INSIGHT

OCTOBER 2020 GBB. A BANK ON THE BUILD. media technology education motors fashion arts business property issue 62



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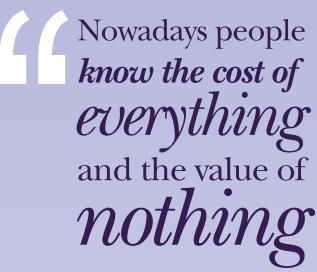
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FOREWORD

Welcome to the October edition of Northern Insight.

With continuing COVID 19 lockdown restrictions in place and business remaining challenging, I would firstly like to wish all of our loyal readers, clients and contributors the very best for what is sure to be a difficult Winter ahead.

We are therefore very proud to bring you another buoyant edition packed full of great features, expert articles and interesting content.

Our cover stars GBB, are a ground-breaking new bank who have chosen Middlesbrough as their new headquarters.

Amongst a plethora of business interviews we talk to Lucy Winskell OBE, who has been appointed Chair of the North East LEP Board.

On our socially distanced travels we also take a trip to visit the Minster City, York, to discover the lovely Elmbank Hotel and Lodge.

Within our ever growing health section we feature the latest expert comment from our award winning columnist David Fairlamb and enjoy the hot yoga experience for the first time.

We hope you enjoy this issue.

Stay safe and well. Till next month...



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NEWCASTLE BUILDING SOCIETY LANDS TOP INVESTORS IN PEOPLE AWARD

The North East's biggest building society has been awarded the Platinum standard by Investors in People (IIP), the highest status that can be achieved.

Newcastle Building Society was the first ever building society to be awarded an IIP accreditation in 1993 and was most recently awarded a Gold standard in 2017. Only the top 2% of businesses IIP accredits are awarded Platinum, so colleagues at the Society are celebrating joining a rather explusive club.

Andrew Haigh, Chief Executive at Newcastle Building Society, said: "We are delighted to have been awarded with IIP Platinum accreditation. As the highest level of award, it demonstrates that our policies and practices around supporting our colleagues are embedded in every part of our organisation. More importantly, it reflects our ongoing commitment to our colleagues and making Newcastle Building Society a great place to work."



FINANCE DURHAM FUND INVESTS £750,000 IN GROWTH CAPITAL VENTURES

Finance Durham Fund, which was established by Durham County Council and overseen by Business Durham, has recently announced the investment of £750,000 in Growth Capital Ventures (GCV).

The investment through Finance Durham, managed by Maven Capital Partners, will support GCV's growth plans as it seeks to further develop its three main business units G-Labs, G-Ventures and Quva, as well as move premises to larger offices within County Durham.

Launched in 2015, GCV is an FCA authorised fintech firm that helps investors build a diversified investment portfolio and supports entrepreneurs with raising capital to launch and scale high-growth businesses.

Craig Peterson, Co-founder and Chief Operating Officer at GCV, said: "We are delighted to have secured £750,000 of investment from the Finance Durham Fund to support the next stage of our growth. We're thrilled that key partners involved in the fund have bought into our vision to support the region."



EURO GARAGES TO MAKE MULTI-MILLION POUND INVESTMENT

Ashwood Business Park in Northumberland is set to benefit from a £4 million investment from major international forecourt operator Euro Garages.

The company plans to build an 8,000 sq ft development on the site which will include a petrol filling station, convenience store and drive-through Starbucks outlet, providing important amenities and services for local residents and passing trade upon the busy A189. The investment will create 50 full and part-time jobs, with a further 40 jobs through construction work.

The 62-acre Ashwood Business Park was acquired by Advance Northumberland in 2018. The vision for the site is to increase its presence as a new centre for advanced manufacturing, the process industry and the engineering sector in the North East.

Euro Garages, which is based in Blackburn, has exchanged conditional contracts with Advance Northumberland to purchase the two-acre site and has submitted a planning application for the development.

SHOW US HOW MUCH YOU CARE BY FILLING IN A FORM

The independent champion for health and social care services in the region is asking the public to share their experiences by completing an online form to help improve services.

Healthwatch Newcastle and Healthwatch Gateshead are participating in the initiative from Healthwatch England and the Care Quality Commission entitled #BecauseWeAllCare.

Interim Operations Manager, Cynthia Atkin, explained: "Together we can help services across Newcastle and Gateshead now and in the future. We're here to listen and act on public feedback to improve everyone's care and to help patients, key workers and our communities."

Whilst the survey runs until next year, early findings have shown that there may be issues accessing dentistry services in some areas. Early findings also show technology has helped during the Pandemic as people in the 50-79 age group have responded positively to accessing GPs by phone and video call.





BUSINESS WHEN YOU ARE NOT IN THE ROOM, WHAT WOULD THEY SAY ABOUT YOUR COMPANY?

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WORLD-LEADING SPORTS TECH FIRM SECURES SIX-FIGURE INVESTMENT

A high-technology sports training system pioneered in the North East is set for further growth after securing six-figure investment to help take the business onto an international scale.

Okkulo has created a world-first system using vision and light science to help improve reaction times in athletes of all levels. Since its launch earlier this year, Okkulo has established a statistics-based track record of enhancing the performance of even the highest-level sports professionals.

Leading international figures have used the Okkulo technology, which recently opened its first academy at the Blue Flames sports centre in Benton, North Tyneside.

The business, developed by Mel O'Connor over the past 20 years, is now braced for projection onto an even bigger scale, by securing investment through a debt and equity fundraise.

While the business is primarily currently used by football players and clubs, it is developing its offering to cover sports including baseball, cricket, boxing and rugby.



NEW CLOTHING AND HOMEWARE BOUTIQUE OPENS IN NEWTON AYCLIFFE

A brand-new boutique, specialising in one-size clothing, accessories and homeware has recently opened its doors.

Born out of a desire to create a happy, stress-free clothes shopping experience. The House of Eden aims to encourage body positivity through its extensive range of one-size clothing and accessories. The shop also offers various homeware items from home fragrances to greeting cards.

Based on Ricknall Avenue on Aycliffe Business Park, The House of Eden offers customers a welcoming and enjoyable shopping experience, whilst also catering to specific product requests.

The House of Eden is also available online and at various events, markets and fundraisers throughout the North-East with its quirky little 'shop on wheels' named Hettie.

Owner, Louisa McLean, said: "It's been a dream of mine to have my own store for years now so I couldn't wait to open my doors to the public and welcome everyone in!"

TOC PROPERTY BACKED LENDING TRUST PLC INTERIM RESULTS SHOW FURTHER GROWTH

The TOC Property Backed Lending Trust PLC, managed by Newcastle-based wealth management and property lending experts Tier One Capital, has continued to expand its portfolio of property backed loans across the North East and Scotland.

Announcing interim results for the six months ending 31 May 2020, the London-listed investment company has grown its revenue per share, recording six-month income of £1.290m, an increase on £1.001m in the equivalent 2019 period.

Despite the challenging COVID backdrop, the company made an interim dividend payment to investors of 1.5p during the period, and the company continues to assess its options for making a further dividend payment during the second half of the year.

The company has also provided almost £4.5m of new lending, with £2.2m being used to fund a new housing development in Scotland and £2.3m loaned to support residential house buildings in the North East.





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GBB. A BANK ON THE BUILD.

GBB is a ground-breaking new bank that will get 'Britain and the regions building again'. Following the announcement that it has chosen Middlesbrough as its new headquarters, CEO Steve Deutsch and Middlesbrough Mayor Andy Preston chat through what this means for GBB and the town.

Tell us about the deal that's just been brokered.

Steve: In a landmark moment in our journey, GBB has secured a lease for 11,000 sq ft of space in Middlesbrough's purposebuilt 2 Centre Square. This will become our headquarters and house an initial team of 60, growing to 120 as we expand. While we'll be keeping a satellite office in Newcastle, we hope to have the majority of our team moved in by early 2021, COVID-19 restrictions permitting.

Andy: We are absolutely delighted to have secured this long-term commitment from GBB, which has recognised Middlesbrough's reputation as a hotbed for digital tech innovation. We are becoming a much braver and more ambitious town and have started to challenge cities like Newcastle and Leeds for investment. Having a new bank based in the centre of Middlesbrough is the perfect statement of that ambition, bringing new jobs and marking the first step to success.

Do you expect GBB to have strong links with the Tees region in the months and years ahead?

Steve: We've had an excellent few months during which Teesside Pension Fund became our cornerstone investor, investing £20m. This, on top of the investment we had already lined up, means we are ready to move on with our start up plans.

We're expecting to receive our provisional banking licence this Autumn and if we do, we'll be well on course to achieve our goal of trading fully as a bank in Autumn 2021, having competed the entire regulatory process and put the appropriate infrastructure into place. Our lease at 2 Centre Square is a fifteen year one, so our links with the Tees region will only strengthen from here.

Andy: GBB's proposition is ground-breaking so it's no surprise that the Teesside Pension Fund's committee voted to invest £20m in GBB following its search for an attractive and well-controlled local investment opportunity.

GBB is going to be very successful, create jobs and gain national attention, so it's absolutely fantastic news for our town. I know the general public and particularly the business community will get behind this fantastic venture, so links between the town and the bank will be incredibly strong.

You've both mentioned job creation – tell us about that.

Steve: Things are moving apace and we are actively recruiting, with a focus on North East talent. We are looking for experts in the fields of finance, risk, customer management, marketing, human resources, IT, lending, savings and more.

Andy: I think there's potentially a fantastic snowball effect that could come into play. GBB intends to lend millions of pounds to finance exciting projects that will create new buildings and jobs — and restore old buildings to their former glory — right across the North East but, importantly, for Middlesbrough and Teesside. This will potentially support the creation of a thousands more jobs on Teesside at a time when this is desperately needed post COVID-19.

How will GBB get "Britain and the regions building again"?

Steve: Currently, only around half of the government's housebuilding target is being met. Alongside availability of land and planning permission, access to finance is a key driver of this. One third of property developers have had an application for finance declined.

GBB intends to get Britain building by providing bespoke development finance to SME property developers in underserved regions. We'll also offer savings rates that the UK public will love.

GBB is determined to be a powerful force in reversing these trends and making a tangible impact in property development in the UK.

Andy: What excites me about this project is that banks who traditionally lend into the Middlesbrough area are always based hundreds of miles away, so they are therefore out of tune with what we really need. So having a brilliant bank in the centre of our town will mean we will have a lender who is sympathetic to what Middlesbrough and Teesside needs to create new jobs and buildings. This is a great shot in the arm for the local economy and we're looking forward to supporting GBB on its exciting journey.



OVER 50 TRAINING APPRENTICES ON THE HUSQVARNA CAREER LADDER

OVER 50 people are working towards careers with Husqvarna thanks to a successful partnership between the lawnmower manufacturer and GEM Training.

The Peterlee-based company, which provides tailored training and apprenticeships specifically developed for its clients, has been working with the Newton Aycliffe firm for some time and has supplied over 500 temporary workers into the company.

The relationship is helping Husqvarna nurture its next generation workforce, and currently there are 53 people who have completed apprenticeships or are in the process of undertaking programmes.

Impressively, many of those apprenticeships have been completed during the coronavirus lockdown, when training and development delivery has had to be significantly adapted to ensure learners were able to continue with their training.

Up to now, GEM Training, which is part of GEM Partnership, has helped 33 people complete an 'Improving Operational Performance: Business-Improvement Techniques, Level: 2' apprenticeship and the company is now in the process of developing some of these apprentices further with a qualification in team leading with the potential of developing from a multi-skilled operator to becoming a line leader.

Kelly Lee, Operations Manager at GEM Training, said: "Our partnership with Husqvarna is thriving with over 50 employees currently completing bespoke apprenticeships which have been specifically developed to meet the needs of Husqvarna. It's also about upskilling current employees to equip them with the qualifications they need to progress through the ranks.



"What we've been particularly impressed with is the attitude and commitment of the apprentices during the months of lockdown. How we trained them had to be significantly adapted, and of course Husqvarna wasn't operating in the usual way either, but all remained 100 per cent committed to their development and that's backed up by the fact 33 of them have completed their Level 2 programmes.

"In fact, some are looking to progress in team leading which is fantastic and shows their willingness to push themselves, but also Husqvarna's belief in them."

Husqvarna has also supported two people through BEng Mechanical Engineering qualifications from Teesside University, from which they recently graduated, and both are now aiming to grow with Husqvarna, becoming project engineers before progressing into management roles.

Rufus Ayre from Husqvarna, which is based on Aycliffe Business Park, said: "Attracting talent into

our business and nurturing that talent is an integral element of our growth plans. Our partnership with GEM Training is really enhancing our business development.

"What is good for us is that GEM Training understands our business, and specifically tailors their programmes to suit our recruitment programme, so we know the apprentices are completing training and qualifications in areas that will benefit our business.

"Apprentices are so important to our long-term success – we're investing in them so they are ideally positioned to become fully-fledged employees with our business with the chance to grow with us. That's backed up by the number of existing employees who have come through this route and are continuing to move up the career ladder, and also the two people who have recently graduated with a BEng Mechanical Engineering qualification with a view to becoming project engineers and they both have ambitions of moving into management roles."

GEM Training has also recently supported Husqvarna in the recruiting of a supply chain administrator.

Rufus added: "The team at GEM Training made the recruitment process seamless, supporting us through the interview process which was done via Teams due to the ongoing coronavirus restrictions. The successful candidate is now nicely embedded within the Husqvarna team and proving to be a real asset."

The apprenticeships offered by GEM Training range from Level 2 through to Level 5 and there are further plans to recruit additional apprentices for Husqvarna over the next 12 months.

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Gedanken - the German word for "thoughts".

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SOS GROUP COMING OF AGE

During a difficult year, Team Valley-based SOS Group has 'come of age,' celebrating 18 years in business and rising to meet new challenges on behalf of clients.



Launched in 2002, the company continues with the same three directors at the helm, John Behan, George Young and Andrew Skelton, and is now proud to count some of the biggest names in sport and industry as clients.

SOS Group also works closely with SMEs and start-ups and, as a supplier and service provider of digital office equipment, related software products

and office furniture, the current Covid-19 crisis has created unprecedented demand to facilitate remote working.

George Young, says: "This health crisis has tested every business and looks likely to do so for some time to come. We're used to remote working and adapted and recovered quickly after closing our doors during lockdown but we appreciate it's not been straightforward for many firms.

"Where our clients were previously focussed on cost effectiveness, security, efficiency and environmental concerns, unsurprisingly, there's now a big shift towards home-working.

continued overleaf..

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"It's been challenging and also a privilege to help clients adapt to the current situation. And while secure document sharing, remote working software and communications were already a growing section of our business, it's an area that's now become critical."

In addition to digital office equipment and software, SOS Group recently launched its DDB Workspace Solutions Division to supply a range of furniture that helps tackle common issues including posture and lack of space. In addition to home-working desks, it features technology that can provide individual heating options, improving workplace comfort and reducing energy costs.

In response to the pandemic, SOS Group has also begun offering short-term contracts, which are proving popular with smaller businesses finding their way through these uncertain times. They offer the security of leading-brand equipment and servicing without investment in expensive hardware or long-term contract commitments.

John Behan, adds: "When we began back in 2002, we were 'all about paper.' And while paper still plays a key role for many of our clients, we've diversified and expanded our offer to meet changing workplace needs. That's given us a good starting point to pull through the current situation and help our clients to do the same.

"This year's not been without its significant business disappointments though. We've been very proud to work with British Athletics and other national sports organisations for many years now and it was a big knock for everyone when this summer's events were cancelled. Thankfully, we're up and running again now, if you'll forgive the pun.

"Undoubtedly, sports events without fans in the stadium lack that special something but it was a great feeling to deliver on-site services for the Mueller British Athletics Championships in Manchester recently, and we're very much looking forward to the Spar British Athletics Indoor Championships in Glasgow."

As well as strong professional sporting links, SOS Group is a company with strong roots in their local community and is a partner of Sport Newcastle, supporting North East sporting talent and helping them achieve their Olympic and Paralympic dreams

In fact, SOS Group has a long and proud track record of community support and recently celebrated donating an amazing £250,000 to charities, talented young individuals and community organisations.

Andrew Skelton, says: "Throughout our history, we've always placed a strong emphasis on community involvement and encouraged and helped others to pursue their ambitions."

"In the last year alone, we've been actively involved in supporting over 30 community projects, charities and talented young individuals.



That kind of support feels more important than ever as charities and organisations are squeezed by Covid-19 restrictions and loss of income.

"This certainly isn't the 18th birthday we envisaged for our company, but the flexibility and commitment of our team here has proved its worth during these testing times and we're proud of them.

"We've more than 'weathered the storm,'

we've supported our clients during these most difficult business conditions and even won new contracts. It's when the strength of those professional relationships really shows.

"In all our 18 years, this has been the most testing. We don't know what will come next but we're well-placed for the next challenges and look forward to meeting them for ourselves and our clients."

Image: Gavin Forster Photogra

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MUCKLE LLP PLEDGES SIGNIFICANT SUPPORT TO NORTH EAST COMMUNITIES

Leading law firm for businesses Muckle LLP is making another substantial contribution to its charitable fund, committing in excess of £30,000 to support community projects across the North East over the next 12 months.

The charitable Muckle Fund, set up in 2002 and managed by the Community Foundation Tyne & Wear and Northumberland, is one of the cornerstones of the firm's CSR activity.

Every year, Muckle makes a donation to its fund, which awards grants to a wide variety of charities and community groups that support young people, tackle disadvantage and improve social mobility.

South Shields based Bright Futures, Gateshead and Sunderland based Oasis Community Housing and Newcastle West End Food Bank were among 35 local causes to benefit in the 2019-2020 financial year. Shortly after the pandemic hit, Muckle also contributed £5,000 to the Community Foundation's Coronavirus Response and Recovery Fund.

Hugh Welch, Muckle Senior Partner and CSR lead, commented: "There can be little doubt that people who were already suffering the greatest deprivation will be in a much worse position due to the pandemic. This means that our charitable work is every bit as important as it has ever been."



KEYSTONE LAW ENHANCES COMMERCIAL PROPERTY OFFERING

Keystone Law has appointed Sheena Ray to the firm's commercial property team.

With over 12 years' experience in London and Newcastle as a commercial property specialist, Sheena advises a variety of high-profile national and regional clients, particularly in the retail sector. Projects have included advising Aldi Stores Limited on the rollout of its 1,000 store programme and Waitrose Limited on the development of its national portfolio, including, the first "Little Waitrose" store.

Sheena also has extensive experience working with investor clients on the sales, acquisitions and ongoing asset management of all aspects of their portfolios, on general landlord and tenant matters and on the commercial property aspects of corporate acquisitions, commercial development, distressed asset sales and refinancing.

Sheena joins a growing number of Keystone lawyers who are based in the North East of England and service clients in the region and nationally.

James Knight, CEO and Founder of Keystone Law, said: "I am delighted to welcome Sheena to the firm. Sheena's breadth of experience is a great addition to the services we offer to our commercial property clients and really boosts our growing offering in the North East."



LEADING COMMERCIAL DISPUTES SPECIALIST JOINS SINTONS AS PARTNER

Hilary Waters, a specialist in tax disputes with over 20 years' experience, has joined Sintons from KPMG.

During her career, Hilary has built a reputation for supporting clients with a variety of complex tax disputes as both advisor and advocate, as well as commercial litigation and regulatory matters.

Hilary becomes the 30th partner in Sintons and the latest senior addition to the firm's fast-growing dispute resolution team, which is renowned regionally and nationally for its capability and expertise.

Hilary has extensive experience of advising on a wide range of tax issues for both individual clients and groups of taxpayers, as well as experience in litigating matters at all levels of the UK Courts and Tribunals, from the First-tier Tribunal to the Supreme Court.

Her clients range from FTSE 100 companies to SMEs in various sectors, including retail, leisure, pharmaceutical, manufacturing, tech, property, universities and sports clubs.

Angus Ashman, Head of the Dispute Resolution team at Sintons, said: "We are delighted to welcome a lawyer with the calibre and experience of Hilary. Her absolute commitment to achieving excellence is an ideal fit for our approach at Sintons."



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NORTH EAST MISSING OUT ON £300M INVESTMENT POTENTIAL

New report by ScaleUp Institute, Innovate Finance and Deloitte identifies £300m funding gap for local companies seeking to grow.

The report, The Future of Growth Capital, looks at the regional funding disparities as part of an assessment of an emerging national growth capital gap of £15bn as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In total, £119m of equity investment was raised in the North East region in 2019 - yet if all our local North East growth companies sought capital, the investment needed is close to £300m - highlighting the urgent need for the region to assess how it develops sustained local access to capital to fuel our scaling businesses that can aid our economic recovery.

The report highlights the importance of ensuring that local growth opportunities can be met as part of a targeted national strategy to stimulate local economic growth as part of the recovery effort.

Growth capital refers to the financing that enables scaling innovative companies, both young and established, to reach maturity.

The gap - the difference between demand for and supply of growth capital - stood at £5bn-£10bn a year before the COVID-19 crisis. The pandemic has significantly exacerbated the issue and effectively doubled the gap, with it now reaching £15bn.

The report lays out five specific and practical recommendations to tackle the long-standing, structural problem of a lack of available capital for scaleup companies. The recommendations are:

- Create a 'National Blueprint for Growth' that delivers a strategic joined up approach to support and champion more consistent and effective economic growth across all regions and sectors.
- **2.** Accelerate the unlocking of Institutional and Corporate Funding through changes in legislation and organisation that crowds in the existing significant private sector capital that can make inroads into closing the growth capital gap.
- **3.** Expand and build upon the British Business Bank (BBB) by strengthening the regional presence of the BBB with empowered decision making deployed under a national framework, and continue the developments of its products along with Scottish Investment Bank (SIB), Development Bank of Wales and Invest NI.
- **4.** Expand the role and scale of Innovate UK and its direct deployment of innovation capital to our most innovative, early stage and scaling businesses.
- **5.** Create a "Future Opportunity Fund" to develop diverse sectors and impact investing potential that is focused on emerging, socially inclusive markets, including the carbon netzero economy.

The UK's 33,860 scaleup businesses constitute a critical portion of UK small - and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and contribute £1 trillion to the UK economy annually. These scaleups represent 50% of the SME economy and are twice as likely to innovate and have international businesses than their peers.

Taking these actions now to close the gap will provide opportunities to 'level up' the regions and aid the UK's economic recovery post-COVID-19, generating future prosperity and boosting regional economies, productivity, innovation and internationalism. This includes an estimated 10-20 per cent boost in regional business investment, doubling the number of scaleups in the UK and supporting levelling-up objectives delivered through strong growth across all regions.

This work has been undertaken in collaboration with industry, investors and the Business Action Council (BAC).

Stephen Hall, office senior partner at Deloitte in Newcastle, commented: "No one can deny the widespread disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. In the short and medium term, it's vital that we find new ways to get the regional economy growing again. However, longer term it also represents a unique opportunity to reset some of the fundamental challenges the UK has faced for quite some time — levelling up, diversity, carbon emissions, unemployment — to name but a few.

"We believe therefore that COVID-19 should act as a catalyst for change. Now more than ever it is vital that businesses are encouraged to start and scale up to their full potential. After all, it could be a chance to create a positive and lasting legacy from the upheaval of this crisis."

Irene Graham OBE, CEO of ScaleUp Institute, commented: "Scaleup companies are key to economic recovery. They make a significant contribution across the country in every locality and sector. As this report highlights, even through the COVID-19 period, they remain highly innovative and are still investing in R&D and job creation. As we seek to build back better we must be bold in addressing our scaleup challenges and the widening gap in long term patient capital.

"We believe that the combination of approaches set out in this report can finally solve long standing growth capital issues and make significant inroads to the leveling up agenda. As this report emphasises, the public and private sector must work together in a collaborative effort to deliver the step change required."

Charlotte Crosswell, CEO of Innovate Finance, commented: "As we reset our economy in the wake of COVID-19, this is the moment to address the growth and innovation-capital gap with long-term policy solutions. We accept that there is no silver bullet or single policy that can resolve a complex issue. That is why our recommendations spread across different areas and feed into a long-term solution.

"The problem is abundantly clear, and it's now crucial we make the changes and address it. Areas of our growth economy such as the FinTech sector – which is full of scaling, innovative companies – are advancing at a rapid pace, and we risk losing an entire generation of vitally important businesses if we don't make the necessary structural adjustments."

CHANGES TO CAPITAL GAINS TAX ON UK RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY SALES

By Gabriella Grant (Personal Tax Senior) at RMT Accountants & Business Advisors Ltd

From 6 April 2020 HMRC have introduced new rules surrounding the declaration and payment of Capital Gains Tax (CGT) on residential property sales in the UK. The changes have impacted both UK and Non-UK residents.

Prior to 5 April 2020, UK residents selling UK residential property that is subject to CGT would have until 31 January following the end of the tax year in which the property is sold to declare and pay any CGT due. However, when selling a UK residential property which is subject to CGT after 6 April 2020, you will now only have 30 days from the date of completion to report and pay any CGT due.

The rate of CGT will depend on an individual's level of income for the tax year in which the property is sold. You are therefore required to make a reasonable estimate of the tax payable on the sale. Capital Gains Tax is payable at the rates of 18% for basic rate taxpayers and 28% for higher and additional rate taxpayers.

Due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, late filing penalties were initially not applied on disposals of UK residential property if completed



before 1 July 2020 which were reported by 31 July 2020.

From 1 July 2020, if you do not report the CGT to HMRC within 30 days of completion, HMRC will issue you with a late filing penalty. Interest will also be charged on any tax still outstanding 30 days after completion on all transactions made on or after 6 April 2020.

Non-UK residents

If you are a non-UK resident you must continue to report disposals of any UK property or land within 30 days of completion, regardless of whether there is a CGT liability. However, you can no longer defer payment of the CGT via your Self-Assessment Tax Return. Any CGT due will need to be paid within 30 days of completion in line with the new rules.

Trusts

If you are a trustee who disposes of any UK residential property held in a UK resident trust, you must ensure that any Capital Gains Tax liability due is reported and paid within 30 days of completion, in the same way as for UK resident individuals.

For further information of advice on anything covered in this article please contact Gabriella Grant – t: 0191 256 9500 or e: gabriella.grant@r-m-t.co.uk





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GLENBURY GOES VIRTUAL AT COMMERCE HOUSE

A forward thinking, new financial solutions company has given itself the best start in its business journey by securing a prestigious TS1 postcode.

Set up by Mark O'Neill, Glenbury Financial Solutions is the latest tenant to join the Commerce House business community in Middlesbrough.

Specialising in mortgage advice, personal insurance and life/income protection, Mark has set up his unique service that takes his involvement one step further as he deals with estate agents, conveyancers and lenders, holding his clients hand all the way through the home buying process.

With over ten years experience in the finance sector, Mark decided it was the perfect timing to use his qualifications to launch his own advice business. Due to the network he is part of, Mark

boasts access to more than seventy lenders so he can secure the best deal for his clients. He said: "I really enjoy helping everyone with their home purchasing, remortgaging or further borrowing needs, but there is something very rewarding about supporting a first time buyer onto the property ladder. It is also gratifying to know that clients have the best policies and cover for their life insurance, critical illness and income protection cover.

"I have been aware of Commerce House for a number of years since it opened and I always promised myself that when I set up on my own it would be my businesses address. I am based in Redcar so the Middlesbrough offices at Commerce House are close to home, but also expand the geographical area from where I can help clients. Although I have started out as a virtual tenant, I know that when I expand to bring in further advisors, I will at that point be taking an office on!"

Commerce House is a stunning Grade II listed building in the heart of Middlesbrough. The owner, Commerce Chambers, has created a luxurious business community complete with high end office space, boardroom, meeting space, hot desk facility and virtual tenancy options. Facilities manager, Christine Huntington, said: "It is exciting when a new company joins Commerce House. We have seen many new companies grow very quickly by being here, and I looking forward to seeing Glenbury Financial Solutions follow suit!"

Offices start from £200 a desk per month. For information on office space and other services please visit www.commerce-house.co.uk or email Christine@commercechambers.co.uk

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SINGLE EASY ACCESS RATES PROPOSED TO ENHANCE FINANCIAL FAIRNESS FOR SAVERS

The Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) has released proposals to improve competition and protect consumers in the easy access savings market to make it simpler and easier for savers to understand the products available to them and to obtain a good deal.

Here, Dr Emma Black, MD of Cascade Cash Management, explains in detail what that means for the savers of the North eEast.

"Typically, longstanding customers on easy access accounts earn the lowest savings rates, having earned an attractive headline rate at onset followed by rate downgrades as time goes on. The FCA is consulting on two complementary proposals to achieve fair pricing and improve competition for longstanding customers, including the introduction of a Single Easy Access Rate (SEAR) and the subsequent transparent publication of SEARs to make it easier for consumers to compare between providers.

"These proposals follow the 2015 findings of the FCA's Cash Savings Market Study which made several proposals regarding cash market remedies that were aimed at ensuring financial fairness for all. This report found that the savings market was not working effectively for savers and particularly for those with easy access savings accounts and easy access cash ISAs. It is estimated that the introduction of SEARs and their transparent publication will incur total one-off costs of £94m with an annual ongoing cost of £35m. Consumers however are estimated to benefit between £148m and £381m per year from higher interest payments (with a mean estimate of £261m).

"Nearly three-quarters of UK adults hold an easy access savings account, with significant aggregate balances. The competition for new customers is strong and providers usually compete on headline rate. Many will offer a high introductory interest

rate to attract new customers but over time this rate falls and it is up to the customer to stay on top of alternative rates and products available. More often than not, inertia and an expected hassle to switch sets in and consumers end up in low-interest rate accounts earning significantly lower returns but by that time, often with higher balances. The FCA estimates that rates on average are 0.42% lower on accounts opened more than five years ago as opposed to those opened in the last year.

"While the regulator's original analysis was based on 2013 data, the FCA reset their findings using 2018 data and still found similar harm from price discrimination for savers. As interest rates are low across the spectrum, the harm is structurally becoming minimised but should interest rates increase, then the expected impact and harm caused will also increase and become more widespread hence preventative interventions are required in advance.

"A good example for rate downgrades can be seen in the highly publicised Marcus by Goldman Sachs Instant Access account which led the market at 1.50% in 2018 and is now at 1.05%, some 0.45% lower. The initial launch attracted a lot of publicity and drove price competition up for new customers, but this was largely driven by the inclusion of an introductory bonus for 12 months of 0.15% for the first year of launch and then 0.10% for Q4 2019 before the bonus was removed entirely in Q1 2020. Marcus by Goldman Sachs have kept customers aware of the rate changes but for those that may not

check their emails and accounts regularly, then on an £85,000 deposit opened in 2018, up to £382.50 annually has since been lost in future income as rates have been downgraded. By shopping around, customers could find for example that the NS&I Income Bond on Instant Access is now paying 1.16% providing nearly £100.00 more per annum per account. While these differences may seem marginal to the naked eye, when you compound them over time, the results become quite costly.

"The FCA are hoping that these changes in the savings market will feed through into other products such as current accounts, overdrafts, mortgages and credit cards. The consultation for SEARs closed on 9th April 2020 with new responses to be considered and any changes implemented during the 2021/22 tax year."

Cascade Cash Management's online Fintech portal is the only one of its kind in the UK allowing independent and unbiased cash solutions meaning that clients don't have to choose only one bank. With the online portal and Cascade's client support team, all banks are accessed quickly and easily, on a daily basis.

The Cascade team administer accounts on behalf of clients and depositors can use the portal to view their own savings in one place. These clients include individuals, companies and charities. Partners including IFA's, solicitors, attorneys, accountants and many more can also self-brand the product for presentation to their own clients.

If you would like further information or to talk to a Cascader about your savings, more information is available at www.cascade.co.uk



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UNUSUAL (IN THE BANKS HEADS!) CLIENTS THAT WE HAVE HELPED RECENTLY

We have helped numerous clients during 2020 across all areas of the market allowing satisfied clients to receive the keys to their new home, remortgage to a better interest rate or perhaps develop a Buy to Let portfolio.

The opportunities available in the mortgage market are now very diverse...could we help you at some stage in 2020? Below are some examples of the types of scenarios that we have helped our clients with recent months - all of the following mortgage offers were successfully received from mainstream lenders.

First time buyers buying a new build property - our client came to us with poor previous credit which precluded him from applying to the High Street banks and as such, he believed that he would not be able to get a mortgage. We were able to secure him a mortgage at the first time of asking and also able to access the Government Help to Buy scheme so that he could buy a new build property that he had always wanted!

Divorce – our client was looking for a lender that would take into account multiple forms of income (employment, tax credits, maintenance etc). This was compliacted as most lenders would take some but not all of the income sources but we were able to find a lender that could accommodate all which increased the level of borrowing so that the client could stay in the area where they wanted to.

Non UK national working overseas – our client wanted to buy a property in the UK but did not have indefinite leave to remain in the UK and also worked overseas. A small number of lenders were able to help but without our assistance, this would have been difficult for the client to source on their own.



High earners with minimal deposit and high PCP debt — our clients were looking to upsize significantly — but a combination of a 10% deposit and very high outstanding car finance led their bank to decline their application. When they approached us we researched the entire market to ensure a successful application to a lender which takes a more flexible view on existing debts and they have now moved into their new home.

Family purchase – our clients rent their current home from a family member who offered them the opportunity to buy the house. Whilst the mortgage was in theory affordable they didn't have a deposit saved. The family member agreed to gift some equity in the house and we successfully secured a lender which was happy to view the equity as a deposit.

Home improvements – our clients were looking to re-mortgage away from a very high interest rate and also release some equity to build an extension next year. We arranged an offset mortgage to allow the extension funds to be kept in reserve for future use, whilst also lowering the interest rate signficantly.

This is a small example of the enquiries that we have received with positive outcomes for our clients, and also demonstrates that we can help most people. We offer local, face to face, independent mortgage advice and can advise on the best solutions for you.

If you would like to see what our clients have to say about us we have one hundred and seventy Google 5* reviews on-line and on our website from satisfied clients (www.innovateml.co.uk)!

Paul Hardingham and Tony Ibson are Mortgage and Protection Advisers at Innovate Mortgages and Loans. Both have over 20 years of experience advising individuals and businesses across the North East of England. They can be contacted for bespoke advice at paul@innovateml.co.uk or tony@innovateml.co.uk or call 0191 284 3723.

Your home is at risk if you do not keep up repayments on a mortgage or other loan secured on it.

KEEP YOUR RETIREMENT PLANS ON TRACK

The COVID-19 pandemic is having a widespread impact on all aspects of our finances, including retirement planning. However, while recent stock market volatility undoubtedly poses a challenge, particularly for those close to retirement, it is important not to allow the outbreak to derail your plans.

A resilient retirement plan

One thing the pandemic has vividly highlighted is the importance of developing a resilient retirement plan. Although market turbulence will impact all pension holders, those with a clearly defined, carefully considered plan will inevitably be in much better shape to weather market volatility.

Stay the course

At times like these, it is also vitally important to remember pension savings are designed for the long term. This means that, particularly in the case of younger investors, there should be plenty of time for markets to recover and pension pots to achieve growth aspirations before retirement income is required. In addition, making decisions based on short-term economic upheaval can be extremely risky, with the potential to lock in losses following declines in investment values. Historically the best strategy is therefore generally to be patient, resist the urge to sell and stick to a long-term investing philosophy.

For those closer to retirement, now is a good time to take stock of your full complement of retirement resources before making any decisions, this will involve reviewing your pensions, and any other savings and investments.

Making your pension last

Another factor that could impact pension holders' response to the pandemic relates to staggered retirement. As a result of increased longevity, a greater proportion of the population now withdraw more gradually from work, as retirees find an optimum work-life balance that accommodates their specific needs. This trend clearly provides for greater flexibility with part-time work



enabling many pensioners to preserve retirement funds into later life - an increasingly popular choice for many.

Advice increasingly essential

Perhaps unsurprisingly given the heightened economic uncertainty, the past few months have seen a sharp rise in demand for professional financial advice. Indeed, it has never been more important for people to obtain sound advice in order to ensure their retirement plans remain firmly on track.

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The value of investments can go down as well as up and you may not get back the full amount you invested. The past is not a guide to future performance and past performance may not necessarily be repeated.



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PROPERTY TAX CHANGES AS AT 6 APRIL 2020, PART 2

Last month we had the first part of a review of the tax changes from the beginning of the tax year. Owing to space limitations we only covered the first three main points. Whilst this is not the most interesting subject it is nonetheless vital information for landlords.

4. Stamp Duty Land Tax Surcharge

These days if a person who already owns a residential property purchases another, then a 3% stamp duty land tax (SDLT) surcharge will apply unless they are replacing their main residence. Typically, this situation will arise where a homeowner decides to purchase a buy-to-let investment or a second home.

However, the SDLT surcharge can also apply when a person makes a purchase with the intention of replacing their main residence but is unable to sell it simultaneously.

In such cases, the 3% SDLT surcharge must be paid on completion but is recoverable if the old residence is sold within three years of purchase of the new residence. The problem has been that the impact of the Covid-19 restrictions on property transactions has meant that a number of people have been unable to meet the three-year sale deadline through no cause of their own. Those who find themselves in this category, may take reassurance from HMRC's updated guidance on exceptional circumstances which allows

applications for refunds to be made following a sale outside of the normal three-year limit where:

- The new property was bought on or after 1 January 2017, and
- The individual was unable to sell the previous house within three years because of reasons outside of their control, such as (but not exclusively):
- i. The impact of Covid-19 preventing the sale, or
- **ii.** An action taken by a public authority preventing the sale.

Once the reason has ended, the property must be sold, as soon as is practicable, to qualify for the relief.

Following the Chancellor's Summer Statement, there will be no standard SDLT on property purchases of up to £500,000 from 8 July 2020 until 31 March 2021. But the 3% surcharge will still apply on additional residential properties in appropriate cases.

On 14 July, it emerged that the Chancellor had written a letter to the Office of Tax Simplification

(OTS) requesting it 'undertake a review of CGT." One of the points under review will be 'the practical operation of principal private residence relief'. We may see some announcements on this in the Autumn Statement.

The bottom line is that property investment is less attractive than ever before, particularly if you consider the moratorium on evictions that we have at the time of writing. Clearly, we live in extraordinary times and individuals and families need protection. It is the landlord who will carry the burden.

We certainly do not see the tax burden on the landlord being lifted any time soon as the Chancellor has a huge deficit to fund.

There are other investment options of course. One could argue that they are less hassle, more tax efficient, profitable and liquid. An investment, property is only an asset when there is a tenant paying rent. The rest of the time it is a liability.

However, the British love of property is deeply ingrained, as the result of past property booms. That may change over time.

If you would like more information, or would like to discuss your own position, then please do not hesitate to contact me or my colleagues, David Hughes and Denise Graham. Peter Rutherford is a director at Rutherford Hughes Ltd. He can be contacted on 0191 229 9600 peter.rutherford@rutherfordhughes.com

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THE SECTORAL IMPACT OF COVID 19 WINNERS AND LOSERS

After an unpredictable year we are now moving into the last quarter of 2020 with more positive month on month economic data and the recover underway.

Despite many economists predicting doom and gloom, the UK has shown its resilience with GDP growing by over 6.5% in July and we expect to see this trend continue when data is published for August and September underlying the ongoing recovery. Whilst the economic contraction has affected most sectors we have also seen strong growth in other sectors such as healthcare, e-commerce and technology.

Taking the technology sector as an example, this has traditionally shown strong growth over the last five years evidenced for example, by c. £20bn of investment in the UK technology sector alone during 2018 and 2019. Many of the technological advances seen in 2020 have been expedited by the COVID-19 pandemic, with more of a focus on technology to drive productivity and efficiency in many walks of

Our region has been at the forefront of some of these technology developments. Tharsus, a Blyth based robotics company, has made a breakthrough in developing a social distancing technology called Bump. Bump is a cutting-edge technology system designed to help keep people safe in the workplace, enabling social distancing measures to be adhered to more easily. Kromek and Graphene, which are based at Netpark, has also been leading the way on COVID-19 projects.

To underscore the growth in the technology sector during 2020 the US technology composite index (Nasdaq) has recently traded at an all time high, fueled by the likes of Apple, Amazon and Microsoft. Despite the COVID pandemic, tech giant Apple recently surpassed a market capitalization of \$2trn, which is in excess of the entire FTSE 100. This is just two years after Apple surpassed the \$1trn mark, demonstrating the growth trajectory in the technology sector. We are also seeing some corporate raiders with UK tech company Arm Holdings subject to a \$40bn bid from US based Nvidia and we expect to see more corporate M&A in this space.

e-commerce is another sector that has benefitted from the pandemic with habits changing as widespread store closures were replaced with stay-



at-home orders. The e-commerce sector grew by 30% in the first six months of 2020 in contrast to 12% in 2019. In light of the ongoing social distancing restrictions, consumers continue to turn towards e-commerce which is likely to drive more permanent changes in consumer habits.

Again, we are seeing some winners from these trends. In the UK, the Hut Group which is an e-commerce platform is due to list on the London Stock Exchange in September at a market capitalization of £5.4bn, placing it straight in the FTSE 100.

Another sector that has been resilient throughout the pandemic is the healthcare sector. Global healthcare funding to hit \$18.1bln in the second quarter of 2020, up 28% year on year. This is driven by the resilience of the healthcare sector during the pandemic with healthcare businesses largely seeing better trading conditions.

One interesting trend is the focus on investment in mental health businesses such as Literacy Capital backed Mountain Healthcare, which recently acquired Venture-People (provider of community support for individuals with complex mental health needs). We expect this to be an ongoing trend with private equity looking to back growing healthcare businesses and providers of mental health services.

