

NORTHERN

INSIGHT

MARCH 2021

ISSUE 66



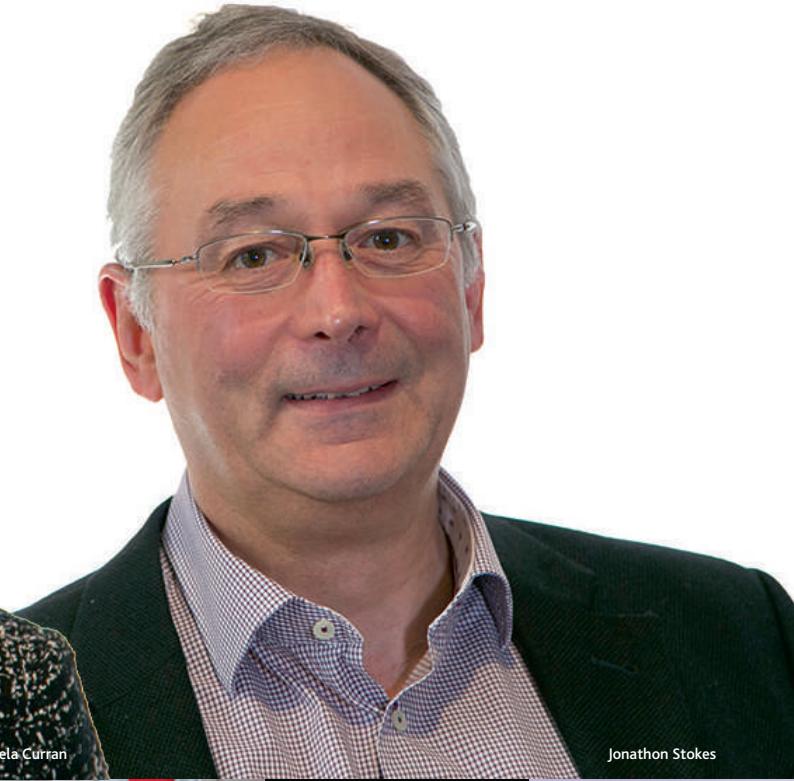
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Angela Curran



Jonathon Stokes



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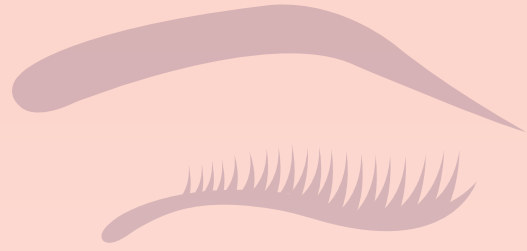
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FOREWORD

Welcome to the March edition of Northern Insight

Lockdown 3.0 has been very tough for many but with Prime Minister Boris Johnson recently providing a roadmap to recovery, hopefully more positive times lie ahead for the regions businesses and economy.

Despite the restrictions, Issue 66 has been a joy to put together and we hope you like another vibrant edition full of success stories, pertinent business advice and great features.

Our cover story focusses on Dunwoodie Architects (DWA), one of the UK's best known healthcare specialists who have expanded into the commercial, retail and leisure sectors.

Look out also for our new 'Construction Corner' and 'Talking Tech and Digital' features as well as another impressive overview of the regions education scene.

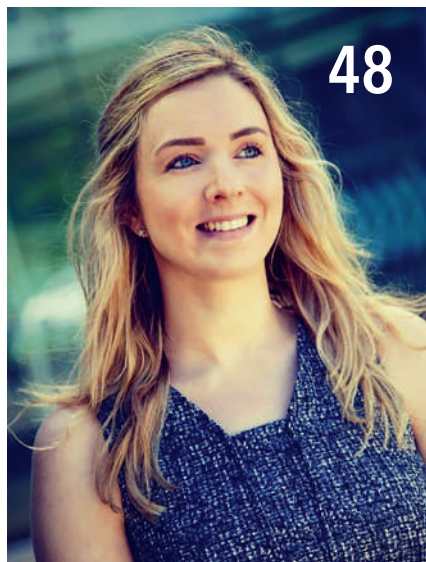
In the months ahead, we look forward to supporting the North East's leisure and hospitality sectors as they reopen and in this issue we look at how many have successfully pivoted their businesses during the pandemic.

Many thanks as ever to all of our loyal clients, contributors and readers.

Stay safe and well. Till next month...

M.J. Grahamslaw

Michael Grahamslaw, Publisher
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SUNDERLAND BUSINESSES INVITED TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT SHOPAPPY

Sunderland businesses can now find out more about a digital high street scheme, set up to help them find more customers.

Sunderland BID, working with Sunderland City Council, has enrolled the city on ShopAppy.com, a website which was created to help independent retailers display and sell their goods virtually.

ShopAppy.com has already been highly successful in towns and cities across the country, mainly down to the convenience it gives shoppers to buy from a number of outlets but have their items delivered from one provider.

The platform has been widely praised for its role in helping to revive high streets and now the hope is more Sunderland businesses will get on board.

Initially, the scheme was launched to complement shopping in person but it has now come into its own because of the restrictions caused by Covid 19.

Sharon Appleby, Head of Business Operations at Sunderland BID, said: "ShopAppy.com has already proved to be a winning formula which is why we are bringing it to Sunderland. It's a fantastic way for people to promote their businesses and showcase what they offer under a nationally recognised brand name."

DARLINGTON BUILDING SOCIETY AWARDED 'OUTSTANDING' RATING

A North East building society has been awarded an "outstanding" rating in a national accreditation programme for its support of employees during the pandemic.

Darlington Building Society has been given a 2-star accreditation by Best Companies, an organisation that specialises in measuring staff engagement and supplies information for The Times '100 Best Companies To Work For' list.

The 2-star rating, limited to employers making an outstanding commitment to creating a happy working atmosphere, was based on a survey of Darlington Building Society staff.

The Society's Chief Executive, Andrew Craddock, said: "This recognition will send a clear message to our people, partners and the regional community that Darlington Building Society understands the importance of workplace engagement and genuinely values its people."



At the beginning of the pandemic, the Society gave staff an assurance that they would be kept on full pay and that there would be no redundancies. The Society adopted an "open for business" policy and continued to invest, with 35 new recruits taken on last year.

The Society also launched a company-wide "Be Kind to Yourself" initiative to encourage employees to take time for themselves and protect their mental health.



COMVEX GROUP CHARGES INTO 2021 WITH EXCLUSIVE DISTRIBUTION DEAL

North East based Comvex Group has unveiled an exciting and innovative new partnership with Reesink Agriculture. The new partnership will see Comvex Compact Tractors, which is part of the Comvex Group, hold exclusive distribution rights across the North East, Cumbria, Yorkshire and Scottish Borders to supply a portfolio of robust and flexible Farmtrac tractors, including the all new FT25G electric tractor.

The innovative electric tractor from leading global tractor producer Farmtrac was launched

in 2020 by Reesink Agriculture, Farmtrac's UK distributor. The zero emissions 4x4 electric tractor, which featured on BBC Countryfile, is the first of its kind in the country.

Capturing the market demand for a faster pace of decarbonisation, the tractor will support the carbon footprint reduction across a range of sectors, alongside capturing the demand to address environmental concerns in agriculture.

Darren Ord Jnr, Managing Director of the Comvex Group, said: "We are delighted to have further diversified our stock portfolio and secured the exclusive distribution rights for Farmtrac products with Reesink Agriculture, in particular the FT25G electric tractor.

The all-electric tractor delivers impressive performance, great value and no emissions."

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**NORTH EAST
YOUTH ALLIANCE**

NORTH EAST YOUTH ALLIANCE LAUNCH WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT OFFER TO CHARITY SECTOR

North East Youth Alliance are about to launch the most comprehensive Workforce Development offer the charity sector has ever seen. There is a huge disconnect within the sector right now, with the pandemic seriously reducing seminars, training and opportunities to connect.

The NEYA Workforce Development Offer will include everything from formal qualifications to outdoor, lunchtime networking sessions. The meaningful opportunities regardless are for everyone whether they are a newly employed practitioner or an experienced senior manager. The offer will support the sector to work together towards being stronger and more sustainable and responsive to young people's needs.

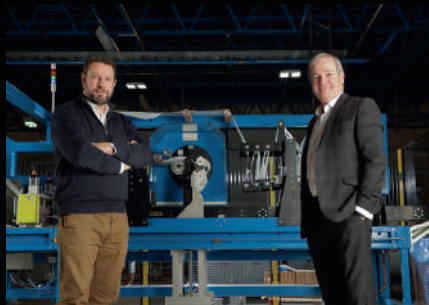
A Workforce Development Offer booklet is about to be sent out to the sector with more information to be found on NEYA's social platforms.

FORUM MEMBERSHIP EXPANDS

The North Tyneside Business Forum has reported an increase in membership and is encouraging more businesses of all sizes and sectors based in North Tyneside to join.

The Forum has been particularly effective helping its members during the pandemic by providing much needed support and information.

It is led by a management group made up of members from various industry sectors in the borough and gives support, connects businesses



WASHINGTON FIRM INVEST £2M IN PPE PRODUCTION

Washington-based PFF Group has created 100 jobs and invested more than £2m in custom-built machines to manufacture Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for frontline NHS staff and social care workers.

The investment follows PFF's appointment by the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) to manufacture 360 million disposable polythene aprons to meet increased demand for PPE.

PFF began manufacturing aprons using existing machinery purchased from international suppliers but has now invested in faster machines manufactured by British machine manufacturer Hanbury-Autogil. The machines are being installed at PFF's manufacturing facility at Washington, where the firm ramps up 24-hour production at the site.

Kenton Robbins, Managing Director of PFF Group said: "We are delighted to be able to use our specialist sector knowledge to ensure the UK's need for PPE can be met during and beyond the pandemic, as well as creating job opportunities in the current challenging climate."



and signposts for growth and development.

Membership is free and open to any business with a trading address in North Tyneside. The Business Forum is supported by North Tyneside Council. Further details can be found on the Forum's social media channels @NTbusinessforum.



DAME MARGARET BARBOUR RECEIVES LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT HONOUR

The Entrepreneurs' Forum has recognised Dame Margaret Barbour's huge contribution to the North East by presenting her with its 2020 Lifetime Achievement award.

Dame Margaret, who successfully reinvented the iconic waxed jacket company following the death of her husband in the late 1960s, was one of several business leaders honoured for demonstrating strong leadership and innovation at the Forum's 17th annual North East Entrepreneurial Awards.

Dame Margaret said: "It is such a great honour to receive this award and to be recognised in this way by the Entrepreneurs' Forum. My daughter Helen and I are so proud of everything Barbour has achieved.

"I believe the key to our success has been that we have always stuck to our founding principles and family values and practiced good housekeeping, leaving money in the business both for the bad times and the good. This has never been more important than today with the current challenges we all face."

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PREMIER ROOF SYSTEMS COMPLETES FIRST ACQUISITION

Premier Roof Systems (PRS) has completed its first acquisition with the purchase of fellow North East-based Classic Windows.

The Jarrow-based company has achieved consistent year on year turnover and EBITDA growth, increasing its market share by expanding its product portfolio and through partnerships with market-leading manufacturers and suppliers.

PRS, which manufactures and supplies conservatory roofs, windows and doors, and serves trade customers and homeowners nationwide, was founded in 2011 by directors Jamie Blackwood and Chris Mullen. Managing director Pouya Bostani joined the company in 2018 as an equal shareholder.

This acquisition builds on an existing relationship between the two businesses

with Classic Windows being a long-standing customer of PRS. It will also create a group of companies, with the acquired business continuing to trade under its recognised Classic Windows name, expanding the manufacturing and distribution capabilities of the two organisations.

Classic Windows, which manufactures windows, doors and conservatories, was established 30 years ago by co-founders Andrew Peart and Joseph Walls. Andrew will act as a consultant to the directors of PRS for 12 months to support the integration of Classic Windows.

Classic Windows operate from a 10,000 sq ft freehold production facility in Stanley, County Durham. Manufacturing will continue at the site alongside PRS' existing 10,000 sq ft operation in South Tyneside.

Advising PRS and helping to secure the funding for the acquisition of Classic Windows was RGCF partner and head of corporate finance, Carl Swansbury, and CF manager Connor McBride.

HANOVER & CITY CV JOIN FORCES TO EXPAND TALENT SOLUTIONS GLOBALLY

Hanover Search Group has entered into a new partnership with specialist career consultancy and outplacement services firm, City CV.

Through the new partnership, the global executive search organisation will expand its capabilities to deliver a more comprehensive service to its client base, while also supporting the further expansion of central London-based City CV in both UK and international markets. Hanover currently offers executive search, leadership solutions and market intelligence services to its global client base.

City CV was founded by Victoria McLean in 2009 and offers a range of outplacement programmes, professional writing and coaching services to

thousands of organisations around the world.

From finance and technology to project management and HR, City CV works with a client list ranging from mid-career-professionals to CEOs.

Hanover, which is headquartered in London and has offices in Europe and North America, operates in a broad spectrum of sectors.

Advising Hanover in the share purchase was head of corporate finance and partner at RG Corporate Finance, Carl Swansbury, and senior manager, Alex Simpson. RG also undertook financial due diligence led by audit and assurance partner Grahame Maughan and director Andrew Cameron.

Alex Simpson senior manager at RGCF, said: "This acquisition continues Hanover's strategy of adding innovative professional services and expertise to its core business, increasing its market share and geographic reach. It also offers a platform for growth for City CV, with access to support infrastructure and investment that will be instrumental for its continued scale-up journey."



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THE REVOLUTION CONTINUES

DUNWOODIE ARCHITECTS (DWA) - DESIGNS ON THE FUTURE

When it comes to designing buildings, you can't beat experience. That's what Dunwoodie Architects has.

The company was founded in 1990. Laura Ruxton became principal director in 2015 having spent her entire career with the firm, and in 2017 she was instrumental in merging with Swift Architects, owned by Peter Swift. They now head-up the team at Dunwoodie Architects.

The company is one of the UK's best known healthcare specialists. In recent years Dunwoodie Architects has continued to grow, expanding into the commercial, retail and leisure sectors amongst others. In the North East they have provided architectural services for North Tyneside General and South Tyneside hospitals, University Hospital Durham, North Tees and Hartlepool hospitals, Sunderland Royal Infirmary and Queen Elizabeth in Gateshead and are currently on site with a new 1000 space multi storey car park at the RVI in Newcastle due for completion soon.

Elsewhere around the country you will find Dunwoodie Architects' work at hospitals in Hull, Scarborough and Sheffield. They also work internationally and have completed work for a hospital in Malta.

But as every business knows, the landscape has changed dramatically over the past twelve months courtesy of the Coronavirus pandemic.

"When everything went into lockdown a year ago, nobody knew what was going to happen or how long we'd be affected," said Laura, "but here we are a year later and nobody really knows how or when it will all finish. Having said that, as a business we've responded really well and are actually working on several Covid related projects."

"Because of Covid restrictions, many businesses and organisations, especially those which are reliant on people having access to buildings, are being forced to take a close look at how they can make facilities accessible in a safe manner," added Peter. "Precautions are likely to stay in place for a long time so we are finding that the need for the way people enter and leave buildings or use certain spaces is having to change."

He's right. We can no longer saunter around shops; many of them have a one way system to reduce the amount of potential contact. How often have you been forced to queue in the rain before allowed inside? Bars and restaurants have had to change their seating areas to allow for social distancing. You invariably find that the entrance and exit areas are now in different places.

"A classic example is the work we've undertaken for the Northumbria NHS Trust regarding Cramlington Hospital, said Laura. "We've redesigned the way patients arrive at the hospital. They will now be immediately met by a Covid safe reception area after which they are then directed to where they need to be. There are route markings, additional signage, newly-arranged waiting areas and a new exit. This work would apply to the majority of hospitals, care homes, health centres, GP surgeries and other healthcare providers because everyone is having to take similar precautions."

Peter also makes a really good point when he says that there's a Covid ripple effect which will be relevant to many businesses and organisations.

"Everywhere that relies on a flow of people will be affected. Railway stations, airports, leisure centres, cinemas, shopping precincts, universities, schools...they all have people moving around them and they will all in some way need to rearrange how that movement takes place. It's hard to imagine that when (if) we return to normal that everything will go back to how it was at the start of March 2020. And what about offices? Many businesses have staff working from home. Will everyone go back to working from an office block? It's highly unlikely."

The flow of people and access is something which Dunwoodie Architects had to consider in another of their success stories.

Peter and Laura designed the Newcastle Stack and Seaburn Stack. These have been two developments which transformed the areas where they've been built. Seaburn Stack is the latest, but there are more Stack developments in the pipeline. They are a clever way of providing a leisure and retail facility in what can sometimes be a tricky place for development & provide a 'meantime' use. They also give people a reason for going somewhere. This could apply to many towns and cities which are being hit hard by retail stores either moving out of town or closing altogether.

"2021 is going to be an interesting year," said Laura.

"A lot of planned developments will need to be either scrapped or redesigned. Many will need to be repurposed. Our High Streets will be changing. The way we work, shop and entertain ourselves is changing. Thankfully, because Dunwoodie Architects has been around for over thirty years, we can point to design ideas which have worked and will be relevant to the new-look 21st Century."

Dunwoodie Architects. They had designs on the past; now they're building for the future.

**Do you have a project that you'd like to discuss?
You can contact Laura, Peter and their team at
Dunwoodie Architects by calling 0191 3758838 or
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“
...The way we work,
shop and entertain
ourselves is changing...
”

THE BIG INTERVIEW

CHRIS MADDOCK

Partner and Head of Employment team at Muckle LLP.

Chris Maddock has reached the top of his profession and is ranked as one of the leading employment lawyers in the North East.

Since joining the commercial law firm Muckle LLP 17 years ago, Chris has progressed from associate solicitor to head of Employment Team and is now an equity partner at the Newcastle-based legal business.

Chris grew up in Neath, South Wales, and had a particular interest in French and German at school. Not knowing what to do at university, but knowing he wanted not to just do languages, Chris enrolled on a Law with French degree at the University of Birmingham, spending a year studying law in France as part of his studies.

While training at a Birmingham law firm after graduating, Chris admits to falling into love with the specialism.

"I found a real fondness for dealing with real people and real issues. In employment law there is often no absolutely right or wrong approach and I enjoyed figuring out which route to take based on understanding clients' motivations and the risks associated with each option."

During his extensive career Chris has looked after clients including international automotive manufacturers and an array of household brands. It was while working with a successful employment team in Milton Keynes that the well-travelled Chris met his wife Penny, a physiotherapist from Morpeth and they began to think about moving North.

Chris said: "It was in the wake of 9/11 and I vividly remember walking on the beach on a visit to Wales and discussing where we wanted to put down real roots. I'd had a very intense two or three months and there was huge pressure.

"Just days after 9/11, I turned 30 and ended up working on my birthday until 4am. My wife had booked a surprise lunch and theatre visit to London for the next day.

"I slept through our lunch appointment, but we made it to the theatre amid all the extra security measures in place. That weekend made us realise that living and working nearer to one of our hometowns would be better for raising a family.

"Moving to Newcastle was an easy decision and the best move I ever made. I now couldn't imagine working anywhere else. I love the region and Muckle is a very forward-thinking business led by a quietly inspirational Managing Partner in Jason Wainwright."

Chris now leads an 11-strong team of employment lawyers at Muckle. Their key clients include NCG, one of the UK's largest college groups, Newcastle Building Society and the FA.

While he has enjoyed great success since joining the leading North East law firm for businesses, there have been many challenging times for employers where Chris and his team's advice has been invaluable.

"Advising on employment matters can be 60% about the legislation and 40% about communication and psychology. There have been many challenges along the way, from the collapse of Northern Rock, when I first became a partner, to dealing with the current pandemic.

"The last year has been an incredibly busy time for our team. We've often needed to react to Government announcements, frequently made at the end of busy working weeks on Friday and Saturday nights.

"There was that crazy period just before the first lockdown when it seemed like we were going into meltdown, and I can remember imploring a client not to start a process to make 450 people

redundant because it was clear something had to give and rumours were circulating of imminent Government announcements.

"By the time I got back home from that meeting, the Government had announced the furlough scheme and the client rang me as I sat in the car on my drive. We both started to cry as we were so overcome with relief!"

COVID-19 and Brexit have undoubtedly led to one of the most challenging and busiest periods Chris and the team have seen, yet they are still making time to help others.

Chris said: "As a team we usually email out a Christmas newsletter which takes some time to produce, but has become a bit of a tradition. It's a themed light-hearted look at the previous 12 months and forward to what might happen in the future. But that just didn't seem right this Christmas and we wanted to do something more tangible to help.

"So instead we emailed all of our clients and contacts and asked them to nominate a charity which was important to them and would benefit from some free employment support on a project during 2021.

"The idea came from me having volunteered a day at Eden Valley Hospital in Carlisle a few years ago when I provided a day of employment advice and training. I also saw the amazing work that they did. It was humbling and so rewarding, easily the most fulfilling working day I've ever had.

"Many charities have been hugely impacted by the pandemic. As Muckle gives each employee two days' volunteering leave per year, and while fitting that in is never easy, each member of our team agreed to commit to using at least one of those days to support a local charity in need. It became our Christmas Pledge.

"We've had a fantastic response and have now selected 12 charities where we think we can make a real difference as they have limited HR capability and the support that we will be able to provide will really help them move forward.

"They've asked us to help with contract and employment policy development, training and strategic initiatives and we are all really looking forward to it. In some small way we hope it can help us all return to some normality in 2021."

www.muckle-llp.com
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“

...Moving to Newcastle was an easy decision and the best move I ever made...

”





Javaad Khalil

CONSTRUCTION CORNER

In a brand new series of features Northern Insight talks to leading figures in the regions construction industry. This month we speak to...

JAAAD KHALIL

Managing Director of Consult North.

Tell us about your career path so far?

My career path thus far has seen my working for both global consultancies and also a small local firms. I started off life working in London within the commercial office. A great place to explore my passion for Architecture, buildings and property in general. The knowledge I gained there are the foundations for my career development. I then moved back to the North east of England in 2015, focusing my time and attention on securing the all-important chartered status with the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors.

You recently launched Consult North. Was this a long held ambition and what services do you offer?

Founding and owning an independent Construction Consultancy has always been an ambition of mine and what better time than now when the industry needs it most. Starting off young in the family business, I've always had an entrepreneurial mindset.

The core services Consult North offer are; Quantity Surveying/Cost Consulting and Project Management

What is the company's USP?

Construction companies are known to be stagnant and stubborn in their ways, we are striving to change this. We aim to be a disruptive consultancy with a management team that will work for its employees and create an environment that encourages innovation and progression within the construction sector. We are selective with our clients and we are selective with our employees, both of which have to reflect our core values - Passion, Pride and Professionalism. We are passionate about Construction, take pride in our work and offer a personable professional service.

Our approach to delivery is simple, we treat the project as if it were our own, our money and our business. We integrate with clients and their businesses to ensure optimal outcomes for them. That's why we are YOUR partners in managing construction projects. But please, don't just take our word for it, speak to our clients.

What changes have you seen in the Construction industry market during the Coronavirus pandemic?

Contrary to other sectors Construction has and will continue to see major growth in the coming months. Operational clients are seeing the pandemic as a window of opportunity to get their refurbishment or expansion projects underway whilst the restrictions have forced them to close. Thus, preventing a closure when restrictions ease and losing out on the post-COVID trade.

Investment driven clients are slowly sweeping up anything that comes to market following the demise of other business' and whilst interest rates are low. We've seen a lot of clients buying low and subsequently adding value to their buildings in ways which projects their asset to the top of the market when life post-COVID commences.

The biggest changes aside from actual construction will be the way in which we do things in this sector. Construction is old fashioned, the technologies available to use are rapidly evolving and the uptake of such will be key for those who wish to survive in this changing landscape.

Tell us the most exciting thing you're currently working on?

Every project is exciting in its own manner. But right this moment it comes down to two projects;

The first of which sees the remodelling of a dis-used Police station into a quirky Hotel, Bar and Bistro and the second is turning a dis-used bank and its vaults into a bar and dining experience.

What's the fondest memory of your career in the industry so far?

Thankfully, I've had my fair share of these.

I always say the true beauty of construction consulting is taking an idea that a client has in their head and systematically going through the design process and managing the delivery on site to one day waking up to a completed building. Most of all, its re-visiting old projects and seeing how the operators or public utilise that particular asset. From occupiers in an office building I've worked on, to travellers staying at hotels I've delivered.

Where do you see yourself in five years time?

A lot changes in five years, just like looking back at where I was five years ago.

My aim is to make Consult North the go to Construction Consultancy firm in the North of England, offering all aspects of Construction Consultancy under one roof for clients.

Since launching at the beginning of January, we have secured appointments on construction projects totalling a value of £40 million. This is a testament to the confidence clients have in Consult North within the Construction industry.

What are your favourite Construction developments in the North East?

The Catalyst – I had the pleasure of working on this scheme on the developing Newcastle Helix site during a previous employment. Undoubtedly, the pinnacle for Design and Construction in the North East. All the awards and accolades it is winning are proof of this.

Spanish City – I love the idea of giving existing buildings a fresh lease of life. A distinct and remarkable refurbishment scheme which is providing an excellent experience to the public.

Hadrian's Tower – A first for Newcastle in terms of tall buildings and quite clearly the gateway for future tall building developments in Newcastle.

Who are your heroes and mentors?

There are too many to name, it's a great time for young individuals in business or looking to get into business due to the wealth of information available at our fingertips. The most successful entrepreneurs are only a few clicks away on our phone, listening to their business advice is invaluable and stories, incredibly inspiring.

When not working, how do you like to relax?

I enjoy going to the gym when restrictions allow followed by a sauna – it's exactly what I need to clear my mind and get ready for the day ahead. Other ways I relax are walking whilst listening to a podcast and reading a couple of chapters from a book before sleeping.

Javaad@ConsultNorth.co.uk

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Living through the coronavirus pandemic has been hugely challenging and for many, things have changed for the worse with fitness levels down and weight going up.

DAVID STOPS LOCKDOWN BEING A WEIGHTY PROBLEM

Working from home has seen our activity severely restricted. Our Managing Director, Mike Gramshaw, hasn't had a round of golf for months and he's seriously missing attending David Fairlamb's regular weekend Beach Bootcamp sessions on Tynemouth Long Sands. So are the other regular 70 or so folk who turn up to burn some calories and keep fit.

David Fairlamb has built a hugely successful fitness business. He's been doing it for over twenty years and has a loyal following which, over the course of a year, extends into four figures. But, Coronavirus has had a massive impact on his business.

"It's been tough. We can't operate as normal," said David. "Part of the fun of our group sessions is the encouragement everybody gives each other. You can't beat the camaraderie of people working together with the same aim...to improve their fitness and keep an eye on their weight. It's not the same when we have to reduce numbers for social distancing or stop altogether."

David Fairlamb Fitness is one of the region's fitness success stories. David has steadily grown his business and continually comes-up with new ideas and innovations. He was one of the first fitness firms in the country to build a floodlit private outdoor gym. Like all his sessions they are suitable for all shapes, sizes and levels of fitness. He prides himself on this philosophy. Carrying tyres, dragging ropes and moving mountains can be achieved by all, with the correct guidance and motivation.

All visits/sessions must be pre booked.

He's also extremely popular as a motivational speaker. He visits companies to speak to staff and clients about fitness, weight loss and health in the workplace particularly focusing on his favourite evil, sugar...or white death as he calls it. Living a refined sugar-free life is his most popular talk.

He was also the first to start Sugar Clean Lean cooking classes, showing clients how to cook healthy natural food and use diet as part of their fitness regime.

However, despite Covid-19 restrictions, David is taking his business onto a higher and better level. "I've never taken more than a week off at a time in over twenty years of running my business. I love it that much. I have a massive and very loyal client base. Consequently I'm pushing forward with new ideas...and...a new base. I'm now situated on the Tyne Tunnel Trading Estate. It means we have more space and the chance to have superior facilities. We're creating three gym areas all of which have a stunning light and sound system.

We're going to be the first fitness centre in the UK with a separate Versa Hub... a specially built room for VersaClimber machines which have three times the calorie burning effects than any other piece of gym equipment. These are machines mimic the natural motion of climbing. It is a 75-degree vertical rail with pedals and handles. There are a number of variables that can be tweaked including handle height, stroke length and resistance. The torching of calorie classes will last 30mins and I can't wait to get started."

There's a sound-proofed room which ensures that noise from one gym session doesn't affect other sessions. It means more classes can take place at the same time. There is private 1-1 gym giving more opportunity for team/group sessions and, assuming we eventually see our tier levels reduced, it means more people can be in the same room and still ensure 2-metre safe distancing.

And there will still be the popular body transformation sessions where clients exercise over a six week period. It works...just ask the Northern Insight editor.

David has embraced Zoom. He's frequently got up to 100 people involved in group sessions over the internet. He's set up an on-line platform which you can access for just £5 per month. It includes indoor and outdoor workouts plus a motivational section with talks about health, fitness, wellbeing and diet. David has written over 800 published articles. He talks you through some of them. There's even a Q&A section.

David is also running ZoomCamp fitness sessions...suitable for the entire family. "Many individuals, couples and families are stuck at home. They stop exercising and slip into eating comfort food. However, if they know a session is coming-up, they'll be raring to go. ZoomCamps will be 9AM on Saturday and 7am on a Wednesday. One of my other trainers will be doing a session at 7am on a Monday concentrating on mobility, strength and mid-section. The price is £5 per household."

In other words, there's no excuse to ignore exercising and keeping fit.

And of course we now know that there really is light at the end of the tunnel. Put April 12th in your fitness diary because that is when gyms should be reopening.

Be limbered-up and ready to leave lockdown with David Fairlamb Fitness.

**The best idea is to go onto David's website....
www.davidfairlambfitness.co.uk and you'll find out all
of the details and news about reopening.**





David Fairlamb in his new specially designed premises.



TOP NORTH EAST IFA SPECIALIST CELEBRATES 50TH ANNIVERSARY

A leading UK specialist Independent Financial Adviser is celebrating its 50th anniversary and announcing the first of several charity initiatives to mark the occasion.

Lowes Financial Management, whose UK headquarters are based in Newcastle upon Tyne, has had no choice but to adjust some of the planned anniversary celebrations due to the COVID-19 pandemic- but still intends to celebrate the milestone accordingly.

Founded by Ken Lowes in a modest office on Pilgrim Street, Newcastle in 1971, the award-winning firm has steadily grown to over 90 people with funds under management of more than £900 million. Further growth is planned for the coming years.

Ian Lowes, MD at Lowes, said: "This is a momentous year for Lowes, and I am immensely proud to be presiding over the company that my father established fifty years ago.

"While I was too young to remember the first office in Pilgrim Street, I am very proud of the business we have become and to be among the most highly regarded IFAs in the profession.

"Not many firms get to celebrate their 50th anniversary. Neither do all firms succeed when the reins are passed from father to son. When Ken stood down and I took over as managing director in 2002, there was naturally considerable pressure on the 'bosses' son' to do well."

Two years after taking over at the helm, Ian Lowes was recognised as being among Britain's 50 Most Influential IFA's by national industry magazine, Professional Adviser. National awards continued to follow for the firm – with Lowes being judged by respected Money Marketing magazine to be amongst the top Investment Advisers in the UK for 10 of the last 11 years.



Ian Lowes,

One major area of development, Ian has personally driven is Lowes Financial Management becoming a nationally recognised authority in structured products. "With typically 40 products being launched each month we have a dedicated team which conducts the analysis and manages the Lowes 'Preferred' lists and our structured product websites," he said.

During the last decade there have been several milestones reached by the firm – including the investment and relocation to a head-office in Fernwood House (Jesmond) in 2016, formerly the national headquarters of Greggs plc; and in 2020 growing to more than 90 personnel and once again being named as Best Investment Adviser in the Money Marketing awards.

To mark 50 years in the business, Lowes has pledged to donate up to £50,000 to charity during 2021. One initiative will involve £150 being donated to a charity whenever a new client comes on board as a result of a referral from an existing client.

If a referral becomes a new client of Lowes- the firm will donate £50 to a chosen charity on behalf of the referrer, £50 on behalf of the new client and a further £50 donation on behalf of Lowes. This will result in a total of £150 per referral to one of five chosen charities – Dementia UK, MacMillan

Cancer Support, Chronicle Sunshine Fund, Plastic Oceans and Blue Cross.

Ian Lowes said: "Lowes has regularly supported a range of charities that make a difference in the wider community. We are keen to invest in the communities in which we operate and those where our clients live and work. With the ongoing impact of the Coronavirus pandemic, this has never been as important as it is now."

In terms of what sets Lowes apart from the competition, he added: "As a leading national IFA, we are obliged to offer the best solutions available to our clients, but we often go one step further and help conceive and create new, improved investments and financial planning solutions for our clients and the wider advice community. Beyond this, we constantly strive to exceed client expectations and doing so leads to a steady flow of referrals.

"Looking ahead to the future, we will continue to grow the business, but we will not be making dramatic changes. You can be sure that we will maintain our family culture and the quality of advice and service for which Lowes is renowned."

More information www.lowes.co.uk

HOW AUTOMATION IS TRANSFORMING AND SUPPORTING BUSINESSES IN 2021

More and more automation is becoming an essential tool for businesses looking to gain a competitive edge, drive efficiencies and move to a modern business technology environment. With budgets and resource tighter than ever, it is vital for organisations of all sizes to revolutionise their clunky, inefficient processes and instead embrace more agile flexible, and productive operations. There is a common misconception that automation is only for large enterprises with budgets to match but there are numerous affordable and easy-to-use automation solutions on the market that can support your process transformation such as drag-and-drop workflow tools, digital forms, chatbots, and more.

SMEs can reap the benefits of automation such as increased efficiency, cost savings and time savings. By automating manual, repetitive, time-consuming tasks team members can instead focus on high-priority, value-add tasks in which their individual skills can truly shine, adding value to other business areas and processes.

Arguably one of the most important elements of an automation solution in the current working environment is that it offers a central location from which processes can be viewed, mapped, and edited. With many still working remotely, this capability unites disparate teams, allowing them to easily manage their operations and processes. Whilst not prioritising automating your processes was understandable in the chaos of 2020, 2021 is the year for improvements.



Justin Short

SMEs are seeing some incredible results from....

Workflow Automation: Advanced workflow allows organisations to transform repetitive, time-consuming, paper-based tasks into editable and sophisticated digital processes using a drag-and-drop interface. This tool is commonly used to transform processes such as employee onboarding (or any starters/movers/leavers process), help desk support, discount approvals, and invoice management.

Chatbots: Chatbots work to reduce the volume of inbound calls and emails that require human

interactions by responding to simple and repetitive customer queries, with a seamless handover to human agents, when required. This offers a consistent and improved customer experience and allows organisations to re-focus their human capital.

Digital documentation: With digital forms and digital document generation organisations can ensure that rich data can be collated onsite and recorded information can be easily transformed into documentation that adheres to branding and contains all mandatory information. This documentation can also be signed on the move using e-signature tools, keeping processes in flow.

So where do you start?

By teaming with a digital transformation partner you can unite your knowledge of your organisation and its processes with the technological knowledge and skillset of automation specialists. At Synergi we use process mapping tools to work with you to understand your existing processes and help you build new, improved processes that address your pain points, improve efficiency, and embrace your company culture.

Synergi's team of automation specialists have transformed the processes of organisations including AV Dawson, Changing Lives, St. Oswald's Hospice, and Winn Solicitors.

To find out how we could help you on your automation journey, visit www.teamsynergi.co.uk, email enquiries@teamsynergi.co.uk, or call 0191 4770365 today.

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SPRING INTO POSITIVITY FOR SUCCESS



Steve Black, also known as Blackie, is well known in the sporting world for his positive mind, fit body approach. More recently he has been using that knowledge to help businesses, individuals and community groups through his latest venture Protean Solutions.

Here, he talks about how this time of year is perfect for re-evaluating performance and stepping up a gear.

"Hello March. The month we can start to look forward to lighter nights, weather improving and spring making everything seem brighter, fresher and more colourful!

"March is a month of reawakening and that makes it perfect for evaluating your own approach to business. The natural levels of our energy return as we leave winter behind. We generally need less sleep and have more positivity as we shed the extra layers of clothing, getting more sunshine and fresh air.

"So how do we use this natural emergence of our senses to improve business performance? My five tips will help you garner that energy, putting into action a rewarding revitalization for the remainder of the year.

"1. Morning. Get up earlier. Start your day with something that refreshes you – a big glass of water, a dog walk, a cold shower...whatever it is for you that wakes up and brings some zing. By doing it earlier, you are giving yourself a head start on the day and fitting in some you time, before you hit the desk.

"2. Change your diet. I'm not talking about dieting or losing weight. I'm talking about eating what is fresh in the stores. What is part of this

new season. Spring greens, vibrant vegetables, naturally sweeter fruit. As the weather warms, our need for food changes and we become drawn to lighter, brighter stuff that gives us a more natural energy than the cozy glow needed through winter.

"3. Take a break. The weather is going to entice you outside, so if it's dry, take a stroll at lunchtime and open your eyes. Step away from the screens for a part of your day to look at the world evolving into another season and appreciate all that comes with it. Spread some kindness on this walk and say hello to your neighbours. We have been long been in lockdown and that human interaction bolsters us all.

"4. Reflection. Review what you love about your job and what drags you down. Can you outsource your least favourite bits, swap with a colleague, do more of what makes you get out of bed in the morning. You don't have to totally re-invent your career to find your mojo again, sometimes just little changes make a huge impact.

"5. Set your goals. There's 10 months left of the year. No scrap that, there's nine months left as by the time we reach December you should be looking ahead anyway! What do your promise yourself you will try to achieve over the rest of this year? Make those goals ambitious but realistic and movable so you can continue to adapt and thrive as we move towards the new normal.

"With these five things you should get that spring back into everything you do and feel more positive. Personally, I am focussing on helping others and have formed an exciting, soon to be revealed alliance to explore how our behaviour impacts on society, on ourselves and on success. There will be more to come on that soon, but if anyone wants to be a case study on what they believe is good behaviour, then please do get in touch!

"I am also dedicating some time to supporting Age UK Northumberland with some videos, and that has refreshed my purpose in the community. Business is one thing but helping those who are vulnerable helps me sleep better knowing I am doing my bit!

"Most of all remember to be the best version of you. Stay safe and God Bless!"

Blackie's portfolio is impressive, with big names including Kevin Keegan, Rob Andrew, Jonny Wilkinson, Jonathan Edwards and Glen McCrory endorsing the former Newcastle Falcons and British Lions rugby coach. He now works with companies including Cascade Cash Management, The John McEnroe Academy and Fairstone to name a few.

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



B U S I N E S S T E C H N O L O G Y

**Welcome to CMYK North East,
your local business technology partner.**



Craig Pratt
c.pratt@cmk-digital.co.uk

Sarah Wharrier
s.wharrier@cmk-digital.co.uk

We are delighted to introduce CMYK North East, the latest regional office in the CMYK Group. Bringing a wealth of industry experience and operating from the heart of Newcastle, we are perfectly situated to deliver exceptional service and support to your business across the North East and Yorkshire.

Founded in 1996, CMYK has over 24 years' experience in providing workplace technologies to all types of clients to improve operational agility. These include:

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- **Visitor & Staff Management Systems (Office & remote worker)**
- **Managed IT & Cloud Solutions**
- **Connectivity, Unified Communications & Mobile Solutions**
- **Specialist IT service like Mac in the Enterprise**

Here at CMYK we are determined to set completely new standards, with the customer at the pinnacle of everything we aim to achieve. Our ethical and client centric approach forms the DNA of our core business values and sets the standard for how we operate. Our Newcastle team are focused on providing leading, cutting edge technologies and solutions to businesses across the North East, whilst always delivering good old fashioned, personal service.

To find out more please contact us...
ask@cmk-digital.co.uk
cmk-digital.co.uk
0191 389 7751

Offices also in Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Glasgow, Warrington and London



The Leaf Grow Founders

MAVEN LEADS £1.75MILLION INVESTMENT IN LEAF GROW

MarTech company redefining marketing services industry secures financing from regional development fund to fuel ambitious growth strategy

Maven Capital Partners has led a £1.75 million investment into marketing technology company, Leaf Grow. The innovative performance marketing services provider secured £1 million through the North East Development Capital Fund, supported by the European Regional Development Fund, and £750,000 through The Future Fund, a government scheme backed by the British Business Bank.

Funding will enable Leaf to invest in its engineering and data science teams, sales & marketing activities and expand its Newcastle operations to deliver on its ambitious expansion plans, whilst continuing to roll out a number of exciting product enhancements.

Newcastle-based Leaf is a technology company that provides end-to-end performance marketing services for ambitious and fast-growing eCommerce businesses looking to scale revenue growth from paid social. Its team of software engineers, data scientists and marketing strategists combine years of data-marketing expertise with proprietary technology (Leaf Grow) to drive unrivalled return on ad spend, for its clients.

By utilising a range of real-time conversion rate signals from client websites, the Leaf Grow

platform enables Leaf's Marketing Engineers to enhance Facebook audience targeting and optimisation, to drive efficiencies on ad spend and improvement in performance, across the entire customer journey, from ad click to purchase.

The business already boasts an impressive client list of blue-chip names and businesses across a number of sectors. These include GoCompare, Footasylum, Mastercard and Bibado.

Founded in 2014 and backed by a strong management team with a range of technical and commercial expertise. CEO Gilbert Corrales has over 15 years of experience in software engineering working for New Futuro, Intel and AvVenta Worldwide. Gilbert and the team have been instrumental in building the concept, designing the product, and delivering the rapid growth experienced to date.

The addressable market for social media advertising and eCommerce is large and growing with social media users, online sales penetration and the number of online businesses continuing to grow exponentially. The global online advertising market is expected to reach \$982bn by 2025 and Leaf is well placed to capitalise on this forecasted growth.

Peter Smith, Investment Associate at Maven, said: "The social ad space is constantly evolving, and organisations must remain dynamic to ensure more than ever that they are engaging customers and creating bespoke experiences to satisfy those customers. Leaf is helping businesses cost-effectively acquire and retain high-value customers in what is an increasingly competitive environment. Gilbert has built an impressive business and we are delighted to support the business as it enters an exciting new phase of growth."

Gilbert Corrales, CEO of Leaf Grow, said: "Leaf has grown significantly in the last two years with very little capital investment. The whole team is excited about what we will achieve with the additional backing from investors and we are really pleased to welcome Maven as part of this round. It is an exciting time for us, and we are experiencing very strong commercial traction from clients all over the globe."

Contact Maven's local team today to access the finance or support your business needs to unlock its growth potential or visit mavencp.com to find out more.

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If your business is in need of funding to help unlock its growth potential, please contact Maven's local investment team on:

E: northeast-enquiries@mavencp.com | T: 0191 731 8590 | funds.mavencp.com/nedcf

GETTING YOUR BUSINESS READY FOR A SALE

Chris Hird, Head of Corporate Finance at Haines Watts North East, discusses all of the crucial considerations when it comes to a business sale.

Selling a business is undoubtedly one of the biggest moments in any business owner's life - it is often the culmination of many years of sacrifice and hard work, by several generations of a family. So, wanting to guarantee the best possible outcomes from the sale is an inevitability.

Taking a pre-emptive approach and preparing your sale strategy in advance is vital. In an ideal world, the planning process would start at least three years before the proposed sale. This gives you the opportunity to gain more confidence and control over the sale, whilst also allowing you the time to prove the financial stability or potential for growth within your business.

Crucially, planning ahead will help you to maximise the value of your business, improving the final outcome for the shareholders. Some of the fundamental aspects to consider when getting your business ready for a sale are as follows...

Removing unnecessary costs

Taking the time to look at the cost base of your business will highlight any unnecessary/discretionary costs which can be removed. This will go a long way when it comes to increasing the profitability of your business, and higher profits typically means higher value.

Even if you're not looking to exit your business, removing these unnecessary costs is good business practice and something I'd always recommend to clients.

Who owns what?

Whether it is leasing agreements, property leases or freehold properties, your assets might not actually be owned by who you think. Often these particular assets are in an individual's name, while the rest of the assets are owned by the company.

If asset ownership is split between different parties, this could give the buyer leeway to lower the price, or worse still, withdraw from the deal altogether. Rectifying this problem at short notice could be costly, so looking into this sooner rather than later could save you any unwanted surprises further down the line.

Protecting your intellectual property

Although less obvious than your tangible assets, trademarks, patents, copyright and 'property of the mind' could well be the most valuable assets your business owns.

Time after time business owners are unaware of the intellectual property they already have. Even the name of your business should be taken advantage



Chris Hird

of and protected by registering it as a trade mark. Failing to own and/or protect, the intellectual property of your business will at best reduce the purchase price of the deal and at the worst could jeopardise it entirely.

Maximising your tax position

Tax can have a huge knock-on effect when it comes to your business sale. But forward planning and ensuring your shareholdings are structured correctly can place you in a much stronger, tax-efficient position.

The variety of tax incentives and reliefs on offer is vast, and it could well be that you are eligible missing out. Making the most of reliefs such as Research and Development tax credits, could unlock trapped cash in your business, improving the health of your balance sheets, and in turn increasing the value of your business in the long-run.

A fundamental part of this, in the case of a limited company is whether the sale is a share sale or a sale of trade and assets. Under the current rules it's usually more tax efficient for a vendor to sell shares, especially if they qualify for Entrepreneurs' Relief. An asset sale is often less tax efficient as (depending on the assets being sold) the company could potentially pay corporation tax on the sale proceeds, and then the individual shareholders could potentially pay personal tax to extract these funds from the company.

Keep in mind that tax is usually payable on any gains made when selling a business – potentially resulting in a very hefty tax bill. However, Entrepreneurs' Relief on a sale of shares can significantly lower your tax liability and is definitely a route worth exploring in the lead up to your sale.

There has been a lot of noise surrounding a potential rise in CGT following an OTS report which recommended doubling the rate in line with income tax. It is impossible to predict when/if such a rise will take place, but it's something you should be aware of given the potential impact it could have.

Building a fit-for-purpose management team

Potential buyers will undoubtedly look into the strength of your senior management team, so building the best team possible will lend you favour in the process of selling.

If you're exiting your business upon the sale, buyers won't want to see all of the expertise and experience leave with you. Making sure your team know all the ins and outs of your strategy and can run the business efficiently without your input, or the buyers, is crucial before your exit.

Are all of shareholders in agreement?

If there are shareholders other than yourself in the business, you need to ensure that they're agreement when it comes to the sale.

A potential fallout between shareholders (which happens more frequently than you might think), could result in someone in your party refusing to sell. One shareholder holding the others to ransom – for even the pettiest of reasons – will cause frustration for you, and the buyer is unlikely to hang around long enough to wait for the problem to be resolved.

Having a shareholders agreement in place now, is an easy way of avoiding this scenario further into the process.

Preparing for due-diligence

Once the sale process has begun, the buyer will typically carry out due diligence, to get a clear picture of what they are acquiring.

Preparing for due diligence is vital, as there is real scope for the price of your business to be chipped down throughout this process. Make sure you have all the correct documentation and that it is all in order, whether it's ensuring your customer and employee contracts are in existence and signed, or checking that all your returns are filed on time.

The value of finding the right advisor

Selling a business is a very specialist area and most business owners will only do it once in their lifetime, so having the right advisor is essential to ensure that the true value of your business is realised.

Working with an expert advisor on the sale of your business can help maximise the ultimate value, offer a strategic direction for your exit plan and can even help you find the right buyer for your business in an effective, discreet and efficient manner.

www.hwca.com

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The Department for International Trade North East are here to help you trade internationally, whether you are exporting for the first time or entering new markets.

Our 'Expanding North East Presence in International Markets' programme has been created to help eligible SMEs in the North East LEP area sell their products and services to overseas markets. This FREE and innovative service provides practical one-to-one support, from local International Trade Advisers. Your International Trade Adviser can help you identify suitable export markets and support business growth overseas by acting as an independent mentor for your business.

To find out more or to arrange an appointment with your local International Trade Adviser contact the North East team at:

Email: northeast@mobile.trade.gov.uk

Tel: 0345 136 0169



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Ryan Grave

RYAN BRINGS NORTHERN SKILLS TO CASCADE

The region's award-winning cash management company, Cascade Cash Management, has created an opportunity for a young person to start a career in the industry and Ryan Grave has jumped at the chance.

The 18 year old from Gateshead completed his A-Levels at Lord Dawson Beamish Academy and took a job at Marks and Spencers to make sure he was going into employment straight away. He always had aspirations for a career in a business and finance capacity though so kept his eyes open for an opportunity.

When he saw the role for an apprentice at Cascade advertised by Northern Skills, Ryan applied and is now delighted to be part of the innovative, pro-active team that help people get the best out of their cash.

Cascade Cash Management is an independent and transparent service created to generate enhanced cash returns and increased depositor protection on deposits through professional cash management. It boasts an online Fintech portal which is the only one of its kind in the UK.

It allows 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. Ryan's role in the office environment involves shadowing the client managers, shadowing who is in the office on the same day as he is during the coronavirus pandemic. He said: "It's a hard time to join a company as everyone is remote working, but we are taking it in turns to do socially distanced days in the office which means I have been able to meet all of the team. They are really lovely, I feel very welcome, and most of all they are all very professional. The first thing I noticed is their positive attitude and the good relationships that they all have with the client base.

"I am working towards my Business Administration qualification through my college studies as part of the Apprenticeship and I have already learnt a lot on the job too. I hope over the next 18 months I'll have enough skills for the team to offer me a full-time permanent role here."

The Cascade team can administer funds through their unique portal on behalf of clients and depositors can use the portal to manage their own savings in one place, with the dedicated support of Cascade. 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.

Cascade's MD, Dr Emma Black, said: "It is important to us at Cascade to be an all welcoming company, giving opportunity and encouraging learning wherever we can. When the opportunity arose to look for an apprentice, Northern Skills were really helpful and seemed to understand the caliber of candidate that we required. We are all delighted to have Ryan join us and we look forward to supporting his journey."

