

Press release: New Northern Powerhouse partners named as exports rise

- Global exporters New Balance UK, Playdale, Tech Buyer and Hitachi join the Northern Powerhouse Partners Programme
- Northern Powerhouse exports now account for nearly 20% of the UK's total goods and services output
- Exports have helped propel the value of the Northern Powerhouse economy to £330 billion – greater than the economies of Austria, Belgium or Norway

Some of the world's most recognisable brands have signed up to support the government's plan for the [Northern Powerhouse](#), as new figures show the region's economy is now greater than that of some European nations.

New Balance, Hitachi, Playdale and Techbuyer have joined the [Northern Powerhouse Partners Programme](#), a government initiative which brings together businesses and organisations from across the North of England. This network of partners believes strongly in the economic potential of the North, and supports the need for a combined effort by government and business to realise that potential.

According to the latest statistics, the Northern Powerhouse is worth over £330 billion a year to the UK economy, and since 2014 its exports have steadily increased. The region now supports around 20% of total UK goods exports – worth £60 billion in 2017.

Northern Powerhouse Minister, Jake Berry MP, said:

Having these trailblazing exporters join the Northern Powerhouse Partners programme is a real boost to our efforts to fuel enterprise and growth in the North of England.

As we seize the opportunities that come with leaving the European Union, it will be the manufacturers of the Northern Powerhouse that will help us deliver a strong and resilient economy fit for the future.

Trade Minister, Graham Stuart MP, said:

Exporters are the driving force behind the Northern Powerhouse's economy and I am delighted to see 4 fantastic examples of industry and innovation become Northern Powerhouse Partners.

Through trade missions tailored to northern businesses and one-to-one support from our locally based expert international trade advisers, the Department for International Trade is helping

thousands of businesses across the Northern Powerhouse achieve their export ambitions.

Over £7 million has been committed to establish a Northern Powerhouse Taskforce to boost trade and investment across the North. The Taskforce has completed over 50 Northern Powerhouse Trade Missions from San Francisco to Singapore.

All 4 companies that have signed up to the Northern Powerhouse Programme have a strong manufacturing presence in the Northern Powerhouse:

- New Balance UK employs 270 people at its site in Flimby, Cumbria producing 500,000 pairs of shoes a week with 80% of sales revenues from exports.
- Hitachi has established a state-of-the-art train factory in County Durham which employs over 730 people. The team of train builders, including over 50 apprentices graduating this year, is building pioneering trains using Japanese bullet train technology. Hitachi has also co-founded a technical college, with students going on to work in the factory. Their trains are manufactured in the UK for use across Europe.
- Playdale's head office, manufacturing facilities and global distribution centre are situated on the edge of the Lake District in Cumbria. To date, they have created over 22,000 play areas in 47 countries across the world.
- Techbuyer is one of the fastest growing tech businesses in Britain with 57% of its sales coming from outside the UK. Employee numbers at the company's plant in Harrogate, North Yorkshire have increased by almost 200%.

Barry Leahey MBE, Managing Director of Playdale, said:

We are extremely proud to become a Northern Powerhouse partner and will do all we can to encourage and inspire other Northern businesses, not yet exporting, to work with the Department for International Trade and explore their exporting potential.

Playdale is a Cumbrian family business dating back to 1735 that now manufactures and sells playground equipment in 48 countries globally. Not only does this demonstrate and promote the economic strengths of northern businesses like ourselves, but it provides a huge boost to local supply chains too.

'If we can you can!'

Karen Boswell OBE, Managing Director of Hitachi Rail in the UK, said:

Our British train builders are using Japanese bullet train technology to create a truly world class factory in the North East. Our presence in the North East supports thousands of jobs through using local suppliers, with over 70% of our parts coming from the North.

Kevin Towers, Managing Director of Techbuyer, said:

Techbuyer has found everything we need to run and grow our business right here in the North and we'd like to promote the opportunities and potential we see around us. Last year, over 57% of our sales shipped internationally and having our main distribution centre in North Yorkshire has been great for national and international trade.

