

# North West digital workforce should be at the heart of the Northern Powerhouse

Submitted by: Advanced Computer Software Group Limited  
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Building a skilled technology workforce in the North West is the key to unlocking the potential of the Northern Powerhouse (<http://northernpowerhouse.gov.uk/>). This is according to several senior digital leaders\* who spoke during a roundtable at Advanced's new regional headquarters on Booths Park in Knutsford on Friday.

The digital sector in the UK is growing at a faster rate than in any other G20 economy (<https://www.bcg.com/d/press/1may2015-internet-contributes-10-percent-gdp-uk-economy-12111>), yet companies in the North West are struggling to recruit employees with the skills required to keep up. During the open discussion, experts shared ideas on how to close the well-documented North South Digital Divide along with the initiatives that will deliver a technology workforce that is both skilled and diverse. These include:

- techUK's Returners Hub – a one-stop shop for people looking to return to the tech sector and for tech companies interested in starting their own returners programme
- Tech North's Northern Voices – a speaker training programme to address the gender or regional imbalances at conferences and media appearances
- Manchester Metropolitan University's Digital Innovation – a project that gives students and staff access to emerging technologies as well as creates opportunities for students to work with companies on "live" and industry-relevant projects
- Manchester Digital's Diversity Toolkit – launching in May, a resource for digital and tech businesses to help them attract and retain a diverse workforce.

The roundtable suitably followed Rt Hon George Osborne MP's (also chair of the Northern Powerhouse) official opening of the regional hub for IT software and services company Advanced (<https://www.oneadvanced.com/>). The newly refurbished offices are now home to over 150 employees and will accommodate digital apprentices in the future too. Advanced has pledged to recruit 60-70 apprentices in the UK each year, with a focus on providing technical training to help address the digital skills gap and improve career prospects in the North.

"As a large technology employer, we are committed to supporting high performing candidates in achieving their potential," says Advanced's Chief Marketing Officer, Sally Scott. "With the introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy, we have decided to focus this investment of approximately £500,000 per year on creating apprenticeship opportunities around technology and digital. Our pledge to boost digital skills, and provide people in the North West with an inclusive and dynamic environment to work in, will enable us to play a key role in the development of the Northern Powerhouse. We employ some of the best talent across the UK, but we want to help close the North South Digital Divide. Our goal is to attract and retain a diverse workplace designed to accelerate career opportunities for candidates from all walks of life in the North West."

Speaking at the roundtable, Rt Hon George Osborne MP commented: "Individual cities like Manchester and Leeds are already innovating but will only prosper if they all work together as one, which is what the

Northern Powerhouse strategy has set out to achieve. The north has enormous potential but we need better transport connections, mayors elected in northern cities and crucially the support of the technology and education industries to boost technical skills and drive the next digital revolution.”

Last month, the UK Government published its Digital Strategy (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-digital-strategy>) with skills at the heart of its plans and revealed significant commitments from some of the biggest UK employers including Lloyds Banking Group, Google, BT and Microsoft to help support and train the next digital generation. Julian David, CEO at techUK, the trade association of tech companies in the UK, believes 2017 will be a critical year for the UK and the technology industry.

Julian comments: “The pace of change is unrelenting. New technology and new business models are disrupting everything from job roles through to established social and political norms. The UK decided to rewrite many of its key relationships and the government has set out a new industrial strategy that puts digital success at its core. Historically, we have done well in digital innovation and adoption such that key centres like London and Cambridge are world renowned. However, the government has also highlighted that this success is not spread evenly across the country and, if we are to succeed in the future, we need to correct this to create a global Britain that delivers for all communities in the UK.”

-ENDS-

Note to editors

\* List of speakers:

- Julian David – CEO of techUK
- Kirsty Styles – Head of Talent & Skills at Tech North
- Mike Perls – Chair of Institute of Directors North West
- Martin Bryant – Community Editor at Tech North (previously editor of The Next Web)
- Ian Cass – Managing Director of the Forum for Private Business
- Sally Scott – Chief Marketing Officer at Advanced
- Katie Gallagher – Managing Director at Digital Manchester
- Paul Bason – Director of Digital Innovation at Manchester Metropolitan University
- Maya Dibley – Head of Programmes and Partnerships, The Landing
- Becky Boyd – Owner of Social Media Geek

About Advanced

Through our enterprise and market focused solutions we positively impact millions of people’s lives through continually investing in our people, partnerships and own technologies to stay focused on our markets’, customers’ and their stakeholders’ needs.

We enable our customers to drive efficiencies, savings and growth opportunities through focused, right-first-time software solutions that evolve with the changing needs of their business and the markets they operate in.

True partnership is the defining thing that makes us different from the competition.

We pride ourselves on delivering focused software solutions for public sector, enterprise commercial and health & care organisations that simplify complex business challenges and deliver immediate value.

Advanced is a Sunday Times Top Track 250 Company 2016 and was ranked in the Deloitte UK Fast 50 which recognises the 50 fastest growing technology companies in the UK and a winner of the Tech Company of the Year in PwC's UK Tech Awards in 2014.

[www.oneadvanced.com](http://www.oneadvanced.com)

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