



Media Release

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Survey reveals North-east business view on EU referendum

Three-quarters of North-east businesses polled in a recent national survey have said they would vote to remain in the EU.

A UK-wide Chamber of Commerce survey released today (Friday) - carried out in partnership with Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce, the Scottish Chambers of Commerce and the British Chambers of Commerce – asked how member businesses would vote if the EU referendum was held the next day.

Seventy-four per cent of North-east respondents said they would vote to remain in the EU, with 11.5% saying they would vote to leave and 14% saying they did not know how they would vote.

This compares to the UK result, where 63% would vote to remain in the EU and almost 27% would vote to leave.

Of the North-east respondents who would vote to remain in the EU, 41% said they were completely committed in their decision and 40% were quite committed and unlikely to change their minds. This declared commitment to voting decisions was also similarly distributed across Scotland and the UK.

Nationally, half (50%) of the senior businesspeople polled said that the concessions the Prime Minister brings back from Brussels will have an impact on their voting intentions in the upcoming EU referendum.

This figure was slightly higher among the North-east respondents (52%)

The findings show that many businesspeople have not yet taken a firm position on the question of Britain's future relationship with the EU – and a clear desire for greater clarity from Downing Street.

James Bream, research & policy director at Aberdeen Grampian Chamber of Commerce, said, "This survey begins our research around the EU referendum and we have found that members are uncertain on what the Prime Minister is actually negotiating on and what the outcome will be".

“That is not acceptable but it does enable us to support members by highlighting the important issues and the potential outcomes.

“We will continue to take the temperature of opinion and to provide information to the North-east business community to support its leaders and employees in making an informed choice.”

The survey polled over 2,000 senior business leaders across the UK from all sectors, regions and all company sizes during August 2015. Highlights – including business understanding, impacts, and priorities – are detailed below.

Key highlights – August 2015 BCC Europe Survey

BUSINESS KNOWLEDGE

Businesspeople in the North-east are following the EU debate with less frequency than nationally, with 51% reading about it at least weekly nationally, compared to 37% in the North-east.

Majorities nationally say they are familiar with the implications of an in-out referendum, with 72% saying they understand the implications for their business and 69% saying they understand the implications for the UK.

BUSINESS IMPACTS

Over eight in ten business leaders, both regionally and nationally, report no material impacts of the planned referendum on their businesses to date.

If the UK were to leave the EU, 40% currently expect this would have a negative impact on their overall growth strategy; 40% expect it would have no impact; and 14% expect it would have a positive impact.

When asked about the impact of a future change in the UK's status in the EU on their business, 46% of businesspeople expect a negative impact - but the same amount, 46%, expect either no impact or a positive impact.

The proportion of North-east respondents' overall negative perceptions at 49% was similar to the Scottish Chambers (50%) and the UK-wide Chambers (46%) but they were less optimistic than their counterparts in the UK and Scotland - 16% of UK respondents and 11% of Scottish respondents saw an overall positive impact for their business, as opposed to 7% in the North-east.

THE PM'S RENEGOTIATION PACKAGE

North-east respondents are less familiar with the PM's renegotiation package, as 29% claiming to be familiar compared to a 31% nationally.

However businesspeople both regionally and nationally are clear they want the Prime Minister to focus his aspirations for renegotiation on greater powers for the UK parliament to block proposed EU

legislation (56%), allowing the UK to opt out from “ever closer union” (41%) and greater UK control over migration (40%).

The most beneficial pan-EU reforms would be a reduction in regulation and red tape (59%) and a change in the balance of power between Brussels and individual member countries (45%). Some 11% do not believe any EU reforms would have a beneficial impact on their business.

Ends

Notes to editor

- BCC’s national survey of over 2,000 senior businesspeople was conducted via email over a two-week period in August 2015, and the results were weighted geographically. Half of the businesses that took part in the survey (50%) export goods to other EU countries themselves, and slightly fewer (46%) import from the EU. Of the survey respondents, 1,026 were from micro businesses, 459 from small businesses, 278 from medium sized businesses and 111 from large businesses. One hundred and thirty organisations from Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce took part.
- Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce (AGCC) is North-east Scotland's leading private sector, member-focused, business organisation. The Chamber represents more than 1,350 businesses with almost 130,000 employees in the private sector covering all industry sectors, ranging in size from sole traders to multi-national corporations.

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