

W: neechamber.co.uk
T: 0300 303 6322
@neechamber
Aykley Heads, Durham DH1 5TS



North East England
Chamber of Commerce

Stronger North East:

**Our 2019 campaign for
business growth in
North East England**

About your Chamber

We are North East England's largest member organisation, representing 3,000 businesses. From SME's to multi-nationals, we bring businesses together to influence and expand the world we do business in.

#growyourinfluence

3,000
Chamber members

400,000
employees in the region

196
countries - our members trade in every major market in the world

200+
years we've been helping businesses and individuals grow their network, knowledge, influence and reach

Foreword

The Chamber is a powerful voice for business in North East England. We represent thousands of businesses of all shapes and sizes, from every sector and from every part of our region. Those businesses come together because they know how much can be achieved through their collective strength and expertise.

They also know that North East England is a great place to do business. Our economic assets, industrial heritage and quality of life combine to create a business environment that is hard to beat. But our members recognise how much more this region could achieve if barriers to growth were removed.

The Chamber campaigns tirelessly for investment, policy decisions and reforms that will enable our region to reach its full potential.

The past twelve months have undoubtedly seen some of the greatest levels of political turmoil in recent history. Brexit has been an overwhelming challenge to business and politicians alike; creating huge amounts of uncertainty and leaving little space for other business issues to receive the attention they deserve.

We have worked throughout the year to ensure that the views of our members have been heard, not just on Brexit but also on topics such as transport, skills and the future of our town centres.

We continue to be passionate in our desire to create a Stronger North East. This will be an economy that builds on its existing assets to become more productive, more resilient and more inclusive. This document sets out the changes we need to see in 2019 to help us achieve our ambitions and commits us to campaigning for those changes.

Our region must become more Influential; with the ability and confidence to have its voice heard on the national

stage. However Brexit plays out, a Stronger North East will be increasingly Global; building on our existing trade relationships and reaching out to new markets while welcoming visitors and talent from across the world.

To make the most of new opportunities we must be better Connected, with physical and digital infrastructure fit for the modern economy. The North East must also strive to be more Competitive by continually improving its local business environments.

Achieving all of this will require the North East to be a Working region, in which a productive workforce possesses the skills needed by employers and young people are fully informed about the career options available to them.

In addition to campaigning for these changes, the Chamber commits to working with its members to ensure they are equipped with the right knowledge, networks, influence and reach to make their own contribution to a stronger, more productive economy.

The Chamber is its members. When we speak, it is our members speaking. When we act, it is with the strength of thousands of businesses across North East England.

You and your businesses are a huge part of what makes this region so special. I would personally like to thank all of our members for their continued support and encourage every business in the region to join us in our mission to build a Stronger North East.



John McCabe, Chamber President



Influential North East

There has rarely been a more critical time for the voice of North East businesses and the wider region to be heard. While the political agenda has been dominated by Brexit, progress on closing the economic performance gap between UK regions has stalled.

Over the past twelve months, the views of business have often been denigrated by senior figures from all aspects of the political spectrum. This is unacceptable. Policy makers need the knowledge, expertise and experience of those in business in order to understand the consequences of their decisions.

This engagement must take place at a national, regional and local level. Across North East England, in every local area, through new and existing structures, we must ensure that business and politicians work hand in hand to stimulate economic growth.

As a region, if we are to be heard we must be bold, ambitious and coherent about what the North East stands for and where its greatest opportunities lie. We must be confident in challenging stereotypes and relentless in shouting about the benefits of investing in our region.

To build a more Influential North East in 2019, we need:

- **Politicians across the North East to engage with, and speak in support of, regional employers**
- **A bolder and more ambitious strategy for the Northern Powerhouse with the North East at its heart**
- **The incoming North of Tyne Mayor to work with business to grow the local economy**
- **Devolved funds and programmes in Tees Valley to be fully aligned with the needs of the wider business community**
- **A clear proposition and cohesive approach to attract investment into the North East**

“The North East of England business sector is bold, innovative and fast-paced, employing many tens of thousands of people from our local communities. We power the regional economy, our companies export to every corner of the globe and we set standards that others seek to emulate. Hodgson Sayers is proud to be part of this dynamic community and we firmly believe that through a collective voice we can deliver a truly bright future for our region.”

John Sayers, Hodgson Sayers



Global North East

The Brexit process has put the issue of overseas trade in the national spotlight. The North East remains a strong exporting region, but as the negotiations have progressed we have seen confidence among many exporters becoming increasingly fragile.

We remain clear in our position that Brexit must not be allowed to damage our firms' ability to trade freely and openly with our biggest export market.

But we also know that our ambitions should extend far beyond the EU. Growing our trade with new and emerging markets will rely not only on businesses broadening their horizons but also on Government doing far more to build trade relationships, stimulate demand and support companies who want to export.

As a globally facing region we should also aspire to dramatically increase our inbound tourism through a clear and cohesive offer to overseas visitors. The North East is a destination that is second to none and we must do more to tell the world about it.

