

# Annual Conference

*Time for Change*

Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> November



[businesssouth.org](https://businesssouth.org)



# Emily Hudson

Senior Broadcast Journalist  
BBC



# Housekeeping

- Phones to silent please
- Agenda access via the QR code on your lanyard card
- Contact QR on your lanyard next to your name
- Wifi is free head to Hilton\_Honors the password is Hilton25
- Please exit on hearing the fire alarms
- We are using Slido today for our keynotes and table discussion
- Parking is FREE but you must register your vehicle at reception



# Thank You



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# Sir Andy Street

Former West Midlands  
Mayor & MD of John Lewis

QUESTIONS  
Slido.com  
#BSTHAC25



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# Table Discussion

- *What do our businesses in the Central South expect of the new Mayoral Office*
- *Agree your top expectation and share this on Slido Word Cloud at the end of the session*





## Mayoral Office Table Discussion

Join at  
**slido.com**  
**#OurMayor**



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Prof Dame Wendy Hall  
University of Southampton



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# Southampton, AI City of Excellence

Dame Wendy Hall

Regius Professor of Computer Science  
Director of Web Science Institute  
University of Southampton



# June 2025: AI@Southampton Launch



AI@Southampton will accelerate research, education and knowledge exchange in the rapidly evolving field of Artificial Intelligence (AI) at University of Southampton.



- **Research & Policy**
- **Education & Training**
- **Networking & Collaboration**



AI@Southampton



Led and coordinated by the **WEB SCIENCE INSTITUTE**

Visit [ai.southampton.ac.uk](https://ai.southampton.ac.uk) for more 13

## Year 1: 2024-25

- **AI Champions** appointed across university
- Over **40 internal and external events** organised throughout the year
- **New website launched in October 2025!**

## Year 2: 2025-26

- Develop **AI Driving Licence** training programme for Staff and Students
- **AI Arts Festival** in Winchester (March 2026)
- **British Science Festival** (September 2026)
- Grow **AI@Southampton international presence** across campuses



# Southampton, AI City of Excellence

Civic University impact project with the aim of supporting partner-led **understanding** & **safe adoption** of AI in Southampton's businesses and communities.

- Research
- Evidence
- Convening





What do we want from AI  
in Southampton?

**3**

workshops

**50**

participants

We want to find out  
what AI can do

We need Individual Skills,  
and Collective Capability

We want to be a Human-  
Centred Place: Diverse and  
Connected

We want everyone to share  
in the benefits of AI

We want accountability  
with and of AI

# Business Engagement: AI: what you need to know with AiLab University of Southampton



# Southampton AI City of Excellence

## AI Advice Bureau: Voluntary Sector

*“How can I check whether AI has been used?”*



*“Could the use of AI in writing grant applications...be seen by funders as ...‘cheating?’”*

*“How can AI tools improve our fundraising efforts and streamline operations?”*

*“I keep seeing...‘AI can speed up workflow’ but I do not really know what that means.”*



Southampton Voluntary Services

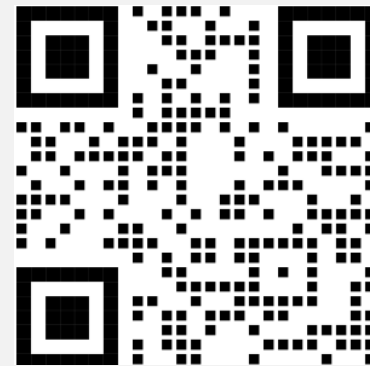


# 2025-26: Phase Two

**AI Advice Bureau:** Roll out of further sessions with charities, schools and governors, and SMEs. **Get in touch if you want to collaborate!**

**AI City Vision Project:** Funding renewed for a second year to create an AI innovation sandpit for civic organisations in Southampton to address barriers to AI adoption.

**Engagement:** Steering Group will work to develop relationships locally to highlight Southampton's AI credentials and ambition and create partnerships regionally and nationally.



