North East
Local Enterprise Partnership

Sunderland Software City is enabling the growth of the technology sector in the North East of England, providing support and creating opportunities for aspiring and established digital businesses.

**Jill McKinney,
Head of Skills and Training**

Can you tell me how many recent graduates from North East universities work at Sunderland Software City and what their roles are?

We currently employ one graduate at Sunderland Software City, Jordan Hewitt our Events Coordinator.

How would you describe Sunderland Software City in a nutshell?

Sunderland Software City has been running for 10 years now. Our big focus is supporting digital SMEs

in the North East LEP area. We do this in several ways; from providing business support to start ups and small businesses, to creating commercial opportunities for SMEs in the region. Our business support services include advice on PR and marketing strategies, sales masterclasses and training on social media. We also carry out surveys so that other businesses can better understand the tech sector.

What are the benefits to a company like Sunderland Software City to retaining graduate talent?

People who have recently moved out of education come with a fresh perspective. Graduates tend to come brimming with new ideas.

FIND OUT MORE

#LiveWorkandStay

And what are some of the benefits for graduates of staying in the North East for their careers?

The North East has a lot to offer, particularly in the thriving digital/IT industry. There are a lot of opportunities to develop a career given digital is so high on businesses' agendas. All businesses are looking to digitalise and up-skill their staff.

Alongside that, cheaper living costs and good transport links make the North East a very attractive place to live and work.

Another benefit is the huge wealth of support within the digital/IT sector - there is a lot of cross-pollination; people are willing to share skills and help each other.

We do have an issue with skills in the North East and we're working hard to create a pipeline of talent. That's something the whole sector is supporting because it will benefit the entire region.

What can businesses do to encourage graduates to stay in the region?

PR is a big thing; getting the message out in the regional and national press so graduates can see what's happening in the region. It's not just about the success of one business, but the sector as a whole.

At Sunderland Software City we organise skills meet-ups where people can find out more about sector in the North East and network with some of the businesses working here.

Our careers event – Tech Talent – is the North East's largest tech-specific careers and opportunities fair. It attracts some of the biggest tech and digital companies in the region as well as new and fast-growing SMEs. It's a great way to encourage talent from both inside and outside the region to consider a career in the North East. It's also a great showcase for businesses.

It's important graduates get the message before leaving university about the opportunities in our region, there are some great things coming out of the North East. We have world renowned businesses based here and we need shout about ourselves.

What kinds of career paths can graduates follow at Sunderland Software City?

We're just a small team, ten people in total. We've actually almost doubled in size in the last six months!

We always support staff to be involved in different areas of the work we do; be that through Sunderland Software City or the Digital Catapult Centre North East & Tees Valley. It's a great place to learn what's going on in the sector and develop skills that will help the sector grow.

What are the benefits to Sunderland Software City of being located in the North East?

The digital/IT sector is thriving in the North East. It's second only to London in terms of growth. We have access to some amazing businesses that are just getting started on their journey. Many come to us as only an idea, so it's really exciting to see them grow and establish.

Jordan Hewitt, Events Co-ordinator at Sunderland Software City

Which University did you graduate from and what did you study?

I completed my undergraduate degree in English Literature at York St John University and then I moved back to Sunderland to do my Masters in Business Management.

Why did you decide to stay in the North East after graduating?

It was a combination of things really. I'm from the North East and all my family is based here too. When I completed my undergraduate degree I stayed in York for a little bit but I found the city to be quite small and there wasn't a huge amount going on at the time. Industry in York is based around tourism and hospitality and that wasn't the sector for me.

That's part of the reason for my move back to Sunderland: to complete my Master's degree. With Durham and Newcastle on the doorstep I knew I had more job opportunities available to me.

Do you think the North East offers graduates and young people good career opportunities?

Yes absolutely, particularly in the digital/IT sector. One of the major benefits is the links the Universities provide to employment. Sunderland University has fantastic networks and helped direct me to where I am today. The support they offer doesn't stop at graduation.

FIND OUT MORE

#LiveWorkandStay

Outside of work, what do you enjoy most about living in the North East of England?

I love living by the sea, we can take it for granted here but it is one of my favorite things about living in the North East. The region is also really accessible to travel around. I don't have a car and travel a lot with work so the Metro system is a fantastic resource.

Would you say the North East offers a good work/ life balance?

Most definitely. One of the things I love most about working at Sunderland Software City is how they've embraced flexible working. It doesn't matter where you work – be it in the office, on the train or at home – as long as you get the job done. I have a little boy so the flexibility that provides is perfect for me. It helps create a very relaxed and welcoming working environment too.

What has staying in the North East meant for your career?

It's opened up more options for me. I didn't know the tech sector was an area I would work in but it's a booming industry and there are some fantastic career opportunities as a result. It's also very supportive; people want to work in partnership and collaborate. I think that's such a positive aspect about working in the North East, people genuinely want to help each other.

What are the benefits to employers if more graduates stay in the region?

It would help fill the skills gap we have in the region. Graduates also bring fresh energy and new ideas. They're eager to be involved and equipped with the skills employers need. They can also help bring more skilled, high value jobs to the region.

Would you encourage other graduates to live, work and stay in the North East?

Absolutely, 100%. There is better work life balance in the North East and a low cost of living. There are fantastic career opportunities in a range of different sectors too. There's also a wide net to choose from with Sunderland, Durham and Newcastle all within easy reach of each other. The Universities are really supportive and help signpost jobs.

FIND OUT MORE

#LiveWorkandStay