

Chamber Business Awards 2017: Best of British Business

The very best of British business was celebrated at the British Chamber of Commerce's annual Chamber Business Awards ceremony last night.

The Chamber Business Awards, which is now in its 14th year, is one of the showpiece events in the business calendar, highlighting the role of business in delivering growth and prosperity for the UK and local communities.

Businesses from across the country came together at the gala dinner, hosted by TV presenter Kate Thornton, to mark the outstanding achievements of both UK firms and Chambers of Commerce.

The award winners in full:

- Best Use of Technology – **AnyJunk**, a London based bulk waste collector for business and homes, is using technology to change the productivity and efficiency of the waste disposal industry
- Export Business of the Year – **Linwoods**, a bakers and health food business based in Armagh, has made excellent use of consumer and market research and sells its products to retailers in over 30 countries
- High Growth Business of the Year – **ICON Aerospace Technology Ltd**, a world leader in highly engineered polymer-based products for aerospace and defence applications, has increased turnover by 30% and created 150 jobs in less than two years
- Excellence in Customer Service – **Stockport Homes**, delivers affordable housing and accommodation solutions, and has driven customer satisfaction through the implementation of a Continuous Improvement Framework
- Small Business of the Year – **DNA Worldwide**, providers of DNA, drug and alcohol testing, has used state of the art technology to develop a range of new services, and has ambitious plans to expand
- Commitment to People Development – **Manchester & Cheshire Construction Co. Ltd**, has shown impressive commitment to the training and development of staff, participating in 252 training days last year
- Business and Education Partnership – **Ahead Partnership**, based in Leeds, has worked to address the soft skills gap, and brings together teachers and employers to create bespoke programmes of learning
- Best Use of Social Media – **JC Social Media Limited**, began trading from a spare bedroom in Birmingham in 2011, and use social media to help clients connect with new customers, gaining 28.9m impressions for over a four-month period for a client's event
- Health and Wellbeing – **Flynn**, a building and maintenance business based in Northern Ireland, developed a 'Boost' initiative to improve moral, mental wellbeing and communication
- Chamber of the Year – **Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce**, has grown by 11% in the last three years and worked closely with other chambers in

the region to share best practice

- Excellence in International Trade – **Northamptonshire Chamber (incorporating Milton Keynes Chamber of Commerce)** offers members a wide portfolio of services relating to trade, including International Trade Forums and regular workshops
- Most Effective Campaigning – **North & Western Lancashire Chamber of Commerce**, has shown determination and a dedication to the local business community in its campaign for energy exploration in the county
- Excellence in Membership Services – **Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce** has grown by 12% over the last two years, and an impressive 20% of Staffordshire's workforce are in membership

AnyJunk also won the award for Business of the Year, and as a prize will be invited to open the London Stock Exchange on March 1st 2018, the day the Chamber Business Awards 2018 are launched.

Commenting on this year's awards, Francis Martin, President of the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC), said:

"These awards are the perfect opportunity to celebrate the best of British business. I never cease to be surprised by the innovation and ambition of UK companies, and the contribution firms of every size and sector make to their local communities. I look forward to seeing the finalists and winners of our award continue to blaze the trail and create jobs and opportunities for our nation."

Ends

Notes to editors:

The British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) Chamber Business Awards took place on Thursday 30th November at the Brewery, London, and was supported by Bibby Financial Services, DHL, Legal and General, London Stock Exchange Group, Moneycorp. RADA in Business, Qdos Consulting and Westfield Health.

If you are interested in speaking to any of the winners or finalists, please contact the BCC press office.

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BCC/DHL: British exporters keep calm and carry on

The British Chambers of Commerce, in partnership with DHL, today (Thursday) publishes its latest Quarterly International Trade Outlook, based on survey and documentation data from UK exporters.

The Outlook shows considerable price pressures amongst exporting businesses – but exporters are absorbing the impact for the moment thanks to stronger sales and orders.

The BCC/DHL Trade Confidence Index, which measures the volume of trade documentation issued by accredited Chambers of Commerce for goods shipments, rose by 2.25% on the quarter, and stands at the third highest level on record.

The survey, based on the responses of over 3,300 exporters, shows that in the manufacturing sector, exporters are enjoying strong sales and orders in foreign markets, and are also reporting improvements in domestic sales and orders.

The results of the survey indicate the price pressure from the cost of raw materials is high across the board for exporters (86% in manufacturing, 42% in services). 68% of exporting manufacturers consider exchange rates as a concern to their business.

Exporters are also more likely to have tried recruiting in the last three months. However, firms across the UK economy are struggling to find the right skills, with 70% of manufacturers and 57% of services firms reporting recruitment difficulties.

The findings suggest that the fall in sterling is increasing price pressure for businesses across the economy, but particularly in manufacturing. However, many of those businesses that export have been able to offset the fall in sterling thanks to timely improvements in sales and orders, both overseas and at home.

Key findings from the report:

- The BCC/DHL Trade Confidence Index, a measure of the volume of trade documentation issued nationally, rose by 2.25% on the quarter. The Index now stands at 126.51 – up 4% on Q3 2016 – and stands at the third highest level since records began in 2004

- 44% of exporting manufacturers and 30% of exporting service firms reported increased export sales in Q3. 41% of exporting manufacturers and 26% of exporting service firms reported increased export orders
- 41% of exporting manufacturers reported that domestic sales had increased, and 38% domestic orders increased in Q3 2017
- 39% of exporting manufacturers expect their prices to rise. Of these firms, 86% cited raw materials as a cost pressure
- 68% of exporting manufacturers cite exchange rates as a concern to their business, and 49% in the services sector
- 33% of exporting manufacturers and 31% of exporting services firms view inflation as a concern to their business

Commenting on the findings, Dr Adam Marshall, Director General of the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC), said:

“While it’s encouraging to see many exporters reporting improved performance on the back of rising demand in key markets, including the Eurozone, price pressures remain a real cloud on the horizon for UK firms.