Website:  
[ai.southampton.ac.uk](https://ai.southampton.ac.uk)



Join our mailing list

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# Rachel Randall & Mark Bretton

Solent Growth Partnership



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# **The AI Skills Partnership**

**Mark Bretton MBE TD DL,  
Chair, Business Board Network**

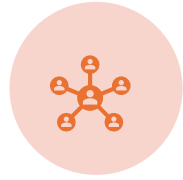
**Rachael Randall  
Chair, Solent Growth Partnership Business Board**

**Connecting local growth**



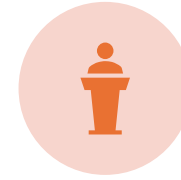
### **Represent**

locally devolved  
Business Boards  
nationally



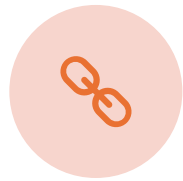
### **Support**

economic leaders  
to connect and  
collaborate



### **Broker**

Ministerial, regional and  
pan-regional meetings  
on key issues



### **Connect**

skills teams and  
Growth Hub  
business support



### **Communicate**

business data/analysis  
that identifies  
opportunities



### **Single point of contact**

for communication with  
Ministers, Whitehall and  
Parliament



### **Engage**

stakeholders and think  
tanks on mutual issues  
of concern

**Connecting local growth**



We are clearly not short of great ideas and initiatives

But:

- 24% report difficult getting technical skills to grow
- 35% state lack of AI skills is a key barrier to adoption
- Understanding of skills gaps remains very imprecise

We urgently need practical routes to execute strategy and Government strongly agrees!

**Connecting local growth**

- Launched an AI Skills Partnership Pilot with the Solent Growth Partnership
- Based on the proven Local Digital Skills Partnerships (LDSPs) model
- Aligns regional AI skills demands with targeted training initiatives and local economic priorities
- The basis of a national model for the future



**Connecting local growth**

# AI Skills Pilot – 25/26

Rachael Randall – Chair of Business Representative  
Forum

# Who we are.....

- Functional economic area
- 3 x UTLAs
- Population 600,000
- 3 Worldclass universities
- 5 FE Colleges
- Solent Freeport



**SOLENT  
GROWTH  
PARTNERSHIP**

# The Ask.....

- Address regional AI and digital skills gaps through coordinated activity, aligned to local labour market needs, sectoral demand and the needs of the SME community.
- Strengthen collaboration between public, private, education and third-sector partners to co-design and deliver impactful AI skills programmes.
- Promote digital inclusion, address digital poverty and provide clear pathways into AI and tech careers for underrepresented groups.
- Support economic growth in the Solent region by equipping the workforce with high demand AI skills and improving SME productivity.
- Co-develop a blueprint that can be replicated across other regions where a Business Board Network member is operating.
- To fulfill the recommendation 'Relaunch and Expand Local Digital Skills Partnerships with single-pot skills funding to streamline investment in skills training for AI use and adoption' identified in Policy Connect's 'Skills in the Age of AI' report.

# What's Happening? – Phase 1 (Sept – Dec)

- Design an information gathering exercise to identify skills gaps and capability shortfalls in the local area in partnership with world leading experts.
- Launch Research Questionnaire and get it out to as many businesses as possible.
- Use the data to identify “Creators” & “Users”
- Use data available from other sources such as IOT to map provision in “AI” from Level 2 upwards.
- Analyse results from Research Questionnaire.
- Design and deliver the responsible AI programme to 100 businesses

# What are we going to do – Phase 2 (Jan/Feb)

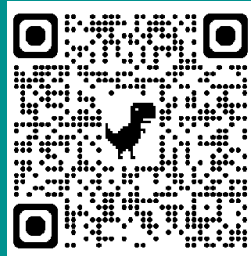
- Using the results of the Research Questionnaire and the Skills Mapping identify findings and skills provision gaps.
- Have the first AI Symposium supported by Hampshire Chamber, sharing the findings from the research with the businesses that took part, to sense check the findings, to share conclusions and also the skills programmes already available.
- Explore other businesses growth needs and solutions.
- Launch the Solent Tech Showcase.

