry, world-class universities, medical schools and teaching hospitals, the north has world-leading strengths in health tech that – at its best – could help humanity reach its fullest potential. This is the scale of our ambition.

We are Tech North. Join us. ●  
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