More information on Cascade is available at www.cascade.co.uk

An abstract graphic featuring a large, dark, circular shape in the center, surrounded by a chaotic and vibrant explosion of paint splatters and brushstrokes in various colors including red, yellow, blue, green, and white. The background is solid black.

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ONLINE B2B MARKET PLACE JOINS COMMERCE HOUSE COMMUNITY

Commerce House Business Community in the heart of Middlesbrough has been chosen by forward thinking Smart Sociates as it's new business address.

The online market place is a platform for business services covering a wide range of sectors from marketing, IT, media, communication, computing and much more. Set up by Pascal Pemha, Smart Sociates was created in 2018, when it was developed in conjunction with Teesside University to be a medium between buyers and sellers online.

Since then Pascal has invested in the technology, which is now proving to be ideal for the way the UK is working throughout the current pandemic, with more remote working and the growing trend in outsourcing short term services on a project basis.

Although Pascal and the team also currently work remotely, he is planning a team office for the future, so to sign up as a virtual tenant with Commerce House gives him the solid business address and base he currently needs.

He said: "Our previous tenancy was coming to an end. I had visited Commerce House to attend an event just after I had signed for the previous lease two years ago, so I have been waiting ever since to transfer to the beautiful TS1 building! As a virtual tenant I will be using the postal service and

address, and then once lockdown is lifted I will be using it for hot-desking and meetings, with a view to once we return to normal, securing a 3-4 man office on the premises."

Commerce House is a stunning grade II listed building which comprises of office space, hot-desking and meeting facilities, a business lounge, boardroom available to hire for meetings and virtual tenancy. Christine Huntington, facilities manager, said:

"We support our tenants every need, which at the moment are very varied. We are delighted to welcome Pascal and Smart Sociates to the community, along with his wife Coco and her healthcare business Tees Care.

"It is also great to hear on the back of a tour of the building with me two years ago Pascal was so impressed he contacted me as soon as his lease came to an end to become a virtual tenant with the view to take an office when things resume to some kind of normality, first impressions are so important!"

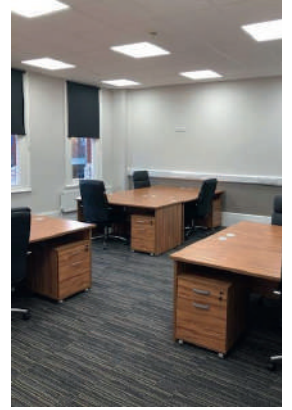
Tees Care specialises in healthcare recruitment and training, where candidates are then placed

in care homes. Coco will be looking to share the office space with Pascal post-pandemic as she delivers her services across Teesside and Durham. A father to two, Pascal lives in Middlesbrough so is keen to keep his families businesses based here. He concluded:

"The platform now has over 2000 businesses offering a range of services. I am currently concentrating on growing that base, so I can enter the next phase of investment drive and build on the technology further. I have recently launched a hiring assistance service where we match the right people to the right project. And I am investing in building out the training part of the platform further to bring inhouse learning to your desktop. I have a number of training providers now onboard and we are looking forward to taking the next step providing an accessible learning environment.

"We can't wait to be operating from Commerce House full time, but for now we are delighted to be onboard with the virtual tenancy!"

More information is available at www.smartsociates.com www.teescare.co.uk and www.commerce-house.co.uk



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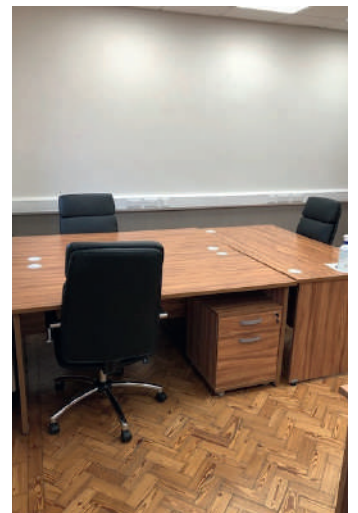
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RMT ACCOUNTANTS' ADVICE HELPS NORTH EAST ENTREPRENEURS ACQUIRE ADAPTIVE LIVING FIRM



(L-R) Mark Adams of Hay & Kilner Law Firm, Stephen Smith of the Depend Group, Michael Cantwell of RMT Accountants and Jane Siddle of NEL Fund Managers

Advice from RMT Accountants & Business Advisors has helped to bring two successful North East adaptive living businesses together under one roof.

Dolphin Stairlifts (North East) and Shape Adaptations have been bought by Stephen and Mary Smith and brought together to form the new Depend Group, which will act as a one stop shop for elderly and disabled people who need assistance to continue living safely and independently in their homes.

The new owners worked with regional fund management firm NEL Fund Managers to secure a £150,000 investment from the North East Growth Capital Fund Supported By The European Regional Development Fund, which they will use to help increase the number of local authorities with which it can work, extend its marketing activity and develop and deliver new products to market.

Corporate finance advice on the transaction was provided by Michael Cantwell and Ayden De Beer of RMT Accountants & Business Advisors, while Mark Adams and Ben Jackson of the corporate team at Hay & Kilner Law Firm in Newcastle provided legal advice to the Depend Group.

Up to four new jobs are expected to be created as the business grows, while Stephen and Mary's son Christopher has joined the business to run the Dolphin side of its operations.

Shape Adaptations was set up in 2007 as a result of Stephen and Mary having to make changes to their own home to meet the mobility and personal needs of their other son James, who uses a wheelchair, and realising there were many other families facing similar situations.

After working collaboratively with Dolphin

Stairlifts, the North East's leading independent supplier of stairlifts and mobility products, on a number of projects, Shape was acquired by Dolphin's owner Bob Lines in 2012, with Stephen continuing to manage Shape's operations ever since.

Based at the Newcastle Airport Industrial Estate, the new overarching business provides bespoke design, build, installation and maintenance services to several local authorities around the North East and North Yorkshire, and currently employs 17 staff.

It also works with a number of private clients, and acts as a designer and supplier of adaptive living products for national operators in the sector.

Stephen Smith says: "Taking advantage of the opportunity to take on both businesses and bring them together made clear sense and gives us a strong platform on which to build their operations by combining the teams' impressive skillsets.

"We know from our own experience the challenges that individuals and facilities face in adapting their living spaces and the bespoke solutions we create in response to individuals' particular situations are based upon many years' practical experience.

"Our focus for growing the business will remain primarily on our home area, and while we already work with a number of local authorities across the North East, there are others that we've not previously had the capacity to target where we know the same needs exist.

"With Bob looking to retire, we examined the different growth funding options available and NEL's early enthusiasm for our proposal made them stand out, with the excellent advice and support we had from both RMT and Hay & Kilner keeping everything moving along as we wanted."

Michael Cantwell, head of corporate finance at RMT Accountants & Business Advisors, adds: "We are delighted to have assisted Stephen and Mary with the MBO by structuring the transaction and securing the required funding.

"The two companies have built up impressive, long-term track records and we're looking forward to supporting them deliver their continued growth strategies."

Jane Siddle, investment executive at NEL Fund Managers, says: "The professional and personal experience that Stephen, Mary and Christopher bring to the business make a powerful combination, and it now has the resources required to continue to develop its presence across the region."

Mark Adams, partner in Hay & Kilner Law Firm's corporate team, adds: "It has been a pleasure to work with the Smith family on realising their long-term business ambitions and helping them on the path towards sustainable commercial success with the combined operation."

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The majority of banks and building societies treat mortgages like a commoditised product, with automated decisions and a computer says yes or no business model (generally determined by your credit score).

For this reason your credit file and the credit score it produces, together with each lenders interpretation of that score, will in most cases determine whether or not you qualify for a mortgage.

Ideally, we would recommend that you speak to a mortgage expert well in advance of any borrowing requirements (even if you are just remortgaging to improve the interest rate) as credit checks will always be carried out. Missed or late payments on any credit commitments, disputes with utility or mobile phone companies, not being listed on the electoral register and taking out payday loans – things which you may perceive as being relatively minor – can all cause problems when it comes to applying for a mortgage.

Quality independent mortgage advice at an early stage will allow the advisor time to work together with you to improve your credit file where necessary. Simple things like registering to vote, ensuring that all addresses and accounts are correctly recorded, taking out a new credit card to build a credit history or even closing old cards which you no longer use can all have a positive impact on your credit score.

Don't despair, however, if you are still struggling to qualify for a mortgage. There are now a growing number of mortgage lenders which take a more human approach and will take the time to fully assess your circumstances and the real

risk of providing you with a mortgage. These are generally not high street lenders and many of these are not available direct to the public.

If you are in any doubt whatsoever, please take expert mortgage advice as early as possible. If you apply directly to a number of different lenders and are told no on each occasion, this can cause irreparable damage to your credit file and make it more difficult to get the mortgage that you need. It is our job as mortgage experts to fully assess your needs and use our in depth knowledge of the various lenders' detailed requirements to find the correct match rather than a scatter gun approach to see who may be able to assist.

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

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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@innovatempl.co.uk or tony@innovatempl.co.uk or call 0191 2843723.

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Paul Hardingham, Director of Innovate Mortgages and Loans

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ENVIRONMENTAL AND SUSTAINABLE INVESTING IN ACTION

Last year we published an article about ESG. It referred to Environment, Social and Governance expressed as a risk factor when investing.

The relevance of ESG is everything to do with sustainability through investment fund managers making a conscious decision to invest in companies that have strong governance, positive social policies and take care regarding their environmental impact, both positive and negative.

The commercial logic is straight forward, better run companies are likely to have a more profitable and sustainable future. The logic of preference is that we are more aware of the fragility of our environment and investing this way will make a difference.

What sets Rutherford Hughes apart is that we apply the ESG risk factor to our proven investment strategies to deliver a fully diversified proposition, managed by ourselves on an ongoing basis in pension, ISA, trust or general investment account.

Investing with a conscience without penalising yourself is a refreshing change and something that is truly gathering a head of steam with new investment money heading to those companies that take account of the ESG factors in running their businesses.

Enhancing this international trend, the UK Government has set ambitious targets for electric cars and for a net zero carbon emission economy by 2050, which will only add to the momentum.

This is good news, and this region is seeing a tangible benefit in that Britishvolt, a start-up battery manufacturer, has chosen the old Blyth power station site to build its new gigawatt factory. It will directly create 3,000 jobs and a further 5,000 in its supply chain. It is to cost £2.6 billion and is the biggest investment in the region since Nissan in 1984.

Another example is Tesla whose share price has increased six-fold in the last year. As you will know, it makes electric cars, although many consider it primarily a battery manufacturer.

So how have the ESG strategies performed, and is there a difference?

Strategy	VA	A	B	C
Standard	25.7%	21.2%	19.3%	16.2%
ESG	25.9%	21.6%	19.6%	16.5%
Investment Association	14.7%	7%	5.4%	3.4%

If we look at 2020, from 1st January to 31st December we have a table comparing our standard strategies with our ESG versions, together with the Investment Association categories they would sit in.

You should be aware that past performance is not a guide to future performance. Capital is at risk. Charges and fees except fund managers' charges are excluded from the performance.

If the concept of sustainable investing together with all that is going



Photo by Thomas Reaumur on Unsplash

on in our environment intrigues you, come and talk to us. We have an excellent record of looking after our clients' best interests and are happy to help you change.

There is no doubt that there is a strong shift towards environmental and sustainable businesses. Your portfolios should reflect this, and indeed mine does. The exciting thing is that investing with a conscience is making sound financial sense too. Our performance proves this.

The world is moving at an increasing pace, this is not the time to be left behind.

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

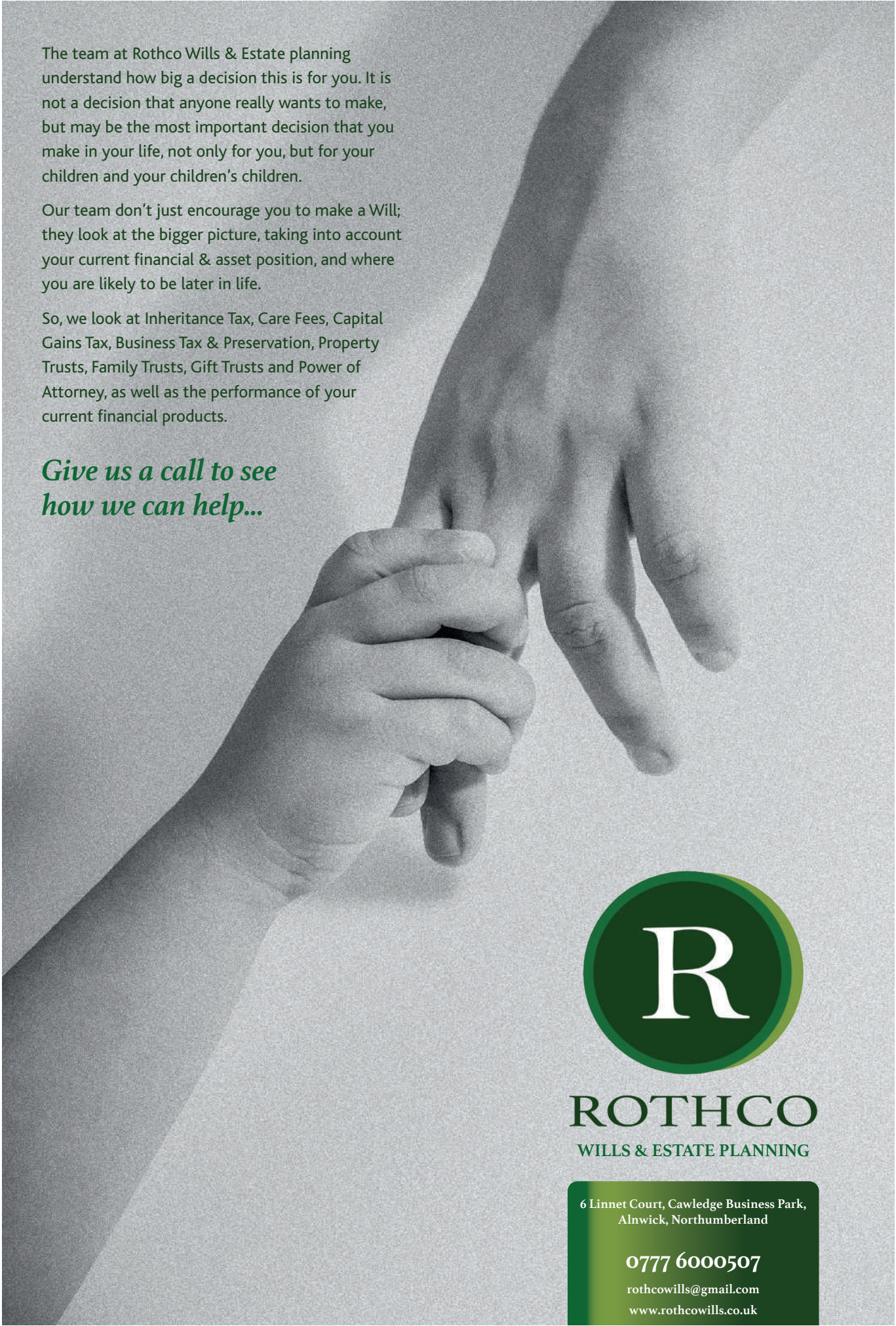
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John O'Sullivan

MHA TAIT WALKER STRENGTHEN ITS CORPORATE FINANCE TEAM

Following a record year in 2020, which saw the team complete over 20 transactions for North East businesses, MHA Tait Walker Corporate Finance has further strengthened its team with the appointment of John O'Sullivan as Corporate Finance Executive.

John joins the team from RSM where he started as a Graduate in 2017 and quickly rose through the ranks to an ACA qualified Assistant Manager in the Audit Team.

Lee Humble, Associate Partner said: "We are delighted to welcome John to the team and look forward to working with him. 2020 was a strange year, book ended by significant levels of activity, with our visibility for Q1 2021 suggesting this momentum is set to continue at least in the short term.

"Covid-19 has clearly disrupted businesses in our region, but we are now seeing the emergence of growth and several "Covid businesses" which have taken off in a short space of time.

"John will be a great addition to the team in a time where capital raising is becoming essential, and when large numbers of management teams are

looking to secure their future via buy out activity."

John added: "I can't wait to get started with the Corporate Finance team at MHA Tait Walker. I have been lucky to have been presented with the opportunity to work within such a forward-thinking team in these challenging times and I look forward to learning as much as possible from my peers.

"My background in audit coupled with my strong commercial awareness will no doubt prove invaluable in what I suspect to be a testing yet dynamic period for the market with the uncertainty around due to Covid-19 and the potential impact of the budget in respect to capital gains tax."

www.taitwalker.co.uk

NEW VAT DEFERRAL PAYMENT SCHEME OPEN FROM 23 FEBRUARY 2021



Do you need to register your business?

Businesses which deferred VAT payments due between 20 March and 30 June 2020 and still have payments to make can:

- Pay the deferred VAT in full, on or before 31 March 2021.
- Join the VAT deferral new payment scheme – the online service is open between 23 February and 21 June 2021.
- Contact HMRC on Telephone: 0800 024 1222 by 30 June if they need extra help to pay.

Businesses may be charged interest or a penalty if they do not:

- Pay the deferred VAT in full by 31 March 2021.
- Opt into the new payment scheme by 21 June 2021.
- Agree extra help to pay with HMRC by 30 June 2021.

The VAT deferral new payment scheme

The VAT deferral new payment scheme will be open from 23 February up to and including 21 June 2021.

Businesses using the VAT annual accounting scheme or the VAT payments on account scheme will be invited to join the new scheme in March 2021.

The VAT deferral new payment scheme lets businesses:

- Pay the deferred VAT in equal instalments, interest free.
- Choose the number of instalments, from 2 to 11 (depending on when the scheme is joined).

The month in which businesses join will determine the maximum number of instalments that can be made.

If Scheme joined by:	Number of instalments available:
19 March 2021	11
21 April 2021	10
19 May 2021	9
21 June 2021	8

Conditions to join

To join this scheme online, businesses must:

- Still have deferred VAT to pay;
- Have a government gateway account;

- Be up to date with all VAT returns from the last 4 years;
- Join the scheme themselves by 21 June 2021 (An agent cannot do this on behalf of businesses);
- Know how much is owed, including the amount originally deferred and how much may have already been paid.
- Pay the first instalment when joining; and
- Be able to pay the deferred VAT by Direct Debit.

If businesses cannot use the online service, for example if they cannot pay by direct debit, it may still be possible to join the scheme using an alternative entry route by contacting the COVID-19 helpline on 0800 024 1222 when the scheme opens.

Error corrections

Businesses may be able to include additional amounts owing resulting from error corrections, which relate to a period covered by the VAT deferral, in the VAT deferral new payment scheme.

Businesses which want to include extra amounts owing resulting from error corrections, which relate to a period covered by the VAT deferral, need to contact the COVID-19 helpline on 0800 024 1222 after both of the following have happened:

- HMRC have processed the error correction; and
- A statement of account confirming the balance has been received from HMRC.

It is therefore essential that businesses which want to include error correction amounts owing in the VAT deferral new payment scheme correct errors as soon as possible and before joining the scheme. Additional amounts owing cannot be included after a business has joined the scheme and any errors corrections notified after 31 March 2021 cannot be included in the scheme.

Businesses which join the scheme can still have a time to pay arrangement for other HMRC debts and outstanding tax.

For further advice, including support around correcting errors and when to join the scheme please contact:

Hydeam Sulton, hydeam.sulton@taitwalker.co.uk

Louise Phillipps, louise.phillipps@taitwalker.co.uk

Ryan Griffiths, ryan.griffiths@taitwalker.co.uk

www.taitwalker.co.uk



TIER ONE CAPITAL WEALTH ADVISER NAMED ONE OF THE UK'S BEST

Senior Wealth Adviser Michael Carrick, from Newcastle-based wealth management and property lending specialists Tier One Capital, has been named as one of the UK's top ranked leading financial professionals and advisers.

Michael, who has been a financial adviser and wealth management expert for more than 30 years, appears in the latest VouchedFor 2021 guide to the UK's top rated financial advisers, compiled using feedback from clients.

VouchedFor is the UK's leading ratings and review website for financial professionals. The website verifies each client review using a combination of an algorithm and manual investigations in order to prevent advisers only accepting positive reviews.

Michael scored an impressive 4.9 out of 5 based on client reviews received since October 2019, when he became Senior Wealth Adviser at Tier One following the company's acquisition of Carrick Financial Management.

Michael is highly qualified with Chartered Insurance Institution qualifications covering investments, pensions, long-term care and trusts. He commented: "I am immensely proud to be included in the guide and feel honoured that our clients value our advice and trustworthiness."



IMH SECURES SIX-FIGURE INVESTMENT

Middlesbrough-based specialist hydraulic engineering firm Industrial and Marine Hydraulics Ltd (IMH) has secured a £250,000 loan from NPIF - FW Capital Debt Finance, backed by CBILS and part of the Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund.

Founded in 1983 by hydraulic engineer Paul Griffiths MBE, who was awarded an MBE for services to Engineering Skills and Apprenticeships in Teesside, family-run IMH has steadily expanded into a global industry leader. The business, with Paul's son James Griffiths now in the role of managing director, has completed major projects worldwide, including the design and installation of the Boston Flood Defence Barrier, one of the largest barriers of its kind in the UK.

Funding from NPIF - FW Capital will provide working capital amidst potential delays to projects caused by the pandemic, whilst also safeguarding jobs in the business. In addition to solving immediate business challenges, this investment will aid the business as it prepares to bounce back and regenerate its long-term growth strategy.

IMH offers services across design, manufacturing, installation, commissioning, maintenance and repairs, as well as component supplies and training. The company has extensive experience in sectors including oil and gas, marine, energy, infrastructure, manufacturing and automotive.

LAW FIRM MARKS 125 YEARS IN BUSINESS

Law firm Sintons is marking its 125th anniversary.

Since its foundation in 1896, Sintons has grown to become one of the leading law firms in the North of England with a client base which extends across the whole UK.

Sintons has become known as a key advisor to businesses and individuals acting on major, complex matters, regionally, nationally and internationally.

In many of its practice areas, including licensing, healthcare, private client

and neurotrauma, Sintons is regarded as one of the UK's leading specialist advisors.

Testament to the quality of service provided is the fact that many of the firm's clients have been with Sintons for decades, with the firm routinely being trusted to advise multiple generations of families and business owners.

Now, in its 125th year, and despite the ongoing challenges being presented by the pandemic, Sintons remains confident in its future.

Christopher Welch, Managing Partner of Sintons, said: "We are very proud of the reputation we have built over the past 125 years, which has seen us become known on a national scale as a law firm of the highest capability which is absolutely dedicated to its clients."



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M&A OUTLOOK FOR 2021

Despite the ongoing economic climate and emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, the M&A market in 2020 remained strong.

The start of 2020 saw an increase in M&A activity as most shareholders and management teams were bullish about the year, following the outcome of the General Election, clarity that emerged regarding Brexit and the anticipated changes that were speculated to be announced in the Spring Budget.

When COVID-19 emerged and led to far ranging disruption, deal activity largely stalled as parties took stock of the business impact. The stalling of the deals market was short lived, as UK businesses have proved to be resilient with sectors such as IT services, healthcare, technology and software and e-commerce being winners. This was evidenced by the Hut Group, a leading e-commerce platform listing on the London Stock Exchange in September 2020 and being placed straight into the FTSE 100 with a market capitalisation of £5.4bn.

As the market readjusted to the immediate impact of Covid there were also a number of transactions in the North East market in the second half of 2020 when the deals market continued to push on and showed great resilience. Transactions included Livingbridge's investment in e-commerce platform Visualsoft, the sale of NBS to Byggfakta Group, and the management buyout of eQuality Solutions, a provider of assistive technology equipment for students with disabilities.

Going into 2021, the deals market has remained buoyant driven by the upcoming Budget announcement on 3 March 2021. In the short term, this has led to some accelerated sale processes where vendors are seeking to transact before any potential changes to taxation legislation are announced by the Chancellor in the Spring Budget. At the time of writing, the Spring Budget has not yet taken place.

Looking beyond the Budget date, we expect the M&A outlook to remain strong for the remainder of the year driven by high liquidity among both private equity funders and corporate buyers.



Sahil Nayyar

Many equity funders raised new capital pre pandemic which means there is a large amount of capital looking for a home, making it an ideal time to consider equity funding given equity terms are highly competitive.

With the availability of large pools of capital and equity funding, interest in resilient sectors continues to accelerate despite the economic unrest, largely due to these businesses continuing to trade successfully during difficult economic conditions in 2020. Investors are still keen to support businesses with the need for working capital funding, development and growth capital, and funding for businesses to pursue acquisitions to accelerate market share gain.

Cavu CF had a very busy 2020 advising on a number of transactions including; 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), advising LDC on the investment in Connect Health, advising a mid-market private equity funder on a bolt-on acquisition and advising Ladhur Group on the acquisition of Sir John Fitzgerald.

2021 has also started extremely well for Cavu with the completion of a £10m investment into high growth e-commerce business Bazaar Group from Comhar Capital which will enable the acceleration of international growth plans.

We expect IT services, healthcare, technology, software and e-commerce to remain strong sectors for M&A and as the impact of the pandemic recedes during 2021, more normal levels of M&A activity to resume in other sectors. We look forward to continuing to support ambitious businesses and management teams throughout 2021 in what promises to be another busy year for M&A.

www.cavucf.com

ENTREPRENEURS' FORUM WELCOMES ITS EIGHTH CORPORATE PARTNER

The Entrepreneurs' Forum has welcomed a new corporate partner, taking the number of businesses it is partnered with to eight.

Research and development tax credits expert Lumo is the latest organisation to become a corporate partner of the Forum, joining Brewin Dolphin, Diamond Group, Encore Group, Hilton Newcastle Gateshead, Narrative, Qrious and Ward Hadaway.

As corporate partner, Lumo will use its expertise to support Forum members and other entrepreneurial businesses to gain the necessary competence to grow their businesses.

The first of this dedicated support will be delivered March 4th in a member-only webinar focused on business innovation and evolution.

The event, delivered in collaboration with Narrative, will see Lumo explore the options available to innovative businesses looking to fund their futures through R&D tax credits.

Joanne Warren, managing director of Annfield Plain-based Lumo Tax, said: "The team at Lumo are really looking forward to working closely with the Entrepreneurs' Forum and

its members. We feel very lucky to have the opportunity to become a corporate partner and excited about the future of being involved with such a fantastic business support network."

Jonathan Lamb, the Forum's chief executive, said: "We are delighted to welcome Lumo as a corporate partner of the Forum.

"The North East is becoming a hotbed of innovation, with businesses from the Tyne to the Tees developing products and services that solve the challenges of the future.

"Funding and investment will be key in many of these business' growth journeys and Lumo's knowledge and expertise of R&D tax credits will play a crucial role in assisting these businesses to continue to innovate and grow."

Founded in 2002, the Entrepreneurs' Forum brings together North East business owners to share experience and help each other grow their companies faster.

www.entrepreneursforum.net



Joanne Warren

YOUR FIRST STEP TO AN R&D TAX CLAIM

Lumo works in close partnership with businesses, helping them understand and capitalise on R&D credits to both find and fund their futures.

WHAT IS R&D?

Research and development (R&D) tax credits are a government tax relief that rewards innovative UK companies.

Research & Development tax credit relief is on average 33p per £1 of all qualifying costs. With each claim different to the next we are here to help you along the way.

From starting a Research & Development tax claim to receiving money in your bank, this can be completed in as little as 6 weeks.

01207 460616 info@lumo.tax



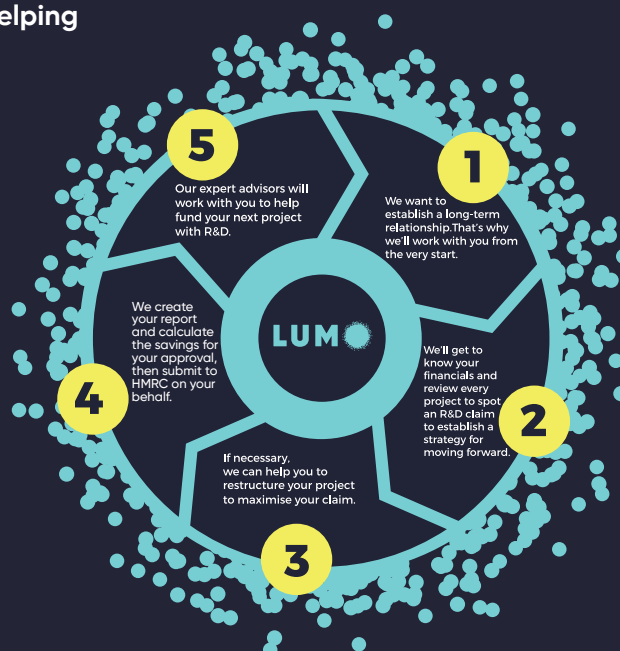
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SIMPSONS MALT COMPLETES ACQUISITION OF WELL-KNOWN SCOTTISH GRAIN MERCHANT WITH SUPPORT FROM UNW

Newcastle-based chartered accountancy and business advisory firm UNW has recently supported Simpsons Malt, a fifth-generation family malting and agricultural merchanting business headquartered in Berwick-upon-Tweed, on its acquisition of the grain merchanting business of W.N. Lindsay Ltd, Scotland's leading independent grain merchant with a history dating back to 1864.

The acquisition sees Simpsons Malt, the largest independent maltster in the UK, operate four of its stores in Scotland within a new subsidiary company.

The four stores, which are situated at Gladsmuir in East Lothian, Stracathro in Angus, Keith in Morayshire, and Sidlaw in Perthshire, will provide more than 200,000 tonnes of extra in-house grain storage, enhancing traceability and sustainability for both the grower and end user.

The UNW team have long standing relationships with Simpsons Malt and provided tax advice and financial due diligence for the transaction, which completed at the end of January 2021.

Tim McCreath, Managing Director of Simpsons Malt, said: "W.N. Lindsay Ltd is a long-established and highly respected family business with an excellent reputation in Scottish and UK agriculture and we are delighted to have acquired its grain merchanting business. This combination provides a strategic opportunity to further secure our

malting barley supply chain, as well as to increase our product and service offering to our growers. "W.N. Lindsay Ltd's people and infrastructure will complement our own and, together with our ongoing investment in business systems and processes, this acquisition is a positive step for the entire cereal and malt supply chain."

UNW's team was led by David Ward (Corporate Tax Partner) and Paul Kaiser (Corporate Finance Partner), alongside Tim McElwaine (Tax Senior Manager); Hayley Deeming (Tax Manager); Stephanie Davidson (Corporate Finance Senior Manager); and Mohammed Miah (Corporate Finance Executive).

Reflecting on the support received from UNW, Graeme Hogg, Finance Director at Simpsons Malt said: "I have known and worked with David Ward and Tim McElwaine for many years and knew that they would add value as part of our 'deal team.' It's safe to say that their work alongside Paul Kaiser and the UNW Corporate Finance team

didn't disappoint. We were thoroughly impressed with their proactive and pragmatic approach together with the quality of advice available within the firm."

David Ward, Corporate Tax Partner at UNW added: "We are delighted to have supported Simpsons Malt on this important strategic transaction. It was a pleasure to support both Tim and Graeme throughout the process and to have been involved in helping them fulfil a long-term ambition with the acquisition of W. N. Lindsay Ltd's grain merchanting business.

"The deal is a key part of their current strategy, and we look forward to seeing their continued growth in the future."

Legal advice to Simpsons Malt was provided by Matthew Walsh and Sara Worsick at Muckle LLP.

For more information please visit:
www.unw.co.uk

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We are incredibly proud of our close connections with the community.



I started my early career in Personal Injury work in 2002, before joining Watson Woodhouse in 2006 where I qualified as a solicitor in 2008.

I was drawn to the firm's culture and values; Watson Woodhouse has for 30 years upheld the ethos as the "champion of the people" and will continue to do so. We are incredibly proud of our close connections with the community through our legal aid work. We are determined to ensure that everyone no matter their financial standing, should have access to high quality legal advice. This passion to really help some of the most disadvantaged people across the region was stand out for me.

As Head of Civil Litigation, I manage and develop my team to provide effective and efficient advice over a wide range of legal services including work in Personal Injury; CICA; Inquests; Actions Against Public Authorities; Housing; Employment; Human Rights; Breach of Privacy/Misuse of Private Information; Defamation and more. The Pandemic has brought with it some incredibly challenging times for everyone, but more so for lower income families. We have seen a marked increase in cases of domestic violence; sexual and physical abuse; inquest work; housing issues and breach of civil liberties. I go to work each day with the objective of helping to improve conditions for individuals no matter what their needs; personal circumstances or vulnerabilities.

Legal aid is an incredibly valuable means to enable individuals to fight for justice and I am proud to have held supervisor status in the legal categories of Civil Actions Against Public Authorities; Inquest work and Housing Tenant support.

On 28 January 2021 a new legal aid rule came into force. "The Legal Aid Mortgage Cap" which has the potential to have an

incredibly positive impact for families wishing to escape desperate circumstances but feel unable to, because they are without the financial means. The change was made following a Judicial Review challenge brought on behalf of a domestic violence survivor and means that more homeowners on low incomes will qualify for legal aid as 'trapped' capital in the matrimonial home may be disregarded. The rule change applies to all areas of civil law (not criminal law).

My team also push for change directly through the Courts and by way of Judicial Review. We successfully challenged the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme (CICA) "Same Roof Rule" in the Court of Appeal on behalf of a client from Teesside. "The Same Roof Rule" prevented victims claiming compensation if they were living with the perpetrator at the time of the abuse/assault. This applied from the start of the scheme in 1964 until a change in 1979. However, the change was not retrospective so victims abused before 1979 could not claim under the scheme. The rule caused misery to many thousands of victims who found themselves unable to claim compensation, despite winning guilty verdicts against their abusers in court. The rule has been heavily criticised over the years but successive governments refused to abolish it.

We argued that the rule was incompatible with the Human Rights Act and this resulted in the abolishment of the rule by Parliament. Since this landmark decision the Government have stipulated that the CICA must deal with these claims through an accelerated procedure with a dedicated team of case workers. So less delays and a more personalised approach will be adopted. However, the deadline for submitting a claim expires on 12th June 2021 (2 years after the rule change). We are therefore encouraging anyone who may be eligible to contact us, even if they have previously had a claim rejected.

I am a positive advocate for hard work; I believe that you can achieve anything once you set your mind to it. I run a successful department, as well as having a huge case load myself. I also run my own business and appeared on BBC 'The Apprentice' in 2018, something which I am extremely proud of as it allowed me to showcase that you can still be a business woman and a thriving legal representative too.

If your family or business are experiencing legal concerns due to the Pandemic, please do get in touch with us for a free confidential informal discussion.

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To ensure everyone, no matter their legal standing in life, has access to high quality free legal advice.



I have been a qualified solicitor for 26 years. It's been interesting to see how the Pandemic has created a very unique set of circumstances for families, there has been a rise in enquiries but people are often reluctant to seek advice due to their perceived cost of legal representation.

Watson Woodhouse has responded to this demand by increasing our FREE Legal advice clinics across Stockton and Middlesbrough offices, making them more accessible with virtual clinics and on-line live chat. Clinics run midweek and Saturday mornings, manned by qualified specialist advisors. There's no obligation for us to represent you either. This sits directly with the vision and belief of our founder Jimmy Watson; "to ensure everyone, no matter their legal standing in life, has access to high quality free legal advice"

Our Civil Litigation Department has seen a marked increase in cases of Personal Injury, Inquests, Housing, Mental Health and Sexual/physical abuse claims, all direct effects of the Pandemic. I specialise in Inquest work; Personal Injury; Historic abuse and Actions Against Public Authorities.

My professional profile has been raised recently, through my dedication to pursue claims for victims of abuse whilst detained at Medomsley Detention Centre in Consett. I organised a Steering Group made up of solicitors from Law Firms to collaboratively lobby the Government Legal Department (GLD). As a result we agreed a scheme to compensate victims. More than 2000 victims came forward to Durham Police to report abuse at the institution. Medomsley detained young offenders aged 16-21, most who had committed minor offences, as an alternative to mainstream prison. Intended to keep younger prisoners away from those with a significant criminal history and to deliver a "short, sharp, shock" to them to deter them from repeating behaviour. Its regimes were cruel and vicious and the abuse has had long term damaging effects both physical and mentally on those young men. Our lobbying received support from local MP's which lead to the issues being raised in Parliament, and the GLD extending eligibility criteria and conditions.

Watson Woodhouse has offices based in Middlesbrough, Darlington, Redcar, Durham & Harrogate. We offer FREE legal advice at our weekly Law Clinics in person at Stockton, or via our on-line chat or by telephone Wednesdays, Thursday, Saturdays; No appointments required. See www.watsonwoodhouse.co.uk

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The agreed extension means many potential applicants who were initially not eligible can now make a claim. The initial scheme was restricted to victims who suffered at the hands of officers who were convicted of criminal offences; however, the extended scheme removes the requirement for the officer to be convicted. Victims now only need to prove they were in the detention centre at the same time as the officer who physically abused them. Separate claims can be pursued for victims of sexual abuse and assaults causing serious lasting injury.

Following the landmark Medomsley case, hundreds of young men have come forward to say they were abused at Kirklevington Young Offenders Institution, near Yarm. We continue to fight for justice for those men also.

Just last month we led the call for a Public Inquiry into Tees Esk Wear Valley Trust (TEWV) due to systematic/systemic failings identified following an investigation into the deaths of 3 young girls following time at West Lane Hospital, Middlesbrough. The Trust had previously acknowledged failings in the level of care at the facility. We continue to support a growing number of families and individuals who have sadly lost loved ones to suicide, or have been highly impacted, or damaged, by their experiences within facilities managed by the Trust. The Trust acknowledged at least 15 deaths in the last 3 years, yet Watson Woodhouse alone are representing numerous more families, who's loved ones either took their own life, or who felt they came out far worse mentally than when they went in.

I will continue to be a positive advocate, to help people in their fight for justice. I am extremely passionate about the work I do and will continue to offer support to our clients during these difficult times.



Laura Dobson

SOLICITOR OF THE MONTH

In the latest of our new series of profiles Northern Insight talks to

LAURA DOBSON

from Clarke Mairs, Newcastle.

What is your name and which area of the law do you work in?

Laura Dobson. I'm a property lawyer dealing with both residential and commercial property.

Did you always envisage a career in the industry?

I have to be honest and say no. My high school was an arts college, very dance and drama driven, and I was already part of a local drama group run from my high school before I started! It massively boosted my confidence as a teenager, so think it all set me up for where I am today. When it came to choosing what to study at University, whilst I was certain a career in the Arts wasn't for me, I had no idea what was! I think it was my head of sixth form who had discussed options and mentioned law, so I thought why not try it (as if it was going to be a doddle!). I told my parents, who were supportive as always, got accepted on to the University course and didn't look back.

What has been your career path so far?

After passing my A Levels, I left home and moved to Newcastle to study law degree at Northumbria University. I graduated after four years at University in 2015 and was lucky to secure a paralegal role in the September. I worked hard to prove my worth and was offered a training contract the following April. I qualified as a Solicitor in April 2018 which was when I joined Clarke Mairs. The years have flown by so far, long may it continue!

What have been the biggest challenges you have faced so far?

I don't think there are any stand out 'big' challenges, but I do remember when I was training to be a solicitor, I gave a talk to a group of around 15-20 people on Probate and why it is important to have your affairs in order. It was nerve wracking but I received great feedback afterwards. Just generally, every week brings different challenges, both legal and personal! As cliché as it may sound, I'm proud of every challenge I overcome, no matter how big or small.

Who do you most respect in your industry?

Those that have helped me get to where I am so far - there isn't one specific person. I also feel very lucky and truly respect the team I have around me now.

Which fictional lawyer would you most like to meet?

I'd love to spend the day with Harvey Specter. He has a great office, in New York, and makes it look quite easy so I'm interested to know how he does it!

What is your greatest strength?

I have two, if that's allowed! First I would say is my willingness to learn. Since joining Clarke Mairs I've learned so much, been exposed to a variety of work and whilst it has been very challenging, I feel I've given everything a go and taken it head on as best I can. Second my friendly approachable manner, whether that be with colleagues or clients.. I hope it comes across anyway!

What is your biggest weakness?

This is always a tricky question to answer, but I think my lack of self-confidence and overthinking. It sets me back sometimes, but I'm working on that.

What are your remaining career aspirations?

Thankfully it's still very early days in my career and I'm still enjoying exposure to new work all of the time but I aspire to manage a small team of my own one day, if I'm lucky enough.

How do you see your industry evolving in the next 10 years?

We all know the law is going to change...but taking a different approach, I'm hoping the industry will continue to be more diverse and more accessible. It's great to see that women are taking leading roles in the industry, and as a woman...long may it continue!

ld@clarkemairs.com
0191 245 4832

“

...It's great to see that women are taking leading roles in the industry, and as a woman, long may it continue!...

”

FUNDING FOR ELDERLY CARE?

by Jacqueline Emmerson

Recently, a relative of mine in Northern Ireland took ill. They are elderly and it is clear that they will need a care package when they return home. I immediately swung into lawyer mode and started to investigate who was going to help and who would pay for my relative's care.

Social services or the NHS? But good news, over there there is an organised team of people to help. The hospital social workers work with the doctors and the home help service and the occupational health therapists. Everything is set up for a person coming out of hospital and it is all properly funded. Imagine that. If you are my age or older you will recall when funding for elderly care was not an issue, it was a right.

Compare that case with the type of issues that occur in England every day. An elderly person lives alone, they own their own home, they have some savings. They take ill, they are assessed in hospital, you need to go into a care home they are told. You are a Self Funder. So, they are placed into a care home, sometimes with the help of a friend sometimes social services arrange this for them.

They sign a contract to pay care home fees and everyone thinks they have done a good job. You are a Self Funder, the words that accompany a future lack of assistance. You are a Self Funder, it's not our job to help you further. Sometimes it's not too long before a care home realises that they aren't being paid properly. Some care homes will actually appoint a care worker who will apply for all relevant state benefits, some don't see it as any of their business.

Most of the elderly clients that I deal with in this situation either have no relatives left or are estranged from them.

So what happens to their home?

Have you ever noticed the dilapidated house sitting there for years? Once these elderly clients go into care there is often no one to help them. The house just sits there rotting away. Is it even insured, what would happen if there was a flood or a fire?

Here are some examples of the help that clients have not received and my solutions once I was appointed as their attorney under a Lasting Power of Attorney;

- A client who had not been assessed for Attendance Allowance. This should have been sorted out as soon as she came into contact with social

services. I applied for the same on her behalf and obtained over £22,000 in back-dated benefits. This meant that she could pay the arrears on her care home fees. Imagine how stressed that lady was to receive regular letters from her care home threatening legal action.

- A client who, when I managed to gain access to his bank statements, was overpaying many bills. In particular he was paying house insurance to three different companies at one stage. I managed to produce medical records showing that he was not capable of understanding his mistake, and after quite a battle I recovered a considerable amount of money on his behalf.

- I also stopped the £600.00 per month that he didn't realise he was paying to various charities. They would ring him up and ask for his bank details, he would merrily provide the same.

- A client who had been paying council tax on a property for years when he should have been assessed as having a lack of mental capacity and thus in England should not have been paying council tax.

- A client who, it transpired, had two houses. We found out about the second house (his old family home) when we spotted a demand from a local authority that council tax be paid forthwith or he would be sued. What's particularly galling about that case is that if you are going to sue someone you should make sure that they have received your correspondence first. He could have been dead, as it was he was in a care home and had stopped receiving his post three years previously. Where on earth did this local authority think the man had

gone? He is over 90 years of age.

- The client who had not received over £30,000 of pension payments to which he was entitled. We then used this money to clear the arrears on his care home fees which prevented any further court action against him.

The above list is lamentable. Is a complete failure of society to care for our elderly. No joined up thinking, often a lack of kindness, no one prepared to investigate what is going on. It's not my job guv.

So in the absence of help from society there are solicitors out there like me. It shouldn't be the case that you need the likes of me to help you. But it's clear that various government organisations are not helping in England. If you need someone to manage your affairs because you physically can't cope anymore then contact me. It might be worth you addressing your mind to this situation now, if you live alone and don't have relatives to help you. A Lasting Power of Attorney could be drawn up and could be used by a solicitor as and when you need help. It is not a complete takeover of your affairs unless you simply can't manage at all.

I'm sorry to start the new year off with this article but unless a miracle happens this situation will continue. You need to know how to obtain help and how to access the funding to which you are entitled. You need to live your life free of worry and stress.

If you require any help, or a chat about how we can help you please don't hesitate to contact me on NCL: 0191 284 6989, SLND: 0191 567 6667 or enquiries@emmersons-solicitors.co.uk



Jacqueline Emmerson



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LAW FIRM

MENTAL HEALTH, WELLBEING AND COVID-19: GUIDANCE FOR EMPLOYERS

Mincoffs Solicitors employment solicitor, Laura Tennet, sets out some suggestions for employers to support the mental health and wellbeing of staff.

Businesses and employees have both had to adapt as a result of COVID-19. Not only has this had a serious financial and socioeconomic impact but there has also been a substantial impact on the mental health and wellbeing of employees.

While some employees are feeling isolated while working from home, others are anxious about returning to their place of work; some employees are feeling exhausted from increased workloads and others are concerned about job security and financial pressures.

In a world filled with uncertainty and differing concerns, what can employers do to ensure the wellbeing of their staff?

Open communication

Communication is essential and line management is key. Whether employees are attending their place of work, working from home or on furlough leave (or any other leave of absence) checking in with employees about their health and wellbeing, where appropriate to do so, will likely be appreciated.

Communication from employers can go a long way to encourage openness and trust and could prevent employees from feeling isolated or anxious. In addition, it may ensure that employers can manage any concerns employees may have which, if left unaddressed, could become greater issues.

Managing concerns

If an employee raises a concern with their employer it is important that the matter is handled sensitively, effectively and in good time. There will be a number of reasons why an

employee may raise a concern but dealing with the matter adequately is important. What constitutes 'adequate' will differ from person to person but employers should work closely with employees to understand and mitigate their concerns.

If a concern is not managed appropriately then it may develop into a number of greater issues such as a formal grievance, sickness absence or the need to instigate a performance management process. At worst, for employer and employee, it may result in an irreparable breakdown of the employment relationship and a potential claim at the employment tribunal.

How to help

Employers should be aware of company policies and available support functions so that they can ensure they understand how to best support staff and how to have open conversations about how

the employee is feeling. These conversations and clear policies on how to act in certain situations, such as during a sickness absence, will help create a positive culture around mental wellbeing.

If you are in doubt as to how to support your employees you should seek assistance and there are various resources available to help you to do this. Mental health charity Mind has provided helpful guidance by which may assist in encouraging open conversations in the workplace. In addition, our employment team can create or review existing policies which manage potentially difficult situations such as sickness absence or grievances as well as providing specific advice as to circumstances which you are finding difficult to resolve.

To speak to Laura about your mental health and wellbeing policies, call 0191 212 7784 or email ltennet@mincoffs.co.uk.



Laura Tennet, Employment Solicitor,
Mincoffs Solicitors LLP

Our dedicated employment team provides practical advice on all aspects of employment law. These include advising on all day to day HR issues such as tribunal disputes, employment contracts, redundancies, restructures and reorganisations, TUPE and occupational pension schemes as well as advising employers and trustees in relation to disciplinary and grievance issues and workplace policies.

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SOLICITORS



CHILD MAINTENANCE

Having been through an extremely acrimonious and also public divorce myself, I understand first-hand the difficulties involved in the breakdown of a marriage, especially when there are children caught in the middle of it.

I therefore cannot stress enough, the importance of seeking early legal advice especially when it comes to the agreement of child maintenance arrangements and the overall financial provisions on divorce, providing stability and security for both parties and ensuring the well-being of any dependent children.

There is a legal obligation for both parents of any dependent child to financially support them while they grow up. Regular financial payments must be made towards a child's living costs and everyday needs. Due to acrimonious and complex break ups, ex-partners often find it difficult to come to an agreement on such payments.

Child maintenance can be arranged in the following ways:-

- Family based arrangement.
- Child Maintenance Service (CMS).
- Court Order.

A family based arrangement is usually quick and easy and involves both parents agreeing their own terms as to the amount of child maintenance to be paid and how often it will be paid. It is an informal and private arrangement with no court involvement and generally not legally binding. This means that if payments are reduced or stopped without mutual consent you cannot use the legal system to enforce it. Such agreements are useful when the separated parties maintain an amicable relationship.

If the separated parties are unable to agree a family based arrangement or the arrangement has broken down, then either party can ask the CMS (government scheme) to put in place an arrangement which is enforceable. They will calculate how much you should pay or will be paid to you. This is problematic as they can only calculate child maintenance based on incomes up to £3,000 per week (gross), and based on the income declared to HMRC for self-employed parents. Payment is made either directly by one parent to the other or by collect and pay whereby the Child Maintenance Service will collect money from one parent and transfer it to the other parent, the paying parent will incur charges as a result of CMS becoming involved. Any missed payments are enforceable.

In limited situations a Court can deal with applications for child maintenance, this may be necessary in complicated situations. A court order may be appropriate for such cases as:

- If paying parent lives outside the UK.
- If there are additional expenses due to the children having disabilities or school fees.
- If the paying parent has an exceptionally high-income exceeding amount considered by the CMS.
- Domestic abuse/Families involving stepchildren.



Heather Swan

In the wake of the Coronavirus pandemic, many separated couples have been affected by further financial strain facing reduced pay or no pay at all. As a result, there are genuine circumstances in which a parent's ability to pay child maintenance may be reduced, however, paying child maintenance is a legal requirement and both the CMS and the Courts can take enforcement action against non-paying parents such as liability orders, removal of passport or imprisonment.

If you are struggling to agree a financial agreement following the breakdown of your marriage, or child maintenance arrangements, please contact Sweeney Miller to arrange a consultation on 0345 900 5401 or email, enquiries@sweeneymiller.co.uk. We can deal with your separation and/or divorce from the outset to ensure that you understand the process before entering into any financial negotiations with your former partner.