We live and work in a thriving location with a wide range of businesses – from SMEs to international, traditional to innovative – providing us with services, customers and stock suppliers. Increased connectivity and investment is surely key to addressing the current imbalance between North and South and showcasing the development and successes of Northern businesses like ours is one way to achieve this.

Fran Allen, Vice President of New Balance's EMEA region, said:

We are delighted to become a member of the Northern Powerhouse Partners Programme.

As a manufacturer, exporter, and contributor to the regional Cumbrian economy, we see the enormous potential in being a part of this collaborative effort, by the government.

It is a grand initiative which stands to link the great communities of the North, boost economic growth, and, together, make the Northern Powerhouse a reality.

The [Northern Powerhouse](#) is the government's vision for a globally-competitive northern economy with a flourishing private sector, a highly-skilled population, and world-renowned civic and business leadership.

The [Northern Powerhouse Partner Programme](#) is an important part of creating the Northern Powerhouse. The government is looking to build a network of partners who all believe strongly in the economic potential of the North, and support the need for a combined effort by government and business to realise that potential. There are currently over 170 (178) businesses and

organisations signed up to the Partner Programme.

[Regional trade statistics first quarter 2018](#).

Prospective partners can email NorthernPowerhouse@communities.gsi.gov.uk for more information about the Partners Programme and how to apply.

The Department for International Trade has 3 locations in the Northern Powerhouse to help business start exporting, or export more, to existing or new markets.

View the Twitter accounts of those 3 locations below for more information:

[News story: More than 420,000 people get on the housing ladder with Help to Buy](#)

More than 420,000 people have now used the government's Help to Buy schemes to help them realise their home-owning dreams, [new figures show](#).

First-time buyers continue to open new Help to Buy: ISA accounts, with more than 1.2 million accounts now opened, offering government bonuses of up to £3,000 on top of their savings.

[Quarterly Help to Buy statistics released today](#) (Thursday 16 August) show that:

- more than 420,000 completions have taken place using one or more of the Help to Buy schemes
- more than 365,400 first-time buyer households are now on the housing ladder thanks to Help to Buy
- the North West is the region with the highest number of Help to Buy completions (more than 20,000 in the last quarter)

John Glen, Economic Secretary to the Treasury, said:

We're helping a new generation of first-time buyers realise their dream of owning a home.

Help to Buy continues to be hugely popular across the UK, with 420,000 people getting support so far.

And with our stamp duty cuts and the lifetime ISA, we are delivering for first-time buyers.

Kit Malthouse MP, Minister of State for Housing, said:

This government is committed to helping more people get on the housing ladder, restoring the dream of home ownership for a new generation.

Our Help To Buy: Equity Loan scheme has made this a reality for tens of thousands of households across the country, helping almost 170k households purchase their home.

More than 169,100 property purchases have taken place through the [Help to Buy Equity Loan scheme](#), which offers buyers up to 20% of a newly built home's costs so they only need to provide a 5% deposit.

95% of first-time buyers who pay stamp duty will also benefit from tax changes announced in Autumn Budget 2017, helping more than a million people get on the housing ladder over the next 5 years.

The government has abolished stamp duty altogether for first-time buyer purchases up to £300,000, and made this relief available for the first £300,000 of properties worth up to £500,000, providing help for people in higher value areas.

So far, [121,500 first-time buyers have saved a total of £284,000 thanks to this stamp duty relief](#).

The government is committed to making housing more affordable, with an aim to build 300,000 new homes a year in the areas that need it, as well as encouraging better use of land in cities and towns.

For people saving up for their first home or for later in life, [the Lifetime ISA is also available](#). Savers can put in up to £4,000 each year, until the age of 50. The government will add a 25% bonus to your savings, up to a maximum of £1,000 per year.

