

NORTHERN

INSIGHT

July 2023

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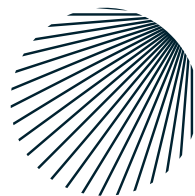


Synergi: Transforming Businesses

business • technology • property • media • education • community • social • arts • leisure • health

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AND SOMETHING MAGICAL JUST HAPPENS?"*

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Directors of distressed businesses must proceed carefully.

Seeking good early professional advice usually means more options, and always means that a concerned Director is much better informed.

Northpoint is an established local firm with a personable, pragmatic approach to best assist in business distress situations with expertise in rescue,

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- Voluntary Arrangement
- Administration
- Liquidation
- HMRC negotiation
- Law of Property Act
- Bankruptcy
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Northpoint.

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greg@northpoint.co.uk

Linda Farish
Tel: 07308 662 252
linda@northpoint.co.uk

Eothen Care Homes

*Would you like to help guide the future
of a well-established Christian charity?
Why not become a charity trustee?*



Eothen Care Homes are looking for Trustees to join our board, to help us make a difference in the care sector.

Our trustees are Committed Christians, have a variety of skills and experience and meet three times a year to discuss the future of the charity.

Eothen Care Homes has three highly-rated homes in Whitley Bay, Wallsend and Gosforth, and is dedicated to providing the best care to our wonderful residents.

If you have a heart for older people, you might just be the person we are looking for! Please get in touch for an informal chat and/or visit.



Eothen Care Homes is rated as one of the UK's top small care home groups. Join us as a Trustee to help us make a real difference to the lives of our residents in the North East.





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£469,950

Situated in the heart of Northumberland, Allerburn Manor is the latest development from Ascent Homes in picturesque Alnwick, featuring a mix of new build properties and a careful conversion of the existing hall, Allerburn Manor offers homebuyers the perfect place to live.

SEE MORE:





SEE MORE:



WOOLER

CURRENT AVAILABILITY:

2, 3 & 4 BEDROOM HOMES
FROM £217,950

Kingsmead is situated in Wooler on the edge of the Northumberland National Park and offers an array of new homes.



ELLINGTON

CURRENT AVAILABILITY:

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FROM £214,950

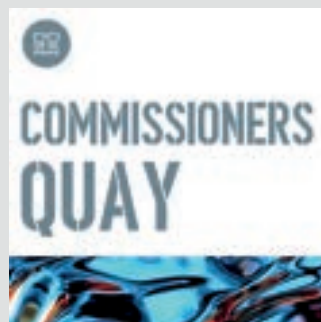
Combining contemporary design with unrivalled luxury, Wayside Point features homes to suit every customer's needs, comprising two, three and four bedroom homes.



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BLYTH WATERFRONT

CURRENT AVAILABILITY:

3 BEDROOM HOMES
FROM £254,950

Commissioners Quay is located on Blyth's iconic waterfront and hosts a mix of two and three-bedroom homes

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CHOPPINGTON

CURRENT AVAILABILITY:

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Foreword

Welcome to the July edition of Northern Insight, the regions most comprehensive and indepth business, social and leisure magazine.

On one of our most eyecatching cover stories to date we feature cloud solutions and managed services provider, Synergi, who have achieved their best financial year yet in 2022.

Elsewhere we showcase some terrific event coverage including the Hay and Kilner summer social and the Just Williams sales, service and success conference.

Look out also for a fantastic Asian Business Connexions impact report and celebration feature.

Meanwhile on our travels we make a welcome return to the lovely Fratellis in Ponteland and take a first visit to Lasun, a hidden gem within South Shields extensive food offering.

A lovely issue to put together. We hope you enjoy it!

Huge thanks to everyone concerned for the continued support.

Till next month.

M.J. Grahamslaw

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Fells Kitchen walks along path to good mental health

Catering expert Chris Reay, who founded his own business 'Epicurus' 25 years ago, has found a unique way to promote physical and mental well-being. After facing challenges during the pandemic, Chris realised that he was spending too much time managing people and not doing what he loved- cooking. During this period, he also experienced mental health issues, which led him to pursue a new hobby and increase his exercise.

Chris decided to combine his passion for the outdoors with food, forming a new venture called 'Fells Kitchen'. He now guides groups on hikes in the Cheviots and the Lake District, teaching navigation along the way. At the end of each hike, Chris prepares a nutritious gourmet meal using fresh ingredients he carries with him. The menus are diverse, accommodating different dietary needs, including vegan options.

Apart from the physical exercise and breath-taking scenery, Chris has personally experienced an improvement in his mental health since starting Fells Kitchen. Recognising the benefits, he plans to collaborate with a mental health charity to help more people gain a fresh perspective on life through hiking and shared meals.



Through Fells Kitchen, Chris offers safe and practical walks suitable for all ages and abilities, catering to individuals, groups, and even adventurous experiences like ghyll scrambling. This initiative combines fitness, healthy eating, and the great outdoors to support overall well-being.



Beaconhouse Events grows team in line with major new client wins

Beaconhouse Events, a leading corporate

events agency based in Newcastle upon Tyne, has announced the addition of eight new major clients to the agency's extensive portfolio since the beginning of the year and have welcomed three more full-time team members to support their growth.

New clients include Newcastle Building Society, North of Tyne Combined Authority, Newcastle Carers and international client CF Fertilisers. The announcement comes on the back of BeaconHouse's goal to grow their portfolio by 25 percent in 2023 following major client wins in 2022, including Fenwick, Bridgestone and a new delivery model with Great Run Company.

BeaconHouse Events has already began

delivering work with their new clients, creating two customer events and an annual general meeting in April for Newcastle Building Society and the 'Good to Grow' event in partnership with North of Tyne Combined Authority in May, with the latter attracting over 150 business leaders to discuss what doing good business really means. Future delivery will include a celebration for adults, children and young people who care for a loved one in partnership with Newcastle Carers, a two-day community conference with No Code North East for makers and platforms to showcase, learn, and play and a series of staff engagement events across 2023/24 with CF Fertilisers.



Gateshead company announces growth as it celebrates 40th birthday

Gateshead-based Access Training is celebrating its 40th birthday and has announced it is on track to grow turnover by a third by the end of its financial year in July – bringing an impressive 85% growth in revenue over its last two financial years.

The expansion is largely down to high demand for its North East Workforce Skills programme which delivers ESF fully-funded one and day-two CPD

courses to employees of North East businesses. Interest in these courses, particularly, team leading & management, project management, and HR principles - which can be used to quickly impact local businesses - have proven extremely popular and this has been mirrored by an increase in apprenticeship enrolments.

Access Training - originally called English Estates YTS - was set-up in 1983 to tackle high youth unemployment by running the government's Youth Training Scheme, and to date the firm has helped over 5,000 people into work, mainly via modern apprenticeships. Over the years – a significant number of these learners have remained with their original employers and, or have progressed into senior management roles, often recruiting apprentices of their own.

The firm has 28 employees and is based at Gateshead Skills Academy on the Team Valley in Gateshead.

Speaking at Access' 40th birthday event where guests included some of its very first learners, employers and team members both past and present - managing director, David Armstrong, said the company has exciting plans for further expansion, investment and a recruitment drive:

"We're so proud to be celebrating forty years, having supported over 5,000 people get on the career ladder and well over 2,000 North East businesses prosper through providing quality training for their people.

"We have a strong, talented team to thank for our success so far and we are recruiting for more staff to join us in fulfilling our growth plans."



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

www.bradleyomahoney.co.uk





The Banks Group records £36m operating profit

County Durham-headquartered renewable energy, property development and mining firm The Banks Group is making strong progress across all its business areas after more than doubling its operating profit over its latest financial year.

In the family firm's first set of annual results since the closure of its coal mining operations, it has reported a combined operating profit of £36m across all its businesses for the financial year ending 30 September 2022, up from £18m the previous year.

Overall group sales for the year rose by around two-thirds, up to £112m from £67m in the previous period, and are expected to remain robust during 2023.

Since the end of its last financial year, the business has launched a dedicated regional housebuilding company, Banks Homes, which will see it building its own houses for the first time on sites of all sizes across North

East England and Yorkshire.

Banks Homes operates independently from, but alongside, the company's existing property development arm, Banks Property, and is looking to acquire sites from other developers as well as identify its own market opportunities.

Banks Property is continuing to work with many of the UK's best-known housebuilders, as it has done successfully over the last 35 years, while work on Banks Homes' first two projects, at Mount Oswald in Durham City and West Rainton in County Durham, is set to start later in the year.

Banks has also continued to support community groups and environmental projects across its operating areas during the year by awarding more than 140 community grants totalling over £664,000 from the funds linked to its different operational and planned developments.

Simon Fisher, group finance director at The Banks Group, says: "In line with our expectations, the performance of our business in 2022 was much stronger than the previous year, with all parts showing impressive growth compared to 2021."



Exciting time for Northern Leaders Trust

Northern Leaders Trust (NLT), a multi-academy trust that oversees two secondary schools in Newcastle, has made a further top tier appointment.

Martyn Gordon joins NLT as Associate Executive Principal. Martyn, who is currently a Principal in Hartlepool, has led his school to outstanding in all areas. In its latest report for that school, Ofsted described Mr Gordon's leadership as 'inspirational', and went on to say that he 'has created an exceptional and truly inclusive school'.

Kenton School is one of the largest secondary academies in the North of England, with over 1800 students on roll including a large Sixth Form while Studio West is a smaller studio school of 600 students.

Commenting on Mr Gordon's appointment, Lee Kirtley, said: "We are delighted with Martyn's appointment. Martyn's extensive experience in school leadership will be a great support to both principals and our Trust Education Improvement Team.

"His values align perfectly with those of the Trust, and I know that Martyn truly puts students at the centre of everything he does. I am excited to observe the impact Martyn's work will have on the outcomes our students achieve."

Diversity campaigner joins The Northumberland & Newcastle Society

A leading North East campaigner for diversity and inclusion has joined forces with one of the region's oldest societies.

Nitin Shukla, Programme Lead - Equality, Diversity and Inclusion at the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner – has become an Ambassador for the Northumberland and Newcastle Society (the N&N).

And, following his formal welcome at its AGM this week (6 June), Nitin pledged to highlight the importance of its work throughout the diverse communities of the city.

For almost a century, the Society has played a pivotal role in preserving the heritage, culture and landscape of the city and county.

It liaises with councils, heritage groups and developers to not only preserve the best of the built environment, but to look at ways of making existing buildings sustainable for future use.

In becoming an ambassador for the Society – the oldest civic society in the region – Nitin joins The Right Worshipful the Lord Mayor of Newcastle upon Tyne, Cllr Veronica Dunn – who also attended the AGM – and Her Grace The Duchess of Northumberland, Lord Lieutenant of Northumberland, among others.

Nitin said: "I am honoured to join their ranks. The North East has been my home for 50 years and that heritage is very important to me; this place is part of me and my identity.



"There are many others like me who have made this city and county their home and I hope that in my new role with the N&N I can help them recognise a sense of place and belonging – because it's a very special place to call home."

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Cover Story



Synergi - Empowering North East organisations to modernise, innovate and grow

Cloud solutions and managed services provider, Synergi, achieved their best financial year yet in 2022, grew their workforce by 20%, secured their largest contract to date with a medical safety giant in the USA and gained a place on the Northern Tech Award's Top 100 list.

With the experience and competence to work with big brands like the Scottish Fire & Rescue Service, National Highways and Northumbrian Water, Synergi are fast becoming the go-to technology business helping organisations to digitise.

They continue to grow their impressive roster of North East customers in every sector, from exciting start-ups to established and recognised North East businesses which firmly establishes Synergi as the technology partner of choice in our region.

Making Wise Technology Investments

Synergi empowers organisations to make the right investments in technology that deliver for them:

Step 1

Identify your requirements by understanding your pain points and ambitions. Are your systems and data safe from hackers? Has staff home-working highlighted new challenges? Are you projecting rapid business and staff growth but don't have the systems or processes to scale? Do you have legacy applications leading to an unhappy workforce? The key question is: what is holding you back?

Step 2

Find the right partner. Your technology partner must have the right capabilities, be aligned with you culturally and support working at a pace that suits your business.

Step 3

Strategy is key. Building out your strategy and roadmap is crucial to protect your business and ensure sustainable growth. Prioritise areas that will add value quickly and/or reduce risk in your organisation. Your technology should support your normal business planning; ask yourself 'will this make us more money or save money?'.

Step 4

Commit to action. Commitment to the execution of your strategy and roadmap is arguably the most critical step, without it no progress can be made. Both your business and your technology partner must complete their actions. Your technology partner should support while you drive the difference in your organisation.