**sweeney
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NEW COMMERCIAL LAW FIRM LAUNCHES IN THE CITY

A heavyweight corporate lawyer who has launched a city centre commercial law firm during the height of the pandemic is set to defy turnover expectations during the first 12-months of trading.

Mergers and acquisitions specialist Jabad Jaigirdar, who has more than 12 years' experience acting for companies, lenders and investors on a range of corporate, commercial, real estate and private equity matters has opened JLF Law Firm at the historic Bank Chambers on Mosley Street, Newcastle.

With the support of advisors from Robson Laidler accountants, JLF has seen significant demand for its services since its launch on market leading transactions involving high profile names such as Greggs plc, Travis Perkins plc and HSS Hire Group plc.

The firm has recently recruited a senior lawyer and a paralegal to help service demand and is actively recruiting for more senior and junior positions.

Senior partner Jabad said: "We are delighted that clients are choosing JLF to help navigate challenging market conditions and as a result, we have achieved



JLF Law Firm's Jabad Jaigirdar (front) with Nick Wilson from Robson Laidler.

exceptional results by completing over 80 deals across our Corporate and Commercial teams in Q3 and Q4 of 2020. Our pipeline for this year remains very strong and we look forward to continuing to support our clients and delivering more completed deals in 2021.

"We certainly seem to have made a significant foothold in the market with clients welcoming a new approach to legal services. We work collaboratively with our clients, as we know they are looking for more than just legal expertise. At JLF, we make a genuine effort to learn and understand our client's operations as well as business objectives. By doing so we can offer bespoke and cost-effective legal solutions, which are also commercial.

"The whole team of business advisors at Robson Laidler have been instrumental in the setup of the firm, registering us with regulatory bodies, implementing the best systems for our needs and of course, taking care of all our financial compliance.

They act as a coach and will continue to support us as we grow."

Robson Laidler director Nick Wilson said: "It's very satisfying to see a client launch a business during the middle of a pandemic and get off to a flying start, achieving results not often seen. We worked closely with Jabad on the pricing model and business strategy and it is great to see such impressive results being generated so soon.

"Jabad also acted on the advice we gave about taking a consultancy approach – by working in partnership with the businesses he supports offering more than just regulatory work he has seen extraordinary results."

Jabad previously held positions with large firms such as Eversheds Sutherland, Hay and Kilner and more recently spent several years at Millican Law.

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ST JAMES' SQUARE LAW FIRM WELCOMES NEW PARTNER

Commercial law firm, St James' Square has appointed industry leading Partner, Gemma Iceton, to head its Family Services department.

Gemma, a highly regarded family lawyer, joins St James' Square with over 16 years' experience in family law. She has worked for a number of leading law firms in the North East and advises on all aspects of family law matters including divorce, separation, complex financial matters, children, pre-nuptial agreements, living together agreements and estate administration.

Gemma's move comes at another exciting milestone for St James' Square as her appointment further increases the number of Partners at the firm and adds to the offering available to their client base.

Gemma has a breadth of experience on matters relating to matrimonial and non-matrimonial property, assets held in trust, complex pensions on divorce to include offsetting and lifetime allowance, spousal maintenance, and estate administration. She is a member of Resolution, a community of family justice professionals who work with families and individuals to resolve issues in a constructive way, and has recently been appointed as a leading North East lawyer by WiseLaw.

Gemma said: 'I am thrilled to have joined the team at St James' Square. It is fantastic to be part of such a vibrant, forward thinking and expanding team and I'm excited to be working with such driven people.'

Paul Monaghan, Managing Partner, continued: 'We are delighted to welcome Gemma to the team. As part of our strategic plan for long term growth, the Family Services department will further diversify the services we are able to offer our clients. Gemma is a leading lawyer in the area of family law and I have no doubt that her expertise will be invaluable to our client base.'

The appointment takes St James' Square to 7 Partners offering commercial services in areas ranging from Corporate and Commercial law, Dispute Resolution, Employment and HR, Real – Estate Commercial Property and Sports law, to name but a few.

The firm also announced this month its continuing support for the Chronicle Sunshine Fund through 2021 and 2022. St James' Square is committed to raising monies for North East based charities that



Gemma Iceton

specialise in helping children that suffer from severe disabilities. The firm raised over £40,000 for Heel and Toe in 2019 and hopes to break this figure in 2022. It has committed to raising an initial £20,000 for The Chronicle Sunshine Fund in 2021.

Siobhan Sargent, Charity Director at The Chronicle Sunshine Fund said: 'To say we are blown away by the generosity of the SJS team would be a huge understatement. We want to say a special thank you to staff and clients who will contribute to this donation.'

St James' Square was established three years ago and, given its significant investment in technology and forward-thinking working practices, it has been well placed to respond to the demands and challenges of the pandemic.

St James' Square has expanded rapidly since initially operating from one room at Hoults Yard. The firm now employs over 30 staff, occupies 7,000 sq ft of Grade A premises at Esh Plaza and has a turnover exceeding £2.6 million. It has expanded its commercial departments to include services in Employment and HR, Corporate and Commercial Services, Dispute Resolution, Real Estate – Commercial Property, Real Estate – Residential Property, Corporate Recovery and Insolvency, Family Services, Debt Recovery and Sports Services.



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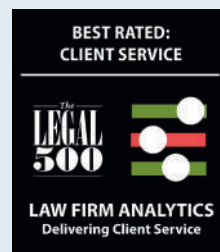
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Emma Gaudern, Managing Director

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*Correct at time of print. Face-to-Face meetings only available in line with Government advice and must be pre-booked.





CAN YOU FINALLY CLAIM FOR BUSINESS INTERRUPTION?

It's the breakthrough businesses had been waiting for, Litigator Ailsa Charlton, of leading North East commercial law firm Muckle LLP, explains.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has wreaked havoc on businesses across the globe. A new ruling could finally mean businesses could recover losses and claim via their business interruption policies.

Now the Supreme Court judgment has been revealed and it may provide many struggling UK businesses with the lifeline they so desperately need.

Many businesses who have suffered substantial losses due to COVID-19 have tried to claim under their business interruption insurance policies, only to be told their insurers were refusing to pay out.

The Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) decided to bring a test case to resolve the lack of clarity and confusion many businesses were facing while attempting to claim under their policies.

Now the courts have ruled largely in favour of the FCA, even after insurance companies appealed, which means that thousands of businesses could now be eligible to recover their losses via their business interruption insurance. Some may even be entitled to more than they originally applied for.

How the FCA turned things around

The FCA's test case involved 21 policy wordings from eight different insurers, but it had the potential to affect 700 types of policies, across 60 insurers, and over 370,000 policy holders.

The case was heard in the High Court back in September 2020. The High Court ruled substantially in favour of the FCA and the 370,000 potential affected policy holders. However, the

insurers subsequently decided to appeal the case to the Supreme Court.

Why businesses could claim for more than before

On Friday 15 January the Supreme Court released its judgment which largely upheld the judgment of the High Court and dismissed the majority of the insurers' appeals.

The ruling supported the High Court's judgment that out of the 21 sample policy wordings most, but not all, provided cover. The Supreme Court also extended the judgment to cover mandatory closure orders that were not legally binding on businesses, meaning even more businesses may be able to claim.

The judgment also allowed the FCA's appeal that claims should not be reduced even though businesses would have suffered similar loss due to the pandemic regardless of whether they were forced to close or not. This means that successful claims are likely to be for an even higher amount than before, so this is even more good news for businesses.

This case is a landmark victory for UK businesses and may mean that insurance may have to pay out to the over 370,000 organisations that may be affected by this judgement.

What now?

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an unprecedented impact on businesses and this judgment is the potential lifeline that organisations across the North East and



Ailsa Charlton

throughout the UK have been hoping for.

The judgment provides guidance on which claims are covered, which will hopefully make it easier for business owners to claim under their policies and reduce the number of disputes. By allowing the FCA to appeal this judgment it also means that more businesses will be covered, and some pay-outs will be higher.

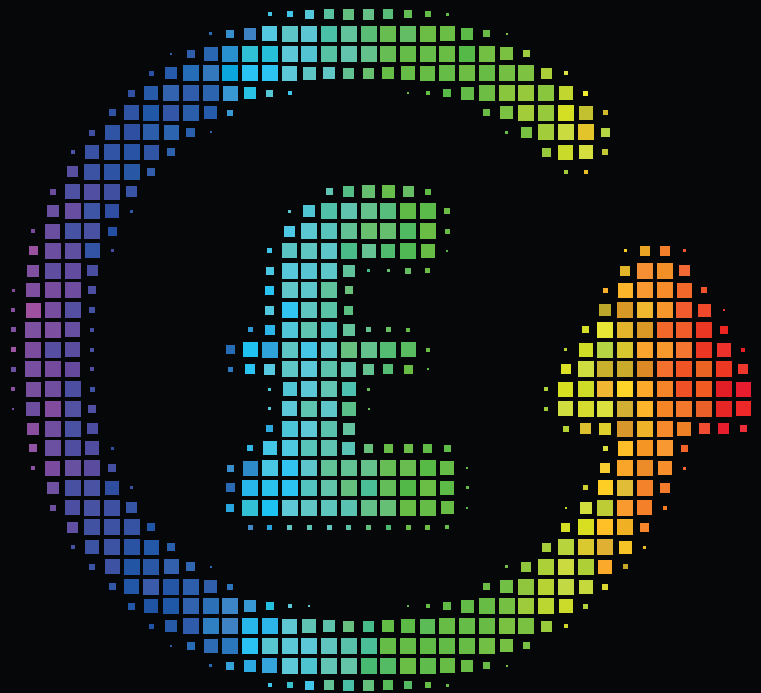
However, despite the overwhelming positivity of this judgment for UK businesses, claims will still need to be assessed on a case by case basis.

Businesses that may have a claim or have had their previous claims turned down should seek professional legal advice.

Need some help?

To find out if your business can claim, contact Ailsa Charlton, dispute resolution solicitor, on 0191 211 7735 or ailsa.charlton@muckle-llp.com

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CAN AN EMPLOYER FORCE AN EMPLOYEE TO GET A CORONAVIRUS VACCINE?



Paul McGowan

As we enter 2021, the vaccination efforts against COVID-19 are looking promising, with the UK having approved three vaccines at the time of writing (the Pfizer, AstraZeneca and Moderna vaccines) and the vaccination rollout effort has already begun in earnest.

However, the question on many employers' minds is whether they are able to have any say over whether their employees get a coronavirus vaccine. From an employment law perspective, this is a highly sensitive issue that will understandably require delicate handling. We have set out some points below for employers to consider.

Can employees refuse to get a vaccine?

When faced with an employee who is unwilling to be vaccinated, it will be important for their employer in these circumstances to establish the basis for their refusal. For example, if it relates to a medical condition which they have, a religious belief or their age then these are examples of things which may amount to protected characteristics and the employee may have protections under the Equality Act 2010, including that they should not be treated less favourably as a result of their protected characteristic. Employers should be careful not to automatically assume that an employee's refusal stems from misinformation about the vaccines and should communicate with their employee to understand the reasoning for their refusal.

Can I dismiss an employee who refuses to be vaccinated?

In addition to the any discrimination issues which may arise, an employer must consider the fact that employees who have more than two years' continuous service have protection against being dismissed unfairly. An employer seeking to discipline or dismiss an employee for refusing or failing to get vaccinated will still need to follow a fair procedure before taking the decision to dismiss and should certainly seek specialist advice before taking such a decision. Guidance from ACAS suggests that this could be treated as a disciplinary issue, and therefore one which could result in dismissal, but this would be dependent on factors, such as whether the employee needs to be vaccinated in order to carry out their role.

What can I do about employees who are not vaccinated?

Employers should continue to ensure that there are robust measures in place to ensure the health and safety of all their employees and to minimise the risk of COVID-19 infection. As vaccines are rolled out to the population, these measures may naturally be eased in time in response to mass immunity. However, employers should still have

regard for those employees, and even customers/clients, who have not had the vaccine and this may be a factor to consider when assessing health and safety risks in the workplace and continuing with coronavirus-related measures such as social distancing, hand washing and wearing masks.

Comment

We have already seen some companies announcing that they would dismiss those who refuse to be vaccinated and others who are utilising IT systems to note which employees have received their vaccines. Whilst these approaches may be appealing to some employers, they are not without risk and employers should be careful when looking to implement blanket policies on vaccination. All employers will likely have to consider the implications of the mass vaccination of the workforce at some point this year and this is likely to be a hot topic in employment law in the months ahead.

**Paul McGowan is the Managing Partner and Principal Solicitor at employment law specialists Collingwood Legal. www.collingwoodlegal.com
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Support:

1. ½ day strategy meeting
2. Weekly 1-2-1's
3. Email and telephone support throughout the programme
4. Production of essential documentation to include:

- 2021 contract of employment
- Disciplinary Procedure
- Grievance Procedure
- Holiday cards
- Appraisal forms
- Induction checklist
- Recruitment checklist
- Personnel records checklist

Duration of programme:

6 weeks - 3 months - 6 months



Mentoring Programme – Don't Be a Busy Fool

Aim: To bring clarity and confidence to busy CEO's and developing leaders, especially where they employ staff.

Support:

1. ½ day strategy meeting
2. SWOT analysis
3. Determining of leadership style
4. Weekly 1-2-1's
5. Email and telephone support throughout the programme

Mentoring to include:

- Getting organised
- Time management
- Motivating staff
- Dealing with conflict
- Playing to strengths
- Building a strong team
- Building self confidence
- Bringing clarity

Duration of programme:

6 weeks - 3 months - 6 months

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BUSINESS GROWTH STARTS WITH BETTER RECRUITMENT

Bryony Gibson, managing director of Bryony Gibson Consulting, shares tips and advice to help you improve the success of your recruitment in the current climate.

Right now, the accountancy job market is active. It's moving fast, employers know the skills they want, and those in search of a new role have - in the main - made up their mind to move quickly.

It sounds idyllic; and you'd be forgiven for thinking it is easy to find the right hire but, with high demand for niche skills, it is only those who are adaptable and can move quickly that are thriving.

Increased competition for talented people, by its nature, puts job seekers in the driving seat. If someone with the right skill set becomes available, they can very quickly have several opportunities to consider and, for a recruiting firm, this creates a problem.

Delayed decision-making, the need to seek authorisation, or a lack of time devoted to moving the stages of recruitment forward means you are highly likely to miss out on the best people. They won't wait to see what 'might' happen.

If you want your recruitment to be more successful, you need to ensure your processes are robust and fit for today's purpose:

1. Plan ahead

Avoid reactionary recruitment wherever possible by future planning. For example, in 2020, we understandably saw a reduction in trainee recruitment. Fast-forward three years and you can expect to see a black hole in the number of qualified accountants available. It pays to keep a constant eye on the market and to regularly review staffing risks against your business goals. I'd suggest starting by mapping out your team and their skills versus your needs now and in the

medium-term. You'll soon be able to build a plan that gets you ahead of the game.

2. Adapt your style

Different situations call for different approaches, so make sure your methods stay fit for purpose. Simply offering video interviews in a pandemic isn't enough. You need to modify the way you build a rapport and demonstrate the culture of your business. Have you adapted the job specification to reflect home-working? How do you plan to induct new employees and integrate them into your team without the opportunity to meet people face-to-face? These are questions which need to be answered before you start recruiting and employers doing this will reap the benefits.

3. Communicate clearly

A regular flow of clear and honest information is crucial to building trust. Show respect to each applicant by keeping them up-to-date with timings and progress and providing useful feedback. Every communication counts as you are effectively demonstrating the level of care your organisation has for its staff. Communicate consistently throughout the process and - regardless of the outcome - you will create positive advocates for your business.

4. Remember it is a partnership

People become valuable and loyal to a company because they've developed a mutually beneficial alliance. Whether the motivation is future progression, support with study or an increased salary, if you're helping employees to fulfil their career dreams they will work hard for you to achieve yours and, over time, you will build a reputation as a highly attractive place for aspirational and talented people to work.

5. Act quickly

In a candidate-led market, you need to be decisive. Good people will vanish as quickly as they appear, so make sure it's to join you. There's nothing more disengaging than attending an interview, being impressed and then not hearing back for days. If you like someone, tell them before someone else does.

When times change, the way you recruit needs to change but, ultimately, good recruitment comes down to being prepared, proactive and treating people the right way.

Being fleet of foot is very important right now, but you must also remain honest and genuine in your attempts to help people achieve their ambitions in tandem with reaching your goals. That's how you can truly build a trusting relationship, as well as a reputation as a great employer and place to work.



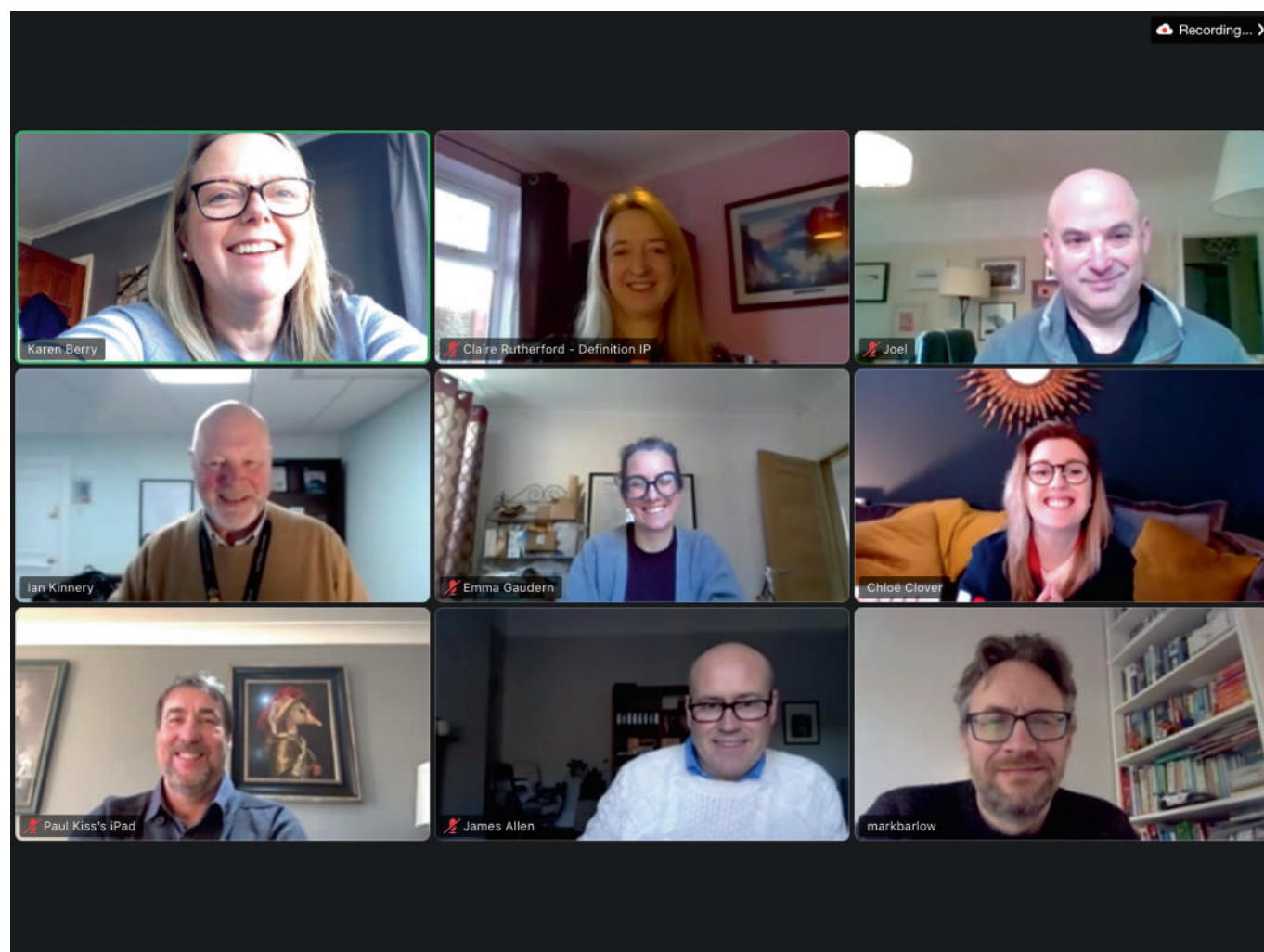
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ENTREPRENEURS' FORUM WELCOMES SEVEN MORE BUSINESS LEADERS TO ITS SCALE-UP PROGRAMME



Seven business leaders are gearing up for growth after joining the Entrepreneurs' Forum 2021 Scale-up Leader's Academy.

Chloe Clover of Wander Films, Claire Rutherford of Definition IP, Emma Gaudern of EMG Solicitors, James Allen of Guerilla, Joel Marks of Cheviot Insured, Mark Barlow of Logic Architecture and Paul Kiss of K Construction and Maintenance – who make up the Academy's fifth cohort - have completed their first coached session with scale-up expert Ian Kinnery.

Delivered over six months, the entrepreneurs will learn about key topics linked to sustainable business growth based on the 'four critical decisions': people, strategy, execution and cash.

Exploring what it means to scale-up sustainably, the Academy will prepare those on the programme to face the challenges of growth, helping them create an actionable 'One Page Strategic Plan' to achieve their goals.

Scale-up coach, Ian Kinnery of Kinnery, said: "On previous cohorts we have witnessed quite exceptional growth in turnover and profit. I am excited to see how this year's cohort can scale despite the current challenges".

Since its launch, the Scale-up Leader's Academy has supported almost 50 business leaders in their growth journeys.

The second cohort of businesses, which were the subject of research conducted by Newcastle University, reported a 140 percent rise in operating profit, with an average increase in turnover of 13.2 percent and a rise of 8.6 percent in employment. A quarter of scale-ups participating in the programme also increased their level of export sales over the past 12 months.

Andrew Mackay of Newcastle-based Coleman James was part of the third cohort of the Scale-up Leader's Academy. He said: "It was an invaluable experience. Coleman James began life in 2016 with just me and a laptop. Today Coleman James boasts a national client base, working in partnership with many high-growth companies in the built environment and rail sectors, and we have plans to open a second office. We delivered a multi-million turnover in 2020, which we'll double in 2021.

"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 is delivering a toolkit of invaluable knowledge to business owners that allows them to prepare for rapid and sustained business growth.

"It addresses the key challenges faced by scale-ups in our region - such as access to talent and leadership development - helping to equip our members with everything they need to grow sustainable companies with the ongoing support of their senior leadership teams.

"We've seen great successes from previous cohorts of the Academy and are delighted to welcome another seven business leaders to the programme."

www.entrepreneursforum.net

DURATA EXPANDS CRITICAL POWER PROTECTION SERVICE

The appearance of Take That star Gary Barlow on our TV screens last December evoked a real sense of pride in the watching McGee household.

For husband-and-wife team John and Alison knew something the singer-songwriter, along with his star-studded line-up of Michael Bublé, Alesha Dixon and Ronan Keating, were all blissfully unaware of.

And that was should the iconic venue – London's Natural History Museum – suffer a power failure, then the TV special would continue without interruption.

The world-famous museum is just one of the high-profile organisations and businesses across the UK to seek that guarantee from Teesside-based critical infrastructure specialists, Durata.



It specialises in installing, monitoring, and testing uninterruptable power supplies and cooling systems for data-led industries, including banks, hospitals, government, and Ministry of Defence sites.

John, who is Durata's managing director, said: "It's all about providing peace of mind and protection – knowing that, in the event of an outage, there is an immediate and seamless supply of power.

"Even a brief loss of power may have potentially disastrous consequences, and could affect a business' ability to trade or, in the case of a hospital or bank, delay access to crucial data."

Company secretary Alison added: "We happened to be watching the Gary Barlow TV special and were full of pride knowing that Durata was playing its part in ensuring it could be broadcast without a hitch!"

The business was founded by time-served electrician John in 2013, with ex-colleague Andy Mullen, after spotting a gap in the niche critical power market.

In the intervening years, Durata has worked on highly prestigious projects throughout the UK, Europe, and Middle East, many of which are covered by confidentiality agreements.

Clients include the National Archives, several Ministry of Defence sites, the British Museum, Royal Academy of Arts, together with a range of businesses and data centres.

The company is a preferred partner for integrated services specialists CBRE, as well as installation partners to the world's largest UPS manufacturers, and recently signed an agreement with one of the world's largest technology infrastructure companies.

From humble beginnings, Durata has grown from a team of two to employing 23 staff and last year moved into new headquarters on Tees Advanced Manufacturing Park (Tees AMP) in Middlesbrough, where it is surrounded by key suppliers, including Cleveland Cables.

Classed as a critical supplier, its services have been in demand during the pandemic, which has succeeded in underlining the importance of data security.

Several new projects are due to start in the coming months, and as a result, Durata is looking to recruit up to eight electrical and mechanical engineers as part of its long-term expansion plans.

Some of the additional work it has been involved with over the past 11 months has included logistics centres and testing facilities following last spring's lockdown.

Alison, previously the regional manager of a tooling company, said: "Many of the sites we have worked on are now being used as mass vaccination centres so it's great to know that we are contributing in a small way to the fight against Covid-19.

"We have also worked to guarantee power supplies to hospitals and a range of businesses, such as banks and data centres. We are also expanding our offer to include green to green technology to embody the EV world we will soon be living in.

"Because many businesses introduced home working arrangements, our experienced engineers have been able to go into their offices and carry out the work without disruption."

Durata, which operates sales teams in the South East and South West, is also seeking to expand its work in the North of England.

John added: "We've always been based in the North East and our roots are here, so we want to expand the business here in the North.

"The majority of our work is in the south of England, where I think businesses and organisations seem to be more aware of the need for critical back up and they view the cost as necessary expenditure.

"In the North, while the attitude is changing, it is very much the case that the benefits are only recognised once a disruption has occurred."

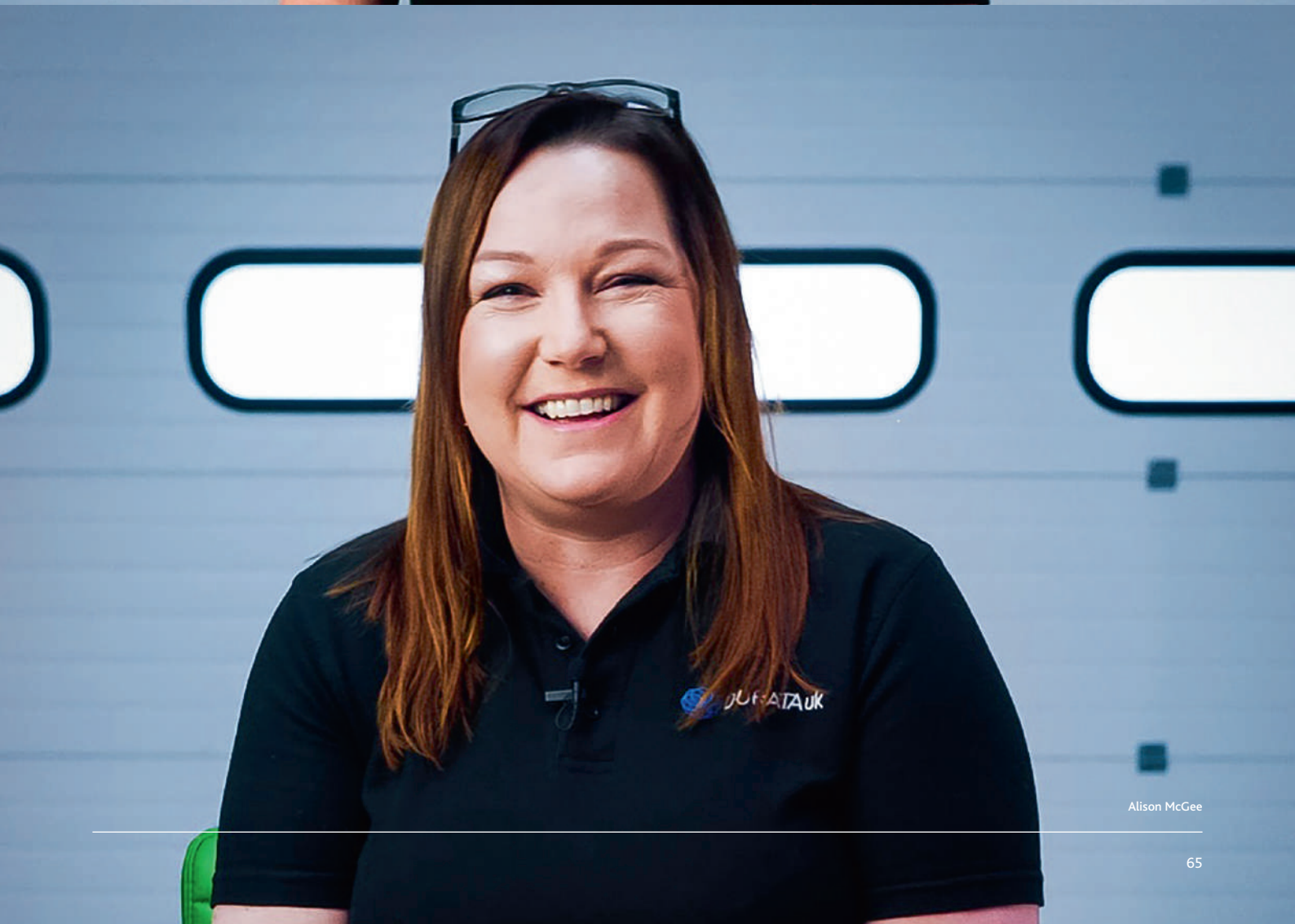
Alison added: "Durata has become a leader in critical power infrastructure because of its high standards.

"For a company from the North East to be involved in such prestigious projects and long-term contracts is a real success story for the region, and we look forward to growing the business further in the coming months and years ahead."

John and Alison McGee are members 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



John McGee



Alison McGee



Ammar Mirza CBE

TURD IMMUNITY

Our brain receives over 11 million bits of information per second, which is an incredible amount of data. Luckily for us it only processes around 50 bits. However, how true and important the bits of data are, is a different question.

Over the past 12 months, I have seen a steady rise in the amount of dis and mis information being shared with people. Whether it is fake news stories that have been sensationalised, conspiracy theories on COVID, to just outright lies by people in powerful and influential positions. Knowing what is true or accurate; what and who to trust; has become one of the major challenges for us. Especially given the overwhelming amount of information overload.

Growing up, I used to be glued to a comic or fictional book, and I remember being told off for reading "such rubbish". Funny how times have changed and we are all glued to our screens. This magical device that provides an infinite amount of information. As it is all coming through the same channel, it makes it even harder to decipher. It is almost as if we are living in a world of "Chinese Whispers". Oh, how I wish for comics for our kids, which were probably more factual than the rubbish they are exposed to now.

So, developing and maintaining a Bullshit radar

seems to be one of the most important skills we can develop. Interpreting the conspiracy theories - that COVID was derived by mind controlling aliens, to Bill Gates being responsible for developing a nano-tech vaccine through Microsoft so that he can eventually "CTRL-ALT-DLT" us all - some of the stories are so far-fetched they would make incredible science fiction. Yet there are people out there that genuinely believe them.

As we appear to come out of the lockdown with a roadmap announced, potentially allowing us to party in June, the only reason this has been made possible is down to the vaccine roll-out. The decline in deaths from over a 1,000 a day, to now just over a 100 is clearly a factual demonstration that the vaccine appears to work.

Although, I must admit that initially I was vaccine hesitant, but once again, this was due to me not fully understanding the facts and having all of the information I needed to comfort me. **Even now,**

I still don't know why I am three times more likely to die than a White person, and no-one has been able to explain this to me. But I do know one thing for certain, that if I had a choice between living and dying, and the vaccine enabled me to live and protect those close to me, then I am getting vaccinated and long live those aliens.

Plus, when the wife says that if we have to have a vaccine passport to travel and I don't have one, then she is going on holiday without me, is a significant driver. And my great lady only speaks the truth.

So, protect yourself, don't listen to everyone's crap, and get vaccinated. Develop Turd Immunity and I guarantee a happy and maybe even a long life...

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.



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Paul Jennings

HELPING OUR UNSUNG HEROES AT SEA

By Paul Jennings, chief executive of North P&I Club

As a business with a 160-year heritage here in the North East, we've seen our fair share of challenges.

There is little however, that can compete with COVID-19 in terms of the dramatic impact it has had on our economy and society. From deaths of loved ones and mental health struggles, to business closures and financial troubles – we have all undoubtedly suffered this past year.

However, with improvements in the scale and rate of testing and our vulnerable and front-line staff now receiving doses of the coronavirus vaccine, there finally seems to be a light at the end of the tunnel.

And yet, a vital workforce is still being neglected.

According to latest data from the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS) there are 1.6 million seafarers serving on internationally trading merchant ships worldwide.

More than 90% of global trade - from household goods and food, to fuel and medical supplies - is moved by sea, and yet seafarers are not classed as key workers by our government.

As one of the world's leading maritime insurers we are in daily communication with our maritime community and are acutely aware of the immense strain the pandemic has caused on our sailors' mental and physical wellbeing.

Seafarers usually work 10–12-hour shifts, seven days a week to man ships, on four or six-month-long contracts, which is then followed by a period of leave.

But due to the coronavirus crisis and travel bans brought in by many governments to combat new

variants of COVID-19, hundreds of thousands of crew have been spending extended periods at sea, far beyond the expiry of their contracts.

For those who have been at sea for months longer than their contract requires, there is a growing risk to their mental and physical health.

Not only are crew unable to leave their vessel or receive medical attention ashore, but they have also been separated from their families and loved ones for several months, despite many having had no contact with the virus and posing no health risks. For a staggering number, there is still no certainty as to when they can return home.

Whilst those stuck on ships face tough physical and mental struggles, thousands of maritime workers at home have been hit hard by the pandemic too.

With crew change protocols not being implemented, a large number of seafarers have not been able to join their ships and work. Others have been unable to claim financial support from the government as their employers are not UK businesses. With incomes slashed and no certainty of when contracts will be renewed, the International Transport Workers Federation estimates there could be as many as 300,000 seafarers facing financial ruin.

Undoubtedly all of this is causing unprecedented levels of stress, anxiety and mental health issues for both our seafarers and their families – and something needs to be done.

It is more important now than ever that we rally

behind our maritime workers and recognise the vital work that they contribute every day to our economy. So, we are calling on our North East business community to support us in our endeavour to class seafarers as key workers and ensure they receive their COVID-19 vaccinations as a matter of urgency.

By doing so, we can help to protect their psychological and physical wellbeing and reunite them with their families and loved ones.

Vaccinations will allow our seafarers to continue to work safely and ensure that essential goods continue to be in plentiful supply in our country. Inoculated workers will be allowed to come ashore in many countries around the world, alleviating psychological and physical issues, and should help avoid any restrictions being re-imposed on sea crews in the future.

With safe working practices enabled and crews offered the vaccine, fixed term contracts will return to normal, allowing those furloughed at home to also re-join their ships and return to work.

Our seafarers have been hidden in the wings too long, and it is time that we acknowledge their unwavering hard work in keeping our country going throughout this time of crisis. Like our frontline staff, they are real heroes and there is no better way of showing our appreciation than by helping them stay mentally, physically and financially safe and well.

For more information: www.nepia.com

NORTH EAST BUSINESSES HELPING TO SHAPE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT



Michelle Rainbow

How can we make sure the voices of businesses are heard when it comes to skills development in the North East?

Michelle Rainbow, Skills Director at the North East Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) explains how employers' input helps shape skills delivery in our region.

At the start of this year, the government published its Skills for Jobs: lifelong learning for opportunity and growth white paper which sets out reforms to post-16 technical education and training to support people to develop the skills needed to get good jobs and improve national productivity. One of the recommendations included in the report was to give employers a greater say in the development of skills – something which we recognise is essential if we're to develop a future workforce which has the skills needed by businesses in our region.

One of the ways we are embedding this role for employers in the North East is through the North East Skills Advisory Panel (SAP), which brings together local employers and skills providers to pool their knowledge on skills and labour market needs, and address any challenges we're facing in relation to skills gaps.

Skills is a central part of the plan to create more and better jobs in our region and the SAP oversees all of the North East LEP's skills, inclusion and progression programmes, helping to achieve our ambition that employers have strong links with education and

training providers, leading to provision that meets local business needs.

During 2020 and into 2021, the SAP also has a part to play in coordinating the region's response to COVID-19. Some of our skills programmes have been scaled rapidly to help mitigate the impacts of the pandemic on businesses and employees and, since March 2020, the SAP has provided a single point of coordination between government bodies, regional agencies, education organisations and local authorities in the North East COVID-19 response.

We know that, although young people have faced huge disruption to their schooling during the pandemic, it's not just the younger generation which has felt the impact of COVID-19 on their work and education. Employees aged 50 and over are just as likely to face changes to their employment and the need to reskill.

To make sure we can support all sectors of our workforce effectively, the SAP collects monthly data and intelligence to inform its work. This evidence informed elements of the North East Recovery and Renewal Deal which asks government for £2.8 billion investment to unlock half of the 100,000 more jobs required to support North East recovery quickly.

The SAP has worked with education partners and local authorities over the summer to support the transition of young people from schools into further education, apprenticeships and higher education at this difficult time, and we've developed a detailed understanding of the challenges around COVID-19 and the impact on apprenticeships, proposing a number of ways to support employers and young people as they take their first steps into the workplace.

Currently being developed is the North East Local Skills Report, which will give employers, training providers and other stakeholders a clear and accurate picture of the skills that are needed across different areas of our economy. This will help us plug any skills gaps in our region and make sure that the skills that employers need match the priorities of training providers.

Central to all of the work going on in the region to create a skilled workforce is the involvement of businesses, and we welcome input from employers of all shapes and sizes, operating in any sector as we work together to make the North East a great place to live and work.

Find out more about the North East LEP's Skills Advisory Panel at northeastlep.co.uk

THE HEART OF YOUR CENTRAL HEATING: PROFLAME

A healthy boiler is the beating heart of any central heating system and it is always playing a quiet but essential role in keeping your house warm. Maintaining proper care of your boiler is crucial, which is why ProFlame are here to share their top tips on keeping your boiler from breaking down.

Whilst we often take our boilers for granted, they play a vital role in our central heating systems. It's important that we ensure proper boiler maintenance during the winter months, but spring and summer are the best times to prepare and avoid the expensive hassle that can come with boiler breakdowns in the colder seasons.

The weather can bring a variety of problems, and boiler neglect can result in frozen outdoor pipes, system blockages and ultimately, a very cold house. ProFlame's best practise to avoid a pipe freeze-up is to install some wrap-around insulation on your outdoor pipes. You can buy insulation from any good hardware store for a small price and it will provide a crucial, extra protective layer for your pipe, which will reduce



James Haghghat

any heat loss and keep your water hotter for longer. Taking this simple step to maintaining your boiler will be saving you excess energy, whilst also protecting you from a complete boiler breakdown.

If you often find yourself battling with your boiler over winter, it might be worth checking the diameter of your condense pipe. A well-functioning condense pipe should ideally have a diameter of around 22mm, any smaller would make it more susceptible to lagging and blockages. Clearing any snow from your drains would also

be worthwhile, as a build-up of snow can back up into the boiler and cause further damage to the system.

A healthy boiler is the key to keeping your house warm, and proper care both in season and out of season will significantly reduce the chances of it breaking down when you need it the most.

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Graham Montague

It's almost 25 years since Graham Montague recognised a gap in the market for selling printed carrier bags.

Working in the chemical industry at the time, Graham saw that what was available for personalised packaging was very limited and realised that there was an opportunity to build a new business.

Fast forward to 2021 and GM Packaging has not only relocated to a new unit at North Tyneside New York Industrial Estate – twice the size of its previous base – but is also on course to hit sales in excess of £3m this year.

The company's success is down to a combination of Graham's skill in identifying an opportunity, a fast-developing product range and the promise of fast delivery for customers.

Now GM Packaging offers more than 1000 different products and exports around the world, offering everything from bulk items to personalised branded items for many of its big name customers.

While COVID-19 has undoubtedly taken its toll on many businesses, it hasn't all been bad news.

The increase in home deliveries, eating at home and delivering of takeaways has seen a surge in orders for GM Packaging.

At the same time the company continues to supply some of the UK's biggest retailers such as Marks & Spencer and Aldi, delivering thousands of containers every week.

"We've seen a significant growth in a relatively short space of time," said Graham.

"We've acquired a considerable amount of new business but also managed to maintain our repeat business which is why we have now moved to bigger premises."

One of the first challenges was to ensure that the company was Covid-compliant, which led to putting in place a number of new rules including sending out only unopened boxes and temporarily ceasing its sampling service.

The organisation has continued to supply its international customers – which come from countries as far apart as Nigeria and Iceland – while also still providing items for hospitals, local authorities and leading high street food chains.

Always wanting to be ahead of the game, Graham was quick to recognise the importance of offering eco-friendly packaging and is continually sourcing new products.

Among the many products GM Packaging offers is a range of eco-friendly items, many of which are made from bamboo and sugarcane, while others are compostable and biodegradable.

The company also provide personalised packaging for a number of leading organisations as well as being able to corner the market in specialised, smaller volume orders.



Graham doesn't take for granted the fact that the company has been able to succeed in the current economic climate.

"We know it has been a very hard year for business generally so we are very grateful that we have been able to continue to grow and bring on board new customers as well as continuing to supply our long-standing ones," said Graham.

"We needed to move to cope with the level of orders that we are now dealing with on a daily basis and to give us the flexibility we need as we move forward."

For further information visit
www.gmpackaging.co.uk



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INSPIRED HR AND AGILITY

As the COVID-19 crisis challenges us again many companies are already financially impacted, and the global economy is set for unprecedented debt according to the World Economic Forum.

To overcome all these issues, employers are becoming more agile and thinking outside of the box. When COVID-19 evolved into a pandemic, many of my clients took action to protect their employees at very short notice on the following matters:

- Covid Crisis Management
- Furlough
- HR Process & Policy Reviews
- Working from Home implementation (WFH) – Agile working
- Organisational Design & Redundancy
- Employee Wellbeing - Covid Safe Working/Risk Assessments/DSE/Mental Health

The significance of agility is – and will continue to be – in three key areas: employee needs, customer expectations and economic uncertainty.

The biggest need of employees amidst a health crisis is to stay healthy, feel safe, pay all the bills and being close to their loved ones. That is why it is so important for all employers to adapt to the needs and protect their employees' wellbeing. And as an employer, you have a duty of care to do this.

We have supported so many businesses during 2020 and at the start of 2021 to respond to their employee needs. This has included:

- Helping them create COVID-19 crisis management processes.
- Creating COVID-19 policies, risk assessments, training and business guidelines to help mitigate the spread of the virus and meet safety obligations.
- Providing WFH guidance, processes and policies.

- Kept them up to date on the ever-changing furlough guidance and provided templates.
- Interpreted the new complex and constantly changing employee and safe working guidance.
- Guiding them on organisational design to minimise and manage necessary redundancies.
- Implementing wellbeing strategies.
- Managing challenging employee matters surrounding sickness, disciplinary, grievance, maternity, ACAS and employment tribunal matters.

2021 will see us continue to deal with the pandemic, as well as adapt to new ways of operating because of Brexit and our own internal challenges. Whilst there are some concerns internally, there can also be opportunities that positively impact your business. Having a strong business strategy, which addresses both challenges and opportunities will be key, and from this, setting out how you will achieve success through your people will be essential.

It is likely you are currently re-evaluating your strategy and business plans to rise to the current challenges that all businesses face. One of the most expensive things in that plan is the cost of your people. Getting the absolute best out of this large cost to your business doesn't happen by chance and now is the time to evaluate you needs and get the best from your people.

You have a finance team to get the money right, so a people team to get the people right makes a lot of sense to us! Strategic HR needs to work alongside your business plan so that you can confidently address:

- How to actively engage your team, particularly through times of change – after all, highly engaged teams show 21% greater profitability.
- How to motivate your best people and decrease staff turnover. 41% of employees leave their jobs because they are unsatisfied with the leadership of senior management.
- Decrease sickness absence, as highly motivated employees have 41% lower absenteeism.

So why Agile Strategic HR? It isn't just about HR, about paper pushing or wasting management time. It is about truly harnessing motivated people in your business.

As the events evolve locally and globally, we are still enabling new measures; regulations and precautions become quickly outdated and require reconsideration. But by remaining flexible and agile, and available to listen and help, we help all our clients to identify future employee needs, business essential requirements and act fast upon them.

No matter the size of your business, or whatever your worries, Inspired HR we will find a solution that works for you. We can help transform any businesses with our no-nonsense approach – so don't hesitate to contact us today to find out more at hello@inspired-hr.co.uk or call us on 0191 205 8020.

We also offer a FREE HR Healthcheck on your business which helps you identify and mitigate employee risks in your business. Please click on this link if you wish to take advantage of this FREE service: bit.ly/3rLXUoy

THE RIGHT TIME TO START A BUSINESS

The ongoing coronavirus pandemic continues to affect many businesses, as restrictions remain in place to prevent the spread of the deadly infection.

So, now might seem a surprising time to choose to start your own business.

However, Peterlee-based support organisation East Durham Business Service believes it is exactly the right time, as people have more spare time on their hands to turn their business dream into a reality.

It has been a challenging 12 months across the globe and the coronavirus pandemic is still very much with us.

The third national lockdown remains in place with a significant number of businesses and schools still closed and many people either working at home, on 'furloughed' arrangements with their employer or even laid off permanently or temporarily.

And while it may be hard to see the light at the end of the tunnel, the team at East Durham Business Service is urging people with entrepreneurial aspirations to turn their downtime into an opportunity.

Operations Director Denise Fielding said: "This is a particularly challenging time for everyone and while many people don't know what the future holds for them, it could actually be the perfect time to think about self-employment.

"Setting up on your own is a big decision and often, for many people who have thought about it, they decide it isn't the right time for them



L-R: Sandra Wardle, Denise Fielding, Hina Joshi and Christine Foster.

or they are reluctant to give up the security of employment.

"But in the current climate when you might be taking additional leave or are working reduced hours or have even been laid off, we're suggesting that you could use this to your advantage and think about whether working for yourself could be something for you.

"We've definitely seen an increased motivation from the people we're supporting, who seem to be progressing their business plans much quicker than

they would normally be. That can only be a good thing for the area's economy and entrepreneurial culture."

Although the East Durham Business Service team is working on a staggered system to support social distancing, they are continuing to offer help to people in the area who need ongoing business support.

www.edbs.co.uk

Sandra Wardle, 0191 586 3366 or
email sandra.wardle@edbs.co.uk



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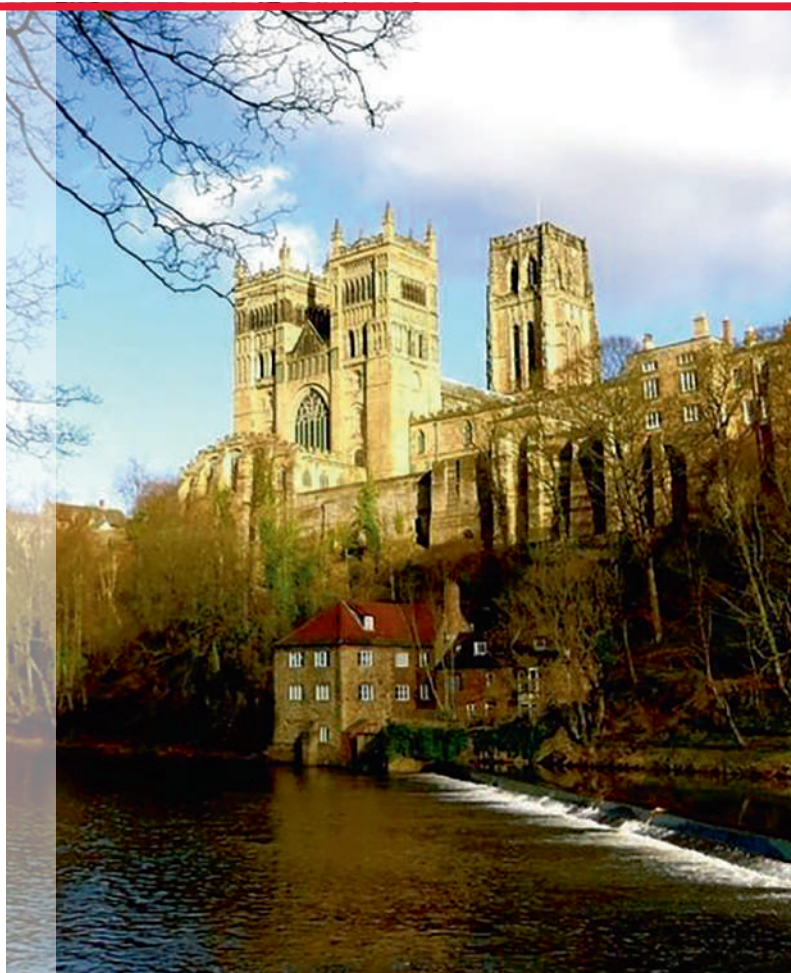
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Dr. David Cliff

Hyperbole:

- obvious and intentional exaggeration.
- an extravagant statement or figure of speech not intended to be taken literally, as "to wait an eternity."

Exaggerate:

- to magnify beyond the limits of truth; overstate; represent disproportionately.

Fake:

- prepare or make (something specious, deceptive, or fraudulent).

Source: Dictionary .com

PERHAPS A MIDDLE PATH?

Our modern-day pursuits of hedonism, lifestyle and self-expression have resulted in some interesting uses of language. In close accompaniment to this is the language of marketing that in its essence often strives to make necessities out of luxuries in our minds.

So, the modern lexicon of language in common usage removes everyday descriptiveness and emphasis in favour of endemic exaggeration. "Satisfactory" and "acceptable" become automatically not good enough, it has to be "outstanding" or "fantastic" (with the slight hesitation and emphasis on the "t" in the latter). Things are no longer "competent" or "good", they must be, "amazing" or "awesome". In fact, we have populated our language with so much hyperbole that its true descriptive consequences are often compromised and somebody speaking in more reasoned, evaluative tones, is now seen as just plain dull. Given the current mental health crisis, it's small wonder so many young people are suffering from social anxiety due to comparisons with others, where some express themselves in social media and elsewhere with such grandiosity that others simply find this absent and their lives wanting.

