

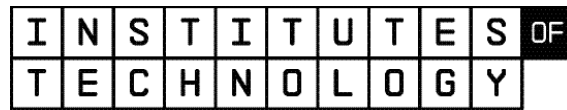
BOOSTING OPPORTUNITY,  
SKILLS & GROWTH THROUGH  
COLLABORATION

CONFERENCE  
PROGRAMME

THE NATIONAL NETWORK OF

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THE NATIONAL NETWORK OF



Institutes of Technology (IoTs) provide education and training in STEM-based occupations to meet the needs of employers. Each Institute of Technology (IoT) is a co-ordinated regional partnership of education providers and employers sharing a common goal and is also part of a national network that enables collaboration and collective action.

**Our mission is to equip individuals with the advanced technical skills needed to drive growth and meet the evolving needs of industry.**



Supported by the Gatsby Charitable Foundation

Gatsby is a foundation set up by David Sainsbury to realise his charitable objectives. This includes a commitment to strengthening the country's science and engineering skills by developing innovative programmes, commissioning research, and informing national policy on technical education, skills and good career guidance.

## CONFERENCE PROGRAMME AT A GLANCE

Location	Timings	Agenda
Library	10:00 – 10:30	<b>Arrival</b> (Refreshments available)
Lecture Theatre	10:30 – 10:40	<b>Opening Address</b> The Rt Hon Baroness Smith, Minister for Skills
	10:40 – 10:50	<b>Welcome &amp; Introduction</b> Yewande Akinola MBE, Conference Host
	10:50 – 11:00	<b>Keynote Address</b> Phil Smith CBE, Chair of Skills England
	11:00 – 11:45	<b>Skills to Kickstart Economic Growth: Addressing the Industrial Strategy Skill Needs</b> Laurence Grafton, Debbie Johnson, John McNamara and Rosa Wells
Movement between sessions (Tea and coffee available in the Library)		
Lecture Theatre	12:00 – 12:45	<b>Skills for Clean Energy Technologies: Electrification</b> Simon Warburton, Rosa Wells and Paul Whiteside
Dinsdale Young	Presentations	<b>Skills for Agritech Innovation: Digital, Robotics &amp; Sustainable Practice</b> Edward Keyes
Library	12:45 – 13:30	<b>Lunch &amp; Networking</b>
Lecture Theatre	13:30 –14:15	<b>Advanced Manufacturing: Skills for Innovation, Growth &amp; Digitalisation</b> Georgina Barnard and David Thomas
George Thomas		<b>Construction: The Future of Sustainable Construction Skills</b> Mark Cottam, Claire Foreman and Sharon Grant
Maurice Barnett		<b>Green Energy: Skills for a Sustainable &amp; Resilient Power Sector</b> Stephen Mariadas and Rachel Quinn
Dinsdale Young		<b>Health &amp; Life Sciences: Preparing the Workforce for the Future of Healthcare</b> Matt Butcher and Alex Clancy
Movement between sessions (Tea and coffee available in the Library)		
Lecture Theatre	14:30 – 15:15	<b>Employer-Engaged Skills Provision: Investing in the Future Workforce</b> Darush Dodds, Stephen Evans, Rachel Quinn and Gert Rohrmann
	15:15 – 16:05	<b>Powering Regional Growth: Skills, Industrial Strategy &amp; Local Economic Development</b> Claire Arbery, Nicola McLeod, Poorvi Patel and Matt Tudge
	16:05 – 16:15	<b>Reflections on the Future</b> Rosa Wells, Chair of The National Network of Institutes of Technology
	16:15 - 16:30	<b>Conference Close</b> Yewande Akinola MBE, Conference Host

## MORNING PLENARY OVERVIEW

Location: Lecture Theatre

**10:30**      **Opening Address**  
**The Rt Hon Baroness Smith**, Minister for Skills



**10:35**      **Welcome & Introduction**  
**Yewande Akinola MBE**, Conference Host



**10:40**      **Keynote Address**  
**Phil Smith CBE**, Chair of Skills England



**11:00**      **Skills to Kickstart Economic Growth: Addressing the Industrial Strategy Skill Needs (Panel)**

### Session Overview

This panel will explore how skills can drive growth in sectors identified in the UK Industrial Strategy and Skills England priorities. Panellists from across education, industry and policy will offer insight into key skill needs, collaborative approaches and lessons from successful interventions. The discussion will also examine how training provision can remain agile in the face of evolving economic demands.