What is AI really Delivering to Businesses?

AI is delivering real, measurable value to organisations of all sizes, often solving problems that occur from repetitive and time-consuming tasks that are prone to inaccuracy. AI is supporting customers across Synergi's 3 core areas; Cloud Applications, Managed Services and Microsoft Dynamics.

Managed Services – cyber security

You may think AI is somewhere on the horizon for businesses in the North East - but its already here. AI can be found in your endpoint security software – or it should be if you have the right type.

Sophos have been using AI since 2017 and the latest versions of MDR (Managed Detection & Response) use a combination of AI and humans (working together) to detect early signs of potentially compromised systems. AI does the large-scale work identifying indicators of compromise (IOCs) – the human threat analyst does the important complex research to verify the threat and remediate.

Microsoft Dynamics

Microsoft Dynamics has introduced AI (Copilot) that is able to write accurate and on-brand product descriptions. For example, if an organisation introduced 100 new products, it could take someone 2 or 3 days to individually write these up OR you could use AI. Choose the tone of voice, the content to include or leave out i.e. different elements or keywords and AI does the rest.

Cloud Solutions

Low-code technology is radically changing the traditional development landscape. The Microsoft Power Platform and next-generation AI is providing both a new way for developers to solve business problems and helping end-users to use AI in the flow of their work to be more productive. For example, an organisation can now build a bot to answer questions for job vacancies by pulling wording from existing content within the recruitment process and taking into account company values.

What's next?

Synergi's mission for 2023 and beyond is to continue supporting organisations with their strategy and direction, identifying pain points and aligning technologies that make them more successful and have less risk. The truly modern technology partner is now a highly capable, end-to-end specialist with full capability and the ability to understand challenges in a way that considers the wider business picture. Synergi is proud to be a modern technology partner here in the North East.

To contact Synergi call 0191 477 0365 or email enquiries@teamsynergi.co.uk



Jessica Williams

If I could tell you one thing...

We all search for the 'silver bullet'. We all look for those incremental gains that will increase our bottom line, enhance our pipeline and drive return.

Whether that be a new market opportunity, a large contract win or an opportunity to develop a long-term client relationship that will, in turn, open new doors, the silver bullet can look different to every business.

I am frequently asked about it – the one element that will 'revolutionise a business', or individual member's performance. Whether that be in customer service or in business development, it matters not. The quest behind the silver bullet remains the same for everyone, what is the most efficient and effective way to drive sales and grow the customer base?

In last month's edition I discussed a topic hotter than the British summertime and one I really want those of you with sales targets, portfolios, account management duties, etc to consider; CLV – Customer Lifetime Value. One of, if not the

most important aspect of any of the above roles and one no Business Owner should dismiss. Also featured last month was perhaps a new one for you – CPAM – Cost per Acquisition and Maintenance, which leads me nicely to this: If I could tell you one thing to help grow your business, reach new markets, and find that elusive silver bullet, here's what you need to do...

Develop a Customer Retention and Engagement Strategy

I talk about this so much that I've been questioned as to whether in fact, it is in the remit of Sales. My reply – everything you do is Sales. Customers have never had so much choice or information at their fingertips, or so many alternative providers to choose from. If you don't engage, make them feel valued, and manage the relationship, they will go elsewhere. Let me repeat that, they will go elsewhere. Gone are the days of long-term loyalty. We as consumers want to feel valued, engaged with and heard. And it's quite simple these days, if we don't, we will find someone else who listens! Too direct? You should grab a coffee with me and see how animated I get on this subject!

It always amazes me how many organisations and individuals are all about the chase – the win, signing the contract then what? The fun is over, and the customer is left to their own devices – they will suss you out and they will leave. You know how much more expensive it is to acquire a new customer than to retain an old one. But retention isn't enough. We need to engage with our customers on a deeper level – they have the ability to shape our future innovation, introduce

us to their stakeholders, and in turn grow our business exponentially. They have the ability to be our ready-made sales and marketing team, promoting us at every opportunity.

It's no longer enough to have an annual account review or send a newsletter out once a year calling it "Customer Engagement". If I could tell you one thing, it would be to create a customer journey – a fully mapped cyclical process. Engage, interact, and above all, make your customer feel valued because if you don't, someone else will.

Or if you, like us believe in Outsourcing and focusing on your core expertise, we have a range of sales and/or marketing solutions for you to help you grow your business profile, increase lead generation and are your ready-made Sales and Marketing team. Including supporting your retention and customer journey...

Find out how we can help you with your Sales and Marketing.

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- **Going For Growth** – Sales and Marketing outsourced for medium businesses.

We would love to chat to you. Contact me or any of my team to find out more.

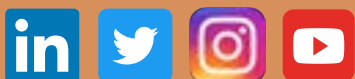
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Sales, Service & Success Conference

The Just Williams Sales Academy presented the second year of the Sales, Service & Success Conference, this time from the Radisson Blu in Durham.

Joined by nearly 100 attendees, the event saw presentations from leaders in Sales, Customer Service, Marketing and Mindset fields come together for a day of inspiration, motivation, learning and networking.

Jessica and the whole team at The Just Williams Sales Academy would like to express their thanks to all who attended, sponsored and supported the event.

Register for earlybird ticket information for 2024 at www.justwilliamssales.academy



Intelligent coastal investment

Here at Sanderson Young our coastal office at Alnwick has seen an incredible uplift in sales of holiday homes to savvy investors wanting a slice of our beautiful Northumberland coastline.

This flourishing market place is in part due to such relevant trends as flexible working and staycation holidaying on the beautiful British coast still being so very much in demand, and as this is expected to persist, so in turn the market continues to respond.

We have seen demand for self-catering staycations positively boom at an unprecedented rate, as holiday makers have shifted from travelling abroad to getaways closer to home that feel easier, safer and are of course less costly.

This has also hugely impacted the attractiveness of holiday letting as an investment opportunity and increased the substantial benefits of having a NE bolthole. Location, as with so many clever purchases, will always be a major factor in maximising returns, and the Northumberland coastline is certainly a factor in why we've seen such a boom, with Bamburgh being recently named the best coastal village in The Telegraph's annual list. We are so lucky to have an abundance of incredible coastal locations, with hotspots such as Bamburgh, Beadnell, Craster, Alnmouth and Warkworth all being highly sought after, with homes in these areas often having multiple viewings and offers.

This, combined with other contributing factors such as affordability in the North, compared with our Southern counterparts, has created



Gillian Greaves

an ideal environment for positive potential letting income and revenue. For those thinking of buying a holiday let, you could experience a lucrative return on investment on the Northumberland coast. This can be a useful source of extra income, as long as you do your research carefully and ensure you know all the obligations involved in buying a second property.

There are many considerations such as which locations offer the best amenities, which types of properties are the most popular for holidaymakers, or whether the energy efficiency of the property cuts into a profit margin, which can make finding the right property a lot more complicated than you may first think. After all, a holiday home is no longer just a place to retreat for the summer; it's a dual-season residence, a restful co-primary home, a golden pension pot or a prospective

retirement dream. It may seem obvious but choosing a trusted and reliable management agency is key to the success of a holiday let investment. Finding the right company, for expert advice and support can make all the difference to achieve the best out of your home buying journey.

If you need assistance in buying a holiday home, we would be happy to help. Please contact our Coastal property experts on 01665 600 170. With our wealth of local knowledge and 25 years of experience in the holiday letting market, alongside our huge database of potential buyers and sellers and our extensive marketing we are confident we can make that dream coastal home a reality, however you choose to enjoy it.

Gillian Greaves, Alnwick Branch Manager,
gillian.greaves@sandersonyoung.co.uk

COASTAL

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Invest in the region's finest Coastal homes...



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Coming Soon!

Lovaine Terrace, Alnmouth

A Grade II Listed period house on this historic terrace of eight colour washed properties, built by the Duke of Northumberland c 1860. With one recently sold and another currently under offer, this lovely family home provides the opportunity to purchase on this popular terrace with fabulous estuary views and private gardens. Alnmouth is a much sought after village on the Northumberland Heritage Coast with a beautiful beach, local shops, cafes, restaurants and public houses as well as a mainline train station with services to London Kings Cross in the south and Edinburgh in the north.

🛏 4 🛋 2 🛏 2



Gillian Greaves

01665 600 170

gillian.greaves@sandersonyoung.co.uk





SANDERSON
YOUNG





Rock Mill Farm

Rock, Alnwick

We are delighted to offer this stunning country farm, which currently provides four residential dwellings and an option for a fifth. Rock Mill Farmhouse, with its cottage and two adjacent dwellings, is situated in an area of outstanding natural beauty within North Northumberland and creates a significant investment income for holiday homes/lets. The properties have had a considerable amount of refurbishment works carried out and the cottages are all listed as 5* rated holiday homes. The total grounds extend to 7.31 acres. Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax: D.

Price Guide:
£2.25 Million

 5  3  2  E



Ashleigh Sundin

0191 223 3500

ashleigh.sundin@sandersonyoung.co.uk



Coble Quay *Amble*

This beautifully presented, luxury apartment has uninterrupted coastal views and a fabulous open plan living space with private balcony. Located on the first floor of the exclusive Coble Quay development in the popular coastal town of Amble, the apartment is currently utilised as a successful holiday let investment. No upward chain. Tenure: Share of freehold. Council Tax: Business rates.



 2
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  C

Price Guide:
£525,000



Gillian Greaves

01665 600 170

gillian.greaves@sandersonyoung.co.uk





SANDERSON
YOUNG



Wynding House

The Wynding, Bamburgh

Wynding House is an outstanding period home in the heart of this historic village. Planning permission is granted (Ref 22/03305/LBC) to extensively refurbish the house and create a principal bedroom suite to the top floor, a stunning stairwell, and internal refurbishment to the ground floor including a beautiful kitchen/family living space. The property currently provides a second home as well as an income stream when used as a holiday let. Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax: Business rates.



5 2 4 E

Price Guide:
£1.35 Million



Harry Young
0191 223 3500
harry.young@sandersonyoung.co.uk





Pupils from Wardley Primary School with Opencast's Lily Martin (second left) and Dave Wright (back right), with CMYK's Craig Pratt (front right).

Robots from Wardley to Dallas are go!

CMYK Business Technology supports client Opencast to donate a dozen MacBook laptops to help pupils at a Gateshead school design and build new robots – and compete in the world's largest robotics competition.

Wardley Primary School has a busy and active robotics programme – and pupils there spend their own time perfecting robot designs, regularly contributing to the school's robotics YouTube channel, at [youtube.com/channel/UCC9MCOd-tTbubaSpPtKSyQ](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCC9MCOd-tTbubaSpPtKSyQ).

Wardley's robotics team took part in this year's International World VEX robotics competition – joining over 900 teams from around the world – and the school is looking to go back to Dallas again in 2024.

The school is working with local and regional businesses to help them deliver its ambitious ongoing STEM learning programme. One company it enlisted to help was CMYK, an IT services provider that manages the school's printing services.

CMYK regional sales director Craig Pratt also works with Opencast and he approached the company to see if it would be willing to help. Opencast swiftly agreed to donate 12 laptops to help Wardley pupils to learn code for their robots.

Craig said: "We've been Opencast's outbound IT services provider since last October and when we explained what the school was doing, they were only too happy to help. The laptops are perfect for the ongoing needs of the school, but they didn't have the budget to buy the computers themselves."

Craig added: "I'm a huge believer in North East enterprise supporting education, especially in the technology sector, as ultimately these young people could be future team members for our firms – and it's just a great thing to do."

Other companies responding to the school's request for help include Nissan Skills School and the Reece Foundation.

David Sarginson, Opencast's head of software development and a STEM ambassador, said: "Opencast is delighted to make this donation of MacBooks to Wardley Primary School. We hope the computers will help students there to learn and build an interest and use of technology.

We're committed to doing what we can to boost STEM learning in schools through schools visits and donations like this.

"We need to invest in the next generation of technologists to meet the ever-changing demands and trials of the future."

Daniel Burfield, a year 3 teacher at Wardley and Vex robotics enthusiast, said: "Our team, 38154A, really enjoyed meeting Lily Martin and Dave Wright from Opencast, as well as Craig Pratt from CMYK. It was lovely to watch the enthusiastic discussion about the team's robot and their recent experience at the VEX Robotics World Championship in Dallas.

"One of our goals is to make STEM and robotics available for all at Wardley Primary. For us, it is not enough to just have a number of extremely successful robotics teams – we want all the children to enjoy the joy of programming robots.