So okay, the pursuit of the good life and indeed marketing speak may be contributors but what is it at the core of humanity that makes us veer towards this imprecision? Are we so tired of the everyday that we must embellish? Equally when we go in the opposite direction and come out with terms of insufficiency or negativity, they are couched in similarly graphic terms often using metaphors such as "train wreck", "cringe worthy" and the like. The Oxford English dictionary exceeds 3.2 million words with approximately 800 new words added each year. In most languages, the basis of fluency is 800 words and there is a tendency towards a much lower number in our expressiveness vocabulary. Words are often reduced to simple edited highlights of far deeper emotional and psychological transactions between people, which is why marriages fail, business partners get into disputes and companies fall out and litigate!

I am not being gratuitously circumlocutory here, but it does strike me, that the richness of the language has been reduced to a far greater populism. Equally I am not suggesting an Orwellian type of "good/plus good/double plus good" continuum to qualify our usage, but moderation in our language does often allow it to be far more descriptive.

We can also add in the fact that often descriptiveness in language is increasingly substituted with the liberal application of expletives where an "f" adjective is seen to add more emphasis over eloquence and tone.

Words have power to shape, influence, inspire and instruct. They can also be used to distort, misrepresent and embody emotional states over an appreciation of the true facts. Why is this important? Well in an era of increasing fake news and the ability for people to print highly visual, attractive and seemingly credible content, suffused with the language of popularism, we have a real challenge about the acceptability and appeal of credible information. It is often more complex, more descriptive

and requires more thought in a world of increasing information overload. We have seen these factors play out recently with the ridiculous allegations, backed up by quackery, of inbuilt tracking and monitoring biotechnology in the Medina Covid 19 vaccination which is both technically impossible, and completely pointless anyway given that one's privacy is even more easily invaded by the simple possession of a mobile phone and an internet connection.

Conspiracy theories, shallow appreciation of facts and hyperbole can be at best unhelpful and at worst the modern-day equivalent of propaganda used by far-right regimes in the past to exert influence. It is beholden upon all of us to become more informed, more balanced and moderate in our language and to recognise that we need to work far more on the message sent, recognising the multiple realities now that exist in recipient audiences.

We live in a world now where things that exist in cyberspace, a virtual, information-based, conceptual existence, are often treated with the operationalisation of something existing in the actual world. Aficionados of neurolinguistics and others know that the subconscious mind discriminates little between fact and fantasy. We are heading for a world where some people will inject disinfected when an authority figure advocates it, will distort the elitism and privilege in society around half-baked conspiracy theories rather than look at the actual oppression in society and will avoid epidemiological science in favour of the rumour mill and word-of-mouth hysteria.

The Buddhists got it right with the notion of the eightfold flow approach, including right speech and right action, are balanced on what they called the middle path. It's not sexy and it probably won't sell more goods or services short term. It may mean you have to build relationships and credibility with the use of the facts over time rather than attractive and eye grabbing headlines and hype, but it is a far more genuine place in which to operate business and other relationships into the long term. Indeed, our politicians need to stop being 'world beating' and simply be integral, representing all, instead of the most powerful voices in our society. Instead of the language of 'levelling up', it may just be that a more integral position of being truly 'on the level' is where everyone needs to be.

May your day be really, really 'awesome', but it will probably just be good at best....

www.gedanken.co.uk

THE LEADERSHIP CLIMB OF A LIFETIME



As a Vistage chair and business leader who supports peers in his North East business community, Andrew Marsh is often asked what are the laws to being a good leader?

Here Andrew, who also owns Marsh Business Transformation and is Non Exec Director and Chair on a number of charitable and SME boards, guides those at the top through principles that make working life better.

"As a business leader, your job is to make decisions. The result of those decisions become what your success is judged on, by yourself and others.

"That's daunting. It makes even the best decision maker hesitate or doubt themselves. Pushing through a big decision is tough, usually very lonely and isn't often fun. You may lose sleep, and friends, along the way.

"So how do leaders do this every day, constantly getting up to climb another path of decision making?

"Vistage members have recently been given a guide called *Journey To The Summit*, The CEO's 7 Laws of Leadership. In it there's real pearls of wisdom. For this article I'd like to expand on them, in my own words.

Reject shortcuts to growth

Nothing worthwhile is ever easy. Good leaders check every angle, tick every box and explore every possibility. They commit to a plan and take ownership before making a decision that leads to growth.

The Vistage guide advises asking two questions: what am I missing and where's the truth in the feedback? I'd also ask 'If this goes wrong, what's the worst and best case scenario?' Often the worst case is still an opportunity that pushes you to that final 'yes'.

Create space to work on the business

How many times do you hear people say work on the business as well as in the business? It's a true adage. Decision making needs to be pro-active not just re-active to be successful. Pro-activeness requires thought, planning, time. Often that means taking yourself away from the business. Physically by working somewhere else, away from your usual day-to-day office. Mentally by investing in a peer group, in training or mentoring. Maybe read a book. I can recommend so many that create a clear mind!

Challenge your thinking with fresh perspectives

You can ask trusted others to challenge you, by playing devil's advocate they help you see a new thought train. Our peer groups are great for this. Everyone sees the same thing slightly differently. You have to open your ears, eyes and heart to this, and then make comparisons to re-evaluate your standing.

Stoke curiosity

One of my favourite quotes from the Vistage guide is "World-class business leaders are high on curiosity and low on ego."

In other words, ask questions. Presume others know better and grill them for knowledge.

Apply discipline

There are many ways to graph actions – it doesn't matter which you use. As long you are applying a principle for yourself to follow, you have applied discipline.

Always cover the four main elements influential to decision making, for example: instinct, experience, facts/data and perspectives of others.

Find a trusted guide

In a previous article, I reminded you that 'no man is an island'. This is true when making potentially life changing decisions for yourself and other people. Find someone who understands you, respects your job and your company, with the right experience but who also challenges you. You aren't looking for a friend. You are looking for someone to bring the best you out. That said, they will probably become a friend through the process!

Rise by helping others

By helping others make critical decisions, you train yourself to make your own. You hone skills and by seeing how your input creates a positive impact, you build your confidence.

For these seven steps, being part of a peer group or business mentoring organisation away from work has huge benefits. Whether you join a well-known global organisation or a local one with experienced business leaders, you won't regret the support and your leadership skills will come on in leaps and bounds!

Andrew offers free initial consultations to the region's CEO's, MD's and other decision makers. To get in touch please email Andrew@marshbusinesstransformation.co.uk



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“ I have been using Telex for the last couple of years and have always found them to be very efficient and responsive, they continue to deliver what they promise and work hard to obtain the best possible deals for our business.”

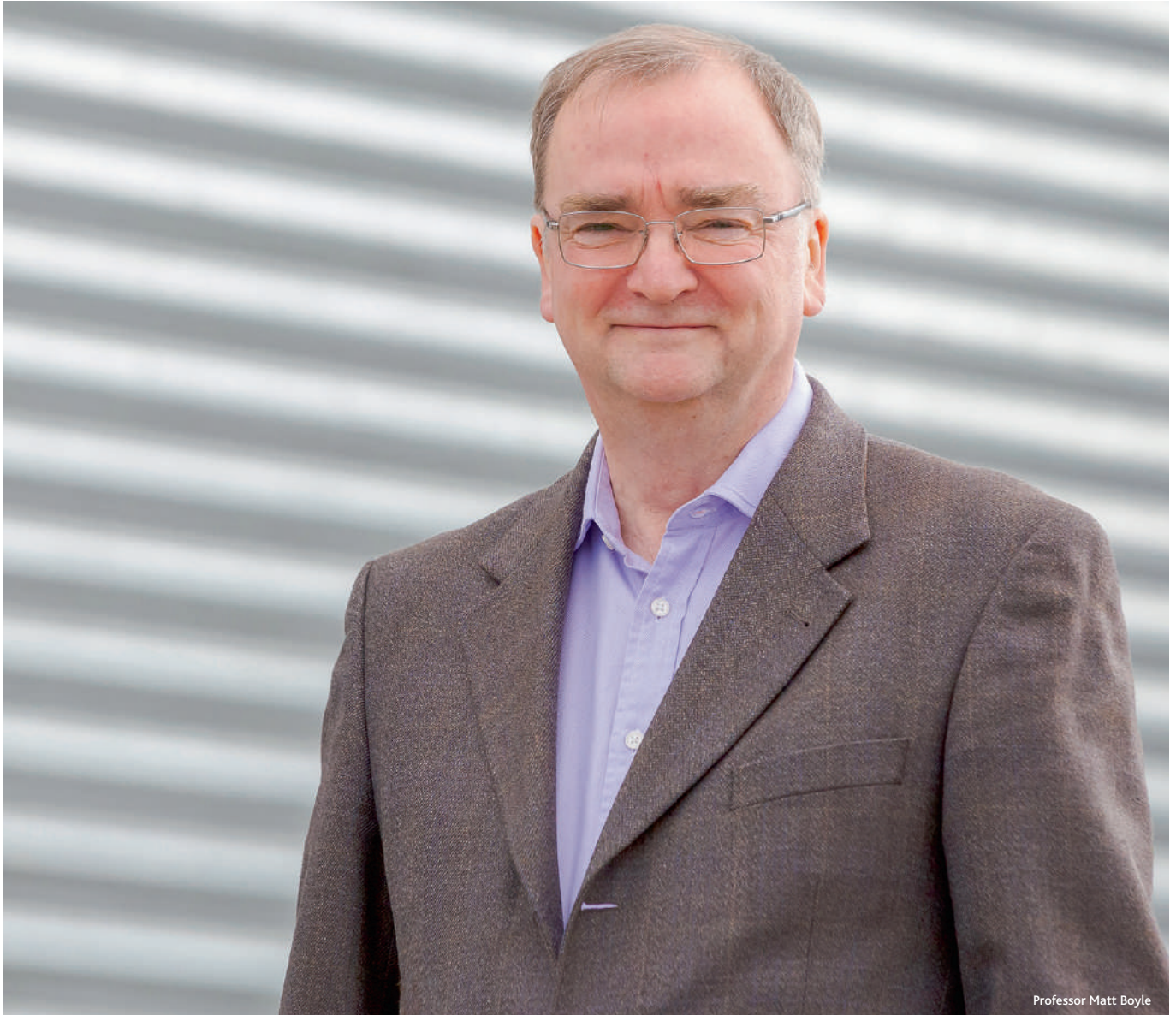
“ Without fail Telex UK always offer us the most competitive price and the most transparent and honest advice.”

“ Telex UK is different – from the moment I first spoke to them, I felt that they were going to do an excellent job in finding the best solution for my business and helping make the move. And so it was, they were extremely efficient, friendly and helpful and the transfer to a cost effective supplier was seamless.”

“ Telex UK were able to find very competitive prices for my business. They provide a friendly, efficient, prompt service, providing clear, helpful advice. Excellent customer service always.”



Get in touch to see if we can help with your business energy....



Professor Matt Boyle

MATT ENGINEERS A NEW ROLE AT NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY

Matt Boyle OBE, chairman of the North East Automotive Alliance (NEAA), has been appointed engineering professor at Newcastle University.

Managing director of Collingwood Solutions, Matt is a former president and chief executive of North East electric vehicle firm, Sevcon.

With a wealth of experience and impressive credentials within the UK power electronics, machines and drives sector, Matt will assist the university in its role as national lead for the Driving the Electric Revolution Innovation Centre project.

Paul Butler, chief executive of the North East Automotive Alliance, said: "I congratulate Matt and Newcastle University on this appointment. We, at the NEAA, know only too well that, as our chairman, Matt has been a driving force for innovation within our sector. Matt is a leading national influencer and advisor on electrification. It is crucial that we capitalize on our inherent

strengths in electrification and through academic research within our universities we develop nationally significant research programmes, linked to industry challenges and needs. This will bring more public sector research funding to the North East, attract more students to the region, support the Governments levelling up agenda and ultimately establish the region as a true automotive powerhouse."

Alongside, Paul Butler, and Ryan Maughan, Matt forms EV North, initially launched as the NEAA Electrified Powertrain Technologies Group, in its aim to support advances in new technology across the region, particularly in powertrain electrification.

Chaired by Ryan Maughan, EV North is an important step in supporting the North East's transition to become a true automotive

powerhouse and a location of choice for automotive investment in Europe.

Matt Boyle, said: "The UK and the North East in particular, have been at the forefront of electrification for decades. Go back to Smiths Electric Vehicles all the way through to Sevcon, EV North and the Nissan Leaf, the North East is a leader in manufacturing, investment and exploitation of electrification. It is also a major developer of the technologies needed to address climate change. I see my role at Newcastle University as helping to coalesce the research, development and the manufacturing of electrification technologies for the sectors that need to decarbonize."

www.northeastautomotivealliance.com

IN CONVERSATION WITH...



Paul Smith

PAUL SMITH

Director, HLA Services

Tell us about your role at HLA Services?

I am co-owner and a director overseeing our large multi-disciplined in-house contracts departments for both the 'end user' and construction sectors. I also oversee the financial departments.

What services does the company provide?

We provide essential compliance and operational services including heating, general and specialist ventilation, air conditioning mechanical services, plumbing, water hygiene, refrigeration and catering equipment and mechanical and electrical services, as well as, more specialist services such for example LEV (local exhaust ventilation), legionella control, car charging points and air source heat pumps.

What's your proudest business achievement?

Every few years this changes. Obviously, setting up a business back in 2003 with Neil Henry at the age of 29, was quite an achievement (these days, with the gig economy, not such a big thing but back then it was) but we didn't have time to be proud.

I am also very proud of the various business awards we have won, as well as guiding and expanding the business through the financial recession and following years.

However, I have to say, it's the way we have dealt with, and battled the COVID-19 situation, including keeping the business active and profitable and looking after the wellbeing of our staff and customers, that stands out above all else we have faced.

Although we are still in the grasp of the pandemic, the end is in sight. I think we will come out of this quite unscathed thanks to the efforts of all the staff. This, I feel, will probably be our finest achievement.

Even dealing with the aftermath of Brexit will seem like a walk in the park, after this!

What challenges have you encountered?

You can take some of the above as our greatest challenges, but the ever-changing face of health and safety, human resources and the add-on costs associated, has given us some large challenges. The difference in the landscape over the last 18 years is massive and rightly so.

How has the industry changed since you started the company?

We are a very nimble and versatile company. We can change course and adapt very quickly and this has helped us survive the legislative and technological changes we have had to deal with. We have always found an opportunity within change.

Who are your heroes in and out of business?

There are obvious answers like Richard Branson. However, I would have to say my heroes are my peers in business. I know a lot of business owners and they are all heroes for taking on a small business and growing it to a decent enterprise, whilst looking after their staff, especially in these harsh times.

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

Honesty and reliability.

How do you like to unwind?

Aside from with my family, it used to be scuba diving but it's been a few years since I did that. Recently, it's been exercise, although not always successfully!

www.hlaservices.co.uk

STANDBY GROUP NOW HAS SYNERGI

It's hard to believe that the last time we caught up with Alex Williams and Kieran Porter at Standby Group, we were discussing how busy they'd been helping out all areas of the health service to recruit full and part time staff to cope with the Coronavirus pandemic, and we were looking forward to everything getting back to normal in hospitals, care homes, GP surgeries and community support.

That was eight months ago and we're still in various stages of lockdown, although we are being told that there's light at the end of the tunnel. Allegedly.

Needless to say that Standby Group is as busy as ever...but Alex and Kieran haven't been distracted from making their company one of the biggest players in healthcare recruitment in the North. They've already hit the heights of healthcare in the North East and North West of England, but they're looking to spread their wings into other areas of recruitment.

Standby Group has now added a new brand to the portfolio...

One is Watson Black Search and Selection. If you are looking to fill a permanent position within healthcare, Watson Black are experts in the field. They're a specialist recruitment agency who, as with Standby Healthcare, are experienced when it comes to finding the right people to fill health and social care roles. Whereas Standby Healthcare tends to largely deal with filling short to medium term healthcare positions...the clue is in the word 'standby'... Watson Black is purely for companies who need full time staff members.

The other company within the Standby Group is Synergi Search, fronted by Dave Skimming.

Synergi Search specialises in working with housing associations and other charitable property providers who offer social, affordable housing. Most social housing was previously controlled by local authorities, but there was a steady trend for councils to dispose of their housing stock and let the private sector look after them. With the ever-

changing needs within the sector to bring more and more outsourced functions in house, the need for specialist recruiters is vital to bringing in the best talent to grow aid the progression. That is where Synergi step in.

"Housing associations are constantly evolving which is why it is such an exciting sector to be involved in" said Dave Skimming. "They are just like any other house builder and therefore need the same sort of workforce. Up until a few years ago, housing associations tended to outsource work, but more and more associations are now doing everything in-house. Here at Synergi Search we have vast experience in finding exactly the right people for those housing associations supporting numerous functions from Housing, Asset, Development and Design, to complex Compliance needs within Fire, Asbestos and Legionella.

One thing is for certain, the next year will see a boom in construction undertaken by housing associations. The Covid-19 pandemic has caused a decline in general building and, due to social distancing measures, it has been difficult for groups of people to work together, although many housing associations have had terrific success with their staff working from home. The problem especially comes with social care because visiting owners and tenants has been tricky to say the least.

Dave fully understands the problems with recruiting in the current climate and why making the right hire is currently more important than ever on both temporary solutions and permanent hires.

As experts at finding the right people Synergi prides on its knowledge of the sector, whilst also tapping into the expertise and recommendations provided

by the network of close relationships built up within the industry.

He expects the next few months to be pivotable for housing associations as they not only try to get themselves back up to speed as everyone returns to offices, but also because April is the time when most associations plan their budgets for the next twelve months, and look to make the vital hires to carry them through the year. For many, the past year has been a time for consolidation, to take stock and see how they can move forward.

"Synergi Search has all the tools to be a market leader in the sector because we understand and pride ourselves on emerging ourself in the culture of the sector and really get to know the people we work with," adds Dave. "As with Standby Healthcare and Watson Black, we will continue to grow and increase our influence within the field of recruitment. We also follow the same values as the rest of the Standby Group...to provide clear information and be honest in our approach to everything."

The best idea is to check out their websites. You'll find more details about each company plus a list of latest vacancies. They're always keen to hear from anyone who would like to be included on their list of people who'd be willing to work part-time in health and social care or may be searching for a new permanent role either within the health system or with a housing association.

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HOW CAN WE PREVENT CRIMES BEING COMMITTED AGAINST EMPLOYEES?



What are crimes against employees? These are not •actual• crimes that are committed against employees - stuff that will land you in jail/in trouble with HMRC/ACAS/Health & Safety Executive - like people being forced to work while on furlough, discrimination or modern slavery.

I'm talking about those things that are technically legal, but are totally impacting the lives of your employees, causing unnecessary (and avoidable) pain and suffering.

I facilitated a Work Pirates Gathering session in February to talk about the things that really gets our goat. The 'crime' that got the strongest reaction was working with a 'high performer' (AKA someone who brings lots of cash into an organisation) who seems to get away with behaving badly. Because they're generating income, they're never challenged. It seems that management are completely oblivious to problems this causes in the wider team. Motivation, engagement and happiness are impacted. It doesn't seem particularly fair. Please have a word with your 'superstar' and ask them to behave, and if they don't - not managing their performance broadcasts that it's ok to behave badly around here and soon you'll have lots of fires to put out!

One of my big bug bears is when you see people promoted into management positions and then left. Are they just expected to know how to do all the things managers have to do without any kind of support or training? Surely this is setting people up for failure/stress. Leading and managing people is really quite tricky, please give your people a

little support with it.

I could write a book about this topic...but this is the last one (honest!). This one makes me facepalm...when you are given feedback about your performance not being up to scratch in your annual review. Seriously? Why have you waited a year to give this feedback? Surely when the performance started to dip, having a quiet word could have rectified the problem. Feedback in your annual review should not be a surprise, receiving regular feedback helps people.

What do employees want?

It is not rocket science. Employees want to feel safe, like they belong and that they are protected.

Psychological Safety - this is the belief that you won't be punished when you make a mistake and is key to collaboration, risk-taking and innovation. Psychologically safe teams have higher levels of engagement and happiness, increased motivation to tackle the more tricky problems, more learning and better performance.

Sense of Belonging - I think we all enjoy belonging and being included, feeling a part of the team. Having some kind of shared purpose, with an understanding of what is expected from your employees, how they contribute to the success of

the team. People want to feel accepted, included, heard and be a part of something bigger than themselves.

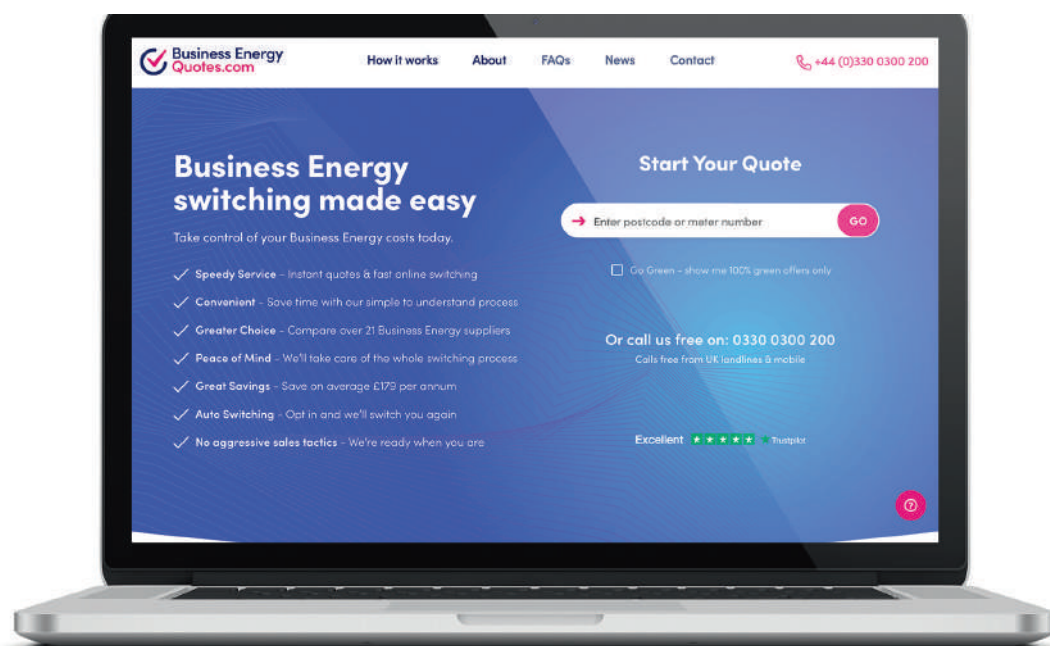
Support so that they can do a good job - People do not go to work to do a bad job. There needs to be systems, resources and support in place to help them do a good job. Employee wellbeing is so important - their physical, mental, social and financial wellbeing needs to be carefully considered. Workplace stress and burnout are major concerns (globally!) at the moment because they have a real and tangible impact on businesses. Frequent feelings of stress and burnout directly cause declines in productivity, engagement and loyalty.

Are you doing enough as an employer to prevent crimes from being committed against employees?

About Work Pirates

We're like the A-Team. But for organisations. We design and deliver compassionate programmes that unshackle your talent and leave happier, more productive workplaces.

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



BUSINESSENERGYQUOTES PUTS THE POWER BACK IN THE HANDS OF SMALL COMPANIES

The Power of Small

Some of the busiest people you'll ever meet are small business owners. They've got to spin so many plates, from stock, staff and bills to customer relationships and marketing. There's an awful lot to do.

Small businesses deserve our respect. The SME market is responsible for 99% of all the UK's 5.9 million businesses and an incredible 60% of total UK employment. In terms of their economic contribution, small businesses amount to 50%-70% of total GDP! The power of 'small' should never be underestimated.

These are some staggering figures. But even more staggering is the data which suggests that SMEs could be overpaying on gas and electricity to the tune of £7 billion due to mishandling of the network and a lack of information and market knowledge for end users.

It's the consequence of an untenable business energy switching method where SMEs face mounting non-commodity costs from energy stakeholders, including charges from transmission and distribution networks.

So, what should a SME business owner do? In the current world we live in, margins are as important as ever. How can you ensure you're not losing out on your energy deals?

Switching Business Energy

Traditionally, methods to secure new business energy deals have been impractical and time-consuming, requiring obscure and lengthy details from energy bills. This usually preceded follow-up phone calls and arduous negotiations to arrive at competitive business energy offers.

But business confidence in the energy sector is set to improve through the online business energy pricing engine: BusinessEnergyQuotes.com.

During a time where business confidence is already fragile, the smart-grid connected proposition from BusinessEnergyQuotes.com is a welcome enhancement to the energy sector.

Swift and Seamless

With a goal of making energy switching swift, seamless and transparent – BusinessEnergyQuotes.com aims to help SMEs save time and money.

Launched in February 2020, the pricing tool delivers accurate business energy quotes using actual consumption data from business energy meters in ten seconds thanks to robust software and connectivity to the Smart Grid.

BusinessEnergyQuotes.com's application development secures cheaper business energy deals via an e-signature in under three minutes. It allows

for quick, hassle-free business energy switching, inevitably giving time back to the SME businesses who need it most.

Through Smart Grid technology, BusinessEnergyQuotes.com identifies a business meter and consumption patterns down to Day/Night Splits or Evening/Weekend Usage. It means that the tariffs offered by its 21 business energy suppliers are as precise as possible, building SME confidence by securing accurate deals.

Go Green Only

Additionally, with 66% of businesses more focused on carbon reduction strategies post COVID-19, BusinessEnergyQuotes.com provides "Green Only" offers from suppliers who provide electricity from renewable generation sources. In recent months, with a surplus of renewable energy, it's proven to be a beneficial option for UK SMEs, with the market pricing green energy favourably against non-renewables.

Commercial Director of BusinessEnergyQuotes.com, Tim Strange, said: "Small to medium businesses do not have the time for long calls or a drawn-out process when gathering business energy quotes. They want to quickly see a range of affordable, accurate supplier offers to get the best deal possible for their business – to which BusinessEnergyQuotes.com is perfectly suited.

"Currently in the business energy sector, there are no propositions where UK SMEs are able to gather wholly-online, reliable and accurate cost comparisons without resorting to lengthy calls or haggling.

"UK SMEs lack time. They need a quick, accurate and frustration-free switching experience. It needs to be transparent. We've designed BusinessEnergyQuotes.com to put the power back into business' hands, giving UK SMEs competitive choice quickly and reliably."

The new pricing engine is created by award-winning energy specialists Northern Gas and Power – part of Global Procurement Group. The energy consultancy, the largest in the UK, has headquarters at the Gateshead Quays and is the top ranked North East business in the Sunday Times' HSBC Profit Track 200 League Table.

www.ngpltd.co.uk





AKZONOBEL CELEBRATES A PLATINUM START TO THE NEW YEAR

Global paint manufacturer, AkzoNobel Ashington, has achieved the highest Investors in People accreditation of Platinum, following a year of rigorous evaluations.

Regarded as the world's most advanced and sustainable paint factory, the site received the second highest three year accreditation (Gold) back in 2017, whilst only in their first year of operation.

A few years later with significant operational performance data under their belt, amid a global pandemic, the Ashington team are delighted to have received such a prestigious accreditation.

Investors in People is the international standard for people management, developed to recognise organisations that encourage sustainability and best practices through the management and development of their people.

The IIP assessment involves analysis of site values, policies, employee performance and satisfaction. Information is obtained through online surveys, assessments, individual and group interviews, performance data analysis, a site tour and observations. In line with Covid-19 guidance and restrictions, the site completed most of the assessment steps virtually, including the site tour.

The team at AkzoNobel Ashington has been recognised and praised for several factors including the level of trust between leaders and employees, alignment of reward and recognition, open and effective communication, working toward shared values and for building strong connections with both the internal and surrounding communities.

Head of manufacturing unit at AkzoNobel Ashington, Jeff Hope, said: "We're absolutely delighted to have received the highest accreditation from IIP. Platinum status is something we've been aiming for since our launch as we wouldn't want to offer anything but the best to our employees and their families.

"We're very grateful to and would like to congratulate, each and every member of the AkzoNobel Ashington team for creating a working environment where this possible. I'm incredibly proud of the team for their ability to convey their passion and enthusiasm, immersing those from outside of our team too. We would also like to thank our IIP Practitioner for their

attention to detail, rigour and support in finding areas where we can keep improving."

The Ashington site also received praise regarding employee satisfaction. Evidence from the assessments showed that employees felt their work had purpose and that many take pride in what they do; survey data taken from the past three years shows that every single employee believes that 'their role has an impact on achieving the overall vision of the site' which is a true representation and a reminder of the importance of working as one team.

Jeff added: "Platinum is a level achieved by only 3% of IIP accredited companies globally. This is a huge achievement for the site and everyone should feel incredibly proud.

"Since our launch, we've continued to grow and develop as a team, using the IIP framework to ensure we're able to continue offering rewarding, varied and secure career options."

To find out more about AkzoNobel visit:
www.akzonobel.com/en

PROFESSIONAL HOUSEKEEPERS MOP UP THE COMPETITION



Helen and her team .

Photo: The Bigger Picture Agency

Despite the crippling effects of COVID on many businesses, an award-winning domestic cleaning service provider has bucked the trend with increased year on year growth, additional staff take on and a move to bigger, more prestigious premises to help them cope with an increased workload.

Bright and Beautiful North Tyneside provide eco-friendly cleaning, tidying, laundry and ironing in North Tyneside, Ponteland and Darras Hall. Headed up by former advertising and marketing manager Helen Ross, the business has just reported their best ever year on year turnover figures which she attributes to their high level of customer care, the use of eco friendly products and a professional and dedicated workforce together with a marketing strategy that left many of her competitors behind.

The business has moved to the prestigious Rake House Farm development in North Shields, a

unique set of farm buildings made of traditional Northumberland sandstone with fully equipped modern open plan office space.

The firm have been successful in retaining many of their pre-covid clients who were desperate for them to come back after the first lockdown and new clients were gained thanks to Helen using her previous marketing skills to good use.

The exponential growth in customers, turnover and workload has led to Helen taking on additional professional housekeepers, with her workforce now standing at 14. Helen vowed that every one of her team would be retained

come what may, a fact that she achieved despite tremendous outside pressures caused by the inability to work due to the COVID restrictions in place.

"I'm very proud of where we've moved to this year both in terms of business growth and our fantastic bright and beautiful new office space. We've achieved so much in such a short period of time and I'm very grateful for that," said Helen.

For more information contact: Bright and Beautiful North Tyneside 0191 7314973 helen.ross@brightandbeautifulhome.com



Amber-Paige Thorpe



Hazel Rockingham

THE GIRLS' NETWORK IN THE NORTH EAST

Inspiring and empowering the young women of our region.

The Girls' Network has existed since 2013 and aims to inspire and empower girls aged 14-19 from the least advantaged communities by connecting them to a mentor and a network of professional role models who are women. We reach girls via relationships with schools in London, Sussex, Portsmouth, the West Midlands, Greater Manchester, the North East, Tees Valley and Merseyside. Our mentors are all professional women, who are extensively trained and vetted by The Girls' Network and volunteer to meet their mentees at least once a month for a year. Mentoring is a journey, helping mentees get from where they are to where they want to be.

Why mentoring? Hazel and Amber's story

Hazel Rockingham, who became a mentor as part of our first Tees Valley cohort, explains what motivated her to get involved with The Girls' Network.

"After seeing mentions of The Girls' Network on LinkedIn and reading up about it, I really wanted to get involved as I related so much to the case studies on their website. I could see my younger self in the girls, and really connected to the mentors' motivations as well.

Growing up, I was very privileged to have a good support network around me, but I still didn't have the aspirations that my close group of friends had. I was always that person who was good at many things but never excelled in anything in particular. Even when I looked at the activities I enjoyed, I still couldn't visualise what that looked like as a career. Fast forward from 1994, I have a degree in



marketing, 26 years' experience in various industries, 14 of which at management level. I can now see the confidence and determination to succeed came from the inspiring women I surrounded myself with: my amazing mother, my two wonderful grandmothers, my friends and some hugely inspiring women I had the privilege of working with over the years.

When the day arrived, I was so pleased to be matched with Amber.

We have had three mentoring sessions so far, and I can already see that Amber has started to challenge herself and create a vision for her future. I am delighted to be working with her and I feel privileged to help her shape and realise her goals.

If you have an hour a month to give and you'd like

to get involved with The Girls' Network by sharing your skills, knowledge and experience to help inspire the young women in our region, please contact Rosalind or Stacey."

Amber's point of view

"When I signed up for mentoring I was expecting to get some really useful and helpful ideas with what I wanted to do in my future and my career, and what steps and paths I would choose to be able to achieve my goals. It has 100% done that for me so far and I'm so pleased I was a bit brave and went for it.

Generally I am coping well with lockdown and having someone to speak to regularly is helping me. Knowing that I'm not alone and still getting help and advice about my future is very reassuring because times are tough at the moment.

I would recommend mentoring with The Girls' Network to other girls my age. It may seem a strange thing to do at first but, trust me, it makes sense very quickly and then it makes so many things easier and more achievable. Go for it."

North East Network Manager - Stacey Wagstaff
stacey@thegirlsnetwork.co.uk

Tees Valley Network Manager - Rosalind Stuart
rosalind@thegirlsnetwork.co.uk

There are other ways to support The Girls' Network if mentoring isn't for you, such as donating, fundraising, partnering with us as a business, and sharing our work with your network!

DRIVING INNOVATION IN COUNTY DURHAM

By Sarah Slaven, Interim Managing Director of Business Durham

As we continue to navigate the rapidly changing world, it has never been more important to help businesses overcome the challenges arising from the Covid-19 pandemic and support them in the months ahead.



Salvus Home, Aykley Heads, Business Durham headquarters.

Over the past year many businesses across County Durham have had to adapt their ways of working to continue operating and fulfil customer expectations.

Our priority has been to help guide businesses across the county to get the help they need during this unprecedented time. It is vital for companies to be able to access the necessary support available, in order to develop new and innovative solutions to either help their business get back on track, seize new opportunities or do both.

As the economic development arm of Durham County Council, Business Durham has a proven track record of helping free-thinking companies grow, thrive and bring innovation to market.

We recognise that there are lots of entrepreneurs with great business ideas, but they are not always able to research and develop products for a variety of reasons or don't have the confidence to pursue them.

With this in mind, our latest support programmes for start-up businesses and SMEs help increase ambition, raise aspirations, and help County Durham companies to reach their full potential.

Durham Ambitious Business Start-ups (DABS) is aimed at helping high-quality start-ups in County Durham to start trading and offers expert support during the critical first 12 months in business.

This programme offers two unique support packages – one for innovative individuals with a fledgling business idea and another for new entrepreneurs at the start of their exciting journey. Our tailored approach enables us to maximise our support to help unlock the potential success of each business.

For those with a clear business idea with growth-potential, the support focuses on developing a scale-up strategy and securing investment and funding. Entrepreneurs benefit from a series of workshops on the start-up process, with topics such as innovation and opportunity, growth through partnerships and pricing strategies to grow and scale.

As well as supporting start-ups we have launched the Durham Future Innovation Building (DFIB) programme for SMEs who are looking to invest in research and development to help bring their innovative product, process or service for the future to market.

This programme is targeted at the key growth sectors of construction, health and 'electech' (electronics, electrical and embedded software). It will create opportunities for companies to collaborate and learn from industry and subject matter experts.

They will be able to work up their ideas and connect to individuals and other businesses who can help in developing new innovations. The programme will enable them to adapt, discover new markets, become trend setters, continuously assess their products, and adjust quickly to market conditions.

The DFIB Programme will be delivered through a series of events, masterclasses, workshops and practical sessions, designed to help businesses unlock their innovation potential and develop their knowledge and skills – even outside their initial area of expertise.

In addition to the masterclasses and workshops, companies will be able to apply for funding to increase their expertise either by taking on their own experts or bringing in external consultants and specialists.

Both programmes are funded by the European Regional Development Fund (EDRF). DABS, which was launched in 2020, is a three-year project, and DFIB is a two-and-a-half-year programme running up until July 2023.

As we move towards recovery, we hope both programmes will inspire and support entrepreneurial activity across different sectors to help safeguard jobs and retain businesses in the county.

There will continue to be challenges ahead, but we need to remain positive. Our job is to build confidence that there is a strong economic future and by working together we can boost the local economy.

Innovation is the key to success and by helping ambitious businesses to reach out and grow year on year we will create a lasting legacy of great businesses that County Durham can be proud of.

For further information on Durham Ambitious Business Start-ups (DABS) and the Durham Future Innovation Building (DFIB) programme, and to check eligibility criteria, visit www.businessdurham.co.uk



Sarah Slaven



WHO RUNS THE WORLD?

Unfortunately, NE Youth have not been able to host their annual International Women's Day event this year, but they still wanted to celebrate all the amazing work women do, whilst raising money to run mental health workshops for young women across the North East.

As part of the celebrations, they recently launched the NE Youth Inspiring Women Awards 2020/21, sponsored by Vibrant Thinking.

They are also promoting a Walk & Talk weekend sponsored by Robson Laidler where they are encouraging women to take a walk with their Mum, sister, daughter or friend and talk about how they are feeling.



INSPIRATIONAL CARD LEAVES LEGACY FOR KAIYA

Owner of Letterbox Property Solutions, Angus Griffin, met fellow student Ruchit at university in Nottingham. Ruchit later had a daughter, Kaiya, who sadly contracted lymphoblastic leukemia, followed by a virus in hospital which fatally attacked her kidneys and liver.

At Kaiya's funeral, everyone was given a card designed by Kaiya which asked the holder to do a good deed then pass the card onto someone else to do the same. The card has inspired Andrew to do something positive to help.

Angus has now completed the renovation of a three bedroomed house in Sunderland which has been leased to a charity. A plaque has been placed on the door saying "Kaiya's Home" and the profits from the rental agreement are expected to bring around £6000 per year to the Children with Cancer UK charity.



WEAR SIDE DOMESTIC ABUSE CHARITY MEETS INCREASING DEMAND

A charity which helps families escape domestic abuse is managing a surge in referrals with the help of a four-figure grant from the region's biggest building society.

Wearside Women in Need provides community-based services to women and children suffering domestic abuse. The charity runs a family refuge centre that has remained operational throughout the pandemic and is currently dealing with well over 200 referrals every month.

Newcastle Building Society has awarded the charity a £5,000 grant which will help it cover the increasing demand for its services and support families escaping domestic abuse.



BUILDING SOCIETY DONATION BOOSTS DARLINGTON FOOD BANK

Kings Church foodbank is the latest good cause to benefit from Darlington Building Society's pledge to donate 5% of its profits to worthy community organisations, as the foodbank receives £3,000 from the building society.

Darlington Building Society Chief Executive, Andrew Craddock, commented: "Supporting great causes in our communities is central to our ethos. The work of the Kings Church Foodbank has never been more important and we are delighted to have been able to provide this financial help in these difficult times."

GO ONLINE, GET ACTIVE

Local charity US Active has launched 'Get Online, Get Active', 15 weeks of free online fitness classes designed to improve mental health in North East's young people.

The initiative is in response to the pandemic and the impact it is having on the mental health and emotional wellbeing of many young people who are becoming increasingly anxious, depressed and socially isolated.

If you are aged between 12 and 25, you can book a variety of free online fitness classes including boxercise, strength training and yoga. To view the timetable, go to www.usactive.org.uk/goga.

For over 85 years NE Youth have been making a positive difference in the lives of young people, now more than any time we need your support



Visit:
www.neyouth.org.uk
to learn more or
email:
jon@neyouth.org.uk



CHARITY OF THE MONTH

MANDY DRAKE

Executive Head of Fundraising,
Great North Air Ambulance Service

Tell me about your charity?

The Great North Air Ambulance Service (GNAAS) brings pioneering pre-hospital care to the scene, rescuing hundreds of severely injured or ill patients every year. Our life-saving air ambulance service operates in the North East, North Yorkshire and Cumbria.

Our onboard team is usually made up of a pilot, a specialist pre-hospital doctor and a paramedic who not only work on board our helicopters and overnight rapid response cars, but also carry out advanced research and welcome clinicians from all over the world to our centre of excellence for world-class training.

How much do you need to raise a year to survive?

Last year we had to raise £5.3 million per year to survive. In 2020 alone, we responded to 1,262 call-outs throughout our region.

Since the pandemic hit, we have had to really rethink the way we do things. The COVID-19 outbreak and the subsequent restrictions have cost GNAAS over £350,000 in challenge and events fundraising alone and although we have managed to keep going so far, it has been a constant fight.

It is the donations that really keep us operating and with the support of the public we are able to save more lives and carry on easing suffering across the region.

What have been your proudest moments so far?

It really is hard to pin down only a few of our defining moments. However, since I began working at GNAAS, the general development of the charity that I have witnessed is something to be proud of.

Last year, the Jet Suit Paramedic was born. A concept that, if brought through from trial to completion, could see GNAAS paramedics reach patients who have been injured in remote locations in the Lake District. We hope to demonstrate how this can work later in the year.



The introduction of our blood on board service has allowed GNAAS to carry out roadside blood and plasma transfusions on patients at the scene. The pioneering scheme was devised by GNAAS doctor, Rachel Hawes OBE in collaboration with Newcastle Hospitals which is also something we're very proud of.

This year, we launched GNAAS' first business club in the hopes of uniting businesses across the region, giving them the chance to build lasting relationships and hear from inspirational speakers on a monthly basis.

Membership fees from the club will go towards helping GNAAS continue to provide life-saving critical care to ill or injured patients at a time when the charity has seen a slump in revenue from corporate supporters.

How has the influence of women helped to shape the charity's success?

From our female doctors and paramedics, to our executive team, fundraising staff and volunteers, we have many strong and inspiring women in the workforce who have helped shape the charity into what it is today.

If it isn't the ground-breaking research and

schemes brought on board by our female doctors, it's female staff completely revolutionising our teams and the way we do things. Our newest venture, the business club, for instance, was brought into play by our corporate fundraising officer, Leya Baksh, who started with us in 2019.

We have others like Sarah Zissler who joined us in an assistant position and is now our head of fundraising. And there's lots more new talent coming on board and making a huge difference throughout the charity. It's a privilege to be a part of.

In March's business club, our guest speakers are all inspirational women from across the North, including one of our own female doctors.

How can you get involved?

Your donations keep us operating. To help us to continue to save thousands of lives across the region, please visit www.gnaas.com

If your organisation would like to sign up to our business club, hear from inspirational speakers and make connections, please email baksh@gnaas.com



Kerry McCabe

COVID UNLOCKS THE POTENTIAL OF NE1 CAN CAREERS PROGRAMME

By Kerry McCabe, Business Network Manager, Newcastle NE1 Ltd



Cath Tucker, Careers Manager at NE1 CAN.

Covid has caused seismic changes in most jobs, businesses and industries, but the impact has not all been negative. At NE1 CAN, a free careers and engagement programme for young people in Newcastle and the North East, Covid has unlocked our potential. One of the silver linings of the pandemic has been the dramatic and almost overnight transformation of our service and the rapid and enthusiastic take-up of the programme by a host of new students, schools and educational establishments.

We have been overwhelmed by the response and are delighted by the programme's success in what has been the most unpredictable of years.

After being forced to switch to online delivery in March last year, we have seen a huge rise in the number of attendees to our events and engagement programmes. We are now planning to use the lessons learnt during the pandemic to shape our programme for the future. We are currently developing our Spring/Summer programme and hope to roll it out as a hybrid model, as lockdown restrictions ease, combining both in-person delivery with live-streaming of events. This way we can retain the inclusivity and extra reach we have enjoyed during lockdown.

We also hope to expand the programme with more focused work with schools catering for children with special educational needs and with more educational establishments and businesses.

Thankfully, we are a small and agile team at NE1 CAN so when the pandemic hit, we could switch our programme almost immediately. We had a full timetable of events scheduled for the Spring term, all fully booked with a waiting list of potential attendees. Traditionally the number of attendees in face-to-face sessions were constrained by the capacity of the venue and the business hosting the event. By switching to an online platform limits on numbers and many of the barriers to attendance were removed.

Our Spring programme gave us the chance to test online delivery and gain confidence in the new format, so when we launched our extended programme for the Autumn, numbers went through the roof.

Online delivery also removed some of the issues we'd previously had with delivery, not just in terms of numbers but in terms of access and inclusivity. Being online gives a degree of anonymity to the attendees, who can take part regardless of age, gender, or socio-economic group.

It has been liberating.

Schools who would previously have been unable to attend due to budget or timing constraints no longer need to calculate the cost of attending. There is no need for coach hire, or timetable re-jigging. Instead, we share the programme content with teachers beforehand and they can identify which students they would like to attend and get them to log on via a link. It is that simple and the results speak for themselves. We have had a huge uptake in attendance and the numbers are continuing to rise, with new, cross-sector businesses coming forward to get involved in the programme. Feedback from both the students attending and the businesses delivering the sessions has also been extremely positive.

NE1 CAN was launched by Business Improvement District company, NE1 Ltd in 2016 to connect Newcastle businesses and employers with potential future employees. We work to provide insights and advice on jobs and careers and encourage and help young people to broaden their horizons. All sessions are free for all schools and educational establishments to attend with NE1 working with a diverse range of businesses from the NE1 catchment area and the wider North East region to deliver the programme. Businesses are keen to get involved to help shape the next generation of potential employees, providing career insights and generating enthusiasm and interest in their sector.

Changes to the programme's content and mode of delivery has really resonated with educational providers. We have capitalised on current recruitment and employment trends to ensure the programme is both topical and meaningful for students and for businesses. One of our first sessions in the Autumn focused on Paramedic recruitment in the NHS. Interest levels were phenomenal with over 150 attendees from schools including Benfield School, Sacred Heart and others.

Demand for NE1 CAN's services is now greater than ever. Young people have demonstrated their personal commitment and determination to continue to focus on their future career goals, despite all the challenges they currently face. We need businesses to match this commitment by getting involved. We would welcome any support and involvement the business community can offer.

Any businesses, entrepreneurs or individuals interested in engaging with the programme should contact Kerry.mccabe@newcastlene1Ltd.com



Nicola Cook

CAN YOU INNOVATE YOUR WAY OUT OF A RECESSION?

If the ONS statistics are to be believed, the UK economy has suffered more and shrunk faster than many of our economic counterparts as a result of the pandemic.

Despite the government propping up money supply and the third best global roll-out of vaccines (behind Israel and UAE), it would seem that a combination of long extended lockdowns, uncertainty about how and when life will return to normal, and let's not forget, changes to trading conditions with our greatest economic partner post-Brexit, and one would be forgiven for feeling more than a little down hearted.

However, we're entrepreneurs. You know, the guys and girls in society who are famed for not accepting 'No' as an answer. Who work tirelessly to find a solution to any given problem. Who embrace creativity. Who shrug off knock-backs and rejection and for the few of us who are sporting the odd grey hair these days – one might add wisdom to that long list. Like me, this may not be your first rodeo.

Therefore, if anyone can impact the future prosperity of our country – it's us.

The past twelve months have thrown up as many opportunities as challenges. The question is, are you actively searching and embracing them?

Here's four things to help you innovate your way out of a recession:

1. Reevaluate your value proposition

... or something I refer to as your UDP (Unique Differentiating Proposition). You may be in a sector that has been completely shut down or contracted as a result of the pandemic – in which case you have no option but to innovate.

Never before has it been so important to understand the value you bring, how you differentiate that value from your competition, and how you can become part of your customer's route out of the pandemic. How do you solve their pain, which may have changed post-pandemic? How can your value proposition help them recover and become more profitable and competitive in their marketplace?

Better yet, how can you use the current chaos and uncertainty to disrupt an existing sector? How can you break the rules? Become the challenger either through innovation in product/service or business model, or both?

By the very nature of who they are, large businesses are slow to change. Agile, fast-moving business with dynamic leaders can always capitalise on a changing economic landscape.

2. Refine your Target Client Avatar

The customers you had pre-pandemic may no longer be profitable, or indeed there – so who should you be selling to

now? Which parts of the market are thriving as a result of the last twelve months? Identify them, then figure out their triggers in the sales process, and position yourself front and centre to fulfil their needs? Be mindful that your previous successful marketing strategies may need a rethink.

3. Adapt to new buyer behaviour

Newsflash – buyer behaviour is always changing. Only the enforced changes in living and working patterns has accelerated and exaggerated the pace of that change.

Work to create a buying process that your customers WANT TO PURCHASE FROM IN THE WAY THEY WANT TO BUY. Not the other way round. Look for the blockages in your current pipeline and innovate your way around them. Over the past nine months, a couple of my businesses have completely re-written their sales processes and have no intention of returning to their old ways.

If you don't already have one, the idea of creating an omni-channel approach to selling, or you've never heard of the S'Marketing part of the customer journey – then I highly recommend a deeper conversation with someone like me, who can help guide you on how to build a Sales Engine to future proof your business.

4. Power to the people

Often the best ideas come from your team. Actively invite your team to contribute. What do they believe you should be doing differently? Give them a competitor or sector to research before presenting their findings in a group? And now is the time to upskill them—a great use of furloughed resource. If you don't already, introduce a company non-fiction book club, or some Fizzy Friday group shared learning sessions where you share best practise and upskill one another.

I firmly believe that we are going to see an explosion of growth in the latter part of this year, and the companies that benefit from that expansion will be the ones who laid the foundations now.

Nicola Cook is the CEO of Company Shortcuts. The UK's leading Sales Acceleration agency helping scale-ups build a profitable Sales Engine for Growth. Her waitlist is open and is currently taking new applications for 2021. If you're interested in finding out how she could help your business, for an application form contact helen@companyshortcuts.com

MAKING CHANGE FOR GOOD IN A TIME OF DISRUPTION

As businesses, we have all faced unimaginable challenges over the past year. As Shared Interest supports over 200 fair trade businesses in 51 countries, we have seen firsthand the impact the pandemic across a wide range of sectors, particularly agriculture and handcrafted goods.