Cavu CF has also been busy in the healthcare sector having advised on three private equity deals since the beginning of February. Transactions include advising HIG Capital on the acquisition of Vernacare (from Palatine), advising HIG Capital and Vernacare on the acquisition of the Infection Prevention business of Frontier Medical Group (from Kester Capital) and advising LDC on a new investment in a North East based healthcare business.

Going into the final quarter of 2020, the M&A outlook is improving. Shorter-term M&A is being driven by potential changes to capital gains taxation that may be announced by the Chancellor in the Autumn Budget, whilst medium-term M&A activity will be driven by corporate activity and also private equity investors who remain keen to invest across many sectors including technology, e commerce and healthcare. Our expectation is that 2021 will be an incredibly active year as we exit the pandemic, business confidence continues to grow and there is a return to M&A across a wider range of sectors. The legacy impact on business of Covid 19 however will be wide ranging including acceleration of digital and technology adoption, better resilience planning, productivity gains and some sectoral shifts with some permanent winners and losers.

At Cavu CF, we have and continue to support clients and many quality businesses in the North East and look forward to continuing this throughout the remainder of 2020 and going into 2021.



CORONAVIRUS AND YOUR FINANCIAL HEALTH

Three tips for what you can do now to look after your financial future.

The impact of the pandemic has been widespread. People, businesses, and economies have all been hard hit. The road to recovery is likely to be bumpy for all. But what does this mean for our pensions and investments? What can we do right now to safeguard our financial future?

Firstly, keep calm and take the long view

Remind yourself of your goals. Why are you saving and what is it for? When are you likely to need to draw an income or utilise the funds? For those with time on their side, history shows that markets typically rebound, given time. Although there may be further bumps ahead, cashing in your investments during a downturn will cement losses on those that have fallen without giving them time to recover. Also, if you have been making regular contributions to your investments try to continue doing so to benefit from compound interest, pound-cost averaging, and long-term returns. These factors will gradually help to get your finances back on track and provide some protection from the ebbs and flows of the markets over time.

Secondly, consider whether your nest egg is diversified enough

A mix of investments such as cash, bonds, and equities, typically offer the best protection against the downs and ups of the market. By also looking at industrial sectors and geographical regions, you can further diversify your risk

and returns. Positioning your nest egg to benefit from a range of investment returns can help it withstand shocks. For example, you could add funds that are designed to minimise downside risk such as absolute return funds. Or increase your exposure to corporate bonds and gilts. If you are unsure about doing this yourself, an adviser can help you build a portfolio with a broad spread of investments to suit your appetite for risk. Many advisers also have ready-made portfolios suitable for a range of risk profiles that can help you get started.

Thirdly, make the most of your tax allowances

You can place your investments in tax-efficient wrappers such as ISAs and personal pensions to benefit from tax-free income and gains, which could build a substantial investment pot over time. Personal pensions are particularly effective at growing a long-term nest egg as you can benefit from tax relief at your marginal rate. This can mean an extra 20-45% boost to your ring-fenced pension savings.

If you still feel that you are not on track you can seek help If you are unsure about your next steps and would like some expert help, an adviser specialising in long-term saving can help you plan ahead. Understanding your appetite for risk and your target retirement date, can enable you to make the best decisions today to safeguard your financial future.

Gary Fawcett, Divisional Director, Senior Investment Manager. 0191 279 7440 gary.fawcett@brewin.co.uk



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FOUNDER OF PINK BOUTIQUE APPOINTS MHA TAIT WALKER TO HELP GROW NEW BUSINESS VENTURE

A talented entrepreneur who turned £90 into the £14m online fashion firm Pink Boutique has recently launched Rowen Group and appointed leading accountancy and advisory firm MHA Tait Walker as business and tax advisors to help identify and build on future growth.

Alice Hall left Pink Boutique last October, eight years after she and her mother each invested £45 on dresses to kickstart the web venture.

Since then she has been working on new plans with husband Andrew, resulting in the launch of Rowen Group which will act as the 'engine room' for a series of businesses, providing all the infrastructure, HR, marketing, warehousing and fulfilment they need

Initially the group comprises three exciting new businesses. Allergy Box will provide allergy friendly snack options delivered to your door. Low Kal will sell health snacks online. The third business, Rowen Homes, will enroll Alice's creative side, which has been honed since last year when she started a part time diploma in interior design. And it's already

proving successful with footballers lined up to benefit from her services.

All of the businesses will be based at Rowen Group's new offices at Baker's Yard in Gosforth, the former Greggs Bakery site.

Alice Hall said: "I'm so excited to be creating new jobs in the region and hope to support other businesses too. I'm also looking forward to recruiting talent who are excited to join us on this journey.

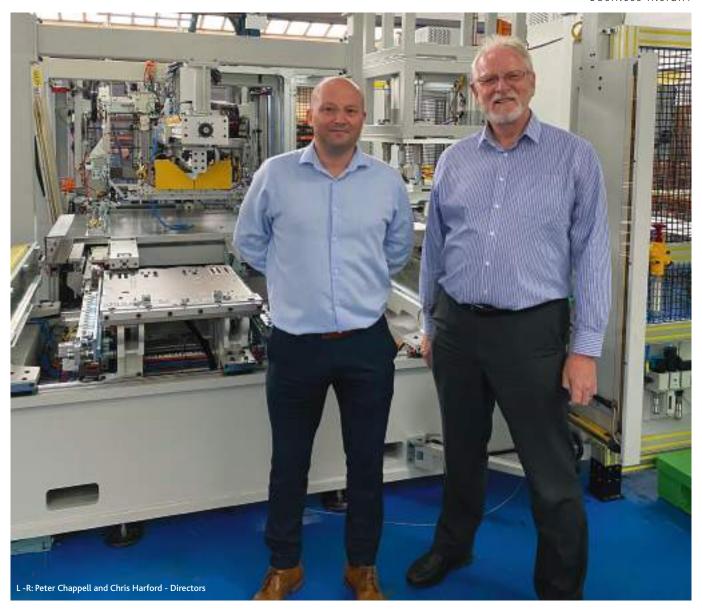
"We started with a group of eight working remotely and in a few short months we now have a 13 strong team working out of our new office, with more staff lined up to start in the coming weeks. Future job creation depends on how fast we grow but we

will keep on recruiting."

Hollie Thompson, Tax Manager at MHA Tait Walker said: "MHA Tait Walker are delighted to be able to get involved at the early stages of the business and help to identify and build on potential opportunities — the Rowen Group is designed to become an incubator of sorts and MHA Tait Walker's business and tax expertise is well placed to help Alice and Andrew structure the group as efficiently as possible.

"We will also be helping them access funding opportunities and valuable tax reliefs. For example, we will be looking at maximising reliefs on their new office at Baker's Yard in Gosforth, exploring the potential for R&D claims, and helping them incentivise their new workforce."

www.taitwalker.co.uk



REGIONAL EXPERTS ADVISE ON MILL MASTERS MBO

Experts from two local firms, alongside funders NatWest have teamed up to assist the management of specialist engineering firm Mill Masters International with its buy out from US parent Mill Masters Inc.

Teams from MHA Tait Walker led by Michael Smith, and The Endeavour Partnership led by Nigel Williams, were on hand to guide management team Chris Harford and Peter Chappell through the buyout process, while the company's bank NatWest provided the facilities to enable the buy out to proceed.

Between them, Chris and Peter have over 50 years' experience in the automotive heat exchanger sector, and they are both looking forward to further developing MMI as an independent business.

Formed in 2014, MMI employs a team of highly skilled engineers and designers to design, manufacture, commission and supply heat exchanger assembly machines and associated equipment, predominantly to the automotive and HVAC sectors.

"We will continue to work with our US colleagues" said Chris Harford, "in fact we have several major projects ongoing at the moment, but we also have some exciting plans in terms of where we want to take things ourselves in the coming years."

Peter Chappell explained "We learned a lot during the buy-out process; Michael and Nigel were excellent, and their experience and technical ability was invaluable to us in getting the deal done. The team at NatWest helped put the funding package together and were always on hand throughout to make sure the deal happened" "Chris and I are extremely grateful to Bill Panthofer for giving us this opportunity to develop and grow the business and we wish him and the team at MM Inc every success in the future."

Michael Smith said "Nigel and I have a lot of deal experience, in fact we first worked together more than twenty years ago. That said, every deal is different; MMI is a fantastic local manufacturing business and Chris and Peter head up a committed, ambitious, and talented team. We wish them well for the future."

David Robinson, Relationship Director at NatWest, said "We are delighted to support the management team in bringing this local business back into UK ownership. Mill Masters is a seasoned exporter and we wish Chris and Peter continued success."

www.taitwalker.co.uk



UNW STRENGTHENS EMPLOYMENT TAX EXPERTISE WITH NEW SENIOR MANAGER

In response to continued demand for its specialist tax services, North East accountancy and business advisory firm UNW has added to its team of experienced tax practitioners with the appointment of Paul Tucker as Employment Taxes Senior Manager.

In recent years, the Newcastle-based firm has continued to invest in its Employment Tax offering, which operates alongside a number of different specialisms within UNW. The specialist service is led by Lee Muter, the only dedicated Employment Taxes Partner in the region, and provides clients with advice and support on all aspects of employment tax from both a compliance and advisory perspective.

Paul brings a wealth of experience to the firm, having worked in both the public and private sectors, and spent over 25 years' as an employment tax specialist. A chartered tax adviser, he is also a member of the Chartered Institute of Tax National Employment Taxes Committee and Chair of the Chartered Institute of Tax National Employment Tax Forum, and regularly delivers lectures on the subject.

On his decision to join the firm, Paul said: "I saw many attractions with UNW, in particular its strong local presence and the level of expertise and

client service available within the firm – which is critical for Employment Tax advisers. The chance to work alongside Lee also encouraged me to join the firm, as he is a well-respected adviser in the North East.

"We both share the view that employers need support and that we are the ones who are able to provide that help. We already have some great ideas to move forward, and there is an opportunity for us to build a service that is a recognised leader in its field – not only in the North East, but nationally."

Lee Muter, Employment Taxes Partner at UNW, added: "Paul is a superb addition to the team and I am delighted that someone with his knowledge and skillset is joining the firm. Paul not only has vast employment taxes experience, but more importantly, he has a strong desire to help clients, build relationships and work as part of the team. His arrival provides us with the opportunity to strengthen the service and continue to be viewed in the region as experts within the field."

For more information please visit www.unw.co.uk or contact Lee Muter, Employment Taxes Partner, on 0191 243 6089 or at leemuter@unw.co.uk



SECOND-WAVE: THE UNCERTAINTY OF NOT KNOWING

It's coming, but how hard will it hit our pensions?

With COVID-19 cases on the rise and local lockdowns coming into effect, it looks like we're moving ever closer to a second wave.

The markets are still recovering from the initial impact of COVID-19 and inflation has hit a 20-year low, opening up a wide range of questions about pensions and retirement.

What impact do you think a second wave will have?

It's going to depend on if we have full national lockdown again or regional ones. If it's a national lockdown, we will see an immediate effect on consumer spending and on perceived demand. Issues relating to a second wave are that it creates uncertainty and markets dislike nothing more than uncertainty.

Recovery of the markets is still yet to reach pre-COVID levels, with Professor John Turner, a financial expert from Queen's Management School claiming the market is 25% down since the start of the year. Without making a prediction, a new lockdown could have an impact on retirement portfolios, as so much of

the market is driven by fear.

What impact will 20-year low inflation have on pensions?

You might well find that it's going to drive people away from annuities. Annuities are in part linked to inflation-linked bonds called gilts. When inflation is low, you get less for your money and have to accept a lower rate of return.

There's a huge benefit to lower inflation; your money goes further. This means that you can enjoy spending more without having the cost of an inflation increase to also consider.

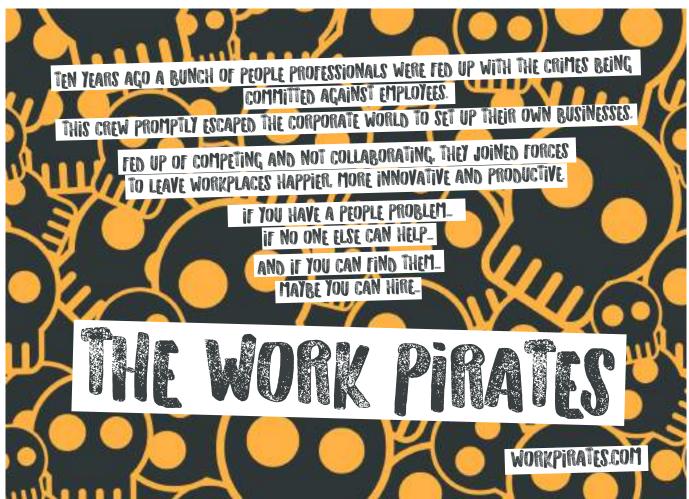
What should people consider when transferring and consolidating pensions?

Annuity rates and the stock markets are quite low at the moment, as such your retirement pot might be lower than you were expecting.

With all the uncertainty in the markets at present, now is an excellent time to talk to a financial adviser about your retirement options, available funds and any concerns you might have.

Luke Watkinson, Financial Adviser at Joslin Rhodes Lifestyle Financial Planning. Joslin Rhodes.co.uk 01642 52 55 11 hello@joslinrhodes.co.uk

Investments can go down as well as up, you may not get back what you invest.



LEARNING FROM LOCKDOWN -SECURING EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

2020 has been a year that nobody could ever have predicted. It has been a year of uncertainty, lockdown and navigating the 'new normal' which has brought many challenges for organisations worldwide.

In March 2020, UK businesses were forced to close their doors and working from home became the default position.

Nearly six months on we are now easing out of lockdown and looking to bring employees back to the office or explore new hybrid ways of working that bring together the best of home and office working practices. As employers consider their options, effectively prioritising employee engagement will be key to navigating our way towards a work environment that best meets both the desires of the business and its employees.

What changes should we expect to see?

A recent article in Forbes magazine suggests we are likely to see enduring change in a number of areas including:

- corporate flexibility;
- our office set up and operations (social distancing, hygiene, temperature checking);
- home-ready working (technology and physical set-up);
- e-learning becoming the norm;
- business attire (acceleration in acceptance of casual attire); and
- video virtuosos (long term adoption of these new ways of communicating).

Now, more than ever, the importance of engagement and gathering feedback is crucial to the future success of the organisation. Collating employee feedback will help to create traction in planning and reactivating the future workplace, so that we don't remain in a temporary state, immobilised by uncertainty. Granted, some employers will have more flexibility than others in such decisions, but even the smallest bits of information relating to employee and customer preferences, concerns or restrictions will be instrumental in understanding and reassuring those individuals of how you can reintegrate them into the workplace and the services you provide.

Look back as well as forward

Of course, it's been well publicised that for the many employees who have discovered the benefits of working at home such as less travel, more flexibility and a better work life balance, they will want to try and retain some of those benefits in the long term.

However, it's not just about exploring alternatives for the future, organisations have a perfect opportunity now to also look back and learn how employees have viewed the response of the organisation to



lockdown – what worked and what didn't – the good, the bad and the ugly!

It has been said that feedback is the breakfast of champions, and it would be naïve to believe that society will not face challenges of this magnitude in future. Whether or not it comes in the form of a global pandemic, gathering feedback to ensure our contingency and disaster recovery plans are refined for future is a valuable exercise in itself.

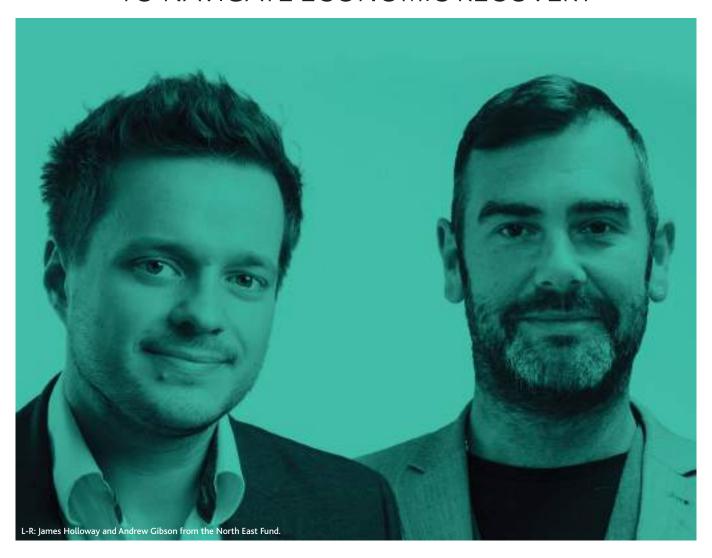
Proactivity now will help shape the future of your organisation

Employers who are best prepared and are proactive in this approach will be in a better position to navigate the new and hopefully better normal. Investing time in surveying the workforce and conducting staff feedback forums and focus groups is the best way to solicit open and honest feedback from employees, before memories fade. A survey allows employers to gain insight, invite suggestions and develop involvement in decision making, helping to shape the future of the organisation, and embed a culture of collaboration and trust.



For more information on how RSM can help your organisation with employee engagement or any other HR issues, please contact Jude Lean at jude.lean@rsmuk.com or your usual RSM contact.

ONE-TO-ONE, SME BUSINESS ADVICE ON OFFER TO NAVIGATE ECONOMIC RECOVERY



The North East Fund has proactively supported local SMEs before, during the pandemic and now, as the region navigates its way through a period of economic recovery.

The Fund's ethos has always been to get behind companies the best way it can, assist with growth opportunities, and provide owners and management teams with the means to access investment and advice when needed the most.

Engagement officers, James Holloway and Andrew Gibson, have, over the last few months, been offering free one-to-one sessions in order for business owners to obtain the correct information as to what financial support is out there and how to access it.

This is still available to companies based in Northumberland, Tyne & Wear and County

Durham as SMEs across all sectors aim to rebuild, restructure, take advantage of new market opportunities or grow in a changing business landscape.

James explained, "We have seen a significant number of business owners and management teams take up this opportunity and seek our advice as to what loans, grant schemes and financial assistance is out there for them. It is a challenging time for the majority of companies, whether restructuring to survive, adapting their offering or servicing a rapid spike in demand for their products, and we've seen this combination across most sectors.

"However, the North East Fund has also helped to secure £10m+ of investment for regional SMEs since the start of lockdown, therefore we'd advise anyone needing support and advice to get in touch."

Both James and Andrew can also advise on UK-wide schemes such as Innovate UK grants and the Future Fund, and are familiar with what is on offer across the whole North East region. Working very closely with local authority economic development teams, support organisations and the wider business community, they have access to information which could prove critical for company owners in an ever changing business environment.

To arrange a virtual one-to-one appointment with North East Fund representatives, please email:

James.holloway@northeastfund.org (for Sunderland, Northumberland, South Tyneside and Newcastle-based companies).

Andrew.gibson@northeastfund.org (for County Durham, North Tyneside, Gateshead and Newcastle-based companies).

Alternatively go to www.northeastfund.org for details.



ENTREPRENEURS' FORUM INVITES GROWING NORTH EAST BUSINESSES TO JOIN ITS SCALE-UP PROGRAMME

The Entrepreneurs' Forum is inviting North East businesses with ambitious growth plans to apply for its fifth annual Scale-up Leader's Academy.

Delivered over six months, the programme – launching in January 2021 - offers a range of practical advice through a mix of inspirational events, team sessions and scale-up coaching workshops led by Gazelle International coach Ian Kinnery.

Exploring what it means to 'scale-up' sustainably, it prepares business owners to face the challenges of growth, helping them create an actionable 'One Page Strategic Plan' to achieve their goals.

Those interested in the Academy can attend the Forum's preview event on Thursday 1st October 2020 at Hilton Newcastle Gateshead, when Ian Kinnery will explore the barriers to scaling a business. The event will also be streamed via Zoom.

At the event, Sally Marshall of the Teesside-based Marshall Robertson Group, who completed the fourth cohort, and Andrew Mackay of Newcastle-based Coleman James who completed the third, will highlight the lessons they learned and how

they were implemented within their businesses.

Andrew Mackay of Coleman James said: "It was an invaluable experience. Coleman James began life in 2016 with just me and a laptop. Over the past four years, we've grown to an award-winning team of 14 based at our modern studio in Hoults Yard, a space which gives us plenty of room as we continue to scale.

"We have a national client base, working in partnership with many high-growth companies in the built environment and rail sectors, and plan to open a second office. We delivered a multi-million turnover in FY20, which we're on track to double in FY2, despite the impact of COVID.

"We were already on a significant growth trajectory but the Academy placed a focus on actionable insight delivered by industry experts — in particular around the key areas of 'people, strategy, execution and cash'."

Jonathan Lamb, Chief Executive of the Entrepreneurs' Forum, said: "The Scale-up Leader's Academy launched in 2017, and since then we've supported almost 40 North East business leaders to develop a toolkit that allows them to prepare for rapid and sustained business growth.

"For each cohort, we refine the programme to reflect our members' feedback and to address key challenges faced by scale-ups such as access to talent and leadership development.

"For this year's cohort, we also had to adapt quickly, shifting the programme online during the lockdown. Regardless of delivery method, our goal is to ensure that our members and their senior leadership teams are fully equipped with everything they need to grow sustainable businesses."

Applications are currently open for the 2021 Scaleup Leader's Academy.

To register your interest, contact info@entrepreneursforum.net or visit www.entrepreneursforum.net/scale-up



An Entrepreneur Interview with...

EMMA GAUDERN

Managing director, EMG Solicitors

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Tell me about your background in business?

Having completed my law degree at Leeds University, I qualified as a solicitor in 1999 and began my professional career in the North West, gaining experience with several law firms, notably as partner and head of the wills, trusts and probate practice at the Manchester office of national law firm DWF LLP.

I returned to the North East, where I had spent my early years, in 2010 to be with my partner who was living and working in Sunderland. I joined Darlington-based BHP Law, where I was partner and head of the wills, trusts and probate team.

Up until the point EMG Solicitors was founded, I had gained 15 years' valuable experience in the profession and was confident I had the expertise to deliver an exceptional service to clients, although admittedly little knowledge of the actual nuts and bolts of running a business.

However, I possessed a huge amount of ambition and the desire and drive to do things a little differently. This, and the support received from being a member of the Entrepreneurs' Forum, has helped scale-up the business tremendously.

How was EMG Solicitors formed?

It was all really down to babies! In 2013, I was seven months pregnant with my second child and it was at that point I decided that I wanted to branch out and took the momentous decision to hand in my notice. Following my maternity leave I founded EMG Solicitors with Jemma Morland, who at the time was a Court of Protection solicitor with whom I'd worked with at BHP law

Jemma also wanted to have a family, and this shaped the way we formed the business. We have dispensed with desk-based PCs and everyone at EMG can not only work remotely from home using laptops, but work in a flexible manner which has made us family friendly.

As a result, we have attracted many working mums to the firm. We actively discourage the often-ingrained practice of presenteeism and support our staff to fit work around their home life. The important thing is that the work is completed, not that it is done from an office within traditional business hours.

Our long-held practice of remote and flexible working also stood us in good stead during the Coronavirus lockdown. We took the decision to ask our staff to work from home several days before the announcement was made and many continue to do so to this day.

Because we already had the IT systems in place and our staff were familiar with working remotely, we were able to make the transition smoothly and without disruption.

In your own words, what is it that EMG Solicitors does?

We provide the legal support that our clients require to achieve anything from their basic needs to their wildest dreams - and everything in between!

What is your proudest moment with the company?

In the early days, there were just four of us - me, Jemma, a paralegal, and a secretary working out of a serviced office. The business then grew to a size where we needed and were able to buy our own premises and moved into our current office in Durham.

This provided one of my standout moments, seeing the sign above the door and, returning to the office that evening to discover some of the staff had got together to hold a surprise 'moving in' gathering! It was a touching moment.

Another proud moment also involved a surprise party, this time in February 2019 when lots of people came together to celebrate the firm's fifth anniversary. It's great to know that our staff are invested and care about the business.

Is there a particular mistake you have made while in business? And how did you overcome/learn from it?

Effective communication with staff is vital, keeping everyone updated with developments in the business. In the past, due to intense periods of work, this has sometimes slipped.

However, during lockdown communicating with our staff was crucial, so I was posting video posts up to twice a week. Having a clear and constant communication flow within the business is at the forefront of what we do and encourages interaction.

What is the USP of EMG Solicitors?

There are many firms that offer legal advice, but we stand apart by ensuring we keep our clients at the heart of everything we do.

This involves taking the time to get to know them and understanding their needs in order to forge a strong and trusting relationship, essentially becoming a friend. In addition, we aim to offer exceptional service at a fair price.

We are also a business that believes in supporting our community and have been involved in several initiatives. In 2019 we set up our own EMG Charitable Fund with County Durham Community Foundation to help support our local communities through charitable giving.

How has the firm grown and what do you attribute this to?

From four people in 2014, the firm has expanded to 56 staff and most of that growth has happened within the last three years. As well as our main office in Durham, we opened an office in Gosforth 12 months ago.

This reflects the expansion of EMG into different areas of legal work, including disputes and litigation, employment law, family law and commercial property.

Much of the growth is due to two factors. The first is that our clients return to us for other types of legal work because of the service we have provided and the bond forged.

Secondly, we have a team of really great people. Because we are a friendly, caring, and flexible business, we attract high-calibre people which fosters a strong team spirit. We invest in, listen to, and train our people and provide an inclusive culture where everyone can be themselves.

Do you live by/do business by a certain motto?

Supporting Clients. Protecting Assets. Changing Lives.

What are the future plans of EMG Solicitors?

Ask anyone at the firm and they will say 'global domination' as that is a phrase that is bandied about! This is slightly tongue in cheek but I want people to know that we have a huge amount of ambition and are focused on growing the business further — without impacting on the quality of service and those client relationships that have been built up over many years.

Within the next ten years, I'd like to open a further two or three offices. We will always be North East-based and are proud of our roots here in the region but would consider opening offices in other parts of the country.

This year the firm will achieve a turnover of just over £3m and I would very much like to see that grow to £10m within the next 10 to 14 years.

Emma Gaudern is a member of the Entrepreneurs' Forum, a group of like-minded people who come together at inspirational events to share best practice, create valuable connections and help each other to grow their businesses. For more information, visit www.entrepreneursforum.net





THE WINTER KNIGHT

When it comes to winter, there's one man that's in everyone's phonebook, meet James Haghighat, owner of Proflame Heating Services.

We caught up with James for the latest information, just in time for the winter season.

Can you tell us a bit about Proflame Heating Services?

Back in 2014, I decided to take the plunge from my day job at British Gas, to build my own business. I specialise in all areas of gas work, so I wanted to create a one-stop-shop for my customers where they can rely on us for everything from central heating and boiler work to all gas appliances.

How's the business doing, given the current pandemic?

Honestly, the pandemic hasn't affected us too

badly. Being an integral part of the home, we're always needed. Our business is usually word-of-mouth referrals, but we're ready to fire up the furnace — pardon the pun - so have brought JAM Prints and Marketing on board. So, you might be hearing a lot more of Proflame.

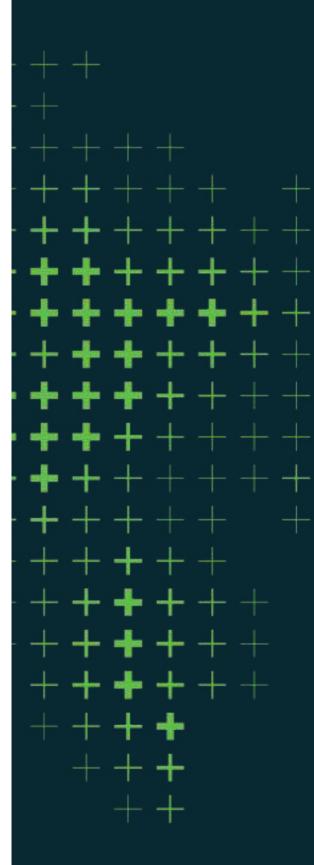
Winter's coming, what's your advice for our readers?

Two words — Boiler service. It's vital to get your boiler serviced at least once a year, and even more so when it comes to the winter season, I've had too many call outs to faulty boilers and freezing customers because they 'thought we could get away with it this year.'

Secondly, keep your eyes out for the Government grants, we've not had much information on them at this point, but they're definitely going to be worth using. Last of all, my favourite money saving tip is to invest in a thermostat, they're much better for the environment and will save you money too.

Sold! How can our readers get in touch?

We're currently undergoing a website re-vamp, so the best way to get in touch is via our Facebook page - @ProflameHeating - or give us call - 07804646241. Winter can get pretty busy, so we recommend getting booked in as soon as possible.



Capital Grant Funding

Support for small and medium sized businesses looking to expand or establish new operations in County Durham.

You could be eligible for a grant of 20% to 45% of expenditure, if you are:

- A small or medium sized business
- Planning capital investment of at least £100,000
- Expanding or establishing in County Durham

To find out if your business is eligible, contact our expert advisers.

01917161006

countydurhamgrowthfund@weareumi.co.uk www.countydurhamgrowthfund.co.uk

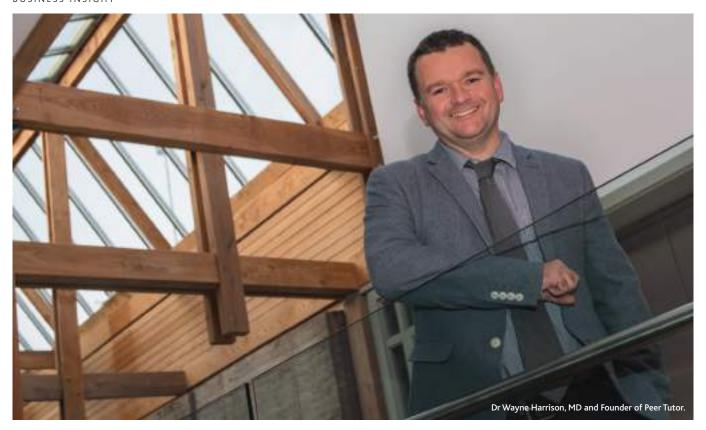
The County Durham Growth Fund is managed by UMi on behalf of Business Durham with funding from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).











COVID-19 AND INCREASING THE INEQUALITY OF ACCESS TO HIGH QUALITY EDUCATION

As the Covid-19 pandemic continues to cause disruption to people's lives, Dr Wayne Harrison, MD and founder of the peer-to-peer learning app, Peer Tutor, explores how another lockdown might further increase the attainment gap between learners from different economic backgrounds.

As a nation, we learned in a short space of time that many schools were not equipped or prepared for a pandemic. This is not a criticism, as almost every sector of society has been significantly impacted in some way by Covid-19, with the exception perhaps of toilet roll manufacturers or purveyors of online conferencing software!

However, as we are already seeing signs of a second wave of the virus emerging, if we are to learn from our experiences of lockdown in its first iteration, then we need to do more to sure-up our state education system to ensure that future generations are not disadvantaged for years to come.

Research published by Professor Francis Green from University College London's Institute of Education 'Schoolwork in lockdown: new evidence on the epidemic of educational poverty', provided policy makers and Government with an early indication of the issues facing the education of children during Covid-19. To summarise some of the key points:

- One fifth of pupils over two million children did no schoolwork at home, or less than an hour a day. Only 17% put in more than four hours a day. The inequality between regions and social groups was substantial.
- Offline schoolwork is lowest in the Northeast of England, where the proportion receiving four or more daily pieces is just 9%, compared with the country-wide average of 20%. In the Southeast

- region, 28% of children are receiving four or more pieces of offline schoolwork per day.
- 31% of private schools provided four or more live online lessons daily, as compared with just 6% in state schools. Support from teachers checking private school pupils' work was strong, and virtually all private school children (97%) had access to a computer at home.
- One in five of those on free school meals had no access to a computer at home.

The partial reopening of schools in June and July then provided further challenges, as the additional demands of split classes and social distancing placed pressure on primary and secondary school leaders to focus their teachers' attention on provision for the small percentage of learners in school, rather than those at home. In some cases, research by National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) revealed that as little as 6% of teachers were focused on remote teaching which as a result, put pressure on parents to step up to the plate.

As a parent myself, I found home schooling incredibly difficult even though I am a former teacher and my wife is a teacher. We had to juggle trying to motivate our daughter to complete self-directed learning tasks whilst working from home ourselves. She had no access to online lessons from her school despite being a pupil at an Ofsted 'Outstanding' rated primary school.

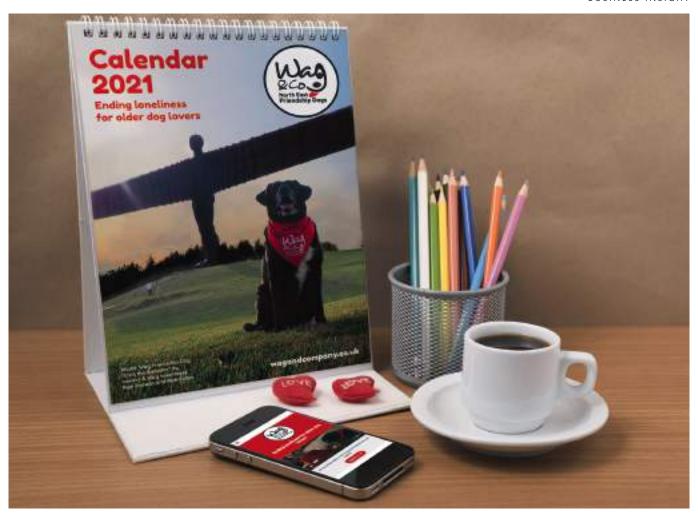
My daughter's experience of remote learning is not unique, with the same study from NFER revealing that 61% of learners in state schools were directed to complete worksheets or do work from textbooks in place of direct interaction with their teachers. By comparison, many private schools were able to switch to online teaching when the pandemic hit so pupils were able to continue learning new content with their teachers.

If children in key examination years are required to sit their exams in the usual exam windows, the vast majority of pupils outside of private education have a monumental challenge to catch up and are significantly disadvantaged.

Unless, as a country, we can move learning online for all pupils when local lockdowns are enforced, the divide between the privately educated and state educated children will have a profound impact on the life chances of many. As a society, we cannot allow this to happen.

As we all know, Covid-19 is not going anywhere fast and the next academic year will not be normal. The release of the Catch Up Premium and National Tutoring Programme may help to close the gap for some, however, more than anything we need to ensure that all schools, teachers and pupils are equipped to provide interactive distanced learning in the event of further school closures.

To find out more about Peer Tutor, visit www.peertutor.com



DOG OWNING VOLUNTEERS STAND IN FRIENDSHIP TO SUPPORT CHARITY

A North East charity that works to combat loneliness for older dog lovers has turned to its volunteers and army of four-legged friends to come up with a way to raise much-needed funds, while providing a special gift to elderly people at the same time.

Wag & Company is launching its very own 2021 calendar that can be sent out as a heartfelt 'thinking of you' gesture to its elderly friends whilst Covid-19 restrictions prevent physical visiting.

The calendar is a showcase of some of the fabulous 'Friendship Dogs' who showed off their personalities for inclusion in the calendar.

Diane Morton, Founding Director of Wag & Company, said: "We invited our volunteers to submit photos of their special Friendship Dogs and I must say we had some fantastic entries. Choosing one for each month plus a front and back cover, so 14 images in total, was very difficult indeed.

"This calendar, along with some other new products and activities, is such an important initiative for the charity, our volunteers and all the elderly people who have come to rely on our visits. The impact of Covid-19 means our visiting activities were suspended in March. Our recruitment activities

have slowed down, dog assessments aren't possible, and our fundraising income has pretty much dried up.

"The calendar is now available to buy online from our new e:shop on our website and we're offering people the opportunity to buy one for themselves and also to donate one to be sent to one of our elderly friends. Over 2,500 calendars are being posted to our friends in their own homes and in the residential care settings that our volunteers would usually visit across the region. It's so important they know they're not forgotten, that everyone's thinking of them and we'll be back just as soon as we possibly can."

Wag & Company was set up five years ago to tackle loneliness and isolation among older and vulnerable dog lovers in the North East. In ordinary times, its network of 407 volunteers and their dogs (Visiting Wag Teams) visit people on a 1:1 in their own homes and also 245 regional care and nursing

homes. Volunteers and their dogs are currently not able to safely visit their elderly friends in their own homes and residential care environments due to social distancing and health and safety guidelines.

Since late March, Wag and Company has looked to innovative ways to engage with the vulnerable people they help - around 3,000 across the North East - while also raising money.

Diane said: "It has been inspiring to see so many of our volunteers regularly keeping in touch with their friends during these difficult times.

"Some are doing shopping, dogs are FaceTiming, there's regular phoning, sending cards, books, photos, and cakes. This special gift is just another way to make them smile.

"We hope people inside and outside of our volunteer network will support the charity and add the Wag Calendar to their Christmas gift list. It's a great stocking filler or even a gift for clients; every dog has a story to tell."

The calendar retails at £6.50 each and is on sale in the charity's new e:shop now: www.wagandcompany.co.uk/shop

MOVING ON UP: EASING THE TRANSITION FROM SCHOOL TO WORK DURING 2020

Matt Joyce, Regional Lead: North East Ambition at the North East Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), talks about the support available for young people who have had to make decisions about their futures during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Earlier this year, the country went into lockdown just as many young people were beginning to make important decisions about their futures.

For some students who are moving on from school or college and beginning the next stage of their education or starting work, this is a particularly crucial part of the academic year, a time when they will be talking to their school or college careers advisers, and other key staff, in order to decide what's the best route for them and to get support applying for different opportunities.

That's why the skills team here at the North East LEP has been working closely with schools and colleges in the region to support them at a time when it's been difficult to deliver careers guidance in the usual ways.

Together, we wanted to make sure that young people – and also their parents and carers – are equipped with all the information they need to make informed decisions, even when they might not have been able to access the usual face-to-face support from their school.

A new website – jobopportunitiesnortheast.co.uk – now brings together information for young people and their families on the full range of options, from apprenticeships and university to the new T-Level qualifications which are rolling out from this year. In addition, it highlights how they can access further information, advice and guidance – from professionally qualified, trusted sources – if they need it



It also includes the latest government announcements which affect young people, such as the new Kickstart Scheme, designed to help employers create six-month job placements for young people who are currently on Universal Credit and at risk of long-term unemployment.

Our aim is to help young people to realise their career aspirations and also to reduce the number who are at risk of not being in employment, education or training (sometimes referred to as

The new website also contains the latest job vacancies which have arisen across a range of sectors as a result of COVID-19 — ranging from vacancies with small businesses to new roles with large corporates like Sage UK - and guidance for business owners on workplace safety and adapting to post-pandemic working.

Over the next few months we'll also be working with employers to see how we can create meaningful ways for students to gain virtual experiences of the workplace when traditional placements and visits to workplaces might be more difficult to arrange than they were pre-COVID. The use of new technology opens up a lot of possibilities and it's vital that we make sure that links created between education and industry are not lost.

This all ties in with the broader work of the North East COVID-19 Economic Response Group, which is leading the region's economic response to the pandemic, mitigating the impact on the North East economy, and readying the region for recovery.

One area of focus for the group has been keeping people in employment, and that includes looking at the impact of the pandemic on the cohort of young people who are taking their first steps into the world of work.

As well as our work with schools and colleges, we're talking to employers about the skills they need from their workforce – including new starters who are fresh from education – and how things are changing for businesses as a result of the pandemic.

As ever, it's the combination of schools, colleges and employers working together which will help each and every young person in our region to achieve their potential and successfully make the transition from education to the world of work – even now, during one of the most difficult years many pupils in our region will have faced.

Visit jobopportunitiesnortheast.co.uk to see the latest information for young people who are moving on from years 11 to 14, as well as job vacancies and guidance for employers.

www.northeastlep.co.uk



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WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?

Procrastination has a number of forms and motivations. At its essence, it is a tendency to defer action unproductively. This can result in things being done last minute, or not at all, resulting in poorer outcomes and missed opportunities.

Alternatively, the issue concerned perhaps was not important enough in the first place and so has stayed around for days weeks and months as mental "clutter".

Procrastination can come from a lack of specific skills and organisation. Most comes from our internal world and includes how we manage thought, self-awareness and the mental disciplines we bring to bear on our lives and businesses. For many people, procrastination is the outcome of a lack of personal focus resulting in other things being prioritised over that which are truly important.

We live in an increasingly anxiety fraught world, the reasons for which are legion. Our attempts to manage anxiety often involve avoidance and denial as well as selective perception wherein we can re-prioritise unnecessary things as more important than others. These are natural human defence mechanisms, well documented in the annals of psychology texts, be they popular or academic. Difficult tasks in our external world often raise the prospect of conflict with others or internal conflicts. If what we are about to do simply does not accord with our identity the natural anxiety that evokes, often can result in us fudging things

We also live in an information-based world. Information overload often in itself is anxiety provoking as we must sift through vast amounts of data and establish which may be relevant to us before we act. This information bombardment can seem constant. Our phones texts and emails pursue us relentlessly and the social media platforms that support them need to be actively managed by us if we are not to be under constant pressure. Fragmentation comes when we cannot focus ourselves into course of action. Our concentration splinters and we never properly process the tasks in order to make robust

Leadership, management and indeed business training, coaching and mentoring can make a huge difference on these journeys, not only offering insights into business but also for wider life aspects. We need to learn to understand the complexities that are involved in the procrastination/fragmentation process.

Meantime, here are some key messages that we can get hold of and make a difference.