Chair:  
**Yewande Akinola MBE**, Conference Host

### Panellists:

- **Laurence Grafton** | Head of People and Skills, Industrial Strategy Unit, Department for Business & Trade
- **Debbie Johnson** | Head of Innovation Talent & Skills, Innovate UK
- **John McNamara** | Master Inventor, IBM
- **Rosa Wells** | Chair, The National Network of Institutes of Technology



## PARALLEL PRESENTATIONS

*Delegates should choose one session to attend.*

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12:00 - 12:45

### Skills for Clean Energy Technologies: Electrification

Location: Lecture Theatre

Speakers:

- **Simon Warburton** | Chief Technical Officer, Autocraft Solutions Group
  - **Rosa Wells** | Chair, The National Network of Institutes of Technology | Dean of STEM and FE Principal, University College Birmingham
  - **Paul Whiteside** | Head of Programme, Electrification Skills Network
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12:00 - 12:45

### Skills for Agritech Innovation: Digital, Robotics & Sustainable Practice

Location: Dinsdale Young

Speaker:

- **Edward Keyes** | Course Manager, Askham Bryan College
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## BREAKOUT SESSIONS

*Delegates should choose one session to attend.*

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**13:30 - 14:15**

### **Advanced Manufacturing: Skills for Innovation, Growth and Digitalisation**

Location: Lecture Theatre

Speakers:

- **Georgina Barnard** | Vice Principal, Newcastle and Stafford Colleges Group | Lead, Stoke-on-Trent & Staffordshire Institute of Technology
- **David Thomas** | Training & Development Manager, Siemens

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**13:30 - 14:15**

### **Construction: The Future of Sustainable Construction Skills**

Location: George Thomas

Speakers:

- **Mark Cottam** | Social Value Lead, Laing O'Rourke
- **Claire Foreman** | Director, Greater Manchester Institute of Technology
- **Sharon Grant** | Director, North East Institute of Technology

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**13:30 - 14:15**

### **Green Energy: Skills for a Sustainable & Resilient Power Sector**

Location: Maurice Barnett

Speakers:

- **Stephen Mariadas** | Executive Director, South West Institute of Technology
- **Rachel Quinn** | Executive Director, East Midlands Institute of Technology

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**13:30 - 14:15**

### **Health & Life Sciences: Preparing the Workforce for the Future of Healthcare**

Location: Dinsdale Young

Speakers:

- **Matt Butcher** | Vice Principal Commercial, Skills and Partnerships, New College Swindon, Swindon & Wiltshire Institute of Technology
- **Alex Clancy** | Assistant Principal, Employer Engagement, Yeovil College, West of England Institute of Technology

## AFTERNOON PLENARY OVERVIEW

Location: Lecture Theatre

### 14:30 Employer-Engaged Skills Development: Investing in the Future Workforce (Panel)

#### Session Overview

This session will explore how and why employers work with education providers to shape skills provision for the future workforce. It will showcase examples of sustained collaboration, including co-designed programmes and employer investment, and examine what motivates business to engage - from securing talent to meeting regional needs. Panellists will discuss the conditions that support impactful employer involvement across different sectors and business sizes.

Chair:

**Yewande Akinola MBE**, Conference Host

Panellists:

- **Darush Dodds** | Group Director of Corporate Affairs & Social, Esh Group
- **Stephen Evans** | CEO, Learning and Work Institute
- **Rachel Quinn** | Executive Director, East Midlands Institute of Technology
- **Gert Rohrmann** | Training & Development Manager, Siemens GB&I

### 15:20 Powering Regional Growth: Skills, Industrial Strategy & Local Economic Development (Panel)

#### Session Overview

This session will examine how regional and local actors are aligning skills policy with economic development priorities to drive inclusive, sustainable growth. It will explore how the UK's Industrial Strategy and devolved economic agendas are creating new expectations and opportunities for skills planning, investment and delivery at a local level. Through local examples, panellists will discuss what's working, what's missing, and how different players within the system – employers, providers, local leaders and government – can work together to strengthen the regional skills-growth link.