The producers we support are not only facing the challenges of the pandemic but also the increasing effects of climate change. Covid-19 has severely hindered trade routes due to border closures and port restrictions, in addition to changing consumer buying patterns. This has been further compounded by unusual weather conditions which have affected harvests. In Kenya, agricultural production accounts for about 33% of GDP and yet erratic rainfall patterns are already affecting yields. If this continues, there is a much greater risk of food insecurity and loss of income for those in greatest need. Last year, communities in Uganda were hit by severe flooding and in Honduras, hurricanes destroyed housing, infrastructure and crops.

Despite this, we have also seen how a time of disruption can be an opportunity to implement change, including creative use of technology. With a team spread across six different countries and a membership of over 10,000, here in the UK, we have always embraced virtual methods of communication but never at the level experienced recently. We have maintained, and in many instances become closer to the customers who receive our finance. A new virtual due diligence framework was developed to ensure we could evaluate new customers and assess their needs remotely. Staff engagement has been maintained as the team have generated interesting ways to support each other, overcoming cultural, language and time differences, including weekly exercise challenges, quizzes and a focus on mental wellbeing.

Holding face-to-face events has always been an important part of our stakeholder engagement, allowing us to share stories of our impact across

thousands of communities. Unfortunately, the impact of Covid-19 meant that our 30th Anniversary event in March 2020 was cancelled, and as a result, we could not formally receive our third Queens Award for Enterprise in the Sustainable Development category from the Lord Lieutenant, as planned. I am, however, very proud of the way our team have maintained a high level of engagement and we remain encouraged by the steadfast loyalty of our supporters. Investment levels continue to rise and we should soon reach a combined pool of £48 million in Share Capital. Like many individuals, our members have embraced technology to keep in touch with family and friends and as a result, almost half of our membership now manages their investment online, a 35% increase from last year. We also held our first virtual member event in November and the response was overwhelmingly positive, with the majority of attendees not having joined a member event previously.

As I write this, we are now approaching two key events in our diary – Fairtrade Fortnight and our AGM. Under normal circumstances, we would be looking forward to welcoming our colleagues from Africa and Latin America to our Newcastle head office, and coordinating visits from fair trade businesses supported by our finance. This year looks very different but there is still a great

deal to celebrate. Our AGM will take place online for the first time, followed by a series of virtual workshops. We have already managed to reach a much broader cohort of members with the number of participants expected to be the highest in our history.

When we start to make the transition to a post-Covid world, we – like many other businesses – will approach stakeholder engagement in a different way, in order to give our membership alternative ways to contribute, challenge, and understand the impact of their investment. So, as we approach this year's Fairtrade Fortnight, it is in a very different world to the one we experienced last year. In some ways, the pandemic has brought us closer as a team as we share experiences, support colleagues and look for innovative and collaborative ways to tackle challenges. Technology also enables us to feel more connected with farmers and workers in the developing world, although some of our business challenges are very different. Perhaps that makes this year's message all the more poignant: Choose the world you want. The pandemic has brought global interconnectivity and it is clear that we all must play our part in making a difference to drive long-term change.

www.shared-interest.com



Patricia Alexander

NORTH SEA LINK RELEASES LEARNING RESOURCES TO HELP TEACHERS AND FAMILIES WITH HOME-SCHOOLING

With home-schooling set to continue until at least 8th March, National Grid's North Sea Link project has released an exciting range of educational materials for pupils to access at home.

North Sea Link is a subsea power cable, also known as an electricity interconnector, that stretches 450 miles from Blyth in Northumberland to Kvittdal in Norway.

Due to become operational at the end of this year, it will be the longest subsea interconnector of its kind in the world. It will enable the exchange of clean energy between Britain and Norway and provide enough electricity to power almost a million and a half homes.

The educational materials, including a detailed presentation and downloadable worksheets, are designed for KS2 and KS3 pupils and are available online now.

The resources were previously used at the project's educational centre in Blyth which opened its doors to pupils in 2019 and received fantastic feedback from local teachers and pupils.

Lockdown rules have meant it has been closed since March, but this hasn't stopped the team wanting to reach out to pupils virtually.

Project Communications Manager, Sally Barson, said: "We loved welcoming youngsters to our Energy Education Centre to learn about the project and enjoy some of the fantastic games and virtual reality experiences.



From left: Pupils From Cambois Primary School with Steve Coxon, Senior Project Manager Sally Barson, Communications And Stakeholder Engagement Manager, and Mike James, Site Manager At North Sea Link

"Unfortunately, the restrictions imposed by Coronavirus have meant we have been unable to welcome pupils back to the Centre, so we had the brilliant idea of taking the Centre to them by sharing our resources and presentations online.

"We are passionate about encouraging children to take an interest in STEM subjects and hope that sharing these resources will support this and also make home-schooling a bit more enjoyable for pupils, teachers and parents."

To download the NSL Educational Centre resources see www.nationalgrid.com

VIRUSES AND VACCINATIONS: SORE PAWS

Advice from Doctor Elizabeth Stead, BVM&S MRCVS PgCert SAS

Since the pandemic, there have been a surge in new dog owners, but owning a dog can come with a variety of new responsibilities. Here at Sore Paws, we want to share some important advice on keeping your dog safe and healthy during these difficult times.



It's not just humans that have to worry about viruses and vaccinations, there are dangerous viruses out there for dogs too, such as leptospirosis and parvovirus, that they need to be protected against. Although there are few

recorded cases of viruses such as rabies in the UK anymore, due to the stringent vaccination and preventative programmes, it's never a good idea to become complacent. We would encourage you to make an appointment with your vet, to ensure your dog is up to date with their latest injections. That way, as we begin to ease out of lockdown and start socialising again, you don't have to worry about your dog being susceptible to any new viruses. If you are concerned, make sure to look out for any changes in your dog that might indicate an infection. Coughing, vomiting, diarrhoea, and loss of appetite are all signs that your dog might not be well, and may require medical attention.

Unfortunately, with the increase in demand for puppies during lockdown, there has also been a surge in dog thefts. It's traumatic for any dog owner to have their pet stolen - and even more traumatic for your pet - which is why we want to encourage everyone to be vigilant and keep their beloved pet safe. Since 2016, it's a legal requirement to make sure your dog is microchipped, no matter what

their age, that way if it is found, it can be returned home to you safe and sound. There are also plenty of everyday precautions you can take, such as not leaving your dog tied up in a public place, alone in a car, and regularly practising recall in the dreaded case they do run off during a walk. These small changes can hugely reduce any chances of your dog being stolen and will help to always keep your furry friend safe.

Our Practice Plan is perfect for new and old dog owners alike, offering a range of vital services, including vaccinations, for a small monthly fee. We have a team of highly trained individuals working within Sore Paws, so if you are in need of any advice or help, we're always here for you.

For more top tips, follow us on Facebook. To speak to one of our trained veterinary nurses, head to our website at www.sorepawsveterinaryclinic.co.uk or call us on 01325 308 000 (Newton Aycliffe) or 0191 414 4233 (Winlaton).

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ARE YOU LINKED IN TO LINKEDIN?



Nevil Tynemouth

LinkedIn is a significantly underused, underrated and misunderstood tool for professionals when it comes to business development.

With LinkedIn global account numbers heading towards 750m and UK accounts approaching 29m there is a wealth of opportunities for professionals who want to grow their network and find new clients.

What is it that stops people getting their LinkedIn approach right? I see one underlying major issue time after time. That issue stems from a simple question: Why are you on LinkedIn?

Most people don't have a clear answer for this, instead they have vague notions of 'growing their personal brand' or 'raising their profile'. Others have a clearer picture of why they are on LinkedIn, or rather they did have a clear picture when they joined LinkedIn, it was to find a (new) job. Finding a job on LinkedIn is a great idea, I see and speak to so many people who have done just that. The challenge starts when our 'why' on LinkedIn starts to change.

If you start from a position of looking for a job your LinkedIn profile and approach are centred around a really engaging CV. Once you have your job, you might decide to use LinkedIn to find new clients, which is a great thing to do. The disconnect happens when we realise we are approaching clients with a LinkedIn profile that has been designed to find you a job. You are using a powerful tool in a way that may well not connect with potential clients. Think about it this way, if a client phoned you up to ask about a new piece of work, would you offer to email them your CV? Unlikely, and if you did choose to send the

CV would it get you the piece of work? Even more unlikely!

If you want to find new clients on LinkedIn (if that is your "why"), you need to build a profile and presence that aligns with this. You need to have a profile that quickly and easily tells me how you might benefit me in some way. This sounds like a really simple thing to do, and it is something I have asked numerous professionals to do. The starting point is a question like "what is you do to benefit your client?" Answering this question is tougher than it might appear on the surface. To get it right spend a little time thinking about the ultimate goals and issues your clients typically have and then draw up some examples of what you have really done to help, serve and support them. With those ideas and answers in mind, here are the most important things you need to do:

- Represent yourself well, sharing what you do, how you actually help, serve and support your clients.
- Build trust in every interaction and engagement.
- Be yourself, be authentic and personalise what you do.
- Spend time writing and editing your profile so it matches your current 'why'.
- Tailor your profile so it leans towards your ideal clients.

Doing these five things will help you get so much more from LinkedIn. It will help you engage, start

a conversation with, and build relationships with potential clients.

How do you go about achieving these key areas above?

Spend time thinking about who your ideal clients are. Document this and have it in mind for everything you do on LinkedIn. Be specific and if you can get right down to the job titles and companies you really want to engage. This clarity of your goals will help you focus and refine what you do to move towards your ideal outcome.

Look at every part of the profile that LinkedIn provides you with and ask – "how do I tailor and complete each section so it speaks to my ideal clients?" LinkedIn gives you lots of support and help to really focus your profile building, so take some time to read their articles and review their advice.


Start sharing, commenting, and engaging with content. Again, do this thinking about your ideal clients, asking yourself: Will this help my ideal clients? "Will they want to listen to or engage with this content?"

When you have done all of this you can start to build and grow your network towards your ideal clients. With nearly 750m accounts I think you will be pleasantly surprised by how many opportunities there are for you on LinkedIn, if we can get beyond your CV based approach!


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David Anderson

USING OKRs TO SHIFT UP THE GEARS

David Anderson likes to practise what he preaches. As a director at leading North East management business consultancy AuxinOKR, he applied the concept of OKRs to his other business – Ride Electric – and explains how this is driving performance

First of all, can you explain what OKRs are?

OKRs is a goal-setting framework just like SMART and lots of others. OKR stands for Objectives and Key Results. The objective is an aspiration. It is a place you want your business to be in the future. The key results are quantitative. The KR's are the metrics we will use to measure our progress towards achieving the goal, or it's how you track progress, create alignment, and encourage engagement around measurable goals.

How can they help a business?

The greatest challenge in making a business grow is defining and sharing the direction with everyone involved, so they are absolutely clear of their role, and are motivated and properly geared to deliver. This is not just at the start, it is critical that this focus is constantly maintained, with activity and direction based upon the ever-changing nature of business. We've read many articles where few people can clearly articulate the strategy for the business – even the board of directors in certain cases – so what chance does the staff have to deliver?

Why did you think OKRs were right for Ride Electric?

We are a fast-growing start-up business that is evolving to the current demand for driving eMobility, which is of particular focus owing to

environmental and current issues with Covid. Our original direction did not bear the fruit as we had expected so we had to adapt fast. Old school business planning processes would have failed us. We loved the concept of OKRs which are dynamic but promise focus and fast execution. I had a bias too – I'm involved with helping other businesses with AuxinOKR.

What problems did you encounter trying to apply OKRs?

As with any new methodology, we needed to get everyone behind it, which isn't hard with a great bunch of people we work with, however knowing what to focus on, to make a difference was – and is, tough. As the book says you have to 'measure what matters', or as we are finding, be able to execute what matters, is critical.

What is the difference of theory v actual implementation?

As many people find it, this isn't about measuring what has happened, it's about what needs to happen. It's not all that obvious! As we have been advised, it's not a thing you can read about and do, it needs to be learned and experienced. An analogy I can use is it's like learning to play the guitar. I've been in bands for years but it wasn't till I focused and dedicated to learning lead playing that I made it happen – with a lot of help,

commitment and patience. I'm not there yet, but definitely on the way, which for me is incredible. It's that same sense of achievement that is relevant to growing business through OKRs – or I guess any other aspect of a business. You need skills and experience, as well as knowledge!

How has Ride Electric benefited?

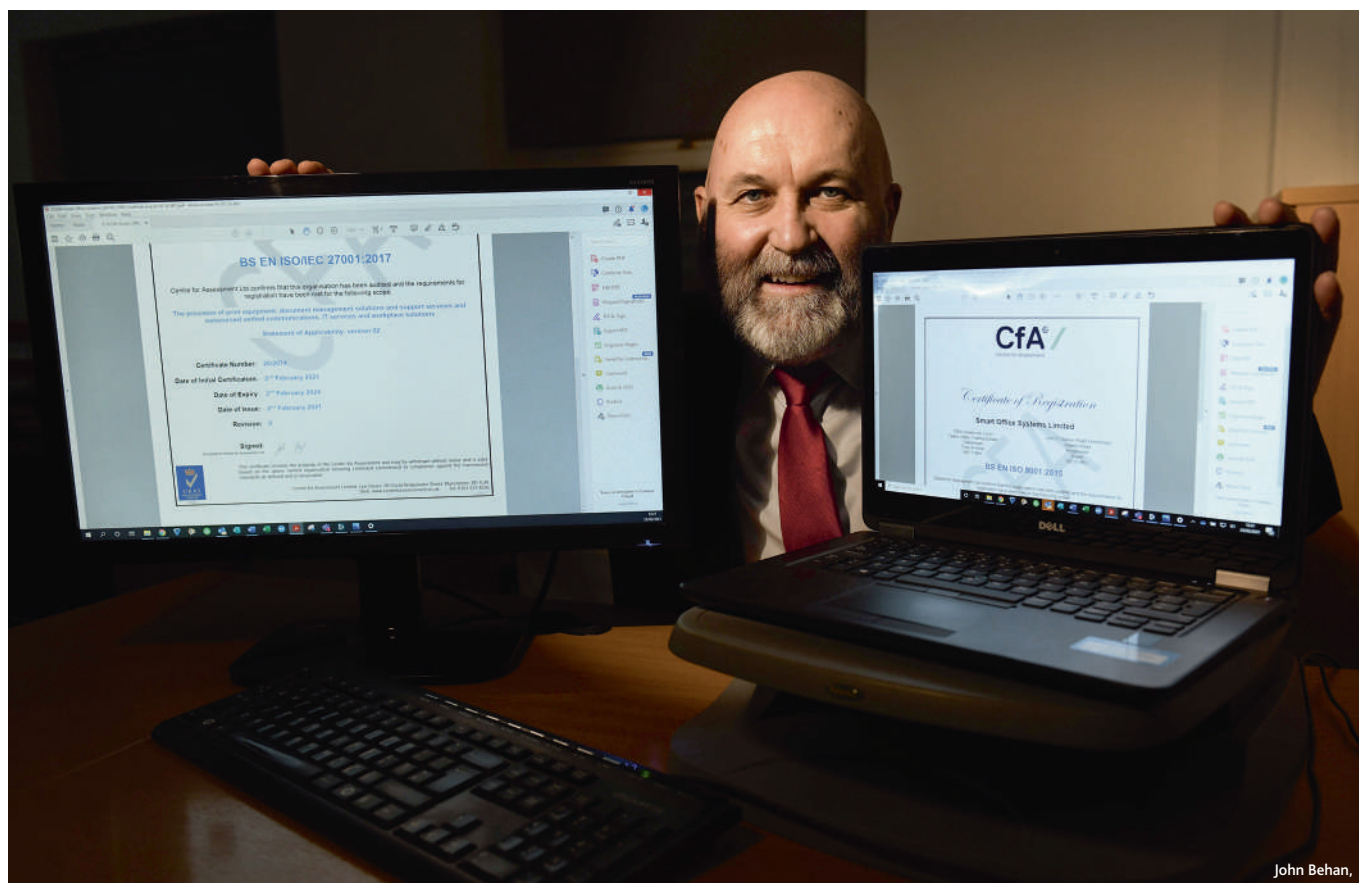
Through clarity, hard-work, circumstance and discipline we are in an incredible place with a very exciting future ahead. Again, we're not there yet, but we know where we're going. I often look at successful companies and wonder what it took to get them there. I don't necessarily know the answer to that question for others, but I do know that without a framework and a mindset shift for me and the team, we wouldn't be as confident as we are.

What is next for Ride Electric?

We are in the midst of realigning into two distinct areas – premium retail of an eBike lifestyle and the delivery of our about to be launched venture, e-Mobilise with its mission of facilitating the transition from motor vehicle dependency to eMobility, which by the time this is in the press, will be operational, serving an initially, UK-wide marketplace.

For more details visit www.auxinokr.com

STEPPING UP TO THE MARK



John Behan,

During a very challenging year, Team Valley-based SOS Group has stepped up to achieve both the ISO 9001 and ISO 27001 accreditations.

During normal business conditions this would signal a strong commitment to the certifications and, given the issues created by Covid, dedicating the time required is exceptional.

Throughout the pandemic, in addition to managing its own team of staff, the office technology company has continued to provide specialist support for its clients, which range from local start-ups to the IAAF World Athletics Championships, as all organisations adapted to the difficulties created.

John Behan, one of three company Directors, explains: "This has been a tremendously challenging year for all businesses.

"We're very proud of the way our team responded when the pandemic began. We implemented our Disaster Recovery Plan and Business Continuity Plan and, if anything, we're emerging from this crisis with stronger client relationships than ever.

"Given everything that's happened, we could have been forgiven for putting these accreditations on the back burner. But it was our ambition to achieve both of them during 2020 and we stuck to our guns. We know how important they are and, while committing the time to them was a big undertaking, it has certainly paid off."

ISO 9001 is the internationally recognised Quality Management System standard, which is designed to help business plan, monitor and

manage business quality and identify areas for improvement. It recognises continually improving effectiveness and efficiencies across the business, while ISO 27001 is a highly prized IT security accreditation.

John continues: "We're particularly proud to now hold ISO 27001, which is a significant accomplishment and achieved after a meticulous audit of our information security management system.

"It shows we have the policies, procedures and risk controls needed for robust IT security management. And, if the last year has taught us anything, it's the necessity to be prepared for the worst-case business scenario.

"We're growing our IT and Telecoms business presence and the ISO 27001 credential clearly demonstrates how securely we treat client data and information, and our expertise to support clients to do the same.

"Cyber security is one of the biggest threats to every business in today's world and the move to remote working and change in practice by most businesses since the pandemic began has heightened risks still further. Accessing files securely and remotely is a key issue.

"Achieving the two certifications was a team effort lead by myself and Ben Fletcher, our service manager. We started the road to accreditation back in June 2020 and began with six half day

blocks to build the basis of our manual and then followed up with the detailed evidence gathering and background work.

"There were various stages in the project where up to 10 members of the SOS Group team were involved and, in total, something like 25 working days dedicated to the effort. That commitment, during an already challenging business period, was validated when we received confirmation of our accreditation in February.

"The two ISO certifications are an endorsement of our existing business processes and procedures, as well as a measurable demonstration to our current and prospective clients of our commitment to delivering quality in everything we do.

"They're a world-recognised standard and a true mark of quality we're very proud we can now display."

SOS Group supplies and maintains leading brand digital office equipment. As well as offering a full range of office management services, including unified communications, IT support, document management, cost consultation and managed print services.

In addition, the firm's DDB Workspace Solutions Division supplies a range of furniture that helps tackle common issues including posture and lack of space.

For more information, please visit www.sosgroup-ltd.co.uk

BUILDING A GREAT TEAM, THE EVERFLOW WAY

Behind every great company is a great team, and utilities group Everflow is no exception.

Here, Head of Talent Leeanne Hedley explains what they look for in a team member, how they nurture their employees and the benefits such an approach has for all.

When I started as Head of Talent a year ago, I soon realised how great the Everflow Group is as an employer, and how successfully it has managed to create and maintain such a fantastic culture. Everyone is united in the group vision to 'make water simple', whether they work in software development or customer operations – and it shows in the group's success.

Josh (Gill, Everflow founder and CEO) has always made it his mission to create a workplace everyone enjoys coming to, and he's definitely done that – our employee net promoter score (a metric to assess employee satisfaction) currently stands at +77, where anything over 60 is seen as outstanding.



Everflow Group Directors

A great place to work

Everflow's approach is simple; it values each employee and their opinions, and recognises that they need to enjoy their job to be good at it. Our team work hard and play hard; we put a great deal of emphasis on fun and employee wellbeing, with regular social events and monthly breakfasts at our Wynyard HQ (when they were allowed). There's reward and recognition, cycle to work, mobile and tech salary sacrifice schemes in place that help support the team in their personal and professional goals.



Leeanne Hedley - Everflow Group Head of Talent

During Covid, our focus on wellbeing was more poignant than ever, and we worked with the team to make sure everyone was safe and supported, granting employees a monthly allowance to cover their bills while working from home and setting up an employee loan facility. We know that during uncertain times, finances are one of the main causes of adverse mental health and we believe employers have a duty of care to their team's wellbeing in relation to work.

We're delighted that, despite all the upheaval the pandemic brought, we maintained our employee net promoter score of +77 – which goes to show just how valued our employees feel.

One of our values is 'teamwork makes the dream work', and it's well and truly lived out at Everflow. Individuals and teams go the extra mile to help each other and in turn, help customers.

They say variety is the spice of life, and our team really proves that. There's no particular Everflow 'type' – the main thing we look for is people who share our values – and so we have a real mix across all ages, sexes and backgrounds.

I think that's part of why we work so well as a team; everyone brings their own skills and knowledge to the table to create something truly magical – and we wouldn't have it any other way.

A great place to learn

Another of the great things about being a relatively new company (we celebrated our 5th birthday last year) is that there's always room to grow as the team expands and roles diversify.

This element of personal development is extremely important to Everflow; one of my priorities is to

upskill our existing staff, and to support them in training where it suits their job role.

There are opportunities for anyone who wants them, and we love to see our team gain knowledge, skills and confidence along the way.

This approach isn't restricted to existing employees though; since I started, I've had lots of young people enquire about roles, so we've started hiring apprentices and we developed the Everflow Academy to provide them and others with a route into roles across the group.

At the moment, we have two apprentices working in the group; one IT apprentice who has come through QA Apprentices, and a business administration apprentice from Learning Curve.

Young people are great at bringing new, fresh eyes and ideas into a business. They offer a different perspective and are keen to learn new skills.

Similarly, the Everflow Academy provides ambitious individuals with great opportunities to learn. It's a simple, innovative onboarding programme which allows candidates to work in each department, as well as benefitting from a tailored training plan to support their development.

And, unlike some firms, we don't ask for a wealth of previous experience to be eligible, as the whole point of the programme is to impart that vital trade knowledge.

Such an approach once again supports our vision of a well-rounded team. We believe every member, no matter how experienced or otherwise, has a voice to be heard – and we're always listening.

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SUNDERLAND WINS EUROPEAN AWARD

Sunderland City Council is the winner of the 2020 Civic Innovation in Technology Award (Europe) from the Technology and Entrepreneurship Center at Harvard.

The Technology and Entrepreneurship Center at Harvard recently announced the winners of its third Annual City Innovation and Innovator Awards, at a fitting digital ceremony broadcast across the globe.

With its Social Health Enabling Independent Living (SHEILA) App's innovative use of assistive technology, the Council earned its place as top civic innovator in technology across Europe for 2020.

The Council has been developing technology enabled care as a core element of the social care offering in the city. The service is now well versed in helping families to use GPS and other IOT devices to identify when a family member needs assistance and provide the response that is required to keep them safe.

Users describe feeling empowered by the technology to maintain vital social connections whilst continuing to live independently.



MAVEN LEADS £1.75MILLION INVESTMENT IN LEAF

Maven Capital Partners, one of the UK's most active SME finance providers, has led a £1.75 million investment into marketing technology company, Leaf.fm Ltd.

The innovative performance marketing services provider secured £1 million through the North East Development Fund and £750,000 through The Future Fund, a government scheme backed by the British Business Bank.

Funding will enable Leaf to invest in its engineering & data science teams and sales & marketing activities, as well as expand its Newcastle operations to deliver on its ambitious expansion plans, whilst continuing to roll out a number of exciting product enhancements.

Newcastle-based Leaf is a technology company that provides end-to-end performance marketing services for ambitious and fast-growing eCommerce businesses looking to scale revenue growth from paid social. Its team combines years of data-marketing expertise with proprietary technology to drive unrivalled return on ad spend for its clients.



TRUSTACK HELPS NEIGHBOURS AS IT EXPANDS ACROSS THE GLOBE

Experienced Managed Services Provider TruStack is helping one of the North East's biggest brands, which happens to be one of their neighbours, in its continued expansion across the globe.

Outdoor clothing and equipment manufacturer Montane, based in Ashington, Northumberland, has huge plans to expand its presence in various international markets in 2021 after significant investment.

As part of Montane's expansion, TruStack, located just a few miles down the road in Cramlington, has provided Montane with an enhanced back up and business continuity solution to support its projected growth and expansion.

The recent project saw TruStack deliver improvements to back-up and disaster recovery solutions for Montane, adding to the other solutions already in place.

Montane has also commissioned TruStack to enable staff to work from home, allowing them to access a business applications such as Sage, remotely.

RAZORBLUE CONTINUES RAPID GROWTH WITH SENIOR APPOINTMENT

North East-headquartered managed IT service provider razorblue, which has seen 363% growth over the last five years, has added to its team once again with the appointment of senior industry expert, Nigel Hedley.

Nigel has joined Microsoft Gold Partner razorblue to support the growth of its software division

which helps improve business profitability and efficiency through digital transformation. Working closely with businesses, razorblue implements industry-leading Microsoft Dynamics 365 Financials, ERP and CRM solutions.

razorblue works with around 500 businesses across the UK including Stiller, Total Fitness and Frasers Group, with seven offices and a headcount of 100.

Jonathan Anderson, Managing Director of Business Software at razorblue, said: "I am thrilled to welcome Nigel to the team who, with his wealth of experience and knowledge, will play a key role in razorblue's growth strategy and support businesses on their digital transformation journey."



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Event

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in conjunction with Cybsafe

2. Business Safety in a Digital Age

the landscape today, in conjunction with Cisco

3. The importance of data recovery and backup

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Date

Wednesday, 10th March

3:00pm – 4.00pm

Wednesday, 17th March

3:00pm – 4.00pm

Wednesday, 24th March

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A BAD DAY AT THE OFFICE

Think your business is protected just because you are told you have a backup? You need to think again.

Businesses understand that without backup there may be no recovery. However, not all backups are the same, and different organisations require different solutions and a backup must be fit for purpose.

In very simple terms, backups are there to recover your systems and data if something goes wrong. This could be as basic as the accidental deletion of a file to more impactful issues such as the corruption of a database or application or the ever more regular occurrence of attacks from virus or ransomware.

No business can ever totally avoid risk but having an effective backup strategy in place mitigates the risk of being without your systems and data.

Take the following real-life scenarios from organisations that approached ITPS for help.

Company A

The simplest of examples. The company had moved all their systems to the cloud (Microsoft 365 to be exact). When we asked about how the backup was configured to establish whether it was suitable for the company needs, we were told that the backups 'happen' as part of the subscription. This was an assumption; the reality was that this customer had no backups at all. This is an all too common scenario. The solution thankfully was equally simple, we implemented a cloud-based backup as part of our managed service provision.

Company B

Company B managed its own full backup, which took four hours to complete so when required, took the same time to restore. When a virus hit the

business, the client needed the backup. However, you cannot just restore a backup, you first need to check that the backup itself does not have a virus. In this case it was discovered that the most recent (and the five previous) backups contained the virus. This meant going back six backups to get to the first clean version.

This was a major issue for the client as the data would need to be restored and virus checked a total of six individual times, before discovering a clean version and take an estimated 30 hours.

ITPS was able to assist by enabling the six individual backup files to be restored to the ITPS virtual estate simultaneously meaning a full recovery took just under eight hours rather than the 30 hours it could have required. However, the company data was still six days behind.

We also provided extensive virus clean up across the estate to disinfect the system before it was returned to the users.

This client did have a backup, but they did not understand how to manage the virus and the implications of the virus compromising previous backups.

The choice of backup solutions can be bewildering. Ideally, you should be working with an expert business continuity and disaster recovery partner. They will carry out a full backup needs analysis, guiding you through choosing the right solution.

You could opt for a full, differential, incremental or reverse incremental backup, or mirroring. In addition, you need to decide where that backup should be stored - on premise, on a data centre model, or in a public, private or hybrid cloud environment.

To create your strategy you need to understand the impact, and establish two milestones. The first is your recovery point objective (RPO) - the physical point in time that you want to reach back to. The second is your recovery time objective (RTO) - the amount of time you are prepared to wait for your backup to be reinstated.

One organisation might be able to live without data for a day or even a week, while another might only be able to survive for an hour without serious financial and operational consequences.

You will need to make sure you have enough computing power to cope with running a backup and restore, especially if you cannot identify a point in the day when user requirements are low or the server can be shut down.

You should put arrangements in place to carry out regular testing. Unless you test it in a live environment, you will not know whether it works, and you do not want to find the answer out on the morning you have a disaster.

All too often, organisations only think about backups after the event. By then, the business has suffered the loss of the file, data or systems. Having a clear appreciation and understanding that your backup is fit for purpose is fundamental to mitigating risk.

Backup is the cornerstone of a successful disaster recovery strategy and there is no room for error.

Register for our spring series of Security Webinars at webinars@itps.co.uk and hear our own experts and industry speakers give advice on how to protect your business from accidental or malicious threats.

PLEXUS INNOVATION GROWS WITH DEDICATED SALES TEAM



Sufri Weithers

A Durham-based technology company has expanded its team by appointing a dedicated sales manager who will be concentrating on assisting more care homes, social housing providers and hospitality providers gain access to a must-have remote monitoring solution.

Sufri Weithers has joined Plexus Innovation bringing with him an enviable track record in successful sales and business development roles in the region, specialising in digital technology and IT/AV solutions.

He has joined the ever-growing team at a crucial time for Plexus Innovation as the company's innovative product GUARDIAN® is poised to change the way organisations collect data for compliance forever.

GUARDIAN® is a remote, automated measurement and alert system that focuses on environmental data including temperature. Designed and manufactured in the UK by Plexus Innovation, GUARDIAN® is already enabling significant business improvement opportunities for those who have invested in the technology.

Ideal in reducing the risk of Legionella and ensuring temperature in water or refrigeration units is at an optimum level to protect health, GUARDIAN® technology comprises of a combination of hardware, with remote monitoring software. The product also provides other significant benefits including alerts for scald risk, taps left running and leaks; energy saving opportunities and identification of failed or failing assets. It is especially effective for MediFridge

temperature monitoring, protecting the life of temperature sensitive medication.

Sufri, who is father to two and located in the North East, said: "This was a unique opportunity to join a company at such a key time in its growth and development. Having recently secured a £400,000 investment, Plexus Innovation is now moving at a fast rate of knots supplying essential data to the care social housing and hospitality sectors.

"GUARDIAN® is a radical game changer highlighting business risk, ensuring on going compliance and reducing operational costs amongst its many benefits."

Plexus Innovation was founded by Ian Murray and Steve Todd, when the pair identified a gap in the marketing for intelligent remote monitoring. Recent events have meant that the company has been able to assist both care homes and social housing providers operate more safely during the stress of the pandemic. The product is also preparing the hospitality industry, particularly hotels, to be in a safer position when reopening.

And now with the addition of Sufri, Ian is enthusiastic about the coming year. He said: "Steve and I are on a mission to make remote technology across the service industries the

norm, rather than niche. Considering its Return on Investment, GUARDIAN® is an exceptionally viable business improvement solution and with Sufri onboard, along with our robust marketing campaign, we can reach and support even more people in the care, social housing and hospitality sectors. Sufri is a great fit for our business, with the right experience, enthusiasm and professionalism."

Plexus Innovation is already successfully rolling out the innovative GUARDIAN® technology and is looking to support the education and healthcare sectors in the near future too.

Current clients have benefitted from uninterrupted compliance management delivered remotely throughout a number of lockdown scenarios, with a range of key issues detected that would not have been possible via manual measurement. Sufri concluded: "I am immensely enjoying rolling out GUARDIAN® even further, helping more compliance and facilities managers; operational and maintenance teams, and nursing and care professionals to do their job better. This is a truly rewarding role at a critical time for many."

More information is available at
www.plexus-innovation.com

A QRIOUS TRANSFORMATION

The Coronavirus pandemic continues to be a hot topic of conversation for businesses and the country. The phrase we hear most from the politicians and experts is "there's light at the end of the tunnel."

Well, a lot of the businesses we talk to here at Northern Insight are still searching for that light. Perhaps it's easier to spot from an ivory tower!

Thankfully, help is at hand in the shape of Qrious.

Qrious, as MD and Co-Founder, Nick Salloway, likes to say, "is in the business of redesigning businesses." Their team of technologists, UX designers, service designers, software developers and digital strategists, have a remarkable track record of helping their clients to improve customer experience and capitalise on technology's potential to accelerate growth, productivity and profitability.

When it comes to ensuring that businesses really ARE giving their customers the ultimate experience, Qrious say they can support those firms to "break down the traditional organisational hierarchies, operational silos and sometimes inflexible management models that stifle creativity, slow down decision making, kill innovation, and ultimately, impact negatively on customer experience".

"We're about helping our clients to transform their WHOLE business; their customer experience and the operating and management models that support it," says Nick.

And let's face it, at the moment EVERY business is thinking about changes they need to make to keep operating - and in some cases, survive - by serving their customers as best and efficiently as they can. Hopefully, while focusing on the long tunnel where light is shining at the end,....allegedly.

Asked about the impact of the pandemic on Qrious, Nick responds "Like all businesses, Covid-19 has disrupted us, but the pandemic also presented an excellent opportunity to practice what we preach."

"A crucial part of what we do requires close collaboration with our clients as we work with them to design strategies and solutions for their business. Under normal circumstances, our teams would be in a room with our client for several weeks, but that isn't currently possible, so we've had to rethink how we use technology ourselves. We ended up completely redesigning our business and design processes to ensure we can remotely deliver our services."

Nick says that the result was QLab, a completely online version of Qrious' digital transformation service, that, before the pandemic was delivered face-to-face, in a room full of white-walls, pens, and post-it notes. Instead of white-walls, Qrious now provide their QLab service to clients using virtual collaboration and design tools, and video conferencing.

"It's been hugely successful," says Nick. "Q-Lab is creating more and better opportunities for collaboration with our clients as they can involve more of their team in our process. Geography is no longer an issue - people from anywhere in their organisation can attend and contribute to the work. The time they spend with us is super focused, and although we have to manage the length of sessions carefully to avoid Zoom fatigue, we're finding that clients are more engaged in the process."

Nick goes on: "I do believe that a lot of firms, including Qrious, will emerge much healthier from the disruption caused by Covid-19. Inevitably, some will, sadly, fail. But those businesses that survive will come to reflect on the pandemic as a pivotal moment - a period that forced them to fundamentally rethink how they create value for customers and reimagine how they capture value with innovative business and operating models that utilise technology in entirely different ways."

"In the medium term, this kind of disruption usually proves to be favourable for companies, although, I'm sure many probably won't see it that way at the moment!"

"Covid has been the incentive for many firms to accelerate their digital strategies" adds Nick.

"Many businesses, and SMEs in particular, are a long way behind the curve when it comes to transformation and making use of technology. Firms must now adapt and digitally transform quickly to survive. As they do so, it's essential for them to recognise that digitising a service here and there or doing meetings on Zoom is not transformation; successful digital transformation requires firms to rethink how they apply technology to every aspect of their organisation. For example, suppose they aspire to a leaner, more agile way of working, but operate a hierarchical management model. In that case, they'll need to also look at how they can use technology to flatten their management structure, speed up decision making, and shorten planning and finance cycles to align with how agile teams work."

"Digital Transformation is a whole-business endeavour", says Nick.

It's impressive stuff from a relatively small, North East based digital consultancy playing on the same turf as some larger national consulting firms, and it seems to be working.

"Half a dozen firms have been through the QLab service since it launched last year, and with another 3 in the pipeline, it looks like the virtual offer is becoming the preferred option for our clients," says Nick.

So, not just light at the end of the tunnel, but blazing sunshine!

If you need to transform your business or give it an in-depth digital health check, the best idea is to chat with the guys at Qrious.

Start thinking about the future of your business.

Get Qrious.

**You can contact Qrious via email
hello@qrious.co.uk or call on 0191 338 8093**

A vibrant landscape featuring a large bush of purple flowers in the background, a green field of purple flowers in the foreground, and a blue sky with several butterflies. The scene is bright and colorful, with a mix of green, purple, and blue tones.

“

...Successful digital transformation requires businesses to rethink how they apply technology to *every* aspect of their organisation...

”

SUCCESS STORY FOR NORTH EAST BROADBAND EXPERTS ALNCOM



North East rural broadband experts Alncom, who are based in Alnwick, Northumberland have received a boost of funding from strategic investors and telecom experts Railsite Telecom.

The partnership will rapidly develop Alncom's footprint in rural broadband across the region and is a real success story for the local community, with increased investment and jobs.

Managing Director Stephen Pinchen said; "This is a great success story for the community that will improve local telecoms, internet connectivity and provide jobs and investment into the North East. Our expertise combined with Railsite's industry heavyweight experience is an exciting development for the company. The aim now will be to penetrate further into the hardest and most challenging rural locations, with full fibre making the North East one of the best-connected parts of the UK."

As part of their growth strategy, Alncom have appointed a new Operations Director, Dave Swanston, who will be in charge of the new build program. Alncom's work so far has seen isolated, off-grid communities connected with recent successes transforming life for homes and businesses in the College Valley, Powburn, Ellingham, Ingram Valley, County Durham and into the Scottish Borders.

Mike Surrey, managing director of Railsite

Telecom said, "We were impressed from the start with Alncom's track record in ultrafast rural broadband in the North East. As a company they deliver at every level and their reputation is outstanding. It complements our expertise improving mobile coverage in Northumberland for railway passengers and rural communities. Put simply, it was a perfect fit".

Railsite's Chairman, Andy Elliman will be joining the Alncom Board. Andy has been involved in the design and construction of Telecoms networks over three decades and brings a breadth of experience of growing companies in the telecoms sector.

Alncom have a fleet of off-road, go anywhere vehicles, including a cutting edge driverless "cable plow" to rapidly install the latest fibre optic cables. Alncom's expansion coincides with news that ultrafast broadband can add £3,500 to a home's value (Ipsos Mori Study), Government Broadband Vouchers are available to help financially and Ministers have pledged to roll out gigabit-capable broadband to 85 per cent of the country by 2025.

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LUCID SECURE



Here at Lucid we work tirelessly to make sure your network is as secure as possible; we do this with a layered defence approach and make it as difficult as possible for cyber criminals to get a foothold in your network. One of the biggest challenges for organisations is cyber criminals, exploiting the people working within the organisation. Lucid Secure has been designed to close this security gap and develop your team's cyber security awareness and reduce your human, cyber risk.

We identify weaknesses in a number of key areas:

Can your staff recognise a data breach or possible cyber attack?

How many of your staff have been caught up in a data breach?

Would your staff know how to deal with a Phishing email, or be able to spot one?

Are your staff trained in basic Cyber Security awareness?

The First Step – Reporting

Lucidsecure can provide a report to show who, when and what was breached and going forward you will be notified when your users are exposed to a data breach. With continuous monitoring and employee micro-training, your staff would be educated, so that further breaches should not occur.

The Second Step – Send a simulated Phishing email to your employees

Phishing emails remain one of the most common sources of successful cyber-attacks and employees continue to show that they are still the easiest point of entry. But how can your business combat this threat?

Simulated phishing tests provide you with an invaluable insight into how vulnerable your users are, whilst offering employees a first-hand look at how phishing attacks and social engineering work to try and attack your systems.

Why Phish in your own pond?

"Simulated phishing is just as vital as implementing antivirus and firewalls. It's an invaluable Cyber Security process that helps patch your last line of defence."

Where should you start?

Assess how vulnerable your users are to an inevitable Phishing scam and increases awareness around social engineering.

Decrease the chance of Baseline where phishing education is most needed.

Lucidsecure can send a simulated phishing email once a month to all employees, to see if they spot it. The ones that do not spot the email, or need some extra help, will be put onto training courses to continuously educate for further, potential attacks.

The email is custom designed and can be from a customer, supplier or government body etc.

The Third Step - Results and Training

Based upon the results of the simulated Phishing emails, we would build an individual training plan of online courses, targeting areas where that user proved to be weak. These

ongoing IT Security Awareness, Training Sessions are provided initially on a monthly basis, (Can be more frequent).

We would track the results of the training and report back. We are constantly updating and adding to our training modules.

Last Step – Policies

There is a policy section where ISO 27001 compliant email policies are available for your use, or you are able to upload your own, keep them up to date and digital deliver policies for users to review, sign and track. This will provide valuable help for anyone who deals with the public sector.

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Location Intelligence

Vehicle Tracking

Prices start at £11.50 for a basic service.



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Want to cut emissions and create savings?

Need deep insights into your day-to-day usage?

Nord VPN – Need to connect to the internet but don't want the bad guys to see you – Nord VPN is the answer. Designed more for one man bands and smaller SMES.



WANT A SAFER INTERNET CONNECTION ?

NordVPN safeguards your connection with next generation encryption, so you can log into your accounts, make bank transfers, and shop online without worries.

Even on unprotected Wi-Fi.

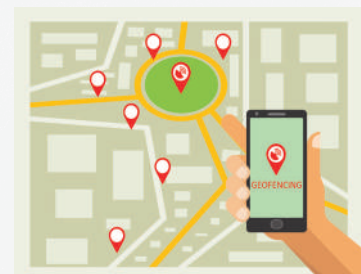
No logs policy It's nobody's business what you do online. That's why we don't track, collect, or share your private data. We couldn't provide any details about you to third parties, even if they ask.

Cyber Training

Think your staff need to be able to spot cyber threats training courses are available. Per staff member per month from £1.99.



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Lynemouth Power Station in Northumberland which has been highly commended in this year's British Renewable Energy Awards.

LYNEMOUTH POWER STATION COMMENDED FOR CONVERSION TO RENEWABLES

Lynemouth Power Station (Lynemouth Power Limited/LPL) has been highly commended in this year's British Renewable Energy Awards organised by the Association for Renewable Energy and Clean Technology (REA).

The annual awards, which celebrates work being done by UK organisations to achieve net zero and address climate change, praised the Northumberland power station's mammoth, multi-million pound conversion from fossil fuel (coal) to full biomass electricity production carried out over the last few years.

LPL was highly commended in the Pioneer category which acknowledged companies or organisations in sectors 'not previously associated with renewables that have now become involved and demonstrated a pathway others can follow.'

Lynemouth was the first UK power station to start the process to convert to biomass electricity generation and has been one of the largest civil engineering and industrial projects delivered in the North East in recent times.

Jonathan Scott, Commercial & Fuel Director at Lynemouth Power Station, commented, "This is great recognition for all those who have not

only worked tirelessly on the biomass conversion project but also more recently throughout the pandemic as key workers. This includes our many employees, subcontractors, strategic delivery partners and supply chain organisations on-site, at our external facilities and internationally.

"The transition from coal to renewable energy was complicated and a very complex, highly-coordinated planning, construction and engineering programme of works. At one stage, it involved more than 800 personnel here at Lynemouth with every single person playing an integral role. We also tried, wherever possible, to partner with regional-based operators and supply chain companies, and that in itself brought jobs, new employment and training opportunities, and long-term economic benefits to the North East and the wider region. We're therefore delighted to be recognised by the REA as part of their awards."

Lynemouth Power Station's transition to biomass included the construction of six,

new 194ft-high concrete silos onsite to store approximately 50,000 tonnes of wood pellets, bespoke ship unloading and fuel handling storage facilities being built at the Port of Tyne to store a further 75,000 tonnes of pellets at any one time, and purpose-built rail wagons to safely and efficiently transport biomass from the port to site.

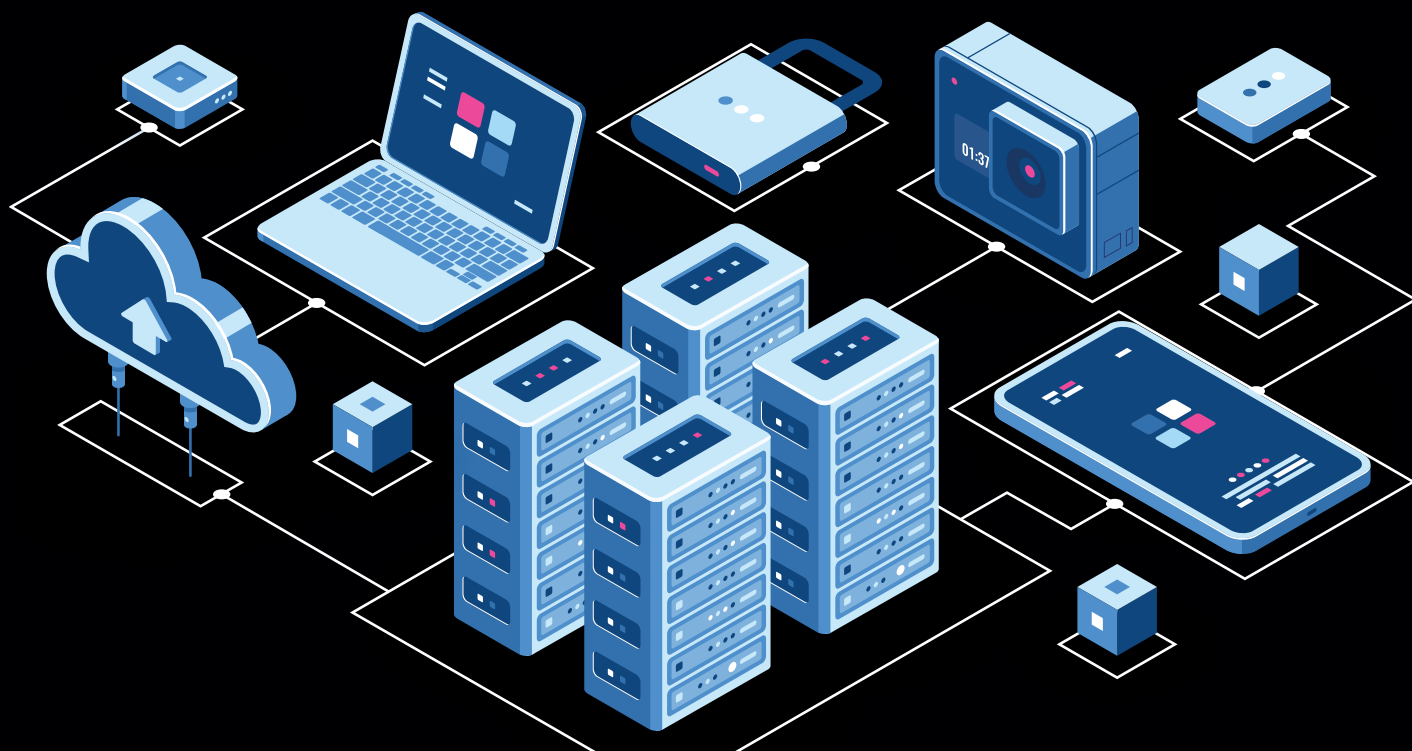
Dr Nina Skorupska CBE, Chief Executive of the REA, added, "This year could be a momentous one for our industry, with COP26 having the potential to be a watershed moment in our drive towards net zero. What better way to start 2021, than with a celebration of the brilliant work of so many organisations and individuals in our renewable energy and clean technology sectors.

"We have so much to be proud of as an industry and these winners, and indeed all of our finalists, represent the very Best of British."

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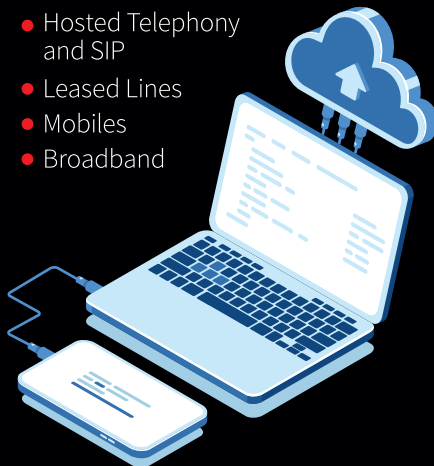
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TALKING TECH & DIGITAL

In a new series of features Northern Insight talks to...

STEPHEN O'CONNELL

Founder and Sales and Marketing Director, Advantex

Did you always envisage a career in the world of technology?

Technology's always been alluring but I hadn't envisaged it as a career. In the Royal Marine Commandos, I had worked with some sophisticated technology and found it interesting, but it wasn't until I completed a course after leaving the forces that my appetite was really whetted. This led to my brother Dave and me starting Advantex in 2002, which has now grown into a full-service technology and consulting firm.

What attracted you to your current role?

I guess you could say it found me. I have held many roles since we started the business but to be honest I have always been passionate about the customer side of what we do; providing carefully thought through, ethically-sound technological solutions that make a real difference to people's lives and help businesses and enterprises secure growth and prosperity.

How important has technology been during the Covid pandemic?

Undoubtedly, it's been huge. However, where it's really helped has been to ensure millions of people in all walks of life have been able to carry on with their lives as best as possible in challenging circumstances, using secure cloud based services and other technologies to work safe and secure from home.

What tips would you offer someone looking to work in the industry?

Go for it! I can't think of another industry that offers as much diversification as ours. The sky's the limit so look at your skills and think about where your passion lies to ensure you start out on the right path. Keep an open mind also about where you see yourself in a few years' time and be prepared to be flexible and adaptable. After all, technology constantly evolves and there'll undoubtedly be roles in 10 years' time that haven't even been thought of yet.

