



Beyond the Bottom Line:

How Enterprise Drives Inclusive Growth

9 October 2025



NorthEast
Enterprise
Agency

INSIGHTS 
North East



Durham
University

On 9 October, Insights North East and the North East Enterprise Agency (NEEAL) hosted an engaging evening exploring how enterprise can drive inclusive economic growth across the North East. The event brought together researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to share new research findings and discuss how to build a thriving regional economy that works for everyone.

Insights North East aims to connect regional policy and decision-makers with evidence-based research, ensuring that policy interventions make a positive and lasting impact on people's lives. We work across the North East policy system to understand key challenges and match them with expertise and evidence that meets the region's priorities. Drawing on rigorous research from across our universities, we distil actionable insights for effective policymaking.

New Research on Enterprise and Inclusive Growth

At the event, Insights North East shared a policy briefing titled "Beyond the Bottom Line: How Enterprise Drives Inclusive Growth", the first output from an ongoing research project. The project brings together existing academic research, new primary data from in-depth interviews with regional experts, case study reports and evaluations from enterprise support providers, and insights from a collaborative workshop held in July. The briefing presents a new holistic framework for understanding growth and its policy implications for partners across the region.

Setting the Scene: The North East's Local Growth Plan

Phil Witcherley, Director of Economy and Innovation at the North East Combined Authority, outlined the region's interim local growth plan, which sets a bold new agenda emphasising inclusive growth, child poverty prevention, the foundational economy, and boosting representation of underrepresented groups in business.

Entrepreneurship as a Pathway to Opportunity

Professor Jonathan Kimmit, Professor of Entrepreneurship at Durham University, spoke about what motivates founders and how entrepreneurship offers individuals the chance to take control of their economic future. The discussion explored how enterprise support could create pathways out of poverty and generate opportunities for those most excluded from economic prosperity.

Professor Kimmit also highlighted the complex, non-linear nature of regional growth. He emphasised the rise of entrepreneurship across the region and the importance of ecosystem models and support systems.



Creating Truly Inclusive Entrepreneurship

A significant theme throughout the evening was how to better include and harness neurodiverse talent within the entrepreneurial ecosystem. Speakers acknowledged that traditional business environments and support structures may unintentionally exclude talented individuals. Creating truly inclusive pathways to entrepreneurship requires deliberate effort to reshape both culture and practice, with representation playing a critical role in shaping who participates.

Learning from Local Entrepreneurs

A panel of entrepreneurs included founders from a diverse range of enterprises. The panel ranged from Kelly Smith, who set up SPELK studio to make furniture and kitchens with sustainability at its heart, to Tracy Fee, who set up a social enterprise, Hiy'ed, to support people with neurodiversity in gaining employment. Adam Croney set up a health food kitchen, Fuel'D, to promote healthy food consumption in North Shields, while Dave Head is trailblazing the use of AI in design and marketing. These brilliant entrepreneurs shared their varied motivations for starting businesses, which were primarily focused on the social value they could create through their enterprises.



Rethinking Success

Speakers reflected on how we measure success and set meaningful targets. Do conventional metrics truly capture the value that enterprises create for individuals and communities?

This prompted deeper consideration of what constitutes "successful" entrepreneurship when viewed through the lens of inclusive growth.

The Importance of Connection and Support

The event highlighted the challenges entrepreneurs face when starting out—often alone—and the fundamental need for networks that reduce risk and promote resilience. Peer support, mentorship, and community connections are essential for building sustainable enterprises, alongside the practical support offered by business advisors.

Looking Forward

This event represented an opportunity to develop a distinctly North East approach to policymaking that truly addresses the region's needs and builds new kinds of opportunities for the future.