Chair:

**Kay Church**, Principal Business Transformation Leader, Met Office

Panellists:

- **Claire Arbery** | Director, West of England Institute of Technology
- **Nicola McLeod** | Director of Education, Work and Skills, Greater Manchester Combined Authority
- **Poorvi Patel** | Head of Education, Employment & Skills, Heathrow
- **Matt Tudge** | Head of Skills Planning & LSIP Project Manager, Business West

## AFTERNOON PLENARY OVERVIEW CONTINUED...

Location: Lecture Theatre

**16:05**      **Reflections on the Future**

**Rosa Wells**, Chair of the National Network of Institutes of Technology



**16:20**      **Conference Close**

**Yewande Akinola MBE**, Conference Host





## SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES

**Yewande Akinola MBE** | Chartered Engineer, Innovator, Consultant and Speaker



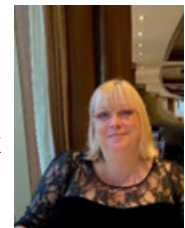
Yewande is an engineer with experience in design, construction and delivery of innovative systems in the built environment. Her work spans projects in the UK, Africa, the Middle East and East Asia. Yewande is currently EMEA Technical Director at CBRE and Vice President of the Institution of Engineering & Technology, where she also chairs its Knowledge Services & Solutions board. She has been named one of the 100 Most Influential Engineers in Europe by the Financial Times and Inclusive Boards and the UK Young Woman Engineer of the Year by the Institution of Engineering & Technology.

Yewande is a non-executive director at Co-Creation Hub, Africa's leading innovation enabler, and at Midlands Mindforge, supporting university spinouts in the UK. She is a Visiting Professor at the University of Westminster, sits on the governing body at the University of Warwick, and serves on Warwick Business School's Global Advisory Board. A passionate advocate for STEM, she presents engineering programmes for television and was awarded an MBE in 2020 for services to engineering innovation and diversity.

For more on Yewande's work, visit [yewandeakinola.co.uk](https://yewandeakinola.co.uk).

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**Claire Arbery** | Director, West of England Institute of Technology and Vice-Chair, The National Network of Institutes of Technology



Since 2019, Claire has led West of England IoT – a partnership of six academic partners and 12 employers that has been successful in piloting several government funding initiatives. Under her leadership, West of England IoT now leads the Local Skills Improvement Fund for the region. Previously, Claire was a Programme Manager at the National Centre for Computing Education, supporting teachers to be confident and competent in the delivery of the GCSE computer science curriculum. She has also managed significant apprenticeship provision and STEM engagement activities and is well-placed to support the skills requirement of a future workforce.

**Georgina Barnard** | Vice Principal, Newcastle & Stafford Colleges Group and Lead, Stoke-on-Trent & Staffordshire Institute of Technology



Georgina spearheads the Stoke-on-Trent & Staffordshire IoT and oversees the broader higher education provision across Newcastle and Stafford Colleges Group as Vice Principal.

Previously, she spent almost eight years at Dudley College of Technology, culminating in her role as Managing Director of the Black Country & Marches IoT and overseeing its successful launch to students in September 2021. Earning a Master of Science Degree while working full-time, Georgina firmly believes in the transformative power of education. With a wealth of experience in senior leadership roles, spanning further education and industry, Georgina is deeply committed to ensuring that local communities have access to the very best opportunities for life success.