"The donation of 12 MacBooks from Opencast is amazing and we are incredibly excited about the positive impact it will have. Like the majority of schools, we are not in a position to purchase the cutting-edge hardware needed to develop our provision."

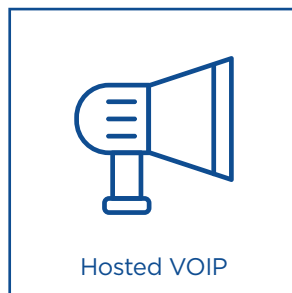
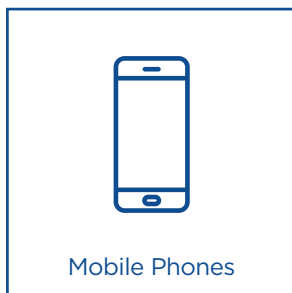
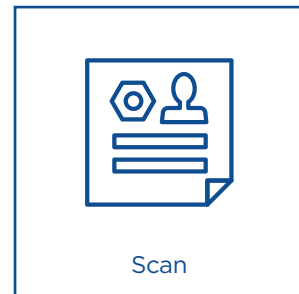
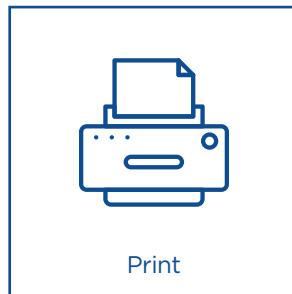
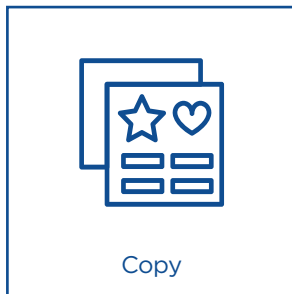
The school has also launched a GoFundMe page to attract sponsorship from businesses and donations from the public to help ensure the team can compete at next year's world championships in Dallas.

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Investment drives further growth and new jobs for Tees Valley security firm

Next Level Security Services (NLSS) is expanding again with the creation of 55 jobs after winning new work worth almost £5million. It further cements NLSS's position as the one of the top security services in the UK.

Headquartered in Stockton-on-Tees and with offices in Leeds, Glasgow, and a new office in Warrington set to open, NLSS has secured a six figure second round of funding from NPIF – FW Capital Debt Finance, which is managed by FW Capital and is part of the Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund.

NLSS was established in 2015 and currently employs 204 people. It specialises in the provision of all aspects of security from security guarding, access control, key holding and response, CCTV, close protection operative and consultancy services. NLSS customers also benefit from improved communication services thanks to a unique NLSS Security App.

Derek Laird, Managing Director at Next Level Security Services explained: "I'm thrilled with the success we've been experiencing at NLSS. We believe we're the biggest and most sustainable organic security business in the North East and I'm proud of this latest new contract win which has led to significantly boosting our workforce. The investment from FW Capital has been instrumental in our growth and we've received excellent support from Dave Hawkins."



NEL Investment tailored to specialist HR Consultancy's growth plans

A specialist HR consultancy which helps companies positively attract, motivate and retain high-performing people is looking to build a bigger team itself with the help of a five-figure investment from the North East Small Loan Fund Supported by The European Regional Development Fund.

Tailored Thinking provides positive psychology, wellbeing and HR consultancy services to clients right around the world which help them to manage issues around attraction, retention, performance and leadership.

The Durham-based business uses the concept of 'jobcrafting' to help individuals find ways to personalise their working lives, align their roles more closely with their strengths, skills and interests, and so enhance their resilience, engagement and job performance.

The business has worked with regional fund management firm NEL Fund Managers to obtain the investment, which is being used to support the wider roll-out of its services and implement industry-specific marketing campaigns, including in the further and higher education sectors.

Two new jobs are expected to be created in the first instance, with more to follow as the business works towards its target of increasing its annual turnover by around 40 per cent.

Develop North PLC secures £6.5m debt facility for investment into North East England and Scotland

Develop North PLC, a North East based investment fund providing loans to property developers in the North of England and Scotland, has renewed a £6.5m debt facility from Shawbrook for a further two years.

Managed by Newcastle upon Tyne-based wealth management and fund management specialists Tier One Capital Ltd (Tier One), the investment fund will utilise the facility to continue its support for residential and commercial property developments in the region and North of the border.

This funding represents Shawbrook's ongoing

backing for Develop North PLC's strategy to support the levelling up of the North through alternative lending that delivers high quality property schemes.

The Speciality Finance team at Shawbrook has an established track record in providing funding lines to non-bank specialist lenders across multiple sectors, including property, SME and consumer finance.

Since its launch in 2017, the London Stock Exchange-listed Develop North fund has supported the development of 33 residential and commercial projects, across the North East of England and Scotland with a combined value of £70.3m and an estimated £184m Gross Development Value (GDV).

Brendan O'Grady, Fund Manager at Tier One, said: "We are proud to continue the ongoing positive relationship with Shawbrook's Speciality Finance team. The renewal of the revolving credit facility for the sixth year



recognises the continued support the fund has from its lender as a credible and growing alternative lending source for property schemes in North East England and Scotland."



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Salary or dividend for company owners and directors?

For some time, it has generally been the case that dividends have offered company owners and directors a cost effective and flexible remuneration option compared to a bonus or salary.

However, the gap between the two has narrowed in the past few years, and with the recent Corporation Tax rise from 19% flat rate to an upper rate of 25%, it can no longer be assumed that a simple dividend option is the most effective route to take for owners and directors' remuneration.

With a new personal tax year recently starting, now is an ideal time for directors and shareholders to assess their remuneration plans.

Tax effective remuneration

Regular planning is undertaken to help entrepreneurs, business owners and directors to extract profit from the business in a tax efficient way. There are a few ways this can be done, but the most commonly used options are through dividends or via a standard salary/bonus scheme.

It is also common to see a blend of the two routes - depending on the personal and business circumstances of the director/shareholder.

Dividends

The ability to pay dividends relies upon the company earning profit after tax in excess of the amount of dividends to be paid. Dividends are not subject to National Insurance Contributions (NICs), and have been viewed as a more attractive way of extracting money compared to salary. Dividends, however, do not reduce a company's Corporation Tax bill as they are paid out of the company profits after tax.

In terms of income tax, it is taxed at the dividend rate of income tax for the individual. The basic tax rate on company dividends is 8.75%, the higher rate is 33.75%, and the additional rate is 39.35%. The tax due for a dividend paid in 2023/24 would be payable via self-assessment on 31 January 2025, except for where payments on account are needed on 31 January 2024 and 31 July 2024.

Bonus/salary

It can also be beneficial to receive pay via bonus/salary as this allows the individual to build qualifying years towards their state pension, and to make higher pension contributions if they wish to do so. From a business perspective, the amount of corporation tax which the company pays would be reduced compared to receiving pay via dividends. Unlike dividends, however, there will be NICs due from both the individual and the company, and a higher rate of income tax will be payable by the individual.

The business will be able to claim corporation tax relief on the NICs and bonus/salary it has paid, so it can deduct both when calculating profits, which are subject to corporation tax.

Historic approach

We have seen many directors and shareholders who have paid themselves a minimal salary (up to the general threshold for NICs) and then rely on dividends for the balance of their income. Recent

changes in tax rates have made this approach more complex, meaning extra calculations and diligence is required as well as seeking specialist advice before going down this route.

Is there a clear cut answer?

Simply, every individual's personal and business circumstances are different. If you add into this the following tax changes coming into play in this new tax year, there are a number of influencing factors:

- **Corporation Tax** - Increased from flat 19% rate on all taxable profits to 19% on taxable profits up to £50,000 and 25% for taxable profits over £250,000
- **Marginal Corporation Tax rate** - Effective rate of 26.5% on taxable profits falling between £50,000 and £250,000
- **Income Tax**
- **Tax-free Dividend Allowance** cut by 50% to £1,000
- **Additional (45%/47%) Rate** threshold cut from £150,000 to £125,140
- **Personal Allowances** frozen

The most effective remuneration plan will also be affected by ancillary matters such as age (no National Insurance for those over 65), pension contributions, salary sacrifice arrangements and benefits in kind.

If you haven't reviewed your remuneration recently we urge you to do so now to make sure you have the right plan for your circumstances, particularly in view of the significant increase in complexity of the tax system and the effective increase in tax rates.

We are here to help

If you have any questions relating to which option is best for you or would like to discuss tax efficient remuneration planning, please get in touch with a member of our specialist team or your usual Azets advisor.

www.azets.co.uk

RMT advice helps Dubai multinational make first acquisition in UK financial services sector



Michael Cantwell with Anne Sajeev Kochumman

Advice from RMT Accountants & Business Advisors has helped a Dubai-headquartered multinational group of companies make its first move into the UK financial services sector.

The Gosforth-based firm has worked with Aroma Global on the acquisition of longstanding West Midlands investment advisory business MitonOptimal Portfolio Management (UK) for an undisclosed sum as part of Aroma's continuing diversification into new markets and sectors.

Founded in Dubai in 1997, Aroma Global employs around 6,000 people around the world, has an annual turnover of around £250m and has been active in the UK since 2013.

Its interests range from construction, film production, plantations and organic farming

through to real estate, hospitality and the Fragrant Nature chain of luxury hotels and resorts across the Indian peninsula.

Michael Cantwell and Rachel Warriner of RMT Accountants & Business Advisors advised the Aroma Global management team on the acquisition of MitonOptimal Portfolio Management (UK).

MitonOptimal Portfolio Management (UK) provides investment advisory services to both corporate and individual clients on a fully-regulated basis, as well as a range of other personal finance services.

Aroma is now looking to increase the size of the MitonOptimal team, which is based in Wolverhampton, and to expand the range of services the business provides as part of its growth strategy for its new acquisition.

Anne Sajeev Kochumman of Aroma Global says: "The support and advice provided by the RMT team has been excellent and this acquisition is the first part of what we expect to be a long and successful relationship.

"Aroma's long-term success has been built on taking the time to establish firm foundations in every sector into which we've diversified

before going on to use this as a base for growth, and we'll be looking to do the same with MitonOptimal in the UK financial services sector.

"The business is very well-respected in its field, has a highly-skilled team which we will be looking to expand and has the potential to grow significantly in a number of different directions.

"Moving into the UK financial services sector has been a long-term ambition for us and we have a range of ideas for how we're going to enhance our presence in it in the years to come."

Michael Cantwell, head of corporate finance at RMT Accountants & Business Advisors, adds:

"Aroma Global has an impressive heritage of more than 25 years of building a successful presence in each new sector that it has entered and this acquisition is the result of a clear, long-term strategy to move into a sector where it sees a range of new opportunities.

"We're very pleased to be supporting the Aroma management team in this latest venture and look forward to working with them on the next stages of their business plan."

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A retreat to remember

Members of Vistage recently enjoyed their Annual Retreat with chair for the North East and Northumberland, Andrew Marsh. Including two intensive, personal focused days, the cohorts enjoyed two speakers, a dinner and an overnight stay at Solberge Hall.

Following on from Andrew's recent article on how to make the most of away days, here Northern Insight readers get a frank insight into how Andrew runs his own events.

Day one saw the attendees focusing on their health, as Dorian Dugmore focused on Younger Next Year. Dr Dugmore holds a PhD in cardiovascular medicine and is internationally recognised for his work in the field.

As the director of corporate wellbeing at the FA and director of Beyond the Barriers, Dr Dugmore's programs have won global and European awards for best practice in corporate health and wellness, and for improving the quality of life within the community. Dedicated to bringing the best speakers to the events he hosts for his members, Andrew said: "It was fascinating to see the reaction of the members, when they realised that often how they work and being under stress damages the heart and shortens life. Throughout the day more and more we started to connect with him and what he was saying, giving us all lots to think about. We concluded the day by crafting our own wellbeing commitment statements, which will have such a positive impact on us all individually.

"As chair I committed to bringing speakers that not only looks after the members businesses and their performance, but also the wellbeing of everyone in the cohorts. To be an effective leader your wellbeing must be in good shape, so Dorian's topic was well received. The fact that Dorian was recently honoured with a Vistage Speakers Award, which recognised his 10 years of delivering value to Chief Executives, meant I could have confidence that he would be good.

"In future members days sessions, we will revisit our wellbeing commitments, holding each other accountable to the promises we made."

Alison Dunn, who is CEO of Citizens Advice Gateshead, attended the retreat and her feedback on the day led by Dorian was: "At first, I wondered why a man who is obviously very educated in heart health was at our business retreat. As the day went on, much of what he had to say sank in deeper and deeper. As leaders we often put our needs last, but if we start to fail in health that is no good for our team, our organisation or the people we love. Thank you, Dorian for making us all stop and think about how to work better."