Tell us the most exciting thing you're currently working on?

This is a ground-breaking project that involves us researching 'smart' network technologies and machine learning to help improve personnel operations at a UK defence contractor. Our work will see us provide a solution to a specific problem and will change the way the company manages onsite health & safety, delivering significant improvements in protecting people and assets.

What's your fondest career memory?

I remember taking a call from the US military in the early days of Advantex which led to work to provide new wireless infrastructure at 40 American airbases across the UK and Europe. This really put us on the map; it was a turning point. We doubled our headcount overnight to deliver the contract successfully, and it opened the door to a successful partnership with Cisco, which continues to go from strength-to-strength.

Do you have any remaining career ambitions?

I guess it would be to make sure Advantex continues to be a great place to work; providing an environment in which talent thrives, creativity flourishes and ambition is rewarded. It all adds up to ensuring we continue to provide great customer care and services well into the future.

What piece of technology would you be lost without?

Cloud-based services, which are accessed via mobile phones and laptops, are up there as must haves. They have allowed me to strike a much better work/life balance and manage things more productively.

Who are your heroes and mentors?

Motivational speaker and author Simon Sinek is a big influence. His views on human relationships and goal setting really resonate. Adam Foster is also an inspiration. His own story is one of triumph in the face of adversity, while his work with people who have chronic pain and fatigue rebuilds lives - I know from personal experience. He's a hero in the true sense of the word.

How do you like to relax?

Family time is important. I also run and enjoy walking, taking in the beautiful landscape that surrounds us here in the North East. It gives me time to think about life and what's important.

More at www.advantex.uk.com

“

...there'll undoubtedly be
roles in 10 years' time
that haven't even been
thought of yet...

”

SIMPLE, YET TRANSFORMATIONAL LEARNINGS FROM THE GLOBAL SHUTDOWN

The year of 2020 saw two years' worth of digital transformation in the space of two months.

While this sounds impressive, it must be noted that many of these digital solutions were designed and implemented to be an interim, quick-fix solution. After all, Covid-19 surely was not going to last more than a couple of months...

In an economy that is contracting, it is ever more important for businesses to become more efficient and retain market share. I challenge you to readdress those quick-fix solutions and plan for not only a sustainable, but a resilient future.

Data-led decisions

Business leaders should now be asking themselves "do we have a true understanding of our suppliers, operations, people, customers and marketplace?"

Such understanding derives from data.

As a starting point, the data you should focus on is that which can be generated and analysed in your day-to-day business operations. This is existing information about your customers, operations, people, suppliers and supply chain.

To use this data effectively, it must offer a single version of the truth through an undisputed source of performance data. Critically, this data should be presented in a way that not only supports informed decision making, but also provides immediate feedback and analysis opportunities.

Take your finance department as an example - one of the main challenges they face are the inefficiencies around collating and analysing large datasets. The amount of resource and time needed to transform this data into deep business insights and reports is colossal and often unnecessary.

Many companies have data stored in numerous, disparate systems, creating challenges to deliver accurate, on-demand management information.

This is where business intelligence tools such as, Power BI come in. Compiling and automating relevant information into a tailored interface, enabling users to efficiently extract information and make data-driven predictions based on real-time statistics.

These scalable business intelligence tools help you gain a deeper understanding of your data, as well as ensuring you get the most out of any big data investments. Insights can be shared and promoted across your organisation, whilst maintaining accuracy, consistency and security.

Streamline your processes

Many businesses responded to the economic uncertainties and huge drop in demand by



Jonathan Anderson,
Managing Director of razorblue Business Software.

reducing their workforce. Whether your business made redundancies or not, one question remains: can your business thrive with reduced resource?

Crucially, businesses now need to assess whether workloads can be more efficiently managed, and which of their processes can be streamlined through automation. This in turn will not only reduce overheads but increase business resilience.

Frustrations around manual data entry, the inability to find what is needed, time spent tracking down data inconsistencies, and in some cases the hours spent manually compiling reports are far from uncommon. Whilst good-intentioned, workarounds such as Excel spreadsheets demand far too much of our precious time and resource.

Employees can quickly become absorbed in high-touch manual steps to data entry that despite best efforts often result in incomplete data and ultimately impair productivity.

Automating processes produces results immediately and eliminates any risk of human error. Importantly, replacing mundane and time-consuming tasks, keeping overheads down and freeing up resource to focus on the all-important relationship-building or creative tasks that humans are designed for.

Consolidating disjointed processes and systems can be achieved easily through products such as Microsoft Dynamics 365.

Through its modular approach, Dynamics 365 allows businesses to take only the applications that are most appropriate and suitable to them and their existing systems. This is an industry-leading product suitable for all business types regardless of size or sector.

When implemented correctly, Dynamics guarantees improved efficiencies and according to multiple recent reports, for every £1 spent, you will see a minimum return of £7.

Implementing a solution like Microsoft Dynamics 365 will help your organisation improve data access and automate processes, enabling your employees to spend more time strengthening existing customer relationships and pursuing new ones.

Embracing change

Whether through business intelligence tools, automation, or a mixture of the two, such digitalisation will provide sustainable solutions and crucially improve efficiencies. It is fair to assume that the marketplace is only going to get more competitive and it is organisations who embrace change and build resilience into their operations, that will not only survive but thrive.

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100 NEW HOMES PLANNED FOR GATESHEAD QUAYSIDE

Plans to transform a derelict site into 100 new residential apartments on Gateshead Quayside have been submitted to Gateshead Council.

The development to the south of Fletcher Road has been proposed by North East property developers, UK Land Estates and Bellway. The £16.5 million proposed development is expected to create 81 new jobs over the three-year build period, giving a significant economic boost to the area.

The site has been vacant for over twenty years since the closure of the railway goods yard in the 1990s, however, should the application be successful, it will soon provide a mix of one and two bedroom homes across three modern apartment blocks.

Tim Witty, Development Director at UK Land Estates, commented: "We are passionate about facilitating growth, development and regeneration within our region and we believe that the proposed development on Fletcher Road will do just that."



HUNDREDS OF NEW HOMES FOR TEESSIDE GET THE GREEN LIGHT

Hundreds of new homes will be built on Teesside after two multi-million pound residential developments were given the green light.

The news will see 570 two, three, four and five bedroomed homes built by Miller Homes and Bellway on a 15-hectare site at Upper Warren off Merlin Way in Hartlepool, after the local planning committee approved the project. Onsite construction work is expected to start in spring 2021.

Middlesbrough Council has also approved plans by Avant Homes to develop 139 new two, three, four and five bedroomed homes on the former St David's School site in Acklam, Middlesbrough. Onsite work is expected to start in summer 2021.

The housebuilders, along with North East planning consultants Hedley Planning Services, estimate that over 2,200 direct and indirect jobs will be created or supported in Teesside with the two planning approvals.



CUSSINS EXPANDS WITH PLANS SUBMITTED FOR DARLINGTON DEVELOPMENT

Premium housebuilder Cussins is expanding its presence in the North East with plans submitted to build 173 homes in Darlington.

Cussins, a fourth-generation family business, has developments underway across Northumberland and Tyne & Wear and is thrilled to be making a return to the County Durham town after 25 years.

The firm will build a selection of two, three, four and five-bedroomed homes at West Park Garden Village. The properties will boast both sandstone and heritage brick exteriors and benefit from an abundance of open green spaces, which will create a sense of spaciousness and tranquility.

A new link road will also be built to serve the Cussins development and future phases of the Garden Village. The Village will include 1,200 homes in total with extensive landscaping, footpaths and cycleways, as well as a potential school.



LOCAL DEVELOPER BRINGS BLAYDON PROPERTY DEVELOPMENT TO MARKET

Independent local developer Greenway Homes is bringing Garden Mews to market, following a multimillion-pound investment.

Situated in the Blaydon conservation area and comprising a stylish mix of 25 homes, Garden Mews includes the renovation of the historic Blaydon House into three family homes. Seven apartments, three mews houses and 12 three-

storey townhouses complete the project.

Following the success of its first development, Hallgarth Mews, in the neighbouring village of Winlaton, Greenway Homes' reputation for attention to detail and sustainability is also evident at Garden Mews.

Ian Watson, Chairman of Greenway Homes (NE) Ltd, said: "This fantastic development will offer aspirational living in a key location. I am proud that Greenway Homes is investing in the North East, building homes that people want to live in and making a contribution to the economy of the region."

Sanderson Young has been appointed as the selling agent for Garden Mews.

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Damiano Rea, Director, Heaton Property

BAD HAIR DAYS AND A HIPPOPOTAMUS

In the mid nineties the Spice Girls ruled the charts and business was coming to terms with a new opportunity called the internet. There were stumbles on the road.

Pen Island should have thought it through before they simply stuck dot com on the end of their name.

In the mid-noughties social media changed the game completely by allowing true interaction with customers. Again, there were stumbles. Most company bosses did not understand social media so they handed responsibility to someone who did. Usually a young intern.

This was the case with a multi-national food and beverage manufacturer. All was well until the firm got some low level flack regarding abstracting water and denuding forests to plant their crops. The intern fought her corner until she had bad hair day when she screamed "GET A LIFE YOU DISMAL HIPPOPOTAMUS" to an eco-warrior on Twitter. The retweets went viral, mainstream media caught on and the reputation of a global player lay in the dust.

Today we have strategies for conflict resolution and dealing with news fakers. But some firms seem unable to grasp the dynamics of social media, to their cost.

A law firm recently charged a client £200 for

advice. The customer was not happy so left a negative review on Trustpilot. The law firm, being a law firm, went to law. The judge awarded £25,000 against the customer.

But as the dogs of law headed for the champagne bar to celebrate, the law of unintended consequences was dusting off his top coat. The story went viral on social media then was picked up by the BBC. As a result, hundreds of disgusted individuals swarmed onto Trustpilot and left one-star reviews citing the bullying tactics of the law firm.

This took their Trustpilot rating down to two stars and the page has been locked meaning it will stay there. So, an exercise in trying to protect reputation on social media has backfired in spectacular fashion.

With Covid restrictions, social media has become increasingly important over the past twelve months. In the event we have a dispute our proven resolution method is to invite the complainant into the office for an Italian coffee and a biscuit. On pretty well every occasion, half an hour later both parties walk away smiling, dispute resolved.

This is no longer possible since we must enforce a 'locked door policy'.

While phone conversations are still possible it is often on social media we first become aware of an issue. So, it is on social media we must resolve it. But we are always aware, in tough times many people are having a bad hair day. Lockdown, vulnerable friends or relatives, home schooling or just crushing boredom. Many people just need to vent and if we are the ventee, we will roll with it, offering virtual coffee, biscuits and conflict resolution.

Patience and understanding are key. Sometimes it is not easy but perseverance pays off. To quote entrepreneur Elon Musk, "Patience is a virtue and I'm learning patience. It's a tough lesson".

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Price Guide: £1.1 Million

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We are also very proud of the reputation that we have, where the company is recognized for its maturity and wealth of knowledge, with many of our colleagues having worked in estate agency for 30 years or more. We believe this wealth of knowledge is a very powerful tool and something that should be utilised and passed on which is why, over the last five years, we have seen many younger individuals joining SY.

These new recruits have a unique opportunity to learn from all this experience and to develop and progress in a company that nurtures all these different skills whilst they, in return, are giving the company a fresh, dynamic, and modern new approach.

We thought it would be a great idea for you to get to know our younger team members a little better, so we asked some of our younger generation a few questions on what it is like being part of the SY family.



Rebecca Novak

AGE: 27

JOB TITLE: Sales Negotiator, Gosforth Office

Why did you join Sanderson Young?

I have never worked in estate agency before but when I saw the job at Sanderson Young become available, I knew I had to apply! I felt it was a great opportunity to start my career within the property industry as Sanderson Young have such a good reputation and are well known for the exceptional service they deliver.

What made you want to become an estate agent?

I have always had an interest in houses and spent a lot of time looking on Rightmove at properties. I have always thought it would be so lovely to help people find their dream home... and it is!



Lauren Black

AGE: 23

JOB TITLE: Sales Administrator, Alnwick Office

What made you want to become an estate agent?

In all honesty, I had never thought about estate agency until the job came along at just the right time. But now being in estate agency, I don't think I would ever want to do anything else!

What has been your most valuable experience?

I have learnt so much in estate agency since I started 2 years ago, considering I came into the job not knowing a great deal. I have also gained further communication and customer service skills, a better knowledge of the North East area and life lessons that will benefit me for the future such as financial services and the stages of buying a house including the conveyancing process, which I don't think you necessarily learn about at an early age (which I think you should!)



Louise Murray

AGE: 27

JOB TITLE: Sales Administrator, Gosforth Office

Where does your interest in property stem from?

My dad used to have his own building company, so properties have always played some part in my life. I used to enjoy going to the jobs he was working on to have a look at the extensions/houses he was creating.

What is a typical day like at Sanderson Young?

I never have the same day twice in my role! I could be training our apprentice, helping with marketing/PR, placing properties onto the market, or working closely with the valuers to complete marketing reports etc. It offers me a lot of variety and never gets boring!



Harry Young

AGE: 24

JOB TITLE: Sales Negotiator, rare! Office

What has been your most valuable experience?

I've worked on and off in the company since I was 16 when I canvassed houses for new instructions with leaflet drops. Since my degree I have worked full time and experienced the on-site sale of New Homes and a magnificent regeneration project at North Shields with Smiths Dock as well as 18 months working with Ashleigh Sundin in the Rare! Office from whom I have learnt so much. I've most enjoyed the diversity and the mobility working seven days a week and 24 hours a day to put transactions together and keeping them together until completion.

What's the most challenging aspect of your role?

Managing client's expectations. Everyone's home is their most prized asset, so it is understandable for someone to expect the very highest price when they are selling and so many times, through our proven methods of marketing, we reach that aspiration. However, that aspiration must be managed and realistic and that's quite a skill keeping that balance between ambition and reality.



Lee Redshaw

AGE: 17

JOB TITLE: Administration Apprentice, Gosforth Office

What do you love most about estate agency?

I love the idea of working with different properties and vendors every day, meaning that I have a huge variety within my role and this gives me wider knowledge of the property sector.

What do you enjoy doing outside of work?

I am quite an active person and could be found at the gym or boxing when they're open! However, during lockdown I have kept myself busy by cycling and playing football and can also always be found watching Newcastle United play!



Simra Kaleem

AGE: 24

JOB TITLE: Sales Negotiator, Gosforth Office

Why did you join Sanderson Young?

I was working for another agent when I saw an advert for a sales negotiator. I always aspired to work at Sanderson Young due to the fantastic company reputation, the beautiful properties they sell, and the experienced team of estate agents, some of whom have 20 plus years of experience and are so keen to share their knowledge to see me progress in my career.

What do you love most about estate agency?

You learn something new every day. There are so many different styles of properties you need to become an expert in, as well as the different ages and locations and then it is so rewarding when you agree a sale.

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HOW TO OPTIMISE YOUR OFFICE SPACE FOR 2021 AND BEYOND



Photo credit: Toa Heftiba, Unsplash.

As the vaccine signals a light at the end of the tunnel, businesses are looking to the future.

Companies and organisations are thinking. They are planning. How should my office space be? In the new world of work.

Despite the shift in working patterns brought about by the pandemic, demand for office space isn't going away. But Knight Frank's recent (Y)OUR SPACE survey shows that office-occupiers have shifting priorities. Including, a new emphasis on agile working, more amenities, safety and smarter use of technology.

- 56% of survey respondents expect an increase in, and broadening of, the amenities provided within their workplaces, over the next three years.
- The war on talent is one of the things driving the requirement to make the office an 'experience' for employees.
- There is a clear expectation for landlords to proactively make office space safer. Particularly through more regular cleaning and increased air changes and HVAC maintenance but also via the greater adoption of building technology.

So, what does this year have in store?

2021 will be the year when the office evolves. A new, hybrid world of work is here. Your office space will look different. Our relationship with the office will be different. Less fixed. And more flexible.

Office space will no longer be about a sea of fix desks but about a variety of workplace settings. Ones that create collaboration, community and energy. You only have to look at the new and recently fitted-out office of Home England at The Lumen in Newcastle city centre to see this approach in full swing. This is backed-up by an

increasing number of occupiers with active office requirements in the North East market right now, who are seeking a similar environment, continuing this trend away from the 'old norm'.

It is well known that office occupation costs, on average, account for only around 5-7% of the cost of running a business and yet they have the power, if positioned right, to empower the workforce and take a central role in the war for talent. Therefore, getting your office space right is more important than you may think.

What type of space do I need in a post-Covid world of work?

Things to consider:

- You have office options: coworking; serviced; managed; and traditional offices – or a mixture of the above.
- Within your office, what type of environments do you need? Have you asked your people?
- Do you need to create a flexible working policy?
- Do you want more collaboration space, more desk space or more meeting space? Or more of other types of space? Ask all your employees for their input, as well as drill down into your business strategy – how can your office strategy support your goals?
- Research shows a growing appetite for amenity-rich office spaces that support an enriched workplace experience. For example, facilities that support mental well-being e.g. sanctuary spaces; socialisation hubs; training spaces for upskilling and re-skilling; cycle storage and facilities; leisure activities; and drop and collect parcel facilities.

- If you want people back in the office, how will you incentivise those happily working from home, to invest in a commute?
- Given the fragmented physical working conditions of the last year, do you need to provide space for employees to re-group, share ideas, collaborate and learn together?
- The quantum of space, and mix of spaces required by businesses – core, flex, and home – is not a 'one size fits all' model. What is your team telling you about their needs? Have you asked them?
- What elements of your office space will attract and retain new employees?
- Think about your current and future headcount. How flexible do you need the size of your office space to be?
- The upheaval of Covid-19 is likely to inspire a new relationship where employees look to their employers to help with new priorities, such as positive mental health. How can your office support this agenda?
- What role does your office play in your business' brand and image?
- How will you strike the balance between office occupation and health and safety?

If you need expert advice, from friendly, down-to-earth people, on this and/or help with searching for an office in the North East, Knight Frank's Office Agency team in Newcastle can help.

Contact Patrick or Hannah on 0191 594 5015.
Email patrick.matheson@knightfrank.com or hannah.ives@knightfrank.com



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PROPERTY FIRM MAKES SENIOR APPOINTMENT TO DRIVE STRATEGIC GROWTH

Bradley Hall Chartered Surveyors and Estate Agents has made a senior appointment to drive its strategic growth and provide creative solutions to support high demand for new homes.

Industry expert Brian Ham joins the team as director of public sector consultancy to support the firm in expanding its services to Local Authorities, Housing Associations and Homes England.

His longstanding career in the industry also includes Executive Director of Development at Home Group, Acquisitions Director at Sage Housing and Executive Director at Newcastle City Council. He will also remain as a Director and co-founder of Swallowfield Homes.

Brian said: "It is no great secret that only approximately 200,000 of the 300,000 required new homes are being built per year. There are many challenges and hurdles, especially given the current economic climate, and our aim is to create innovative and effective solutions for Housing Associations, Local Authorities and public bodies including Homes England.

"My role will include supporting clients in accelerating development capabilities to meet this overwhelming need for new housing, while providing guidance which also help to add value to such projects.

"Bradley Hall is a strong regional player with a



Brian Ham

deep insight into the Northern property market. I look forward to building on the successful foundations which they have created in this specific discipline within the sector."

Bradley Hall group managing director Neil Hart said: "Brian brings an unrivalled experience to the team and we look forward to him driving forward this area of the business, providing our public sector clients with specialist support.

"We've continued to work closely with Local Authorities, Housing Associations and Homes England in recent years and we look forward to strengthening those relationships by adding Brian's support to our service, while also supporting the delivery of much more quality housing to the North."

Bradley Hall operates across the North with bases in major cities Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Leeds and Manchester with an established branch network across its busiest towns. Departments include; Commercial Agency, Building Surveying, Residential Agency, Land, Development & New Homes, Property Management, Mortgages and Professional Services to include valuations and lease advisory. Its sister company, BH Planning and Design, provides expert planning support for house builders, commercial developers, land and property owners, investors and Local Authorities.

www.bradleyhall.co.uk

To contact Brian please email brian.ham@bradleyhall.co.uk or call 0191 232 8080

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Neil Turner

DESIGN CHALLENGES FOR 2021

By Neil Turner, director, Howarth Litchfield

We are starting to see a way out of the current pandemic and I've been so impressed with the construction response of the North East and its ability to work through all the new challenges. Every business has had to develop new strategies and approaches.

So, what are going to be the challenges for 2021 and beyond? I will try to predict a few regional trends and predications.

Firstly, the NHS has overcome massive challenges supported by great thanks from the public. I think we will re-evaluate the services and see new investment in Primary Care and changes to Secondary Care, so that we can cope with a repeat of a pandemic. The spatial flow of buildings, the need for segregation and changes to entrances will challenge architects to incorporate safety, flexibility, and usability into their designs. Many GP practices have had little investment in the last decade. We should now look to create new post-Covid-proof surgeries.

We have seen the first real high building, Hadrian Tower, zoom up in Newcastle. Will this trigger an interest in high-rise in city centres? Middlesbrough is looking at a similar building. What this will do for out-of-town locations is a complicated question. Manchester and Leeds have seen staggering growth in towers so why

not the North East? Will this last year influence this desire to go higher? Or will we now see a desire to build better housing estates in the suburbs and countryside?

Town centres need to recover and once more become the focus for work, shopping, eating and leisure. We have all been locked away for the year so a renaissance in our town centres is vital for economic and social reasons. There is great investment going on in Sunderland, with offices, a new civic centre and a new music, arts and cultural quarter - MACQ Theatre - (which Howarth Litchfield is delighted to be involved in). All provide new reasons to enjoy this fabulous city.

Mass Housing design must change to accommodate the needs of flexible working. We have all seen inside other people's housing on zoom, so the luxury of a separate study or the ability to design 'home working zones' into flats and houses is now key. We must re-evaluate our homes to make them work harder.

Offices will re-energise and come back into use. As designers, we need to look at how to make people feel safe and secure. Offices allow interaction, ideas, and banter which as humans is essential to wellbeing. It's also essential for companies to have staff back together to reinforce company ethos and creativity. We are seeing companies asking us to look at layouts, to make them more appealing and attractive. We have led by example. At HL we have re-designed our already flexible office to allow more space and more privacy, yet retain the studio experience. We have remained open for those that cannot work from home and a base for all staff to use facilities. A pattern for the future.

So, lots of opportunities to look forward to and I hope sincerely to see our lives return to normal - a new normal perhaps - but let us all be positive.

Neil Turner, director, Howarth Litchfield can be contacted on 0191 384 9470 or email: nturner@hlpuk.com www.howarthlitchfield.com



CAPS AND COLLARS

Don't worry, you've not strayed onto a fashion page or a new fetish column, I'm talking about commercial property leases (as opposed to the residential leases I spoke about last time)

Commercial leases have been around since time immemorial, but it was only in the 1950s when it was felt by some landlords that it was unfair the rent could be fixed for a long period of time with the tenant getting more and more benefit as his turnover and profits increased merely with inflation but his rent stayed static. I believe that it was Land Securities, (the largest property development and investment company in the UK) who first introduced the principle of reviewing the rent during the term of the lease. And so it became standard that most commercial leases were held for either 21 years with rent reviews every seven years or 25 years with rent reviews every five years. The situation has changed somewhat recently with shorter leases becoming more the norm, say 10 years with rent reviews every five years or sometimes every three.

Rent reviews are based on a variety of different formulae, the most common being to "market value" – what would be worth today. Other possibilities include a percentage of market value, an increase in line with a known index such as the RPI or just fixed increases to a certain amount. What is important to note is that most rent reviews are "upwards only" – that is, if rents do fall, then at review time the rent will stay the same as before the review. The tenant does not benefit from any negative change in the property market and the landlord does not lose.

A concept that started in the United States and spread to England with the development of shopping centres such as Eldon Square and The



Philip Bowe

Bridges is the concept of a "turnover rent". In this situation, the rent is estimated and agreed between the parties – as usual – but then what is known as "caps" and "collars" are applied to this. Then there is an agreement based on a percentage of the shop's turnover that the landlord will accept as rent. For example, say a clothing shop expecting to sell £500,000 worth of clothes in a year, may agree that the market rent for the unit is say £20,000 per annum. This is of course 4% of turnover. So they will agree a rent of 4% of turnover, subject to a "cap" of say £25,000 and a "collar" of £15,000. If trade increases dramatically then the landlord sees some of this benefit but if it suffers then the landlord shares in the pain. This situation is becoming ever more common and I believe that it is likely to become the norm by say 2030.

So as a business person occupying a property, or as an investor looking at buying a property investment (commercial properties are still popular as a purchase for pensions as they slip nicely into SIPP) with the future rent increase uncertain, both sides need good quality professional advice. The main thing to be

established is the percentage of turnover that is to be paid as rent. In order to do this, a full analysis of the business plan is required and this takes a different skill to analysing comparable evidence based on a floor area valuation. A good advisor (I know just the one!) can help on this.

The secret however is to know the gross margin that any given trade is likely to earn and then also be aware of likely overheads for the business. For example, a jewellery shop or furniture shop may have a high gross profit margin (60% - 80%) but sales volumes will not be so high as a supermarket where the gross profit margin may only be 5% - 6%. The supermarket will have considerably more wage costs but the turnover will be considerably greater than the jewellers shop or furniture shop. It may not be public knowledge, all trades have a "norm" for trading within a defined floor area and with this, an industry standard gross profit margin range and wage cost as a proportion of turnover and gross profitability.

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SOUTH TYNESIDE COUNCIL TO SUPPORT THE GLASSWORKS OFFICE DEVELOPMENT

South Tyneside Council has been awarded £3m from the government's Getting Building Fund to support the creation of a proposed state of the art, glass-fronted riverside office building in the town.

Subject to planning permission, The Glassworks will be built on former brownfield land in the Harton Quay area of South Shields and provide 50,000 sq ft of Grade A office accommodation. It will aim to be one of the first near-net carbon zero office buildings in the North East.

The Getting Building Fund, managed in the region by the North East Local Enterprise Partnership, is part of the government's package of financial support to kick-start the economy, create jobs and help areas facing the biggest economic



challenges as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

Helen Golightly, Chief Executive of the North East LEP, said: "The Glassworks will be an important new development by South Tyneside Council and an excellent example of the type of project the region needs to help support our recovery from the coronavirus pandemic."

Spread over five storeys, The Glassworks will form part of the new living, working and cultural quarter in Harton Quay.



KNIGHT FRANK NAMED MOST ACTIVE INDUSTRIAL PROPERTY AGENT

A buoyant 12 months has seen Knight Frank in Newcastle take the top spot for the most industrial property transactions in the North East during 2020.

Research by Estate Gazette's Radius Data Exchange showed that Knight Frank transacted the most industrial space of any property agent in the region, at 847,901 sq. ft for the year, across a total of 84 deals.

Businesses with an online presence seem to have prospered during the Covid-19 lockdowns, with companies like Knight Frank generating huge volumes of business.

Simon Haggie, Partner at Knight Frank, said: "2020 ended in a flurry of activity. It was actually a remarkable year for us and completely counter intuitive to what was going on around with lockdowns and the retail/leisure doom and gloom.

"Much of the activity was under 5,000 sq. ft, but there were a considerable number of decent sized deals which fell just under 50,000 sq. ft, notably Hermes which took 47,500 sq. ft at Boldon and Gateshead NHS Trust which acquired a freehold 48,500 sq. ft factory in Washington.

"The signs for 2021 seem equally promising and there appears to be very little let-up in the volume of enquiries."



NEWCASTLE BUSINESS HUB OFFERS OPPORTUNITY FOR SMES

Operators at a multi-million-pound Newcastle business hub are redefining traditional commercial property leases to make city centre occupation more accessible to SMEs.

Hadrian Newcastle, a £5m project by SONA Estates, is offering bespoke and flexible office spaces for businesses and start-ups, with licenses starting from three months.

SONA Estates is working with Bradley Hall Chartered Surveyors and Estate Agents in marketing the hub, which is set behind the Laing

Art Gallery.

Director at Bradley Hall, Richard Rafique, said: "The North East commercial property market has remained buoyant despite challenging circumstances thanks to innovative, collaborative and flexible solutions.

"SONA Estates has thoroughly considered the needs of clients to provide a fantastic business hub which will allow organisations to benefit from short licenses and low, all inclusive, rates, from £19 per sq ft.

"SONA Estates has created a fresh, modern and exciting accommodation for its occupants and a great environment to impress visitors, work collaboratively and create a productive working space."

It was recently announced that international charity OXFAM will occupy a 3,800 sq. ft. suite while Zurich Insurance Plc have signed up to another ten-year lease.

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BUILDING LUXURY HOMES THROUGH A PANDEMIC

Luxury housebuilder Homes by Carlton aims to be a leading regional housebuilder across the North East and Yorkshire in the next few years. We spoke to MD Simon Walker on progress and the impact of the pandemic on growth plans.

How many sites does Homes by Carlton have in the region?

We currently have three sites across the North East - at Middleton St George, Thorpe Thewles and Redmarshall - with several more planned for later in the year.

With the sites ranging from 11 homes at Redmarshall to a multi-phase development covering 198 homes at Middleton St George, it's an immensely exciting time.

What makes you different to other housebuilders?

Our focus is on building the homes people need, in the areas they want to live - and every home we build is treated as if it was for ourselves. We want to live in the homes and locations we build.

We spend a considerable amount of time sourcing the right land. We have all lived in the region for decades and fully appreciate the need not just to have a fantastic home, but for that home to be in the right location.

What impact has the pandemic and lockdowns had?

The first lockdown was a period of uncertainty, as it was for everyone. The importance of the housebuilding industry though - which supports around 750,000 jobs a year and adds over £30 billion to the UK economy annually - was recognised and we've been able to continue operating for the vast majority of the last 12 months.

In fact, the only time we've had to actually stop building has been because of the weather.

We've obviously had to introduce a number of measures to ensure the safety of everyone on site because of COVID, but I'm delighted at how the team has responded.

How strong are sales and demand?

When the pandemic hit, there was a feeling among all housebuilders everything would effectively be put on hold - but that's proven to be anything but the case.



Simon Walker

With completions and reservations continuing over the last 12 months, demand has been high throughout. Our sales and marketing teams have been fantastic, introducing COVID-precautions to ensure our showhomes remain open, whilst creating virtual tours - you can explore our showhomes, experiencing 360 degree views of every room, from the comfort of your sofa.

There's always been a strong demand for high quality homes throughout the region. But the Stamp Duty holiday coupled with existing schemes such as Help to Buy - and many homeowners saving more money than planned - has meant it's been a more active time than anyone in the industry could have imagined at the start of the pandemic.

How many homes do you hope to complete in 2021?

Our intention is to have 50 new homes ready to welcome their new owners by Christmas this year.

We're very fortunate we have an experienced team who are agile and deliver the required output through the most challenging of times.

What are the company ambitions in the next few years?

We are working tirelessly to be the leading housebuilder in the region when it comes to quality. And that stretches across everything - from the finishes of our homes themselves, to the locations in which they're built, and the service you receive as a homebuyer.

Our primary focus isn't on volume. It's on providing homes people want and need in the areas they want to live - and homes they're genuinely proud to live in.

How do you relax off-site?

Now, the same as most others - sat in front of the TV digesting a box set on Netflix!

I'm a huge fan of hiking and biking though, so I'm fortunate COVID hasn't hampered this. We have some stunning countryside walks in the region that really do help you reset and refresh.

I love live music, too, so you could often find me at gigs throughout the region before COVID, and I'm arguably looking forward to this most.

More details www.homesbycarlton.com

It's not surprising that Newcastle's Ouseburn Valley ticks every box when it comes to living in a city, with the added benefits of being close to the river and surrounded by greenery.

NEWCASTLE'S OUSEBURN IS NATIONALLY RENOWNED AS A GREAT PLACE TO LIVE – AND A NEW DEVELOPMENT WILL BUILD ON THAT REPUTATION...

It's an area which has everything on its doorstep – from unique food outlets to an artisan bakery, from its very own farm to some of Tyneside's most iconic watering holes.

Throw into the mix cultural venues like Seven Stories and musical hot spots such as The Cluny and you've got a vibrant and exciting place to live, work and spend leisure time.

In recent years Ouseburn has also become highly prized as somewhere to buy a home, highlighted by the popularity of the multi-award winning Malings development.

And this summer the people behind that development will complete their latest scheme, breathing new life into a historic area of the city and creating a new community of residents.

The appeal of the area is definitely high – evident by the fact that over a third of the new houses are already reserved.

Steenberg's Yard had been derelict for more than 15 years before it was taken over by Pfp Igloo which recognised its potential for new homes and started working in partnership with Newcastle City Council and Homes England.

The site dates back to the 1850s when its namesake, Richard Steenberg, moved to Newcastle from Denmark with the Jutland Steamship Company which imported timber from Scandinavia and exported grindstones to Denmark.

Steenberg started a warehousing business using the buildings on the site - which then became known as Lower Steenberg's Yard.

Now however work is on track to build 28 two and three bedroom homes which are already attracting a huge amount of interest, from everyone from older people wanting to downsize to first time buyers looking for a unique property.

Like the Malings before it, Steenberg's Yard is all about building a new community – and Pfp Igloo has had the foresight to create its own community to bring the scheme to fruition.

It's just one of the many factors that make this scheme so unique, that those who are involved in its creation have a strong connection with the Ouseburn.

"Unlike many other homes, Steenberg's Yard has been truly locally made," said Lowri Bond, Pfp Igloo Development Manager.

"Many of our team are based locally, in fact over 80 percent of the design and construction services on the project have been supplied from within Tyne and Wear, boosting the local economy."

Jan Dale, director of executive estate agents, Urban Base, which is selling the properties on the development said there had been a huge number of enquiries about the 28 duplex two and three bedroomed homes, all with outdoor terraces.



The interest has come from far and wide – from ex-pat Geordies who want to return home to those who just love city living but with the added bonus of green space and a waterside location.

"With the situation caused by coronavirus we have seen that people are looking for more than just city centre living," said Jan.

"And the appeal of Steenberg's Yard is that it's not only unique and exceptional but it's right in the heart of the Ouseburn Valley which is such a fantastic place to be.

"It's a community in its own right and I think that has become very important to people given what everyone has been through in the last year.

"People want to stay close to home and these properties are so close to so many great local businesses, have fantastic views over the river and offer a really chilled lifestyle, which is now more important than ever."

Further information about the development is available at www.steenbergseyard.com
Urban Base 0845 6431186





WDL HELP THOSE LESS FORTUNATE

Gosforth based WDL Builders have recently ramped up their charity efforts.

The company are supporting a new foodbank in Kenton. This comes hot on the heels of recent donations to the West End Foodbank and the Full Circle Foods foodbank in Ashington.

Director, Alexander Dickinson said: "These are causes very close to my heart as in times of austerity it is always people at the lower end of the scale who are hardest hit. Naturally this has only been heightened with the ongoing pandemic."

WDL provides a comprehensive building and property maintenance service to both the commercial and domestic market and are able to provide services throughout the North East, Cumbria and Southern Scotland.

Should you wish to make a donation go to [gofundme.com](https://www.gofundme.com) and search for Kenton Labour Party Foodbank and Poverty Donations.



Please send me your building queries through facebook - @WDLne, website: [wdlnortheast.co.uk](https://www.wdlnortheast.co.uk) or through my Dads good pal Michael Grahamslaw at Northern Insight on mjgrahamslaw@outlook.com

The continued adventures of... **Ziggy!**

Hi there everyone, time is flying by into March already – it will soon be my birthday.

The weather has not been kind to us recently but fortunately we have inside work so we have not been too held up.

I mentioned in the December issue that I have a new sister – Cally. She is six months old now and nearly as big as me – she is very naughty (dad is on to his third set of slippers) but he says if she is good he will ask Mike to put her picture in the magazine.

Bill from Longframlington asks:

Q: I am considering having cavity wall insulation and would like your opinion as to the best materials for the job.

A: Cavity walls were first built, in exposed coastal areas, in order to keep

out wind-driven rain. Filling the cavity with insulation will always hold the risk that moisture will be able to find its way across to the inside, whatever the insulation material used. There is also the possibility that the installation will be less than perfect, leaving unfilled air pockets – these will leave 'cold spots' on the inside walls which attract moisture.

Another problem concerns wall-tie corrosion; cavity insulation makes the outer brick leaf colder, and therefore wetter, which can accelerate rusting of the wall ties. And if the ties have to be replaced, there is no satisfactory way of refilling the holes in the insulation, whatever the material.

The cavity insulation industry denies the existence of these problems, but in my experience they are quite common.

I do not think cavity wall insulation is a good idea.

NORTH EAST'S LIVING SPACES WINS GOLD AT TOP INDUSTRY AWARDS

North East lettings agent, Living Spaces, has been shortlisted for a number of national awards having won gold at The British Property Awards.

The Grey Street-based company performed exceptionally well throughout the extensive judging period which focused on the quality and level of customer service and care being offered.

The British Property Awards shine a spotlight on the property industry and provide agents throughout the UK with an invaluable opportunity to compare the services they provide against those being offered by local, regional and national competition. Living Spaces' 2020-21 letting agent gold award for Newcastle upon Tyne (city centre) demonstrated that staff go the extra mile to provide outstanding levels of customer service in a highly competitive business space.



L-R: Tom Allender (Lettings Specialist), Harry Grigg (Lettings Specialist) and Hannah Wilson (Sales Specialist) of Newcastle-based Living Spaces.

Vikki Higginbottom, Business Manager at Living Spaces, commented, "We are thrilled to win such a prestigious award which reflects the work of our outstanding team. We were delighted just to be shortlisted, and now to win the award is brilliant news. We received fantastic feedback from the mystery shopper calls, with the team described as displaying a 'very friendly and professional approach'. There was also praise for our knowledge and willingness to help."

Newcastle-based Living Spaces is the sales, lettings and management arm of Kingston Property Services, part of the Bernicia Group. Living Spaces and Kingston both make a significant contribution towards Bernicia's work helping North East communities through the Bernicia Foundation.

Colin Ord, Managing Director of Bernicia Commercial, said, "Congratulations go to the Living Spaces team, everybody should be very

proud. This is a huge boost, especially after such a difficult year, and I am confident that they will be further recognised regionally and nationally."

The British Property Awards is seen as one of the most inclusive estate agency awards, on average judging over 90% of agents meeting the criteria at a local level. Its team mystery shops every agent against a set of 25 criteria to comprehensively judge customer service levels.

Robert McLean from The British Property Awards added, "Our awards have been designed to remove any opportunity for bias therefore if an agent has won one of our awards, it is down to the fantastic customer service levels that they have demonstrated across a prolonged period of time. Winning agents should be proud that they provide a benchmark for local, regional and national competition."

www.livingspaces.co.uk



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Tom Gibson

IN CONVERSATION WITH

This month Northern Insight talks with...

TOM GIBSON

7 Electrical, Owner

What were your career ambitions growing up?

When I was younger, up until around 14/15 years old I wanted to join the police force, I always wanted to be an undercover police officer, however once starting my exams and thinking about my future, I only really had one plan thereafter and that was to build a business, but it had to be something hands on.

Tell us about your current role?

My current role is the heartbeat of my business, the customer relations manager, the admin role, and still perfecting jobs on the tools; I am pretty busy to say the least. It's my job to ensure that the staff I employ carry the company's high standards, as I am a perfectionist.

What is your proudest business achievement?

My proudest achievement to date is how I have grown so quickly whilst still achieving the very highest of standards across the board. We're known for our reputation in both the B2B markets and B2C, so it's comforting to know that the staff are ensuring their service is second-to none, whether they are dealing with the general public or companies. I am also proud of the fact that I took a risk in leaving my job on the Friday and starting my business on the following Monday, out of the back of my car with one tool box, but a determination to succeed.

How has your industry changed in the last decade?

It is a lot more competitive now with a lot more electrical contractors on the road, standing out from the rest is a massive factor in being able to succeed, and one we constantly aim to achieve.

What are you currently working on?

We are currently coming towards the end of a huge office install, new sockets to supply individual offices, new lighting, data points supplied to desks, new distribution boards, new external lighting as well as new security systems.

Tell us about the team you work with?

I currently have a team of four, with the latest addition being my younger brother who is currently serving his apprenticeship right through to my longest serving team member, Graeme. We have a real mixed bag of experience and different qualities throughout, which helps us give the client and outstanding finish.

What is the best piece of business advice you have been given?

I was told to always treat the client like they were your friend or family, and here at 7 Electrical, we really do pride ourselves on customer care.

What has been your biggest challenge?

The biggest challenge I have faced since being in business is finding hardworking, trustworthy employees, as I want all my staff to be able to follow the business values as well as being open to learning further skills.

Who are your heroes inside and outside of business?

I have taken a lot of inspiration from my mother. She always succeeded in her business ventures, against adversity being a single parent at times, juggling work and family life. I definitely have her determination and business mores.

How do you unwind outside of work?

Outside of work I like to go to the gym at least five times a week, as well as socialising with friends. I love regular city breaks and holidays and I follow Newcastle United. I am also a big fan of going to music events, well I was, before Covid!

Favourite book/CD/DVD?

The Wolf of Wall Street is my favourite film, down to the fact he does everything in his power to succeed, has bumps in the road, but he was always back on the horse, taking risks to enable him to succeed. I admire his determination, but not always his ethics!

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“

...I was told to always treat the client like they were your friend or family...

”



L-R: Peter Rowe, Kenny Walker, Robin Gill, Scott Bibby, Paul Seager, Daniel Selby, Adam Willis, Chris Archer.

NEW SKILLS FOR MODERN METHODS OF CONSTRUCTION

An innovative modular North East housebuilder is expanding the business by recruiting a team of people with a diverse skillset.

CoreHaus, which recently set up a manufacturing facility in a 20,000 sq ft unit on Jade Business Park, Murton, near Seaham in County Durham recently assembled its senior team and is now steadily recruiting the workforce.

But the team are not only the usual workforce with brickies and skills that many housebuilders turn to – rather, they often have technical and engineering backgrounds too.

Joining the management team are Robin Gill as technical manager, along with Dan Selby, as production manager. Robin has operated as a principle engineer with more than 42 years' experience in multiple sectors ranging from power generation to high-performance aerospace manufacturing and process development. Dan Selby is a senior operations manager with a strong technical background in construction. He has around 17 years' experience in modern methods of construction.

Scott Bibby, MD of CoreHaus, said: "Both Robin and Dan bring a wealth of different experience to their roles. Dan's background is more directly related to the modular construction environment whereas Robin brings a technical engineering, product quality and process control to the team. "We're doing something different in the modular housebuilding sector and need people who think

and work differently. Our production and designs draw on modern, technical skills and innovation. We have a real opportunity to break the current mould, bring about change in housebuilding and construction."

Due to the nature of its steel-frame build, CoreHaus will adopt a different production methodology to most housebuilding. Technicians will be needed in the new factory who have engineering qualifications and are agile at problem solving in a technical environment.

Scott added: "We are recruiting people from different industries to create a diverse workforce with a growth mindset. We need engineering skills and construction experience combined with a creative way of thinking."

This philosophy has been applied to the recruitment of the first five technicians – Chris Archer, Adam Willis, Kenny Walker, Peter Rowe and Paul Seager.

For instance, Paul Seager joins CoreHaus as a fully qualified domestic gas and plumbing engineer having also worked in the rail manufacturing industry. Peter Rowe has a varied background predominantly within high level engineering companies such as McLaren Racing and Hitachi. Kenny has construction experience combined with military aviation and manufacturing. Adam joins fresh from a lightweight steel manufacturer with

experience in timber-frame modular construction too. Chris brings a wealth of experience from a variety of roles within construction and engineering.

Scott is liaising with Derwentside College to discuss the kind of multi-skilled young people he would like to recruit, train, and develop going forwards.

"We're looking for a new breed of technicians as well as apprentices with a different mindset. We want people to love the job, to really want to come to work and get a buzz from the work they will be doing," he explained.

CoreHaus is a joint-venture company between Carlton & Co Group, the parent company behind North East based Homes by Carlton, and national social enterprise Fusion21, specialists in public procurement for the built environment.

The five-year plan will see CoreHaus producing around 1,000 modular homes a year, which will result in more than 100 people working across the business. These homes will be built using modern methods of construction (MMC) which will result in high quality homes, built faster, with engineered precision and expected lower energy bills.

More details at www.corehaus.co.uk



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NEW APPOINTMENTS AND BUSINESS WINS FOR LOCAL MARKETING AGENCY

Award-winning marketing agency Narrative is celebrating a string of new business wins, worth over £500k, whilst simultaneously growing its team to further strengthen its creative prowess and PR capabilities.

The North East-based full-service agency has welcomed numerous new clients including Reed in Partnership, Health Call, Dalton Park, Proxismart, Hello Future, Corporate & Commercial Business Solutions and Sunderland City Council.

The contract wins come at a time when many sectors have faced turbulent operating periods. In response to their evolving needs, Narrative's team has assisted in developing and expanding clients' strategies and brands to underpin business continuity.

The agency has further strengthened its expertise with the appointment of Tony Lowe, who recently joined Narrative as Head of Creative with over 30 years' experience.

Narrative has also enjoyed growth in their PR and Digital teams with the appointment of Nicola Hall as PR & Communications Manager, with finely tuned expertise in SEO, content strategy and digital PR, as well as Matthew Bryson as Senior Web Developer, who has over 10 years' experience working in web development, analytics and CRO testing.

MARKETING WITH NO 'FUZZ' FOR MIDDLESBROUGH SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

A Middlesbrough-based social enterprise has announced a partnership with a North Yorkshire marketing agency to deliver PR services.

Recovery Connections Enterprise Ltd, incorporating The Fork in the Road Cafe, The Fork in the Road - Stage One Cafe, Bloom Florists and 131 The Venue, has joined up with Peachy Digital, which will support both the charity and social enterprise by providing PR, strategy and profile building services to help build awareness of its work and ethos.

Recovery Connections was approached by Peachy Digital's Managing Director, Lizzie Turner-Jones, who offered the company's



services for free as a way to give the marketing team more time to focus on other crucial work and support of service users.

Lizzie said: "Recovery Connections is a superb Middlesbrough based charity, backed by its social enterprises which deliver incredible opportunities for those who need support getting back into employment. I love the foundation of the operation which is built on a focus of individual strengths and a 'do with' rather than a 'do for' approach to support, in addition to breaking down the stigma associated with addiction and recovery."



PR FIRM OFFERS ONLINE SHOPPING FOR SERVICES

A North East PR and marketing agency is offering clients a new way to work by taking the whole process online.

Darlington-based Harvey & Hugo was launched by Charlotte Nichols 11 years ago to offer flexible PR services.

Now, the firm has taken the contract-free Pay-as-Hugo element of its offering to the next level, creating a standalone e-commerce website to allow clients to browse and order a range of packages online.

The snacksize servings of the firm's PR, social media and content marketing services can all be purchased individually, allowing clients to create a bespoke package containing as much or as little as they need.

Charlotte said: "While online shopping has been big business for a while, 2020 really highlighted the benefits and I felt the time was right for our PR services to get on board. Clients can browse and purchase our range of PR and marketing snacks from the comfort of their own homes or offices."

"Over the next year, we have some exciting changes on the cards, with new software planned for the summer to improve efficiencies both internally and for our clients, and the business in a strong position for any challenges it may face."



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Food and drink marketing is a true specialism of ours. From foodie PR to social media management, strategy development, profile building and more, we've worked with companies of all sizes across the industry.

Peachy Digital is a fun and slightly sassy marketing agency working with a wealth of clients across the UK and in several industries, with a specialism in food & drink. We work across the full marketing mix, both on and offline, and services include social media management, PR, email marketing, content creation and strategy development.

Our fundamental ethos is marketing 'without the fuzz' – no jargon, no nonsense, just clearly defined strategies that deliver.

We believe in working in a way which is relaxed and friendly while remaining completely professional – you won't find us in power suits but you can be sure we'll develop high quality marketing communications that will work towards our clients' business goals.

For more information call **01677 252120** or email **info@peachydigital.co.uk**



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MARKETING AND MEDIA MATTERS

In the latest of our series of 'Marketing and Media Matters' features Northern Insight talks to leading figures in the region's media industry.

This month we meet...

LEANNE FAWCETT

Managing Director of Peterlee-based LEC Communications and Design, which she launched in 2012.

Did you always envisage a career in the Media industry?

Yes, from a young age all I wanted to be was a journalist. I was fascinated by newspapers and used to cut out articles I liked – usually about celebrities – and make scrap books filled with them. I'd write my own stories and loved watching the news to see what was happening in the world.

I wasn't artistic in the slightest – I'm still not – but I loved writing so I guess that was my creative talent.

What has been your career path so far?

After A Levels, I went to journalism school to sit the NCTJ exams, as I was in no doubt I wanted to be a journalist. I could have gone to university but from speaking to people in the industry I knew that even if I did, I'd still have to gain this qualification. I was so keen to work, so sat the exams and by the age of 19 I'd got my first job.

I worked for five years in the industry, latterly as a business reporter at the Hartlepool Mail, before moving into corporate communications at One North East and Tees Valley Unlimited, now part of the Tees Valley Combined Authority.

In 2012 I set up my own business and nine years on here we are!

What have been the biggest challenges you have faced so far?

In the early stages of my career, I struggled with the exams. Academically nothing has ever come easy, it's been down to hard work and determination, so I had a fair few resits. But I got there in the end which is what matters!

Who do you most respect in your industry?

Those people who understand business and are passionate about making a difference. I am lucky enough to work with some great people who I respect very much, and for me that is so important – surround yourself with the right people and you'll be stronger for it!

Which fictional media character can you most relate to?

Olivia Pope in Scandal – I'm watching that at the moment and her role as a 'fixer', after she left the role as White House media spokeswoman, is one I would absolutely love to do. I've always loved crisis communications and she's very good at it.

How have you adapted your business during the coronavirus crisis and supported clients?

In the early days of the pandemic, a lot of projects were put on hold and clients had to step back from their communications plans, which was tough. But I knew we'd get through it so it really was a case of allowing them the time they needed to manage their own challenges and being there for them when they were ready to start working again.