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**Matt Butcher** | Vice Principal Commercial, Skills and Partnerships, New College Swindon



Matt is currently Vice Principal Commercial, Skills and Partnerships at New College Swindon (NCS), with Executive responsibility for the Swindon & Wiltshire IoT. He has been at NCS since February 2023, and is also responsible for student recruitment, employer partnerships, marketing and the college's adult and apprenticeships provision. Prior to this role he worked at Bournemouth and Poole college for nine years, his first role in further education. Before entering the world of education, Matt had a varied career in marketing, business development and account management across a range of industries, including publishing, retail and business support.

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**Mark Cottam** | Social Value Lead, Laing O'Rourke



Mark brings over 20 years of experience driving impactful social value initiatives across the construction sector. He is proud to represent Laing O'Rourke as a strategic employer partner of the Greater Manchester Institute of Technology (GMIoT), where he also serves on the board. For over three years, Mark has worked closely with GMIoT to support the development of future talent. He is passionate about nurturing new skills and empowering students through collaborative efforts, ensuring their journey is enriched by real-world opportunities and meaningful industry engagement.

**Alex Clancy** | Assistant Principal, Employer Engagement, Yeovil College



Alex Clancy joined Yeovil College in November 2021, leading business development and employer partnerships. With a background in retail and technology at Specsavers and Dyson, Alex brings over a decade of industry experience. He has collaborated with major employers, including the NHS, Leonardo, Thales, and the Ministry of Defence. At Yeovil College, serving South Somerset and Dorset for over 130 years, he drives growth and quality in education and training. Previously, Alex led employer engagement at one of the South West's largest colleges, building strong links between education and industry.

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**Darush Dodds** | Group Director of Corporate Affairs & Social, Esh Group



Darush heads up Esh Group's Corporate Affairs function and is responsible for public relations, communications, events, brand and Esh Group's Queen's award-winning social value programme, 'Constructing Local'. With over 15 years of experience in the delivery of education, employment, engagement and economic programmes, Darush leads the delivery of measurable socioeconomic benefits for Esh's construction clients and their communities as part of the procurement process.

Alongside his role at Esh, Darush is Chair of the North East Chamber of Commerce's Social Value Forum and Chair of the North East Institute of Technology's Construction Board.

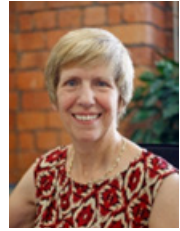
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**Stephen Evans** | Chief Executive, Learning and Work Institute



Stephen has been Chief Executive since 2016, having spent two years previously as Deputy Chief Executive. He joined from Working Links, where he led on policy, strategy and business development. Prior to this, he worked for the London Development Agency as Director of Employment and Skills, commissioning programmes and leading the work of the London Skills and Employment Board, was chief economist at the Social Market Foundation, and spent six years as senior policy advisor in HM Treasury working on policy for skills, productivity and child poverty.

**Claire Foreman** | Director, Greater Manchester Institute of Technology

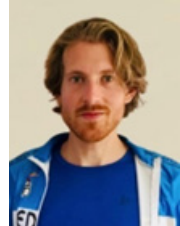


Claire combines private sector expertise with senior roles in further and higher education, offering a strategic view of education as a catalyst for driving individual potential, social mobility and business success. A period leading government-backed initiatives to help SMEs adapt to major industry shifts sparked her transition into the further education sector. Claire has served as Deputy and Vice Principal at two colleges, mastering post-16, adult and apprenticeship education over a 20-year period.

As Director of the Greater Manchester IoT, she champions education and industry collaboration across the region, promoting higher technical education in sectors including construction, manufacturing and cybersecurity.

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**Laurence Grafton** | Head of People & Skills, Industrial Strategy Unit, Department for Business & Trade



Laurence is leading on all skills and human capital elements of the UK's Industrial Strategy at the Department for Business and Trade. He spent four years in the Department for Education where he delivered a White Paper and package of reforms to transform the skills system and, before that, was the Education and Skills Lead in the Prime Minister's Implementation Unit. He started his career in policy on the Civil Service Fast Stream, after a short stint teaching law at the University of Bonn.

