

# Paul Benneworth: It's tough sticking to my 2015 New Year's Resolution

- Opinion
- *by The Journal*

## Journal columnist Paul Benneworth discusses the difficulty of sticking to his promise to always be positive about the North East this year

It's been difficult keeping my 2015's New Year's Resolution. I'd decided that in future columns I was only going to be positive about the North East and ignore the wanton damage wreaked by the Coalition.

I've resigned myself that the 2015 election is probably going to return an extremely unsavoury, hostile coalition.

So, rather than waste time worrying about things I can't affect, when Big Ben chimed, I resolved to embrace my beloved region's many positive sides.

It hasn't been easy. Barely a day passes without more bad news of poor coalition policy wreaking permanent damage on us, predictable to all but the most blinkered Tory cheerleaders.

Yesterday gave a couple of choice examples. The first was figures showing the effects of the much-heralded economic rebalancing from public-sector to private jobs. In England, since 2010 about as many private jobs have been created as lost in the public sector.

But the main problem isn't that the private sector jobs are often poorly-paying, insecure, and low-skilled, needlessly wasting long-serving public servants' valuable skills. No, the effects have predictably been hugely geographically imbalanced.

The big winners are (natch!) the south and east, whilst the north east and north west's substantial public job losses have outweighed private gains by more than two to one. The cuts piled more misery on our region as the government tries to conjure up a pre-election economic illusion in its wavering southern constituencies.

And where to begin with Free Schools? Letting dedicated groups of parents run schools might sound good.

Factor in a government so desperate to make this hairbrained scheme work that they've let any old Tom, Dick and Harry in following secretive selection processes, and you've got a recipe for disaster.

Free Schools' one putative advantage is that freed from the dead hand of local education authorities, they could inspire their pupils to soar to new heights of achievement.

But they have stashed literally billions of public money in their reserves recently simply to replicate the financial stability that LEAs provide their schools.

And if Free Schools are financially dubious, then in educational terms they are a disaster. After Ofsted slammed Durham Free School for being unprecedentedly weak in all areas, the Government hypocritically announced yesterday that it didn't like freedom that much, and stopped its public funding.

But if this mess is coming out of a nasty Westminster, then we're not going down with a fight. Perhaps emblematic was Blyth Spartans' televised FA Cup heroics, with Jarrett Rivers' goal in the dying seconds [at Hartlepool](#) earning them a second-round tie and making its way onto the Dutch press' back pages to boot.

Behind this symbolism, almost every day brings positive news from our burgeoning energy and engineering sector.

Famous names long written off by Whitehall as having no place in a modern knowledge economy embraced new technologies and now possess the skills and technologies that sees the world beating a path to our door.

The new high-technology campus on the Gallowgate Brewery site continues to develop into an internationally-significant science hub, Science Central.

Ten years after the idea first emerged, the 'triple helix' partners – business, city council, and university - are [making Newcastle](#) more a real 'place-to-be' for all kinds of high-technology sector.

None of these things have come quickly or reflected Westminster's craze of the day – all have involved talented local teams working diligently despite braying London voices that nothing clever ever happens in the north.

Sometimes the loudest naysayer has been national government, but thankfully we kept ploughing these furrows and are now harvesting the rewards.

Despite the Tory-led coalition's wrecking-ball antics, our region definitely has the Resolution to keep moving forward in 2015.