What is your greatest strength?

The ability to put myself in my clients' shoes and really understand them; to use that understanding to write editorials that bring their business to life. I pride myself on the fact that what I write rarely needs editing by the client, which is a talent not many people possess.

What is your biggest weakness?

I have always been guilty of writing too quickly, which can be an asset but also a weakness. That's why proof reading is key!

What has been your proudest achievement?

Having a news piece which I broke go international – I covered a story about an offshore off-licence being run off the Hartlepool coast, which sparked national and international media coverage and led to me being nominated for a regional journalism award. People still remember that story now!

What are your remaining career aspirations?

To continue to grow LEC and help our clients implement and achieve their own plans for growth.

How do you see your industry evolving in the next 10 years?

Coronavirus has highlighted the importance of digital marketing and media profiling, and that's resulted in many businesses investing in things like their brand, website and profile. I expect that will be the case for the coming months and years, with the continued growth of social media platforms as tools to support business profiling.

Email leanne@lecc.co.uk
tel. 07824 631950.

“

...Academically nothing has ever come easy, it's been down to hard work and determination...

”



Leanne Fawcett

The team at Astute.Work are constantly curious about anything that might impact the world of business communications.

THE ARRIVAL OF CLUBHOUSE

Britain's most admired, scenario-based cash planning and more.

Here its managing director and management and PR consultant Sarah Waddington shares five things that caught her attention and might interest you and your organisation too.

1) The arrival of Clubhouse

Clubhouse is the newest and most hyped social media app on the block. The premise of this audio-based social network is that you join a voice chat room and take part in or just listen to a free-flowing conversation on a topic of interest to you. Some conversations are moderated, others aren't and none are recorded by the app - although a number of users have already used YouTube streaming to do so. Still in development, only those on iOS can access the app (work on an Android version is ongoing) and the only way to gain entry is through an invitation from an existing member. While yet to establish itself, Clubhouse presents some interesting opportunities for brands, for example by offering the chance to create curated conversations around topics related to brand purpose and extend communities that way.

2) Britain's Most Admired Companies

Published in Management Today, Echo Research has unveiled the 2020 winners of Britain's Most Admired Companies. The survey is the longest-running corporate reputation study in the UK and this year's results acknowledge businesses which have demonstrated transformational leadership, shown resilient teamwork and put people first in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. Topping the list is Halma, the global group of life-saving technology companies, which was commended for its well thought-out, purposeful, long-term strategy, while Tesco was singled out as the most admired company for its response to COVID. Attributes of the most admired companies range from strong management and a sound business model through to innovation, diversity and inclusivity and communication.

3) Birdwatch

A new trial being piloted in the United States is employing a community-based approach to combatting misleading information on Twitter. Birdwatch is a bid to reduce the amount of misinformation on the site, which has grown significantly in recent years. Anyone interested in its progress can follow @Birdwatch, which published its first dataset on 1st February.

4) Facebook News

The launch of Facebook News sees the tech giant build a more personalised news experience on the social networking site. The UK launch is the first outside the US and involves partnerships with the Telegraph Media Group, Channel 4 News, Daily Mail Group, the Guardian, the Economist, DC Thomson, Financial Times and Sky News. The Guardian reports that "Facebook said the investment was intended to "support the industry in building sustainable business models". However, it will also be seen as a strategic play by the company aimed at discouraging wider international regulation of the news media market - by showing that it is prepared to support local publishers without government intervention."

5) Scenario-based cash planning

McKinsey has reported an increase in scenario-based cash planning as organisations attempt to manage uncertainty and ensure they have sufficient cash reserves. According to the management consultancy, five areas of best practice have emerged. These include considering future states for the business that are different enough to foster meaningful debate; managing complexity by concentrating on just a few fixed variables; linking scenario planning to specific outcomes; having the right amount of modelling granularity; and choosing the right type of modelling approach to suit the needs of the business.

www.astute.work.



“

...Clubhouse presents some interesting opportunities for brands...

”

Sarah Waddington

IN OUR NEW REALITY OF LOCKDOWNS, IS THERE ANY ALTERNATIVE TO DIGITAL MARKETING?



The answer to this will undoubtedly depend on whom you ask, ranging from in-house marketing managers to speciality agencies whether these be digital, PR, OOH (Out Of Home), media buyers, broadcast, design and print or Direct Mail.

As an integrated agency who are media neutral, in that we don't favour one media or marketing strategy above another but believe every account or client requires their own mix specific to their individual challenges, we would strongly advocate that there certainly are alternatives to digital marketing which may or may not be equally or more effective, and may be best used in combinations, dependent on the product and service you're intending to promote and to whom.

But first, let's be clear about what we mean by digital marketing – broadly speaking this refers to promoting your content to consumers using online technologies and includes, amongst others Search Engine Optimisation to ensure your website is highly visible, paid advertising which is usually PPC or Pay Per Click, Social Media such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter and LinkedIn, Content Marketing which includes video, blogs and podcasts, Email Marketing, Mobile Marketing targeted specifically at mobile devices and finally, but probably key to all, the dark science of Analytics which gives quantifiable information on what's working, and, crucially, what isn't.

Our new reality, which has seen a general 40% reduction in marketing spend, means people are now spending a lot more time at home to the detriment of channels like Cinema and Out Of Home advertising. Digital advertising is huge and growing – Statista estimate that at the end of last year, UK

digital advertising was worth approximately £15.6bn – often at the expense of other traditional channels such as broadcast and print. But this does not mean that any marketing campaign should ignore other channels, indeed there is now evidence of growing 'digital fatigue' amongst consumers.

The phenomenal resurgence of Direct Mail during the pandemic is a great example of how a traditional channel has become particularly effective in this new world. The Royal Mail's own research conducted by JICMAIL (Joint Industry Committee for Mail) and Trinity McQueen, reveals how 2 in 5 people have reported suffering 'digital burnout' and welcomed the human interaction that Direct Mail represented. The research also shows that while too many messages from computers and phones can feel invasive and stressful, physical mail is often welcomed into the home and what arrives on the doormat is also inherently trusted. It feels as though a person has thought about it and invested time, effort and money in getting their message across. "It must be worth reading" was a common sentiment among respondents.

The research found that consumers engaged with 96% of all mail during the lockdown, with 88% reporting that they paid as much or more attention to flyers landing on their doormats than before lockdown, interacting with each item of mail 4.5 times on average. This established that the number of people venturing online after being prompted by an item of mail increased 70% year-on-year.

The resurgence of interest in direct mail spans all age groups, particularly those aged 18 to 34 who account for 24% of people engaging with their post during lockdown.

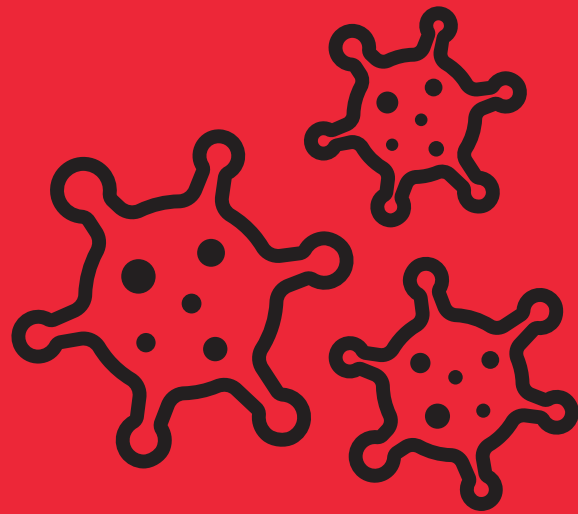
But, whether you invest in digital or traditional channels, your return will depend on both content and design and whilst I completely understand how the quantifiable nature of digital marketing makes it immensely attractive to marketing managers who can triumphantly report to their boards on the RoI (Return on Investment) their campaigns produced through Analytics, good design and fresh content will always attract attention, whatever channel is used.

Clever marketers are like great cooks, using only the best ingredients and varying the mix, to suit their diners. So a realistic campaign of using Direct Mail, PR and broadcast advertising to drive website traffic combines several marketing channels in a holistic strategy that, with great content and design, can be spectacularly successful for customer acquisition.

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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WE LOVE OUR BUSINESS

With many businesses being adversely affected by COVID, Highlights PR's Keith Newman asked some of his RADAR members to pass on the best piece of business advice they'd received.



"The best business advice I've received is you don't have to know everything to start. You'll learn and adjust as you go."

Anne Morrison, Therapist and Coach

"The best piece of advice I have been given came from an old mentor who told me, no matter what problem you are encountering in your business, other people out there will have encountered exactly the same problem and will have developed a better solution than you will most likely develop. So, get out of your business, meet like-minded peers, share your problems and tap into their solutions. He paraphrased this as "don't be scared to shamelessly plagiarise other people's smart solutions, that's how the human race evolves"

Andrew Esson, Esson Partnership Ltd and Vice Chair North Tyneside Business Forum



"Treat clients how they wish to be treated: communicating how they want and when they want. Provide an excellent service for a fair price and don't do free as it has no value. Above all, be totally straight and honest with people."

Neil Fraser, Northumberland Wills and Probate



"Best business advice I've ever had was from an ex-Governor of San Francisco. He said that in business not every client or customer will like you, they may not like your style, they may not like your accent. However, if YOU are YOU and you provide a great service to them and their company, in turn you will likely be the person they will refer back to in the future. It's all about being you and don't change to suit the needs of other people."

Steve Air, Lucid Technology Solutions



"For me the best piece of business advice I've been given is to be authentic. People buy from people. My services are bespoke and personal and it's all about trust and how I can help people on their life journey."

Lucienne Gage, Next Chapter Styling

"My best piece of business advice is to seek progress rather than perfection. The only way to improve and develop a business idea is to put it out into the market and get feedback from real customers."

Lorna Watkinson, Vibrant Thinking



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RISING STAR

SOPHIE HANNAH

Marketing Executive,
JAM Prints & Marketing

What were your career ambitions growing up?

Honestly, I had no idea where my path would take me, but I knew it would be something creative. My favourite subjects were Art, Textiles and English and I went on to study Fashion Marketing at university in Manchester.

Tell us about your current role?

I'm currently a Marketing Executive at JAM Prints & Marketing. Each day is different in my role, from managing client's social media accounts, designing graphics and creating videos, to writing press releases and editorials for the regions' media, it's a mixed bag but I love it all.

What is the most challenging aspect of your job?

Organising so many varied projects for a huge range of clients - although I think my fellow Jammy Dodgers would agree that organisation is my thing.

What's your biggest weakness and how have you managed this?

Confidence - I'm an introvert through and through, I find it much easier to express how I feel through writing, rather than speaking - a true millennial who would rather email back and forth than have a quick phone call - but JAM has definitely brought me out of my shell, as regular contact with clients is vital.

What are you currently working on?

Getting our clients ready for the post-pandemic hurrah! Hopefully it'll come sooner rather than



Sophie Hannah

later - I need an espresso martini and a trip to the lakes.

Tell us about your team?

I have the best team! Creative, talented, experienced - yes, I'm talking about our resident office Pooches, Luna and Mia. The rest of the team are great too of course.

What is the best piece of business advice you have been given?

"We cannot become what we want to be by remaining what we are."

What are your proudest achievements?

Career-wise, it's all the little things, when clients love the work you've done for them and when you see amazing results - success is a series of small wins. My proudest achievement though, is that I have just bought my second home at 24, in the

midst of a global pandemic.

Where do you see yourself in five years time?

In five years time I'll be one month away from hitting 30 - ouch. My goals aren't specific, but I do hope to keep growing, learning and climbing the ladder. If the past year has taught us anything, it's just how fast a whole year of your life can fly by, so I'll be making the most of every opportunity.

How do you like to unwind outside of work?

Since getting our dog last summer, my favourite thing to do is head out for a good walk, preferably to the beach or a forest trail, with a nice coffee. I also enjoy drawing, and have a little side business creating hand-drawn digital illustrations. It's the simple things for me.

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OUR PEOPLE MAKE THE DIFFERENCE - UNIQUE MAGAZINES

Unique Magazines is a North East success story. To simply say that they supply a range of magazines is the understatement of the 21st Century.



John Porrett

Here are some stunning figures...

- Their range of magazines extends to beyond 3,000, including a broad mix from weeklies to specialist titles that you might not always find on the high street.
- Last year (2020) they delivered 265,000 magazines around the world
- They deliver to 100+ different countries.
- They have a dedicated customer support centre open 9.30am - 4:30pm weekdays.

Their aim is to provide people, all over the world, with easy access to a vast range of magazines, whilst amazing their customers with truly outstanding service.

We thought we'd pop in and meet the team behind Unique Magazines and find out more about this unique NE based business...socially distanced of course.

When we visited, John Porrett, Managing Director, showed us a customer email which sums up the level of service the business continuously provide.

"I live in Australia and couldn't source my favourite hobby magazine. I discovered that Unique Magazines could find it for me so I ordered a copy. Four days later it was delivered through my letterbox here in Melbourne. I took out a subscription and, for the last three years, the magazine has arrived like clockwork, on time, every time, every month."

Now that's what you call amazing service.

John Porrett, Managing Director. "My main goal is to make magazines available to as many people as possible and to amaze people with our customer service. We are a trusted company. We have trust at home and abroad. We do what we say...and a bit more. My roles includes company strategy, business growth, looking for new markets, and mentoring. I have trust in my team and like to step back a bit...see the big picture.

In the early days it was all about growth and increasing sales. Now the most important thing is finding the best people and developing their career within the business. We want our team to develop as individuals and help the company grow.

I am proud of our record of appointing apprentices who have gone on to have excellent careers. We currently employ 11 people, however this will shortly grow to 13 with two apprentice appointments in our distribution and customer service teams. My vision is that the business reaches a critical mass whereby we have a reputation for sourcing and distributing magazines, and always exceeding customer expectations.

Sarah Johnson, Operations Director. "My role within Unique Magazines is to ensure we amaze our customers and suppliers everyday, going above and beyond and ensuring we are customer centric. I act as the company's main advisor on all issues relating to operational functions and keep abreast of latest developments to ensure that the company maintains its competitive position. Working closely with our business partners, part of my role to create and maintain new systems to improve inhouse efficiencies and constantly improve our customer experiences.

With the support of our Customer Service and Distribution teams, I continue to make sure we provide brilliant customer service, excellent speed of delivery and fantastic product availability. It is so important that customers receive their magazines on time. We can't let them down. I know a lot of our customers appreciate the measures we've taken.

As our team are so important to us, I also assist John and the senior team with staff mentoring. We want everyone to enjoy working here because, as in the end, it means our customer service will always exceed the customers' expectations".



Sarah Johnson

Andy Cant, Distribution Manager. "When I came for an interview, I was struck by the family atmosphere. At busy times everyone helps one another. My role is running the warehouse which means ensuring magazines are ordered on time, sorted when they arrive and crucially make sure they go out on time. Customers want magazines to arrive in pristine condition so the correct packaging is vital. If someone in the USA asks us to find and deliver a specialist magazine, I want them to be amazed when we do exactly what we've promised...and a bit more."

Angela Walker, Management Accountant. "I've worked for Unique Magazines for three years. The business is an incredible operation for a small family business and it's great to see business increasing during the pandemic, providing customers with the best range of magazines delivered direct to their doors. The desire to amaze customers is a top priority. My role is to keep John fully informed about the accounts so that he can make financial decisions. We have several big accounts with money coming in from all over the world, which can sometimes be a challenge. It's hugely rewarding when the finances run smoothly."

Laura Hewitt, Digital Marketing Manager. "I oversee the online and offline marketing strategy for the business which includes SEO, email marketing and social media. SEO plays a huge part of the strategy with us providing such a broad customer base and magazine range. Customer service and availability of product is key and what sets us aside. When a customer receives a magazine that they've struggled to find and it arrives on time, carefully packaged, I like to think they'll be amazed."

We're also in the process of developing new areas within the business including The Comic Club and Magazines for Schools...which are both monthly subscription services for children"



Angela Walker



Andy Cant



Gordon Johnson



Ellie Purvis



Kyle Clarke



Jordan Cook



Laura Hewitt



Thomas Robson



Jess Austin

Jess Austin, Customer Services Administrator. "I joined the company two years ago as an apprentice and I'm currently completing a Business Administration course. John and the team give lots of support. Mentoring is so important in the company and it's great to have that sort of backing. My main role includes talking to customers, dealing with customer orders, processing payments, contacting publishers and placing business orders. It's complicated but I love it. It's all about customer service and exceeding expectations. If something were to go wrong, it's really how we deal with it quickly and efficiently that makes us so good."

Unique Magazines also provide a collection service from their store in Swalwell, Newcastle with cash and card payments both accepted.

If you'd like more information about Unique Magazines, and the magazines and service they provide, you can contact John and his team by calling 0191 270 2805 or email John directly on john.porrett@uniquemagazines.co.uk

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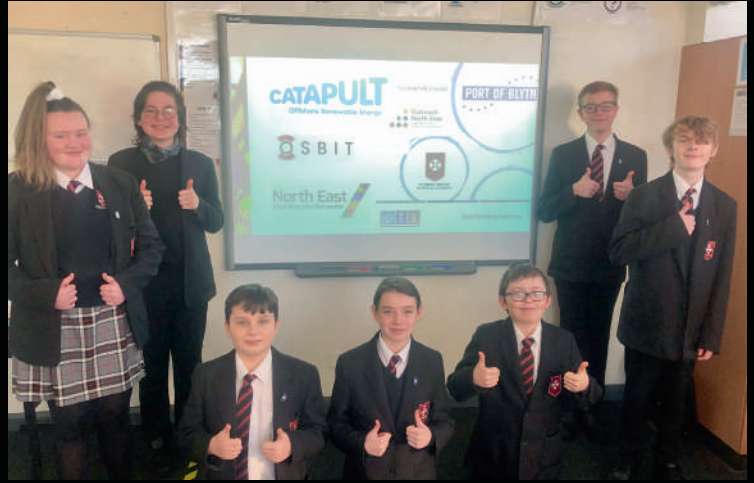
NEWCASTLE SCHOOL ENCOURAGES SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AMONG STUDENTS

Newcastle Preparatory School's ethos is underpinned by the need to instill a sense of community among pupils, which comes with a responsibility to look out for others and contribute in whatever way they can. This has led to a string of accomplishments for the school.

Recent achievements include raising funds for Children North East during a reading challenge, donating to The People's Kitchen and supporting Jesmond library.

Some children have also made a fantastic effort in supporting the NHS. Ethan Cockburn, aged 9, raised an amazing £785 for the Great North Air Ambulance Service. Ethan completed 8 runs and covered 32 miles in total and is now considering what his next charity fundraiser will be.

The school also has its very own mini celebrity Romir Sehgal, aged 6, who recently appeared on ITV News to commemorate Sir Captain Tom Moore. Romir was inspired by Captain Moore to cycle for the NHS.



TEACHERS EMPLOY THEIR OWN EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS FOR CAREERS WEEK

Teachers at St Benet Biscop Catholic Academy in Bedlington employed some of their own problem-solving skills to ensure that their annual careers week went ahead, despite the entire student population being plunged into remote learning.

Assistant Headteacher, Lesley Poulter, was tasked with the job of making sure everything worked like clockwork. She said: "We continually raise young people's aspirations and do so by giving each student a wide range of experiences of the world of work. It's about opening doors and highlighting the vast range of possibilities open to students. We emphasise some of the key employability skills that they will need including motivation, good communication, teamwork, problem-solving and adaptability."

With the support of the North East Local Enterprise Partnership and a variety of alumni and local entrepreneurs, Lesley's own problem-solving skills were put to the test as she and her team put into place a plan to hold the careers week remotely.

During the week, students at home and those in school from families of key workers virtually toured colleges and workplaces and received vibrant and dynamic presentations from employers and guest speakers including David Hodgson from the Futureme project and four speakers from Founders4 Schools.

TOLENT CREATE ONLINE SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

National contractor Tolent has created a selection of online school activities focused on promoting careers in construction, which are being used by schools and colleges across the North East.

Due to the ongoing restrictions posed by the pandemic, Tolent's usual activities of hosting site visits, supporting school career events and general engagement with local education establishments have been unable to go ahead.

With a commitment to helping young people into construction careers, the team set to work to create a suite of materials to ensure the focus on jobs in the industry was not lost.

A number of schools have now trialled the activities and following brilliant feedback, Tolent is now ready to roll them out wider across the region and beyond.

Andy McLeod, CEO of Tolent, said: "I'm incredibly proud of everyone involved in this project who continue to uphold our reputation as a considerate contractor, going above and beyond what is asked of them and making a real difference to our communities. With more than 230,000 construction jobs expected to be created in the next five years, it's important we engage with school learners now to promote the choice and quality of roles within the industry."



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Throughout the disruptive situations we've seen over the past 12 months, the learning process our children enjoy never stopped.

School just shifted to home.

The classroom, online.

Our teachers meticulously tackled lesson planning and delivery and when a child needed them, they were always on hand to help.

And it assured a parent that their child's academic growth was never compromised.

As a school with deep rooted family values, we make sure our children are supported well.

Visit us on Open Day 24 April and learn more about this 137-year old institution, a family-run independent school, with a heritage in building generations.

A heritage we are truly proud of.

Since 1884.



Our children never stopped learning.

BE INSPIRED BY OUR STUDENT STORIES

"I am delighted to say that we have now completed three terms of virtual teaching, and that we have just announced another set of fantastic Chartered Institute of Marketing exam results with our tutors and students achieving a 95% pass rate. Whether you're at the beginning of your career journey, want to move up a level, or need to grow your knowledge in specialist areas, CIM and CIPR qualifications will help take you further, faster." *Veronica Swindale, Managing Director.*

Meet Alex

*CIM Certificate in Professional Marketing with Digital Marketing.
CIM Diploma in Professional Marketing & CIM Diploma in Professional Digital Marketing.*

Digital Marketing Executive at SoundbiteLearning UK Ltd

Alex started his CIM journey after internal discussions about his career development. He quickly progressed from certificate level onto the Level 6 Diploma as it became clear that CIM qualifications were beneficial to his professional development. Alex became so hooked on learning that he decided to complete a dual qualification at Level 6 so he now has the marketing and digital marketing qualifications. After noticing a real difference in his strategic thinking Alex now has his sights set on the CIM Marketing Leadership Programme.



“

"What I enjoyed most about studying was the sense of community with a common goal. All my cohorts were young professionals who were embarking on similar journeys to further their career development".

“

"It was good to gain different perspectives on real-life challenges, discuss possible solutions in a confidential environment, and explore academic theories and marketing initiatives in action".



Meet Lucy

CIM Diploma in Professional Marketing

Alumni Relations Manager at Newcastle University

Lucy wanted the opportunity to strengthen her professional development. Although she had worked in several engagement and marketing roles, creating marketing strategies and developing exciting campaigns, she was aware that she did not have an academic marketing qualification to support her experience. She wanted the opportunity to learn more about the theoretical principles at both a strategic and practical level to help her navigate the ever-changing marketing field.

Meet Laura

CIPR Professional PR Certificate

Communications & Engagement Support Officer at NEAS

When Laura started her new job, she discovered that it was not only the skills and experience you needed. She needed to know more about how the PR industry worked and how to communicate with her audience to get the best outcomes. And most importantly, Laura wanted to understand how to evaluate her work, so that she could continue to make improvements. She gained a lot of knowledge from her tutors and took plenty of ideas back to the office with her.



“

"Since graduating, I am actively taking on more responsibility to write PR plans and lead various work aspects. I now make a specific effort to keep up with the latest industry demands and trends too."

“

"Studying has supported me on many levels in my career. First, it kept me busy while on furlough, and then, it helped me secure my new job, and along the way, I loved discovering new people with different backgrounds".



Meet Marine

*CIM Certificate in Professional Marketing
CIM Certificate in Professional Digital Marketing*

Digital Marketing Executive at Appetite for Business

Having no formal marketing qualification, Marine decided Level 4 would help her develop strong marketing skills critical in her career. She found that continuous learning was instrumental in creating more pertinent work. In developing her long-term thinking and employing more marketing and business tools, Marine was significantly able to improve her work quality. She enjoyed taking on board new ideas so much; she decided to double up with a dual qualification in professional marketing & professional digital marketing.

Meet Karl

CIPR Professional PR Diploma

Communications Executive at BIGGA Ltd & editor of Greenkeeper International

Karl wanted to push himself to the next level, he came on the Diploma, not knowing what to expect, but after each session, he would go back to work wholly reinvigorated and excited to practise what he had learned. The expert knowledge that he gained on the course has impressed management and other members of staff. He is now planning and shaping the association's direction rather than just responding to a knee jerk reaction or instruction.

“

"The sharing of knowledge around the nesma table was something I appreciated, and it was fantastic to have a group of people with shared experiences in the same room to discuss ideas with."



Meet Charlotte

CIPR Foundation Award in PR

CIPR Professional PR Certificate

Communications Coordinator at Innovia Films

Charlotte wanted to gain more knowledge around Public Relations and learn the best practices for communicating with other businesses. She wanted to learn how to create the best content for the consumer and understand how to evaluate it. Charlotte admits that studying has increased her confidence and improved her performance with robust planning and more targeted messaging. We are delighted she could complete the course earlier than anticipated despite working from home with two young children.



“

"I found it fascinating to see what tools worked for one sector, did not always work for another. The tutors were very knowledgeable, and they made a conscious effort to include all participants and every industry".

As you can see, the CIM and CIPR qualifications are a valuable investment, both in personal and business development.

Our new term starts in April, and all our courses will be going ahead as virtual interactive learning sessions, as we know that interaction with your tutors and peer group is equally crucial to your learning experience.

If you are interested in studying with us, talk to Lucy on 07734 222 254 or lucy.davidson@nesma.co.uk

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Northern Insight meets...

TONY JACKSON

Headmaster at Barnard Castle School

In a sentence, how would you describe the year 2020?

Like the Tour de France: lots of ups and downs, some blind corners, and a relentless amount of pedalling!

How has the school adapted to the Coronavirus Crisis?

Our first objective was to imbue a sense of calm and deliver consistent and transparent communication with our parents. Using a combination of common sense, experience, wider sector advice and feedback from staff, pupils and parents as to what was working and what was not, we then quickly developed a home learning programme that focused on Engagement, Balance and Sustainability.

We also made the commitment to update our IT provision. Additionally, the School rented a large marquee for extra social space within student Year Group bubbles, while construction work took place in areas of the School, converting smaller rooms into larger communal areas for our students.

All of these measures, combined with the imposition of clear safety guidelines, meant we did not have to close any year group at any point of the Michaelmas Term.

What are you currently working on?

Our intended focus at the start of 2021 was superseded by the announcement of a third national lockdown, and the subsequent need for the teachers to prepare for a seamless transition into home learning, which they have done remarkably well.

We are also focused on our wider strategic piece, working out how we emerge from this period even stronger. Part of this is reviewing our curriculum, ensuring that it remains relevant and appropriate for the 21st Century. We pride ourselves on developing young adults with character, and it is important we constantly review our offering to ensure we give ourselves the best chance of doing that.

In spite of the Coronavirus, our boarding numbers continue to increase, so we are increasing the number of staff and beds available. This forms part of a wider 'Masterplan' development; an ambitious building plan that will ensure the School remains at the forefront of independent education in the North East for decades to come.

What have you learned about yourself this year?

Whilst we continue to live the Coronavirus experience, I have not had a great chance to reflect on personal learnings, but I can say I have lived and led through a crisis and survived!

One of the key elements to that has been maintaining perspective. Ultimately, we are extremely fortunate to live and work where we do, doing something we fundamentally love.

On a daily basis there are anywhere between six and 20 issues hitting my desk, and the ability to see individual issues as molehills that can be picked off one at a time, rather than seeing them as a collective mountain, has stood me in good stead.

How have you found remote working and how has this affected your staff?

My colleagues and I all entered the teaching profession because we love interacting with others. It has been this removal of face-to-face engagement that has been most challenging. Video assemblies are an appropriate substitute, but there is nothing better than having 600 students and staff in the same room, singing a resounding hymn or applauding someone's achievement or act of kindness.

Which regional businesses have you admired in their responses to the pandemic?

Roman Showers in Newton Aycliffe is a perfect example of a British-based business that has diversified to meet the needs of the pandemic. It has adapted from manufacturing showers to creating a completely new product line aimed at ensuring the safety of workers in a range of settings.

Additionally, both Wharton Construction and HLP were able to work together to ensure we could create and then build, four large social spaces within the original school building, in which our students could socialise and interact.

What is the best piece of advice you have been given in recent months?

To ensure that as a leader, even during a crisis, it is of vital importance to keep an eye on the business, not just in the business, ensuring the bigger strategic picture was not lost at a time of flux. I have been helped here by having a very strong team around me, who have had all of their collective eyes in the business over the past year.

Have you developed any positive personal habits as a result of lockdown?

My wife may disagree, but I would certainly say that I am more conscious of my technology use when I am at home. Additionally, I have had a standing desk installed in my study, which has certainly improved my working methods, and I would highly recommend it.

What will 2021 bring for yourself and the school?

Opportunity and excitement. I am a big believer that if your mindset is right, you can use adversity for good. I am also excited about the time we can bring people back into the School, including visitors to watch music concerts, drama productions and sporting fixtures.

Above all, though, I look forward to the students returning and reassembling as a whole school community, and one that is stronger because of this shared experience.



“

...a home learning
programme that focused on
Engagement, Balance and
Sustainability...

”

Tony Jackson

TIME FOR SCHOOL

There has been much speculation about the reopening of schools. At the time of writing, we are eagerly anticipating a signal from Government that we can begin the process of opening our doors once again.

In the first instance, schools are likely to reopen with similar measures in place as were in force during the Autumn term – year group bubbles, social distancing, face coverings in corridors and communal areas, regular cleaning routines and so on - supplemented by the new practice of lateral flow tests that have already been rolled out for the staff and the children of critical workers who have been in school this term. Importantly, the reopening of schools gives a message of hope to all, a symbolic step forwards that we will one day fully emerge from this darkest of times. While the prospect of a wider school reopening may give rise to nervousness about the possibility of increased transmission in some areas of the community, a well-managed return to school is very much in the best interests of children, families, and society.

At the RGS we have been fortunate in the quality of the remote learning that we have been able to deliver with regular human interaction through live lessons using Microsoft Teams and a balance of online activity and offscreen tasks. We have just written reports for all our pupils in Year 7 and Year 12 – both year groups that have made a significant transition this year. Having read the reflections that our pupils have written alongside their reports it is clear that nearly all have embraced online learning and quite a number comment that they have even been able to get even more work done without the distractions of people around them. They have been developing their organisational and independent learning skills in ways that may continue to benefit them long after lockdown. Added to this, those who normally have to travel some distance into school have also noticed the benefit of being able to wake up later and get more sleep, which has to be a good thing for young people.

All of the above is about making the best of the situation, but young people fundamentally need to be around others; peers, teachers, and role models. However good the online experience, it cannot replace the positive dynamic of day to day interaction between human beings. Even just a passing conversation in the corridor can help lift someone's mood and, by being around people, in school even the most reticent teenager learns social skills that they will need as they grow into young adults and pursue careers. Children also benefit from structure and routine in their lives that gives them the security and confidence to grow into happy and healthy young people. Those who have had the prospect of public exams and other such rites of passage being cancelled may be feeling particularly anxious about the future. Different children will react uniquely to the current situation



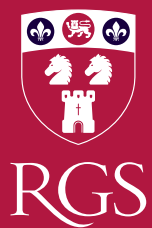
but it is true to say that they will have all been profoundly impacted by the experience of the past 12 months. It is difficult to predict the full extent of the impact but the social isolation that young people have experienced in their formative years is likely to have increased the potential for our young people to experience mental health issues significantly going forwards.

Children can be surprisingly resilient but how can we support them in the coming months to reduce the long-term impact? In the first place we need to get pupils back into school as simply being around other human beings will make a difference. The co-curricular life of school is going to be just as important in supporting our children, as what goes on in the classroom. Our children need to have the opportunity to be social, to play, perhaps to kick a ball around together, sing in a choir or take part in clubs and activities that interest them. Alongside this, the pastoral safety net also needs to be strong so that pupils feel they are in a safe space where they are properly supported by people who care about them. We already have a strong pastoral provision but as a school we have been consciously providing additional training to all our teachers in identifying and supporting pupils with mental

health issues and we are proactively increasing the capacity of our counselling provision in school so that we can be prepared to help where needed.

Many of us as parents may also be facing our own challenges, whether caused by relationship issues, worries about job security, fears for the health of loved ones and so on. A lot of parents are likely to have been under pressure from supervising home schooling, often when also trying to work from home and perhaps with limited devices in the house and wifi capacity issues so children returning to school cannot come soon enough. Everyone's circumstances will be different but, whatever we are experiencing, we can all do our best to provide security and comfort to our children. We need to make sure that we are doing our best to look after our own mental health so that we ourselves can act as role models to our children in accepting uncertainty and showing resilience in the face of adversity. It may sound obvious but, if we as parents can do this, we can have a really positive impact in supporting how our young people can thrive not only while this pandemic lasts but long into the future.

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AC-CENTTCHU- ATE THE POSITIVE, THE CORRECT SPELLING OF THE SONG, HONEST...

By Simone Niblock, Headteacher,
Durham High School.

Indubitably, the pandemic has wreaked havoc on the lives of many people, with economists and scientists endlessly debating about the possible negative impacts on our future selves.

However, although Hamlet's assertion- 'There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so'- is a manifestation of his angst-ridden solipsism, we can take comfort from Shakespeare in how we can shift our perception in order to salvage some positives from the experiences of the last year or so.

1. 'Stuff' doesn't matter. Apart from obsessively buying e-books, my conspicuous consumption has taken a complete nosedive over the last year or so, much to my frugal husband's relief. I feel that I have lost my 'shopping mojo' and very much doubt that, once I am let loose on the shops again, the allure of John Lewis will never be the same. Indeed, it appears that I can function perfectly well as a human being without possessing the latest *Sunday Times*- recommended gizmo or the newest 'edition' of Trinny London's *BFF Cream*. FYI, you probably have to be a woman over the age of 40 to understand the last reference.

2. Less Pollution. I am no expert on environmental science, but even a neophyte like me on all matters ecological can recognise that the lack of global activity may have had a positive effect on our worldwide environment, even temporarily. As most of us have had no choice to do other than 'stand and stare' rather than rushing around on endless holidays- guilty as charged- it seems that our ecosystem has benefited from a period of less light pollution, lower air pollution and the absence of lairy youth hitting the nightspots of 'Marbs' and leaving their detritus



Simone Niblock

to suffocate the local flora and fauna. Check out a fascinating piece of research from NASA entitled: *Environmental impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, as observed from space*.

3. The resilience of young people. Like all educators, I am very concerned about the impact that lockdowns may be having on the psychological and emotional wellbeing of children and young people. However, in conversation the other day with a parent who specialises in paediatrics, we discussed the sheer resilience of children and how they are infinitely adaptable, much more so than adults. This made me think of just how magnificently all year groups at my school have taken to remote learning again, after encountering it last year, and how they have adapted their learning to accommodate the medium. I don't want to sound all Panglossian here- it will definitely be the case that there will be many concerns across society when we return back to 'normal'- but we should also be acknowledging and celebrating how brilliantly, by and large, children have been coping with the

strange sort of incarceration they have been asked to endure.

4. The decline of the 'Influenzas' (sic). Obviously, I am not part of the demographic group that the *soi-disant* 'Influencers' are trying to attract, but one cannot avoid their pointless presence in society per se. Therefore, I have been so pleased to note that there appears to have been a backlash against those social media mavens who decided that a sneaky trip to Dubai was necessary 'for business purposes', with other 'celebrities' calling them out for their thoughtless hedonism and cloth-eared approach. Who knows, but in our 'brave new world' post- lockdown, perhaps such flagrantly outré behaviour might be censured as unseemly and we may never need to see E-list 'slebs' flogging 'Skinny Sprinkles' ever again?

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.



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SCHOOL WIDER OPENING

By David Tickner, Headmaster at Newcastle School for Boys

Like all schools, we await government announcements as to what can happen in relation to the wider opening of schools on 8th March and beyond.

Inevitably, there has been a great deal of speculation about how, when and in what ways this might or should happen. The debate was enlivened further by the recent announcement in Scotland that some of its younger children would be returning to school after half term on 22nd February.

All schools want to see their children back in classrooms as soon as possible. We would all acknowledge that this is highly desirable for a range of important reasons including, of course, children's education and wellbeing, but it should not be done at the risk of public health or prolonging the coronavirus pandemic and its effects.

We hope that the decision as to when schools can open more widely again in England is driven by safety and public health rather than political or other considerations. It is hoped that, as schools return this time, there will be no more blanket restrictions on schools as they and wider society steadily return to a sustainable post-COVID reality.

The case for closing schools in January other than to the children of key workers and those deemed vulnerable was not because schools themselves are unsafe. Indeed, there is evidence that transmission rates amongst children remain low. The case for closing schools was driven by wider public health considerations. When schools are open, there is a great deal more movement and contact within communities generally. It is this that increases infection rates rather than schools themselves.

The key factor in the timing and extent of wider opening must therefore be public health with regard to infection and transmission rates, the number of cases requiring hospital treatment and the consequent demands being placed on the National Health Service.



David Tickner

It would seem sensible to open schools on a phased basis and to keep a close and careful eye on the impact this has on transmission and case rates within the wider community. Schools in England should not open to all students at once. If public health allows, my suggestion would be to start with up to and including Year 2 in primary schools and with Years 11 and 13 - who face important assessments this summer - in secondary schools.

Within this, headteachers should - through consultation with their local authorities, governors and other relevant bodies - be allowed some discretion on how they operate and to scale back on grounds of safety and public health if they judge it to be in the best interests of their school and local communities.

Welcome but overdue is the government's recognition of the need to give schools a little time to plan major changes in their operation by pledging to give at least two weeks' notice of wider opening. Of course, more time would be welcome, but this is a fast-moving situation to which everybody needs to be able to respond quickly - particularly where that involves children returning to school.

It would also seem sensible that mass testing in

schools supports their wider opening. A number of changes in approach to lateral flow testing in schools since it was rolled out in January has left confidence in its effectiveness at a low level. The original announcement that all pupils and staff should be tested twice initially on their return to school, then weekly and, in the case of contact with a positive case in school, serially has been largely abandoned with little real explanation. At the moment, only staff who volunteer are tested up to twice weekly. This offers some reassurance and should eliminate any 'super spreaders' amongst staff but doesn't appear to offer the full benefits of the original plan.

Whilst we have continued to maximise our remote provision to support all of our boys' academic progress and wellbeing during the pandemic, we look forward to the day when all of our boys can return to school with the confidence that public health is also protected.

Newcastle School for Boys is an independent school for boys aged 3 to 18 in its Nursery to Sixth Form provision based in Gosforth.

For more information about Newcastle School for Boys, visit www.newcastleschool.co.uk or contact admissions@newcastleschool.co.uk

THE NEW NORMAL

Whilst we are still firmly in the grip of the pandemic it is hard to gauge which of the changes we have experienced as “the new normal” this year will persist once, eventually, the restrictions are relaxed and life will become more familiar.

No doubt the owners of Amazon, Zoom and Deliveroo will hope that the boost to their businesses will continue and equally, many small retail outlets, leisure facilities and restaurants will be only too delighted to resume their normal trading.

Education too is on the cusp of potentially revolutionary change; not so much in the world of schools perhaps, but certainly in the world of universities. For the former, whilst the shift to remote learning has accelerated many schools' journeys along the silicon road, we can be confident that schools will look and feel fairly similar once they are fully reopen.

I'm not sure that this will be the case for universities. The challenges of the pandemic have called into question the fundamental role of universities in our society in a way it could never do with schools.

Consider the average experience for a student in their second year of their university course. After the initial excitement of the first term in 2019, and some mildly concerning reports about a strange disease which startled to emerge that Christmas, they have been forced into a student lifestyle that couldn't be more different from what they would have expected. Face to face teaching is much reduced, and in some cases, absent. Rather than the whirl of social activities and making new friends, they are largely confined to their uncomfortable, expensive accommodation often with people they don't know or, worse, like much less than they thought they did when they signed their accommodation contract earlier in the previous year. Meanwhile tuition fees continue to be charged with little quarter in remission terms given by their often surprisingly cash-strapped institutions.

Students have reported higher than average dissatisfaction levels not only with their courses but with their lives themselves. Unsurprisingly, mental health problems are significant. Much of this is of course due to the disappointment of what would be a special three years of their lives being blighted by



Kieran McLaughlin

the restrictions due to the pandemic even if, in the vast majority of cases, the illness itself. But, stripped of all of the fun which surrounds the study, it has called into question the reasons themselves for attending university.

Most university graduates would acknowledge that their reasons for studying for their degree were not quite the lofty intellectual aspirations they may have identified on their UCAS forms or in their admissions interviews. Of course they may have (mostly) enjoyed their courses, but often the real reasons for attending are a mix of increased employability together with a desire to go through the rites of passage that are enjoyed now by half of the youngsters in the country. FOMO, as they might say.

Is this a bad thing? Well, I suppose it depends on what you believe university is for. If you believe the primary function of a university education is to act as a passport to a well-paid job and increased life prosperity, then I would ask you if you thought that was the most effective way to act as a proxy for business recruitment practices. The growth of high value and successful degree apprenticeships would call in to question the necessity for the traditional

three years at university in order to carry out highly skilled roles. Rather than relying on the shorthand of degree institution and course, recruitment departments could, and increasingly are, devise alternative methods to get the best possible employees.

If however you believe that universities' prime function is to act as reservoirs of knowledge or non-profit making bodies dedicated to the pursuit of new frontiers in academia, then you will see a degree as an essential part of the rights of a citizen in a civilised society. I wouldn't disagree, but I would argue that such a purist's view of study is inconsistent with the massive expansion of the number of institutions and courses over the last twenty years. Perhaps the fallout of the pandemic will force us to ask the unaskable question. Do we want so many youngsters going to university after all or might they better served moving into the world of work straight after school?

For further information about Durham School, or to arrange a visit, call 0191 731 9270, email admissions@durhamschool.co.uk or visit www.durhamschool.co.uk

YOU CAN LEARN TO BE CREATIVE

By Dan Howard FIEP, Managing Director at Skills Forward, Operations Director - Learning for Work at NCFE

When creativity is mentioned, it usually conjures up images of great feats of artistry like the Mona Lisa, the sculpture of David or an arrangement of a symphony.

With so few of us able to claim anything quite like this, 'being creative' can seem like an exclusive club that is near-impossible to become a member.

The arts often get the lion share of recognition; however, you'll find creativity in what we believe to be truly functional factions. As creativity is a form of problem-solving, areas such as science, psychology, engineering, and maths all demonstrate their own brand of creativity. And who's to say that a CGI double helix, the Collatz conjecture or complex computer code is any less creative or beautiful than the Sagrada Família?

Creativity in the workplace

When considering creativity in the workplace, many of us do ourselves a disservice and categorise creatives as the ones with the crazy ideas, that choose the visuals or can easily turn a phrase. We count ourselves out because we're convinced that we're not part of that club. In reality, creativity goes far beyond aesthetics. Anyone can apply creative thinking once they know where to start.

Creativity is powered by curiosity. Asking questions, unpicking processes, and making observations are the buds of creative thinking. After which comes the desire to make something better, faster, easier, or more efficient. Often the product of creativity, the "I wish I'd thought of that", is preceded by an awkward adolescence of false starts, failures, and experimentation. It is a fear of failure that stops many of us from truly engaging in our own creativity. When we shake off this fear and see setbacks as a learning opportunity, we give ourselves the chance to make a creative connection between problem and solution.

Communicating creatively

Our management of relationships with colleagues calls for us to engage our creativity. Our approach to communication must be as diverse and varied as we are as people. How we reason, deliver, debate, and persuade will vary from one person



Dan Howard

to the next. And, when you think you've seen it all, you'll meet someone who has you stumped until you find a way in which to communicate efficiently.

Unlocking the power of creativity in three steps

If it can be argued that creativity is everywhere, then it can also be argued that it is in everyone. So how can everyone join the club for creatives? We've covered the notion that creativity starts with curiosity and questions, and that you need to shake the fear of failure to access your most creative ideas. Alongside that, here are my three other top tips for engaging your own creativity.

1. Write things down

You may have noticed that those who scribble way in meetings also tend to pitch the most creative ideas. Many argue that these two actions are correlated. The act of writing things down allows you to examine the detail, find patterns, pitfalls, and possibilities. When your thoughts or notes are written down, you can revisit your initial thoughts with a fresh perspective later – essential when time is tight, and you have a jam-packed schedule.

2. Find the space and time for creativity

Speaking of jam-packed schedules, is it any wonder that we find ourselves too busy think creatively and choose to stick with the status quo instead? It's true that many meetings could be emails, but ideation sessions, away days or

even 15 minutes blocked out in your diary for quiet reflection should all be given their proper credence. Pairing this with a new environment, which may just be stepping outside or away from your desk, helps to break the same old cycle and create the physical room needed for fresh thinking.

3. Exercise creativity like a muscle

It's not true that creativity is a thing that you either have or you don't. Increasing your exposure to things outside of your comfort zone, new thoughts and ideas and new people and experiences will all help you to flex your creative muscles and unlock strength you didn't know you had. Whether it's shadowing someone in a different role or using your spare time to pick up a paintbrush for the first time, you may surprise yourself. You're unlikely to become an expert, but you never know, however you will gain a new perspective and that is where new ideas can spark.

Exercising creativity is a key component of NCFE's 'go the distance' initiative, where we're tackling the big issues when it comes to youth employment in the current economic climate. At NCFE, we're determined to play our part in helping people to train, find, stay and progress in work in spite of the current economic and labour market context. You can find out more and how to get involved here.

For more information on NCFE's qualifications visit www.ncfe.org.uk



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IN CONVERSATION WITH...

JEFF SMITH

Principal of Queen Ethelburga's Collegiate, York



In a sentence, how would you describe the year 2020?

Having officially taken over as Principal on 1st August 2020, although attending the school since April 2020 in a handover period, my time here has been spent during periods of lockdown and government restrictions. It has meant I have had little time in front staff and students, interacting in a way a Principal normally would.

In summary, the year has been challenging, but these challenges have brought about some really excellent and surprising collaborations between colleagues, and with our students, that have in many ways brought this community closer together.

How has the school adapted to the Coronavirus Crisis?

Although there is no substitute for students learning in a physical classroom environment in 'real time', what we have offered at QE over periods of national lockdown and individual student absence has continued to ensure excellent progress and outcomes.

In periods of remote learning, all students access live lessons, available each day and following their usual weekly timetable. These lessons are recorded so that students in different time zones have full access at convenient times. This ensures that students maintain their study routines as well as delivering important subject content and key skills. Online assignments continue to be set, with these marked regularly to give helpful teacher feedback on areas for improvement.

Our excellent Pastoral Team run our THRIVE@QE programme which went online at the start of the first national lockdown and continued to provide students with group wellbeing sessions, together with individual online support seven days per week, available throughout the day and evenings.

Although some students may not be physically on the campus, we wish everyone's experience to be 'business as usual,' with regular contact between all of the people who would normally assist them with their education and life at QE.

What have you learned about yourself through this challenging period?

I have learnt to be more appreciative of the simple things that happen in schools that are so important - the interaction with students, staff and parents and the school events that bring the community together.

How have you found remote working and how has this affected your staff?

Attending meetings and conferences, observing lessons, and talking to staff, students and parents can be done online but it will never replace personal contact that picks up on human emotion. I have

been incredibly impressed with the work of the Board and school leadership team in dealing with the challenges that the national lockdown, and the wider global situation, have brought. All our staff have constantly been focused on the safety of our students and their happiness. QE has gone beyond the measures required by the UK Government and we have committed ourselves to the BSA School Safe Charter. Our staff have consistently shown themselves to be adaptable, caring, and innovative. They are willing to roll up their sleeves and get their hands dirty, to support each other and the students. It is a pleasure to see.

Which regional businesses have you admired in their responses to the pandemic?

I know the NHS does not come under the title of a regional business, however, we all share our admiration and respect for what they have done for the British public. I have three children working in the NHS and I know how difficult it has been for them.

What has also been heart-warming to see, are those individuals and small groups in the community who have come together to support those in need; the neighbour who shops for those isolated in their homes, the people who drive those in need to their appointments. The struggling businesses who provide free meals and services for those who cannot provide for themselves.

We've also seen a great many businesses forced to adapt their operations, just as we have had to in the education sector, switching to online purchasing and distribution. Many of our food suppliers at QE such as Sykes House Farm (our butcher) and Hebdon and Poole (our Fruit & Veg, and dairy suppliers) were quick to offer doorstep delivery to get their fresh produce out to customers.

What can the education sector learn from this difficult time?

The importance of connecting with the community we serve and how everybody benefits when we support each other. Equally, the importance of the interaction between students and their teachers.

What has been your proudest moment in the last 12 months?

Working with such a dedicated group of staff who want the best for their students and the determination that the students have demonstrated.

What does the School have planned for 2021 and beyond?

It will be important for us at QE to remain focused on ensuring our students receive the continuity to their education they have received so far, and that we can retain a flexible and adaptable approach to our excellent teaching and learning provision. We will continue working on our rapidly improved online learning experience, taking the opportunity to innovatively develop our e-learning provision and IT Strategy for the future.

QE is a special place and the warm family atmosphere here is very important to us. Continuous improvement is also key. We will be reflecting on everything we do and will continuously seek feedback from our students, parents, and teachers so that we understand our community's needs and aspirations.

To find out more about QE and take a virtual visit of our campus, please visit www.qe.org



Jeff Smith

HOW TO SUPPORT THE WELLBEING NEEDS OF A CHILD WITHIN A 21ST CENTURY SCHOOL

For over 30 years, schools have managed data using Management Information Systems (MIS). These systems digitally capture data of people that are within the school building.

The use of information technology has rapidly increased and now, with current challenges, needs to do so even more. Here, education expert Scott Biggs talks through how schools can use digitalisation to improve wellbeing on a human level. He said: "MIS systems were introduced originally to support the school office to collect data. The systems available today go much further in their functionality allowing school users to collate, analyse and review a magnitude of data to ensure high performance of schools."