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**Sharon Grant** | Director, North East Institute of Technology and Vice-Chair, The National Network of Institutes of Technology



As Director of North East IoT, Sharon enjoys promoting STEM and raising awareness of sector skills. She is passionate about collaborating with the IoT employer-education network to build a work-ready talent pipeline and showcase the ongoing technical advancements in the North East. The IoT consortium has several ongoing projects demonstrating how industry and education can work together to address skills gaps – both regionally and nationally. As a Vice-Chair of the IoT Network, Sharon is proud to support the Network's collaborative aims and objectives, particularly in advancing higher technical skills and driving the transition to green energy and net zero.

**Debbie Johnson** | Head of Innovation Talent & Skills, Innovate UK

Debbie's role focuses on two goals: supporting innovative businesses in accessing and developing talent to realise the UK's innovation ambition; and ensuring that the education and skills system is supported in responding to the changes created by innovation to maximise its potential for the economy and society.



Prior to joining Innovate UK, Debbie was involved in the design and implementation of collaboratively funded, business-led skills programmes in the construction sector.

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**Edward Keyes** | Course Manager, Higher Education, Askham Bryan College

Edward comes from a farming background and graduated from Harper Adams with a degree in Agriculture with Land Management in 2015. He then worked in the agricultural industry for ten years, primarily in dairy herd management, which is where Edward first focused on using technology to make evidence-based decisions to improve farm efficiency. In 2023, Edward took on the role of Course Manager for Higher Education at Askham Bryan College where he is focused on providing high quality education that provides skills that meet the needs of industry.



**Steve Mariadas** | Executive Director, South West Institute of Technology

Steve's extensive background spans both industry and education, including a tenure as Chief Information Officer for a European airline. Over the past fifteen years in education, he has been pivotal in establishing digital and data apprenticeships throughout the South West region. Steve was granted a Technical Teaching Fellowship by the Royal Commission of 1851 and collaborates closely with numerous employers in the South West. His commitment to sharing knowledge is further demonstrated through his published books, "Data Science Fundamentals" and "Information Systems".



**John McNamara** | Master Inventor & Academic Programs Lead for Europe, IBM and Visiting Professor

John is an active inventor with a diverse portfolio spanning AI, mobile technologies and predictive analytics. He has led the delivery of cognitive, cloud-based and integration solutions that spur rapid innovation and drive measurable value in areas such as defence, banking, health and Tech for Good. John also collaborates with academia on the creation of AI-based Tech for Good – enabling charities to adopt AI to support their communities.

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**Poorvi Patel** | Head of Education, Employment & Skills, Heathrow

Poorvi has over 20 years of experience in responsible business practice, focusing on education and employment. Her career started with Business in the Community, where she worked with corporate leaders to drive inclusive practices. In her current role, she is connecting local talent with jobs and careers at the airport. Poorvi is a member of the Mayor of London's Jobs and Skills Partnership, Chair of the Aviation Industry Skills Board, and Trustee of C-Change, a social inclusion charity. She was also a board member of the West London Institute of Technology in the initial years of its formation.

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**Rachel Quinn** | Executive Director, East Midlands Institute of Technology

In her current role, Rachel facilitates a partnership of colleges, universities and industry to enhance technical education in the region. Formerly Head of People and Skills at D2N2 Local Enterprise Partnership, Rachel has led or shaped regional policy and programmes for careers, skills, employability and inclusion for the last 20 years. Her successes include the publication of the first inclusion strategy aligned to regional economic objectives and the launch of the Digital Skills Bootcamps pilot in the East Midlands.





**Gert Rohrmann** | Training & Development Manager, Siemens GB&I



Gert joined Siemens as a Graduate in 1985 and has held varied roles in the manufacturing sector, including digital industries, automation and, more recently, smart infrastructure. As Training and Development Manager, he defines and implements training strategies for entry-level talent and develops competencies among engineering staff to meet current and future needs. He chairs the City & Guilds Engineering & Manufacturing Employer Industry Board, focusing on the development of engineering T-levels; co-chairs the North West Tech Talent Consortium; and serves on the Greater Manchester IoT Steering Committee. He cultivates relationships with key education partners to explore collaboration opportunities, identify future skills and attract new talent.