One: Actively prioritise. It's the old 'first things first second things not at all'. Do we do what we like, or what we must, and which should come first;

- Two: Do difficult things first. Start your day with those things that are going to be the least pleasant and get them done. That way the energy of any anxiety is channelled into action leaving you free to devote your efforts to other matters and better enjoy your day!
- **Three:** Adopt "ditch or delegate". Look at the areas that you are avoidant or procrastinating in. Then decide if you really need these, are the benefits really greater than the hassles or is there someone who can better take these on? Delegate can include asking a friend, a member of staff colleague or
- **Four:** Resist beating yourself up. Most people procrastinate in some way. Instead, admit it, challenge it, ditch or
- Five: Protect time for detailed matters. We don't give complex things the time they need. Some tasks are necessarily time intensive and require a full concentration. We need protected time where attention to detail is important. It's at these times we must learn switch off the phone, tell people are not available and tell ourselves this is something we are doing today.
- **Six:** Foster concentration and contemplation. Time to think, time to explore matters with a third party and time to meditate can all help in re-fixing our concentration, reiterating our decision-making processes and creating a concrete basis for action.
- **Seven:** Remember the benefits. Look beyond the challenges of something you have been delaying for whatever reason to see the outcome you want for you and others. It's a "light at the end of the tunnel" thing.

Those of us delivering professional coaching and mentoring frequently encounter this with clients and recognise the value they find in sharing and examining these practices so that they can take appropriate measures to be more effective, feel better about themselves and experience greater satisfaction in life and

I hope you enjoyed this article, and it has not been a distraction from something else you have been putting off!

Now go do something (ringing Gedanken might be quite a good

THE PET **DOCTOR**

Introducing Doctor Sarah Elizabeth Stead – Owner and Top Dog (every pun intended) at Sore Paws Veterinary Clinics in Winlaton and Newton Aycliffe.

Every month, Doctor Stead will be on hand to answer your questions that come with ownership of our furry, and in some cases, not so furry friends. This month is just an introduction, however we welcome your questions, so that we can answer them, in print, and put your pet worries to bed.

For email enquiries - sorepawsvets.winlaton@ outlook.com

"If you, like many pet owners, begin to dread this time of year with the approach of Bonfire Night, you're not alone. Many pets suffer with noise phobias, particularly towards fireworks. We often have a number of enquiries about what pet owners can do to help their fearful dogs during this time. Fireworks are terrifying for our pets and many suffer terribly during these months.

"One of the products we use to counteract the anxiety that this time of year can bring is Nutracalm products. It is a supplement specially formulated by vets using a unique combination of all-natural ingredients developed to help fretful pets. It works fast, without any sedative effects and is suitable for cats, dogs and horses and can be given alongside other medications.

"Many pets get stressed and anxious with the loud bangs that fireworks make, but these products can also help with such problems as separation anxiety, travelling, visits to the vets or when pets have to stay away from their owners and homeenvironments. Separation anxiety, especially following this pandemic, is something that we,

at Sore Paws have seen an increasing number of cases of, so I am sure that the calming products from Nutravet can help with some of those issues. Another bonus is that this product does not require a prescription and can be bought over the counter.

"Other things you can do to help your companion on Bonfire night includes exercising them before dark to tire them out, keeping them inside overnight and keeping curtains and all windows and doors closed. Leaving a radio on or the TV on quietly to help drown out the noise from outside, and providing a "den" for them to hide within and feel safe. There are also more aggressive therapies which can be implemented such as mild sedatives, however these need to be prescribed by your vet and we recommend you speak with a veterinary professional first before considering these. We don't want to be killjoys, but some celebrations simply aren't good for our pets, so at least we can rest easier knowing that there are things we can do to help them."

See you next month, Sarah.





For information on Sore Paws Veterinary Clinics and Nutracalm products, email: Sorepawsvets.winlaton@outlook.com - 0191 414 4233 (Winlaton branch) or 01325 308 000 (Newton Aycliffe branch).



THE POWER OF P

Five years ago, the world was a distinctly different place. You could even argue five months ago, our lives were very different!

In 2015 I was appointed the David Goldman Visiting Professor for Innovation and Enterprise at Newcastle University. A prestigious role, held by someone from industry who has made a significant impact through a successful career, primarily from the North East of England.

A visiting Professor appointment was an incredible achievement for me, having come from abject poverty to being recognised by a foremost North Eastern university as one of the best in my field. But also, serving as a great tribute to my late parents. My father was a career academic who had devoted his life to teaching across the Globe and the most inspiring person in my life, my mother, had not fully used her teaching skills, but taught other Asian females as a hobby, in between bringing up five children single handed, and trying to make ends meet.

The inaugural David Goldman Lecture is a highlight within the North East with 100+ of

the leading academics, community and industry leaders coming together to hear from their newly appointed Visiting Professor. **This had to be one of the most daunting prospects for me**. At the time, I was comfortable speaking publicly, but had never done so to such an audience and in such a setting.

One of the major challenges was the topic, in a room filled with academics and industry leaders, it needed to be something compelling and educational. I spent weeks exploring different topics. From quantum computing's role within nuclear physics through to the time and space continuum conundrum. All of these sounded highly intelligent, but none that reflected me or my experiences.

I eventually settled on a methodology that I had been designing, defining and developing over the past few years. Something that related to the way I worked but also reflected the universe and time itself. I had developed the Power of 3-a

approach based on the principle that our lives and the whole of history have been influenced by 3's. Time is recorded as past, present and the future; religion has the Holy Trinity; and so on.

I took the third letter of the alphabet and using the letter C had come up with Communicate, Collaborate and Celebrate as the Power of 3. Using this approach in our personal and professional lives helped ensure success. If we use the right communication approach, worked collaboratively with the right people and we all came together to celebrate one another, the world would undoubtedly be a better place.

The last five years have been spent refining and improving the Power of 3 and, having used influences from my role within academia, and continuous learning, I am excited to share the Power of P. The three single most impactful traits seen in the most successful individuals and organisations across the globe. What are they? Patience, Perseverance and Positivity. In isolation they are good but together they help create great. I had applied this rule to the hugely successful David Goldman Lecture and in everything I have worked on since. If we all become more patient, persevered with our goals with a positive mindset, we could all achieve so much more. Filling our North East with even more Passionate People and helping us all realise our ambitions!

Ammar Mirza CBE is Chair & Founder of Asian Business Connexions, Chair of the NELEP Business Growth Board, Chair of the IoD North East (North) and holds various positions across the public and private sectors.



TEES VALLEY BUSINESSES TO BENEFIT FROM EXPERT SUPPORT THROUGH OPENING OF NEW HUB

An SME business hub which has supported the growth of hundreds of ventures across the North East has now established a base in the Tees Valley to provide dedicated support to the Teeside business community.

The Tees Valley Business Hub, powered by the SME Centre of Excellence (SMECofE), has opened a base in Boho in Middlesbrough to offer a full range of support services to startups, scale ups and high-growth businesses throughout the area.

The team, backed by partners from across the Tees Valley, offer a bespoke holistic approach to entrepreneurs and innovators to help them start their business, survive and thrive. With a strong focus on digital, the Tees Valley Business Hub will also offer expert support in areas from new market entry and product development to core back office functions including HR, accountancy and marketing.

The Tees Valley Business Hub builds on the success of its first hub, based in Ponteland, Northumberland, which has worked with hundreds of businesses from all sectors throughout the North East since its opening in September 2018.

Having already supported around 200 Tees-based businesses during that time, and delivered Digital City Scale, Investor Readiness and Accelerator Programmes on behalf of Teesside University over the past three years, SMECofE is now in a position to extend that even further by having a dedicated Tees Valley centre.

Led by prominent Tees entrepreneurs Matt Atkinson and Jordan Dargue, they will work alongside the creator of SMECofE, Ammar Mirza - awarded a CBE for his efforts in promoting the North East business

community - to deliver the tailored support Tees Valley businesses need to help get them to the next level, guiding them through the current COVID-19 crisis and map out a plan for their future.

Its opening has been welcomed by Tees Valley Mayor Ben Houchen, who said: "Supporting our fantastic local businesses is my absolute priority and is more important than ever as we continue our recovery from the coronavirus pandemic, and the new Tees Valley Business Hub will play a crucial part in that.

"My plan for the economic recovery of Teesside, Darlington and Hartlepool is a plan for jobs which will see the creation of good quality, high skilled local jobs for local people, and this new centre will support hundreds of businesses in our region to help them invest, grow and create these jobs."

The team already has strong relationships with many businesses and business support services - it has recently been appointed as a partner for Tees Valley Business Support funding - and is also looking to develop links with serviced office providers to offer additional tailored assistance to tenants.

Matt Atkinson, Chief Executive of the Tees Valley Business Hub, said: "The Tees Valley business community is unique and we have established this Hub in response to the specific challenges and needs that entrepreneurs here will face, both in the current climate and into the future. The SMECofE is a very well-established brand in the North East, and to

have already supported so many Tees businesses is phenomenal, but to truly support our community, you have to be part of it.

"Digital transformation is a key focus for us and presents a significant area of growth for the Tees Valley. As an entrepreneur, I have years' of experience in this field and I have seen first-hand what it takes to establish and grow a successful business here. Working with our expert team, I want to pass on our knowledge and experience to others and work alongside them to offer the right support at the right time and help them to achieve their full potential."

Chief operating officer Jordan Dargue added: "These are exciting times for the Tees Valley. We have so many businesses led by dynamic and passionate entrepreneurs which could be set for big things with the right guidance at the right time - and that's where we come in. We work with everyone from startups to scale ups and established international brands to help them realise the vision for their business and how to achieve it.

"Our ambition is to help businesses already based here, as well as to help attract inward investment and bring new ventures to the Tees Valley through the first-rate business support on offer.

With our bespoke support in all areas of what it takes to run a business, we can help them thrive and continue to show the world that the Tees Valley is the place to be."

Contact Hello@smecofe.com to get the right support at the right time to help you start, survive and thrive.



ABC AWARDS DINNER

IN ASSOCIATION WITH



Let's celebrate the significant contribution that the Asian community makes to the North East's health, economic and social wellbeing.

This year we have more of a reason to come together and demonstrate we are one community.

Nominate yourself or someone that you know who has made an impact by emailing awards@abconnexions.org or enter online at www.abconnexions.org

Confirmed speaker The Right Honourable Anne Marie Trevelyan
Secretary of State for International Development

The ABC Awards are being virtually held on the 29th November with award nominees being presented their awards at the County Hotel by Sponsors - in accordance with Government Guidelines. An authentic Indian Meal will be delivered to each Ticket Holder as part of the evenings celebrations ensuring everyone has an enjoyable evening.

Email: mfo@abconnexions.org | Web: www.abconnexions.org The Beacon, Westgate Road, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE4 9PN Tek 01912424892 | Twitter: @abconnexions

Tune in to ABC Show Business each Filday morning hetween 9-11am www.spicefm.co.uk







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IS IGNORING HAPPINESS AT WORK COSTING YOU MONEY?

Yes. Yes, it is! Ignoring happiness at work is bonkers.

There are ridiculous amounts of research showing that having happier, more engaged employees leads to less sickness, less employee turnover and greater innovation. You'll also have happier, more willing-to-spend customers, more profit etc... So why are more organisations not doing everything they can to help people become happier?

Because it is hard.

Happiness is totally subjective - it's a complex thing. It is not one-size-fits-all. And it's not taught. So, so many people do not know how to personally achieve happiness - how insane is this? So, an employer asking the average person - what makes them happy, they might not even know. More money? More holidays? More flexibility? Free breakfast? Not a clue.

So where do you start?

Firstly, how are your people? In themselves? Are they actually ok? Do you know? We have been through a lot in 2020. People will have lost loved ones, had to juggle work and childcare, deal with

the loss of freedoms we once took for granted, manage relationships with no downtime, or have even spent months alone. Your health and safety responsibilities as an employer do not stop at personal protective equipment. Do your managers know how to have difficult conversations? Ask difficult questions? Are they ok being uncomfortable? Have they checked people are coping?

One thing that we have learned during these weird COVID times is that not all jobs have to be done sitting in a specific chair at a specific office with people being constantly 'supervised'. We had to adapt and be more flexible during lockdown, working in different ways. Have you asked your people where they work best? Is it in the office? At home? A mix of both? Is it possible to accommodate everyone's preferred choice? So they can be happier and more productive? Fairness is all about treating people equally, not necessarily the same.

Talking about productivity, do your people know what they are good at doing in work? Where they

perform at their best and their strengths shine through? People are so much more effective when they are doing something they enjoy. Can you jiggle peoples' jobs about a bit so they are doing what they love?

Finally - do your people understand how their role contributes to the success of the organisation? How their individual efforts make a difference to the world? People who have meaning and purpose in their lives are happier, feel more in control and get more out of what they do. They also experience less stress, anxiety and depression, so less time away from work.

Go on, give it a try... what's the worst that can happen? It might even be fun.

About Work Pirates

Many business leaders have people problems they don't know how to solve. We created Work Pirates, which is like the A-Team, but for organisations to give leaders the confidence, courage and tools to do things differently to tackle these problems, feel less stressed and have a happier, more innovative workplace with more empowered employees.

Find out more at workpirates.com or get in touch with Michelle at michelle@workpirates.com

SHORTLISTED ENTRIES FOR NORTH EAST CONTACT CENTRE AWARDS 2020

NECCA

NECCA

The North East Contact Centre Awards (NECCA) have announced their shortlist of entries for the 2020 awards, featuring many of the region's well-known brands, as well as outsourcing specialists and public sector organisations. The shortlist can be viewed at www.necca.co.uk

The Awards have been revamped for this year, with more emphasis on individuals within the contact centres who are delivering success and impact – at all levels including operators, team leaders and senior managers. National and international firms with significant operations in the region are competing for the top spot in all categories, together with public sector agencies who have had to adapt and respond quickly to increasing call volumes due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Nineteen categories are being contested, recognising and celebrating the "Individual Stars", "Awesome Teams" and "Outstanding Organisations" across the North East. The judging process is being carried out by a core panel of five industry experts, supported by other specialists in contact centre operations and management.

The team of judges is being led by Christine Allenson, a former Customer Service Director who has led the region's largest contact centre with 1,500 employees. Christine commented on how pleased she was to be supporting the regional awards: "The North East Contact Centre Awards have been a popular programme for the sector over the last 16 years. I am delighted to be leading our core team of judges and supporting the organisers of NECCA - who have already given this year's awards a major boost, with several new categories announced and the emphasis on recognising individual talent within our industry. Special mention of course to our sponsors for their proactive support this year: Sunderland City Council, greenbeen, North Tyneside Council, Business Durham, People Gauge and Invest North East England.

"Throughout my own career I have seen rapid growth in our sector with many household brands opening contact centres in the North East, so I'm keenly aware how much the regional awards mean to companies who enter. Our industry is one of the region's largest employers and we are determined to recognise the many unsung heroes who drive this success.

"Shortlisting the entries has been a difficult process as we received 121 applications in total – the highest number yet, in spite of major challenges across the sector caused by Covid-19. We are delighted to announce our shortlisted entries – but I want to take the opportunity to thank every nomination we received. The standard of entries was particularly high and all organisations who participated this year deserve praise for their resilience, dedication and commitment whilst working through really difficult circumstances."

Councillor Graeme Miller, Leader of Sunderland City Council added: "At Sunderland City Council we are fully aware of the strength and diversity of the industry – not just in Sunderland, but across the wider region. From Tees Valley up to Northumberland, our region employs more than 30,000 people in contact centres – almost 6% of our workforce - so the industry is clearly a huge contributor to our local economies. I'm sure the competition will be fierce and I'm looking forward to hearing which individuals, teams and organisations will receive our top awards this year.

"The team of judges will now be conducting extended interviews and receiving presentations from the shortlisted candidates to decide on our winners in all categories. Our main judging criteria is how entrants demonstrate impact for their customers, their company, their colleagues and their community."

NECCA is organised by Newcastle-based event management company, The Projects Studio. Director Andrew Wilson commented: "Congratulations to all Shortlisted Entries for NECCA 2020. We know how much effort has gone into submitting applications, and our shortlist is testament to the strength of this sector in the North East. We are supporting our judges now as they embark on the next stage in the process – whittling down the shortlist to decide on our winners.

"Our plan this year was to announce winners at an Awards Ceremony on 20 November at Ramside Hall. We've been waiting for the latest government guidance on events before we make any final decision on format. We will keep in close contact with all stakeholders and shortlisted entries to inform them of any decision we take.















Contact for further information:

Andrew Wilson, Director, The Projects Studio, andrew@projects-studio.co.uk 07736 685588



HOW TO PROTECT TENANTS, GUESTS AND PATIENTS WITH REMOTE TECHNOLOGY

Plexus Innovation is successfully rolling out its innovative GUARDIAN® technology across Care Homes, Social Housing and Hospitals in the UK.

Here Ian Murray, Managing Director for Plexus Innovation, explains why as we face more and more complex social challenges, that remote technology needs to be the way forward when it comes to compliance and condition monitoring:

"GUARDIAN® is a remote, automated measurement and alert system that focuses on environmental data including temperature.

"Ideal for reducing the risk of legionella and ensuring temperature of water and refrigeration units is at an optimum level to protect health, the GUARDIAN® technology comprises of a combination of hardware, with remote monitoring software.

"We currently provide social housing, care home and healthcare sectors alike with GUARDIAN®. We are now poised to enter the education and hospitality sectors and planning for rapid growth, following a recent investment into the company.

"In the care sector, going forward, all care homes need to be extra vigilant when it comes to compliance to ensure a steady focus on the health of their residents.

"GUARDIAN® is ideal to support this as it remotely measures in real time, reducing risk from medical



fridge and legionella compliance issues. It's alert system enables early intervention, ensuring the delivery of an enhanced duty of care to residents.

"At a time when nurses and care home staff need to focus on the residents even more than usual, ${\sf GUARDIAN}^{\otimes}$ frees them up to concentrate on care provision.

"Once installed, GUARDIAN® automatically detects operational issues which would otherwise lead to dispensed medication waste and

undiagnosed water system problems, for example.

"Compliance in the social housing sector is also currently quite complicated when following government guidelines of not visiting homes, and of course, the beauty of GUARDIAN® is that it enables uninterrupted compliance management without staff having to have access a tenants property. believe housing is one such organisation that is currently protecting 136 tenants with GUARDIAN® and will further benefit from a system expansion planned in October.

"Hotels and the hospitality industry is also finding that protecting their guests from legionella or from health risks associated with fridge failure is a much simpler job with GUARDIAN®, with its reassuring technology that compliments the role of their facilities manager.

"GUARDIAN® reduces operational costs and potential for human error in relation to compliance. It is a cost-effective way to free up more staff time, giving real-time data and accurate measurements to facilitate enhanced compliance management, reduce risks and drive operational efficiency.

"Quite simply, GUARDIAN® is the 'must have' technology in medical fridge and legionella compliance."

More information on GUARDIAN® is available at www.plexus-innovation.com

RED HAWK - CREATING JOBS AND CUSTOMER PAY BACK SCHEME

A new utility broker has launched in the North East this month, with a fresh new approach and job creation of 10 in year one planned.

Red Hawk Group Ltd has been opened by Dan Honour, along with financial partners Dave Macmillan and Sean Lavender. In month one Dan has created two new jobs and has been joined by Sean Sweeney and Declan Healey who were trained by Dan in his previous role.

Bringing over ten years experience with him in the

industry, Dan who is 38 and from Hartlepool, has based Red Hawk Group in Billingham where the team is well positioned to service companies across the UK looking to save money on their utilities.

The USP's of Red Hawk Group Ltd that stand them out from the competition include a refreshing approach to not tie clients into long term contracts.

Dan and his team are focused on providing short term solutions that offer flexibility and builds a long term relationship of trust.

The team are looking to change the reputation of the industry by using new and innovative ways to form strong partnerships that will not only save customers money on their next contract but will generate income through their expenditure.

Dan said: "For too long businesses across the UK have been massively overcharged for the Utilities and this has been at the brokers gain instead of the customer. With The structure we have in place, we aim to be fair and transparent with no hidden costs or charges, customers will know exactly what they are paying for and we intend to act with their best interests at heart. This approach will foster long term relationships that will benefit all."

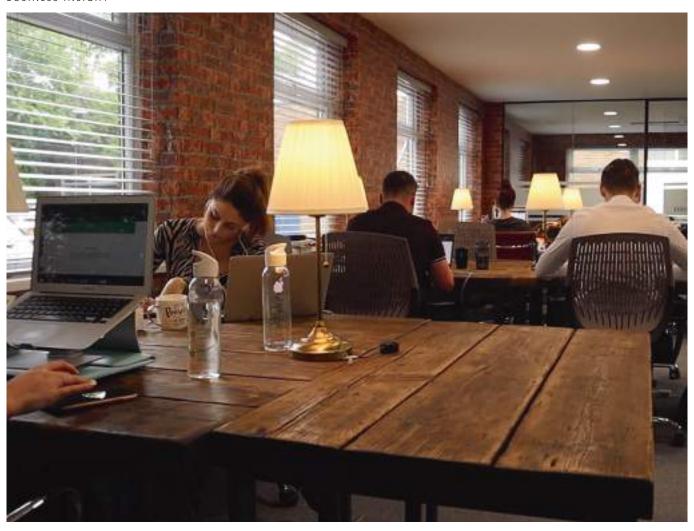
The team can help anyone in commercial premises across the UK, and are operating in a way that is ahead of where the industry is headed. Investor Dave Macmillan said: "Dan was made redundant from his last role during lockdown, and when we sat down to talk about his idea, we both realised now is the perfect time to launch a new business in this sector. The industry is quickly becoming regulated and Dan was keen to be ahead of the game, doing everything transparently, with no hidden costs and fees. That appeal to Sean and I massively and we are delighted to support him.

"When Sean (Sweeney) and Declan were also made redundant, Dan was keen for them to join the team as they understand his ethics. This has started the recruitment process that will see another seven plus people join the team by year end."



More information is available at www.redhawkgroup.co.uk





RONALD JAMES STAYS ON TOP IN 2020

The North's leading Digitech talent agency is changing the game for the sector, making 2020 their biggest year to date. With an upgraded strategy, Ronald James is helping businesses overcome the struggles of attracting highly-skilled tech professionals in the new year.

Ronald James Group is a specialist IT, Digital and Tech recruitment agency based in Gosforth, Newcastle upon Tyne, with offices in Boston, USA. Its tailored digital recruitment-marketing plan is cutting-edge, serving top clients to find the finest professionals for their businesses.

In 2019, the company hit its 4th anniversary with a growing team of over 20 recruitment and marketing experts. Over the years, Ronald James has built a successful series of partnerships with leading tech companies across The North and beyond; each client successfully increasing their talent pool through bespoke marketing strategies that target and engage with top-of-the-line candidates.

Tesco Bank, the agency's latest addition to its extensive client portfolio, has nominated Ronald James to lead their search for tech experts who will join their new tech hub at Quorum Business Park in 2020. It all starts with the correct inbound talent pool.

CEO, James Blackwell, explains: "From what I've seen (speaking to hundreds of business owners and heads of departments), companies with recruitment marketing strategies in place are over 30% more likely to hire greater quality employees". The company found that 70% of job-seekers regard an employer's brand as highly important in their decision to work for them. By correctly marketing clients to the top 15% of candidates, Ronald James brings businesses the best, most motivated talent, decreasing the chances of employee turnover greatly.

Digitech employers are finding it more and more difficult to attract and preserve high-quality talent in their field. After speaking with over 100 business owners in the North East digital and tech sector, the company spotted five key problem areas they were all experiencing:

- 1. Businesses lacks passionate coders.
- 2. Holding onto talented developers is becoming increasingly difficult.

- 3. Hiring costs are increasing.
- 4. Businesses are struggling to find and attract top developers.
- 5. Companies are falling behind on projects due to one or all of these issues above.

Ronald James tackles the root of the problem by tailoring clients' candidate outreach to specific engagement points within the sector. With its dynamic, unrivalled approach, the agency forecasts its biggest and most successful year in 2020, continuing to attract tech giants and expanding into the North West with targets of over £2 million.

Want to make your next career move? Get in touch with your CV today: patricia@ ronaldjamesgroup.com

We have roles for developers, testers, analysts, project managers, digital marketers, web developers, designers and MORE!

www.ronaldjamesgroup.com



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SKATING TALENT FIGURES OUT NEW BUSINESS

A talented 21-year-old from Ashington who became an internationally renowned skater has started his own company to help people starting out in the entertainment sector.

Adam Miller grew up with performance in his blood. He represented Whitley Bay Ice Rink in a national competition and his skills were identified by Dancing on Ice coach Mark Hanretty who trained him in Sheffield.

In 2018, Adam got his big break when he joined the Disney on Ice team touring Europe. However, when COVID-19 cancelled all Disney shows, Adam's career was put on hold.

Now, Adam has set up his own entertainment consultancy to help guide and support people going into the professional entertainment sector.

The result is the Golden Camera Company. Adam will now pass on skills such as media training, corporate skills and audition etiquette, as well as portfolio creation, video making and social skills.



ALL THINGS ARE NOW BRIGHT AND BEAUTIFUL FOR CHURCH

A North Tyneside church is safely welcoming back its parishioners after COVID-19 restrictions meant that all acts of worship had to be done remotely or online.

To facilitate the return, St John's Church in Killingworth Village has undergone a top to bottom deep clean.

Helen Ross runs Bright and Beautiful North Tyneside, a professional home cleaning and housekeeping service with a premium level of customer care, ecofriendly products and exceptionally motivated staff. All of her team have received specialist COVID-19 training and are abiding by social distancing rules, operating staggered start times and wearing correct PPE.

The church's vicar, Reverand Sarah Moon, said: "It's made a huge difference to the appearance of the church which has been empty for almost six months. Bright and Beautiful have made our church bright and beautiful once more but importantly, they've made it safe for us to return."



LOCAL CHARITY PREPARES TO MEET GROWING DEMAND FOR MENTAL HEALTH **SUPPORT**

North East charity uS, which gives young people with mental health issues support and access to sport and fitness activities, has seen a growing need for its services post-lockdown.

Over the last few months, young people across the UK have reported increased anxiety and issues with confidence, as well as feelings of isolation from friends and their usual support networks. The charity has worked hard during lockdown to continue its services and has adapted to take faceto-face activity online, helping young people to connect virtually with each other and the uS team.

The charity was founded in 2016 by Dr Mary Jane Tacchi, a local psychiatrist who recognised the positive impact physical activity has on young people's mental health. Young people are asked to choose an activity that meets their needs and interests and the uS team swiftly responds with an activity programme.

FURTHER EXPANSION FOR LOCAL OPTICIAN

The Village Optician, a family run, local, independent Optician founded in 2003 by Optometrist brothers Michael and Stephen Peart, is expanding with a move to new premises and plans to recruit three new full-time members of staff.

The latest move marks another phase in the firm's expansion which now has four shops spread throughout Durham and Darlington.

After outgrowing the premises on Alnwick Road, Newton Hall, The Village Optician has opened its new unit on Finchale Road, Newton Hall, next door to the new Bell's Fish and Chip Restaurant.

Co-owner Michael Peart said: "The new unit is in an excellent location. The extra space will enable us to improve our clients' overall experience, with more space for dedicated frame consultations, as well as an additional eye examination room."

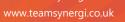
Durham City's leading law firm, Swinburne Maddison LLP, provided legal assistance to support the move.





Empowering digital business.

0191 4770365 enquiries@teamsynergi.co.uk



@team_synergi







TRANSPARENT SERVICE, TRANSPARENT SUPPORT

Award winning business, Forget Me Not Funeral Services, based in Blyth, reached out to local business support programme, Business Northumberland to help them with their digital skills in order to market their new business venture.

Claire Trigg Taws, and Jackie Fender, founded Forget Me Not Funeral Services towards the end of 2019, opening their doors on 3rd February 2020. Combining decades of experience in both the funeral and social care sectors, their services offer people a unique, clear and honest experience during what can be a difficult time.

Feeling frustrated with the lack of transparency and choice within the funeral sector, the local entrepreneurs started up their own business. Forget Me Not Funeral Services offers information, guidance and support from the outset. Their 'less is more' principle means people only buy what they need and want, their detailed, costed quote enables easy comparison between funeral companies.

"With information and guidance comes the strength and freedom to make informed decisions."

Claire who has been in the funeral sector for 17 years, and Jackie, who has worked in health and social care for over 40 years, were determined to broaden support and tackle funeral poverty head on.

"As a community resource we are all about tackling funeral poverty, helping communities to feel more confident in supporting each other when someone dies, and providing bereavement support."

Claire and Jackie's unique approach has recently been recognised for their 'outstanding contemporary and holistic approach to funeral services, bereavement care and creating community relationships'. As a result, The Society of Bereavement Practitioners presented them with the President's Award of Merit on the 25th July 2020. This is only the third time that this award has been presented since the Society was founded in 2005.

Despite 50+ years' experience between them, and the recognition for their services, Jackie and Claire realised they needed support with digital marketing to help raise their businesses awareness.

The local businesswomen found Business Northumberland online and

contacted the fully funded programme immediately. A Business Growth Adviser visited the business, to understand the business aims and objectives and identify streams of support beneficial to Forget Me Not Funeral Services.

Business Northumberland provides support to small and medium enterprises across the North East who are looking to sustain and grow their business online. The fully funded support programme is funded by the European Regional Development Fund and Advance Northumberland, therefore there is no cost to eligible businesses when accessing the support.

Claire and Jackie were soon attending workshops, having regular 1-2-1s with their Business Growth Adviser and guest speaking at a newly launched networking event. The local businesswomen are now confident in implementing their new skills, for example, maintaining their website, identifying new opportunities to increase their Search Engine Optimisation (SEO), and also using Google Business.

"The Digital Marketing course was excellent. The workshop lead was welcoming, knowledgeable and highly skilled. As a consequence, everyone was engaged, discussion was wide-ranging and benefitted from the totality of experience within the room".

Through attending networking events and after meeting other businesses, Claire and Jackie have plans to develop a virtual tour of the business premises as well as a podcast, so watch this space!









To contact Forget Me Not Funeral Services, please visit their website www.fmnf.co.uk or call in, – the welcome is warm and the kettle is always on. Business Northumberland is offering a full range of online workshops and virtual networking events to eligible businesses, to find out more and to register, please go to: www.businessnorthumberland.co.uk



BEING PROACTIVE WITH PRO-AD

Since the outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic a lot of businesses have been forced to change the way they operate! They're having to move with the times, whether they like it or not.

But, one thing hasn't changed. You still need to publicise who you are, what you do and how people should contact you.

That's where Morpeth based Pro-Ad comes in...although they've also been forced to adapt

They're a long-established family company who've been providing a huge range of promotional products and branded clothing for approaching 40 years.

And when we say huge, we mean huge. Their catalogue has over 100,000 products. Wow.

Put it this way, if you want a personalised mug, pen, umbrella etc then Pro-Ad will sort everything for you.

"We have a reputation for finding solutions," said Commercial Director, Loren Nardini. "We have a worldwide list of contacts which means we really can source absolutely anything. The vast majority of the products and clothing which we provide are bespoke.

One of their latest and hugely successful ranges is called Work Safe.

"We were asked by a couple of our clients to provide them with PPE equipment like hand sanitisers, facemasks and dispensers. We quickly sourced what was needed and...well...word has spread and our Work Safe range is now one of our most popular sales areas. We helped the local NHS and regional councils find PPE supplies and ensured that, if needed, they were branded too. It's helped us ensure that, despite all of the challenges brought by the Coronavirus pandemic, our turnover this year will be similar to that of last year. We've also introduced new marketing techniques and become much more pro-active in the way we do business."

One of Pro-Ad's biggest sales areas is providing equipment and products for exhibitions. They source and supply exhibition branding, roller banners, table cloths and a whole array of giveaways. Covid-19 put paid to all of that. A huge chunk of Pro-Ad's business ground to a halt overnight. Exhibitions are due to get the go-ahead sometime in October, but you still won't be able to hand out pens, badges, balloons, cups etc. They're blacklisted.

Loren says the last few months have prompted the biggest changes his company has ever seen.

"We've been forced to take on board the new ways that people work. Thousands and thousands of people are now working from home but the majority are still part of a team. When you work alone at home,

it can be very easy to feel that you are missing out on camaraderie. On top of our normal range what we are now providing is packs which companies send to their employees to let them know that they're not forgotten and are still a valuable part of the company. It increases employee engagement.

We're also finding that companies like to send these packs to clients either before or after on-line conferences. It means the client can feel part of the corporate image. If the client receives a pack before an online meeting, the company can refer to it. If they receive it after the meeting, it reinforces what the meeting was about. It's a simple way of making the client feel good about the company they're dealing with and gets the sales point across. The British Promotional Merchandise Association says that 83% of people could name a brand or company featured on a promotional item they had received and 82% reported they had purchased products or services from a company that had given them a promotional gift."

The pack theme has continued with Pro-Ad developing branded packs, employee packs, hotel packs and travel packs. The packs can either focus on PPE products like hand sanitizer, gloves and masks, or perhaps they are just a fun pack with cakes, chocolates, wine and games. The options are endless but they're all aimed at making either the employee feel part of the team or reinforcing a message with a client.

Pro-Ad becomes part of your company's team. They work on your behalf. That's what they do for businesses like SSE, Jury's Inn, Greggs, Northumberland County Council and Akzo Nobel. They also provide merchandise for Kiss FM's Ibiza beach parties and have won multiple awards for promotional merchandise created for clients in the last couple of years.

Do you want to create a lasting impression or perhaps something to jog someone's memory? For example, when you finish a Zoom meeting, why not send a follow-up parcel with a small gift or reminder note? Oh and don't forget that in these Covid times your employees will not be able to share cups, mugs, pens and bottles at work. They'll need their own kit. Pro-Ad can help by adding individual names to a whole host of products.

In other words, if you need to promote your company and protect your employees, Pro-Ad can sort everything for you.

Don't sit back and worry about the future after Covid-19.

Be proactive and let Pro-Ad help you move with the times.

The best idea is to get in touch with Loren Nardini and his team at Pro-Ad. Contact them on 01670 518928, email solutions@proad.co.uk or go via their website www.proad.co.uk

















WHY THE NORTH EAST HEALTH AND LIFE SCIENCE SECTOR NEEDS A NATIONAL VOICE

As a North East native, I've always been passionate about where I came from. That's why I moved back up north in 2009, after growing tired of the bright lights of London to set up Onyx Health in 2009, a specialist health marketing communications agency.

It is one of the best decisions I have ever made, and I've never looked back. One of the things that bothers me about working in my industry is the lack of national recognition the North East health and life sciences sector receives.

We have world leading assets in the region, with a unique environment for medicines manufacturing and health innovation located right on our doorstep. The trouble is people just don't know about it.

The North East economy and beyond

Many people don't realise it, but the region is a major location for the global pharmaceutical industry. It makes an estimated contribution of between £0.73b to £1.28b to the UK economy and supports between 18,800 and 23,500 jobs.

There are a number of large global pharmaceutical manufacturers located in the region such as Glaxo Smith Kline, MSD and Fujifilm Diosynth. So much so that health and life sciences have been designation as a key area of strategic economic importance by the North East LEP.

We all know the North East has an export-led regional economy, but what is perhaps less well known is the contribution pharmaceutical manufacturing makes. In 2017 the North East exported £12.9 billion of goods: including £7.4 billion of machinery and transport and £2.8 billion of chemicals (including pharmaceuticals).

The pharmaceutical manufacturing sector is a key driver of the region's export success story. 86% of the North East's pharmaceutical products are exported, with 64% of finished products going to the United States. Link

Our Region's Golden Assets

We have an array of golden assets which constitutes the North East's key unique selling points as a region. They have the potential to act as a catalyst for change and a lightning rod for future inward investment, creating jobs and generating skilled employment.

The North East houses a strong academic base in life sciences and healthcare. Through the Academic Health Science Network (AHSN), our leading universities and the NHS are able to develop more innovative approaches to manufacturing. Newcastle leads the UK in respect of clinical trials, presenting a significant opportunity for the region.

There are also key assets in County Durham, including the CPI Healthcare Futures Centre and the CPI National Formulation Centre. The CPI is one of the leading independent technology innovation centres in the UK and a member of the UK Government's High-Value Manufacturing Catapult giving it national influence.

Moreover, the creation of the National innovation Centre for Ageing (NICA), and the National Innovation Centre for Data (NICD), also represents a major commercial opportunity to exploit the connection between the region's digital and healthcare sectors. Despite these advantages we often get overlooked as a health and life science destination.

The need for a national voice

One of things holding us back as a region is the lack of a single united voice for the health and life science sector to get our businesses seen and heard on the national stage.

We have an embarrassment of riches in the North East, but there is a pressing need to make some noise about the great work we do.

There are several organisations that help other sectors of the North East economy make their mark with key decision makers in Westminster and Whitehall. Whether its NOF Energy or The North East Automotive Alliance, these sector alliances are now giving North East businesses a distinctive voice, as part of a national conversation in their respective fields.

The North East health and life science sector lacks the equivalent organisation with the same fire power behind it.

For too long the sector has been one of the best kept secrets about the North East economy, it's time that we stopped hiding our light under a bushel and showcase what we've got to offer.

This is vital to create growth, inward investment and job creation we need to power out of the coronavirus downturn. At a time when the Government's levelling up agenda is focussed on rebalancing growth across all regions of the UK, establishing a dynamic sector led body could help us take advantage of this opportunity with long term economic benefits for the North East economy.



IN CONVERSATION WITH...

NORMAN THOMPSON

Group Safety Manager, UTS Engineering

What were your career ambitions growing up?

I recall always having a natural tendency towards being very practical and technically minded. I always enjoyed problem solving, so when I began my career, I soon got into some technical roles.

Tell us about your role at UTS Engineering?

The role of group safety manager is very challenging and also rewarding. The opportunity to make important changes and the interaction with everyone in the business is what I enjoy most.

What services does the company provide?

We provide a specialist service, primarily engineering in nature, providing bespoke and unique solutions mainly in the utility sectors, but also other engineering/fabrication services.

What's your proudest business achievement?

In general terms, to reduce accidents at work is always what we look to pursue, and when this is achieved, it makes all the hard work worthwhile. I have also enjoyed making a significant change so as to improve the health and safety culture within the organisation.

What challenges have you encountered?

Mainly removing 'bad practice' and changing 'behaviour' are the biggest challenges.

How has the industry changed since you arrived at the company?

To see physical changes to health and safety standards is very encouraging, but also to see how we have sustained the business during the pandemic has been very rewarding.

Who are your heroes in and out of business?

That's a great question, not an easy one to answer. I believe that in work, I always like to learn from people/leaders and I have worked with some very inspirational leaders. Outside of work, I admire those that think or perform 'outside of the box' and do their own thing.

Is there a mantra you always aspire to do business by?

I do believe in the 'behavioural' side of health and safety. So, talking and listening to people, is key to me. This enables a positive change in safety culture.

How do you like to unwind?

I tend to do a lot of walking (with my dogs), Spending time in The Lake District with family is also one of my favourites, mountain biking and a cool beer, but not all at once!

www.uts-ltd.com



MORE VIRTUAL, LESS PERSONAL

By Lisa Vescio, Mindfull Business Matters

Why increased online presence is creating brain fatigue and increasing stress.

More people are reporting increased levels of fatigue following a day on video conferencing so much so it has earned its own slang term, 'Zoom fatigue'.

Andrew Franklin, an assistant professor of cyberpsychology at Virginia's Norfolk State University, highlights the increased use of virtual meetings in response to the pandemic and launched an unofficial social experiment showing at a population scale what's always been true - that virtual interactions can be extremely hard on the brain.

During an 'in-person' conversation, the brain focuses partly on the words being spoken, but it also derives additional meaning from dozens of non-verbal cues. Professor of psychology Albert Mehrabian studied the importance of non-verbal communication in the 1970s. His model of communication demonstrates that only 7% of what we communicate consists of the literal content of the message. The use of one's voice, such as tone, intonation and volume take up 38% and as much as 55% of communication consists of body language. This 7-38-55-model is still very much used today.

These cues help paint a holistic picture of what is being conveyed and a typical video call impairs these ingrained abilities, creating sustained and intense attention to words instead.

"For somebody who is really dependent on those non-verbal cues, it can be a big drain not to have them," Franklin says. Prolonged eye contact has become the strongest facial cue readily available, and it can feel threatening or overly intimate if held for too long.

Franklin also highlights how multi-person screens magnify this exhausting problem. Gallery view challenges the brain's central vision, forcing it to decode so many people at once that no one comes through meaningfully, not even the speaker.

For some people, the prolonged split in attention creates a perplexing sense of being drained while having accomplished nothing. The brain becomes overwhelmed by unfamiliar excess stimuli while being hyper-focused on searching for non-verbal cues that it can't find.

It is also important to be aware of people in your organisation who are on the autistic spectrum

as they will struggle with video chatting. It can exacerbate sensory triggers such as loud noise and bright lights.

In addition, constant exposure to the electromagnetic field around computers, smartphones and tablets can be damaging to the human energy field. They emit electromagnetic radiation (EMR), which is known to decrease our production of the hormone melatonin. Reduced levels result in insomnia, difficulty concentrating, shorter attention spans and more. EMR waves can also disturb our bodies' natural electrical system, causing both mental and physical stress. The more intense the EMR, the more physical stress, and thus mental stress we experience.

At the moment it is difficult to reduce online activity, however it is important to be mindful of the things you can do to reduce the impact on your wellbeing.