"MIS systems can change school management by enhancing leadership, human resource management, workload, decision making, communication, finances, planning and assessment. In essence, they are the hub of the school providing structure and clarity to ensure a consistent approach. The best MIS today offers a wide range of solutions to the many problems that a school may face."

"The use of a modern MIS can also help a school support children holistically ensuring whole child wellbeing is being cared for. Once upon a time, MIS systems were all about academic performance but now MIS systems, such as Bromcom, provide information to help children thrive and schools to raise standards."

"Artificial Intelligence can't replace teachers in developing future generations. Technology doesn't replace the physical act of teaching, or the empathy a teacher can show towards a child's circumstances. Instead, technology makes teachers more efficient ensuring that they can support pupils better, by relieving any data time-consuming activities, preparing teachers better before class and when starting the new year with a new class, giving access to the latest data or techniques so that they can create a plan of action to support their class and individual pupils to the best of their ability."

"The Bromcom MIS system is one such system with so many key attributes as follows."

Assessment

One of the biggest assets for a teacher is recording the assessment and progression of the pupils.



Scott Biggs

An MIS system that records such data ensures that the teacher feels supported in improving the performance of their class. The MIS system can then analyse this data.

Bromcom offers teacher friendly, quick, efficient dashboards that drill down into data identifying who needs additional support as well as those who need to be challenged to enhance curiosity and progression.

The Bromcom lesson dashboard allows teachers to write additional notes so when they return to a topic to move onto the next level, the MIS system reminds the teacher of absentees or those who did not understand previous sessions. This develops efficiency in appreciating a child's needs, reducing wasted time in teaching content that the child has not learnt or understood in the previous step. This helps reduce any learning gap building up in certain areas over time.

Interventions

The Bromcom MIS assists teachers in identifying children that are not performing at the level they should be. These children need additional help so the teacher can set up interventions and provisions within the MIS, developing a picture of a child in one place providing holistic, not just academic, actions. The Bromcom system supports in the organising, budgeting and identifying stages of whole child development.

Safeguarding

Bromcom has a detailed safeguarding module for logging and retaining records of abuse a child has sadly encountered. GDPR compliant, it ensures children are supported and cared for. The user notes down the incident, records actions, body maps, file uploads and feedback/actions. System alerts ensure teachers aren't alone dealing with the incident meaning providers of pastoral support can also be of assistance.

Behaviour

Collation of information on behaviour is important to understand the patterns and mindset of pupils. Behaviour needs to be recorded so teachers can understand the experience that a previous teacher has had. This will pre-warn of potential disruption that may come to the next teacher and shares knowledge that the child has been championed and needs further positive feedback. Consistent behaviour management is vital.

Communication

Communication is fundamental in ensuring that the school and homelife of pupils is synchronised. To ensure boundaries and support is in place for a child to reach their full potential there needs to be a unification of approach between school and parents. Bromcom uses the My Child At School App where parents can support their child, understanding assessment, attendance, behaviour, clubs and trips, exams, homework, if they are on report, school report, parents evenings and timetable.

Attendance

One of the fundamental functions of an MIS system is to be able to record the attendance accurately within the system. This is to ensure the safety of the children and to ensure they receive the education they rightly deserve.

"The steps towards ensuring that every child matters and can access the right level of education, requires data analysis. As the MIS market moves towards an intuitive space relieving data analysis pressure, it serves to provide more time for the children to receive the best education possible. In turn, the children feel supported and their learning journey evolves in a bespoke way meaning that they will and can achieve."

If your school needs support, you can contact Scott on mrscottbiggs@gmail.com



ASPIRE CHAIRMAN AWARDED HONORARY FELLOWSHIP FROM CUSTOMS HOUSE

Aspire Chairman, Nigel Begg, has been recognised as an Honorary Fellow of the Customs House Academy alongside entertainers Rosie Ramsey and Nadine Shah. The award recognises the achievements of individuals, who have made a major contribution to the world of Arts & Entertainment.

Aspire is one of the UK's fastest-growing IT companies and was recently named Company of the Year at the North East Business Awards. The business was launched 14 years ago by Nigel Begg and Chris Fraser and now employs more than 150 people.

Ray Spencer, Executive Director of The Customs House, said: "It is great to have the opportunity to celebrate the lives and achievements of South Tynesiders as they join our Honorary Fellowship. In just over a decade, Nigel and Chris have led the team at Aspire to become the most successful IT company in the region, going on to win awards and drawing an impressive client base from royals to political parties.

"Nigel has used his business acumen to help many charities, becoming a trustee of the Chloe and Liam Together Forever Trust, as well as making a significant contribution to The Customs House's IT infrastructure."



NEWCASTLE ARTIST STITCHES HER WAY TO SUCCESS

Newcastle-based textile artist Jane Sanders has married her two loves of needlework and pop music to sew some intricate portraits of iconic musicians, which can be purchased online.

The range of stars Jane has portrayed is vast, from early rock and roll up to the



FREEMASONS LODGE THEIR SPACE ON AIR

Northumberland Freemasons now have their own radio show. The monthly show called Sound Level is being hosted by volunteers at community radio station Radio Northumberland, as part of their commitment to connecting as many diverse groups across the county as possible during lockdown.

Presented by Tom Stewart from Widdrington Station and produced by Keith Newman from Ulgham, the show looks at the personal stories of Northumberland Freemasons, gives practical information and highlights their charitable work throughout Northumberland, Newcastle and North Tyneside.

The 90-minute February show featured an interview with the former guitarist of Hebburn based 80's band, The News, looked at the history of the 100-year-old Cramlington Lodge, examined the impact of COVID on farming and reported on some of the good causes that have been the recipients of almost £200,000 donations in 2020. Interviews being lined up from interested freemasons will also feature in the March show.

Stuart Cairns, the Provincial Secretary of Northumberland Freemasons, said: "The Radio Show is for Masons, by Masons but it is hoped that the general public will listen in and enjoy the content. The format is a mixture of interviews, topics of interest and music."

present day. She stitches the pictures on a vintage Singer sewing machine in her kitchen and often works under the moniker of "Stitchin' in the Kitchen".

The resulting pictures are in a PopArt style, with vibrant characters presented on vividly colourful cloth backgrounds.

Whilst Jane employs traditional techniques of applique and embroidery, she also pushes the boundaries of contemporary textile art by sewing with unconventional materials such as newspaper, playing cards and photographs. Jane also incorporates mixed media to add to the narrative of the subject.

Jane has had three solo exhibitions in the North East and completes commissions both nationally and internationally. Her work has also been featured widely in the media, including Mojo music magazine, Grayson Perry's Art Club and BBC Look North and Talk Radio.

To find out more, contact Jane on 07759880710 or stitchininthekitchen73@gmail.com. Jane's artwork can be also viewed and purchased via her website www.janesanders.co.uk

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THE ARTIST'S YEAR

By Mary Ann Rogers

A rare trip to Tesco recently reminded me just how beautiful the tulips are, and the bunch I bought lasted for well over two weeks, and thanks to a top tip from a viewer of my live videos, they even remained upright throughout. So, it turns out that if you put a 2p piece in the vase, the stems stay straight! Hopefully, there will be lots more tulip paintings to come this year.



As the current Lockdown means the gallery is closed to the public, I have returned to my (almost) daily 'live' videos on Facebook. Anyone at all can tune in to my Facebook page at midday and enjoy the experience of seeing a painting evolve from start to finish, with loads of tips and ideas along the way. There is the opportunity to comment or ask questions about techniques and materials, although it often ends up as a discussion about which Netflix series is the most popular!

A new year brings new ideas and subjects. This year, on two of my recent river swims, an otter has been spotted. These shy, protected creatures are mainly nocturnal predators, hunting fish, eels and shellfish but can be seen at dawn and dusk on the riverbank. I plan to make time to try to do more otter spotting, and perhaps they will end up being painted.

As a year-round outdoor swimmer, the recent low temperatures have led to icy swims among stunningly beautiful ice formations in the nearby river. The amount of time spent in the water at sub 5 degrees is fairly short, but time spent enjoying the wildlife, river fowl and wintry beauty whilst wrapped up warm in many layers and two hats is unlimited. We regularly spot herons, teal, mallard, goosander even woodcock when the snow lay on the ground. A buzzard usually hovers over us while we swim, and we even saw an osprey twice last September, hunting over the river.

The ice has been so beautiful this year. Rare 'hair ice', created by a fungus and exceptionally low temperatures from dead wood has been a real treat, also so-called 'pancake ice', which is formed in very low temperatures in rivers looking just like real pancakes!

During this quiet time, I am mainly doing small paintings, concentrating on layers of colour to create an almost 'jewel-like' quality to the paintings. This small-scale format is ideal for the live videos, as the whole painting can be seen by the viewer on screen.





At last! We had enough snow to indulge in a bit of skiing. Living in the hills means there are plenty of gentle slopes for a modest ski-fix. The main problem is how to get to the top of the hill, bearing in mind I don't have ski touring equipment. Luckily, I have a very indulgent husband who drove me to the highest point in the 4x4 pick up, so that I could ski back home. Opening several gates en route was challenging, but just added to the fun.

Now that the weather is warmer, the bulbs are valiantly shooting up and the sound of the birds tweeting reminds us that spring is around the corner, I begin to hope that we might be able to hold an exhibition of new paintings later in the year!

Mary Ann Rogers Gallery
www.marogers.com 01434 270216



CULTURE CLUB



Joanne Whitfield

JOANNE WHITFIELD

Fund Director at FW Capital

Who is your favourite author and why?

I don't really have a favourite author, I enjoy reading all sorts of books but tend to save them up to read back to back on holiday. I have two books on my bedside table at the moment: *How to Run a Marathon* by Vassos Alexander which is part of my research into running a better marathon; and *Work Like a Woman* by Mary Portas – I am interested in building leadership qualities that better fit the world we live in.

What would be your three Desert Island Discs?

I love all kinds of music so I find it really hard to choose just three! It's Alright, I Feel It – Jocelyn Brown and Nuyorican Soul; Alanis Morissette – You Oughta Know; James – Sometimes.

Who is your favourite film star and why?

Patrick Swayze – see below!

What are your top three films?

As a child of the 80s I have to mention Dirty Dancing having watched it a million times, but my favourite Patrick Swayze film is Point Break. Then Eddie the Eagle and Rocky IV.

Which poem left a lasting impression on you?

"The Dash" by Linda Ellis.

What box sets have you enjoyed?

I have done a bit of binge watching in lockdown and I really enjoyed Queen of the South. I have been a big fan of Billions for a few years and I can't wait for the next instalment – New York is one of my favourite places so I love anything filmed there. Homeland has also been a favourite of mine – and I thought it ended really well without any annoying loose ends. After missing it when it first came out, I recently watched After Life. This amazing series by Ricky Gervais is hilarious but heart-breaking! Not really a box set as there were only 5 episodes but the recent 'It's

a Sin' series is brilliant – a joyous but harrowing and shameful depiction of Aids in the 80s.

Who is your favourite artist or performer?

Too many to mention so I will have to say my first love, and that was Adam Ant.

What is your favourite venue?

Hoochie Coochie – a gem in the music scene in the North East. I am lucky enough to have seen some world class artists perform there.

Which musical instrument do you particularly enjoy?

I love the guitar, it is such a versatile instrument which can do everything from beautifully supporting a simple vocal or be a screaming guitar solo in a rock anthem!

From the world of Arts and Culture who would be your ideal dinner party guests?

Candi Staton, Gregory Porter, Chris Evans and Steph McGovern and of course my favourite, Adam Ant.

www.fwcapital.co.uk



MALHOTRA GROUP MOVES TO NEW HQ

Malhotra Group PLC has moved to new headquarters at 50 Grey Street, following a redevelopment costing in excess of £1.5m.

The historic building was purchased around three years ago for more than £4m and will be home to all 60 of the company's head office staff once lockdown restrictions are lifted.

Behind its historic façade, the building, which will now be known as 'Malhotra House', features state-of-the-art interior. This includes a reception area with acoustic board feature walls, a 48ft chandelier rising up through the full height of the four-storey internal staircase and a monochrome design scheme featuring large-scale images of famous Tyneside landmarks such as Grey's Monument.

Malhotra Group PLC owns some of Tyneside's most popular hotels, bars and restaurants, along with a nationwide commercial property portfolio and high-quality care facilities in the region under its Prestwick Care and Malhotra Care division.



LOGANAIR LAUNCHES DIRECT SERVICE BETWEEN NEWCASTLE AND JERSEY

Loganair recently announced a new direct service between Newcastle and Jersey as an addition to its 2021 summer schedule.

Tickets are now on sale for the route, which starts on May 28, operating twice per week on Fridays and Sundays until July 6, and increasing to three times weekly until October 26 with the addition of a Tuesday service.

The route will be operated using a 49-seat Embraer 145 regional jet with fares starting at £75.99 one-way.

The new service adds to the Glasgow-based airline's summer 2021 destinations from Newcastle, which already includes Aberdeen, Bergen, Exeter, Newquay, Southampton and Stavanger.

Kay Ryan, Loganair's Chief Commercial Officer, said: "We are very excited by the potential of this new route and believe it will prove extremely popular. The route will ensure customers in the North East have access to one of the most beautiful and popular holiday destinations in the British Isles."



DRINKS COMPANY FIZZING WITH NEW ADDITIONS

A leading drinks company has added some additional fizz to its popular range with the unveiling of two new flavours.

The Artisan Drinks Company has expanded its portfolio of 100 per cent natural mixers, with the creation of Amalfi Lime Tonic and Bubbly Soda Water.

The new tonic, made with natural quinine and combining the flavours of lime, lemon verbena, rosemary and bergamot, has been inspired by the flavours and aromas of the Amalfi coast.

The company has also released Bubbly Soda Water, a highly versatile version of the classic mixer which is seen as the perfect partner for vodka, whisky and vermouth.

The new drinks, like the rest of the Artisan range, are ideal for cocktails, with premium spirits or on their own with ice. They complement the existing mixers in the collecting including Violet Blossom Tonic, Agave Lemon Tonic, Skinny London Tonic and Pink Citrus Tonic.

STAY ALERT, SAVE LIVES, STAY COASTAL

One of Whitley Bay's newest hospitality businesses has allocated its apartments free of charge to NHS frontline staff who are unable to return home due to COVID.

Stay Coastal is a luxury self-contained apartment complex with seven rooms and suites including mini kitchens and luxury walk-in showers. After an extensive refurbishment to convert the former traditional seaside guest house to boutique standard, Stay Coastal opened its doors to holiday makers and business visitors in the summer. Now however, despite steady bookings, government guidance has meant that the hotel has had to close to the general public.

Rather than leaving the building empty, the three directors of 3NB North East who own Stay Coastal, Debbie Dorans, Jacqui McGuire and Anna Fisher, have decided to offer the rooms to NHS frontline workers in a bid to raise their spirits and offer them a place to relax following busy stressful shifts.



THE HARBOUR VIEW



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KING OF THE CASTLE HOTELS

Here in the North East we're fortunate to have hotels which could never be described as ordinary. They're extraordinary. Like Langley Castle in Northumberland for example.



It's been named North East Hotel of the Year; named as Luxury Lifestyle magazine's Best Hotel for Romance; Visit England gold award; two AA rosettes for culinary excellence; rated as excellent with Trip Advisor. The list is endless.

Whether it's a weekend break, a wedding, corporate function or just a family dinner or afternoon tea, Langley Castle is the sort of place where memories are made.

It's also a place where you can have some serious fun whilst delving into the history of Northumberland.

Langley Castle has teamed-up with the Ancient Britain so that visitors and guests can find out what Northumberland is really like...both now and in the past.

They're also working with Wild About Adventure to give guests the opportunity to enjoy abseiling, trekking, climbing or canoeing.

Kevin Robson is director and founder of Ancient Britain.

"We are a small family company living and working in rural Northumberland. We're passionate about showcasing local attractions and hidden gems and can't wait to let the guests at Langley Castle experience the Northumberland that we know and love. Come rain, hail or shine, we'll do our best to ensure that everyone has a big smile on their face and leave with great stories to tell their friends."

Kevin, his wife Sara and their team, will offer

Langley Castle guests the opportunity to go back in time and, as their company name suggests, discover Ancient Britain through the eyes of the people who lived in Northumberland 2000 years ago. As well as guided tours of Hadrian's Wall there are tours to the castles of the Northumberland coast at Alnwick, Warkworth and Bamburgh as well as visits to three of the oldest stone circles in Britain. There's an opportunity to get involved in bushcraft where you're shown a mixture of prehistoric and modern skills. You learn about the plants and animals of the local area, how to cook on an open fire and even how to build your own shelter. You can find out how the Romans lived and sample what they ate. Kids will love it...so will big kids too. Everyone from hotel guests to corporate team building to school trips, will learn a lot while they're having a great time.

There is also an important message that Kevin and Sara want to get across to guests who join them. "We connect people to the landscape, the environment and their cultural heritage through activities. If people feel connected to the world around them, they are then more likely to be respectful and protect it for the future." Well said.

It really is a stunning place to stay or just enjoy a relaxing meal. It's the king of the castles.

If you want to find out more, go onto www.ancientbritain.org for full details.

LANGLEY CASTLE WORKING WITH WILD ABOUT ADVENTURE

We've been talking to director Paul Mordue.

"Our first contact with Langley Castle was when we approached the hotel to see if it would be possible to stage a sponsored abseil at the castle. It was at the time when the Great North Run was cancelled due to Covid-19, so we devised the Great North Abseil allowing people to raise money for charities by abseiling off the battlements at Langley Castle. Margaret Livingstone-Evans, the general manager at the hotel was up for it, so within a fortnight we organised everything, managed to get several hundred people to take part and raised over £20,000."

One thing has led to another and it now looks as though abseils will become part of the events calendar at Langley Castle. There'll be Halloween and fancy dress special events. Wedding guests can also take part...photos of the bride and groom abseiling from the battlements in all of their finery should make for brilliant photos. Abseiling is also the sort of activity that corporate guests can safely enjoy. Put it this way, it'll be the ideal way to find out who the team leaders are! And of course it'll be something very different for any guests staying at Langley Castle...selfie photos at the ready.

"We're busy putting together a selection of packages which guests at Langley Castle can enjoy. Along with the abseiling there'll be loads of other activities including cycling and walking plus learning about the great outdoors."

Paul works closely with schools in the region teaching children about nature and how you can get involved with outdoor activities. He and his team put together bespoke packages which are tailored to each school to involve children in team building, problem solving, conservation, first aid, map skills, navigation etc. The schools will receive nationally recognised awards for any work undertaken. This is great for the school and certainly helps with the self-esteem of the children,

especially those who are perhaps moving from junior to secondary education.

"We work with schools in providing residential courses which can take place during the week or over a weekend. We go into a wild environment such as the Lake District for 3-5 days and provide the children with a full programme starting at 7.30 in the morning. Our residential courses are full board and all specialist equipment is provided. We love seeing children in this natural environment, away from computers and electronics and thriving doing things they have never done before; it's amazing to witness." Sounds like fun.

If you'd like further information about Wild Adventure, go onto their website www.wildaboutadventure.co.uk or contact Paul at info@wildaboutadventure.co.uk or Tel: 07966902530/01434689778

For more information about the wonderful Langley Castle, visit their website www.langleycastle.co.uk or call them on 01434 688 888





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WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH – PHIL UP!

Review by Jackie Marston



As I've been around for ever (and ever) and have visited many of the region's networking groups over the years – on my travels I met Phil Hughes, who has an events company called Insangel, that promotes musicians/bands by matching them to the relevant events he, and others organise.

Music events, festivals and such-like is his bag, and as he has a great name in this industry, as he's been in it for over 25 years, I am sure it is something that will pick up massively for him, once Covid is over. As the pandemic took hold, this, and many industries were hit very hard, so it's no surprise that Phil had

to turn to other ways of earning money, since the world literally went mad in March 2020.

Not one for stopping, this entrepreneurial guy decided that whilst he always had a passion for weekend cooking for himself and his family, maybe this could be something that could earn him some much-needed income from, whilst his other business was out of action. As the government was telling everyone to re-train or take jobs in other industries to put food on the table, Phil decided to do just that, literally.

He embarked on a meal prep and food-delivery service, which allows people to place their orders a few days beforehand of some well-balanced, home-cooked foods and then re-heat for some delicious feel-good dinners. Using fresh, local fruit, vegetables, fish and meat, Phil devised a series of food to enjoy at home, with the only effort being to pop into the microwave or hot oven.

This sounded good to me and the fact that I loved his enthusiasm, I placed our order. We got pulled pork and sweet potato fries, crispy chicken and noodles, Irish stew, kidney bean vegan curry, tuna and potato bake and vegan sticky tofu with Pak choi. Six meals in all and plenty for two people in each one and at a cost of just £30, works out at just £5 each, much cheaper than a take-away and a whole lot healthier! As my hubby is a celiac, our food was delivered with that in mind and no gluten was added. The food is all incredibly tasty, there wasn't anything that didn't taste homely and flavoursome. The portion size was generous and packaged/presented well and it was nice to actually enjoy home-cooked food, without the effort.

For anyone out there ordering from food delivery services, you owe it to yourself to give 'Fill Up by Phil Hughes' a try, after all, if something positive for the future can come out of this for him and benefit us lazy home-cooks in the process, then why not give it a go?

For more information - find Phil Hughes on Facebook or call/text on 07901616185. www.insangel.co.uk.

sachins

Owned and operated by Chef Bob Arora, all of the food at Sachins is freshly prepared using the finest ingredients to give you an individual experience.



What the critics say:

"Sachins has established its place as an iconic curry house in Newcastle, and throughout its history has been awarded many accolades, including Love North East's Top Curry of the Year, Chef of the Year in the English Curry Awards as well as North East Curry Restaurant of the Year."

Steph Maguire, ILoveNewcastle.com

"He serves up exotic and creative dishes using the freshest and finest ingredients. No crazy-hot spices or extra colouring make their way into the dishes. The reds come from chillies, the yellows from turmeric."

Jane Hall, The Chronicle

"Perfect for a quick bite as well as a long night of indulgence, it's not hard to see why Sachins has become a popular fixture over the past four decades."

Sam Wonfor, The Chronicle



THE SHOW MUST GO ON

By Sophie Swift

When the UK first went into lockdown back in March 2020, no one could have foreseen what was to come. Almost a year on and at a glance it appears that we are in a similar situation, but there is definitely light at the end of the tunnel as more than 15 million people in the UK have received at least one dose of the Coronavirus vaccine.



As things slowly but surely progress, we have had to learn to adapt as a nation and nowhere is that more obvious than when looking at our hospitality and leisure sectors.

In the North East, hospitality and leisure have pivoted successfully during the pandemic by adapting their businesses. Although this will have taken a great deal of resilience and hard work, each company has continued to adapt to survive. Venues like The Blackbird Ponteland, Kennedy and Rhind, Sushi Me Rollin' and Dabbawal all offer lockdown friendly services and have found a way to keep the local community going.

The Blackbird Ponteland offer a variety of takeaway services. They produce exquisite quality takeaway meals that can be ordered online or over the phone, with amazing Sunday lunches also being an immensely popular option. 'Café Blackbird' is also open daily for takeaway hot drinks including a variety of coffees, teas, and hot chocolate. Owner of The Blackbird, Stuart Young said, "Café Blackbird has been massively successful for retaining customer engagement, even though selling coffee and baked goods is not a replacement for our normal business". Stuart went on to discuss The Blackbird's interest in Jesmond based bakery, Kennedy and Rhind, and noted that they have seen a great deal of cross customer exchange as a result of the teams working together and collaborating on occasions boxes, the next being Mother's Day. Kennedy and Rhind have significantly developed their brand during the pandemic and now also hold a regular Saturday pop-up shop in the Tipi at The Blackbird Ponteland. They are very well received and certainly improved countless people's lockdown routine!

Sushi Me Rollin' are usually based inside Stack Newcastle. However, recently they have adapted and created a takeaway service that changes location daily. Sushi Me Rollin' keep their customers up to date of the changing

location via their Instagram Stories, where they post when and where they will be at a specific location. Orders can be placed online and are distributed to the chosen area. Sushi Me Rollin' is delivering to that day. They offer a wide selection of dishes and options that cater for all, while continuing to 'make fine dining fun' in the home!

Dabbawal Indian street food, based in High Bridge and Jesmond, have recently begun offering a takeaway service that is available for collection or delivery. Dabbawal at High Bridge is open every day for beautiful takeaway meals, and during February they offered a Valentines feast box to spread a bit of love around the region. Their food is superb and a brilliant way to treat yourselves during lockdown.

Like hospitality, leisure is also a sector that has been decimated by Covid-19. Northern Stage has plans to change that though, with their new campaign, THIS IS US. Beginning with Can We Come In? in January, audiences will begin a journey from their homes, into the city for Out on the Toon, which is to begin in March. Then hopefully audiences will be back in the theatre for Housewarming from April. Artistic Director, Natalie Ibu explains, "This Is Us is about radical diversity of stories, characters, lives, forms, locations and times to remind us who we are but also reminding audiences about what we do best – facilitating stories that reach beyond the ordinary". Northern Stage really are making a fantastic effort to keep their audience entertained, even with the theatre doors currently being closed.



Natalie Ibu

JAM JAR

CINEMA & LOUNGE BAR

Jam Jar Cinema is another local company that is not prepared to let the pandemic win! Just before Christmas they launched a local streaming platform that offers a range of titles from new releases to classics or documentaries. To use 'Jam In Cinema' you only need to create a free account, as no subscription service is required. A service that will make movie nights so much more exciting for us all!

It is clear that over the last twelve months the world as we knew it has changed a lot. Yet, it is also apparent that as human beings we have an amazing ability to keep evolving and growing, no matter what the challenge. The North East has a remarkable leisure and hospitality sector that is not going anywhere.



Dabbawal



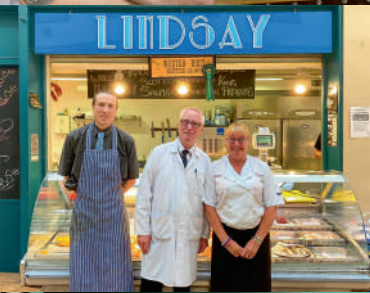
Sushi Me Rollin

THIS IS US

“

...reminding audiences about what we do best – facilitating stories that reach beyond the ordinary..

”



The global pandemic has offered little in the way of positive news stories, but one such positive story is the creation of Grainger Delivery in Newcastle upon Tyne.

THE CITY CALLED AND THE MARKET DELIVERED!

Created to offer delivery of food from the 185 year Old Grainger Market safely across Newcastle and the Northeast, the service went from a Facebook post to a Million pound enterprise which has kept over 20 business operating and 30,000 customers fed for the best part of the last 10 months.

On 23 March 2020, no one could have predicted the chaos and fear in our communities that would follow when lockdown was announced; panic buying leading to empty supermarket shelves magnified an already distressing situation.

Emma-Claude Blair-Phillips, wife, mother to a preschool son, and proprietor of The French Oven - the artisan bakers and caterers based in the Grainger Market's arcade, has a history of supporting the community, working alongside her family and Traders within the market itself to support charities and local good causes. However, the pandemic presented a wider issue, not just provision of food to the city's inhabitants, as the market had done for nearly two centuries, but also how the Traders themselves might survive, with customers perceptibly cut off from accessing the market in the same way, either because of lack of transport, lockdown or absolute fear...

Initially various Traders in the market offered delivery via their social media, but what began as a trickle of enquiries became an avalanche when local personality and food blogger Craig Wilde, came into the market and delivered a Facebook live video which subsequently went 'viral,' attracting over 200,000 views. Craig described how he had visited a supermarket early that Monday morning, to find empty shelves as opposed to there in the Grainger Market, which was relatively quiet and yet well stocked with all the fresh produce one might need. Calling people to action and pointing them at the market for food and provisions, the calls on social media to arrange deliveries came thick and fast and proved a challenge too far, so a solution was needed.

Emma-Claude reached out to Craig and his creative agency Niltoni 360° and within 24 hours a rudimentary website shop was established to take orders - and www.GraingerDelivery.com was born! A few weeks later the site was developed into a store one which now offers over 2000 products from over 20 traders within the Grainger Market. From Butchers to Bakers to fresh fish, cards, gifts and fresh fruit, vegetables and salads, even vegan and whole-foods, kitchen supplies, wines, cheeses and more...

Newcastle City Council, and NE1 Business Improvement Agency were drafted in to support the Grainger Delivery effort to reach as many communities as possible with food and provisions, working alongside the traders and a small army of volunteers the service proved a life-line for communities across the City and wider region.

The site, now in its third and soon to be forth incarnation, is almost a mini 'Amazon', in that customers can shop all the Traders and yet receive one next day delivery six days a week. A huge undertaking that saw as many as 400 deliveries a day during the first lockdown; from Durham to Morpeth, South Shields to Hexham and all in between. Logistics led now by Emma-Claude's brother Darren-Pierre as Operations Director and supported by their father John and a team of delivery drivers.

The local NHS trust, Newcastle City Council and Newcastle's two universities, all looked to Grainger Delivery during the Christmas break to support their employees, Students and Communities with provisions as some isolated or found themselves too stretched with commitments to our health service to shop for the festivities...proving that shopping local is indeed best.

On February 1st Grainger Delivery saw it's 30,000th customer and the business will have collectively turned over £1Million for it's group of Traders - proving a lifeline for all those small businesses and their families; without Grainger Delivery many of them would surely not have survived to this day. Grainger Delivery has grown into a family business, not just for the Phillips' family who manage the business, but for all the Traders and the Niltoni 360° Team who operate and market the site to the region and its communities. Emma-Claude commented "We are all very proud of all the hard work our family, our staff and our friends and colleagues in the market have achieved during these unprecedented times. There are so many people who have been positively affected by our efforts, from all parts of our region and we've been continually humbled by the gratitude in the feedback we have received."

"We have been honoured to be part of supporting the Grainger Delivery service, from our 'Head of Development' Danny Owens, to our 'Creative Content' lead Filipe Neves Ribeiro, and our many support teams and freelancers who have worked tirelessly to support all the market Traders and wider community. Grainger Delivery is a great achievement and I'm sure in no small part has contributed to the Grainger Market's survival well into the future." said Craig Wilde, Creative Director - Niltoni 360°.

"Grainger delivery isn't a faceless giant automated warehouse, it's a community driven enterprise at the heart of the city, ran by local people...with local businesses, supporting the Newcastle and the Northeast; continuing to contribute to make it the outstanding and canny place it is." Darren-Pierre Phillips, Operations Director.

John Phillips, chairman of the Grainger Market Traders group, part of the NMTF said: "The camaraderie, the diligent support and tireless efforts of the Market, it's Traders, Newcastle City Council, NE1 and our partners at Niltoni 360° would be outstanding at any time, but during a global crisis of this magnitude, unseen outside of peacetime is beyond what anyone could have imagined. As we wrestle with what we hope will be the nations third and final lockdown, we are confident our traders and market have a positive future beyond the pandemic, thanks in no small part to Grainger Delivery."

This February www.GraingerDelivery.com will launch it's latest edition with new services, look and feel - improving the customer experience - and, to mark the occasion of this and the 30,000th customer, that lucky customer received a Afternoon Tea for two and bubbly - delivered to their door by the Grainger Delivery Team!

www.GraingerDelivery.com



OUT AND ABOUT IN MALTON



Something to look forward to! A Saturday visit to Malton's monthly farmers' market in North Yorkshire saw me board the TransPennine train at Durham, with only my car in the upper car park, and all charges waived.

From the North East, Malton in North Yorkshire is an easy day trip, but from the south you might like to stay two nights (or more) and enjoy the delights of Whitby, Scarborough, the North Yorkshire Moors Railway (accessed by bus to Pickering) and the city of York. Malton is an ideal spot to discover all of these, not only by train but by the excellent quality buses run by Coastliner from their Malton depot.

A simple change of trains at York and off towards Scarborough and I arrived on time at Malton at 0924. Malton is across the river from another settlement, Norton on Derwent and both the railway and bus stations are actually in Norton. In the past this was the boundary between the North Riding and East Riding of Yorkshire, both now in North Yorkshire. I met up with transport colleague John Gelson and had an hour in the YO Bakehouse discussing railways, buses and local radio, three of our shared interests.

Malton is a generally prosperous town and I had a pleasant hour exploring and visiting the market where I acquired a pork pie and a dressed crab to eat at my next objective: Eden Camp. I took the 840 bus the short journey to the edge of the town where the camp opened in 1942 to hold Italian and later German prisoners of war. 29 huts are full of fascinating exhibits about all aspects of the war, and there was plenty to keep the youngsters amused too. It opened to the public in 1987.

They say to allow three to four hours. If you're a family with kids enjoying the adventure playground and seeing inside a few huts, that's ok. But if you're seriously interested in the subject, and want to study the exhibition boards and artefacts, that's barely enough. In addition to huts, there's a Dig for Victory Garden, and a genuine Tarran prefab house. The Camp was in use until early 1949 when the last German POWs left. Meanwhile rationing throughout England continued until bread (which went on ration post-war in July 1946), came off ration in June 1954. From as early as October 1939 to July 1948 Britain hosted some 402,200 prisoners.

Eden Camp closed at five, and I had an hour before my train from Malton station. I turned right down a no through road and found the path leading up to the A64 which was a considerable shortcut and walked through the village of Old Malton, pausing for a welcome pint at the Royal Oak before continuing along the road to Malton and down to the station with ten minutes to spare. I passed by the Old Lodge Hotel on the outskirts of the small town, and that would be an admirable place to stay to enjoy the area, being close to the bus and rail stations.

The train was busy. Official advice to avoid "peak" journeys forgets that peaks are not just workers on office hours Monday to Friday, but also a trip back home from the seaside on a Saturday evening. The first class areas were full,

having been declassified for anyone to sit in. I changed at York and joined the LNER train back to Durham where there were now three cars in the car park after a warm, educational and enjoyable day.

alexnelson@dunelm.org.uk
www.nationalrail.com

For a copy of the UK rail map, extract below, visit www.railmap.org.uk

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MY WEEKEND

We find out what

DR VICTORIA ARMSTRONG

CEO of Disability North
gets up to on a typical weekend.

Do you ever have to work weekends?

I have been a little more flexible over the past year due to the COVID situation because my work situation sometimes needs that extra attention. The nature of my work at Disability North promoting inclusion and independence as well as giving support and advice to disabled people and their carers isn't just a nine to five, Monday to Friday job.

Are most weekends the same?

I think that at the moment a lot of people think that every day is the same not just the weekends. That's a real problem as everyone needs a break from their daily routines for the benefit of their mental health. I'm very lucky in so much that I can take my dog for a longer walk at the weekend and that gives me breathing space and time to think.

Do you find it hard to switch off?

I've a really busy job with Disability North and we deal with some very serious issues so it's hard to completely switch off when you get home. It can be difficult not to think about those things but exercise is my crutch and I put my thoughts and efforts into that.

What do you do at a weekend which you can't fit in through the week?

I love long dog walks with my Border Collie, Glen. I've had Glen a year now and he takes up a lot of my time. He's four years old and takes a lot of training and enjoys mental stimulation so I spend my time developing training games to keep him happy too. Glen is a reactive dog and doesn't like people so much, so I have to take him away from crowds. We seek out places off the beaten track which of course brings lots of benefits too.

Morning exercise or a recovery lie in?

No question about it – I love exercising!



Dr Victoria Armstrong

IMAGE: The Bigger Picture Agency

Pre lockdown big night out or a night in the house?

I can't cope with big nights out anymore even if we were allowed to socialise. My ideal night out would be to meet a friend in the afternoon, have a few drinks and a bite to eat and then go home and get tucked up in bed by 9pm.

Do you watch or play sport at a weekend?

I watch athletics and I occasionally watch one of the region's major football teams now and then. Being fit is really important and everyone needs to do their best to keep healthy. One of the services we offer is the Ability North Project where we encourage people with health impairments to team up with our personal trainer and use our basic gym equipment.

Sadly lockdown has put this on hold but it's ready to go when we can.

Where do you like to eat out at a weekend?

I love tapas, Indian meals and anything other than

aubergines! If I had a special night out I would go to El Torero in Newcastle for a Spanish meal.

How important is the weekend to you?

It's very important to get perspective and distance from work. I help a lot of people many of whom have severe physical or mental health difficulties and it really is important to recharge the batteries at a weekend so I can go back to work on a Monday fully refreshed so that I can give my absolute best to them.

What's the best thing about weekends?

You can treat yourself to the food you really want rather than being "good" and healthy at work.

Of a weekend, you'll usually find me most happy..?

Out walking with my dog.

Disability North can be contacted
www.disabilitynorth.org.uk
0191 284 0480



MICHELLE JONES 'FRIENDSHIP BENCH' WHAT A LEGACY YOU HAVE CREATED

As I shyly strolled back to my Husband's side, tears streaming down my face, my heart bursting with pride, he whispered in my ear, "you normally have to die to be honoured with a bench".

I smiled as I looked at the brightly coloured rainbow bench sitting proud with the words 'Michelle Jones, Friendship Bench, Come and Make a Friend!'

For a decade I have thrown myself into our local community. I have always been a keen volunteer, but I became extremely passionate about creating a positive impact when I became a Mother. I endeavoured to remove disadvantaged barriers and provide opportunity to create inclusion for all and believed that investing in our young people created and protected a kinder future for us all. Kindness was the foundation to everything I did, committing myself for a decade to the community, with just the one goal, make a positive difference to the lives of the children and families I was serving.

The bench was gifted to me in honour of my kindness and I'm delighted it sits proudly in the community encouraging friendship, it is one of the greatest gifts we can give another Human; our friendship, it was the perfect tribute for my work. The timing of this moment came at a crucial point for me in relation to my career and business choices.

Light bulb moments, we've all had them, inspirational ideas that fill our minds with a vision. In business they are usually the innovative solution to a problem. But often a business concept is developed from an idea that has



burned away for many years coming to fruition over time, usually a significant moment in time is the catalyst either way, such as a pandemic or being honoured for your kindness, in my case it was both.

Throughout my years working in the voluntary and charity sector, running a small creative business, and managing chronic health conditions I identified several disadvantaged gaps within society. The need to remove barriers, help people overcome adversity and provide opportunity to create a more inclusive society grew deeper, an itch I wasn't sure how to scratch.

As we entered lockdown, as many of you are aware, I set up a free crisis management service for the wedding industry through my business Michelle Jones Weddings, which exploded, adding more fuel to my itch. My community work shifted every day to meet the needs arising from the

COVID-19 situation. It was like a rollercoaster of emotion, I spent days helping people overcome the adversity they faced, I had comments such as, 'you've saved my family's life'. It all came with much stress, tears, and exhaustion but rather than dimming my flame, it added so much fuel and Kind Currency emerged.

Then, came the 'Friendship Bench', the power of this gesture compounded my passion to develop the Kind Currency idea into a business concept. Ann English of the fabulous Creative Intrigue was one of many that commented on the legacy I had created in the community, but Ann suggested the bench was a symbol of the kindness I wanted to create through the Kind Currency concept, commenting "communities up and down the country need and will be filled with the Michelle Jones Friendship Bench legacy". With hope and aspiration, Kind Currency is the solution to close disadvantaged gaps and provide opportunity, resolving the identified problems to create a more inclusive kinder society, protecting, sustaining, and celebrating, kind people, kind businesses and kind causes.

Imagine a world where kindness is currency!

Michelle Jones, Founder of Kind Currency,
www.kindcurrency.co.uk,
hello@kindcurrency.co.uk, 07751 564 684.

Championships, Challenge & Charm



Welcome to The Northumberland Golf Club



Founded in 1898, **The Northumberland Golf Club** is steeped in golfing history, designed in golf's Golden Age by Colt and Braid, the world famous golf architects. The friendly club regularly hosts national and regional championships, including the Open Regional Qualifier.

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The
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GOLF CLUB

SMALL EVERYDAY CHANGES WILL IMPROVE YOUR LIFE

Your health, wellbeing, appearance and self confidence will benefit hugely by implementing positive changes that are repeated consistently.

Implementing these changes now should give you noticeable results by July 2021. A four month commitment for tangible results is not long - and you will thank yourself for doing these come the warmer weather.

Example of Positive changes & new things to try;

- Just 15 press ups a day is a monster 1,680 over four months.
- Eating 200 calories less per day saves 22,400 calories - that's 7lbs of fat.
- One mile walk/run a day is 112 miles, that's just under nine Great North Runs.
- Reducing two digestive biscuits (or equivalent treat) down to one a day will save around 9,500 calories
- 30 squats a day adds up to 3,360 in 16 weeks - imagine how strong your legs will feel
- One minute plank a day to improve your stomach and core strength, over the four months you will hold the plank for just under two hours.
- Completing a set of 100 stairs every day is 11,200 stairs in total.
- Cutting alcohol consumption down by just half a glass a day will reduce your intake by 5,000 calories over four months.
- Reducing down from four slices of bread a day to two is a huge 224 slices less over four months.
- Full-sugar fizzy drinks in a 330ml can contain 10 teaspoons of sugar. The daily recommended limit for adults is seven per day. If this is a daily habit and you cut it out, you'd be reducing your intake by a staggering 1,120 teaspoons of sugar over the four month period.



David Fairlamb

- 40 stomach crunches per day will total 4,480 in 16 weeks. If 40 is too many in one go try 4x10 or 2x20 - the main thing keeping the consistency going. I recommend partnering these with the plank for muscle balance
- Three cups of coffee per day with one sugar in each, amounts to 336 teaspoons of sugar and 6,720 calories over four months. Keep the coffee, but drop the sugar.

When you add small everyday changes over a week/month or in this case four months you begin

to realise the huge positive changes you can make. Unfortunately, you can also see how easy it is to go the other way with little or no exercise and a massive excess of daily calories. Over months, years and decades these seemingly small but repetitive unhealthy habits add up which is why this country is in poor health with such high obesity rates.

Try to make changes to your own daily habits & routines to see how much better you will feel in four months.

DAVID'S SUMMING UP

When you add small everyday changes over a week/month or in this case four months you begin to realise the huge positive changes you can make.

"To eat well in England, you should have breakfast three times a day." Somerset Maugham



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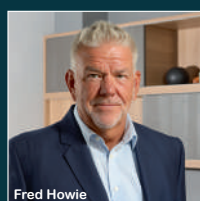
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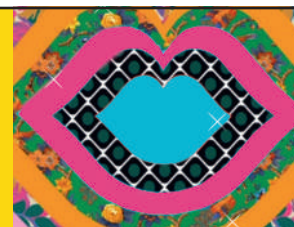


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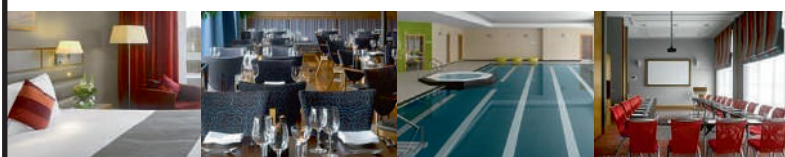
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COMMENT

By Barry Speker

Will the Road Map produce a national consensus? To pull together to achieve recovery for all - physically, economically, socially, educationally, emotionally and recreationally?

While there is widespread acknowledgement of the government's success in acquiring vaccine supplies and rolling out the vaccination programme - a third of the country having had a first jab (including me) - there is still rancour.

This relates to order of the priority groups, whether children and teachers should receive vaccination now, and the police, fire service, ambulance staff, jailed prisoners and prison staff, and all third world countries. The ambitious aim for all adults to be vaccinated by 31 July has produced calls for early lifting of restrictions to restore some normality, prevent national ruin and mass redundancies and protect the futures of children.

The conflict is between those seeking a quick fix to save the economy and restore our liberty and sanity and those urging extreme caution until it is 'safe', avoiding a significant third wave.

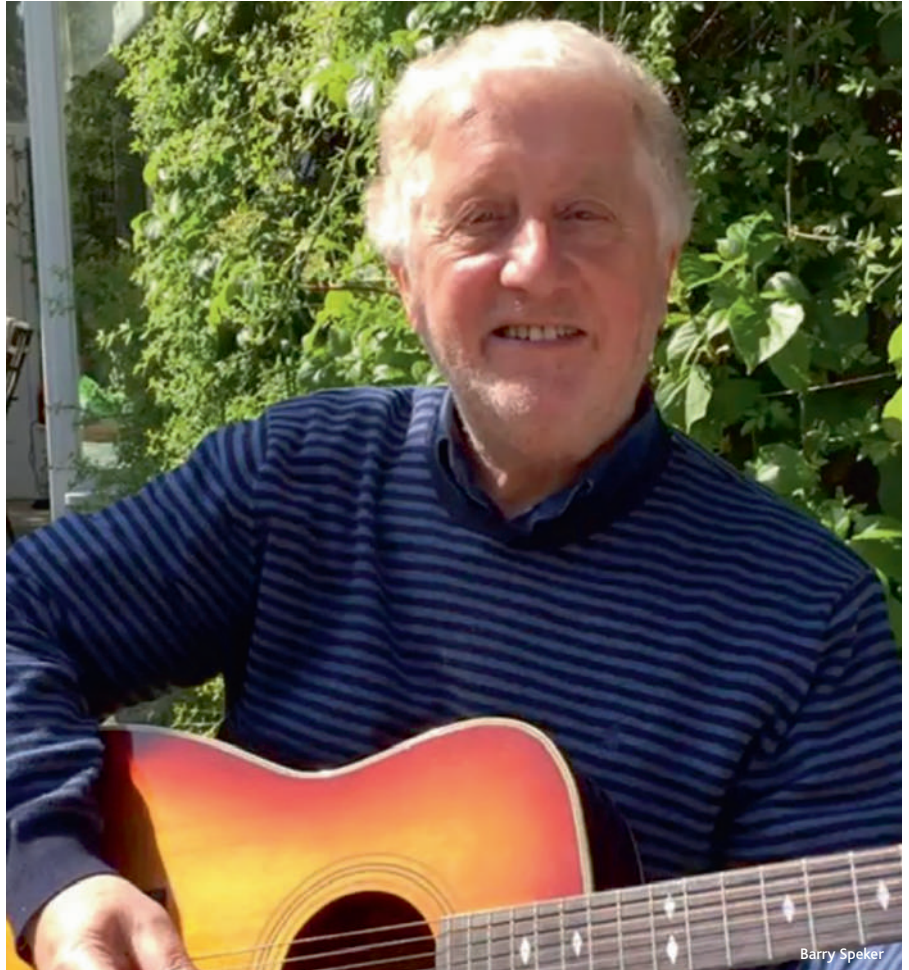
Then a few simple challenges for the Government to recoup vast state borrowings and lost tax revenue, replace thousands of collapsed businesses and jobs lost, deal with early glitches of Brexit, save the Union from attack by the Picts, Scots and Sturgeons and contribute to saving the world's environment. It should be an interesting year.

It cannot be denied that the French are more discerning in their culinary expectations, often mocking what the British are prepared to consume. Covid is bringing about one change. France is to repeal the longstanding law in its labour code which makes it illegal for workers to eat lunch at their desks.

I remember being in France and trying to enter a bank at 12 noon. Pas Possible! Non Monsieur! As the shutter came down blocking entry, 'On doit manger!', I was told (One must eat).

And eating a proper lunch - not a snatched coffee in a paper cup with a plastic wrapped sandwich and bottled water. That barbaric innovation was an import from America - as Gordon Gekko announced 'lunch is for wimps!' The pint at lunchtime is a distant memory.

However the change in France is not a dilution of their civilised standards as to food but to reduce the risk of passing on coronavirus in the canteen. After a year of working from home many will rediscover the pleasure of a decent lunch.



Barry Speker

Although not a regular listener to Women's Hour, I was aware of its concentration on all matters of interest to its faithful audience. The programme has been running for 75 years during not quite all of which it was presented by the recently retired Jenny Murray. Something of a surprise that it should be attacked recently as adopting a style of aggressive interrogation more typical of The Today Programme. A letter of protest was sent to the BBC by 200 'prominent' women.

Their grievance relates to an interview of Zara Mohammed, the new first female general secretary of the Muslim Council of Britain.

The presenter, Emma Barnett, asked Mohammed about the number of women Imams in Britain. When the reply was 'I haven't a clue', Barnett found this hard to accept bearing in mind Mohammed represents 500 mosques and many women's Muslim groups. It is reasonable to expect her to know that the answer to the question is zero.

The 'prominent' women, including Baroness Farsi, Diane Abbott and Naz Shah, suggested that asking such questions was hostile and pursuing a stereotype that Muslim women are disenfranchised by a faith which has not reformed.

If there is any change then surely a smart woman in

a major position as Mohammed should be able and willing to handle simple questions of interest even to the audience of Women's Hour.

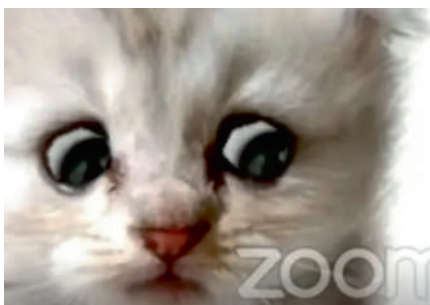
Having competed the compelling series of 'Deliver Us', another Danish import, I have begun watching Bloodlands, a four part series by Joe Mercurio, and starring James Nesbitt. Based in Belfast the dialogue may well justify sub-titles. The narrative evokes the violent times of the Troubles and features the giant Harland and Woolf shipyard cranes, nicknamed Samson and Goliath, but no spoilers.

It may keep us watching pending the March appearance of the next series of Line of Duty.

Whilst Tribunal hearings continue to be almost exclusively by video, I have avoided turning into an indomitable Jackie Weaver despite my power to mute at will. No repeat yet of the predicament suffered by Texas lawyer who made a virtual appearance before a judge as a cat, courtesy of a Zoom filter apparently entered by one of his children. He could not disable it and was left to plead 'I'm not a cat'.

It went viral of course, but the judge was lenient to the advocat! Virtual sur-reality?

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