Following an evening dinner and a good night's rest at the North Yorkshire based hotel, the cohort started their second day which this time was speaker, Louis Parsons.

Louis Parsons is the world's only soulscape artist. His work is collected worldwide, and his artwork has touched the lives of thousands of people. He brings an entirely unique blend of professionally created inspiration artwork, finely honed facilitation skills and years of experience in the corporate sector to create a very powerful workshop known as soul expression.

The members entered a room set up with a number of pieces of Louis' work, splash sheets, paints and painting tools. After a welcome from Louis, and an inspection of his work where they each shared how it made them feel and how they interpreted it, it was time to paint. Bearing in mind our own plans and visions statements, Louis helped everyone to bring those out in painting form.



Through the day everyone painted two of their own creations, based on where they wanted to see themselves in the future, and what feeling they had when they thought of a happy time or place. Ben Tansey, MD of Re:heat, said: "I was so sceptical on whether I could paint or even wanted to, but when Louis took us on a journey into our own future, I found myself totally absorbed. It was great escapism whilst at the same time honing our minds into making changes. A great day, where everyone learnt something new about themselves."

Each person took their artwork home with them and will bring them to the next Vistage members day, to discuss in further detail with their colleagues. Andrew said: "With Louis' accreditations, reputation and natural coaching skills, I knew he was the perfect fit for these particular two cohorts. It was fun to see the hesitation we all had, turn into enthusiasm and some of us discovered a skill for painting. A picture can tell a thousand words and Louis really helped me achieve the purpose of the retreat, which was for the members to work on themselves, rather than their business."

In each session Andrew, who is a skilled peer group facilitator, focuses on how each member can get the best out of themselves, coaches new skills and encourages a safe environment where challenges can be processed with like minded individuals. As well as those sessions and the annual retreat, each member receives a monthly one to one, and Andrew also organises social events, so the cohorts can build long lasting, trusting relationships with each other – the true success of any peer group.

There is the perfect opportunity for corporate and CEO operatives, for small business owners and even for emerging leaders who want to invest in themselves or their company wants to invest in their future. Following the successful completion of a recent cohort of emerging leaders, who get exactly the same level information as the CEO or business owner, a new peer group is starting soon. Organisations with talent they want to hone, can find out more by contacting Andrew to discuss.

More information on becoming a Vistage member or signing up their young talent, can contact Andrew on andrew@marshbusinesstransformation.co.uk



Andrew Marsh



L-R: Andrew Marsh with Peter Neal

Is your board performing the way it should?

Over the last few months, The Experience Bank Group has brought us news and information on how aspiring and existing NEDs, Trustees, Board Advisors and Consultants to Boards can better their own performance and understanding of the role through becoming a member of the EB1 peer group.

But whilst it is great to have people on your board that are excelling as individuals, some boards need further help to make sure they perform well and deliver what the shareholders need for the organisation.

Boards can have a number of issues that hinder performance including personalities, lack of accountability, little diversity, and poor communication, understanding clarity of roles.

The combined experience from founder of the Experience Bank Group, Peter Neal, who brings the right recruitment strategy, and from Andrew Marsh, board expert and experienced facilitator, the pair are well positioned to design and deliver board effectiveness evaluations and effectiveness reviews. Here Andrew explains both the need and the process.

“A board that truly adds value needs to be a group of high performing individuals, but it also needs to be more than that. A great board is a balanced team with complementary skill sets and a culture that allows them to work together to make the most effective decisions for an organisation. It is the full participation of every board member that contributes the most to the effectiveness of a board.

“Our purpose is to support business growth and entrepreneurialism in the region by building long-term, strategic relationships. Peter and I bring a great perspective backed with experience that means we are independent objective, sensitive, able to listen, straightforward, pragmatic and thorough.”

Each assignment is tailored to suit the client's

needs, and could include:

- interview or questionnaire-based reviews
- a review of board papers, meeting observations and in-depth, candid discussions
- the provision of a detailed insight into the workings of the board
- the identification of strengths and weaknesses
- the identification of the changes that will enable the board to achieve its full potential
- a look to the future and identification of opportunities for improvement and development
- a contribution to board succession planning

Peter concludes: “At the Experience Bank Group we offer an end to end solution for all individuals, companies and organisations committed to having the best boards and performance possible. From board level and executive recruitment, to helping individuals in our peer group, to evaluating performance and facilitating change for the better, we are making a big impact. Our philanthropic activity also means that start-up businesses can access board advisors for free from our large bank of professionals that includes some of the best leaders in the region.”

More information is available at:
theexperiencebank.co.uk/high-performing-boards



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 **NORTHERN POWERHOUSE**
 Investment Fund
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UNW triumphs at national tax awards

North East independent chartered accountancy and business advisory firm UNW is celebrating after its Employment Taxes Team was named 'Best Specialist Team in a Law or Accounting Firm' at the national Tolley's Taxation Awards 2023.

Considered a marker of excellence in the UK tax profession, the annual Tolley's Taxation Awards recognise the outstanding achievements of individuals and firms across the industry. Award categories at this year's highly prestigious ceremony, which was held on Thursday the 18th of May at the Royal Lancaster London, covered a broad spectrum of the profession, with prizes on offer to professional practices of all sizes, specialist firms, and those working in-house or in the public sector.

Newcastle-based UNW fought off strong competition from other specialist teams from firms throughout the UK to take home the trophy in what was a highly contested category. The judging panel commented that UNW's submission clearly demonstrated how the regional firm 'is operating at the highest level and attracting a client base which would be the envy of many larger firms.'



Forming part of the firm's wider tax offering, UNW's specialist Employment Taxes Team delivers comprehensive advice and support on all aspects of employment tax, from both a compliance and advisory perspective. Operating primarily out of its office base in Newcastle upon Tyne city centre, but with strong networks across the Midlands and the South West, the team guides its clients through a range of matters including salary sacrifice and employee benefits and expenses, termination pay, employment status, share options as well as overseas and expatriate advice.

The team is led by Lee Muter, the only employment taxes partner based in the North East and a former 'Big 4' Human Capital Director. Working alongside Lee is Paul Tucker,

the current Vice-Chair of the CIOT Employment Tax subcommittee, David Paul, a former 'Big 4' Associate Partner, and Becky Hood, a First Class Accounting and Finance graduate who is currently enrolled on a ground-breaking employment tax apprenticeship at UNW.

Lee Muter, Employment Taxes Partner at UNW, said: "We were delighted to represent the firm at this national award ceremony and were absolutely thrilled to be announced as winners of the 'best specialist team' category.

"At UNW, we always set ourselves the highest standards and take great pride in the excellent feedback we regularly receive from clients. For our efforts to also be recognised on a national level by fellow tax professionals really does demonstrate the quality of the team and the

expertise they possess. I count myself very fortunate to work alongside Paul, David and Becky who all inspire me to continue to look for ways to provide outstanding service to clients.

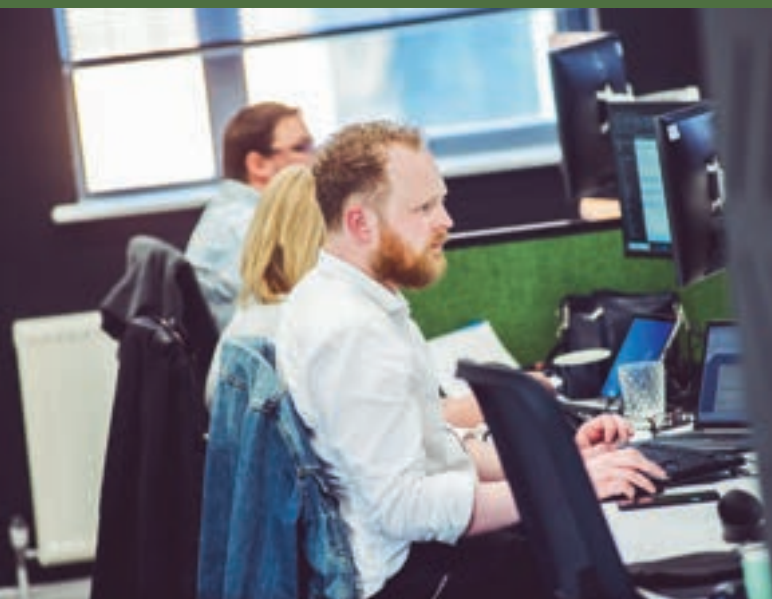
"We certainly have no appetite to stand still and have started to extend our reach beyond our traditional North East market. It is our belief that geography should not be a barrier to delivering the very best service to clients, and we now work with several businesses across the UK. It is our ambition to increase this number further, which in turn will enable us to open more opportunities to our existing people and continue to grow the team."

Learn more at
www.unw.co.uk/employment-taxes

What in the finance?

By Sean-Francis Brown, Senior Information Security Consultant, Waterstones

The financial services industry has supported economies, created jobs, provided investment and enabled access to new markets for organisations across the world for decades.



With financial hubs spread throughout the UK including Canary Wharf, Manchester, Leeds and Edinburgh, the industry is arguably the strongest pillar within our economy, going from strength to strength in the post-pandemic era. In fact, according to CityAM, the sector grew by 8% year-on-year in 2021, with total output exceeding a quarter of a trillion pounds (£261 billion).

But is that strength also the industry's biggest weakness? As it becomes more prosperous, it also becomes a greater target for cyber criminals.

In the last decade, nearly all major financial services organisations have been victim to a cyberattack that disrupted their operations. In 2017, an attack on consumer credit reporting agency Equifax, resulted in attackers stealing names, social security numbers, birthdates and addresses of 147 million US citizens in what is one of the largest data breaches of personal information ever known. Last year, what may have been the biggest theft in history as hackers stole around \$570 million in cryptocurrency from the exchange, Binance.

But it's not just the large organisations that are at risk and, unsurprisingly, regulators are becoming increasingly focused on the sector's resilience – likely as a result of the

increased threat landscape and how critical the services the industry provides are.

Part of this regulatory response is the release of the PS21/3 by the Financial Conduct Authority which outlines a series of requirements for nearly all UK financial services organisations to comply with by 31 March 2025.

There has never been a more important time to protect the financial services industry – and economy – but as many organisations are unsure of the threat landscape, necessary precautions and strategies to be employed, the PS21/3 regulation creates a uniformed framework to follow. Not only that, but it could support further accreditations such as Cyber Essentials Plus and ISO27001 which can create opportunities to appear on frameworks and generate significant projects and contracts.

With significant analysis and testing required, organisations are encouraged to act now to start the roll out of PS21/3 compliance which arms businesses with self-assessment tools, resource mapping to understand current resilience, communication strategy creation and much more, to ensure full compliance by the March 2025 deadline.

By taking a three phased approach through assessment, implementation and assurance, Waterstones is well-placed to support the financial services sector in understanding threat risk, current resilience position, and develop strategies to protect data and assets into the future.

After all, no one wants to be responsible for a dip in the economy...

For more information, contact cyber@waterstones.com or visit the website via the QR code.



A portrait of a man with a full, well-groomed red beard and mustache. He has short, curly reddish-brown hair and is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. He is wearing a light blue or white button-down shirt. The background is a soft-focus mix of light green and white. A dark green rounded rectangle is positioned in the lower-left area of the image, containing a quote.

“

*...There has never
been a more
important time
to protect the
financial services
industry...*

Sean-Francis Brown



L-R: David Nixon of Maven, Cllr James Rowlandson of Durham County Council, Tony Healer of Castle View Group, Peter Rippingale of Business Durham and Michael Vassallo of Maven.

Maven invests in Castle View Group

Maven Capital Partners has announced that it has invested in Castle View Group, one of the UK's fastest-growing and responsive pre-employment training and recruitment providers. The investment has been provided by two funds managed by Maven, the North East Development Capital Fund and the Finance Durham Fund.

Castle View Group is an employer and vacancy-led recruitment and training provider. The company was founded in 2001 by CEO Tony Healer and now works across a range of sectors including manufacturing, advanced manufacturing, engineering, health and social care, production and food production, warehouse and storage and facilities management.

Unlike other pre-employment recruitment and training businesses, Castle View Group offers a unique commitment to providing guaranteed interviews for each candidate, as well as successful employment outcomes for applicants and employers. The business initially started as a recruitment agency, and opened its training division in 2010, from which it has had continued success and has established a reputation as a trusted provider of high-quality service delivery.

The business has enjoyed a sustained period of growth and is now a leading provider of pre-employment services, providing training to over 3,000 candidates a year and placing them into roles in over 250 companies nationwide.