[Press release: James Brokenshire launches £200 million pilot to boost social home ownership](#)

Thousands of social housing association tenants are being given the opportunity to realise their dream of home ownership, as the Midlands Voluntary Right to Buy Pilot launches today (16 August 2018).

Communities Secretary Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP said this is the first step

in helping housing association tenants get a foot on the property ladder.

This follows measures announced in this week's [social housing green paper](#), to make it easier for residents to progress into home ownership. The existing Right to Buy programme for council tenants backs families who have worked hard, paid their rent and have a sense of pride in their home.

Government is providing £200 million for this Voluntary Right to Buy pilot, with places allocated via a ballot to ensure fairness for applicants.

After working closely with the National Housing Federation to make this launch a reality, money from the discounted sales will then be used to fund replacement homes.

Speaking at the launch, Communities Secretary Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP said:

This government is committed to providing opportunities for people to get a foot on the property ladder and to have a place they can call their own.

Our £200 million investment into the Midlands Voluntary Right to Buy Pilot is the first step in helping housing association tenants realise their dream of home ownership.

Chief Executive of the National Housing Federation David Orr said:

Over the past 3 years, we have worked closely with the government on its proposal to extend the Right to Buy to housing association tenants. Of course, this pilot is not the finished product. We want to take the time to get this major endeavour right.

It will be a success for everyone involved only if every home that is sold is replaced with a new affordable home, and if the application process is as smooth as possible for tenants.

Now, we are looking forward to working with tenants, with housing associations and with the government to make this pilot a resounding success. This scheme must empower social housing tenants and meet our own ambitions to deliver the homes the country needs.

This is the latest step by government to make the housing market work, with opportunities available to realise the dream of home ownership whether you rent in the private or social sectors. Council housing tenants are already able to buy their home at a discount and since 2010 Right to Buy has helped almost 94,000 households

Earlier in June, a £1.67 billion government grant was announced from the £9 billion Affordable Homes programme that will deliver 23,000 new affordable

homes, including 12,500 for social rent.

Places will be allocated via a ballot to ensure fairness and manage interest within the funding available. The ballot will close a month from today's launch (16 September 2018), with the pilot running until spring 2020 giving successful candidates adequate time to complete the purchase.

The government will assess the impact of the pilot before deciding on the next steps for this policy.

The [National Housing Federation \(NHF\)](#) is a trade association, which represents social landlords and housing associations in England.

Since 2010 we have delivered over 378,000 new affordable homes through our £9 billion Affordable Homes Programme.

£200 million of government funding is being provided for the Midlands Voluntary Right to Buy pilot, as announced in the 2017 Autumn Budget.

The government will fully fund the discounts, and housing associations will use the receipts from the sales to fund replacement homes.

Registration website for the [Voluntary Right To Buy pilot](#).

Since 2010 Right to Buy has helped almost 94,000 households get onto the housing ladder.

We are using a ballot because we believe this is the fairest way of managing interest within the funding available to the pilot project. The alternative would have been to allocate spaces on a first come, first served basis. This would have disadvantaged residents with accessibility issues, or those who could not get onto the internet in the first few days of opening.

The ballot will be open for a period of one month, after which no further registrations will be accepted. Shortly after the ballot has closed, the ballot will randomly allocate places on the pilot.

Tenants who are successful in the ballot will not be guaranteed that they can purchase under the scheme – they will still need to meet the eligibility criteria and complete the application process in full.

Housing associations will have discretion over which properties they sell. Where the home is exempt from the pilot, the housing association will give the tenant the opportunity to use their Right to Buy discount to buy another housing association property. This is known as the portable discount, and is being tested through the pilot.

A list of participating housing associations and local authorities is available on request.

Press release: UK response to the Ebola outbreak in North Kivu, DRC

UK response to the Ebola outbreak in North Kivu, DRC

The UK is working closely with the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the World Health Organisation (WHO) and other partners to tackle the latest outbreak of Ebola in the country.