To build a more Global North East in 2019, we need:

- **A Brexit outcome that doesn't adversely affect our ability to trade with the EU**
- **Far greater activity across Government and by businesses to generate new trade opportunities across the globe**
- **Better resourced and tailored support for North East businesses to trade internationally**
- **Greater coordination and promotion of tourism across the North East**

“Exporting is vital to our business success. International sales currently account for over 70% of our total company sales and we see plenty more opportunities to increase these figures, with expansion of Germany and Central Europe marketplaces as well as Asia. We are very proud to be part of the North East's long-standing exporting tradition. There is huge potential here and with more international trade support from the Government we could all do even better.”

**Trevor Cossins, P C Henderson,
British Chambers of Commerce
Exporter of the year award winner**



Competitive North East

We continue to aspire for North East England to be recognised as the most welcoming, supportive and cost-effective place in which to establish and grow a business.

Our region's town and city centres are subject to the same challenges as those up and down the country, but with locally driven ambitions and collaboration between public and private sectors we believe these challenges can be met.

We also firmly believe North East England offers an enviable quality of life for those who wish to build their career here. We must ensure that the scale and quality of local housing matches up to their expectations.

The inherent value of good local employers to their communities cannot be overstated, nor should it be overlooked. Councils and other public bodies, working with business, must do all they can to stimulate the growth of local enterprise.

To build a more Competitive North East in 2018, we need:

- **A new UK Shared Prosperity Fund that expressly addresses the needs of the North East**
- **Interventions across the North East to stimulate and support town centres**
- **More funding and innovative approaches to improve the quality and diversity of housing stock in the North East**
- **Ambitious local housing and infrastructure strategies that enable economic growth**
- **Public bodies to give greater recognition to the genuine social value generated by local employers**

“We believe that having an accessible and diverse housing offer across the North East is an essential part of creating the right environment for the region to grow. Investing in housing development is an important driver for growth, it stimulates the economy, creates and sustains jobs, and generates confidence in our communities. Quality is a major factor, we need new homes that match the aspirations of people at whatever stage they are in their lives, regardless of whether they want to buy or rent.”

Chris Smith, Thirteen Group



Connected North East

North East England will only reach its full potential if our businesses are able to connect reliably with their customers, markets and employees.

Problems with our physical and digital infrastructure continue to frustrate firms and limit their growth. Fixing these problems will not happen overnight. We must continue to apply pressure on Government to invest in improving connectivity in the North East and to recognise the role of infrastructure spending in redressing economic imbalances.

These investments will lead to far greater productivity. Improvements to the rail network will ensure more people can access employment opportunities and more businesses can grow their presence across the UK.

Better access to international gateways will enable us to achieve our trade and tourism aspirations, while better and more reliable digital connectivity will cement our growing reputation as a hotbed of technological innovation.

To build a more Connected North East in 2019, we need:

- Investment across the rail network in the North East to enable better local and national connections
- A swifter planning process for key road works
- Reform of Treasury rules on infrastructure spending
- Improved access to ports and airports to further international trade ambitions
- Public and private investment to maintain the North East's competitive advantage in new energy technologies
- Digital connectivity to be given far greater prominence in economic strategy

“As a global logistics business with offices and significant client base in the North East, we rely heavily on the local infrastructure to not only connect manufacturers with consumers, but also to provide an effective and positive working environment to our dedicated staff. As digital and physical connectivity will continue to become more and more important in everyday life and key to successful business locally and globally, we’re committed to investing into the latest innovative and digital solutions that will enable us to continue to facilitate personalised solutions to help local businesses grow globally.”

Peter Wilkinson, Woodland Group



Working North East

The transformation of the North East labour market in recent years has been remarkable, with employment levels frequently touching record highs and the gap between our unemployment rate and the national average narrowing significantly.

However, this progress has exacerbated long-standing skills gaps in key industries, while reforms to skills and education funding have deterred employers from investing in training.

Employers must be supported in their efforts to recruit, train and retain talented staff at all skill levels. Greater flexibility in funding would enable businesses and providers to work together to address skills needs.

While our region has been rightly recognised as an exemplar for its work in improving careers guidance, we should not rest on our laurels. Too many young people still receive inadequate advice. Meaningful engagement with business is an effective way of address this and we commit to providing opportunities for this to happen.

To move us towards a Working North East in 2019, we need:

- Greater flexibility for Apprenticeship Levy payers to allow them to use their levy funds to address skills gaps
- More support for SMEs to utilise the skills system; reducing complexity and allowing them to share resources
- Further improvements in careers advice and business engagement with education to provide young people with the right guidance on career options
- Policy decisions that support our world class Higher Education institutions and their role in the economy
- An immigration system that allows North East firms to attract and retain the right skills from around the world
- Government to listen and respond to business concerns about the viability of T-Levels

“For young people hoping to enter industry in the region, it’s essential that we can offer employers the most relevant and competitive skills, especially in engineering where there is a serious demand for new talent. After being selected for Go North East’s award-winning bus and coach mechanical and electrical engineering apprenticeship, I’m lucky to have a unique opportunity that will allow me to meet that need. Over the next four years, I’ll be training on-the-job alongside other apprentices and the company’s expert engineering teams to develop the specialist skills needed to start a successful career in the industry.”

Melissa Millington, first year apprentice, Go North East bus and coach mechanical and electrical engineering apprenticeship, delivered in partnership with Gateshead College