If you are feeling overstimulated, turn off your camera. Save your energy for when you absolutely want to perceive the few non-verbal cues that do come through.

If it's a work meeting that can be done by phone, it can be less taxing on the brain. Try walking at the same time. "Walking meetings are known to improve creativity, and reduce stress.

Take regular breaks in the fresh air and leave your phone indoors.

Limit screen time after work and enjoy some recreational activities that don't emit EMR.

Be sensible, be aware and manage your screen time effectively.

Email: lisa@lisavescio.com Phone: 07739 580736 www.lisavescio.com



COUNTY DURHAM IS OPEN FOR BUSINESS

Finding the right business space is key to the growth and success of any company and Business Durham has a wide ranging commercial property portfolio to suit all needs.

Business Durham, the economic development arm of Durham County Council, prides itself on meeting the demands of growing businesses and providing the best facilities for them, in a long term and sustainable way.

It works closely with private investors and developers to unlock key development sites and bring them forward to help meet the growing demand for high quality office space, commercial property and industrial sites.

Despite national uncertainty about commercial property and office space due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Business Durham has seen an increase in enquiries about premises, particularly industrial units. With some tenants needing to continue working, especially at North East Technology Park (NETPark). Business Durham has helped some businesses expand into new spaces and welcomed its first tenant to Jade Business Park.

Business Durham manages an extremely varied and evolving property portfolio, with strategic sites including NETPark, the region's only science park, as well as local office spaces across the county including Salvus House in Durham City Centre and Tanfield Lea Business Centre in the north of the county.

NETPark

NETPark in Sedgefield, County Durham is a shining example of where Business Durham has continued to create high quality employment space and jobs for the science, engineering and technology sectors.

It is the UK's only science park with two Catapult centres in the High Value Manufacturing Catapult and the North East Centre of Excellence for Satellite Applications. Also home to the Centre for Process Innovation's three national innovation centres and 35 innovative companies such as Kromek and Filtronic as well as the North East Satellite Applications Centre of Excellence demonstrates exactly why NETPark in fast gaining a growing reputation as a global hub for innovation.

Its vision is to see another 1,2500 jobs and 350,000 sq ft of employment space created at NETPark in the next 10-15 years.

Jade Business Park

Jade Business Park is a 55-acre employment site close to the A19 and Dalton Park that is set to provide over 1 million sq ft of new employment space and over 2,500 jobs.

The park is owned by Durham County Council, managed by Business Durham and delivered in partnership with Highbridge Developments and the North East LEP.

Sumitomo Electric Wiring Systems Europe is the first tenant on the £14m first phase of Jade Park, recently completed by Bowmer and Kirkland.

The first phase of Jade Business Park provides seven new industrial units,

equivalent to 155,000 sq ft of new space for distribution, technology, and advanced manufacturing businesses.

Salvus House

Salvus House is a flagship, quality office development at the heart of Aykley Heads in Durham City. It was acquired in 2017 by Business Durham on behalf of Durham County Council with support from the North East LEP and offers twenty-four offices ranging in size from 164 to 3,701 sq ft.

The award-winning office space is currently 92% let and home to 16 businesses in the growing fintech sector, design, accountancy, engineering, communications and digital design industries employing 196 people.

Salvus House is also home to Durham City Incubator an innovative incubation programme to provide local entrepreneurs with high quality facilities and business support.

Its location has proved popular with businesses due to its close proximity to Durham rail station and is already playing a key role in bringing investment and more jobs to the region.

Station Place, Merchant Park

Business Durham is working with Merchant Anglo to bring forward the next phase of its development at Merchant Park – Station Place.

Merchant Park, a £90m industrial scheme, is a 65-acre development at Aycliffe Business Park in Newton Aycliffe on J59 of the A1(M) and home to Hitachi.

Merchant Anglo has submitted a new planning application for Station Place and if approved the £4.8 million scheme which will provide 50,333 sq ft in 10 new starter units, in sizes between 3,000 and 5,000 sq ft.

Tanfield Lea Business Centre

Tanfield Lea Business Centre is home to 25 businesses ranging from marketing and IT consultancies to financial services and a dog accessories company exporting goods across the world.

The centre in Tanfield Lea, Stanley, County Durham and has forty-one office and workshop units ranging in size from 135 – 1,787 sq. ft

Its state-of-the-art conference facilities make this the ideal base for new businesses and existing businesses wishing to expand.

Business Durham is much more than just a landlord. Its dedicated and experienced team provide bespoke and impartial support that creates the right environment for to help businesses develop and grow, plus because they work hand in hand with Durham County Council they can connect the dots between business needs and council resources.





WHAT TO EXPECT FROM A RECRUITMENT CONSULTANT

Bryony Gibson, managing director of Bryony Gibson Consulting, shares the support you should expect from your recruitment agency when searching for a new role.

After more than 20 years providing advice and support to accountancy professionals, I am all too aware of the negative reputation the recruitment industry often endures.

Of course, there are some very bad recruiters out there - including those who blindly fire out CV's in the hope that something will resonate with someone somewhere - but the truth is that the majority of recruiters work extremely hard, act incredibly professionally, and are genuinely trying to help people make a positive change.

For the entire sector to be tarred with the same brush makes absolutely no sense. It's just not the way business works, especially in a service-based environment which relies upon the skills and performance of people.

If you're working with a recruitment consultant, or have been thinking about approaching one to help you find a new role, here is a list of the qualities you should expect to find as a bare minimum:

1. Honesty and Transparency: a healthy working relationship must be fair, ethical and transparent.

In recruitment, this not only applies to the current state of the market and whether your expectations can be met, but also to who it is that will be directly representing you and working on your behalf.

- 2. Sector Expertise: a specialist recruiter will be capable of talking comfortably with you about your current role regardless of seniority, offering advice on your next move and job prospects. As a leading authority in the market, they'll be highly networked, knowledgeable about the latest trends and job movements and, because they work regularly with the best companies, will be able to give you an immediate advantage through their connections.
- **3. Impartial and Unbiased:** recognising the importance of diversity in successful teams, a good recruiter will work with you to make sure you find a company that not only matches your aspirations but has a culture that aligns with your values.
- **4. Respect:** this means for confidentiality, privacy, and also for you and your timescales. A consummate professional, rather than focusing on what works best for them, your recruiter will work

with you to find the best opportunity possible.

- **5. Excellent Communication:** looking for a new job is time-consuming and can be stressful. It is a big decision which requires serious thought and consideration, especially in a market where talent is in high demand. Regular and clear contact throughout the recruitment process is critical. As well as keeping you up to date, you should also feel that your recruitment consultant is listening carefully to you so that they understand your needs and can react quickly and appropriately when required.
- **6. Helpful and Supportive:** flexible in their approach and happy to offer educated opinion or thoughts on salary advice, your consultant will support you all through the recruitment journey and beyond. By investing time in building a strong relationship before they begin their search, they will not only understand your needs in-depth but also be able to find you the perfect opportunities.

I often ask myself what it is that people expect when they ask for help from a recruitment consultant and, as well as being excellent at what they do, at the top of the list is honesty, integrity, and a positive, helpful manner.

In my experience, when you are working with a recruiter, they will be motivated by one of two things: hitting targets or helping people. While no one works for free, a good advisor is someone who wants to find the best outcome for you.

Placing the right people in the right place is their motivation, and there are a lot of us around so please don't be afraid to be selective, and don't ever settle for less.

For public practice advice and expertise, get in touch: bryony@bryonygibson.com | (0191) 375 9983.

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BERNICIA GIVEN THE GREEN LIGHT FOR SOUTHWICK AFFORDABLE HOMES PLAN

Plans by Bernicia to build quality new affordable homes on a former school site in Sunderland have been given the go-ahead.

The North East housing association has acquired the former Southwick Primary School site from Sunderland City Council who has granted planning permission for 37 new affordable rented homes to be built.

The welcome decision allows four bungalows, as well as a mixture of 33 two, three, and four-bedroom houses, to be built on the site on Northern Way.

Work will start in September to deliver high quality homes for affordable rent and shared ownership to meet local housing needs. The £6 million development has been part funded by Homes England.

Michael Farr, Bernicia executive director of assets and growth, said: "Our aim is to provide quality, well designed new homes local people need and deserve at rents and purchase prices they can afford.

"We know this is an important location in

Southwick with real significance to the local community, and there is strong demand from local people for high quality homes to be built there.

"Our homes will be ideal for a range of people looking to rent or purchase including young families, older people looking to downsize as well as first-time buyers trying to get onto the property ladder."

Councillor Rebecca Atkinson, Cabinet Member for Dynamic City at Sunderland City Council, said: "I'm delighted to see this development going ahead, paving the way for much needed affordable homes for rent in Southwick. This complements the work the City Council is doing in partnership with local housing providers like Bernicia, to increase and speed up the supply of affordable and supported homes in the city to meet the needs of our communities"

The proposed name for the scheme is Alice Gardens after being voted the most popular choice in a poll

of parents and pupils of the current Southwick Primary School. It will be submitted to the Council for approval. The pupils were given three names which were all inspired by local history and researched by Philip Curtis from the Sunderland Antiquarian Society.

Alice Gardens links to Lewis Carroll, author of the children's classic Alice in Wonderland, whose sisters Mary and Elizabeth lived in the Southwick area of the city after Mary married the Reverend Charles Collingwood. The famous writer used to visit the area.

As a thank you for their help, Bernicia is contributing to the school's library of books, encouraging the love of literature and reading great stories. The school has described learning to read as being similar to the foundations to building a home, giving young people 'a strong base for all other areas of the curriculum and an important life skill' for supporting the children's future opportunities and aspirations.

www.bernicia.com



WORKING THROUGH LOCKDOWN

Standby Group appear to have shown resilience over the last six months during lockdown and a global pandemic, that's according to their directors.

Rebecca Wilson (Compliance Lead) and Amy Fagan (Senior Recruitment Consultant), give their take on working through lockdown and the future for Standby Group.

What is your role within the business?

Amy – As a Senior Consultant, I look after booking our temps out for work. Whilst supporting our clients with all their staff needs, I also focus on building a partnership between us as the agency and the client.

Rebecca – As compliance lead, I deal with all aspects of our staff compliance before we send them out to work.

How did your role change within the company when the news of lockdown hit?

Amy – With the news of lockdown, it was quickly arranged for all office staff to work from home. Working from home was difficult (I had a 2-year-old climbing up the desk) but we were able to continue supporting clients and staff successfully.

Rebecca – Working from home meant there was a shift in how our compliance process worked and it was completely overhauled. In order to adapt with lockdown and its limitations, we now operate a completely online process to minimise infection control but increase compliance efficiency.

What is it like working for standby Healthcare and alongside its sister businesses within the group?

Amy – Standby is a great company to be part of. There is a lot of support around me and the company are invested in the development of their employees, giving me personally an opportunity to progress.

Rebecca – Working for Standby has been great for me, personally to broaden my knowledge of compliance required within Health & Social Care. I see my future growing here.

What would you say sets you above your competitors in the North East?

Amy – We really are specialist in our field of recruitment and our temporary staff get to know us on a professional and personal level. By providing a high-quality and consistent service, our clients and workers genuinely see the value in our service. Not many can boast the quick rise and client relationships we have.

Rebecca – As a company, I believe we are very efficient in terms of our turnaround process for new registrations, ensuring our staff meet our high standards of compliance and sending staff out to work.

As the company plans to grow, do you feel involved in that growth and how do you see your role changing?

Amy – It is an exciting time to be part of the company as it grows. With more and more staff coming onboard, there are a lot of opportunities within the company. When the time comes, I have my eye on a management role within the business.

Rebecca – Definitely, as the company and the workforce begins to grow, I'd hope to have a compliance team which can add to our outstanding compliance process.

Has lockdown changed any of your current processes for the better?

Amy – We are definitely more flexible with remote processes, making it easier to onboard staff in different locations and support the growth of the company.

Rebecca – Lockdown has definitely made our compliance process more vigilant meaning we're onboarding better qualified workers.

Referring to Standby Healthcare, this is what one of the homes they support has to say... "I can't thank Standby Healthcare enough for the support they give me as a Home Manager. They are always there on short notice, supply good quality staff and there is never an issue. They are always understanding and professional lead by strong management."

standbyhealthcare.com



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BUSINESS AND BROOD DISRUPTS THE NETWORKING SCENE WITH ITS FAMILY FRIENDLY APPROACH



It is no doubt 2020 has been an annus horribilis but equally it has been auspicious for those seeking to form new and maintain old professional connections without any commute.

Amid working from home and sustaining small humans during the national lockdown earlier in the year, four local women with a love of connecting people decided they would establish "Business & Brood" – a family friendly professional network for working women.

The founders, Stephanie Elliott, Rachael Jordan, Sarah Maluila-Tyler and Elizabeth Gibbison, helped by Catherine Airey-Porter, have a shared passion for female empowerment and inclusion. The key aim is to join together all people who identify as mothers from those on maternity

leave to those at any point in their career. Wellbeing, and self and career development are promoted to ensure that harmony exists in so far as possible between working life and family life as a mum for Business & Brood members. The network so far has seen best-selling authors, top coaches, high flying career advisers and personal branding experts get involved with online events.

The team aim to provide networking like no other which is fully accessible so Business & Brood is a completely free network where mothers can strengthen professional connections

with or without little or large humans in tow. Why? Because sometimes life's not as easy as breakfast catch-ups when you have the school run or lunchtime seminars when you're working compressed or part-time hours. Business & Brood is a space to both be a mother and to enhance your business network.

With the help of the creative geniuses in the team at Think Again Creative, Business & Brood are about to unveil their brand new identity and are excited about their new website which will be launching later in the month.

It's easy to join the network. Just email businessandbrood@hotmail.com and the team will get you set up.

This article was kindly sponsored by BMC Recruitment Group.



EXCLUSIVE BUSINESS & NORTHERN INSIGHT LUNCH CLUB



Whilst meeting for in person networking continues to present challenges we are delighted to continue to provide an inspiring programme of speakers for virtual events this autumn.

Our Exclusive network is an incredible talent pool and we have drawn on this to deliver valuable advice, perspective, conversation and support. Join our virtual events; it's a great way to spend your lunch break and network with a highly engaged business group.

Linda Hitman and Michael Grahamslaw



EMCLUSIVE

BUSINESS

NEWCASTLE EVENTS

NOVEMBER 23rd - John Thompson MBE-Chairman, Thompsons of Prudhoe

WYNYARD HALL

NOVEMBER 9th - Karl Pemberton - Managing Director, Active Chartered Financial Planners, Chair, Institute of Directors (NE South)

DECEMBER 7th - Mark Easby - Founder & Managing Director, Better Brand Agency

VIRTUALLY EXCLUSIVE

In the absence of our in person networking events we have continued to meet via Zoom. Our Exclusive network is an incredible talent pool and we have drawn on this to deliver valuable advice, perspective, conversation and support.



OCTOBER 15th - Ian Farrar Managing Director/Business Coach Far North



October 29th - Ron Immink, Entrepreneur, Intrapreneur, Writer, Author, Public Speaker, @Ron Immick

Visit www.Exclusivebusiness.net for full details Non-members can book to join the events via our website.

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NEW RESULTS FROM NEW WAYS OF WORKING

When Nevil Tynemouth set up his New Results business ten years ago, he had no idea that in March 2020 everything would suddenly take a new direction.

Nevil is one of the UK's leading keynote speakers and a highly regarded trainer and coach with one aim; to improve your business development and sales techniques.

Put it this way, if your job involves clients or customers in any shape or form, you need to hear what Nevil Tynemouth has to say.

Oh...and just in case you were wondering, Nevil is the sort of guy who's been there, done it. He was one of the leaders behind the launch of Dyson products in the UK. He worked for BT to spearhead the

He's one of the most recognisable faces at business conferences and regularly works with many of the UK's leading firms. He's not allowed to name-drop due to nondisclosure agreements, (firms don't want their competitors to find out when they're needing Nevil's help) but trust us, we know the sort of calibre of firms he deals with. You'll either have your financial account with them, have your

forward one of the developments of the New Results business," said Nevil. "We had been planning to gradually move our attention towards companies and individuals

Results to prepare for some face to face sessions near the end of the year...assuming we aren't in another lockdown. Nevil conducts keynote speaking on-line; he's providing video workshops; he does webinars; he does on-line training Results have a library of resources to help you.

"The interesting thing is that a lot of firms have been



forced into using software such Microsoft Teams. We've been utilising this way of providing training for three to four years with our international clients. new way of doing things. The bigger firms are often set in their ways and are struggling to adapt.

We're also seeing that some of the big, well-known names are suddenly having to work hard

relied in their reputation to attract business. Suddenly, this whole new way of doing business has opened up and, to be honest, a lot of firms are struggling to grasp it. That is where New Results can help. We train, coach and support

Century climate and make use of the new tools which

His team will take individuals or groups through live video the group is split into smaller groups. It's all about building a team ethic whilst strengthening an individual's core skills. In addition there are online e-learning packages with exercises, videos, tests and downloads which allows individuals to work

"We provide a blended learning approach to individual clients' needs. Some of our courses are done with me fronting them; some will be done with the individuals discussing topics amongst themselves; some will be done using our online is that we can get everyone around a computer and conduct a training session over the Internet. It's still very hands on... but at a social distance."

development or sales, you need to speak to Nevil Tynemouth and the team at New Results. They've moved with the times...have you?





WELCOME TO NORTHERN GAS AND POWER

It's 2020. Companies around the world are stepping up. Workplaces are evolving to include modern methods which drive the best from their employees.

Apple have an on-site health and wellness scheme for their employees to stay fit. Airbnb include a travel allowance for their employees to tour the world. And Northern Gas and Power give their employees the full month of December off, in addition to annual leave.

Northern Gas and Power are the UK division of Global Procurement Group, an international company specialising in the delivery of global energy services and technologies. Operating in five energy markets across three continents, the group handle over 42,000 meters from around 18,000 clients. The rapid progress lies in the compound annual growth over the last four years at 148%, with profit growth standing at an impressive 144%. It's this type of success which means Northern Gas and Power have outgrown their past four offices — and now, with a global headcount of over 670 employees, it's time to move again.

The biggest commercial project in North East England for the past five years, Northern Gas and Power will move into a state-of-the-art 30,000 square feet commercial property on the Gateshead waterfront. The purpose-built, six-storey building is known as RIGA. The new home of Northern Gas and Power, RIGA will house the majority of its UK staff as the group continues its expansion, planning to take global heads to over 1,200 by the end of 2021.

Northern Gas and Power's vision focuses on the dynamism of its workforce with office environments of previous eras no longer meeting the demands of today's generation of Northern Gas and Power staff. If you compare a mundane and colourless Post Office to an intense and lively Trading Floor, one evokes apathy and the other sparks activity. To spark activity, a modern company must integrate modern methods. And this is where Northern Gas and Power excel. A strong family-feel underpins this forwardthinking company; it incentivises high performance generously and offers more time for loved ones than most other companies throughout the UK. This is a workplace that has redefined the concept of Work-Life balance - a workplace where 'Work' and 'Life' are in harmony.



Northern Gas and Power have meticulously designed their offices in carefully curated locations to inspire its workforce. Offices are open plan, adorned with colourful symbolism, designed to drive the ambition. energy and excitement of its staff. The colours are specifically chosen for the emotions they evoke and form part of a full visual and auditory experience throughout the sales floors. Music plays at the start of the day to create an upbeat, energetic and positive environment. TVs across the floor transmit live business news, ensuring all staff are up to date on latest events on the market. Monitors across the floors show live data from wholesale energy markets to give staff the very latest figures to relay to clients. The floors are vibrant, animated and full of activity, allowing Northern Gas and Power to set a tone and culture that inspires winning behaviour.

More motivation comes with their substantial incentive packages. At any time, there might be an announcement of a cash incentive. And when the pressure hits the pinnacle, there's a pop-up party right there on the office floor where staff can unwind

and let off some steam. There are wellbeing spaces, chill-out areas, Zen-Zones, gaming centres, and the fresh 'Feel Well Deli', where staff will recharge, relax and refocus. Everything, from the sense of nature and contemplation provided by the 'Living Wall' and a variety of flora, to the ergonomic design of the office seating and furniture, is part of a highly considered and successful formula which consistently delivers sales and revenue.

This is a company that in 2019, exceeded its £1,000,000 budget for staff incentives, such was the performance of its team. Northern Gas and Power reward their team with quarterly events, all-expenses-paid holidays, mortgage pay-offs for high achievers, international company retreats and a famous annual conference. In addition to annual leave, all staff get the month of December off to spend with their friends and family once targets are met. It's a balanced system of results and rewards.

Northern Gas and Power have created an unimaginable workplace culture that people may never experience elsewhere in their professional life. The company has already changed the lives of many people.

Northern Gas and Power are one of the fastest growing businesses in the UK and has been racking up scores of accolades throughout its journey to get there. They were named as the UK's Energy Consultancy of the Year at the 2019 Energy Awards and ranked 4th in the Sunday Times' HSBC International Track 200 League Table, which ranks the UK's mid-market private companies with the fastest-growing international sales. Northern Gas and Power were also titled Fastest Growing Large Business and Overall Fastest Growing Business in Ward Hadaway's Fastest 50 Awards 2019, all very impressive.

Northern Gas and Power have created a prosperous model which has become self-affirming over time. Tellingly, its unorthodox approach is being mimicked at several competitors in an effort to replicate its success. But why have none succeeded? Perhaps it's because Northern Gas and Power's culture is organic, well-considered and genuine.

www.ngpltd.co.uk



TIME TO FACE SOME UNCOMFORTABLE TRUTHS

The economic shock post Covid-19 means there won't be any 'normal' for some time. Peter Kerr, MD at coaching specialist AuxinOKR, says the time is now for businesses to embrace change. A series of workshops have been launched to help.

If anyone thinks they are going to return to the way they were trading before the pandemic, then they are in for a rude awakening.

We won't see a new normal anytime soon. Economic conditions are tough and more disruption is on the way. Business leaders regionally, nationally and globally need to prepare for the challenges.

This is not a time to ignore the present and sugarcoat the future. I don't want to sound either negative or alarmist, but we are plunging head-first into unchartered waters.

We remain in choppy COVID waters, we're surrounded by recessionary pressures and in the UK, we have the added uncertainty of Brexit. Forward-looking businesses need to prepare now, develop a robust strategy to confront today's challenges as well as the curveballs that are likely to be thrown in the future.

Of course, some companies and organisations will already be well down the path of reviewing business operations and their strategies for growth; for some this might be more about survival than

growth. The best leaders will rise to the challenge, make some tough decisions and embrace change.

Companies that embrace change to ensure continued growth and greater operational resilience will be the winners in the years ahead. We believe the adoption of OKRs will be the salvation of many companies. It is a critical thinking framework that turns business strategy into measurable goals.

OKRs – which stand for objectives and key results – provide a management team and its workforce with focus by setting ambitious goals which are then achieved through specific tasks. Success is measured by the key results which describe the outcomes you want to achieve. Objectives can be very fresh and based on the latest information at a point in time, allowing you to align teams and shift efforts, perfect when the economic world has been turned on its head.

In a time of such uncertainty setting ambitious targets for a future we cannot predict is just guesswork. Instead, use the OKR framework to explore the assumptions about what the world

will look like in the future and establish how your company or organisation can continue to be relevant to clients by adding value and improving long term sustainability.

Working in partnership with RTC North, Scaleup North East and the Supply Chain North East, we have developed a unique series of workshops intended to help regional businesses survive and thrive during these volatile times.

If you want to shape the future of your business, rather than be shaped by it, these workshops will provide a strategic framework based on critical thinking and agile principles.

The three workshops, run over three days towards the end of October, are:

WORKSHOP 1: It's Tin Hat Time!

Creating an action plan that makes a business and leadership team more resilient.

WORKSHOP 2: Leading for a Better Future

Strengthening leadership skills.

WORKSHOP 3: Making It Happen

Using OKRs to ensure your strategy execution is as good as your planning.

When OKRs are embedded in a business they will:

- Create a sense of urgency.
- Give clear accountability.
- Establish a culture that embraces learning.
- Help spot any blockages.
- Create momentum to drive progress.
- Foster a commitment to continuous improvement.

For more information please visit: www.auxinokr.com/rtc-supplychain-workshops





LEADING THE NORTH EAST'S FIGHTBACK FROM TESTING TIMES

The North East Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) recently welcomed Lucy Winskell as its new Chair. Here Lucy and Helen Golightly, its chief executive, talk about their aspirations for the future.

Managing a senior team transition can be challenging at any point but COVID-19 has changed everything. Is this a good time for a new Chair to join the North East LEP?

Lucy: It's a great time to join the North East LEP. There has been a lot of brilliant work carried out by Helen, the Board and Executive team and there is much to do at pace to address the current challenges. The Strategic Economic Plan was created and refreshed using the most up to date evidence and remains fit for purpose. The same applies to the work being carried out by the COVID-19 Economic Response Group. That's where our energies must focus

The Board already offers an incredible wealth and breadth of experience and includes dynamic local authority leaders, innovative business people and strong representation from the VCSE sector. I see my role as being a fresh pair of eyes, bringing my experience and new perspective to bear to support the work already underway.

Helen: Lucy's arrival comes at an excellent time during a period of transition. She is very welcome as a new critical friend who can help us engage with and influence government on its policies, as well as respond as needed to the changes yet to come.

How is the COVID-19 Economic Response planning shaping up?

Lucy: It's shaping up well. This is not just about getting back to where we were pre-COVID-19. We want to be bigger and bolder, more innovative and more imaginative and to build a thriving region in which there is economic prosperity for all of our communities.

Helen: Our plans are structured around the five themes of job recovery; building the economy of the future; supporting businesses; communities and place; and investment into digital connectivity infrastructure. We have a very clear ask of government and we want to work in partnership with it to make the transformative change we have planned a reality.

What are your ambitions for the region going forward?

Lucy: I'm keen to see the North East maximising the opportunities available to us and that requires a good understanding of government - and government understanding the needs of the North East. It would be fantastic for the region to lead the levelling up agenda rather than this being a top down approach. I also want to see us making strong progress against the targets set out in the Strategic Economic Plan.

Ultimately this current crisis will leave scars for some but we want people to know that we are doing everything we can to lead this region back to health through a plan that is both realistic but optimistic.

Helen: The region is clearly still experiencing a difficult period but we are very resilient. The North East has a significant role to play in UK plc so we will be lobbying for the resources we need to unlock potential and make a difference. We are poised to further transform our region and need Government to partner with us to unlock the potential for our residents and businesses. Our latest video sums this up.

What will success look like for you both in twelve months' time?

Lucy: In a year from now, I'd like to see evidence that the economic response planning work is having a positive impact on the North East, that our targets and measures are being met and that government understands the region's specific strengths and challenges. I'd also like to see continued success in terms of the North East LEP securing appropriate funding and spending this in the right way.

Helen: I'd just add that I'd also like to see a sense of confidence, aspiration and belief from the person on the street, be that a resident, business person or student. It matters that everyone knows we are working hard on their behalf and our hard work is making a difference.



HODGSON DRIVES AWAY FROM FAMILY-OWNED MOTOR GROUP AFTER STONEACRE ACQUISITION

A North East entrepreneur has driven away from the motor retail business he's run for more than three decades after selling it to a national retailer.

The Hodgson Motor Group's Toyota, Mazda and Suzuki dealerships at the Metrocentre in Gateshead and Silverlink in Newcastle, have become part of the Doncaster-headquartered Stoneacre Motor Group after managing director Steve Hodgson decided it was time to retire following two bouts of open heart surgery.

The entire 180-strong Hodgson workforce is being retained by Stoneacre, which intends to invest in continuing to grow its newly-acquired dealerships.

Jonathan Waters and Ben Jackson of the specialist corporate & commercial team at Hay & Kilner Law Firm in Newcastle acted on behalf of The Hodgson Motor Group in the disposal, which had originally been due to complete in March before being delayed by the pandemic.

Steve Hodgson joined what was his father's motor repair and retail business from school in 1976 and led the group's expansion into its first large purpose-built dealership at the Silverlink Retail Park in 1992, which was the initial stage of its development into a region-wide business with an annual turnover of around £80m.

Steve Hodgson says: "The business has always been based around family values and personal service, and we've continuously invested our profits back into it to support its organic growth and ensure we could provide everything that our customers wanted.

"The lasting relationships we've built with customers over the years, some of whom have bought dozens of cars from us, have been central to our success, and many of them have become both personal friends and ambassadors for the Hodgson business.

"Our franchise partners have also always recognised the quality of service and results that we've delivered, with Mark Roden and Ewan Shepherd of Toyota GB standing out in particular for their incredible support and efforts in getting this deal done.

"When I decided it was time to take a step back, we looked at a number of different firms who expressed an interest in taking the business on and it was clear from our very first meeting that Stoneacre had the same values and personal approach that we've always held.

"The deal was done on a handshake and it's great to be leaving the business and our excellent team in such good hands.

"Hay & Kilner's support over the years has been phenomenal, and even when the pandemic dictated that things didn't quite go to plan with this deal, they kept things ticking along to make sure it could be completed as quickly as possible, with Jonathan and his team making everything much less stressful as a result."

Stoneacre Motor Group represents 26 manufacturer partners in 59 locations with 120 franchised outlets.

Managing director Shaun Foweather said: "For over 30 years, Steve has operated a business in the Newcastle area and developed a great reputation with customers and has a very high level of staff loyalty.

"He is leaving the business in great shape and creates a fantastic opportunity for Stoneacre to grow it further.

"We're retaining all of the existing team and intend to provide them with full head office support, training through the Stoneacre Training Academy and full integration into the Stoneacre Culture to ensure that customer satisfaction is further enhanced under the Stoneacre brand.

"I would like to wish Steve a happy and fulfilling retirement and welcome the Hodgson team into the Stoneacre family."

Jonathan Waters, partner in Hay & Kilner's specialist corporate & commercial team, adds: "All the parties have taken a very pragmatic approach to getting this deal done in the most difficult of circumstances, which has very much helped it reach a successful conclusion.

"Steve has been a hugely valued Hay & Kilner client for more than 30 years and has invested heavily in the regional economy throughout that time, so it's great to now see him taking the chance to enjoy the fruits of his labours."

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CAN WE HAVE MORE HOMEWORK PLEASE?

At the start of the pandemic, the Government told employers to encourage employees to "work from home if you can". That messaging was recently changed to one of getting "back to work", arguably primarily to support the local urban economy.

Now, as the risk of Covid19 infection is increasing in various locations throughout the UK, the Government is once more advising people to "work from home if you can".

The short-lived advice to return to office-based normality is no longer currently considered safe from a public health point of view. Offices and city centres will remain largely quiet as many employers and employees must now continue their remote working arrangements. So, does the traditional concept of office-based working being the norm fit with an employer's duty of care towards its employees. Is a wholesale return to the traditional bricks and mortar workplace something that employers should be looking to achieve or even want?

Firstly, it is important to highlight that employers have a duty under health and safety law to ensure the health, safety and welfare at work of all of its employees, so far as is reasonably practicable. In order to comply with those obligations, employers will need to ensure that they carry out appropriate risk assessments relating specifically to the risk of Covid 19 infection, devise a safe system of work for employees and, importantly, ensure that this system is implemented. Employers may do this by introducing systems which comply with current Government guidance. However, following Government guidance does not automatically discharge these duties.

It is not enough just to say that "Government guidance is being followed" and this may be particularly relevant where a proposed return to office based working may not be possible where the workplace is at full capacity or where there is a local lockdown due to the increase in the "R" rate for infection transmission. An employer will always have to consider its legal health and safety obligations over the Government's desire to encourage employees to get back to the office. Putting in place some form of testing regime for Covid 19 could be an example of a reasonable step to take for employers where may be difficulty in accommodating enough space for employees to work in a socially distanced environment

As for whether employers should be looking to facilitate a return to office based working for all employees before Covid19 is genuinely under control, if we have learnt anything from the circumstances arising from the pandemic, it's that working from home has been demonstrated to



actually increase productivity in some organisations. However, the long-term effects of remote working may have an impact on employees' mental health and team morale when working in social isolation for an indefinite prolonged period. Where employees have the capability and technological equipment to enable them to work productively at home (which will not always be possible for many occupations), the answer to the question of home vs office working likely lies somewhere in between the two extremes, where a mixture of working from home and attending the workplace is encouraged and facilitated

Adopting a creative and genuinely flexible approach to assessing the most productive (and safest) place to work may signal the endgame for the traditional belief that the office is the "best" place to work. The evidence does not automatically support that arguably outdated and old-fashioned view.

Efficient homeworking with some regular office contact could result in increased productivity and lead to the Utopian Dreamland of "Work Life Balance" becoming a reality for many more people. Factoring in the needs of modern family life in terms of flexible and remote working is vital to encourage positive outcomes for both organisations and human beings. Accessibility for clients and the provision of high quality services should always be a legitimate business priority, but does the client really care whether the person providing the service is doing so from an expensive chrome and glass tower in the city centre or from a tidy workstation in their spare

bedroom? Encouraging a more flexible approach to working locations may not only be good for health and wellbeing it may also be very good for business.

At the time of going to print the Government has just issued the Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (Self Isolation) (England) Regulations 2020 which set out mandatory periods for self-isolation, and a duty to notify the Secretary of State of the names of people in the same household as anyone who has tested positive for Covid-19.

Regulation 7 makes it an offence for an employer to knowingly permit a worker (including an agency worker) to attend any place other than where the individual is self-isolating. This includes individuals who are required to self-isolate because they live with someone who has tested positive. So, if an employer knows a worker has tested positive (or lives with someone who has tested positive), the employer is now responsible for stopping the worker from working (unless they can work from home). Any employer who fails to do so will face a fine, starting at £1,000.

There is also an obligation on the worker to tell their employer that they are self-isolating (reg 8). Any individual who breaches self-isolation will potentially commit a separate criminal offence (reg 11).

The requirement to work from home or stay at home if exposed to Covid 19 infection is becoming increasingly regulated to ensure that people comply not just from a personal health and safety perspective but also to protect the health and wellbeing of others from a public health perspective.

If you need any advice or assistance on facilitating employees' return to the workplace or any other employment law or HR advice, contact me at Paul. Johnstone@collingwoodlegal.com or on 0191 282 2870.

Straight talking, hard working and forward thinking. Since 1948.



THREE QUESTIONS EVERY BUSINESS SHOULD ASK BEFORE SIGNING A COMMERCIAL LEASE

Signing a commercial lease is often the first big financial commitment that a business makes.

It is a legally binding contractual agreement between a business tenant and a landlord, which gives the tenant the right to use the property for business operations. In return for this, the tenant pays a fee and agrees to comply with certain other obligations.

There are many different types of commercial leases and each come with their own costs and responsibilities. There isn't a 'one size fits all' approach to commercial leases, and each business should negotiate an agreement that best matches their business model. Before any business signs a lease agreement, they should make sure that they've asked the following three questions:

How long do I need to pay the lease for?

You must continue to pay your monthly lease agreement until the contract is ended. Therefore, it is essential that you are satisfied with the length of the commitment to which you are signing up.

There is no such thing as a 'usual term of a lease'. The term is one of the points that would need to be negotiated between the parties. Often, a start-up business might be more reluctant to sign up to a very long term at the outset, until they have had the chance to test the waters with the new business. Equally, an established business might want the certainty of being able to trade from the premises and may prefer a longer term.

It is therefore important that you discuss your requirements with a solicitor early on, who can advise on this point. There may also be a possibility of negotiating a break option in your lease. A 'break clause' is one where the lease can be terminated earlier than its contractual expiry date if certain trigger events are met.

It is also important to consider whether there are any renewal rights at the end of the contracted term of the lease. What happens when the lease ends and you want to renew the lease? You may have built up goodwill by virtue of being in the premises for a long time and you may want to be able to preserve that. A lot of this depends on whether your lease is one that is protected under the security of tenure of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1954 or 'contracted out' of it. A tenant of a lease that is protected under the 1954 Act provisions will generally be able to renew the lease on the same terms (except for rent) as the existing lease.

What are my repair obligations in the lease?

This depends on the type of lease you have signed up to:

Full Repairing and Insuring Lease

Commonly known as a 'FRI lease', this is one where the tenant takes



on the responsibility to repair and insure the building. A tenant of a FRI lease will generally be under an obligation to keep the property in a state of repair, regardless of the state it was in when they took it over. It can therefore be an onerous obligation as the cost of repairing a property can be significant and not something that the tenant may have anticipated when signing up to the lease.

Effective FRI Lease

This is similar to a FRI Lease and is common when the property forms part of a multi-let building. In such leases, the tenant would be responsible for keeping their own property in repair and the Landlord is responsible for repairing the main structure, for which the tenants pay a proportionate contribution by way of service charge.

Internal Repair lease

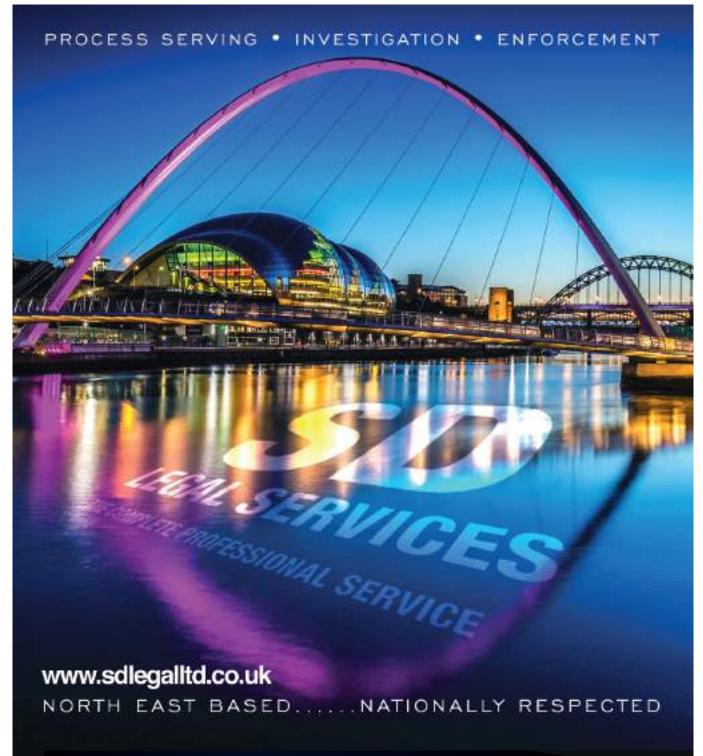
This type of lease is less common than the above two. In an IR lease, the tenant is responsible for repairing their own property and there is no obligation to pay towards repair of the main structure. Usually, such a lease would command a higher rent to compensate for the fact that there is no ongoing liability for repair.

Can I legally operate my business within the commercial lease agreement?

There will be specific clauses in your lease that restrict the business activity that can occur on the premises. Many tenants assume that so long as the lease allows the tenant's business to be carried out, this is fine. Unfortunately, it is not as simple as that. A tenant should also consider what impact this will have on you if your circumstances change in the future. A tenant needs the permitted use to be wide enough to allow its business to grow, adapt and change in a changing business environment. The permitted use of premises is also a key factor if the lease may need to be assigned to a third party in future.



By their very nature, leases can be a very onerous obligation for a tenant to take on. It therefore essential that the terms are carefully negotiated to ensure that the lease is most suitable for your business needs. Sweeney Miller Law's commercial property lawyers have extensive experience in acting for both landlords and tenants of commercial properties of all sizes. So speak to a member of our team today on 0345 900 5401 or enquiries@sweeneymiller.co.uk



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HAVE YOU MADE YOUR WILL YET?

By Jacqueline Emmerson, Emmersons Solicitors

Making your Will is probably something that you have been putting off for quite some time. I know I did, for years. I know the importance of making a will but I was always too busy; it took Covid to galvanise me into action and I can tell you it is a huge relief not to have to worry about this task anymore.

Let's face it, it is a task and when you have children, grandchildren or elderly relatives to look after your own needs are often placed on the back burner.

So, I thought I would give you some help to get started. When a client makes an appointment with us at Emmersons Solicitors, we send them a questionnaire in advance of the appointment. The point of this is to save time, you can give some thought to the questions asked and you can gather the information required.

You will need an Executor

It is always better to have two, especially if you own your own home. The job of the Executor is to manage your estate after your death. It is a position that comes with a lot of responsibility, which includes working out taxes due and sending complex forms to the Inland Revenue stating that everything is correct. How do they know this, what if you gave away large sums of money which should be taken into account for Inheritance Tax purposes? They have to make sure that all bills are paid, some accounts might be online, some bills come in annually. They must account to the Department of Work and pensions for any overpaid benefits.

An Executor is expected to undertake a huge amount of work. Do you want your family and friends to be lumbered with all that this would entail? Is it fair to appoint someone as Executor if they aren't going to benefit from your estate? Are they going to be running about for the benefit of people they might have never met, such as your cousins or your nieces and nephews?

Many of our clients appoint us as Executors. We then get on with everything. But how much does this cost? It very much depends if you have your paperwork in order, or if you have still got bills going back twenty years. Have you listed all of your assets including that old policy that you had forgotten about?

We can often actually make money for an estate by doing the job right, such as cleaning a house out quickly so that there is no rotten food, checking the property to avoid leaks, checking through all paperwork for old forgotten policies, clearing out a house and having it professionally cleaned. If effort is put into this type of thing then we can often obtain a far greater sale price. In one case recently we obtained £55,000 more than the original valuation.

How much is your estate worth?

This is important because it will help us determine if you will need to pay inheritance tax, if we can help you avoid paying so much and to plan ahead to leave money to your family instead of it all being spent on care home fees. We aim to find a balance between losing all of your money to care home fees and leaving you with enough to be able to afford a decent care home.