The UK is providing expertise and support to help the government and WHO respond effectively to this outbreak which is occurring in a very insecure region. This response is enabling faster diagnosis and monitoring of the spread of the disease, and is improving medical facilities and their capacity to treat patients. It will also protect health workers and raise awareness of the disease within local communities.

In addition, we are supporting the WHO to strengthen surveillance at borders and help neighbouring areas to prepare to tackle the disease should it spread.

Yesterday (15th August 2018) the International Development Secretary Penny Mordaunt spoke with Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director General of the WHO, to discuss Dr Tedros's reflections on his recent visit to the area and how the UK can continue to support the current response.

International Development Secretary Penny Mordaunt said:

"Global health threats like Ebola devastate lives and don't respect borders. The UK is acting now to support the DRC Government, WHO and other partners to contain this latest outbreak occurring in a very challenging context.

"We've also already been working extensively with these partners to improve vulnerable countries' capacity to detect and tackle outbreaks like this quickly when they occur – to maintain stability in the region and keep the UK public safe at home."

The UK is supporting WHO and partners to strengthen health systems so that African countries at high risk of disease outbreaks such the DRC have the capability to prevent, detect and respond quickly to new outbreaks. This work was proven to be effective in the swift response which tackled the previous Ebola outbreak this year in Equator Province of the DRC.

The UK is also the leading donor to the UN's Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), and the second largest contributor to the WHO Contingency Fund for Emergencies, both of which have mobilised to tackle this outbreak.

Following the West Africa outbreak of Ebola in 2014, UK aid worked with the Wellcome Trust to develop an experimental vaccine for the disease. UK aid support for Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, has helped ensure a stockpile of this vaccine is available. A vaccination programme to protect high risk

populations in North Kivu province has now been launched. Risk to the UK from this outbreak remains negligible to very low, but Public Health England continues to monitor the situation closely.

[News story: UK armoured vehicles arrive in Oman ahead of Exercise Saif Sareea 3](#)

Saif Sareea 3 (SS3) is the third UK-Oman joint exercise, with the previous two taking place in 1986 and 2001. SS3 is the UK Armed Forces lead exercise this year and the largest joint exercise of its kind in 17 years.

The exercise, culminating in a 'firepower demonstration', will test the UK and Sultanate's ability to operate together in austere conditions through the deployment of a Coalition Joint Task Force.

A Scimitar CVRT (combat vehicle reconnaissance tracked), used for reconnaissance, disembarks from the UK 'RoRo' ship in Duqm. © MOD Crown Copyright

The shipping of the equipment for the exercise is coordinated and delivered by Joint Forces Command (JFC), who will coordinate sea and air transportation (often heading to the new Joint Logistics Support Base) prior to and following the exercise.

The equipment being transported to Oman will be crucial to the Army, Royal Air Force, Royal Navy and Royal Marine activity during the exercise.

The two RORO ships which arrived this week in Duqm left the military port in Marchwood, near Southampton, in late July. The ships sailed into the Port of Duqm on the 10 and 14 August, each with a cargo of over 3,500 tonnes. Their cargo included vehicles such as Warrior armoured fighting vehicles, Scimitar CVRT (combat vehicle reconnaissance tracked) and Bulldog personnel carriers.

Challenger Armoured Repair and Recovery Vehicle being transported from the port to the Joint Logistics Support Base in Duqm. © MOD Crown Copyright

Troops of 17 Port and Maritime Regiment, Royal Logistics Corps, laboured in the heat of the morning to unload vehicles and containers. Corporal Jennifer MacPhee-Peace (32), a Port Operator said:

Because it's so hot, you just want to get it done with, we unlash everything within an hour.

Over 200 vehicles were unloaded from the ship, belonging to 1 Mercian, 22 Royal Engineers, Royal Tank Regiment, 40 Commando Royal Marines and the Commando Helicopter Force.

The vehicles and other logistical equipment will be transported onwards to the Joint Logistics Support Base in Duqm and other locations ahead of the start of the exercise in October.