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**Phil Smith CBE FREng** | Chair, Skills England

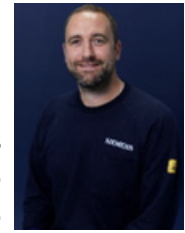


Phil serves as Commercial Director at Be the Business, is a founding associate of VOCL, and acts as a C-level board mentor for Critical Eye. He advises Coventry University and sits on the Corporate Advisory Board of the National Theatre. Phil is the former Chief Executive and Chairman of Cisco UK and Ireland, and has previously served as Chair of IQE PLC, Innovate UK, and TechSkills. He contributed to the development of the government's Industrial Strategy through serving as a member of the Industrial Strategy Advisory Council. He currently leads a taskforce focused on accelerating technology adoption among small businesses.

In recognition of his contributions to technology, business and skills development, Phil was awarded a CBE in the 2019 Queen's Birthday Honours. That same year, he was made a Fellow of the Royal Academy of Engineering, where he chaired the Education and Skills Committee until August 2024.

**David Thomas** | Training & Development Manager, Siemens

David leads a team responsible for learning and development, communication and business administration for Siemens. He is passionate about helping prepare the people of Congleton for a more digital future as well as engaging them to feel part of the success of the business. He enjoys bringing his engineering background to innovate the approaches of the People & Business Support team as well as injecting fun into the working day. David is currently studying the Senior People Professional Apprenticeship at Manchester Metropolitan University.



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**Matt Tudge** | Head of Skills, Business West

Matt is Head of Skills at one of the UK's largest Chambers of Commerce. He leads Local Skills Improvement Plans for Gloucestershire, West of England, and Swindon and Wiltshire, helping to ensure they are great places to live, work, and thrive. With 15 years of experience across business support, inward investment, innovation, and net zero in the South West, Matt also contributes skills and growth expertise to wider Business West projects. Previous roles include General Manager of Low Carbon South West, Innovate UK Advisor, Investment Executive at West of England Combined Authority and Training Manager for Lift People.



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**Simon Warburton** | Chief Technical Officer, Autocraft Solutions Group

Simon is an experienced, time-served engineer. He joined Autocraft Solutions Group in 2015 as Quality Director, before becoming Engineering and Quality Director. He now heads up the new EV Projects Department. Simon started his career as an engineer in the Royal Air Force, moving to JLR as Principle Engineer in the Powertrain R&D division. He spent nine years in Japan as the General Manager for Jatco (Nissan), responsible for supplier technical assistance and overseas customers new product introduction on all transmission programmes. Simon also lived in China for two years where he was Chief Engineer for Great Wall Motors. He gained extensive knowledge of EV and alternative fuelled engines during his time at Intelligent Energy, where he was responsible for implementing a pilot line and supply chain for hydrogen fuel cell modules in a joint venture with Suzuki.





**Rosa Wells** | Chair, The National Network of Institutes of Technology and Dean of STEM and FE Principal, University College Birmingham

Professor Rosa Wells has over a decade of experience in technical education and workforce development. She is Chair of the National Network of Institutes of Technology and a Board Director of the Greater Birmingham & Solihull IoT. Rosa has led innovative, collaborative projects, including the development of training programmes for the battery manufacturing workforce, ensuring alignment between skills provision and industry demand. Awarded a Technical Teaching Fellowship by the Royal Commission for the Exhibition of 1851, she is a passionate advocate for inclusive, skills-led economic growth.



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**Paul Whiteside** | Head of Programme, Electrification Skills Network

Paul is a skills and workforce development specialist with over 20 years of experience across a range of sectors, including automotive and engineering. He leads the Electrification Skills Network at Coventry University, funded by the Faraday Battery Challenge. The initiative connects industry, providers and awarding bodies to develop a UK-wide framework for electrification skills, with a strong focus on short, flexible training solutions. Paul works to align provision with future workforce needs through collaboration, skills foresighting and practical implementation. He supports national and international partners in making emerging skills accessible, relevant and rapidly deployable to meet changing industry demands.



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