Why not look at this list which will help you, these are typical assets that make up an estate:

- Your home and any other property you own.
- Savings in bank and building society accounts.
- National Savings, such as premium bonds.
- Insurance, such as life assurance or an endowment policy.
- Pension funds that include a lump sum payment on death.
- Investments, such as stocks and shares or investment trusts.
- Motor vehicles
- Jewellery, antiques and other personal belongings.
- Furniture and other household contents.

To whom are you going to leave your estate?

This is a very important issue. Many of our clients want to leave some of their estate to friends and neighbours. A typical situation may be that you have an estate worth £250,000 but you wish to leave £10,000 to your helpful neighbour. What if your estate is only worth £20,000 at the date of your death? If you have a spouse and two children, they are then likely to receive less money than your neighbour.

Also, if you have already made a will please review it regularly. Frequently my clients go into care homes and never see their helpful and friendly neighbour again. I have had cases where a person has not been visited by beneficiaries for over four years. Is it time to change your beneficiaries? In one very sad case the beneficiaries said to me, oh, we thought he had died years ago.

When you have chosen your beneficiaries please obtain their full names, dates of birth and full addresses with postcodes. It can be very difficult to track people down sometimes as they might move out of the area or even out of the country. At least if we have their date of birth it narrows down the search.

Using the handy tips above means that you have done most of the hard work. If you would like to make a will then please don't hesitate to contact us on 0191 284 6989. At the moment all appointments are by telephone, so you don't even have to leave your house.



PREPARING YOUR BUSINESS FOR BREXIT: THE FIVE KEY AREAS WHICH ALL BUSINESSES SHOULD BE PLANNING FOR

With the UK due to end transitional arrangements with the EU on 31st December 2020, many businesses are well underway with their preparations, whilst others remain unsure of how they will be affected by Brexit and what steps (if any) they should be taking to plan for it.

Unfortunately, as we draw closer to the end of the transition period, with no sign of a mutually agreeable trade deal between the UK and the EU, it is looking increasingly likely that all UK businesses will feel the impact of Brexit in some way, even those who do not trade internationally. These are the five key areas where we believe that impact will be felt the hardest.

Tax

If there is no trade deal agreed by the time the transition period ends on 31st December 2020, the UK will automatically drop out of the single market and the customs union. The single market refers to the EU as one territory without any regulatory obstacles, meaning that all EU countries share the same rules on product standards and access to goods and services, whereas the customs union is an agreement between EU countries not to charge taxes on each other's goods.

If the UK was to lose access to both of these arrangements, we would automatically revert to World Trade Organisation (WTO) trading terms and would see an immediate change to the way that tariffs (taxes) are imposed and customs checks conducted, which could cause significant delays and make UK goods more expensive and harder to sell in the EU.

Whilst there is nothing any of us can do to prevent such changes being implemented, all businesses should be taking the time to make sure they fully understand how the WTO trading terms would affect their business in the event of a "no deal" Brexit.

Supply Chain

Even if your business is based in the UK, your customers and suppliers (and their customers and suppliers) may not be. A car repair business, for example, which serves only UK customers might rely on replacement parts that are manufactured outside of the UK. Even items which are manufactured outside of the EU might be centrally warehoused in the EU before being dispatched to the UK.

It would be prudent therefore for all businesses — even those who believe their connections with the EU to be minimal — to keep close contact with their supply chain and to ensure that measures are in place to ensure continuity of service in the months ahead. It might even be wise to reach out to your EU suppliers and offer reassurance yourself that you intend to continue your working relationship after the end of this year. The importance of maintaining strong working relationships at times of great uncertainty cannot be overstated.

In some cases, you may need to look into the possibility of moving to a new local supplier to avoid possible delays or additional tariffs going forward or at least take the time to build these factors into your existing plans and procedures.

Customer Base

As with the issue of supply chains, many businesses would be forgiven for assuming that, with a customer base that is predominantly based within the UK, this aspect of their business will be largely unaffected

by Brexit. But it is important to remember that the economic impact of Brexit will be far-reaching – particularly if it is not possible for the government to agree a trade deal with the EU in the time remaining – and this could have a dramatic effect on the behaviour of UK consumers, at least in the short term.

You might choose to see this as an opportunity to explore emerging markets like China, India and South Africa to see whether there is a demand for your products and services there. This could be the perfect time to try and expand your customer base outside of the EU.

Workforce

If you operate a business which: employs EU citizens; requires a steady stream of skilled EU workers; relies on staff being able to travel between EU countries as part of their role; or which utilises any specialist service which has a base in the EU, the impact of Brexit on your business could be significant.

The focus for such businesses will be on retaining their staff and preparing to meet any future legal requirements regarding their continuing right to work in the UK. In some cases, businesses may need to rethink their recruitment and skills strategies all together.

Trade

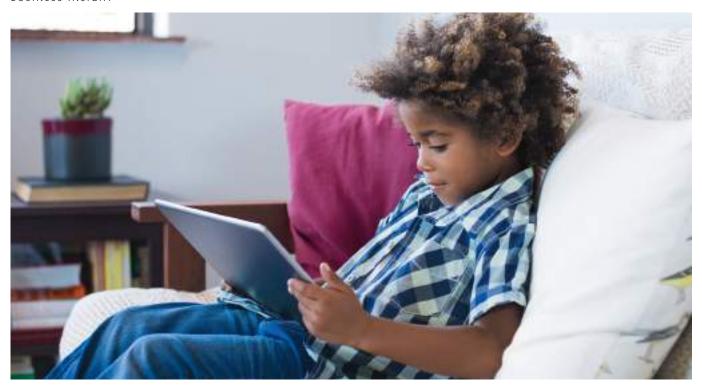
We have already discussed some of the key issues associated with trade – including the potential for increased tariffs and customs delays – which will directly affect many UK businesses in the event of a "no deal" Brexit.

For many larger businesses, which export goods and services across the world and are less reliant on trade with EU countries, trade and exports may not be high on the list of concerns, especially if the government succeeds in negotiating the numerous bilateral trade relationships with non-EU countries as promised. However, for smaller businesses, which tend to export their goods and services a bit closer to home, retaining a strong trading relationship with the EU will be critical to their survival. In all cases, careful forethought and planning will help to lessen the impact on your business.

Although we have focussed here on areas which are likely to have a detrimental impact on many businesses, there will of course be some UK businesses which remain largely unaffected by the changes ahead, and others who positively thrive. For instance, UK manufacturers could suddenly find themselves in high demand by other UK businesses who are struggling to rely on imports from the EU, whilst other businesses might find that the change in exchange rates which would likely occur in the event of a "no deal" Brexit actually work in their favour.

Whether you are feeling hopeful for the future and excited by the potential opportunities ahead or concerned about what a "no deal" Brexit could mean for your business, please do take the time to carefully consider these five key areas and be sure to have your plans in place for whatever 2021 throws our way.





WILL THE INTERNET EVER BE CHILDPROOF?

There's a new code of practice in town and it's all about making online services safer for children, explains Alex Craig, partner and commercial lawyer at Muckle LLP.

How safe are children online? It's a cause of some anxiety for many parents, especially now, when it seems like everything we do hinges on the ability to access the internet.

The majority of us understand that websites, apps, etc. collate our data, and we adjust our privacy and cookie settings to reflect what we are comfortable sharing.

But of course, while teeny tots are often on a tablet or iPad by the age of one, this digital world was not made for kids. Children need to be helped to ensure that their digital experience is as safe as their real world experience.

At home, the onus is on parents to police data use, apply parental controls and set limits to prevent exposure to harmful material.

Education provision has also increasingly been enhanced by online services, and many of us will be aware of schools' efforts to increase child internet safety awareness; think Green Cross Code for online.

But where are the speed bumps, the pelican crossings, the lollipop men and women? In other words, are there sufficient safeguards on the internet for children, and what are digital services doing to help?

The new Children's Code

On 2 September the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) announced the arrival of the new Children's Code (or Age Appropriate Design Code).

It addresses how data protection safeguards should be designed into online services so that they are age appropriate. It aims to make sure that online apps, games and other products ensure the security and privacy of children up to age 18.

 ${\bf Elizabeth\ Denham,\ Information\ Commissioner,\ says:}$



"This code makes it clear that kids are not like adults online and their data needs greater protections. We want children to be online, learning and playing and experiencing the world, but with the right protections in place."

Organisations now have until 2 September 2021 to comply and put children's privacy at the heart of their design.

How does it work?

The ICO highlights how the internet has not been designed for children. That's why the code breaks new ground, as it is regulatory guidance focused on a 'by design approach'.

Applying the code means that the different needs of children, at different ages and stages of development, should be at the heart of how organisations design their digital experiences.

The code sets out 15 standards for designers of online services and products and how they should comply with data protection law.

The code will require digital services to automatically provide children with a built-in baseline of data protection whenever they download a new app, game or visit a website. For example:

- High privacy settings need to be provided by default.
- Geolocation privacy settings should be switched off by default.
- Nudge techniques should not be used to encourage children to activate options that mean they turn off privacy protections.

Is your business affected?

The code is risk based and therefore will not affect all organisations in the same way. Businesses that design, develop or provide online services like apps; connected toys; social media platforms; online games; educational websites; or streaming services that use, analyse and profile children's data, will likely have to do more to comply.

The ICO says that: "Organisations should conform to the code and demonstrate that their services use children's data fairly and in compliance with data protection law."

Will the internet ever be childproof? Nobody is claiming the new code is a child internet safety catch-all, but it is a positive step in the right direction.

Remote learning has been just as important for children as remote working has been for adults throughout COVID-19. The last few months have amplified how important digital services are and that is set to continue for good.

So if you think your business might be affected by the code, it's best to review your practices during the transition period and get ready for the new rules being enforced from next September.

For more help and advice, contact Alex Craig on 0191 211 7911 or email alex.craig@muckle-llp.com





Virtual employment law updates

Wondering what the future holds for HR and the world of work? Join our employment lawyers live for the latest insight into COVID-19, Brexit and everything in-between at our virtual employment roadshows.

When: 5 topical sessions on Wenesdays, starting 23rd September

Time: 9.30am - 11.00am

Where: Online, from the comfort of your own personal space

Cost: Free

book your place

Visit www.muckle-llp.com/events to learn more and register, contact Anisha on 0191 211 7865 or email events@muckle-llp.com



HAY & KILNER LAW WEBINAR TO TACKLE POST-LOCKDOWN WORKPLACE ISSUES

The last six months have seen more urgent issues arising in workplaces than any of us could previously have ever imagined.

The Covid-19 outbreak, the lockdown that followed, the hurried move (for some) to remote working, the introduction of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and the gradual recent return to at least a degree of normality have all created their own demands and difficulties.

During this time, the specialist employment law team at Hay & Kilner Law Firm in Newcastle has been very busy helping organisations of all sizes and types take difficult decisions and manage a huge range of different responsibilities, policies and procedures.

And the team has also seen an increased interest from regional employers in their HR Key and HR Showcase packages, which provide clients with access to comprehensive advice on workplace matters and bespoke training packages for a fixed fee cost, helping management teams proactively manage issues in the workplace.

It's fair to say that the end of these issues isn't going to be anywhere in sight in the foreseeable future, so as part of helping organisations stay on top of their operations, Hay & Kilner is holding a free webinar on Wednesday 15 October which

will provide information, advice and guidance on how to proactively and properly deal with postlockdown employment issues.

The event will cover a wide range of topics, from managing remote/flexible working, staff performance and sickness absence through to implementing changes to policies and procedures, supporting staff well-being and executing redundancy processes.

Participants will also have the chance to submit questions in advance relating to their own situations for the expert team to assess and answer.

Sarah Hall, partner in the specialist employment team at Hay & Kilner Law Firm, says: "Generally speaking, most businesses and employees seem to have adapted pretty well to the unique circumstances in which we've found ourselves this year, with a willingness on all sides to be flexible and adaptable where required.

"But with many more months of disruption certain to come, it's essential for employers to stay on top of their responsibilities and to know that they're fulfilling their obligations to both their staff and the law in everything they're doing.

Sarah Furness, partner in the specialist employment team at Hay & Kilner Law Firm, says: "Giving delegates the chance to get their questions answered during the webinar will ensure they get practical benefits from taking part while also providing guidance for other participants who might have similar issues.

"Processes such as managing a newly-dispersed workforce or conducting redundancy consultations remotely present a new set of challenges which need to be addressed with care and consideration, and our webinar is designed to provide business owners and managers with practical advice on how they should proceed in these areas and more."

Places on Hay & Kilner's Managing Post-Lockdown Workplace Issues seminar, which will run via Zoom from 12.30pm to 1.30pm on Wednesday 15 October, are free, but must be reserved in advance.

Established in 1946, Hay & Kilner is one of North East England's leading independent law firms and provides a full range of legal services to businesses and individuals from both within and outside the region.

For further information, please contact Helen Ward on 0191 232 8345 or via helen.ward@hay-kilner.co.uk



FIRM INVESTS IN NEXT GENERATION OF PROPERTY EXPERTS

An award-winning chartered surveyors and estate agents is developing future talent in the property industry, appointing six new members across its services as part of its strategic growth drive.

Bradley Hall, which has seven offices across the North, has appointed Northumbria University Students Matthew Redfern, Matt Jackson and Oliver Bartles-Smith. The placement students have joined following two years of the Real Estate Management degree, which encourages a placement year to gain real working experience whilst also earning.

Appointments also include Lesley Parry and Rebecca Scott to the firm's mortgages team and graduate building surveyor Liam Grist.

Managing Director Neil Hart said: "We are delighted to have added to the team and to be investing in the future of the property industry. Within the last few weeks we have welcomed a range of new additions to our company, including those with experience but also those who are new to the sector. We have created a safe environment in order to introduce our entire team back to office working, which ensures that we are delivering the best possible service to our clients."

The firm is also set to expand its property management and marketing teams.



NEW CHAPTER FOR RENOWNED TEESSIDE ESTATE AGENCY

One of Teesside's most well-known estate agents has reinvented itself, with a new look and a new name.

Thirtwells, which employs more than 20 staff across its Middlesbrough and Billingham branches, opened in June 1977, making it the longest serving independent estate agency in the area.

Having taken over from founders Margaret and Keith Thirlwell in 2004, partners Wendy Clarke and Nicola Munro have decided the time is right to put their names to the business, which will now be known as Clarke Munro.

Clarke Munro was officially relaunched by Tees Valley Mayor Ben Houchen with a special virtual celebration held via Facebook Live, attended by clients, suppliers, friends and staff.

Along with the name change, the pair have commissioned a new logo and branding for the business, but are keen to reassure clients that the service will remain the same.

Nicola said: "We're known for our honest and reliable service and none of this is going to change. However, we're definitely looking to the future too and will continue to build on our innovative digital services such as virtual walkthroughs and online appointments."

NEW HOMES FOR COUNTY DURHAM VILLAGE GET GREEN LIGHT



Hundreds of new homes and jobs could be created after planners gave the green light for a new multi-million pound residential development in County Durham.

The development will deliver 190 two, three, four and five bedroomed luxury homes in Pelton, a village to the north West of Chester-le-Street in County Durham.

Onsite construction work by developer Miller Homes is expected to start in late 2020, which will include provision for 29 affordable properties, with the first phase of new properties expected to be available by early 2021.

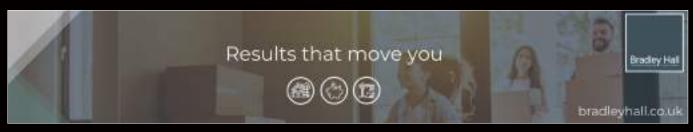
Following planning approval, Miller Homes along with North East planning

consultants Hedley Planning Services, expect to see more than 500 construction, supply chain and retail jobs created.

The move will also pump millions of pounds into the local economy over the next few years as people move in and spend on local services and amenities.

Plans for the site also encompass attractive landscaped trees and hedgerows in accordance with the approved Open Space and Landscaping Plan to improve amenities for local people.

Miller Homes sees the development contributing to the needs of the local community and delivering new homes as part of the regeneration of the area.





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WEST HOUSE, WHALTON, MORPETH, NORTHUMBERLAND



GUIDE PRICE: £1.8 MILLION

West House provides some of the finest country living within this prime region of mid Northumberland. This truly fabulous, Georgian country residence, offering unique accommodation maintained to an extremely high standard, comes to the market for the first time in over 35 years and enjoys traditional architecture and considerable character supported by modern, luxurious fittings. Situated to the western boundary of Whalton, and enjoying sunsets to the west over its magnificent grounds, West House, which is principally south facing, is set within 7 acres including grazing land, three loose boxes with an upper barn, wood store and workshop, as well as a stunning walled garden. A range of outbuildings, attached to the main house, have the potential to be easily converted into a leisure wing or an annex; in addition, West House Cottage is also available to purchase by separate negotiation.







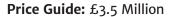






Danemead Melbury Road, Jesmond Park West, Newcastle

This magnificent property provides one of the most outstanding and luxurious bespoke family homes within the whole of Newcastle. The house has been refurbished to an exceptionally high standard and has many unique features, rarely seen in the North East, with stunning interior design.

















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LAMBTON

The impressive main boulevard is the gateway to Miller Homes at Lambton Park off Chester Road, and was inspired by existing residential properties and designed to create a magnificent entrance to the development.

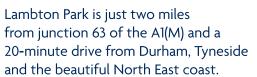
The residential scheme forms part of the wider redevelopment of Lambton Park, which will help to maintain the Estate's legacy whilst opening some areas to the public. Amongst the plans are new offices, retail and community space, and conservation works which include the restoration of Lambton Castle, its stables, and Lamb Bridge. Public footpaths in the previously private park will also be opened up for walks.



The Lifestyle

Meandering through 1,000 acres of historic park and woodland, 15km of footpaths provide an oasis of calm and tranquillity. Adjacent to open parkland and enjoying panoramic views across to Lambton Castle, the Ridge Walk leads down to black drive which heads along the bank of the River Wear from Lamb Bridge to the new bridge. The network of footpaths provide a variety of accessible routes for you to enjoy.









The Superb Design

The formation and character of these new homes is of upmost importance in providing a unique and thoughtfully designed space for a new community to grow. Entirely bespoke, the design includes features such as red brick detailing, sash windows and decorative ridge tiles all inspired by existing residential properties on the estate. The development has been designed by renowned architect and interior designer Ben Pentreath.

Red brick detailing, sash windows and decorative ridge tiles



The History

Lambton Park, the ancestral seat of the Earls of Durham. is one of the most intriguing historic places in the County capturing, as it does, the changing story of the Region.

The beginnings of the Estate as it is seen today lie with the first Earl of Durham, who designed the Park in the then popular Picturesque style. Buildings, from the Castle to the many cottages, were carefully conceived within this landscape-led design.

Lambton Park is still evolving. The traditional estate enterprises of farming and forestry sit alongside a growing residential and business community. It is this special combination of community, heritage and landscape that sets Lambton Park apart.







Testimonial

Lambton Park's first homeowner says: "Owning a Miller home at Lambton Park is more than a home, it's a whole new lifestyle. We moved from a 4-bedroom to a 1-bedroom home. The homes are beautiful and moving here is the best decision we have ever made!

It feels very special to be the first homeowners on the development. We're excited to see the rest of the homes being built and welcoming neighbours in the coming months, as well as being part of a proud community and the Estate's next chapter.

Alison and Malcom in their Lambton Park home.

Book an appointment: 03330 605 825

www.millerhomes.co.uk

Lambton Park, Chester-le-Street, County Durham DH3 4AN

Sales Centre open: 7 days a week, 10.30am - 5.30pm

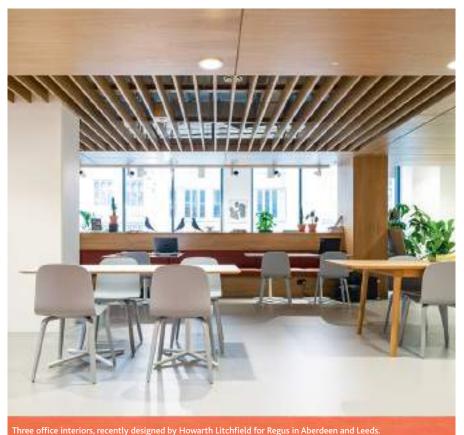


millerhomes

*Part Exchange is subject to availability, status and eligibility. All offers are plot specific and subject to Miller Homes' standard terms and conditions. These are limited offers and may be withdrawn without notice. Estate Agent's fees paid for following instruction made by or on behalf of Miller Homes. No reimbursement will be made for marketing fees or Energy Performance Certificate or Home Report instructed prior to reservation.

**Offer is subject to a satisfactory homebuyers report. Your present home must meet certain basic qualifying criteria to be eligible for Part Exchange.

**Certification of the Assisted Move house value. Home Report and Estate Agent's fees paid for following instruction made by or on behalf of Miller Homes. No reimbursement will be made for marketing fees or Home Report instructed prior to commencement of Assisted Move scheme. Home Reports only applicable in Scotland.







OFFICES AND THE NEW WORLD

By Neil Turner, Director, Howarth Litchfield

The world has certainly seen some changes in 2020 with the Pandemic affecting everything from our health to the way we exist day-to-day, particularly regarding the patterns of work.

I have read many articles and listened to many experts telling us the world has now changed forever in the way we approach the workplace.

I am particularly interested in this change as a designer of office spaces and in terms of how we interact in our working surroundings.

Is the office dead? — I am certain it is not. We are human beings and thrive on the interaction and discussion that comes from working in groups, huddles or communal working areas — offices. The importance of the office to our cities, transport and wider economy is massive in the North East.

People are now looking at the impact of not occupying offices on our wider economy and the effect on our town centres.

The impact of working from home has not yet been fully explored. Whilst many have enjoyed the initial period of home working in the summer months, the reality of working through a cold, wet and dark winter day will start to impact on people's health and well-being.

So, the question is how do we adapt the office environment, to make it safe and meet guidelines but also not lose its appeal?

At Howarth Litchfield we are all back in the office together, benefiting from the osmosis of ideas and



discussions that thrive in a lively studio. Yes, we can work separately (and we did so through the initial period of lock down) but it is so much better to discuss, chat and argue about design directly, together.

We are now advising many clients on how to adapt

their working environments. Our own experience and knowledge allow us to review existing furniture, changes to layouts, and use of flexible working arrangements. The impact on buildings will be seen in the increased use of natural ventilation or mechanical systems seeking to increase the air changes. The whole strategy of mechanical design will need to change focus.

Clever, simple changes can be made to an office without making it look sterile or unfriendly. Screens, displays and break out areas are all great ways to help spread out people.

The long-term impact on spaces and their designs will be with us for a long time, maybe even permanently. Many companies see this as a great opportunity to look at the way they operate and the environments of their staff.

The great cities of Newcastle, Durham and Sunderland need people in them, working, shopping and socialising. Making the offices safe, secure and welcome is a key task. Once people get back to the new normal then our cities will move forward for everyone's benefit.

Who would have thought that the economy of the country would become dependent upon the interior design and space planning skill of designers? But then, we do live in a new world now.

Neil Turner, director, Howarth Litchfield can be contacted on 0191 3849470 or email neil turner@hlpuk.com. www.howarthlitchfield.com

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PAUL REED

Associate Director, GT3 Architects

Did you grow up in the North East or did you decide to relocate here in later life?

I'm Newcastle born and bred: I was raised south of the river and have spent most of my early life in the North East. I completed both my degrees at Newcastle University (with a year out in London to whet my appetite) before I left to see what the wider world had to offer. For ten years I worked in both London and Manchester, and was lucky enough to do a lot of travelling along the way. From South America to New Zealand, Canada to Japan, I've been to some incredible places more, often than not, drawn there by the architecture and culture

What do you think it means to be a business person in the North East of England?

The North East is a small, tightly knit community compared to other cities, but it certainly has big aspirations. As an architect, I get to work on regeneration and masterplan projects across the region — it's pretty special to be able to watch how the region is continually evolving to meet the needs of our businesses and communities. I'd say that business people in the North East primarily choose to live here for the quality of life, but

strive to ensure they are not constrained by the geographical location.

What is your favourite aspect of life in the North East?

Again, the quality of life. My early career took me to London to work on large scale, prestigious projects. Life there is fun, but very busy and hectic. The North East offers a slightly slower pace of life, whilst proving a myriad of ways to spend your time. I live at the coast with my family, so at the weekends we try to make the most of the beautiful coastline on our doorstop. And if we change our minds and want to head to the countryside, we can be there in half an hour!

Where do you like to eat out in the region?

To be honest, we very rarely venture into the city centre any more as there are so many fantastic local opportunities! Elder and Wolf in Whitley Bay is great for a more relaxed evening (wood-fired-oven pizza gets me every time). Another favourite is the small but perfectly formed, Roxborough, the menu changes weekly and is always delicious.

Are the people really friendlier?

Having lived in the big smoke for a number of years (coming home via three years in Manchester), I would say yes! The people in the North East are a very friendly bunch, be it at work or play.

What do you think is the best view in the North East?

Now that is a tough one. I'll have to cop out and give two, because as soon as I see them, I know that I'm home. The first is the Angel of the North from

the A1, greeting you back to the North East after a long car journey. I remember watching it being constructed and have always admired its striking form. The second is the view of the bridges over the Tyne. That view from the train window still has the power to make the hair on the back of my neck stand on end.

Do you think living and working in the North East offers the same opportunities as elsewhere in the UK?

Having worked elsewhere I would say the North East certainly offers the same opportunities if you are willing to look for them. It is a wonderfully vibrant, well-connected place and there are many talented people and forward-thinking businesses.

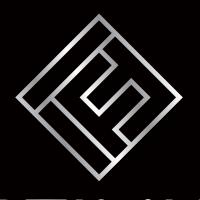
Have you had any experience of working elsewhere and how did it compare?

I have worked in both London and Manchester during my career. London is a fantastic place to live and I wouldn't swap my time there for anything. It's fun and non-stop, offering a brilliant life experience. However, it wasn't somewhere I could see myself raising a family.

We moved to Manchester just before the BBC relocated to the city. It certainly lives up to its Northern Powerhouse billing and provides a very "London-like" bustle against a grittier and friendlier background of the North. Again, I enjoyed my time there and it remains one of my favourite cities to this day.

However, the old saying still rings true: there really is no place like home!

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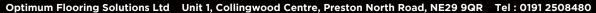






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NATIONAL PLANNING CONSULTANCY EXPANDS



National planning and design consultancy Pegasus Group has expanded its operations in Newcastle with a move to new 3,200 sq. ft office space within Adderstone Group's Gainsborough House on Grey Street in Newcastle.

Pegasus Group, a leading consultancy specialising in planning, design, environment, economics and heritage, opened its Newcastle office just over 12 months ago, but a much higher growth in the region than anticipated has seen the team expand, with a subsequent need for larger office space.

Their move to the refurbished, Grade II listed Gainsborough House on Grey Street, means that the 25,700 sq. ft building is now almost fully occupied, with one remaining 3,000 sq. ft suite which is still available for rent.

Pegasus Group's Newcastle office, headed up by Senior Director Sandra Manson, will accommodate the existing team of eight, with new team members joining very soon to assist with continued growth.

Sandra said: "Since opening our Newcastle office last year, we have seen a much higher growth in work than we envisaged. We very much wanted to be in the heart of the city, in the historic core, and what better location is there than the world-renowned Grey Street."

TYNESIDE BUSINESS PARK TO PROVIDE NEW UNITS FOR START-UPS

A commercial property company which transformed a former Tyneside dairy into a business park offering affordable office space is to develop more units thanks to a funding package from Unity Trust Bank.

Benton House Limited breathed new life into the eight-acre site on the Bellway Industrial Estate in Longbenton, Newcastle, after it was left derelict in 2005.

The company provides competitive rents and flexible leases for start-up businesses and firms looking to reduce their overheads, and the loan from the commercial bank will enable three new units to open

Michael Wicks, Relationship Manager at Unity Trust Bank, said: "We work with organisations that aim to have a positive impact on society through economic, community or social change.

"Benton House Limited offers a range of incentives to help companies in the North East and support like this is very important, especially after the difficulties experienced by many businesses during the Covid-19 pandemic."

Benton House Limited is the brainchild of former solider Courtney Clift who was brought up in a deprived area in Newcastle. Courtney bought the Longbenton site in 2011 and recruited skilled tradesmen from the local community to develop it.





NORTHERN COUNTIES BUILDERS FEDERATION WELCOMES NEW PRESIDENT

Northern Counties Builders Federation (NCBF), a long-established trade association which supports and sustains the regional construction industry, has welcomed a new President.

Tony Kay, who has spent 30 years in the industry working as a quantity surveyor and now as commercial director at Classic Masonry, takes over the two-year appointment from Ken Parkin.

As a new President, Tony is keen to reenergise the work and progress made in recent years to ensure the 120-year-old organisation continues to develop and increase its active and relevant role within the construction industry.

In setting out his agenda for change, Tony said: "I'm delighted to be taking on the role of President for NCBF. After the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, the industry in the region will undoubtedly suffer. Our role at NCBF will be to facilitate the development and maintenance of a sustainable North East construction industry which will enable it to deliver the increase in demand generated by the backlog of projects shelved due to the lockdown."

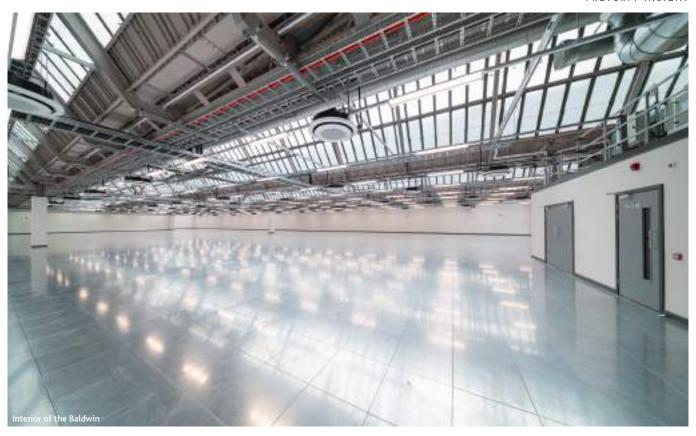
One of the tasks Tony is looking forward to is continuing with the NCBF's apprentice initiative which was launched three years ago and substantially funds SMEs to take on apprentices.

- Commercial Rent Reviews and Lease Renewals -
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NEW OFFICE 'PERFECT FOR A SOCIAL DISTANCED WORLD' LAUNCHES IN DARLINGTON

A brand new 26,000 sq. ft. office in Darlington has been completed and is optimally designed to be a safe workplace for businesses looking to get their teams back into the office.

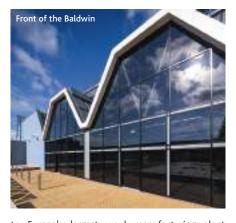
The new building is perfect for enabling office reoccupancy thanks to its large, single-level floor plate which means no lifts are required and there are minimal high-traffic areas. The building also benefits from ample carparking and its own front

The Baldwin office at Lingfield Point business park has been converted from a former industrial unit by London real estate funds manager, Frogmore, and could create up to 300 jobs.

Property agents Knight Frank and Cushman & Wakefield are marketing the space internationally to find a tenant.

Lingfield Point is already home to major occupiers such as Student Loans Company, Capita and Wood Group and is next door to Amazon's £120m fulfilment centre on Symmetry Park. A spokesperson for the Student Loans Company said: "As a business with multiple offices across the UK, we have found that our large single floorplate at Lingfield Point has allowed us to be incredibly efficient in the use of space as we plan for the post-COVID-19 workplace. Being able to operate on a large single floor plate allows us to work in a safe and more efficient environment."

Lingfield Point is a 85-acre business park two miles from the centre of Darlington. It was created on a historic industrial site that was previously home



to Europe's largest wool manufacturing plant developed by Patons and Baldwins.

Patrick Matheson, Partner at Knight Frank Newcastle, said: "This new office is very contemporary with exposed services and lots of natural light. The single-floor layout makes it well suited to a customer service provider and possibly a company that is considering 'north-shoring' or 're-shoring' its operation to make it more efficient.

"Whilst businesses begin to reassess their office structures to accommodate more flexible ways of working, firms will clearly give greater attention to operational risk in the aftermath of the pandemic. This could ultimately drive additional demand into the UK regions, as business strategies may conclude that spreading workforces across a greater number of smaller regional offices could improve resilience.

"Working from home has proved an effective standin for the office during an extremely testing time, and will no doubt be a component of businesses' operational structures moving forward. However, it is not a wholesale replacement. The UK's regions are key to getting the UK's workforce back into offices."

The business location also has office space available from 200 sq. ft. to 130,000 sq. ft. and warehousing up to 130,000 sq. ft.

Greg Davison, Partner at Cushman's added: "For any occupier looking to locate their business in the UK regions, Darlington, and Lingfield Point in particular, offers a fantastic opportunity. It offers a strong labour pool, combined with an enviable life/work balance for staff, all within easy reach of London and the wider region via the East Coast mainline."

Lingfield Point is adjacent to the A66 Trunk Road, which links directly to the A1(M) providing access to the region's major conurbations. It is 21 minutes from York and two hours 21 minutes from London by train, making it very accessible to the rest of the UK.

For information contact Patrick Matheson at Knight Frank on 0191 594 5015 or Greg Davison at Cushman and Wakefield on 0191 223 5710.



BODIES, LORDS AND SHARP LAWYERS

The Chinese sage Sun Tzu said "If you wait by the river long enough, the bodies of your enemies will float by." As a business plan I feel it leaves something to be desired but who am I to disagree with one of the greatest military strategists of all time?

Homeowners fighting for the abolition of ground rent may not wish to see floating bodies, instead they can see light at the end of a dark tunnel as the Competition Watchdog moves to end 'the leasehold scandal'.

Tens of thousands of home owners bought their property assuming they owned it outright, only to find they owned a right to use the property and not the land it stands on. This is leasehold. Typically, the ground rent would start at £250 per annum but with an increase of double every ten years. So, after ten years the charge is £500 per annum. By forty years the charge would be £4,000 and climbing.

This odious fee made properties almost impossible to sell or remortgage. Worse, the volume builders would bundle up these freeholds and sell them to institutional investors. You want to build an extension? Pay the new Freeholder £1,000 for permission to extend your home on their land.

Of course, a volume builder reading this would fasten upon the line "assuming they owned it outright". It was American film director Jerry Belson who coined the phrase "Never assume, because you make an ass of U and ME". Clever, and a decent watchword for most circumstances.

This is the argument put forward by volume builders. The Ground Rent particulars were clearly laid out in the contract the home owner signed. Yes, they were. Buried in the middle of page 25 in eightpoint type. A canny solicitor might have said "Do you fully understand what you are signing here?" Then gone on to explain the potential liabilities and pitfalls; this is precisely what happens when the homeowner tries to sell.

But the majority of home buyers did not employ a canny solicitor. They used the solicitor recommended by, and employed by the home builder. I am sure you do not need me to point out the conflict of interest? Not illegal, but a practice I feel falls somewhere between shoddy and sharp.

Many buyers, excited by their first-time home and trusting in the oversight of that nice solicitor simply signed on the dotted line. Many only came to understand their mistake when they tried to sell or build an extension. Caveat Emptor? Well, to a degree. But we live in a world where we simply click 'Agree' as we download the latest app or programme.

It has taken eighteen years but it seems justice is finally at hand for home owners suffering under the ground rent yoke. During that time most Governments vowed to end the scandal. Things progressed apace until the bill reached the seat of some of Britain's biggest land owners, the House of Lords where it always seemed to get stuck. Can't imagine why, but the reform appears to finally have been dragged kicking and screaming into the light of day

Heaton Property was setup in 2005 and specialises in providing rental property for professionals in Newcastle upon Tyne and the surrounding areas.

In June 2014 the company won gold in the Times/Sunday Times Letting Agency of the Year Awards.

Heaton Property website: www.heatonproperty.com Tel: 0191 240 0665 Email: office@heatonproperty.com



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IS OFFICE LIFE A THING OF THE PAST?

By Adrian Waddell, Chief Executive of NE1 Ltd

Covid-19 like other pandemics has accelerated change that perhaps would otherwise have taken decades to deliver.

Here in Newcastle, like other cities across the globe, one of the fastest, almost overnight changes was the shift from office to home working. At the start of lockdown the city became almost deserted as office workers left their desks with no way of knowing when they would return. Now as the Government calls for workers to return, the question is how many businesses will heed this request and how will the city survive with fewer workers?

The hope was that September would bring the watershed that the country needed and would see offices refill and life return to cities, in tandem with children going back to school and Universities welcoming back students.

Shops, coffee bars and restaurants were all pinning their survival hopes on this return but so far it hasn't happened, at least not to the extent that was hoped for and needed.

Instead the city's offices remain largely vacant and from feedback from city businesses it looks likely to remain this way for the sometime to come.

The situation in Newcastle is no different to the rest of the UK and in other countries. The return to 'normal' office life has been slow and gradual, with full offices still a rarity.

Talks with employers have revealed that the situation is not likely to change this side of Christmas.

To gauge what businesses were thinking and to get an insight into their plans for returning to the office, NE1 teamed up with Invest Newcastle to survey city centre businesses. The key question; what plans had they for returning to work in the city post-Covid 19?

The survey showed that there has been a marked change in how employers see the role of a physical office in their business operations with many believing this change to be permanent. Even businesses whose sole working practices were 100% office-based pre-Coronavirus are now considering a future where their staff work remotely and the need for office space is significantly reduced.



The survey was carried out with over 100 businesses in August. Only 35% envisage ever returning all their staff, full time to Newcastle city centre-based offices. The same number said that a return could be possible in some shape or form in twelve months time.

All those expecting to return to offices at any time suggested that this would not happen overnight, but would be a gradual process over a longer, phased period of time.

Among the respondents were a number of large employers with over 250+ staff. Four of these companies warned that they never planned to bring all their staff back into city centre offices even though, prior to Covid, all these businesses had been exclusively office-based. On average, these companies anticipated that eventually only around a third of their workers would return full time.

One revealing finding from the research was that public transport and perceived safety was a key factor in influencing the return to work for both employers and employees. Many respondents felt that more action and reassurance was needed to make people believe public transport was safe to use.

Around a third of survey respondents warned that they anticipate a much-reduced need for office space in the future.

It is clear from the survey that Newcastle's office landscape, like other major cities, has been markedly changed by Covid-19. Businesses have discovered new ways of remote working and have experienced the benefits of a more flexible approach to work blending home and office life.

www.newcastlene1ltd.com

Covid has changed business behaviour and for many being located in an office will be a choice not mandatory for the foreseeable future.

The key challenge for businesses now is to retain what is/was good about office life and working practices and combine it with the new-found understanding of how homeworking and flexibility can benefit a business.

Cities too face the same challenge and in this lies opportunity. Newcastle must step up and play its part in encouraging people back to work, rest and play within the city centre. There needs to be enough good reasons for people to make their way back into town and to ensure that the city centre offer that greets them, including the public realm is safe, attractive and welcoming. We need to make the most of our many assets, improving our public realm, accelerating upgrade plans, striving for quality and being bold.

We look forward to seeing pedestrian priority on Blackett Street, to Grey Street's footpaths being widened with more businesses using the extra space created and making even more of the Quayside and river basin. Transport must feature in these plans too, so it is clean, easy and safe for people to use to travel into the city centre.

Even if individual offices are less densely occupied, we have a goal to attract more businesses - albeit with a smaller footprint - alongside encouraging more people to choose to live in the city centre, because it is an attractive option. Covid-19 has helped create an opportunity for Newcastle, we now need to champion a modified renaissance for the city centre - because we all have a stake in its success.

FORWARD THINKING HOUSING PROVIDER PROTECTS TENANTS WITH INVESTMENT IN GUARDIAN®

'believe housing', one of the largest housing associations in the North of England, has successfully implemented GUARDIAN® technology to keep their residents of 136 apartments across the region safe from the water born disease, Legionella.



Plexus Innovation, based in Durham, is the company behind this innovative technology. Their in-house team developed GUARDIAN®, a remote measurement and alert system, which they also manufacture in the UK. Managing Director, Ian Murray, said: "It is rewarding to see believe housing leading the way by introducing our technology to their industry. Affordable housing providers are now seeing the benefits of using GUARDIAN® to ensure Legionella compliance, provide enhanced duty of care to tenants and reduce operational costs as it tracks and defines water usage and temperature profile

The believe housing apartments are based in five buildings across County Durham. Compliance Officer for the organisation, Emma Jorgenson says that the system

has shown them problems they wouldn't have even known existed, which has convinced her the data reporting structure is extremely reliable. She said: "We initially trialed GUARDIAN® on the recommendation of our water services provider, and after successful completion, we decided it was well worth investing in.The buildings we have fitted the technology in house vulnerable people over the age of 55, some who have underlying health conditions so it is our responsibility as landlords to ensure we are doing all we can to protect them.

"The technology was easy to install and the reporting system has been better than using traditional manual measurement. It has been particularly important during coronavirus lockdown, when we haven't been able to access the properties ourselves, to have remote, digital measurement.

"It reduces the risk of human error and inconvenience to tenants, and clearly detects operational issues, reducing waste, saving money and allowing us to sort them before they are a problem."

So far GUARDIAN® has alerted believe housing to issues including leaks, boiler problems and also that several tenants weren't using their cold water taps. When investigated, it emerged that the cold water system had air in it, causing clouding to the cold water. The tenants didn't trust that it was safe, even though it was fine to drink, but hadn't reported it.

