Tim Morris  Chief Executive  UKMPG

In your opinion, what will be the biggest challenges for the ports sector in 2019 and beyond?

The strategic challenges are ensuring we as ports grasp the opportunities of new technologies, so that we become the digital gateways to complement our historic physical role, and we do so in a way that is truly sustainable – economically and socially, as well as environmentally.

What do you see as the main opportunities for growth for UK ports in the coming years?

UK Government forecasts paint a picture of growth for major port freight traffic, so the outlook is positive. But it's essential that we think value as well as volume – and here the UK's major ports are really upping their game in the broader and more specialised value-added services that can add to their customers and supply chains. Also, Brexit might prompt a strategic reconfiguration of freight flows to and from the EU.

How can port connectivity be improved? What are the further improvements are needed?

By building 'freight first' prioritisation much more prominently into transport strategic planning and operation. A study for UKMPG forecast a £14.2bn prize for the UK for operating a small number of key routes alone.

How can new technologies and innovations be used in UK ports?

The UK's major ports are already engaging with customers and innovators to realise the potential of digitisation in ports and supply chains. Greater augmentation and automation are trends that are well underway, increasing efficiency but also – crucially – improving safety.

What are the impacts of recent shipping trends on UK ports?

UK major ports have invested to keep pace with the growing scale of shipping categories like containers and cruise. A rapidly approaching trend is for alternative and more sustainable fuelling. Meeting the challenges and grasping the opportunities from this fundamental trend is something not just for ports or shipping companies but for Governments and infrastructure providers too.