During the COVID 19 pandemic, the company's recruitment division also launched a bespoke health and social care service, providing local authorities and health providers with qualified staff able to deliver high-quality 24/7 wrap-around care services.

The funding will be used to support the continued growth of the business' training division as a prime contractor, providing a greater depth of pre-employment programs to motivated job seekers in the North East and beyond. The business will also focus on the expansion of its bespoke health and social care service across the region.

Michael Vassallo, Investment Director at Maven, said: "Tony has built a strong business and is now recognised as a well-established national provider dedicated to training and recruitment services. The company addresses a genuine need in the recruitment industry, and we're delighted to invest following an impressive period of growth. Today's transaction will support the business on its next phase of growth."

Tony Healer, CEO at Castle View Group, said: "We are excited to partner with Maven on the next stage of our growth journey and to welcoming Michael Vassallo to the board. We've also been highly impressed by the team at Business Durham and are grateful for the encouragement and support we have gained from Durham County Council. We are proud to be a North East based business and look forward to creating more jobs in the region."

Cllr James Rowlandson, cabinet member for resources, investment and assets at Durham County Council, said: "We are delighted to be supporting Castle View Group as they grow in County Durham. The company's approach to supporting unemployed individuals back into employment and its work with employers and regional recruitment agencies to understand local recruitment needs is an excellent example of how our Finance Durham Fund is helping to create more and better jobs and contributing towards a strong competitive economy for the future. Through the support from Finance Durham, we can ensure enterprising businesses with dynamic ideas like Castle View have the right means to grow in County Durham and we encourage more businesses to follow suit and access the funding opportunities we have available through our Business Durham team."

Maven is one of the UK's most active private equity investors and is passionate about working with ambitious businesses to achieve their strategic goals and maximise growth potential.

If your business, or the business you advise, is looking at private equity as a solution to fund future growth we would love to hear from you. Speak to one of our investment team by getting in touch at funding@mavencp.com



Maven completes profitable exit from hedgehog lab

Headquartered in Newcastle, and with operations in the US and Bulgaria, hedgehog lab works with a wide range of global brands, including AJ Bell, Aviva, Deliveroo and Tesco Bank. It provides businesses with cutting-edge mobile app and web development solutions and has grown rapidly in recent years.

Maven originally invested in the business in 2017 and was the first investment made by the then newly formed North East team following the opening of offices in Newcastle and Durham. The business received further investment from the North East Development Capital Fund, which is managed by Maven, to help further grow its global footprint, especially in the US.

A key part of Maven's investment approach to drive value is through active portfolio management and this often involves using the expertise and sector knowledge of our extensive network of Executive and Non-executive Directors to complement the skills of the investee management team where needed. In hedgehog's case we supported the appointment of investor Charles Andrews, an experienced technology senior executive, who was the former Sun Microsystems UK Sales Director. Chartered accountant, Martin Porton, also joined as Finance Director from RTC North, bringing over 20 years' experience of working with high growth businesses.

The sale to BGF will allow hedgehog to embark on its next phase of development by acquiring digital product consultancy Netsells, where the opportunity to combine resources and expertise will enable the enlarged business to bring new digital transformation services to the market.

Michael Vassallo, Investment Director at Maven said: "It has been a rewarding journey working with hedgehog lab, and I'm delighted for Sarat and the team that we have been able to support them through a number of exciting milestones. Despite the serious challenges of the Covid pandemic, the business successfully scaled internationally with Maven's help, and has emerged stronger than ever.

"This investment reinforces the message that optimum results are gained when companies work in partnership with their investors. Together we worked closely to pursue our shared ambition of building a world-class technology consultancy in the North East. We wish the team every success in the future."

Sarat Pediredla, CEO of hedgehog lab said: "Michael and Maven backed us when we were a small regional business with global

ambitions. With their support, we were able to rapidly scale internationally, invest in our US business and weather the storm of Covid to become a global business. We did this whilst quadrupling revenues and building a world-class management team. On a personal level, this time has helped hone my capabilities as a CEO and has been one of the best stages of my professional growth. I am delighted that we can provide an exit and repay Michael's trust in me all those years ago."

Charles Andrews, Chairman of hedgehog lab said: "Maven North East actively supported hedgehog lab not only financially but also at a board level to set out the strategy and plans that laid some very solid foundations for the business: a great company culture across the technology, design and delivery teams; a talented and experienced leadership team; regional, national and international customers; and a strong brand voice in the market. I am very pleased to see the successful exit for Maven North East and also to have been part of the successful growth and development of hedgehog lab. The acquisition of Netsells and the investment from BGF will allow hedgehog lab to continue to grow and scale."

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Barry Hopper

Walking the talk at Lowes

Leading IFA Lowes Financial Management continues to grow and develop its team of experienced people. Writer Wayne Halton spoke to commercial director Barry Hopper about his role and vision for Lowes.

In his new role as commercial director at Lowes Financial Management, Barry Hopper is keen to show his worth and imprint a style of management across the firm.

It's a style that's ultimately based on delivering better financial services to clients while supporting MD Ian Lowes and motivating the team around him.

"I'm a walker. I leave my office and like to walk the floor and see how people are doing, show an interest in their successes and challenges. It's always been my style. I like to thank people. I like to talk while walking around the business," says Barry.

It's a business he knows well. Barry, 53, has been at Jesmond-based Lowes for almost 20 years,

moving through the ranks from a junior to senior financial adviser before stepping into business development in recent years.

He came from a corporate world to join his father, David, who was already a shareholder and senior financial adviser in Lowes. As his father gradually retired, Barry – born and raised in Jesmond – took over many of his clients – based all over the UK, from Glasgow to Southampton.

Aside from the depth of knowledge across the firm, he brings a corporate background to the job. His last role before joining Lowes was a financial director within Newcastle-based Sage plc. Prior to that he did a long stint at British Airways in different roles before becoming business development manager, working with a number of airline corporate partners.

While he has a combined background in corporate and personal finance, it's the personal touch that he's most passionate about.

"I never lose sight of who we're working for. Ultimately, it's not Ian Lowes – it's the clients, and it's something I try to instil in everyone," he says.

In his new role, business development will remain a key responsibility. But he plans to work more closely with Ian Lowes and the board driving the business forward. He has a clear strategy that is endorsed by the board.

"Going forwards our focus is on clients, people and adding value to the business. In terms of clients, we're already well underway refining our services and investing in technology to make us more efficient and easier for clients to deal with. The personal element remains paramount, but

some newer clients are more comfortable using technology," he says.

"Our people are core to delivering improved service, so this means we're focussed on developing their potential and helping them gather skills as they progress through their career. For some this will mean more exams and qualifications. We're also keen to encourage cross-learning across departments.

"It's a busy and exciting time at Lowes. Nobody can stand still in a modern, competitive environment. Our clients want excellent service and increasingly want the choice of how they access our financial services – whether that's via the web, telephone or face-to-face."

Barry's vision for Lowes very much aligns with the long-standing values and ethos of this successful family-run firm. It's been said within the firm before that Lowes genuinely sees itself as a family firm looking after families. What they offer is highly personalised, enabling Lowes to offer a genuinely flexible service with minimal bureaucracy.

Lowes advises clients across a wide range of financial aspects such as inheritance tax planning, investment management, pensions, tax mitigation, long term care and other general financial planning issues helping clients and their families to secure their financial future. More specifically, Lowes is a recognised national authority in the profession on structured retail products.

For more details about the firm visit www.Lowes.co.uk

Robson Laidler shortlisted in National Multicultural Apprenticeship Awards



The Multicultural Apprenticeship Awards 2023 finalists have been released and Jesmond and Durham-based Robson Laidler has been shortlisted for the Employer of the Year category.

This year, all records were broken with over 450 nominations being submitted, of which over 350 were apprentices from over 250 different employers. Organisations range from household names and blue chip companies, to small, medium and micro-enterprises across all sectors. Robson Laidler has fought off some very tough competition to become a finalist.

The Multicultural Apprenticeship Awards in partnership with Pearson showcases the outstanding work and achievement of apprentices from multicultural backgrounds in Britain and inspires other apprentices to reach their full potential. The awards are organised by Pathway Group, who aim to close the

diversity gap in apprenticeships by supporting apprentices and working with employers to make meaningful change.

Head of people and culture at Robson Laidler Amy Park said: "Being shortlisted for this national award is fantastic recognition for all that we do to embrace equality and diversity in our workplace."

The awards platform has been instrumental in creating future leaders and ambassadors for apprenticeships and has brought to the forefront key issues surrounding the need for more diversity within certain sectors.

Winning employers have showcased their diversity and inclusion strategies and how it's helped them to shape an inclusive and diverse work environment as best practice examples for other organisations to follow suit.

"We're not just here to celebrate apprentices, but also the people that employ and train them. Congratulations to all this year's finalists!" said Safaraz Ali, CEO of Pathway Group.

Robson Laidler employs over 100 staff across its two offices in Jesmond and Chester le Street. The firm currently offers accounting apprenticeships for Level 3 and Level 4 AAT (Association of Accounting Technicians) and Level 7 ICAEW (Institute of Chartered



Accountants in England and Wales) qualifications. There are also Level 3 Business Administration apprenticeships and Payroll apprenticeships available within the firm.

The firm has a dedicated diversity and inclusion team who meet once a month with an agenda to make the workforce more inclusive and to engage people with a range of different backgrounds and experiences to increase creativity, and better problem solving and decision making across the business. According to its annual equality and diversity survey, 12% of employees were from ethnic minority backgrounds.

Winners will be revealed on Thursday 5th October 2023 at an awards dinner in Birmingham.

www.robson-laidler.co.uk



Newcastle Barristers Parklane Plowden relocate to city centre

Parklane Plowden Chambers has announced it is relocating from its Newcastle premises in Lombard House on the quayside to new premises within Portland House in the city centre.

The set moved out of Lombard House at the end of June 2023 and, after a short stay in serviced offices, is expected to move into Portland House in September. The move is part of the set's ongoing strategic growth plans and will also bring them closer to Newcastle Civic Centre where the Newcastle Civil & Family Courts and Tribunals Centre is located.

The relocation will see Parklane Plowden's members and team of six clerks, led by chambers' director Michael Stubbs and practice director Sharon Robson, occupy 2,000 sq ft of newly refurbished Grade A office accommodation on the first floor of the Grade-II listed building on New Bridge Street.

Sitting opposite the Laing Art Gallery,

Portland House benefits from being adjacent to the city's redeveloped Pilgrim's Quarter, a prestigious project which is part of the historic Pilgrim Street development.

The Grade II listed part of Portland House includes a 19th century maternity hospital designed by famed architect John Dobson. The building was later the local headquarters of the BBC and was used during the filming of the Ken Loach film *I, Daniel Blake*.

Commenting on the relocation, head of chambers, James Murphy, said: "Our new accommodation at Portland House will provide us with a high quality, flexible workspace in an excellent location in the heart of the city.

"We pride ourselves on being a vibrant and progressive set and this move demonstrates our commitment to providing excellent outcomes for our clients and being the place where talented people want to work.

"As part of our ongoing investment strategy, which saw the extensive refurbishment of our Leeds premises in 2021, the Newcastle relocation will give us room to grow and welcome more members and staff colleagues."



Hay & Kilner advice supports sale of Cheshire engineering firm to Canadian multinational

Advice from North East law firm Hay & Kilner has helped the directors of a specialist engineering firm complete its sale to a global industry leader.

Engineering Analysis Services Limited (EASL) has been acquired by Kinectrics Inc, a privately owned, global provider of lifecycle management services to the electric power industry, for an undisclosed sum.

Based in Cheshire, EASL is an advanced engineering consultancy firm providing engineering solutions in structural integrity design, analysis and assessment to the UK civil nuclear industry.

It has supported nuclear power station engineering plant operations, outages, and maintenance activities for more than 30 years which help improve clients' plant availability and support plant life extension.

Mark Adams and Ben Jackson of Hay & Kilner's corporate & commercial team worked with the EASL management team on the disposal, along with colleagues Sarah Hall, John Morgan and Beth Langley.

Muckle LLP further expands agriculture team with new appointment

Leading law firm Muckle LLP is further expanding its Agriculture, Estates and Private Client team by appointing solicitor, Lois Dokubo, the latest in a string of new appointments for the team.

Lois, who qualified in February 2022, will handle a range of legal matters such as landed estate management, deed of easements and commercial leases, rural property finance and sales. She will also be assisting clients with rural conveyancing advice.

Before joining Muckle, Lois worked and carried out her legal training contract at two well-

known North East law firms, building valuable experience in delivering exceptional client service.

