

True North Consultation Response to

“A New Deal for North East Workers”

True North is broadly supportive of the New Deal for North East Workers Strategy acknowledging that we do as a region have issues with economic inactivity, health statistics / outcomes and higher than average youth unemployment.

We support the broad statements of intent from the NECA but would like to see more detail on what this would actually look like, when it would be delivered and what the individual outcomes would likely be.

Some of the one year / three strategic actions feel in the wrong order, and if change is to be achieved some priorities particularly those connected to opportunities for young people need to be moved from three years to year one.

Engagement between schools and employers should be more targeted and earlier in a child's school life, so that they can understand options available to them and how to make themselves employable and successful in the field they wish to get a job or find a career in. This includes significant careers advice and work experience / volunteering opportunities that are more than a tick box exercise. There is a whole piece of work needed on how cycles of inactivity particularly within families and communities can be broken and the role of the private sector in this alongside the public sector.

We would urge better vocational training in schools themselves with input from industry, giving pathways into work and not just setting someone up for university. More can be done with Modern Apprenticeships to make them more of an attractive option seen as a sign of success to our youngsters, removing the perception of a working-class stigma.

A particular emphasis has to be on raising the profile of alternative next steps after education including the different levels of apprenticeships and this must be directed to parents as much as it does to young people. A step change in mindset is required with some degree of urgency.

Opportunities for young people in rural areas deserves particular attention, as there are additional barriers for them in terms of transport and connectivity, and the costs associated with this for young people starting out.

The high growth sectors and opportunities are quite rightly detailed but that should not mean that other sectors such as tourism, agriculture, transport, professional services, hospitality and food production should be ignored. The rural economy has much to offer and should not be overlooked. True North rural economy and destination events highlighted the fact that the same skills and staffing issues exist in these sectors too.



Mention should also be given to attracting skilled workers to the North East from other regions and retaining those that come to the north east to study. The North East has a great deal to offer as a wonderful area to live in and the attraction of house prices, and related costs that have a positive impact on disposable income. Attracting and retaining the best workers in the North East will be best done by attracting and retaining the best businesses in the North East. True North Director Dan Harrison notes that when he was CEO of True Potential they attracted and retained top talent because they were one of the top Financial Services firms in the UK and thus employees wanted to join and build a long term relationship. More focus on the private sector and less on the public sector will create a more balanced economy.

Health issues are impactful on economic activity figures and mention should be made of waiting times across health access from GP appointments to waiting list and referral times. Timely outcomes are imperative to getting individuals back to work, with or without reasonable adjustments.

A final point needs to be made about the soaring costs of employing people. Ignoring the impact of rising rates of pay, national insurance hikes and the impact of other Government economic policies will not only raise a question on the credibility of the strategy but also the real impact these government decisions have on employers across the North East. The right conditions for business growth are also essential and for the North East to reach its full potential there does need to be some intervention to help businesses to invest and grow. A truly transformational New Deal for workers will be created by working closely with business leaders and entrepreneurs, thinking differently and being bold – reaching out to the people who are normally too busy building their businesses to engage on public policy.