Chief Executive of believe housing, Bill Fullen, concluded: "believe housing always puts the safety of our tenants first. Reduction of the risk of legionella is high on Emma and the compliance team's list. The timing of installing GUARDIAN® meant we had remote and accurate readings that ensured we had uninterrupted management of water compliance throughout the coronavirus lockdown."

GUARDIAN® is cost effective, reliable, gives accurate measurements and real-time data as well as being easy to install. For more information please contact Plexus Innovation on 0191 922 3969 or visit www.plexus-innovation.com



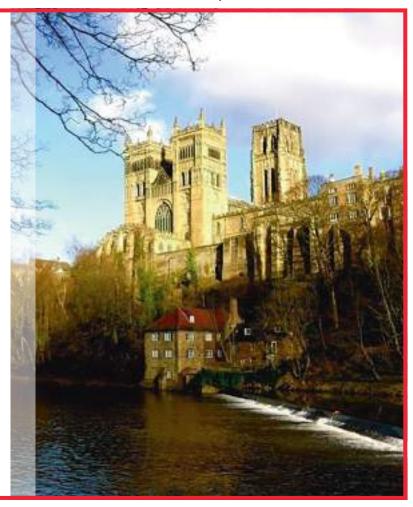


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STACKS OF FUN BY THE BEACH!

When the first STACK opened to the public of Newcastle in August 2018, few anticipated how popular it would become. With this experience behind them, Danieli Holdings have gone one step further and have begun to expand the STACK model elsewhere, beginning with Seaburn.

CEO Neill Winch alongside Dunwoodie Architects Director, Peter Swift aimed to recreate the atmosphere and feel that was previously generated in Newcastle, but on the seafront at Seaburn, bringing a concept not experienced before in the area.

The site at Seaburn is larger than at Newcastle and its design takes advantage of the beautiful sea views. Once inside, there is a large central plaza filled with seating, street-food vendors, and bars. There is also a covered 'festival style' stage for singers, bands & other forms of entertainment to create the crackling atmosphere that STACK has become renowned for. On the first floor, there are further seating areas and bars, complete with panoramic views up and down the coastline. A special addition to STACK Seaburn is the bridal suite which incorporates a private external terrace overlooking the sea.

Although the opening of STACK Seaburn was pushed back a week due to poor weather, it was not a cause for concern for Neill Winch, who said, "We are very excited to welcome people to the venue and let them experience the STACK atmosphere. I truly believe we have created something unique and special for Sunderland, a vibrant destination that will delight visitors and keep them coming back time and time again for a great experience".

Some may view opening during a worldwide pandemic a slightly risky decision. Yet with measures in place to ensure the safety of customers and staff alike, the team at STACK Seaburn have everything in hand to enable guests to enjoy their visit safely.

STACK Seaburn plays host to a variety of dining outlets and street-food vendors that cover an extensive range of culinary delights. From fish and chips to Greek and Mexican food, to burgers, Thai or Italian cuisine, STACK Seaburn has something





to satisfy all taste-buds. Natalie Brand, the owner of Healthy Thaim, focuses her food around a Slimming World diet plan and, as a result, many of the dishes are zero syns, making Healthy Thaim very unique. She wanted to expand her business with a container at STACK Seaburn and said, "We specialise in healthy food and that, in particular, is something that's been missing in Seaburn". Since

expanding her business to Sunderland, Healthy Thaim has been voted Number One on Trip Advisor for the most healthy place to eat in Sunderland!

Although everyone tries to be healthy from time to Thaim, we all need a treat and that is where The Little Cakery comes in, to satisfy those of you with a sweet tooth! They sell cupcakes, traybakes, cheesecakes, cookies and even family picnic boxes to take onto the beach. There is also a wide selection of bars at Seaburn, including, the Heineken Bar, The Gin Cabinet and Barley and Me. Then there are Yolo, a STACK favourite, Hop House 13, both bars with spectacular views of the seafront.

Like STACK Newcastle, Seaburn is more than just a venue for food and drink. At Seaburn, there are two entirely new businesses to add to STACK's repertoire. The Game Cabin, run by Mark and David Potts-Brown is a place to come and play together. The Game Cabin brings together a mix of XBOX, PlayStation and PlayStation VR all inside a shipping container. Leave your children to game away the hours outside of their bedrooms or take part yourselves in tournaments and events!

If gaming is not for you and you prefer the great outdoors, pop into Woofs 'n' Scruffs dog parlour after a walk on the beach. The dog parlour is a place where your pups can get all cleaned up in the dog washing stations, as well as get a good grooming before heading home. Woofs 'n' Scruffs also sell a host of dog accessories, including dog cakes and dog ice cream for the warmer days!

Although STACK Seaburn was created to bring a new lease of life to this corner of Sunderland, it has done so much more than that. Neill Winch and Danieli Holdings have established a social and leisure hub in an environment that caters for all, from children and adults alike, to even the smallest of our furry friends!

www.stackseaburn.com



ARCHITECTS FOR:

STACK SEABURN STACK NEWCASTLE





A PLAGUE ON BOTH YOUR HOUSES!

Northern Insight sometimes asks people to write about fairly solid matters; in the past I have given contributions with my thoughts on Energy Efficiency, changes in the High Street and of course a couple of blurbs about myself. But this time they've asked me to write about something I think is fairly fluid, and I'm not talking Merlot or Real Ale.

They asked if I could write on how coronavirus has impacted on property values. Now if I had penned this on Monday 14th September, I might have said something different to what I might say today, the 21st September. Because in the interim we have had 'local lockdown.' By the time you're reading this, things will have changed several times again.

I'm not going to get into a politically charged opinion piece about how serious coronavirus is, or whether the media has whipped everyone up into an unnecessary frenzy, but the result is the same. A lot of retailers felt during the national lockdown, and are feeling again, that this is a plague on their businesses. With restrictions on numbers allowed in shops, with some openly flouting all regulations and some taking them to extreme with constant sanitization, it's made business for many retailers difficult. In August I said that there will always be a demand for shops because some items are more "touchy feely." I stand by that, and of course the hospitality trade has been hit – who wants to go to a pub and not be allowed to talk to your mates? I am aware that many restaurants were at one time saying it made for better management when eating was by reservation only, but if numbers in parties are limited, this takes away a significant element of the eat out trade. Less trade = less profits = less rent.



And here's the plague on the second house. Some retailers have been able to secure grant funding towards overheads, but those with Rateable Values in excess of £51,000 have not. And this includes most of the prime shops and leisure businesses in Newcastle, Sunderland and Durham. These businesses have been hit hard and it's difficult to see how they'll get back out again. So, a number of retailers have said to landlords "Can't pay, won't pay." Landlords don't qualify for any grant assistance and this is hurting many of them badly. Before anyone goes on about "evil

landlords", just be aware you may sometime benefit from one. Eldon Square is 40% owned by Newcastle City Council, and the rents from here subsidise Council Tax for many of us. The Galleries in Washington is owned by M&G who provide ISAs to millions of small investors. Aviva Insurance have significant property holdings.

Quite apart from the tax implications to pay for all the aid that Rishi Sunak has delivered, I feel the economic plague of coronavirus is going to be felt for a long time into the future, even as we do adjust to what I called last time a "new world".

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DREAM DESIGNS FOR NORTH EAST START-UP

Creating quality design and delivering effective marketing for brands and businesses has always been a passion for Laura Thomson. This has been the driving force behind the leap to set up Laura Jayne Design.

Previously working as an inhouse designer for a global business, Laura has developed a wealth of knowledge which has enabled her to set up her own business.

Following the whirlwind of 2020, Laura now runs Laura Jayne Design and provides a range of services to elevate any business to the next level.

Laura commented: "It has always been a dream to run my own design business and until this year it always felt a little far from my grasp. Sometimes in business we can be short of time and that's where Laura Jayne Design's expertise can help businesses with their creative difficulties and marketing challenges."

For more information, email hello@ laurajaynedesign.co.uk or visit the website at www.laurajaynedesign.co.uk.



NEW CHAPTER FOR MAGAZINE DISTRIBUTION FIRM

A North East magazine subscription and distribution firm has strengthened its team to help reach more customers on a global scale.

Gateshead-based Unique Magazines was established in 2009 and now delivers a choice of more than 3,500 magazine titles to thousands of readers in 160 countries all over the world.

Following an unprecedented demand for quality titles during the lockdown period, MD John Porrett has recruited a management accountant, a digital marketing manager, a warehouse operative and a customer service apprentice.

Ryton based management accountant Peter Carr joins the firm after a prominent career in the aerospace industry.

Digital Marketing Manager Laura Hewitt spent 13 years in the automotive industry and brings a host of skills to help her spread the brand digitally.

The new members of the team are completed by 23-year-old warehouse operative Jordan Cook and 18-year-old customer service apprentice Ellie Purvis



DURHAM MARKETING FIRM CELEBRATES INTERNATIONAL SUCCESS

A North East based social media agency has added seven new members to its team following a string of successes in recent months.

The Social Co., which was launched in 2016 by James Ogilive, Phil Sutcliffe and Kane Haig, is celebrating significant business growth including major client wins which now includes a range of local companies and national organisations including Audi, SCS, Specsavers and the NHS.

The firm also recently launched its #weremember viral campaign, which is estimated to have had over 100 million views.

The campaign was launched at the beginning of lockdown to inspire positivity and was shared by a range of celebrities including A-lister Whoopi Goldberg, used on ITV news and also classified as approved content by the United Nations.

The trio of directors has also recently invested in several businesses including garden company ATM Outdoor Living and leading cosmetic teeth whitening company Diamond Whites.

R//EVOLUTION LAUNCHES BUSINESS RECOVERY PACKAGES

As companies across the North East continue to feel the effects of the pandemic, r//evolution is offering support in the form of 'Bounce Back' packages, designed to offer companies the digital marketing support they need for three months at an affordable rate.

r//evolution service clients UK-wide from their office bases in Gateshead and Manchester. The company works with fast growth SME's and corporates to deliver accelerated growth, with a focus on automation and digital transformation.

With 3 levels of service package catering to different requirements, 'Bounce Back', 'Spring Back' and 'Launch Back' are packed with growthgenerating digital activities, helping North East businesses to get back on their feet.

bounce back faster bounce back stronger

r//evolution MD, Gill Burgess, commented: "There's no doubt that businesses are feeling the impact of a long lockdown and impending recession. It was an

111

obvious next step to create affordable, short term packages to help North East businesses to recover

in the shortest possible timeframe."

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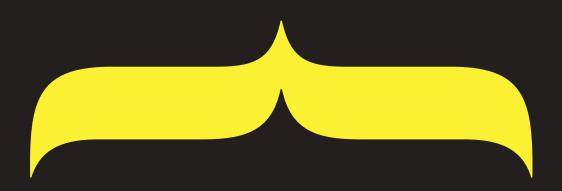
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Lockdown and Covid-19 have prompted businesses to reflect and build greater resilience into operations.

Business as usual has gone for the foreseeable.

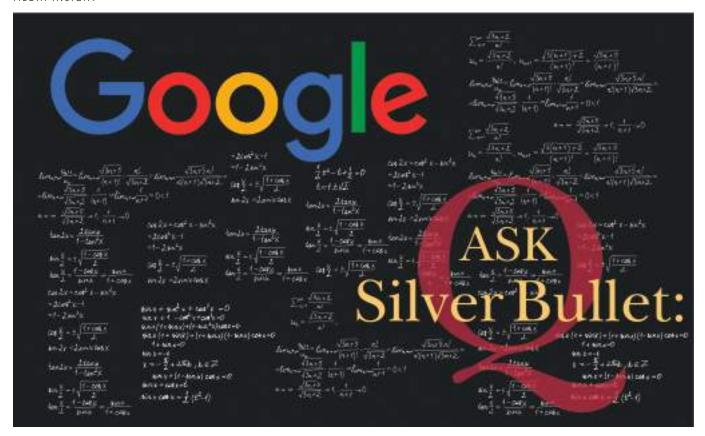
Doing the same is no longer an option.

Now is probably the time to review and change your PR and marketing.

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WHAT IS THE NEW GOOGLE ALGORITHM ALL ABOUT?

This is a question that will impact not only upon everyone who has a website but also everyone that uses Google as a search engine, i.e. about 1.7 billion people per day!

In May, Google announced they would be implementing a new algorithm in early 2021. Now, although there's nothing new in them introducing new algorithms as they update these constantly, it's far rarer that they announce these – the last such warning was in 2015 when they introduced the Mobile Friendly update which meant web site design had to be responsive to mobile devices but before that the Penguin update in 2012 had penalised sites buying links to boost their SEO, whilst the 2011 Panda update had penalised sites with poor quality content.

The fact that Google is giving the world over six months' notice, possibly partially due to the delays and interruption to normal business caused by the Coivd-19 pandemic, is a sign of how significant the changes to SEO will become. This update is called the Google Page Experience Update, with the clue as to what it will involve being in the name – Google will judge and rank web site pages based on the user experience – how satisfied users will be with visiting the page. The metrics they use consider factors such as how fast the page loads, whether it's mobile-friendly (responsive), is the site secure, are there intrusive adverts, how is the content laid out, is the content stable and does the page do what it says in the existing SEO.

Google calls these factors the Core Web Vitals and, without going into the technical details of the LCP (Largest Contentful Paint), FID (First Input Delay)

and CLS (Cumulative Layout Shift), it is basically Google's way of judging how good your site is from a user's perspective. Whilst there's no certainty as to exactly when in 2021 the new metrics come into operation, what is clear is that Google are giving six months' notice to web site managers and it would be foolish to ignore this.

The power of Google as the world's premier Search Engine shouldn't be underestimated as some of the Internet's most popular sites have discovered to their cost - in 2013 Interflora's website disappeared from Google search pages for purchasing advertorials in newspapers with links back to their site and Google also reduced the page rankings of those papers, including the Daily Mail, which carried the advertorials. In 2006, BMW had its Page Rank reduced to zero for influencing search results whilst GoCompare's website dropped from Page One to Page Seven in 2008, also for purchasing links. They have even penalised themselves, or rather their own Chrome browser, on five separate occasions for diverse SEO tactics ranging from paid links to 'cloaking' or showing the web crawlers something different to what the human eye could see. The lesson here being that if you're confused, don't worry, even the Internet gurus at Google sometimes get it wrong!

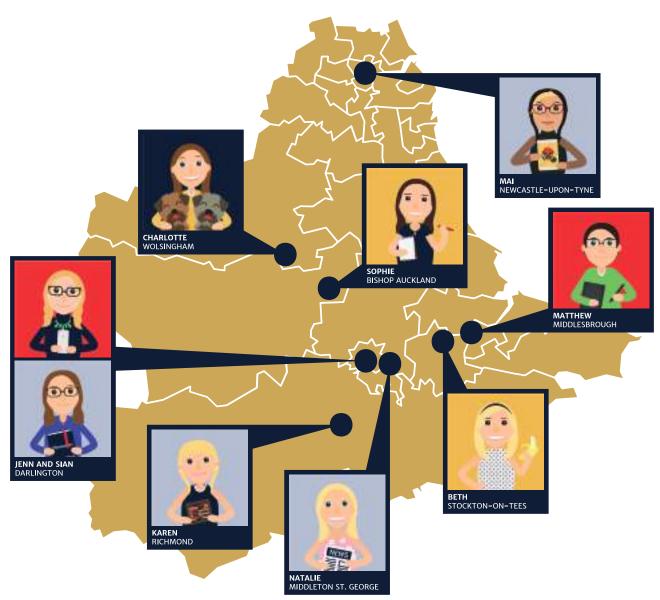
Victoria Borrowdale, User Experience (UX) specialist at Purple Pixel Creative, commented, "I'm pleased that good user experience is now going to be at the core of site reputation and relevance in the eyes of Google. Over the years they've covered the essentials, most memorably the shift of importance in having a responsive website in order to rank and be recognised. Now sites aren't going to be able to get away with poor usability and accessibility and Google's constant focus towards the user is going to keep the Internet evolving with better web sites which offer a better experience by loading faster and being easier to use, getting higher rankings than poorer UX sites."

There are also some fairly simple steps you can do to test your site for compliance with the new algorithm. Using Google's own free tools starting with Analytics which will give you the basic information about your existing traffic against which you can then benchmark improvements. Google's other tools like Search Console, PageSpeed Insights, Keyword Planner, Trends and other tools will give you a basic Technical Audit Analysis and insights into your existing SEO from which you can identify areas of improvement.

SEO is critical to any organisation's website and the new algorithm reinforces the fact that new sites should be designed and developed with SEO in mind if the site is to be visible – it may seem obvious, but there's little point in investing in your great site if it's never going to appear in a Google

Do you need some assistance with your marketing, PR or design? Do you need to review your strategy or do you want to know how we can help your business? Talk to us. Email your questions anonymously to us today hello@silverbulletmarketing.co.uk or Tweet us (not so anonymously) @SilverBulletPR.





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Media Matters

In a new series of features Northern Insight talks to leading figures in the region's media industry.

This month we meet **Keith Newman**, Director, Highlights PR.

Did you always envisage a career in the Media industry?

From a young age I always wanted to work at sea as a navigation officer. Sadly however, mild colour blindness put paid to that and I settled for a career ashore. Everything happens for a reason though and I still have a strong pull to the water as I am the national PR officer for the Maritime Volunteer Service charity and I have my floating office based on the Tyne.

What has been your career path so far?

I had 23 good years in the gas industry in a variety of senior management roles including my last position in the communications team where I did everything from press releases to crisis management. It was a great place to learn.

I formed Highlights PR in 2005 and to this day still work alongside my ex workmates in Northern Gas Networks. My business has grown year on year and I think the reason for that is our honest approach to PR. If there isn't a story that I think will stand up against others I won't do it. I'd rather find a different angle or wait until the time is right for my client.

I'm lucky that I have a varied range of clients from fledgling businesses like The Golden Camera Company and House of Ruhr to those more established like Bright and Beautiful North Tyneside, Geon Training and Unique Magazines. I also work extensively with the entertainment sector including Sunday for Sammy Trust, Tyneldols, Scattered Pictures, Blowin' a Hooley Theatre and many musicians and authors. Charities benefit from my support too and I work with names such as The People's Kitchen, The Dragonfly Trust for Cancer and Changing Minds with Pick Up a Penny.

Who do you most respect in your industry?

Freelancers and small businesses like mine. From the biggest agency to a one-person operation, there's a place for all of us but I have a lot of respect for people who run their own business and provide excellent one to one customer service to their clients.

Which fictional media character can you most relate to?

I loved the news anchor character Will McAvoy played by Jeff Daniels in the US TV series The Newsroom. He was professional, great at getting the story out and respected in his industry. He was also a bit grumpy so not all good!

How have you adapted your business during the coronavirus crisis and supported clients?

At the start of the pandemic I, like many others lost work. I turned my attention to helping people who were doing good things for the NHS and managed to get a lot of media attention for them. While this wasn't necessarily paid work, the coverage I got on TV, radio and in print maintained my high profile leading to more work. I've also used my previous

experience in business to offer common sense suggestions to get people through the bad times.

What is your greatest strength?

One of my strengths is finding an angle for my client that no one else would think of. I put myself in the position of the reader, listener or viewer and ask if I would find the story interesting. If I don't, I think again and ask more in-depth questions to my client. The more interesting the story, the more coverage you can expect. I'm also proud of the excellent relationships I've made over the years with the media.

What is your biggest weakness?

I'm told that I never stop. If I'm not meeting clients or writing press releases, I'm busy with my voluntary work with Radio Northumberland or the Maritime Volunteer Service. I'm lucky that I really enjoy my PR work and if things get too much I can always untie the boat and sail away for an hour or two!

What has been your proudest achievement?

I'm always proud when my work directly helps people, so gaining huge amounts of PR for The People's Kitchen and then seeing donations of food and money being put to good use for the benefit of others always brings a smile to my face.

I love working with the Sunday for Sammy Trust and the work I do to promote the charity to sell the show DVD's which in turn helps young entertainers in their career. Standing backstage at the Newcastle Utilita Arena and seeing a full house for the recent shows was a fantastic sight especially knowing that I had helped to fill those seats.

I think though that I am most proud of the fact that Highlights PR has a good reputation for excellent results, being cost effective, easy to work with and the uniqueness of having a boat as an office

What are your remaining career aspirations?

I never stop learning and I constantly look at new technology and systems to help in what I do.

I'm happy career wise as I feel that my previous four decades in business has led me to where I am now.

How do you see your industry evolving in the next 10 years?

I've seen a massive change in the industry and guess that technology will change things even more. I really feel for traditional print journalists as the amount of physical newspapers and therefore reporters are dwindling. Online news is really important however as everyone wants the news now at the touch of a button.



DECENT BROADBAND ESSENTIAL TO RECOVER FROM LOCKDOWN

We talk to the founder and MD of North East rural broadband experts Alncom, Stephen Pinchen.

"When we say rural, we really mean rural and that can mean off-grid to homes and business in Northumberland and the North East. Where other companies will give up on the supply of fast broadband, we accept every challenge and that can literally mean jumping on to a quad bike or our fleet of 4x4's or even walking to some really inaccessible areas and using drones to oversee the areas from every angle. We are privately owned and we love the North East community. 20 years of climbing the steepest hills and connecting the most isolated locations can be very rewarding and it keeps us fit!", said Managing Director Stephen Pinchen.

"Fast broadband must be available to everyone who wants and needs it."

From farmers, to whole villages and businesses, Alncom's success stories have included the most remote valleys in Northumberland, from College Valley down to Durham and beyond with success stories with Northumbrian Water, Matfen Hall and the surrounding businesses and homes and companies in the North East.

Stephen Crees, the manager of College Valley Estates; a beautiful valley that lies within the Cheviot Hills in Northumberland within the Northumberland National Park, worked closely with his wife Catherine and Alncom, to encourage residents across the valley to join together and combine the value of government vouchers. Gigabit-capable broadband was installed along eight kilometres of the valley, with reliable wireless connections going live November 2019. There were no installation charges and 100% cheaper monthly costs, with an unlimited data allowance. WiFi calling means that estate workers can use their phones and everyone can access the emergency services if necessary.



there is no longer any lag for my son when he is

gaming".

Based in Alnwick, the team cover the length and breadth of the North East. www.alncom.co.uk telephone 01665 604816 info@alncom.co.uk



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NEW OFFICE AND NEW LOOK FOR CREO COMMS

Northern Insight caught up with Louise Bradford, founder and managing director of Creo Communications, to hear how the company is continuing to expand as it adapts to life post-pandemic.

Founded six years ago, Creo Communications started life as a one-woman comms consultancy, founded by managing director Louise Bradford and servicing a handful of manufacturing and public sector clients.

Today, the Sunderland-based company is a full-service strategic communications agency, offering PR, creative, web design, social media management and content creation to organisations from an array of sectors, from manufacturers to tech start-ups, and public sector bodies to global property developers.

This evolution - which has seen Creo not only continue to increase its service offering but also diversify its client portfolio - is what Louise believes has helped it to continue growing and remain steadfast in the face of adversity.

"Creo is so much more than just a PR agency," she said. "Over the last few years, we've invested heavily in the creative side of the business, both in terms of personnel and equipment, and we have really enhanced our offering, ensuring we can offer more cohesive communications support to clients who are looking for a multi-channel approach.

"PR is about so much more than media relations and press release writing. We think about how our clients' stories translate to digital and social, and create a suite of collateral and content to help our clients articulate their offer to their customers. I think one of the things with communications is that - if you're worth your salt - you will ask probing questions of clients that get under the skin of their business and their objectives; you try and understand the full picture, which is what we strive to do on each and every account and is why we are able to use that deep understanding to deliver more meaningful, impactful support for clients."

Creo has grown year-on-year - and having reported its best performance to date last year - made the decision to up sticks from its Sunderland Software Centre office to a new HQ of its own in 2019, a splendorous four-storey Victorian building in the heart of Sunderland city centre.

The company has invested close to £200,000 on the move and despite the pandemic and the challenges it has brought to all kinds of businesses, Louise is confident that it will stand the company in good stead as they adjust to life post-pandemic and continue growing their headcount and service offering.

She said: "The new office gives us the additional space we need to grow and is a real statement of intent. I have

always had a long-term vision for Creo and investing in a permanent base for the business means we will have the space required to grow significantly as we look to the future.

"When I set up the business and took my first office, I bought an extra desk and an extra laptop. It meant I had one eye on growth and was always prepared to add to the team. When we recruited, I bought another desk and laptop, so we always had one ready for the next person joining us. Moving to Foyle Street is the next stage in the evolution of that process. It'll put us back in a growth mind-set — we have space to continue to expand for years to come - which is very important as we look to the future."

Creo is also undergoing a brand refresh to coincide with its office move, which Louise believes will reflect the company's transition to a creative communications business and will position it well for future growth.

"Creo is completely different to the business I started, with different skills and strengths - and our new brand better reflect this," she added. "This is an opportunity for us — as a company - to show what we are. Creative, fresh and dynamic. The new look represents that."

Yet despite the setbacks of the pandemic, which saw work on Creo's new office grind to a halt and a move to full time home-working, the team at Creo has remained resilient – and just as the business has continued to adapt its service offering to cater for a changing world – Creo is now confident of adjusting to life post-pandemic, however it may look.

"Last year was our best year to date," she said. "We continued to increase our turnover and welcomed a host of new clients including Castles & Coasts Housing Association, North Tyneside Council and a string of other accounts that complimented our existing client base. And - despite Covid-19 – we're projecting further growth this year, having already secured Legal & General, Landid and High Street Group as clients over the past few months.

"However, we're also aware that there are some things that are simply out of our control, and just like any other business, my job is to put the business in the best possible position to get through this global crisis in the best possible shape - and that's what I'm aiming to do.

"With the move to a new base, and a new look for Creo, we're taking control of our destiny and are looking forwards. And we'll keep adapting. Whatever the future holds."

REMOTE WORKING HAS HAD ITS ADVANTAGES

But it's time for the pride to return to the office!

Michael Knowles, Managing
Director of ROAR Digital
Marketing, explains why he's
chosen to move his business into
new larger premises as many
organisations are contemplating
permanent remote work.

It's been a turbulent few months for many businesses in the North East, and it's been incredible to see how resilient companies have been in the face of such uncertainty. It's a testament to the careful planning and adaptability of organisations that so many have been able to quickly transition to remote working and keep some sense of normality.

We repeatedly hear in the news about the unprecedented times we live in and, quite rightly, it's made us all stop and take stock of what's important to us – both in our personal lives and our businesses. One of the things that I hear discussed on a regular basis is whether remote working will now become the "new norm" and if we will see any companies asking staff to come back into the office full time.

As a digital marketing agency working almost entirely online, you might think that the team at ROAR Digital Marketing are advocates for this way of running a business. But in actual fact I have found that this time away from the office has shone a light on the importance of a dedicated place of work for our company. I should caveat that statement by saying that I can see a clear benefit to what we might term "blended working" in the future. To help people reduce commuting time, manage childcare and find a healthy work-life balance, having the facility to work remotely is a wonderful thing.

What I would say, however, is that the last few months have shown me what sharing an office and interacting with colleagues can achieve. As a team,



we've found that having dedicated face-to-face time (and I don't mean pre-arranged video calls) is crucial to our creativity and productivity. It's those little interactions between organised meetings or those fleeting afterthoughts shared at the coffee machine that often prove to be where the magic happens.

Understanding what we are missing by working at home is as important as assessing what we can do without in the workplace. That's why in the last few weeks I've not only initiated a return to work for the team at ROAR Digital Marketing – in a safe and socially distanced fashion, of course – but actually moved the business to new, larger and more suitable premises at Mistral House, Silverlink Business Park.

In heading up a growing team of marketing professionals, I want our staff to retain flexibility and feel that their work provides genuine choice and balance. Yet we are finding that the benefits of dedicated co-working time cannot be underestimated. Having won a flurry of new UK and EU based clients throughout lockdown and the summer months, we've learnt that there's no substitute for getting together to formulate plans and work on delivery strategies as a team.

On a practical level, I must also say that delivering

digital services to clients who expect the highest standards cannot always be done from home or the local café. Whether it's working to optimise a client's website, Create and implement new PPC Ad strategies or running virtual Google training sessions, it's crucial that we have access to superfast, reliable broadband and on-site IT support. And having additional facilities such as a spacious high-tech boardroom, and well-equipped training delivery areas, enables us to accommodate both new and existing clients more effectively and safely.

Having been in our new premises for just a few weeks, I wanted to see whether my own stance on office working versus remote working was at odds with other companies in the region. But in speaking to Samantha Elliot, Mistral House Operations Manager, I was surprised to hear that office enquiries have been on the increase since lockdown was lightened.

She says: "Mistral House was designed with the modern business in mind, and it's great to see a Google Partner like ROAR Digital Marketing choosing to move their operations and team to us. While large organisations are perhaps moving towards a more flexible working solution, many of the SMEs we currently have as tenants are already working in that way. Professionals in small and medium, agile enterprises often work from cafes, on the road or at home on an odd day. Yet, the majority still want a hub from which to base themselves and their teams."

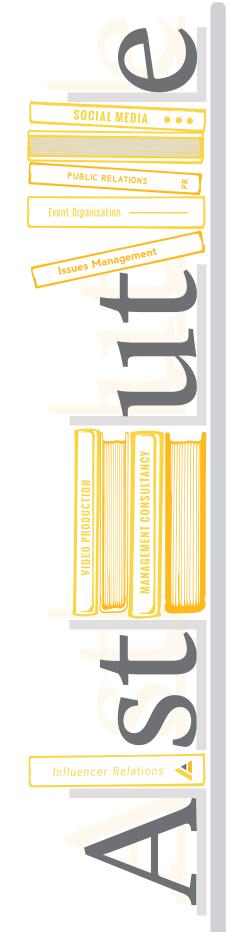
On reflection, I've come to the same conclusion myself. Being able to work from anywhere is something that technology affords us in 2020. But the basic requirements of a successful, cohesive and productive workforce need people to interact offline and in-person, as well as via Zoom!

While there will undoubtedly be further bumps in the road before the Pandemic subsides, I know I've developed a new appreciation for the office that I'll carry with me into the future.



For further information about ROAR Digital Marketing, and their range of PPC, SEO, Analytics, and Marketing Automation services, please visit - www.roardigitalmarketing.co.uk. You can also call the team on 0191 259 4737 or email info@roardigitalmarketing.co.uk.





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YOUR EYE ON THE REGION

PETER DARRANT-PARKES

CEO of Pride World Media Ltd,
Director of Pride Community Network & Pride Radio 89.2FM

Did you grow up in the North East or did you decide to relocate here in later life?

I'm a Bradfordian at heart and grew up in West Yorkshire. I came to the region in 1994 for a six-week work contract and never left.

What do you think it means to be a businessperson in the North East of England?

There's a lot of opportunity in the North East and optimism which means it's a positive place to work and do business. Sometimes I wish we'd pick up the pace a bit when doing a deal, perhaps that's me wanting to build Rome in a day, but you do get the feeling that we all working together to bring success to the region.

What is your favourite aspect of life in the North East?

My husband will laugh when he reads this, partly because I seem to be always working, but there's the opportunity to have a really good work life balance.

There's a vibrant business community, great leisure and retail attractions, cultural experiences to enjoy and you are never far away from a beach or woodland walk.

Do you have a favourite hotspot for a business meeting?

I'm bound to say the Pride Media Centre in Gateshead. Four film studios, the home of Pride Radio 89.2FM, a 30-seater screening rooms, podcast suites, offices and meeting rooms — it's perfect! And, free car parking (ok, that's the shameless plug out of the way).

I do think we have some amazing country house hotels, and I love visiting Wynyard Hall for meetings and pleasure. I even got married there.

Where do you like to eat out in the region?

My favourite gastropub is the Black Horse in Beamish. In a previous job; I spent a lot of time working in the hotel industry and was expected to be in my suit and fine-dine most evenings hosting journalists and clients.

Now I tend to enjoy a relaxed environment with quality food and a less formal approach. The Black Horse ticks that box and it has great views of Beamish Woods.

Where do you like to unwind within the North East?

Unwind? I think I've heard of that! I love walking and I'm happiest in Chopwell Woods enjoying the peace and quiet with my dog Teddy.

Are the people really friendlier in the North East?

Yes, people from the region want it to succeed so there is a sense of camaraderie and friendliness. I've made friends for life here and have great memories.

What do you think is the best view in the North East?

There are too many to choose from and, having only lived here for 26 years, I still haven't explored a fifth of the region.

I love the all the beaches and the views from parts of <u>Hadrian's Wall are spectacular</u>.

Do you think living and working in the North East offers the same opportunities as elsewhere in the UK?

I think the region is still playing catch up when you look at how Leeds and Manchester have reimagined themselves in the past 20 years.

Better infrastructure would help and a push to embrace new technology would benefit us all as we look to the future. We have brilliant entrepreneurs based here who are doing great business and we need to do all we can to support them and attract new opportunities from outside the region.

Have you had any experience of working elsewhere and how did it compare?

I've worked all over the UK in various roles but the North East is where my home is.

Before moving to the region, I lived in London so it was a bit of a shock to the system at first as I adjusted to the pace of life here which is less frantic and more manageable. I now speak to friends in the South who can't believe the opportunities here and that I can be on the beach in twenty minutes.





A WELL-PRACTISED **PR**ACTITIONER

Veronica Swindale, FCIM, MCIPR and Managing Director of nesma chats to Laurel Hetherington in celebration of her career in PR.

Laurel is well-known across the PR and marketing comms scene in the North East and has been instrumental in developing nesma's CIPR students at every level of their career development. With so much experience she is a PR powerhouse and inspires everyone she teaches.

You've run your own business as consultant training PR professionals and in-house teams, a university lecturer and tutor for nesma. What do you enjoy most about teaching, and what do you hope your students take away with them?

I was the PR student from hell and thought I could do better, so I've always looked at any course I deliver from the perspective of how would I feel if I were an attendee; would it interest, excite and challenge me? Confidence is an important factor too, once people understand how things fit together, it gives them a significant boost.

It must be great to be in a position where your reputation goes before you! What have been the most rewarding elements personally of your career?

Seeing my former students progress onwards and upwards, and then send their own staff onto courses I'm involved with because they know they will return to work engaged and motivated. Two Fellowships were very pleasing, but most satisfying was to be appointed as one of the CIPR's 70 @ 70 in 2018 for outstanding contribution to PR education and training.

What do you think have been the most significant changes in PR and communications?

Originally a lot of my training was media relations based, now the emphasis is on strategy and using research to set SMART objectives. When people can see the links between these, the budget, and then how to measure and evaluate it is often like watching a light switch on – then I know I have really succeeded. I have two PhD students at Newcastle University to supervise until they finish their PR theses – unimaginable when I first started out.

How significant has good communication been during the Covid-19 pandemic?

Communication has been key throughout the pandemic, but unfortunately, not all of it has been good! Like many others, I have sat and watched interviews and statements, U-Turns and protests and often cringed. Interestingly all of the nesma CIPR students continued working for their organisations throughout as well as continuing their studies.

What advice would you give to anyone thinking of PR and communications as a career?

Practise what you hope to preach! So start blogging, volunteer to help promote a cause close to your heart, be an avid media consumer (and not just in your own social bubble) and get a qualification — either at university or through CIPR workshops and training. This means you have more choices in your career options.

nesma.co.uk

Anne-Marie Lacey says "Laurel is like my PR Mum - she's taught me pretty much everything I know from being a post-grad student to volunteering with the CIPR to running my own business - she's always looked out for me and helped to keep me on the right track with my career".



Marketing and communications is a vibrant, everchanging discipline. To be successful you need to be engaged in continuous professional development. But, finding the best source of learning can be a challenge. If you are considering starting a CIPR qualification this autumn nesma's tutors are always available to shed light on the courses they teach and their relevance to your career.

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Araminta Hartley

PR and Media Officer Great North Air Ambulance Service CIPR Professional PR Diploma (L7)

"Completing this qualification has increased my knowledge and understanding of PR theories and concepts, I now feel more confident in creating and managing effective PR campaigns which strategically support my organisation's goals and objectives."

Lauren Watson

Marketing Manager
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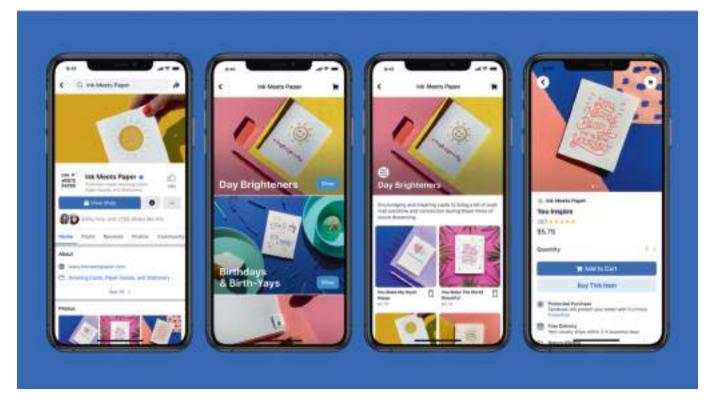


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THE CURTIS GABRIEL SOCIAL ROUND UP

North East Social, Digital and Design agency Curtis Gabriel bring you this month's news and updates from the ever-changing world of social media and digital marketing.

Facebook Adds Shop Tab

Facebook has unloaded a series of new updates for its eCommerce tools, which will provide businesses with more ways to connect with customers and sell directly on both Facebook and Instagram.

First off, Facebook's rolling out a new 'Shop' tab in Facebook: "a new place to discover businesses and shop for products in the Facebook app".

As you can see here, the new, dedicated Shopping tab will be available in the options menu and will showcase a range of businesses that are selling products

Instagram has had shopping tags available for some time, but it hasn't been able to facilitate in-stream purchases for everyone. Until now but there are some limitations:

"To use checkout, businesses must have shops and use Facebook Commerce Manager or our partners Shopify and BigCommerce. We'll support more platform partners soon."

#FAKENEWS -Twitter has Improved Account Security during the 2020 US Election

The US Election is fast-approaching, and Twitter want to do their bit to help. The social media platform is trying to inform and empower their users on correct US Election News and Information.

Throughout this year especially, with the rise in social media usage, Twitter understands that they serve as a hub for political conversation, resources and breaking news.



However, they want to make sure that this is all reliable and accurate information that US users can rely on to inform their decisions. For example, they have banned certain political ads and have expanded their polices around election misinformation.

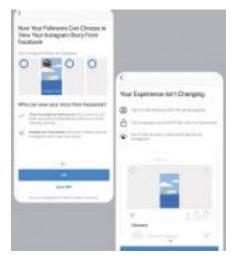
Twitter have also introduced enhanced security for high profile accounts, in a recent statement they said; "Voters, political candidates, elected officials and journalists rely on Twitter every day to share and find reliable news and information about the election, and we take our responsibility to them seriously. As we learn from the experience of past security incidents and implement changes, we're

also focused on keeping high-profile accounts on Twitter safe and secure during the 2020 US election

Instagram Stories coming to Facebook.

It's not just Facebook's messaging tools that are slowly becoming more intertwined – this month, some users have reported seeing this notification in their Facebook feed;

The note, as you can see, explains that some users are now able to view Instagram Stories on Facebook, with the Instagram Story appearing within the Facebook Stories feed, though with an Instagram rainbow border around the profile circle, as opposed to a Facebook blue one.



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YOU'VE HIGHLIGHTED OUR BUSINESS - GEON TRAINING

This month we look at one of Highlights PR's clients – a North East training company whose innovative approach to virtual training helped get the region back to work.



Businesses and jobseekers struggling with the coronavirus downturn turned to Geon Training's online expertise to help upskill staff working from home, re-train as healthcare key workers or get market-ready skills in key sectors. By switching to virtual classrooms, Geon Training recorded zero absences with all courses completed.

Geon Training specialises in fully funded, bespoke training programmes based around its key sectors and continuously works with partners and clients to offer its learners local employment opportunities, as well as CV coaching and careers advice.

Highlights PR was able to secure positive media coverage on a number of levels including a BBC radio interview, articles in regional newspapers and many web-based news sites.

Co-founder and managing director Nadia Scott

said: "Keith helped us to raise our profile at a time when we were undergoing major changes in the way that we operated. The coverage helped us to maintain a public facing presence when many of our competitors had stopped working.

"The whole PR process was taken care of for us including professional photography and copy writing. It was a great experience for the management team, our trainers and trainees."

For media support contact Keith Newman at Highlights Public Relations on 07814 397951, keith@highlightspr.co.uk

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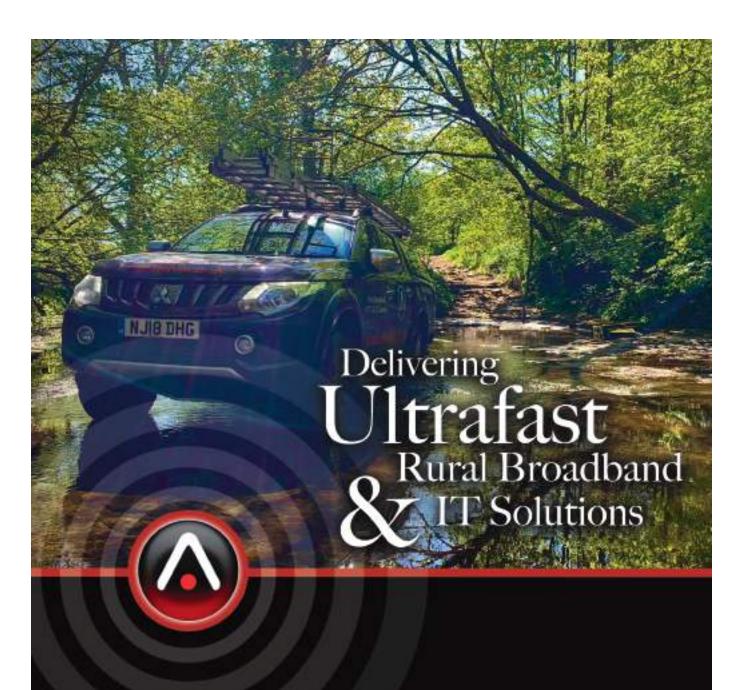
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Technology & Communication Solutions



NORTH EAST TECH COMPANY CHANGES THE RAIL INDUSTRY

As the rail industry prepares to go digital, Newcastle enterprise app developer Nutshell is helping companies working within the sector to embrace digital transformation with an easy-to-use, no-code app development platform.