Passionate about helping and giving back to the community, Lois has previously volunteered at a community grocery store and continues to volunteer at her Sunday school as part of her local church's community outreach initiatives.

Lois said: "I've only been at Muckle for a short amount of time, but I already feel like I have a strong sense of belonging within the team and wider business.

"As I've been settling in and getting to grips with my role, I've mainly been working in high-value rural conveyancing as that's where my past expertise lies. I'm looking forward to getting to know my clients while also handling a diverse array of legal matters within the agriculture and private client sector."



David Towns, Head of Agriculture, Estates and Private Client at Muckle, added: "It's fantastic to welcome Lois to our rapidly growing team. With extensive experience in delivering great results for clients, along with her dedication to the community, she will be an excellent asset to the team and business."



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Sarah Reid

Solicitor of the month...

Sarah Reid

Managing Director, Richard Reed Solicitors

What were your career ambitions growing up?

I always wanted to be lawyer. I have always been fascinated by the rules that govern us, how they are applied and how they affect us. Being particularly interested in the social side to law, becoming a family lawyer seemed a natural step. I have a passion for helping people resolve their issues at one of the most difficult times of their lives.

Tell us about your current role and what do you most enjoy?

I had been a family lawyer for nearly 20 years before I took up the position of Managing Director. I have completely moved away from running family law cases and now solely concentrate on running our business. I have responsibility for all aspects of that, from our compliance and regulation to our strategy, culture and growth. I especially love working directly with our teams helping them grow and nurturing our new talent. I also enjoy networking and helping develop new opportunities for the firm.

What is your proudest business achievement?

Being given the opportunity to become an owner of the firm at age 31 and then becoming MD at age 39. I was very proud to be trusted with this role, I have the ultimate responsibility for the growth and stability of the firm and everyone in it.

How has your industry evolved in the last decade and what changes do you see in the next decade?

Being one of the oldest, more traditional professions, the legal sector took some time to catch up with more commercially minded industries. Many law firms now though have fully embraced change and the use of technology to better their services. We have done this too by improving systems to ensure we are now paper-light and also how we gain and do business.

Looking forward, we will continue to use developing technology to not only improve access to our services but to also make lives easier for our employees.

What are you currently working on?

Our strategy over the next three to five years and the future growth of our business, what that looks like operationally in terms of workforce changes, infrastructure developments and potentially a move to new premises, along with how that impacts on every stakeholder – employee, client and our colleagues within the business community.

Tell us about the team you work with?

We have grown a lot over the past few years and whilst this of course means we have some relatively new members of our team, we also have some amazing long-standing employees, with our longest serving being with us for 36 years!

We really are a family! We support one another and we value what each and every one of us brings to the table. I'm proud of the flexibility I see in our team, their commitment and loyalty and the way they care about each other and the firm.

What is the best piece of business advice you have been given?

You don't know what you don't know – so ask! A law degree and years of experience makes you an expert in your legal field, but you develop your ability and confidence to manage a business over time, so take every opportunity and challenge your comfort zones.

Where do you see yourself in 10 years' time?

Continuing my role as Managing Director of a successful and thriving law firm which is central to the local and business community in Sunderland and beyond.

Who would be your four ideal dinner guests, alive or dead ?

Princess Diana - as I child I was fascinated by her – the fairy tale and then the reality, I'd love to know more.

I'm in awe of people that go above and beyond for a cause they believe in – so someone like **Odette Sansom** who went to extraordinary selfless lengths during the War.

Sarah Millican – just to add a bit of comedy to the table!

Gordon Ramsay – maybe we could get him to cook the meal!

How do you unwind outside of work?

Exercise! It keeps me sane; I walk, run, swim, and do Pilates. Also spending time with my two girls aged 11 and 12, a real reality check!

Favourite Book and Boxset?

I've just finished reading Lucinda Riley's series *The Seven Sisters*. Each book has a historical context based in a different part of the world to the last and the Seven Sisters' stories are intertwined in all of the books. The last book, *Atlas*, brings it all to a satisfactory conclusion. I like a definitive ending!

Boxset – *Breaking Bad*; everything the lead character does is illegal, yet you couldn't help wanting him to survive and actually succeed!

richardreed.co.uk

“
...take every
opportunity
and challenge
your comfort
zones...”



*Laura Keegan, insolvency expert and
associate solicitor at Muckle LLP*

Let's be honest; no one wants to talk about insolvency

Insolvency is a touchy subject. However, reluctance to consider your cashflow situation seriously and objectively can very quickly lead to big problems. Laura Keegan, associate solicitor and insolvency expert, discusses the importance of spotting early warning signs.

A business can only pay its creditors if it has sufficient cash coming in. A 2022 study by Barclays found that 58% of SMEs in the UK were waiting for late payments. Intuit Quickbooks estimate that SMEs spend 56.4m hours chasing debts which is worth more than £6.3bn to the economy each year.

It is more important than ever for directors to know the early warning signs, both within their own businesses and that of their customers. Many directors don't appreciate that failing to pay debts as and when they fall due is a legal definition of insolvency. This can have serious impacts on their statutory duties to the company and its creditors.

A director cannot be personally liable for company debts (a supplier couldn't pursue a director personally for an outstanding invoice). However, if a director fails to act in the company's or its creditors' best interests, there can be personal liability to compensate the company for any losses. Sometimes things are outside of your control. In a world where economies are so interconnected, regular monitoring and due diligence are vital.

Most of us are very good at getting to know our clients and customers at the initial engagement phase but rarely continue that due diligence after contracting. That's not to say that everything is hopeless! As with any

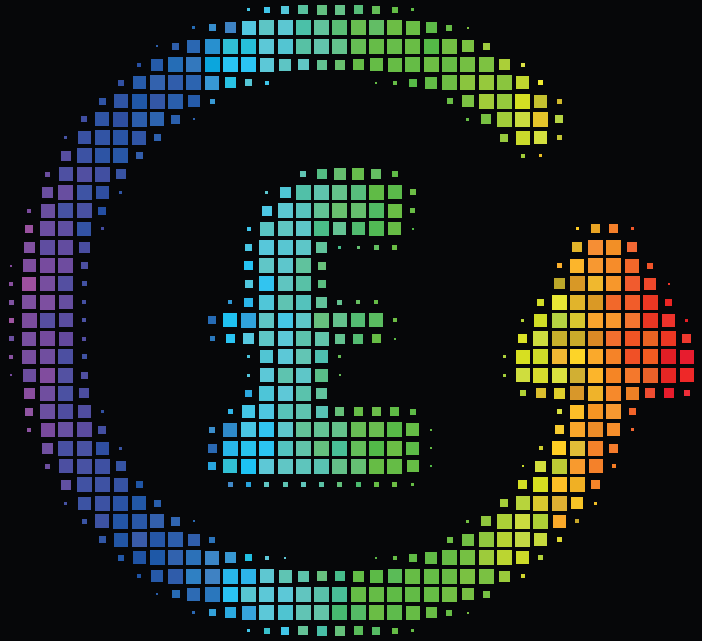
business risk, small steps to establish effective internal procedures and policies do - help. This can include:

- Having a robust set of terms and conditions, which clearly set out your invoicing and collection policy
- Understanding the early warning signs of financial difficulty within your sector
- Having a clear internal invoice collection procedure so that overdue debts are sent out to a reputable invoice collection team, specialists in recovering overdue debts without damaging those important commercial relationships
- Implementing ongoing monitoring and due diligence in respect of the financial position of key parties in your business, whether customers or suppliers and understanding your rights as a creditor

If you are ever concerned about the financial position of your business, seeking early specialist legal and accounting advice is key - but you can only seek that advice early if you are alert to the risk.

For more information, contact Laura using laura.keegan@muckle-llp.com or 0191 211 7970.

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Lydia McCaslin

Am I too young to make a will?

Lydia McCaslin, partner and head of wills, probate and trusts at Mincoffs Solicitors, explores the benefits of getting a will in place sooner rather than later.

Many people think of a will as something you don't need to consider until later in life, however you're never too young to start planning for the future.

If a will isn't something that has crossed your mind recently then you're not alone, with an estimated 84% of people under 35 currently without a will in the UK.

While this may not be a surprising fact, the

reality is that many people in and around this age group will have assets and dependents that they would want looked after in the case of their death.

After all, recent studies found that the average age to buy a house is 32, the average age to start a family is in your early 30s and 59% of new pet owners over the pandemic were aged 16 to 34.

However, it isn't just property and dependents to worry about - perhaps you have a sentimental collection you would like to pass to someone who will take care of it or have a family heirloom already promised to a particular person.

Including this in your will ensures that your wishes are documented in a formal, legal agreement. Not only does this provide peace of mind, but it also means nothing is left to chance when it comes to dividing up your assets and making arrangements for dependents.

It might even reduce the chance of dispute among loved ones, who may otherwise not be able to decide on who had claim to something with sentimental value. It is also worth remembering that a will deals with the assets you own at the time of your death.

Meeting with a solicitor and putting a will in place therefore ensures that you have protections in place for the future, when your finances and assets may look very different. While many of us will live long and happy lives, none of us knows what the future holds.

With this in mind, it is important to note that without a will, your estate would be distributed according to Intestacy Rules on your death. Not only could this leave a surviving partner or spouse in a significantly different financial situation than you had planned, but it also means that distant or estranged relatives could stake a claim to inheritance.

The minimum age to make a legally valid will is 18 years old and it is also recommended that you update your will every five years, or at the time of a significant life change such as a marriage or birth of a child.

This ensures that your will reflects your wishes and looks after those near and dear to you, giving you one less thing to worry about.

For friendly, sensitive advice about writing or updating a will, contact Lydia McCaslin, on lmccaslin@mincoffs.co.uk or visit www.mincoffs.co.uk/services/wills-probate-trusts

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The Renters' (Reform) Bill: What is it and what does it mean for Private Landlords?

From abolishing 'no fault' evictions to permitting pets in flats, Sweeney Miller Law's landlord and tenant team reviews the Government's proposals.

In May 2023, the Renters' (Reform) Bill ('the Bill') was introduced to Parliament with the promise that it will revolutionise and standardise the relationship between private landlords and tenants. The Bill aims to empower renters to challenge poor landlords and to simplify the process for landlords to recover their properties when necessary. Here are some of the main proposed changes.

Abolishing 'no fault' evictions

For landlords, perhaps the most significant proposal is the abolition of Section 21 'no fault' evictions, under which landlords have been able to evict tenants without having to establish fault. Under the Bill, landlords can only evict under reasonable, legal circumstances – such as repeated tenant arrears, to sell up, or to move a family member into the property. This proposal is causing alarm in the buy-to-let market as it will no doubt make it harder to repossess a property.

Periodic tenancies and notice periods

Also outlined in the Bill, and a key consideration for landlords, is the Government's plan to move all Assured Shorthold Tenancies, currently the most standard form of rental agreement, to a single system of periodic tenancies. This basically means that most tenancies will move from a fixed initial six or 12 month contract to a rolling contract without a specific end date from the start. Under the new scheme, tenants would be required to give at least two months' notice to leave to protect landlords and avoid 'lengthy void periods' with untenanted properties. For landlords looking to increase rent, notice periods will be raised to two months, rather than one. This may cause some issues with student lettings which traditionally run as fixed term tenancies alongside the academic year.

Ombudsman service and property portal

A new Ombudsman service and digital property portal are also included in the Bill with the intention of "giving confidence to good landlords while driving the criminal minority out of business". The Ombudsman will be empowered to provide efficient and cost-effective resolutions to tenancy disputes. It is likely to be compulsory for all private landlords to join.

The proposed digital property portal will act as a "single front door" for landlords, tenants and local authorities looking for useful information, including a landlord's historic compliance and potentially also including data from the Database of Rogue Landlords.

Pets in lets

According to Battersea Cats & Dogs Home, tenants being unable to find a suitable rental property allowing their pet is one of the most common reasons for animals needing to be rehomed. Under the Bill, landlords cannot reasonably withhold consent if a tenant requests permission for a pet in their home; however, tenants must provide written confirmation that they have sufficient pet insurance or commit to paying for any damage caused to the property.



Surbhi Vedhara

Sweeney Miller Law's view

Commenting on the Bill, Surbhi Vedhara, Managing Partner at Sweeney Miller Law said: "The Bill brings forward some interesting considerations for both tenants and landlords in the private rented sector, and it is great to see the Government championing 'good landlords'. However, the changes to Section 8 and the abolition of Section 21 notices, in particular, may become a legal tightrope for some landlords, so it will be crucial to have a legal team on side that understand the changes and how to avoid lengthy, and potentially costly, litigation.