# What are we going to do – Phase 3 (March 25)

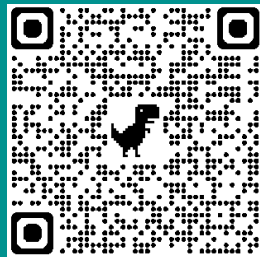
- Solent Tech Showcase – Ideal Home Show for Tech
- For creators to show their innovation and creativity
- For businesses to source the latest tech to help their businesses grow and develop.
- National High End Sponsors
- Flagship event for the area.

# Get Involved!

Sign Up for Newsletter



Do the Survey



Connect with our partners over lunch, the conference will resume at 13:00



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# Emily Hudson

Senior Broadcast Journalist  
BBC



# Leigh-Sara Timberlake

Group CEO

Business South Group

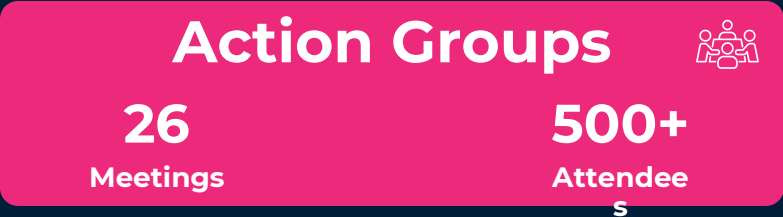


# Year in numbers

2024 - 2025



It has been some year, so here is just a snapshot of some of Business South's highlights from the last Annual Conference



# Celebrating 20 years of Business South

To commemorate this milestone we are hosting a celebration to honour the people and partnerships that have shaped our success.

**Please join us**

Thursday 16th July 2026 from 18:00  
Southampton Harbour Hotel



# Leigh-Sara Timberlake

Group CEO

Business South Group





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# Action Group Update

Gavin Hall

Head of Office, Southampton  
Savills

Emily Hudson

Senior Broadcast Journalist  
BBC



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Luke Murphy MP  
MP for Basingstoke



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Connect with our partners over drinks refreshments, the conference will resume at 14:30



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SIR ANDY STREET

HOW THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY CAN COLLABORATE WITH THEIR MAYOR & HAVE A STRONG MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL RELATIONSHIP

EXISTS TO 'GET STUFF DONE'

THE MAYOR is the glue!

THE BUCK STOPS HERE...

# BUSINESS - A FORCE FOR GOOD

THE BEST THINGS HAPPEN WHEN PUBLIC & PRIVATE SECTORS WORK TOGETHER



## \* OPENNESS \* TRANSPARENCY \* COLLABORATION \*

### A GREAT MAYOR WILL...

- ★ PUT THE PEOPLE & REGION BEFORE THEIR POLITICAL PARTY
- ★ BE ABLE TO WORK CROSS PARTY & PUSH THROUGH POLITICAL OPPOSITION
- ★ UNDERSTAND CENTRAL GOVERNMENT & BE ABLE TO UNLOCK FUNDING
- ★ UNDERSTAND/COME FROM BUSINESS
- ★ BE A LEADER
- ★ DRIVE INWARD INVESTMENT

- ✓ LEAD SECTOR GROUPS
- ✓ GET ON THE GOVERNING BOARD

IT'S UP TO BUSINESS TO DRIVE THE SUCCESS OF THE MAYOR

- ✓ WRITE YOUR OWN BUSINESS MANIFESTO FOR THE REGION

- ✓ HELP WRITE GROWTH PLANS
- ✓ HOLD THEM ACCOUNTABLE

### steps to DRIVING ECONOMIC GROWTH

1. INWARD INVESTMENT
2. REGIONAL ECONOMIC PLAN/ INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY
3. IMPROVING SKILLS & QUALIFICATIONS OF THE WORKFORCE

- ✓ GENUINE PARTNERSHIPS
- ✓ PUBLIC INVESTMENT

It's about the PEOPLE not the POLITICS



### WHERE TO FOCUS...



BUSINESS SOUTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2025

Business South

PARAGRAM.CO.UK



businesssouth.org



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# Kate Beal-Blyth

Woodcut Media



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# Henri Murison

Chief Executive  
Northern Powerhouse

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# Thank You



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# Continue the Conversation

Beefys Bar  
Upper Ground Floor



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