“The depreciation of sterling has undoubtedly benefited some firms, but has ratcheted costs up significantly for others. Taken together with higher domestic costs facing businesses, a tipping point may soon be reached for some firms – with consequences for investment, recruitment and trade.

“Many exporters are also being hampered by issues in the domestic business environment, most notably the widening gap between business skills needs and the pool of available labour. Trading businesses in some areas now say that there is a generalised labour shortage in their area, which could put a brake on their overseas activity if it is not addressed. This is a sobering reminder that the focus needs to be on the fundamentals here at home, as well as the high politics of Brexit and global trade policy.”

Ian Wilson, CEO DHL Express UK and Ireland, said:

“Now is an interesting time to be part of the UK’s export industry. Whilst it remains shrouded in uncertainty about what Brexit will look like and the implications for UK businesses large and small, those businesses are demonstrating a defiantly positive export performance.

“The world is now more connected than it ever has been, and this report shows that UK businesses are embracing this connectivity, despite the lack of clarity about what lies ahead. We must ensure that businesses remain able to meet international demand and, in doing so, keep the UK at the forefront of buyers’ minds when shopping cross border.”

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The Trade Confidence Index is a measure of trade documents issued by Accredited Chambers of Commerce for goods to overseas markets where documentation is required.

Spokespeople are available for interview and a full QITO report is available from the press office.

Balance figures are the percentage of firms that reported an increase minus the percentage that reported a decrease. If the figure is a plus it indicates expansion of activity and if the figure is a minus it indicates contraction of activity. A figure above 0 indicates growth, while a figure below 0 indicates contraction.

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BCC comments on rail strategy

Commenting on the publication of the rail strategy by the Department for Transport, Jane Gratton, Head of Business Environment at the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC), said:

“The prospect of increasing capacity by re-opening some railway routes will be cheered by business communities across the UK, and help to crowd in local housing and economic developments. It will go some way to reassure firms in the regions that their economy is not being neglected, following the cancellation of some of the electrification plans earlier this year.

“The new joint teams need to have regular dialogue with businesses to better understand the issues and opportunities at the local level, and businesses must be consulted on the competitions for new franchises.

“We look forward to working with government to ensure that the UK’s rail infrastructure is reliable and fit for purpose as we leave the European Union, giving UK businesses the best domestic environment possible in which to thrive.”

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BCC: Focus on places key for long-term success of Industrial Strategy

Director General Adam Marshall comments on the publication of the government's Industrial Strategy White Paper.

Commenting on the Industrial Strategy White Paper, Adam Marshall, Director General of the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC), said:

“Chambers of Commerce have been working actively with government to develop the Industrial Strategy, and we are pleased that the concerns and ideas of business communities across the country have been listened to.

“Businesses will welcome the sense of mission that infuses the Industrial Strategy, as well as its assessment of the challenges and opportunities that the UK faces, particularly as both businesses and government look to forge a new path beyond the European Union.

“We have been clear that harnessing the potential of our cities, towns and counties is crucial to make our country more competitive and prosperous, and so Chamber business communities will cheer the focus on places to boost productivity in local economies.

“Over the coming months, it is crucial that the government listens to the full range of business voices when developing local and sector-based deals, so that firms of all sizes and sectors can buy into the Strategy for years to come.

“Businesses will now want to see clear evidence that this Industrial Strategy can be implemented over the long term – and will be dismayed if it falls victim to short-term Westminster politicking. Only a consistent and coherent approach over time will help set the foundations for business communities across the UK to grow and thrive.”

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[BCC comments on OBR forecast November 2017](#)

Commenting on the latest forecasts by the Office for Budget Responsibility, Suren Thiru, Head of Economics at the BCC, said:

“The downgrades to the OBR’s latest GDP forecasts are significant, and are now closer to our view that the UK economy is in a prolonged period of sub-par growth. Their projections confirm that consumer spending, a key driver of UK growth, is likely to remain under pressure over the next few years, with pay growth not expected to exceed price growth until 2019. The OBR’s latest outlook also confirms that the imbalances in the UK economy are likely to remain in place for the foreseeable future. Business investment is forecast to be much weaker than in the OBR’s March outlook, and net trade’s contribution to overall UK growth is expected to remain limited.

“The downgrades to the OBR’s projections for productivity highlight the deep-rooted structural problems in our economy – from skills shortages, to infrastructure bottlenecks – that continue to undermine the UK’s long-term growth prospects.

“On the public finances, it is encouraging that government borrowing for this financial year is now expected to be lower than in their previous forecast. However, over the next few years the pressure on the UK’s fiscal position is likely to increase by more than the OBR is currently predicting, in the face of subdued growth and weak productivity. In order to make sustained progress in cutting the deficit, more needs to be done to deliver the type of economic growth needed to achieve a real strengthening and widening of the UK’s tax base.

“We welcome a number of policy announcement made in today’s Budget that will help overcome some of these critical issues. The government will need to be more radical in supporting investment and growth as the Brexit transition becomes clearer.”

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