Realistically, these planned changes are unlikely to come into force for at least another year, but landlords should be thinking about and planning for their implications sooner rather than later. The devil is in the detail and we await further details of what the changes will mean in practise. We hope to see the introduction of reforms that balance the interests of both landlords and tenants."

Bright future?

Recent press reports suggest that the North East is becoming the 'buy-to-let capital of Britain' as a result of the promise of low property prices and high rental yields. Property sales are up by 7%, compared to a fall of 7.5% nationally and, in the past year, over a quarter of purchases in the North East were made by buy-to-let investors. The average rental yield in the region is reported to have topped 8%, significantly above the average in London and the South East of around 5.5%.

Expert team

Sweeney Miller Law has dedicated Buy-to-let and Landlord and Tenant teams dealing with all aspects of rental property for clients across the North East and nationally, working with established landlords with an extensive portfolio, through to first time property investors, such as those looking to top up their retirement income or provide accommodation for their children at University.

Alongside other prominent regional businesses, Sweeney Miller Law is also part of the North East Landlords network, offering regular events, support and updates to landlords in the local area from industry experts.

For any questions or advice about the impact of the Renters' (Reform) Bill, or any other rental property queries, get in touch with Sweeney Miller Law on 0345 900 5401 or email enquiries@sweeneymiller.co.uk or visit www.sweeneymiller.co.uk

**sweeney
miller** LAW

The power of Business Lasting Power of Attorney (LPA)

Dating back to 1820, Hunton & Garget Solicitors proudly stands as one of the oldest firms in North Yorkshire. Throughout its history, the firm has maintained an unwavering commitment to providing high quality legal advice to clients across the North East and beyond. With a unique blend of modern practices and traditional values, Hunton & Garget Solicitors delivers a consistently high standard of personal and professional services.

At the helm of the firm is Lisa Potts, Managing Partner. As a business owner herself she understands the challenges faced by businesses and is passionate about supporting smes and helping them to thrive.

In today's fast paced and ever changing business landscape, proactive legal planning is crucial to ensure the protection and continuity of a company. While entrepreneurs often focus on day-to-day operations, they may overlook the importance of safeguarding their businesses against unforeseen circumstances. This is where the Business Lasting Power of Attorney (LPA) emerges as a powerful tool that every business owner should consider.

A Business LPA is a legal document that grants designated individuals, known as Attorneys, the authority to make decisions and act on behalf of a business owner in the event of their incapacity or unavailability. It serves as a proactive measure to ensure business continuity, protect assets, and mitigate potential risks. By appointing trusted Attorneys, business owners can maintain control and safeguard the best interests of their companies.



Lisa Potts

The benefits of having a Business LPA are manifold. First and foremost, it ensures the continuity of business operations, even when the owner is unavailable. Attorneys can handle financial transactions, sign contracts, manage day-to-day operations, and make strategic decisions aligned with the company's vision.

Additionally, a Business LPA provides protection against unexpected events. If Covid has taught us anything it is that life is unpredictable, and business owners must be prepared for accidents, illnesses, or emergencies. With a Business LPA in place, the business can thrive in the absence of its owner, preventing potential legal disputes or struggles to make critical decisions during challenging times.

One of the significant advantages of a Business LPA is its flexibility and customisation. The document can be tailored to the specific needs and requirements of the business owner and their company. It outlines detailed instructions, limitations, and preferences to guide the appointed Attorneys in their decision making. This level of customisation allows owners to maintain control while empowering their trusted Attorneys to act in the company's best interests.

When creating a Business LPA, careful consideration must be given to the selection

of Attorneys. These individuals should be trustworthy, reliable, and possess a good understanding of the business's operations. Effective communication with the designated Attorneys is crucial to ensuring they comprehend the owner's vision, values, and long-term goals.

Regular review and updates of the Business LPA are essential. As with any legal document, it should be periodically revisited to account for changes in the business landscape, personal circumstances, or the identification of new Attorneys. This ongoing review process ensures that the document remains up to date and reflects the evolving needs and goals of the business.

By embracing the power of a Business LPA, business owners can proactively protect their interests, ensure continuity of operations, and provide a solid foundation for the future success of their companies. The team at Hunton & Garget Solicitors are committed to supporting businesses in implementing a Business LPA that meets their specific requirements and welcome you to contact them to discuss your specific requirements.

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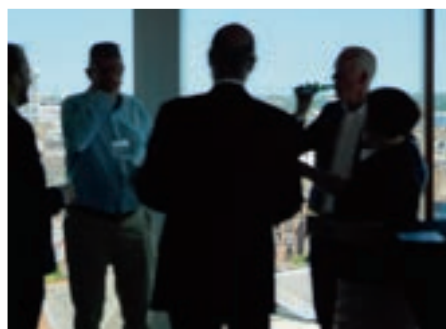
Seaside Special for Hay & Kilner's Summer Party

North East law firm Hay & Kilner has taken more than 100 clients, contacts and friends on a trip to the coast at its annual summer party.

The seaside-themed event, held at the firm's headquarters on the fifth floor of The Lumen building in the Newcastle Helix hybrid city quarter, saw fish and chips and ice cream being served to guests as they enjoyed the iconic views of the surrounding Newcastle cityscape from the office's open air balconies.

The Duck House Pantry Catering provided food for the event, with Ice Cycles serving ice creams around the event from a vintage 1920s style ice cream trike.

Managing partner Jonathan Waters says: "The magnificent summer weather provided the ideal backdrop for our summer party and the seaside theme couldn't have been more fitting in the sunshine."





Extinguishing the bonfire of EU Employment Laws?

Nathan May is a Solicitor at specialist employment law firm, Collingwood Legal. Nathan considers the implications of the Government's recent decision to scrap the "sunset clause" of the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Repeal) Bill.



Nathan May

The Retained EU Law (Revocation and Repeal) Bill ("the Bill") promised to "completely overhaul" the EU laws which remain part of UK legislation. The main conduit for this was the "sunset clause" which would have resulted in numerous laws expiring at the end of the year. The Government has now dropped this provision from the Bill, so what does this mean for employers now?

What has changed?

The Bill had promised that the majority of laws which derive from EU law would expire on 31 December 2023 unless they were otherwise preserved. In essence, unless the Government were to take positive action in Parliament to keep or restate the law in question, it would cease to be law. The "sunset clause" was the subject of criticism from many quarters as it may have produced legal uncertainty as to which laws remained and which did not.

Seemingly in the face of this criticism, the Government has reversed its position and has amended the Bill so that any EU derived direct or subordinate legislation to be revoked is to be explicitly stated in a schedule to the Bill. If it is not in this schedule, then the law will remain on the statute books.

The immediate impact of this change is that employers should have greater clarity as to which laws will no longer be applicable at the end of this year.

What should employers be aware of now?

The Bill is currently in the process of "parliamentary ping pong" as the two houses of Parliament cannot agree on the exact wording of the Bill. The House of Lords proposed substantial amendments to the Bill which would have required further parliamentary scrutiny of any legislation to be revoked and requiring the Government to identify aspects of directly effective rights and obligations, such as those from EU Treaties, which it intends to repeal before this can take effect. This is particularly important for rights such as those under Article 157 which has been used in equal pay cases. The House of Commons has rejected these amendments and it appears unlikely that they will feature in the final version of the Bill.

In addition, while it is now necessary for the Government to publish the laws it wishes to repeal, the power under the Bill for the Government to restate, revoke and replace existing regulations remain in the Bill. Therefore, the regulations which remain on the statute books may be subject to change. The Government has already indicated that it wants to amend the Working Time Regulations 1998 so

that normal and additional leave are one single entitlement and to allow "rolled up" holiday pay. The Government has also suggested that TUPE 2006 will be reformed so that there is no obligation to consult in businesses with fewer than 50 employees and where fewer than 10 employees are affected. We await to see whether the Government has any further regulations which it wishes to amend.

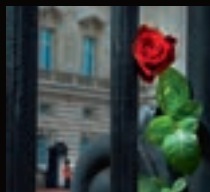
What happens next?

It is likely that there will be further amendments to the Bill before it is passed, not least because it appears that the House of Commons, where the Government has a majority, and the House of Lords disagree on how EU derived law should be removed from the statute book.

The current list of laws to be repealed does not include any significant pieces of employment law, but this is subject to change, and it is hoped that we get further indication from the Government regarding the laws they wish to repeal or amend.

Collingwood Legal is a specialist employment law firm and we provide bespoke training and advice to organisations on all areas of employment law.

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Calvin says “Life is Better as a Geordie”

Calvin Millar, a talented graphic designer from Jesmond, has gained recognition in the fashion industry with his collection of Geordie-themed t-shirts and hoodies. His brand, "Life is Better," has achieved success through sales at Tynemouth Market and online.

Millar's designs capture the essence of Geordie culture, appealing to both locals and those fascinated by the Geordie way of life. Liam Fender, a musician from North Shields, even featured Millar's clothing in a pop video.

By combining his artistic skills with a deep understanding of local culture, Millar has created a brand that stands out. His Geordie-themed apparel reflects the region's identity and celebrates its language and vibrant spirit.

The success of "Life is Better" can be attributed to

Millar's eye for design and commitment to quality. Each item is well-crafted with attention to detail, ensuring customer satisfaction. Millar's brand has become synonymous with style, quality, and an authentic representation of Geordie culture.

Calvin Millar's father, Alexander Millar, is a renowned artist known for his portrayal of a popular Geordie character, "The Gadgie." Calvin draws inspiration from his father's artistic background, guiding his own creative journey.

As "Life is Better" gains popularity, Millar plans to expand his brand's reach within and beyond the local community. He is developing new designs to appeal to animal lovers, individuals with Scottish heritage like himself, and tourists visiting the area.

Millar aims to establish an online presence and continue operating a successful market stall, ensuring people from all walks of life can proudly display their Geordie spirit through his unique apparel.

Teesside Hospice and Wynyard Hall work in partnership for the Dragonflies summer in-memory campaign

Teesside Hospice, a local charity that provides end-of-life care to patients and support for their families, has partnered with Wynyard Hall, an award-winning private working estate and exclusive wedding and events venue located in Stockton-on-Tees for a special summer in-memory campaign called Dragonflies.

The Dragonflies campaign, which will run from Saturday 19th August till Sunday 17th September, will see one thousand dragonflies fly brightly in Wynyard Walled Gardens as part of an installation. The partnership will raise awareness of the essential work Teesside Hospice does in providing compassionate care and support to patients and their loved ones in their final moments.

As part of the partnership, Wynyard Hall are waiving their entry fee to all visitors to view the installation, and to experience the wonderful ambience of the Wynyard Gardens. Additionally, Wynyard Hall's popular Woodland Walk will be transformed into the Dragonflies Trail throughout the duration of the campaign providing a day out for all the family.

Ivor Hobbs, Sales and Marketing Manager at Wynyard Hall said:



"Bereavement and the loss of close family members is something that impacts most of us at some point in our lives. The work that Teesside Hospice does is remarkable, and we are proud to be supporting their Dragonflies campaign."



A man's best friend

Neil Capstick, the founder of Executive Compass, a Newcastle company that helps businesses with tendering services, has taken a break from writing bids to support a local dog day care centre. As a dog lover with

four dogs of his own, Neil understands the importance of finding a reliable and enjoyable environment for their care during his busy work schedule.

Neil entrusts the care of his dogs to Greencroft Dog Day Care in Annfield Plain, which offers stimulating activities and a comfortable environment for dogs throughout the day. The centre has gained a stellar reputation for its exceptional services, catering not only to working individuals but also to the elderly and those with disabilities who need assistance with their dogs.

Impressed by the care provided and recognising the social value of the centre, Neil and his business partner decided to support Greencroft Dog Day Care with a £10,000 grant from Executive Compass's Social Value Fund. This funding will help establish a shop within the centre, allowing customers to purchase dog-related items and contribute to the sustainability and expansion of the business.

David Lowes, the owner of Greencroft Dog Day Care, expressed his gratitude for the investment and mentioned that it would enable them to provide a one-stop shop for dogs and extend their delivery services to housebound dog lovers in the Stanley area.

WE CARE FOR YOUR DOGS @

GREENCROFT DOG DAY CARE

www.greencroftdogdaycare.co.uk



Unit 11a, Greencroft Industrial park
Annfield Plain, Stanley, DH8 5PE

0191 3898353

New North East business aims to combat 'culture-washing' and build high-performing teams

Centric Consultants, a new business founded by former pharmaceutical executive and well-known North East fundraiser, Ivan Hollingsworth, has launched a bid to tackle 'culture-washing' and support business leaders to build strong, sustainable, high-performing teams based on trust and psychological safety – not just pool tables and pizza Fridays.