Planning for Delivery, or P4D, is a safety improvement programme launched by Network Rail to avoid near misses, close calls, accidents and fatalities on the railway. In 2021, as part of the P4D programme, Network Rail will roll out the next generation of Rail Hub, a one-stop digital platform that allows railway workers to plan and deliver safe work on or near the line.

Martyn Cuthbert, Founder of Nutshell Software, said: "The P4D programme is the biggest transformation in a generation. It will affect every company that provides operational services to the rail sector, roughly 600 companies with 45,000 workers.

"In short, Network Rail are going paperless. Inefficient and outdated paper-based processes including track-side safety briefings, work package plans/risk assessments and management reports will all become a thing of the past and will be replaced by user friendly mobile apps, digital forms, and automated processes that will help the industry communicate and operate more effectively, learn from mistakes and ultimately save lives."



EVOLVED SEARCH APPOINTS HEAD OF STRATEGY & PERFORMANCE

Growing search marketing agency, Evolved Search, has appointed Martyn Addison into its newly-created Head of Strategy and Performance role, a key position for accelerating client growth and positioning the agency as a strategy-first specialist.

Martyn joins Evolved Search with a decade of digital marketing experience, gained in search marketing roles at eCommerce agency Visualsoft and most recently in senior SEO and strategy roles at performance and affiliate marketing agency Silverbean.

Speaking of his new position, Martyn said: "Whilst strategy is something that is already heavily considered at Evolved, as a standalone department it is still in its infancy, and for that reason, I am really excited about bringing it to life and utilising it to get even more results for clients.

"I'll be responsible for developing and managing the strategy department, in which we will be accountable for reviewing and accelerating client performance in relation to their agreed goals and objectives."

This is the most recent of several hires by the award-winning agency during lockdown, with the team working fully-remote on client work for the likes of Select Car Leasing, tombola, and Ocean Finance.

NE FINTECH FIRM SET TO CREATE JOBS AND SCALE UP TECH FIRMS

Rapidly growing fintech company, Growth Capital Ventures (GCV), has secured £1 million of growth capital from institutional investors to continue its expansion and fast-track the growth of Britain's burgeoning tech sector.

GCV has now opened up the investment round to new private investors via its online investment platform, growthfunders.com.

Investment from the current round will enable GCV to support 30 high-growth start-ups and create hundreds of new tech jobs within the North East through its venture builder unit, G-Labs. It will also enable GCV to increase internal

headcount from 22 to 40 in the next 12-24 months.

GCV is very much immersed in the tech sector, having facilitated £45m of investment in high-growth tech businesses, including digital lenders Atom Bank and B-North, and the creation of more than 600 new jobs in the past five years.

Craig Peterson, Co-founder and Chief Operating Officer at GCV, said: "Our aim now is to invest in and support exciting new projects that can build, launch and scale businesses, creating much-needed jobs at a time when employment is falling due to COVID-19."



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Baffled by backup options?

Have the events of 2020 been the catalyst that prompted you to finally focus on creating a comprehensive business interruption strategy?

With almost half the workforce working from home, and the rest of it apprehensive about returning to the workplace, it's vital your people have 'anytime, anywhere' access to systems and data.

Business continuity success starts with the right backup solution, but the options are complex and have long term implications



If your backup is costing you too much time and money, we can help.

Our experts will carry out a detailed backup needs analysis and talk you through the options, so you make the right decisions and ensure the wheels of your business keep on turning.

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CHOOSING THE RIGHT BACKUP SOLUTION

Have the events of the last few months been the catalyst that prompted your organisation to finally focus on creating a comprehensive, regularly tested disaster recovery strategy?

Disaster recovery is an umbrella term that covers a wide range of business interruption situations. The rush to facilitate remote working back in March this year was without doubt the biggest interruption the business world has seen in decades, and proved a tricky situation for organisations that were unprepared.

An effective DR strategy starts with the right backup solution.

How confident are you that your backup arrangements will stand up to scrutiny? If you think your business is protected because someone runs a basic backup to a tape and stores it on a shelf somewhere, we invite you to consider a few backup basics.

Backup type. Different organisations require different solutions. For instance do you understand the differences between a full, differential, incremental or reverse incremental backup, and which one would reduce your data footprint - and therefore costs – and be most effective for your needs?

Location. You need to decide where your backup should be stored. This might be on premise, in a data centre model, a public, private or hybrid cloud environment or a combination of several of those and other factors. Make sure your backups are

held separately from your network. Once a hacker gains entry the first priority will be to encrypt your backup data and paralyse your business.

Multiple copies. It's very risky to rely on a single copy of your data, instead you should be creating multiple copies and storing them in and outside cloud locations, for maximum safety.

Asset inventory. To make sure your backup covers all bases you need a full and constantly updated inventory of every piece of hardware and software and touch point involving your organisation, and whether it's on-premise, in the cloud or involves a mobile device. If that looks like a Herculean task, there are asset management tools on the market that can simplify the process.

Recovery. Many organisations are so busy focusing on the actual backup they neglect to think about restoration. If your backup takes eight hours, it's likely to take the same amount of time — or more, depending on how it's structured and how wide and fast your communications pipeline is – to restore. Can your organisation wait that long?

Your DR strategy hinges on two crucial factors your recovery time objective (how much time you can afford to lose without incurring critical losses) and your recovery point objective (how much data you can afford to lose without significant impact). Computing capacity. What is your restoration plan if you are hit by a virus and half a dozen of your latest backups happen to contain it? You need to make sure you have enough computing capacity to do more than one restore (very few organisations do), and you can carry out a virus clean up across the entire IT estate before allowing access to users.

Scaleability. Can you scale up your backup as and when needed, minimising cost and contract implications? We live in a data-driven society and with data volumes growing exponentially, you need to make sure you can maintain pace.

Test it. We really can't say this enough times. Regular testing of your backup needs to be done in a live environment, to give you the absolute confidence that it will work when you need it to.

There is a lot of choice out there, and it grows by the day. If you're not sure about your backup options and their long term implications, our DR and security experts will help you by running a detailed backup needs analysis and talking you through the options, so you make the right decisions and ensure the wheels of your business keep on turning.

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MAKING THE MOST OUT OF REMOTE WORKING

With regulations surrounding office attendance in constant fluctuation, it is more important than ever to facilitate flexible working styles within your organisation and ensure that employees working from home have a pleasant and productive experience.

Ultimately it is important to understand that the mass migration to cloud working we have seen this year is reflective of an already existing pattern. Whilst the initial country-wide lockdown in March accelerated this move, many organisations were already hosting the majority of their processes in the cloud. Luckily this means that there is a plethora of tools that make working remotely not only easy but widely accessible and often more efficient than its manual counterparts. These tools can help foster innovation, improve teamwork, and create a sense of community, maintaining the integrity of your working culture despite the change in working scenario. But making remote working work for you will look different between both individuals and organisations, so selecting the right tools is imperative. Here's a quick guide:

What are my pain points?

First, it's important to take a look at your remote working processes. Where are the inefficiencies? Which processes are clunky or outdated? Maybe you're struggling with file duplication,



disconnected teams, or the use of non-supported applications (shadow IT). A good teamwork solution should continue to facilitate that which runs successfully within your organisation and offer simple and efficient solutions that address your pain points and further innovate your communication and collaboration. Once you better understand your processes and pain points, you will have a clearer idea of the capabilities you

require from your remote working solution.

How does my organisation operate?

So now you know what pain points you need addressing, it's time to think about your organisational culture. What tools do your teams regularly rely on? Is it important that these tools can still be utilised? This is important to consider when choosing an appropriate solution. Additionally, you may want to consider your organisational values. For example, if you aim to foster employee innovation, you may want to implement an ideas portal where users can suggest and rank suggestions or perhaps you have a company fantasy football league that you need to be contained to a certain area of your teamwork solution. These little details can help make a solution truly engaging to your employees, promoting engagement.

What do I do now?

So now you understand your organisation and its processes you could do one of two things: you could start researching the various remote working tools on the market and approach a partner of that tool for implementation or you could approach a cloud solutions provider, like Synergi, for a free consultation in which a specialist will explore your needs and budget and suggest the most appropriate solution.

Whichever you decide, we're here to help. Discover leading teamwork software on our website www.teamsynergi.co.uk or get in touch by calling 0191 4770365 or emailing enquiries@teamsynergi.co.uk.

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UNLOCKING THE DIGITAL FUTURE

Gateshead-based Synergi has played a key part in the rapid uptake of cloud services, and no more so than over the last few tumultuous months.

The 'cloud first' business specialises in helping organisations digitise working practices, migrating from traditional IT systems to more flexible and cost-effective cloud-based technologies to improve efficiency and productivity.

Its nationwide client list includes Yorkshire Water, Arriva, Lloyds of London, the AA, and Scottish Fire and Rescue Services while closer to home it works with Electrix International, Sotech, Hacel Lighting, Tyneside Safety Glass and others looking to maximise investment in modern technology.

Last year Synergi celebrated a 60% turnover rise, on the back of a steady 40% year on year growth since its inception in 2013.

Chief Executive Officer Peter Joynson takes up the story: "The last 18 months have marked a particularly successful point for the business. We launched a new fully managed service practice, consolidated our footholds in Scotland and the South, and invested a substantial sum to create the North East's first Digital Business Den, a dedicated learning environment where clients can explore the future of digital business.

2020 brought with it a very different business landscape for all of us. As both cloud users and innovators we maintained business as usual and were ideally placed to help businesses facilitate a swift and seamless change to working from home, with all its complex security and access implications. We were also able to offer free, no-obligation COVID-19 support packages to a business community suddenly faced with huge change."

Few would disagree that the pandemic has turned cloud into an essential service, and the continuing rise in adoption is set to underpin Synergi's growth

"The last few months have transformed the working landscape, and much of the success is down to cloud services," adds Chief Operating Officer Justin Short.

"We saw demand across all cloud solutions, particularly in video conferencing, where Microsoft reported a jump to 75 million daily users of Teams, and in intranet and home-based telephony services. Every organisation is at a different stage in its digital journey, and we helped people in all sectors and sizes cope with processes such as signing documents, maintaining regular contact with staff, and accessing core finance systems. Functions such as cloud accounting are

not just a nice to have, they are now an essential part of every business."

Synergi's new end to end managed service is a logical extension to its portfolio, designed for customers looking for a partner delivering service excellence across on-premise, hybrid and cloud technologies. It saw the firm expand into mainstream IT services including proactive security monitoring and disaster recovery services, and extend its support desk to cover infrastructure, networking communications management, and legacy infrastructures.

Director Paul Burns joined as Chief Technology Officer, spearheading the new service. "This move was part of our long term strategy, and despite the challenging conditions we felt it was the right time to launch," he said.

"It's delivered on flexible contracts that allow clients to access and pay for technology on demand, and all through a single point of contact. Clients tell us it was a service they were struggling to find, and they are already praising the benefits in service performance and cost control, reinforcing our faith that we are filling a gap in the market."

The move has already created several jobs and there are more in the pipeline, says Paul.

"The calibre of our people is one of our biggest strengths. People are attracted to our supportive culture and good benefits package and we are always looking for new talent to join the team, whether they have several years under their belt or are graduates entering our development scheme and looking to forge a career with a cutting edge employer."

Looking forward, the Synergi team exudes quiet confidence.

"We're seeing a growing focus on innovation and restructuring working practices, putting cloud and digital transformation at its core. It's the ideal moment for businesses to undertake a review of IT infrastructure and management," adds Peter.

"Organisations are looking to accelerate cloud strategies and take advantage of agile technologies through what could be uncertainty for at least the next 12 months.

Our objective is to become the automatic choice of North East cloud provider, and a leader in the UK. Everything we do is about helping businesses improve efficiency, productivity, insight and security, and there will always be a demand for that."







HELPING COMPANIES WORK SMARTER

Growing tech specialist Wilson-Etheridge is helping a rising number of companies extract maximum potential from their IT systems. Owner and director Daniel Wilson explains how he's helped a global company work smarter.

It's great when a plan comes together; particularly when you overcome challenges above and beyond the actual technology you're working with.

Every project has its challenges and it's always satisfying when you're able to resolve a client's problems, design and install new systems while causing minimal disruption to the business.

A project that we're proud of at Wilson-Etheridge is one we undertook for RelyOn Nutec, which we delivered earlier this year. It's a great example of us completing an ambitious project with users working from different countries operating across different time zones.

This was the first significant project for us that had such global reach. We encountered many common and anticipated issues but the scale and spread of the business added a different complexity.

The global user base meant we had to adapt to be flexible to different ways of working across multiple sites. Working across different countries also meant we had to quickly understand and accommodate different cultures to ensure a successful project delivery.

RelyOn Nutec migrated to an Office 365 environment last year and as a Microsoft specialist we were engaged to improve that environment.

The company was following old best practices from an on-premise SharePoint environment and we were tasked with scoping tech requirements to ensure the digital infrastructure could provide efficiencies, greater collaboration and increased productivity across the business.

After completing a deep analysis, we presented several options to the IT director. A project was agreed to design, develop and implement a new SharePoint intranet, enabling the company to move to a more secure, modern workplace.

There was a greater focus on management information and creating the right environment and content going forwards.

After careful planning and a structure implementation we successfully delivered a client branded intranet, a new navigation system, a permissions matrix, employee search functionality and a worldwide RON centre search application.

Over a few months we provided a robust, smooth experience for users with minimal disruption. Running parallel to this project, we also helped implement and embed Microsoft Teams. With RelyOn Nutec being a global company, Teams quickly proved a crucial platform for greater collaboration and user communication.

And, of course, alongside all these changes

we deployed a training programme to ensure employees understood the changes and knew how to exploit the potential of the new system.

Remote training presented its own challenges. But through a well-planned and delivered communication, supported by a training plan, we ensured good adoption across the group.

I am glad to say that this successful implementation and the benefits gained by the company have led to further projects and a long-term working relationship between Wilson-Etheridge and RelyOn Nutec.

This is just one example of many projects we're starting to get involved with as more companies, large and small, move to the cloud and want a full migration strategy to develop robust systems for future working.

As a Microsoft 365 specialist we're able to provide the full service from licence reselling to design and development, consultation and implementation to ongoing maintenance support. There's also a training provision for those who require it. We typically work on monthly or annual contracts; but our new Pay-As-You-Go service means we can also provide quick, high-impact support and interventions for those that have more limited budgets.

More details at www.wilson-etheridge.com

In loving memory of

Nikki Peacock

1971 - 2020



Nikki was a much loved North East marketing professional. She developed her passion at a young age with visits to her Father's marketing agencies, earning pocket money checking competition entries. Nikki was a much loved colleague, she brought enthusiasm and highly dedicated professionalism to everything she did. She had a hugely positive impact on Synergi in our time together, She will be greatly missed but never forgotten.

Nikki was a single mother and left behind two sons.

As a team we continue to do all we can to help fundraise for the boys and we would love your help too. Any donations would be hugely appreciated, to support Tom & Archie's Fund For A Brighter Future.

Simply go to:

https://www.gofundme.com/f/tom-amparchie039s-fund-for-a-brighter-future

Thank you, synergi



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Geofencing Explained

Worktraq can help you plan, manage and track your workforce/remote workforce
Whether you are in the maintenance / warehousing / transport / waste / manned guarding or construction the health and safety of your lone workers is paramount to the success of your business.

According to the Oxford dictionary, A geofence is a "virtual geographic boundary, defined by GPS or RFID technology A Geofence gives businesses the opportunity to monitor the site, vehicle or item in real time.

A geofence is a virtual boundary around an item, site or vehicle to ensure all your assets are safe, performing as expected. Geofencing reduces complaints from clients as they can see for themselves what is happening in live time because of this it increases customer satisfaction. Geofencing is a Health and safety must if your business employee's lone workers as Worktraq sends a notification when a worker reaches a checkpoint – they maybe be late or not show up at all which allows you to become aware of a potential incident. Worktraq provides peace of mind for employees working alone, their employers, and even the workers families to an extent.

Advantages can be varied and can include:

Asset management – The application will notify a network administrator when a company asset, meant to be used within the firm goes out. In addition, from there, they can track the location.

Fleet Management – geofencing can be used to notify a manager when a vehicle leaves site and where it is on its route.

Human resource management – can be used to create timesheets etc. and can restrict staff from having access to certain areas etc.

PA service – Personal reminders to accomplish certain tasks when in certain geographic area

Marketing - Promoting deals, or drive incoming business.

Tracking – Tracking items, vehicles - keeping track of logistics and delivery timekeeping

Safety – messages for tourists when they wander too close to dangerous landmarks

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Please contact the sales department on 01642 792567 01325 582121 • 0191 8160444 or email Info@worktraq.co.uk Mike Grahamslaw catches up with...

PAUL CURRY

Managing Director, Aero IT

What does Aero do for it's Clients?

We provide IT & Cloud Services to North East Business and Remote Office 365 Consultancy UK Wide. Essentially, we use modern Cloud Technologies to allow organisations to adopt a fluid 'Work Anywhere' model.

How has 2020 been so far for Aero?

Like most, it was business as usual until third week of March. We responded quickly to lockdown and continued working as normal from home locations. Most of our clients were also functioning so our service was essential to keep their businesses connected.

Do you think the Covid outbreak has affected and changed business?

Absolutely. We've been back in our offices since the end of June and experiencing low traffic volumes and empty car parks, it's very clear to see. I don't think we really have an understanding as to what the new normal will be for a few more months.

How was lockdown for you personally?

An experience that I still find very surreal. Without technology it would have been very different indeed.

How do you think North East Business will adapt moving forward?

Without a doubt, there will be a greater emphasis on home and remote working. We have already assisted many clients and helped them achieve a more flexible working approach.

If you were starting a New Business in 2020 what would you do different?

I have always favoured an office based environment, so making sure I had the space from the beginning to accommodate growth would be a priority. Technology would be key and having the ability to work anywhere would also be at the forefront.

What are your plans for Aero in the future?

Using this year as a benchmark, we will continue to evolve our Cloud Technology products.

Where would you like to be next year on a personal level?

I think safe and in good health would be a fair response.

What album are you listening to currently?

London Calling, The Clash.

Aero Networks Limited, 13 Bankside, The Watermark, Gateshead, NE11 9SY. Tel: 0191 484 1230 Email: paul.curry@aeroit.cloud









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^{*} Please be advised that due to current conditions, appointments are necessary for visiting the school as we are restricting walk-ins and can be done only after 4.30pm on weekdays. We have a deep-clean procedure underway every evening to ensure our children and staff come back to a safe environment.





BEST YEARS OF THEIR LIVES

By David Tickner, Headmaster at Newcastle School for Boys

At the start of each academic year, I enjoy welcoming boys into the sixth form. An added dimension to this in recent years has been being able to do this in our new sixth form centre.

To my mind, sixth form is one of the most enjoyable stages of any student's educational journey. They are able to enjoy a good deal more independence, although, of course, with this comes additional responsibility. They are able to focus on the subjects that interest and motivate them and in many cases with an eye towards university or a future career.

Since we opened our new sixth form centre in September 2017, our boys have enjoyed its common room and social facilities. It has also brought about a further improvement in academic results underlining the importance of the right environment for our boys to study in.

Although currently close to being full to its capacity

of 100 students, our sixth form is a relatively small one in which, as in other parts of the School, boys are really well known both as learners and as individuals.

Nevertheless, our curriculum is unique in offering not just a broad range of A Level courses - enhanced by our partnership with neighbouring independent girls school, Westfield - but also a number of more practical and vocational courses on which boys have also been very successful. Matching boys to the right courses is a key aspect of sixth form success.

To prepare our sixth formers for life after school, we put a great deal of emphasis on making their experience as relevant as possible. As well as

building character, we encourage them to be outward-looking and to develop a wide portfolio of skills and experiences that will support them at university and in employment.

I look to our sixth formers to carry a great deal of responsibility. There are a number of formal positions to which they can be appointed: prefects, head boys, deputy head boys, heads of houses, team captains that all provide valuable opportunities to develop character and skills.

I also remind all of our sixth formers that whether or not they are appointed to specific positions, they are all leaders and role models in the example they set to the younger boys. This carries inherent expectation for their conduct.

If you would like to find out more about the excellent opportunities our sixth form offers for academic progress and character development, we are holding a live open event online on Thursday 12th November at 6pm. You will be able to register and find out more on our website at www.newcastleschool.co.uk



Delivering progress and character development for boys

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Contact **0191 255 9300** or visit **newcastleschool.co.uk**





GOODBYE SUMMER!

By Simone Niblock, Headteacher, Durham High School for Girls

Summer's gone, day's spent with the grass and sun I don't mind; to pretend I do seems really dumb.

Although this paean (above) to the advent of autumn is hardly on a par with Keats' 'Ode to Autumn'- one of my favourite poems ever -I think these opening lines of the Boo Radley's Brit Pop hit really do resonate. As a middle-aged adult, I spend much of my summer - apart from this one - in Spain, and revel in the Mediterranean sunshine, but I was born and brought up in a part of the English North West, where the euphemisticallynamed 'liquid sunshine' ie rain was ever in evidence.

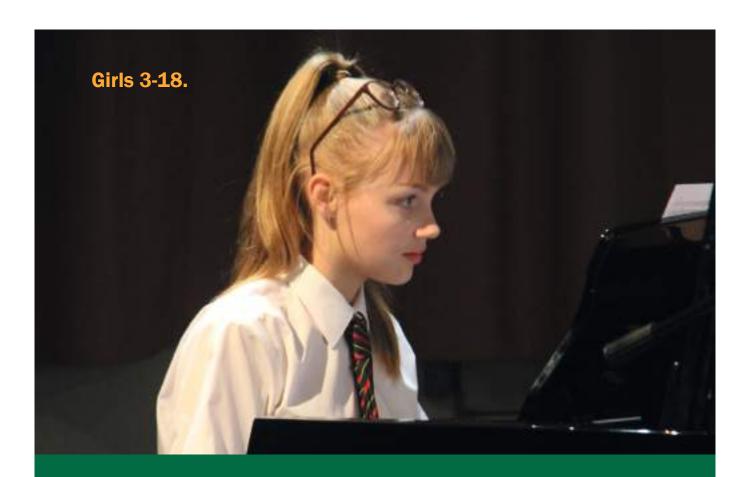
My Mancunian mother's favourite saying was 'It came and it went' and, seemingly, this is how summer sun seemed to me during many days of the long, predominantly grey and rainy summertime of childhood. Therefore, it was never a season to which I particularly looked forward. Autumn, however, as a child, was exciting and distinct; the nip in the air presaged my October birthday and the smells and sounds of Halloween and Bonfire Night. As a so

called 'grown up', I can still take or leave a British summer, but pre half-term October to me is splendid: you can still have the daylight in the morning on the way to work, the air is generally crisp and invigorating, and I can start to put on the central heating in the evening without feeling guilty.

I know that this year, with the Coronavirus ever-present amongst us, there will be no Hallowe'en parties, Trick or Treating or even Bonfire Night in the way we might have done in former years. However within the comforts of our own homes, and within whatever the current guidelines say about how many people we can have in our households, we can still have fun indoors, whilst appreciating the gloriousness of the motley colours of autumn outdoors.

As an honorary North-Easterner, I feel blessed that I am living in one of the most picturesque areas of the country and that the season of 'mellow fruitfulness' is being spent here.

Every day is an Open Day at Durham High School. Call 0191 384 3226 or email enquiries@dhsfg.org.uk to find out more or arrange a visit.



Your first choice for girls' education

Start your journey with us today.

- * Virtual Open Day Friday 9 October
- Virtual Sixth Form Information Evening
 Thursday 22 October
- * **School Tours** w/c Monday 26 October
- * Virtual Open Day Friday 13 November

Get in touch to find out more or register your place for one of these events.

www.dhsfg.org.uk enquiries@dhsfg.org.uk 0191 384 3226



NEWCASTLE HIGH SCHOOL FOR GIRLS EMBEDS INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO LEARNING

The impact of the pandemic on schools is a subject that's been regularly making headlines around the UK. With talk of 'bubbles', A-Level results algorithms and home-schooling, the last few months have been far from easy for pupils, teachers and parents alike.

However, as we embrace the new academic year, one Newcastle school is feeling confident in its ability to adapt to any new challenges that Covid-19 might throw its way.

Staff at Newcastle High School for Girls (NHSG), an independent school that prides itself on delivering an outstanding all-girls' learning and teaching programme, found lockdown an education in its own right.

In autumn 2019, NHSG launched a brand new tech programme designed to create dynamic and flexible educational opportunities for its pupils. When the Government announced, just six months later, that all schools would be temporarily closing, the IT infrastructure and the staff training that were already in place proved invaluable.

Michael Tippett, Head, NHSG, said: "With the majority of pupils required to remain at home during the spring and summer, we were determined to find a way to deliver excellent live teaching remotely. Because the infrastructure was already in place as part of our wider IT strategy, we made it our mission to whole-heartedly embrace any new opportunities that technology presented.

"Consequently, we moved rapidly to a Guided Home Learning programme where we successfully delivered online live lessons for pupils. We advanced the use of technology in teaching and learning at NHSG exponentially.

"Importantly for the girls, it resulted in minimal disruption to their education, enabling daily face to face contact with staff for lessons and pastoral support."

With the new academic year underway, and the pandemic far from over, NHSG's proven success



in Guided Home Learning has been reassuring for both pupils and parents.

Michael Tippett

Michael Tippett added: "In some ways, September has started much like any other, with the usual mix of excitement and nerves although perhaps at a more heightened level. It's been a real joy to see the girls' delight at being back in the classroom with their peers again after so many weeks apart. They also return with the confidence that the School is ready and prepared for every eventuality, including where some girls are in school and some may be required to be at home if self-isolating. We can switch at a moment's notice to a blended teaching programme where we can deliver lessons simultaneously to girls in the classroom and at home.

"The reassurance this provides for pupils is enormous and removes any anxiety they may have had about missing their lessons or school. It's one less thing for them and their parents to worry about"

As a school that channels as much energy into pupil wellbeing as it does academic excellence, NHSG has also found that technology can enable virtual assemblies, school house and charity events, performances and sporting activities to support the

NHSG and wider community. And alongside this, the opportunity for collaborative activities through the use of technology is opening up a vast range of enriching educational experiences.

Michael Tippett said: "A new landscape is unfolding in which the spirit of creativity, innovation and collaboration has been unleashed leading to significant changes and improvements to the way our pupils learn."

For more information and to register for a virtual open morning on Saturday 7th November at Newcastle High School for Girls, please visit newcastlehigh.gdst.net or email: admissions@ncl.gdst.net



THE FIRST OF MANY CHAPTERS

The story of the coronavirus pandemic is becoming one of many chapters.

First we had the presentiment of danger with those of us in the UK watching developments in China and Europe with a sense of mounting inevitability, rather as sunbathers on a beach might stare in awe as a tidal wave approaches.

Next we had the height of the pandemic itself which was genuinely frightening for all of us, particularly those of us with families with elderly relatives. Reports from those who had the virus mixed with fears that the NHS would struggle to cope provided many a sleepless night for all of us.

We had the tedium of lockdown, with most of us confined to our homes for weeks on end. Despite that, there was a sense of camaraderie and creativity which made life bearable in unexpected ways, such as online discos or impromptu Zoom pubs (other video conferencing software is available...)

Then we had the gradual relaxation of restrictions which initially gave hope that a return to normality may be possible soon; these were met with bacchanalian revelry that I fear will have proved ill-founded.

I feel now as I write, with schools having been back a week or two, that we are at the start of a new chapter having ended the previous one on a cliffhanger. On the one hand, schools are fully open with pupils back in class learning in the ways we all missed so much during last term. What has been particularly gratifying at my school is to see how pupils have coped admirably with the restrictions that are in force without compromising the daily joy they find in school life. Old friendships have been renewed, the saga of the exam results faded to a distant memory and the pleasant weather has allowed the resumption of the allowed outdoor pursuits. The sound of leather on willow on the schools cricket pitch is one that has been much missed over the summer.

However, there may yet be a twist in the tale.



Infections are rising, with the famous R rate above one in many areas of the country; the restrictions, so recently relaxed, on meetings both social and business are tightening again. The start of any new term at a school is soon followed by the usual coughs and colds as the weather turns; any routine snuffles have an extra air of menace this year and parents and staff look anxiously on or book tests which are becoming increasingly difficult to obtain.

It's not surprising therefore that the is a degree of trepidation about what the darker winter will bring; all of us will be forced indoors for greater lengths of time making social distancing more difficult. It's a worrying time, but what it brings home to us the importance of understanding the extent of our responsibilities towards each other, and I'm not just talking about schools now. Despite the specious human rights arguments and the paranoid Internet conspiracy theories, common sense mixed with informed evidence on things such as mask wearing will be crucial in getting us through the next few months as safely as we can. The MARK of a Durham School education is that we all display moral integrity, ambition, responsibility and kindness. It's at times like this when those values are tested to the utmost and I'm delighted to see how the pupils and staff are responding to that challenge.

For further information about Durham School, or to arrange a visit, call 0191 731 9270, email admissions@durhamschool.co.uk

FROM THE HEADMASTER'S STUDY...

TONY JACKSON

Headmaster, Barnard Castle School

What was your background prior to joining Barnard Castle School?

I was educated at Bradford Grammar School, before studying Politics and History of the Middle East at Durham University. After I graduated, I spent two years in Sydney working for Macquarie Bank, before a stint playing professional rugby for Valencia, in Spain. When I returned to the UK, I joined Barclays as a Graduate before rising to the position of Relationship Director within the Corporate Bank.

I left banking in 2007 to begin a career in teaching. I received a PGCE from Oxford University, gaining an Oxford Blue in Rugby, before teaching History at Radley College, where I was also a Boarding Housemaster and Head of Careers, as well as a rugby and cricket coach. In 2016, I joined Barnard Castle School (Barney) as Second Master, and was proud to become its tenth Headmaster, in September 2017.

What have been your major achievements at the school?

The achievements of Barney in recent times are as a direct consequence of the teachers and wider ancillary staff who spend every day inspiring, supporting and guiding our young people.

Upon my appointment, we spent a great deal of time clarifying to ourselves on what it was about Barney that makes us stand out and how relevant we are in the 21st Century. This subsequently helped define what it means to be a 'Barnardian' and the expectations placed upon them throughout their Barney journeys.

A focus on character development and preparing children for an uncertain and different future is the purpose of our education. We expect our pupils to work as hard as they can and do as well as they can; academic success will only open a door, it is what they do when they walk through that door that counts.

I would like to think that this has resonated with our community, and consequently we have a more or less full school roll

What positive changes have you seen in education generally and what further changes would you like to see going forward?

The emphasis on the wellbeing of individuals has been a particularly positive change over the past decade.

I would also like to see education on a wider scale



focus on the importance of character development as opposed to simply academic development. I like the saying that "it is our responsibility to prepare our children for the Test of Life not a life of tests", yet we judge schools purely on academic results.

There is some excellent work being done by the Jubilee Centre at the University of Birmingham on this, but I would like to see this at the forefront of our country's educational provision.

How much emphasis do you place on extra curricular activities?

It is in these environments that most life lessons are learned, which is why our activity programme is so varied.

We offer more than 100 activities to our students, which includes a bespoke 'Mind, Body and Soul' programme for Year 7 and 8s. We often find that a number of our pupils create and lead their own activities as well, demonstrating leadership and innovation

What major student achievements have happened in the past 12-18 months?

It is invidious to highlight any particular individuals. We have had students over the past year who have headed off to Oxbridge or been selected to represent their country. It is the small gestures that I value the most; the hand written notes to the cleaning department who are working as hard as ever at this time to keep the school sanitised and open; the foodbank collections and the staggering amounts raised for charity (£33,500 in 2019 alone).

What can prospective parents expect from Barnard Castle School?

They can expect to be known; to have a shared journey with us where we work together to give their child every chance to flourish, arming them with the tools with which to clear the path ahead of them.

What have you got coming up in 2020 and beyond?

There are two main aspects we are focusing on beyond the current COVID-19 situation.

Firstly, we are currently undergoing a review of our curriculum and the shape of the day to ensure we are giving ourselves optimum chance of delivery.

Linked to this is the development of a comprehensive and ambitious vision for Barney through our 'Masterplan'. The first phase of this will see the creation of a Sports Pavilion and Wellbeing Centre, and the redevelopment of our existing boarding houses. We have received some very generous donations and will also provide opportunities for use by the wider community.

How do you relax away from the desk?

I enjoy spending valuable time with my wife, Dawn, who is also a teacher, and our three children, Annabel, Georgina and William, who are all in the Prep School. During the holiday periods, we always look forward to escaping to Bamburgh. I also enjoy watching and playing sport, especially rugby, cricket and golf, and reading books on historical fiction.

Barnard Castle School 01833 696030 www.barnardcastleschool.org.uk



A LUXURIOUS NEW JEWEL FOR NORTHUMBERLAND'S COASTAL CROWN

A stylish new boutique hotel and restaurant is set to bring a fresh wave of luxury to the Northumberland coast.

Nestled in the heart of Alnmouth village, The Whittling House will offer a special kind of laid-back luxury making it a must-visit for those exploring the stunning surroundings.

With 10 blissful bedrooms, an elegant restaurant showcasing the very best local produce and a welcoming bar, day trippers, overnight visitors and locals alike will find it impossible to resist.

A full and extravagant refit, styled by Edinburgh interior designers Ampersand, is currently underway behind the doors of 24-25 Northumberland Street in the village.

The Whittling House is a joint project between renowned North East chef and restaurant owner, Richard Sim, who runs the ever-popular Potted Lobster in Bamburgh, and Kelso-based entrepreneur, Tom Leslie.



MUSICIANS HIT THE HIGH NOTE WITH AERIAL VIDEO

Two North East musicians have teamed up with a local videographer to release an emotive project that promotes the beauty and splendour of the region in music and images.

Dave Whiffin from Tynemouth and Les Watts from Blaydon have written a piece of music entitled Northern Skies which together with drone footage of the area by Graeme Hare provides a fantastic endorsement of the region.

The idea came early in the lockdown stage when the pair decided to create a piece of music together in their respective homes to invoke a sense of space and freedom despite being confined in their immediate surroundings.

Indeed, the video captures the region beautifully from Bamburgh Castle in the north to Tynemouth and Seaton Sluice in the south and across to the Roman Wall and Kielder in the west. The video can be viewed on Youtube.



DUNSTON CRAFT BREWERY RAISES A GLASS TO NEL INVESTMENT SUPPORT

The growth plans of an ambitious North East craft brewery are coming to a head thanks to a five-figure investment from the North East Small Loan Fund supported by The European Regional Development Fund.

The Great North Eastern Brewing Company produces a growing range of hand-crafted cask, keg and bottled beers at its premises in Dunston.

As part of its continuing expansion, the Brewery management team has worked with regional fund management firm NEL Fund Managers to secure a £50,000 investment, which has been used to install a brand-new canning line alongside its existing bottling line.

The Brewery is making the new line available to other North East micro-breweries, meaning that they will no longer have to send their products away from the region to be canned.

The firm expects up to six new jobs to follow as operations expand.

NORTHUMBERLAND PUB CO EXPANDS ITS PORTFOLIO

A North East hospitality group is celebrating a successful summer, after adding a popular restaurant with rooms to its growing portfolio.

The Northumberland Pub Co, which also owns the much-loved Ponteland pub The Blackbird, recently acquired The Northumberland Arms, at Felton.

Since taking over the venue before lockdown, the group has spent more than £70k on renovations and refurbishments to update the former coaching inn, which was originally built in 1820.

Along with giving the building a fresh coat of paint and new decor, the bedrooms have benefitted from new TVs and lighting, while much of the furniture in the bar, garden room and private dining room has been replaced.

The venue, which offers six luxury en-suite rooms, also benefits from a new outdoor dining and drinking space, offering stunning views of the River Coquet and a 16th Century bridge.



Something for Everyone!

Contact General Manager, Peter Smith For more information 0191 4132742 Email: peter.smith@tynesidegolfclub.co.uk









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OUT & ABOUT - GRANTHAM



On arrival at Grantham station I saw the sign "Home of the Woodland Trust", a respected charity to which I applied for a job back in 1993, and I had not visited the town of Grantham since.

It's an East Midlands town through which the Great North Road passed and also the railway since 1850. My journey was on a new LNER Azuma train from Durham, changing at Newark southbound and direct back northbound, although the three compulsory seat reservations were all in a single seat with no window at the end of the carriage. Each time, I moved elsewhere and had a table of four to myself, as like most passengers I prefer a window. Trains to and from were all punctual, and not busy — in fact the lack of cars in the car parks at Durham, Newark and Grantham suggested many car users had taken that mode of transport for their entire journey.

The Stagecoach 1 bus to Lincoln starts from outside the railway station main entrance and travels three miles to the entrance of Belton House, built 1685-8, a National Trust (NT) property since 1984. I approached on foot, seemingly a strange thing to do although the bus is hourly and stops in the estate village with beautiful cottages and a pleasant church. At the time of writing, you have to book online with the NT, and it is always easier to get slots later in the day and stay until closing time. Since the grounds of Belton House were closing unusually three hours early at 1400 for a staff meeting (announcing redundancies, sadly), I just had two hours to explore the formal gardens which gave way eastwards to parkland with follies and ponds and finally a large boating lake and dense woodland paths beyond. I missed the largest adventure playground which the NT has before it was early closing time and I took the bus back into town.

Grantham has two very famous former inhabitants. One of these the town is very comfortable with, that being Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727) the physicist and mathematician, who is commemorated with a park featuring a sculpture of the apple and hand, and a statue outside the Guildhall. Legend has it that the apple fell on his head in Grantham that helped him to discover gravity - not invent it, you will understand! Gravity is also the name of a nightclub in town and the local radio station. The other famous person is the much more controversial Margaret Thatcher, Prime Minister 1979-1990 who was born above a corner shop on North Parade in 1925, which is now the Living Health chiropractic. Unfortunately it was closed for treatments, and there was no statue.

The town museum was closed, and the tall parish church of St. Wulfram which housed a public library as early as 1598. But Notions antiques centre in the High Street was well worth a visit. I found the Angel and Royal hotel closed for refurbishment, once a major coaching inn which fell on hard times when the railway arrived. One of England's oldest hotels dating from 1203, it hosted King John in 1213. The Angel only gained the name "and Royal" in 1866 after a stay by the Prince of Wales. When finished, it will be worth a stay. For my evening meal, I elected for fish and chips at the "Relax" restaurant on Westgate, but I do wish the lady there had refrained from repeatedly calling me "babe". I can just about handle "pet" in the North East, but "babe", I thought, was a step too far!





www.nationalrail.com

For a copy of the UK rail map, extract below, visit www.railmap.org.uk



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MEET THE GM...

TOM ORANGE

General Manager, Hotel Indigo Durham

Did you always envisage a career in the Hotel Industry?

I never thought I would end up in the Hospitality Industry as my ambition as a child was always to be an Airline Pilot! The Hotel industry happened by accident!

Describe your career path thus far?

I actually started working on the first Marriott in the UK (outside London) which was the Metrocentre. I started as a Management trainee before joining their graduate programme. I then went on to becoming a Director of Operations at Gosforth Park Marriott before getting my first GM Job at the Aberdeen Marriott at the age of 29, I was famed as the one of the youngest appointed GMs globally! I then ran various other Hotels within Marriott such as Manchester V&A, Leeds, Hollins Hall and Manchester Airport. I took a career break after 26 years with Marriott to travel and have a well deserved break. After 18 months I decided to come back into the industry and joined Interstate to look after this iconic Hotel.

How have you adapted to working through the pandemic?

Working through the pandemic has been a challenge for all with new standards, training and a complete new way of working but we recently were awarded our Safe to Trade status and a 100% score in our recent IHG audit too! The trick is to remain positive and safe at all times and encourage that within the Team.

What has been your proudest career achievement?

Becoming GM of the year in my first GM role at Aberdeen Marriott.

Tell us about your team?

The team here are simply the best! Each and everyone of them show so much commitment to the Guests and one another that they just work harmoniously together. There is no wonder we are ranked the highest rated Hotel by Tripadvisor in Durham.



What is Hotel Indigo Durham's greatest asset?

The Team of course! Oh and the fantastic building the Hotel occupies, simply stunning!

What are you currently working on?

We are currently working on navigating through these challenging times and trying to get the business back to original levels.

Is there a mantra you aspire to do business by?

Words are words – performance is reality!

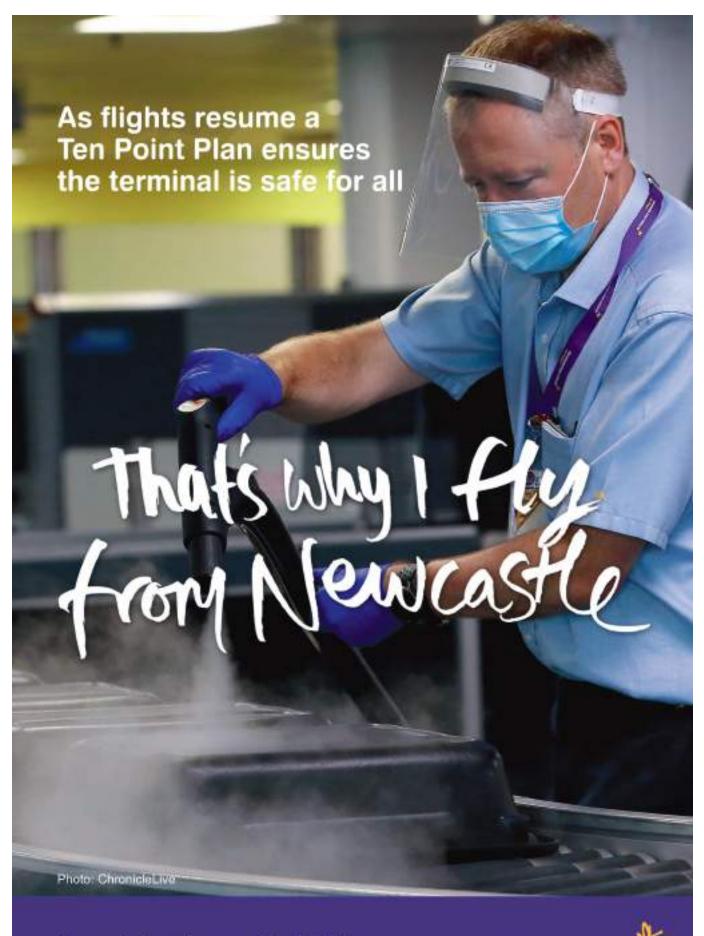
www.ihg.com

Who are your Heroes and Mentors?

My hero would have to be the Queen – she has been through so much but still remains resilient and makes you proud to be British. My mentors would have to be one of my ex bosses Mr Paul Marlow who gave me so many opportunities to shine and polish my career and supported me all the way.

How do you like to unwind?

Spending time with my family and friends with a nice glass of Marlborough Sauvignon blanc. And plenty of holidays!



For more information on our Ten Point Plan and to find out which flights have restarted visit newcastleairport.com Newcastle International











THE ART OF INDIAN FOOD

By Michael Grahamslaw

One has to applaud the team at Rani Indian restaurant in Newcastle. It can't have been easy being hit with lockdown restrictions only weeks after taking the helm at the iconic North East curry house.

Fortunately, thanks to an indomitable spirit, the team have restored the restaurant to its prelockdown highs whilst putting their own stamp on proceedings in the process.

Rani occupies an enviable location towards the bottom of Dean Street with the Tyne Bridge standing triumphantly in the eyeline.

Inside, the spacious dining area lends itself nicely to new social distancing requirements and oozes traditional charm with white linen table cloths, elephant trinkets and ornate gold columns.

It is however the food that really assumes centre stage here. Head Chef, Chand, is a real coup for the restaurant with 25 years of Indian cooking under his belt. Chand has followed the spice trail from Mumbai to Delhi to London and now Newcastle where he crafts authentic Indian and Punjabi specialities.

Our visit happened to be our first family meal out

together since the lockdown and we weren't the only ones out in force with the restaurant boasting a buoyant atmosphere.

Rani's comprehensive menu is a composition of setmeals, North Indian specialities, biryani dishes, old favourites and vegetarian options.

Tandoor dishes are another real trademark so we kicked off with the Pahari murgh tikka and aatishi tandoori king prawns in addition to a sizzling murgh shaslik and a portion of onion bhaji. These proved a stunning selection of starters, exceptionally generous, delicately spiced and shared around with gusto

One real standout at Rani is the emphasis on authenticity with its menu populated by dishes unique to the different regions of India.

For instance, check the butter chicken "Old Delhi style" with rich tomato gravy, cashew nuts and

cream or the "Murgh Village Curry" with onions, tomato and fresh yoghurt.

My son Jack and I chose a similar speciality – the "Murgh Dhabba Curry". This roadside North Indian dish is cooked with onion, tomato, green chilli and cumin powder and was absolutely bursting with flavour.

The girls meanwhile were pleased to find their preferred Murgh Tikka Bhuna in a very agreeable 'old is gold' section sure to satisfy those with traditional tastes.

We supplemented this with rice, a chilli and coriander naan and an excellent 'Gosht Belly Ram' lamb dish – a secret curry invented by Chef Chand himself in 1993. All in all, a smorgasbord of Indian treats all washed down by a river of Cobra lager.

Ordinarily, it is unusual for me to order a dessert in an Indian restaurant (often feeling totally replete) yet we couldn't leave without sampling the speciality Golab Jamun as recommended by our server. For those unfamiliar, this traditional Indian dessert comprises softly fried Indian syrup sponge cakes delicately fragranced with cardamom. Unabashedly calorific maybe, yet this way a real post lockdown treat and the perfect way to round off a totally authentic Indian experience.

Great credit then should go to the Rani team for bouncing back so impressively. Interestingly, the word 'Rani' is derived from the Indian word for Queen in homage to its Queen Street location. Fitting then that this restaurant is a real jewel.

For more information, visit www.raniindianrestaurant.com





NORTH EAST PREMIUM MIXER BRAND FIZZES WITH SUCCESS

The past few months haven't been the best for the hospitality industry and by default, for a great number of their suppliers.

So, it's heartening to see one North East-based company that has continued to grow and thrive.

It's just two years since Alnwick-based Steve Cooper, a former director of innovation at Coca-Cola, joined forces with top artist Alan Walsh and Australian multi award-winning bar owner, Mikey Enright to set up the Artisan Drinks Company.

The business grew out of a chance conversation between the threesome in Mikey's highly acclaimed Sydney bar, The Barbershop, (which just happened to be named the world's top gin bar earlier this year).

The growth of the premium spirit market has, not surprisingly, led to parallel growth in the mixer market and all three believed there was still a gap that they could fill.

Fast forward two years and the Artisan Drinks Company is on an impressive upward trajectory.

Its seven flavours, which it proudly pronounces "were developed in a bar, not a lab", have been well received with the accolades coming thick and fast.

Artisan's Pink Citrus Tonic was voted overall favourite by the 38,000 members of the Craft Gin Club, at the same time the Skinny London Tonic coming out on top in taste tests carried out in The Telegraph and national foodie magazine, Delicious. Steve Cooper

The company believes its success is down to a number of key factors. Firstly, great flavours – think Violet Blossom Tonic, Pink Citrus Tonic, Agave Lemon Tonic, Barrel Smoked Cola and Fiery Ginger Beer as well as a Classic London Tonic and Skinny London Tonic

The fact that the whole range is made with 100 per cent natural flavours has added to their appeal, as does the unforgettable branding created by Alan Walsh — and if you're happening to be passing Monaco, France you can always pop into his

incredible art gallery where an Artisan display has pride of place among the art work.

The company's export market has also continued to rocket, with the product range now being stocked in Australia, Denmark, Italy, France, Czech Republic, Malta and The Netherlands, with strong progress being made to break into the North American market and other major territories.

Closer to home, some of the North East's top bars and restaurants are also now stocking Artisan Drinks, as does Fenwick, with the company also recently doing a deal which will see the mixers in Holland and Barrett stores around the country.

One of Artisan's other recent wins is with the Northumberland Pub Company to supply their sites -the Blackbird in Ponteland and The Northumberland Arms in Felton — with other leading leisure names also poised to sign up.

"It's a very exciting time for Artisan," said Steve.

"We were very clear from the start of what we wanted to achieve and we haven't strayed from that path.

"We wanted to do things differently and raise the bar higher, to bring the same craft quality that's now in the spirit industry to mixers — to enhance the taste and drinking experience.

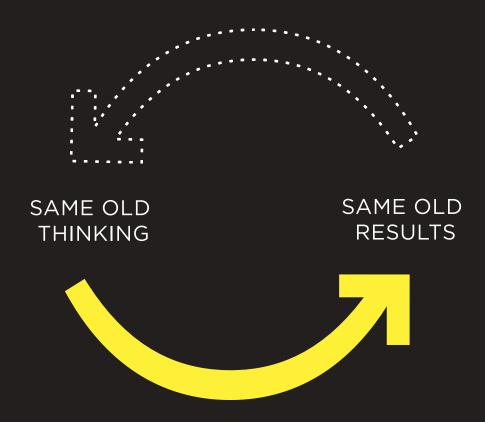
"The combination of our high quality, natural ingredients and the really stand out branding along with our focus on customer service is paying off."



For further information or to order the Artisan Mixers visit www.artisandrinks.com



Doing the same old thing won't work in a post COVID-19 world



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A MEMORABLE RETURN TO THE MINSTER CITY

By Michael Grahamslaw

For many of us this year, dreams of golden beaches and Andalusian sunsets would fade from view. The ongoing coronavirus crisis derailed Summer Holiday plans and many were forced to trade sun and sea for traffic jams and Test Match Special.

This certainly extended to my wife Lisa and I who like nothing more than dusting down our holiday budgie smugglers and picking out our Summer reading at the local Waterstones.

We weren't however too disheartened, as avowed disciples of the 'mini-break', when the chance arose to review Elmbank Hotel and Lodge — a lovely city centre hotel in York.

The hotel is under the umbrella of the Cairn Group – a classy outfit based in Newcastle whose leisure portfolio now extends to over 30 venues across the country.

'Not too far but far enough' — York offers the perfect mini-break escape, easily reachable from Newcastle and packed with things to do. The city holds immense sentimentality value for us, being the scene of many dates whilst 'courting' as I'm sure my kids will shudder upon reading!

Elmbank Hotel and Lodge is located in the city's historic Mickelgate district and is an elegant 19th century townhouse, sympathetically restored to offer a boutique guest experience.

Location wise, you'd struggle to do better with the hotel a mere stone's throw away from the quaint cobbled streets, shops, restaurants and historic attractions which make York such a culturally rich and intriguing city.

For those swerving train travel, ample parking is available on site and we pulled up decidedly impressed. The greeting on arrival was warm and ebullient whilst our guest suite was a haven of comfort and luxury.

Elmbank Hotel and Lodge boasts 62 guest rooms in total which are all tastefully appointed. Many retain the building's original period features with nods to York's equestrian roots and the hotel's vibrant history.

After reclining with a glass of fizz, we rallied ourselves to get out and explore the city. There's certainly

no shortage of things to do with York Minster, The Shambles, York Museum Gardens and the City Walls all within walking distance.

> For when the sightseeing demands a break, the hotel's Peacock Bar and Leetham's Restaurant offer chic spaces to unwind and refuel.

We drank in the atmosphere in the bar area before adjourning to the restaurant for a memorable dining experience, heavy on fresh and seasonal oduce.

Lisa kicked off with the lentil and butternut squash soup of the day which carried a hint of the autumnal whilst I polished off the black pudding bon bon with Bramley Apple Sauce.

Following up, Lisa tackled the crispy skinned half roast chicken with garlic & parsley butter whilst I plumped for the slow cooked pork belly with mashed potato, sauteed greens, roasted apple and onion puree.

The restaurant promises "The Finest of Yorkshire's Cuisine" and certainly delivered this with real aplomb, not to mention some little international inflections.

Nigh on 12 hours later, the restaurant was transformed into a breakfast brasserie serving speciality coffees, pastry baskets, grab & go items and more substantial cooked-to-order dishes which set us up for the road ahead.

Whilst I can't promise they'll serve up 30 degree weather, The Elmbank Hotel and Lodge provided a little ray of sunshine for us in what has proved a challenging, uncertain Summer.

Now heading into the colder months, the hotel offers a fantastic place to escape to for a mini break or a spot of Christmas shopping. Well worth a visit for those travelling from Newcastle and beyond.



WHEN GINGER BEER ISN'T JUST A DRINK

Premium ginger beer from Avenue and Greene.

Have you been into one of the plethora of coffee outlets lately? You know...everything from multinational firms to those funky little outlets. There's no doubting that premium coffee has been a massive success.

And if you go to your local pub, club, restaurant, off-licence or supermarket, you'll find a huge variety of 'designer' gin, rum, orange juice and tonic water etc.

Well, you can now add ginger beer to the list because a Sunderland based company called Avenue and Greene has produced a seriously premium product which has been created with a major focus on tradition and natural ingredients.

It looks really cool too in a super-stylish bottle.

This is also a story of two guys refusing to give up. They had a dream and they followed it.

The driving force behind Avenue and Greene ginger beer are close friends Abu Shama and Kamal Hussain.

"We wanted to create something different...something that was a premium product that tasted fantastic and looked good," said Kamal. "Abu and I have Asian heritage and we were brought up on the health benefits of ginger which have been recognised across Asia and China for centuries. It relieves stress and tension and helps with indigestion. We want to promote the health benefits of our ginger beer as well as making it taste wonderful either as a mixer or on its own. We also wanted it to stand out and be a product that hospitality outlets could offer customers as something that was extra special."

And it's worked. Avenue and Greene is ramping-up its distribution numbers and although most of their current clients are in our region, they're talking to some big hitters when it comes to bars, clubs, restaurants, supermarket chains and health food outlets. We can't name names due to confidentiality agreements, but they are names you'll recognise.

"Things are accelerating after a bit of a false start" said Abu.
"We got off to a flyer and within a few weeks we'd signed up
35 independent bars and restaurants in the region...but then

lockdown arrived. It affected us badly because everything came to a halt. However, on the plus side it allowed us to revaluate our business model and look at our marketing strategy. The Covid-19 lockdown allowed us to concentrate on other areas of the business. We decided to focus on business to consumer rather than concentrate solely on the business to business model. We knew from our product testing and market research, we had a huge following and demand within the consumer market, so we looked at online sales. For example, we have our own Amazon online platform launching very shortly and we have a new website which is due to go on stream next month. We'll also be unveiling some new flavours to sit alongside our ginger beer. There'll be Indian lemonade, sugar free ginger beer and mango and ginger. The Indian lemonade has been very popular during blind tasting sessions, using lemons from the Indian sub-continent to give that special lime taste."

It's all hugely exciting for two guys who five years ago simply decided they'd like leave their day jobs and create a drinks brand without having any prior industry knowledge and experience. It took them eighteen months to source the best raw ginger extract from around the world. And a further twelve months blind testing, and tweaking the flavour from the feedback received from consumers, distributers and businesses. It was a case of scouring the world. They tried North and South America, China, Europe and Africa, but they eventually found what they were looking for in India.

They also had to battle against doubters who kept telling Kamal and Abu that they were wasting their time...and money...and they even had to confront people who were plainly trying to steal their idea, people who came on board with false promises, wasted time and money. All credit too for staying in the North East. It would have been very easy for them to head south to the bright lights of London to launch their ginger beer.

continued...



We had our ups and downs in sourcing logistics, factories who could develop small scale, meeting regulations, funding, trademark and copyright and most importantly seeking professional advice. We feel the North East has huge potential and a support network for start-ups like us, it took us a while to find the right people. There are some really good organisations that can guide you with advice and support. We are from the North East, we are independent. We are Avenue and Greene."

They stayed loyal to this region and we can count ourselves as being fortunate to have the chance of witnessing the launch of not only a new drink, but a new premium drinks brand.

"Yes it's taken us five years to reach this point, but we had to get it right. We've been thankful for a lot of advice along the way and we undertook extensive market research to fine tune everything. We visited regional, national, and international drinks Expo's, farmers markets and a host of bars and restaurants. The feedback was great. Everyone admits that our ginger beer is different has a totally unique flavour. We invite you to have a taste of Avenue and Greene."

And now they're ready to make the move into the mass market. You can have it by itself, or mix it with something a little stronger. Try one of the many cocktails they've developed using gin or rum; alcoholic and non-alcoholic.

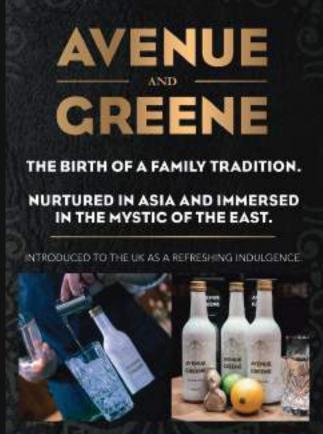
As we said earlier, Abu and Kamal are a great example to anyone who perhaps have an idea and want to give it a go. A lot of us could learn from their experiences.

Follow them on social media on Instagram and Facebook for updates and stories

@avenueandgreene

Good luck to them.

Cheers!





FIND US / CONTACT US: www.avenueandgreene.com



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If you'd like to find out more about Avenue and Greene's ginger beer and their future drinks, get in touch at hello@avenueandgreene.co.uk or contact either Kamal Hussain or Abu Shama, kamal.hussain@avenueandgreene.co.uk abu.shama@avenueandgreene.co.uk







THE WONDER OF WILLI'S

By Michael Grahamslaw

What better way to round off a rare week's holiday than with a lunchtime pit stop at Willi's?

After remaining partially open for takeaway service, post lockdown, the iconic Jesmond coffee house has bounced back with a vibrant new lunch menu to supplement its hugely popular all-day breakfast offering.

Throughout the week, the café remains a social hub for business folk to network whilst of a weekend, a lovely leisurely vibe underpins the place.

It's always a pleasure to see manager, Rod Davies, a genial frontman who was on hand to meet us. We also found a dining area in socially-distanced full swing and were pleased to find a slight makeover in which stunning scenes of the Northumberland Coast now adorn the walls.

Willi's boasts an eclectic mix of dishes including breakfast specialities, doorstop sandwiches, flatbread platters, hot toasties, jacket potatoes and artisan coffees.

Only the freshest ingredients are used, bright colours leap out from the plate and look almost as good as they taste.

After a bracing walk around the town moor earlier that afternoon, I was in the mood for some

lunchtime stodge and found it in the form of Willi's classic club sandwich. This was a layered, three-tiered sensation loaded with chargrilled chicken, smoky bacon, lettuce and tomato and served on toasted white bloomer.

Lisa found more exotic fayre in the Asian steak strip skewers served with flatbread fingers and a garden of side salad featuring fresh chilli, spring onion and cucumber.

Other eye-catching dishes included the tandoori chicken skewers served with mint and chilli yoghurt, the lemon & thyme chicken with watercress, tomato and tzatziki and the smashed avocado on toast which is a real Willi's staple.

Service remains slick and has lost none of the friendly charm which makes this the perfect place to unwind with friends or meet business colleagues.

For those looking for a café a little more homely than the local Starbucks, nestled away in Jesmond's leafy suburbs, Willi's is one of the best in the area.

Added to a sumptuous all-day breakfast menu, these new lunch options bring greater variance and are sure to satisfy its swanky suburbanite clientele.





Visit Willi's at 23-25 Clayton Road, Jesmond NE2 4RP or call (0191) 212 1123 to make a reservation.



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THE FULL ENGLISH - A STAYCATION WITH SPIRIT

By Caroline Preston

Go, don't go, go, and don't go...a frustratingly familiar pattern for travel destinations in 2020.

As Covid-19 continues its rampage plunging people's travel plans into chaos, more and more of us are opting for a staycation. Apart from the horrific impact on the travel industry what better way is there to support our UK businesses than to holiday at home?

Since our pre-quarantine trip to the Champagne region of France this summer I've heard more and more about the recent successes of English wine production. With a family visit to southern England coming up I wanted to know more.

Not many of you will likely have tried a premium English wine, you're unlikely to find them in mainstream supermarkets however this may very likely change soon due to the speed in which the industry is now developing. It seems the chalky south-facing slopes of our southern English counties are ideal wine-growing territory, including wine that in France would be called champagne.

Having recently won a haul of awards in international competitions English wine is now very much in the spotlight, even famous champagne brand Taittinger now own swathes of prime land in Faversham, Kent where 140,000 vines now grow. Taittinger aren't the only interested party buying up land here but roll-on 2023/24 for full maturation and bottles that will be ready to drink.

This trip we'd be basing ourselves in Andover, handy for family and the visits I'd planned to local producers. We booked up at the cosy White Hart Hotel, an inn that is part of Marston's pub chain, basic comfortable rooms and excellent staff at incredible value marstonsinns.co.uk

We set off on a very rainy bank holiday Friday to Andover and en route our first wine producer a'Becketts. This idyllic boutique vineyard sits in rural Littleton Parnell, Wiltshire run by husband and wife team Paul and Lynn Langham. The wine-producing journey for the Langhams started in 1999 when Paul frustrated with corporate life announced wine in hand 'we must be able to do this' and so it began. Their beautiful vineyard now produces a wonderful range of still white wine, rosé, red and a sparkling cuvée which of course I was delighted to sample. Each wine held their own, impressing with flavours that would certainly appeal to the many, I particularly enjoyed the Rosé just bursting with intense strawberry flavours. Available to buy online abecketts.co.uk

Continuing our staycation, Saturday was to be a family day and what better than the next stop, seafront legend Bournemouth, a day at the seaside with sun...we couldn't have timed it better. After relaxing on the stunning beach and losing substantial coinage to the seaside arcades, lunch beckoned, and a seaside tradition of fish and chips at Harry Ramsden's. While enjoying my ultra-light battered cod overlooking the stunning sands I became fascinated by a less familiar view, four magnificent but empty cruise ships anchored in the bay, a sad reminder of the ongoing pandemic but a truly magnificent sight to behold.

Invigorated with sun and sea we headed back to Andover clocking the gorgeous scenery all around. If there was ever a more perfect picture of England it would be those thatched houses and quaint village pubs. As evening arrived we grabbed a quick Pizza Express from the many available options and headed for liquid refreshment. Seeking out something different we headed to the independent micropub The Andover Tap. Sourcing real ales and ciders from in and around Hampshire this place is a delight and after some delicious rather strong flat ciders it was time to retire for the evening.

Our next stop was Hampshire Downs Fine Cider Company, producers of Chalkdown Fine Sparkling Cider with Owner/Director Piotr Nahajski (Peter). Having started this journey some 15 years prior inspired by the romance and hard work of the champagne industry he was inspired to create champagne quality sparkling cider with English apples. The inspiration led to lengthy studies and after perfecting the purest method his light, sparkling cider was born, an elegantly light and zingy apple tart in a bottle. Available online www.chalkdowncider.com/buy-online or at selected retailers including Waitrose and Laithwaites.

It was now time to move on from Andover and so we began heading north towards home and our overnight stop of Cheltenham but first one more quite special visit, a producer of quintessential award-winning English gin.

Longparish, Hampshire is home to The River Test Distillery, as the name suggests it's located on the River Test famed for its 'gin-clear waters'. This place is truly special, a river so clear it's magical, and of course, it was this that was the inspiration that Sarah and John Nelson, newbie distillers, used to launch their business. The river, in fact, runs right through their brand, from the glistening green-tinted bottles to a fishing inspired bottle stopper it's a snapshot of 'that view' in a bottle. What's even better is after just one year the business scooped a prestigious award, Best English London Dry Gin category in 2020 World Gin Awards. This newbie gin infused with handpicked meadowsweet flowers stole the show, definitely one to watch and available to buy online rivertestdistillery.co.uk/shop.

Peeling myself away we now continue to our final destination, the Montpellier District of Cheltenham. Once again luckily bathed in glorious sunshine we checked into the comfort of Cheltenham's Malmaison hotel. The quirky plush surroundings of this former private villa offer fine food and experienced staff making for a very pleasant one night stay. As evening fell we admired the stunningly elegant architecture of this former spa town, home to so many quality eateries. Given a re-visit, I'd be booking into Bistro Blanc by revered French chef Raymond Blanc. The following morning we enjoyed our Mal breakfast, perfect Eggs Benedict and a host of continental sides, delicious. Sadly we'd run out of time and left Cheltenham knowing a return was required with so much left to explore, this was one action-packed fascinating staycation.





THE ARTIST'S YEAR

By Mary Ann Rogers

Suddenly summer is over, the temperature has dropped by about ten degrees, and leaves are being tugged at by the wind, desperate to steal them and carry them away.



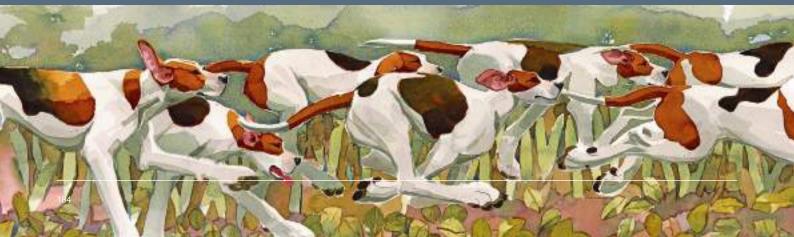
Here at Mary Ann Rogers gallery the staff are back to their normal hours, their children back at school, and everyone round here is busy preparing for the autumn lamb sales, which are no sooner over, than, it seems the tups (rams) are put out into the fields and another year begins!

We are busy designing the Christmas catalogue, which will be stuffed with new print and gift ideas, featuring many of the new paintings from this very strange year, including cattle, oriental poppies, landscapes, guinea fowl and much more. Lockdown created an unusually quiet and peaceful time for painting without the usual interruptions of exhibitions, gallery visitors, trade shows as well as social and family get-togethers which only happened via facetime or zoom!

The daily 'Live' facebook videos have had to be cut back, as life has gradually filled up with work and fun activities. Now we are back to our normal opening hours, its just not possible to stop everything at midday to do painting and chatting online, its quite tricky finding an available day each week when I can do a live, uninterrupted video.

Almost all of the regular Christmas shows and fairs have been either cancelled or redesigned to be outdoors - a format which doesn't work for delicate prints and watercolours in the colder months, as paper is prone to 'waving' or 'cockling' with humidity and dramatic variations in temperature. This will make life much easier this year, but obviously have an effect on sales.











Working out how to run our Christmas open days in a way which keeps not just our customers, but also our staff safe and happy is challenging. With fairly unclear guidelines, we have to use our common sense, and also allow for people to take responsibility for their own safety to an extent. We plan to create a marquee style 'waiting area' for very busy times, with complimentary mulled wine/coffee, along with tables, chairs and rugs in case of very cold weather!

The outdoor swimming will continue throughout the winter again. Already we notice the time spent in the water is getting shorter, and soon we will be dipping in the river here with our woolly hats on, followed by hot drinks and shivering! Before that happens, we plan to get into as many new rivers and lakes as possible, starting with a 'dipathon' in some of the deep pools and ravines of the River Coquet last weekend – that was quite an adventure!

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We are currently offering substantial discounts of 5% when you buy five or more suits and 10% when you buy ten or more suits. This offer also includes shirts, shoes and accessories.



WARKWORTH GOLF CLUB

Founded in 1891 and laid out by the legendary Tom Morris Snr, the current course comprises nine challenging greens, each having two very different tee positions, to provide a true 18 hole experience.

On his way to cover the Open at St. Andrew's, Ben Coley, a member of the SKYTV crew, dropped in unannounced for a round (available on our website, www.warkworth.club). He pronounced the greens superb and described the course as one of the North East 'gems'.

Warkworth is a real 12 month course. It's fast

draining structure means it is rarely closed and we never play on 'winter greens'.

For the competitive player there are men's competitions most Saturdays; the ladies run competitions every Tuesday. The seniors section runs 9-hole sweeps on Wednesday and Friday and has a full programme of matches against other

local clubs. There are regular Junior and Mixed competitions. But you don't have to compete - Warkworth is great for the social golfer and outside competition days, access to the course is easy.







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MORE THAN JUST MENSWEAR

Walton & Sutherland is bringing timeless men's tailoring and modern fashion together in their brand new retail boutique, based in Durham.

Due to open on November 6th, their new boutique, nested in the heart of the beautiful listed building of Ushaw Historic House and Chapels, the venue is a fitting home for the Walton & Sutherland brand and is complemented by the beautiful majestic gardens and ornate architectural surroundings.

Dating back to the 1800's, the Victorian and Georgian architecture and culture alongside Walton & Sutherlands contemporary take on tailoring is a true match made in heaven.

The showroom is set to carry men's formal and casual wear collections, as well as offering their trademark made-to-measure experience for the man who looks for that extra special detail.

Throughout the boutique, you can expect to find a ready-made collection made up of stylish and versatile tailoring in a pallet of warm, natural colours. Clean cut Italian wools and blends of alpaca and cashmere are sure to see you through the fall and into the UK winter.

Once open, not only will customers be able to browse the latest collections, they will also be able to enjoy a personalised service. With luxury at the forefront of Walton & Sutherland, their tailors are trained to create a suit that is not only bespoke to your body, but also to your schedule.

Jack and the team are currently in the midst of putting together their Autumn/Winter 2020 collection, so keep an eye on their website and social media for regular updates and announcements.

www.waltonsutherland.com @waltonandsutherland enquiries@waltonsutherland.com



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Email Julie on admin@thengc.co.uk or telephone 0191 2362498 to discuss an application for membership and arrange a tour of our facilities to see what we have to offer, you will be made most welcome.



BARBER LEADS HAIRDRESSING REVOLUTION WITH LAUNCH OF MEMBERSHIP SERVICE

An internationally-successful barber based in the North East is helping to shape the future of the profession by creating one of the UK's first hairdressing membership services.

Sam Wall has launched 5:AM, a subscription available at a monthly or annual cost, which gives members access to services, products and discounts and offers significant savings against paying face value.

5:AM, which builds on the huge success of subscriptions in other industries, is a first for the North of England and one of the first in the UK. The concept is being hailed as the future of the industry.

Through his membership package, clients will be able to secure priority bookings for sought-after appointments with global award-winner Sam at his base in Hidden Heights Creative Studio, in Gateshead, alongside regular discounts.

Sam, who has also successfully launched his Mr Sam Wall range of hair products, said: "The value of a great haircut or style cannot be underestimated, but the hairdressing industry needs to innovate to make sure they're making that accessible.

"In these very challenging times, we need to make sure we're offering both excellent service and value, and giving our clients the incentive to come to us as often as they would like.

"I created 5:AM so it works for the client and stylist alike. It's great to be at the forefront of this emerging phenomenon in UK hairdressing."

Sam Wall is offering Northern Insight readers a 50% discount on the cost of his annual membership.

5:AM offers members 10% off every cleanse, cut and style service, 20% off all Mr Sam Wall products purchased at Hidden Heights, as well as a free cut on your birthday and a free product on sign-up.

The annual package is priced at £75, but is available to Northern Insight readers for £37.50.

To claim the offer, visit
www.mrsamwall.co.uk and use code
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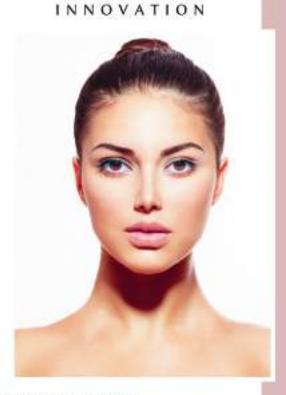
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(Practical training days run consecutively)

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- Contraindications & Side Effects
- Performing Safe Practice
- Recognising & Managing Complications
- Injection Techniques
- Aftercare Protocol
- Live Model Demonstrations

DAY 2 (10am - 4pm)

- Theory Study Question & Answer Session
- Live Model Demonstration
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'LET'S SWEAT PET'

By Sophie Swift

A trend that took off in the USA in the 1970s is making its mark on the North East.

What was originally presented to the western world as a miracle cure for celebrities and American presidents by Bikram Choudhury, Hot Yoga has since evolved here, with the help of Victoria Liles to become a supportive, motivational space that stretches the warmest of welcomes to those of you in the North East.

Hot Yoga Newcastle is owned and run by Victoria Liles and has been since December 2019. Victoria is a one-woman-show and is incredibly passionate about her teaching. She has been doing yoga herself for the last decade and developed an interest for it while travelling in her 20s. She first experienced hot yoga on her third date, with her now husband, when they were living in the Bahamas. They tried it with an electric heater at home and it soon became a habit. Later, when living in Belize, she decided she wanted to expand her love for hot yoga and took part in a teaching course in Manila, to then teach in Belize. After travelling for many years Victoria and her husband felt they wanted to settle and she moved back to where she grew up, the North East. Not long after this, Hot Yoga Newcastle was born, a company offering classes for anyone and everyone that wants to practice Birkram's style of yoga.

Victoria offers professional teaching to guide you through each class; while the infrared heat panels create the perfect environment for you to enhance your practice. The heat involved ranges between 36-38-degrees Celsius; however, the humidity is such that it does not take your breath away. Each class begins with a breathing exercise which establishes a sense of focus and concentration. Once the breathing exercise is complete, Victoria talks the class through 26 postures, and another breathing exercise, to conclude each 90-minute session. Hot Yoga Newcastle offer four different types of class, all following the same 26 postures of Birkram's yoga, however, the heat and speed can differ if you want something more challenging. The classes follow the same structure every time making progress and benefits more obvious to the participant.

I took part in Victoria's Hot Twenty Six class and thoroughly enjoyed myself. I stretched muscles I did not know I had, and sweated as if on a beach in Dubai, but I loved it. The heat was not as offputting as I assumed it would be, and once the first breathing exercise was complete, I was more aware of my sweat than the heat. Although Hot Yoga is a sweaty business, it was a mentally refreshing experience and is something I would definitely try again.

Although yoga has a stigma for being a less strenuous form of exercise, hot yoga has lots of health benefits making it stand out. The heat involved increases the metabolic rate, heart rate and therefore burns fat more easily. The stress of the heat causes the organs in your body to strengthen while lowering your heart rate and blood pressure in general. Like anything, to make real progress, constant work is needed. Yet, with two to three classes per week for six to eight weeks, a physical and mental difference can be noted as you develop your practice.

Victoria is currently in the process of moving to a more permanent studio space in Heaton and is hoping that Hot Yoga Newcastle will be there by the end of the year. She is excited to grow the business further with workshops and classes, with the possibility of focusing on nutrition and overall wellbeing. She feels we need a lifestyle change, as "health is beyond important, especially in the new world in which we find ourselves". With big plans for the future, during a pandemic, changes have to be made. Rather than having 8-10 people per class, there is now only three, and only one class a day. These alterations mean Hot Yoga Newcastle can ensure safety always comes first.

To conclude my conversation with Victoria, I asked her what her top tips on trying hot yoga were. She simply smiled at me and said, "Enjoy it, it is your 90 minutes, just do whatever you are comfortable with, but make sure you enjoy it". Upon experiencing all that Victoria and Hot Yoga Newcastle have to offer, I would thoroughly recommend the experience. Namaste!

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SPRINT YOUR WAY TO A BETTER SHAPE

Research shows less and less people are pushing their bodies through sprinting after the age of 35. Sprinting is one of the most powerful body shaping exercises and is one of the most effective ways to torch body fat.

But sprinting also has many benefits beyond physical ones, such as providing stress relief and building self discipline. Here are some my thoughts on the benefits associated with sprinting.

Builds strength – Sprints are a type of anaerobic exercise, this means they will trigger muscle building helping to define the glutes, hamstrings, and quads shaping your lower half. Your body will become leaner enabling you to run faster and more efficiently.

Works your abs - Many abdominal workouts in the gym are based around resistance training, but very few will give you the same overall results for fitness, explosive strength, speed and the physique that sprinting does.

Shoulder workout - It's important for your arms to have a full range of motion while sprinting this will help shape your shoulders and upper back. Driving your arms also helps to improve your speed and hold your form.

Builds mental toughness – Sprints are a challenging workout, there may be moments in your workout which challenge your ability to finish. It is therefore important to hold your pace and technique. Pushing through the discomfort and finishing your workout will enable you to build your self confidence both in the gym and in everyday life.

Saves time – The short sharp workout of sprints is much more time effective than jogging for an hour. If you are struggling for time, they are a great way to maximize your workout with half the time and probably double the calorie burn depending on the



type and duration of the session. Make sure you warm up before starting your session.

Reduces stress – Sprinting, like other forms of exercise, produces endorphins which are chemicals in the brain which act as natural painkillers and provide you with that feel good factor. The release of endorphins stimulates confidence and self belief, especially post workout.

Improves endurance – Doing sprints is one of the most efficient ways to build your endurance. Training at maximum speed on a sprint will improve your endurance capacity, increase your oxygen uptake and lengthen the time it takes for fatigue to set in. As sprints train the body to burn fat for fuel, it preserves muscle glycogen, prolonging work capacity.

Weight Loss - Sprinting can be an important part of your workout routine. Interval training raises your metabolism and burns fat faster than low intensity workouts. Running as fast as you can, or sprinting, makes you breath harder, so it increases the amount of oxygen in your blood. This strengthens your muscles and raises your metabolism and heart rate. Performing short sprints also raises your heart rate more effectively than low intensity training, supercharging your metabolism which will ultimately help you lose weight.

DAVID'S SUMMING UP

Make yourself feel good, push the boundaries and sprint. Evidence shows the release of endorphins stimulates confidence and self belief making you feel positive.

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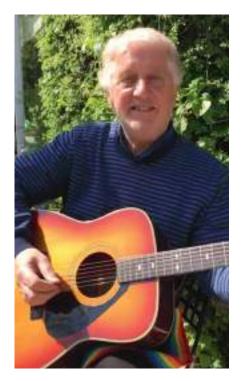
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The lockdown has been recognised as having a detrimental effect on physical and mental health, with the Eat Out to Help Out then adding its (rather enjoyable) contribution. The Government's new strategy 'Tackling obesity: empowering adults and children to live healthier lives' is not overdue. Obesity leads to increase in Type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, at least 12 types of cancer and reduced life expectancy. Is the soup and shakes diet-plan the answer?

About two-thirds of the UK population are estimated to be overweight or living with obesity (BMI of 25 or above). The strategy will be quite a challenge.

Now doctors at the European and International Congress on Obesity have found that people feel the situation is made worse by being called fat or obese. Instead the preferred term is 'overweight' and to refer to 'unhealthy weight' rather than obese, clinically obese, super obese and morbidly obese, all of which produce feelings of disgust.

Considering such terms as harmless and affectionate as in Fats Domino, Fats Waller, Fatty Arbuckle and Fats Jenkins are no longer woke acceptable. The doctors even said that the least favourable descriptions are 'super obese, chubby and fat'.

How will my good friend Roy Chubby Brown deal with this? The name 'Roy Overweight Brown' does not have the same ring to it - and the chant as he appears on stage of 'You fat b£%\$@^d' may not adapt to the change. Chubbs will not give a &%\$@.

Pardoning the language but note that nine Emmys have been won by the American comedy show 'Schitt's Creek'. How will the BBC cope with announcing that on the pre nine o'clock watershed news broadcasts? They will need a new paddle.

The aim of promoting longevity has a warning in Japan where there is no problem with obesity. They have marked their annual holiday, which pays respect to the elderly, by announcing they now have more than 80,000 centagenarians, which means one in every 1,500 Japanese is over 100. This causes real problems with healthcare, pensions and the low percentage of taxpayers, and a sharply falling birth rate. Cynics say we are dealing with this by boatloads of reinforcements arriving across the North Sea.

The deal signed in Washington between Israel and its new Gulf partners, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, should be seen as a historic agreement signifying that it is possible for there to be a real peace between Israel and neighbouring Arab states. There is already cooperation with Egypt and Jordan. Even Saudi Arabia, the epicentre of the Sunni Muslim world may now openly normalise its relationship with Israel.

A Bahraini activist has written that there is a growing awareness that Israel are not foreign colonialists but a sincere and legitimate part of the region.



There is acknowledgement of the historic truth that Christians, Jews and Muslims owe their descent to Abraham and a biblical connection which should abhor lifelong antagonism - although the worst aggression often occurs when family members fight each other.

This makes it all the more exciting that many Gulf Arabs are celebrating the rapprochement with the Jews of Israel. It is time for reconciliation and peaceful co-existence rather than the Palestinian strategy of teaching hate of Israel and the Iranian backed determination to destroy Israel completely.

The fact that the peace is brokered by President Donald Trump and Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, both beleaguered at home, should not detract from the prize of securing peace in the Middle East and the unexpected call for the two to be nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. Some good news at last to come from the period of the pandemic.

The historic recognition of the 80th anniversary of the Battle of Britain and the sacrifice by what Churchill called 'the few' was limited by the covid-19 restriction to the few who were permitted to attend the ceremony at Westminster Abbey. The fly-past by three spitfires and a hurricane was a nostalgic reminder of the sacrifice which prevented invasion of Britain.

It was also reassuring to hear Sir Keir Starmer express the call for Labour to rediscover its patriotism and pride in Britain. However, he still faces challenges from Len McCluskey and the hard left, who hold firm to the Corbyn agenda and will oppose what they see as a more centrist direction, even if it is more attractive to the working class 'red wall' voters lost at the last election.

Is it not time for Amazon as one of the tech giants with Google, Facebook and Apple to deal with online abuse of J K Rowling? Critics of her views on transgender issues have deliberately skewed ratings on her latest book Troubled Blood, her fifth in the Cormoran Strike series, written as Robert Galbraith. The 944 page novel was published recently to critical acclaim.

There was then a barrage of one star reviews on the influential Goodreads.com including from many admitting they had not read it. They were deliberately seeking to downgrade the book because they accuse Rowling of being transphobic.

Multinationals make noises about their intention to clean up the internet. Amazon has the opportunity to deal with trolls. Goodreads with 110 million members, and owned by Amazon, is the world's largest site for book reviews. One should be able to rely on it as being genuine. It states that it will not tolerate abuse of its ratings system; but that is precisely what is being done by Rowling opponents, seeking to vindictively damage her ratings. Amazon needs to act.







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