The company, which has already worked with high-profile businesses across the UK including ITV, Norgine Pharmaceuticals and Gateshead based Media Works, takes a full-team approach to training, focusing on the importance of connection and the power of trust when it comes to increasing performance, reducing burnout and staff retention; all problems facing businesses in 2023.

Ivan Hollingsworth has spent over 16 years in the pharmaceutical industry, working and interacting with a wide-range of different team dynamics both in the private and public sector. This, alongside his training as an elite-level athlete and chair of CHUF (The Children's Heart Unit Fund) has allowed him to observe and identify what makes a truly high-performing team. Over his career Ivan has raised over £500,000 for charity and most recently made headlines across the UK when movie star Ryan Reynolds publicly supported his son Seb, after the 13-year-old underwent open heart surgery in 2022.

Speaking about the launch of Centric Consultants, and why businesses need to take an honest look at what culture really means to them, Ivan said, "In the current economic climate, it is more



Ivan Hollingsworth

important than ever for businesses to adopt sustainable models for business resilience and growth. To achieve amazing results, businesses have to take a real look at what their team culture really is – and walk the talk, not just talk the talk on websites and social media channels. True culture is more than the perks that you offer, it's how psychologically safe your people feel within the organisation, that's what delivers results.

"I speak to a lot of teams around the concept of effectiveness post-pandemic. Modern day life is making us less and less effective we have become experts in the art 'busyness', spending 47% of our time being distracted, but there are methods and techniques that we can learn as individuals and as teams to combat this through changing our mindset.

Outside of work, Ivan was an elite-level athlete and a Heart Dad to now 14-year old Seb, who underwent heart surgery when he was just a baby, and then again as a teenager. He was one of the first recipients of the Prime Minister's Points of Light Award for contributions to the community, has been awarded the Pride of Britain award for fundraising and led the campaign to keep the Newcastle Freeman Hospital's Children's Heart Unit open after more than a decade of uncertainty.

Speaking about how his lived experience inspired him to coach others, Ivan said, "When I talk to teams, it isn't just theories from a text book – the knowledge comes from our lived-experience as a family and from the training I've undergone for fundraising challenges over the years. I talk a lot about what resilience means in practice; resilience isn't a personality trait or an attribute, it is an output, a reaction to the situation happening

in that moment. No-one knows whether they are truly resilient or not until you are dealing with any given scenario. The idea of resilience has been weaponised and is often used to exert power over others which isn't beneficial to individuals or to businesses. We can't stop life going sideways sometimes but we can support our people and give them tools to be able to cope when it does.

"Being resilient doesn't mean not experiencing emotional pain or suffering, it means finding ways to work through it".

Dominic Timney, national field sales manager at Norgine Pharmaceuticals said, "As a leader of a well-established team, I was looking for an intervention that really played to those human skills that we have all come to appreciate and rely on.

"Ivan's High Performing Teams session really blew my mind, using his own experience at the forefront of charitable ventures – both as a participant and as a leader, participating in professional teams and his own journey as an athlete, Ivan was able to describe and coach our team on the key attributes of teams who choose to work together, and how to create an inspirational space where everyone is pulling together to deliver more than they thought possible. Ivan's own experience was backed by in-depth research and theory, I can't recommend this session highly enough."

Centric Consultants is based in Newcastle upon Tyne and delivers workshops and bespoke training across the UK. To find out more and to speak to the team directly about the problems you are trying to solve email ivan@centric-consultants.com



Big shots raise £73k at NE Youth Clay Pigeon Shoot

NE Youth hosted their annual clay pigeon shoot at Hulne Priory, Alnwick recently. A record 360 people attended the event which was held over two days.

An incredible £73k was raised over the weekend which is much higher than last year and totally unexpected!

The winner on Friday were Widdrington Game and on Sunday -Silvermoor Equestrian Haylage retained the trophy from last year.

Storey Homes and Queensberry Design were the main sponsors whilst The Inn Collection, Bradley Hall and Northumberland Estates were partners for both events.

The money raised can be used to fund: three weekly youth sessions for a year across the North East, enabling NE Youth to provide safe hubs for 50 young people per week.

OR

Two full time Youth Workers for a year, each providing support to over 300 young people through information, advice and guidance and a fun and rewarding programme of activities.

OR

Fully fund a programme for Schools for a year, enabling us NE Youth to deliver life skills and leadership programmes for over 600 young people.

Jon Niblo, CEO of NE Youth commented: "We are literally blown away by the shoot this year! With the cost of living crisis affecting everyone we didnt expect to reach last years target, never mind smash it! The money raised will mean 100's more young people will be supported across the region. I thank everyone involved from the bottom of my heart."





Scientifically proven to be good for you!

Now, we've heard a lot from scientists in the last few years, their advice has divided us, especially when it comes to highly infectious viruses. And we are all very aware of the impact it has had on our lives, businesses, communities, economies and families.

But, one super contagious bug that we all have to agree is worth catching, is kindness. Kindness is the future of business.

As individuals, even on your grumpiest of days, it is impossible not to smile back at another smiling at you, that smile infects you no matter your resistance. Be the recipient of an act of kindness and well, it makes your week; but carry out an act of kindness and boom!

So, what does kindness do for you as a person?

- Helping others feels good!
- Increases our wellbeing.
- Improves our social circles.
- Encourages us to be more active.
- Changes the juices in our brains that are linked to happiness.
- Improves our self-esteem.
- It creates a sense of belonging.
- Connects us with our communities.
- Reduces isolation.
- Improves our health.
- Helps us keep things in perspective.
- Changes our outlook on life positively.
- Increases gratitude, feelings of happiness, optimism and satisfaction.
- Boosts feelings of confidence and being in control.
- Even lights up the body's natural pain killers and natural anti-depressant.
- It helps make the world a happier place.
- And the benefits last a long time!



Michelle Jones

It's so awesome and it's highly contagious, and for once, it's a bug we all want to catch.

And guess what? Infecting your business with it will be one of the best business decisions you'll make. Not only will it help sustain your business but the benefits will have a huge impact on people and planet:

- Increases trade and profit.
- Increases employee wellbeing.
- Improves staff retention.
- Drives up customer satisfaction.
- Builds strong connections in the community.
- Increases and improves networks.
- Improves local economies.
- Builds flourishing communities.
- Creates new employment.

- Improves the health and wellbeing of the business.
- Creates a sense of pride in the business.
- Reduces poverty.
- Reduces pollution.
- Improves health for all.
- Helps makes the world a happier place!
- And the benefits last a lifetime.

What's not to love? And it's easy peasy.

The future of your business is Kindness.

It's scientifically proven to be an effective strategy for success.

What are you waiting for?

michelle@kindcurrency.co.uk
www.kindcurrency.co.uk



ASIAN BUSINESS CONNEXIONS

Impact Report & ABC Award Celebration Feature 2023



Connect • Support • Promote • #Inclusionbydefault

For more information, visit www.abconnexions.org





What we have achieved...

Connect, Support and Promote - #Inclusionbydefault



ABC is a not for profit social enterprise that aims to connect, support and promote the Asian and wider communities.

Since 2009 we have established ourselves as the go to representative body for the Asian business and wider community across the North of England working in partnership with Yorkshire & North West Asian business associations and nationally with the All Party Parliamentary Group for Ethnic Minority Businesses.

We...

Connect: create unique and engaging opportunities to network and enhance two-way communication between ethnic minority and wider communities.

Support: provide a range of demand led support services in concert with credible partners and service providers to amplify the outcomes, outputs and impact of all activities.

Promote: critically raise the profile and celebrate the work, ethics, achievements and

cultural diversity of all stakeholders. Having established a network built upon trust and social inclusion we ensure fair and equitable representation.

Our Impact:

- Helped raise over £500k for charities and good causes
- Helped Launch 900+ new start-ups
- Supported over 12,000 existing businesses and organisations
- Engaged with and supported 100+ community groups
- Trained over 10,000 individuals
- Our supported businesses created 5,000+ jobs
- Celebrated over 350+ individuals and organisations through the Annual ABC Awards.



For more information, visit www.abconnexions.org



Words from the Chairman...

Connect, Support and Promote - #Inclusionbydefault



Our Founder and Chair – Ammar Mirza CBE

Ammar has devoted over 25 years of his life to improve the health and wealth of the North of England, primarily focusing on the North East. Alongside establishing Asian Business Connexions CIC and providing critical funds to sustain the organisation, Ammar has dedicated 40% of his time purely voluntarily to support ABC's endeavours of Connecting, Supporting and Promoting.

Ammar's community and voluntary roles include:

- Chair of Governors of Tyneview Primary School and Riverside Learning Trust (16 years)
- Independent Board Member Your Homes Newcastle (9 years) – Effectively Chaired the Customer Service and Delivery, Finance and Resources and Commercial Committees, ultimately establishing and chaired the newly formed trading arm of YHN - Abri Trading Limited
 - Established and Chaired the YHN Employability Task Force that provided strategic oversight and overseen the development of, and progress with, employability activity within YHN in line with Newcastle City Council and YHN aspiration of helping tenants into sustained employment.
 - Reviewed the IT Strategy Plan aligning to industry standards and exploring innovative approaches to improve efficiency, using extensive personal experience and expertise.

- Chaired the working group that overseen the transfer of Palatine supported employment from Newcastle City Council
- Chair of the Institute of Directors North East North Region (2 years).
- Chair of the North East LEP Business Growth Board and SME Representative on Main Board (9 years)
- Honorary Colonel 101 Regiment Royal Artillery (2 years)
- Newcastle University David Goldman Visiting Professor for Innovation and Enterprise (1 year)
- Trustee Tyne & Wear Archives and Museums (TWAM) (3 years)
- North East Lead on All-Party-Parliamentary-Group for Ethnic Minority Businesses (3 years)
- Patron of Charlie Bear for Cancer Care Charity at Freeman Hospital (10 years)
- Development Board Member at Marie Curie Development Committee (3 years)
- Chair of Percy Hedley Foundation Challenge 500 (1 year)
- Radio Presenter Spice FM Community Radio Station (14 years)
- Founder of Primary Inspiration through Enterprise Charity (10 years)
- Chair of Newcastle Progression Forum (6 years)
- Founder of Cadet Apprenticeship Pathway (6 years)
- Independent Founding Board Member of Sunderland Business Improvement District (2 years)
- Launched the Save our SME Campaign to provide pro-bono support over 3,000 SMEs during Covid (2 years)
- Advisory Board Member of Northumbria University Law and Business School (3 years)
- President of the Federation of Asian Business (6 years)
- Representing the Private Sector on various Strategic Partnerships and Advisory Boards (20 years)
- Chair of the Health and Life Sciences Pledge (1 year)
- Championing the North East, regionally, nationally and internationally facilitating a range of cultural, economic and health partnerships (20 years).

Ammar is committed to tackling discrimination and improve social mobility for all. ABC through Ammar's stewardship has launched and successfully delivered a number of programmes and initiatives that have led to long term transformational changes across the public, private and third sectors. All of the activities we undertake are outcome, output and impact driven.

The greatest success of ABC has come from establishing and fostering harmonious relationships with all key stakeholders. Ultimately Connecting, Supporting and Promoting us all



For more information, visit www.abconnexions.org



AWEsome women...

Connect, Support and Promote - #Inclusionbydefault

With enterprising Asian women failing to be recognised and identified, this is leading to a lack of role models for the younger generation or those looking to start their careers. Even though there is a gender pay gap, statistically there is an even bigger gap between what women earn and what Asian women earn. As well as this, there are a large number of barriers that deter women from succeeding such as institutional mind sets, structural obstacles, family choices and societal pressures. A lack of confidence and belief is a bigger barrier than simply a lack of ambition.

In October 2019, 10 Asian females recognised for their hard work and determination and given the opportunity act #AWEsome role models, with more joining them since then. This is a significant opportunity for Asian women to encourage and inspire more women to become entrepreneurs.



Kai Javed

Kai pivoted from working in law through hospitality (L&D and people management practice) into a career in the non-profit/ communities development sector, creating and developing services for women + girls. She currently

oversees the delivery of a range of partnership initiatives designed to tackle and prevent sexual harassment and violence against women and girls in public spaces across the North East at the Northumbria Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner. In 2022 she was recognised in the Northern Asian Powerlist category for Emerging Talent.

Opportunities to platform Global Majority womens voices in spaces where they have faced exclusion motivate Kai in all of her work - contributing to the national campaign Girls Speak by Agenda Alliance, raising awareness and unprecedented funds during a 2021 Christmas appeal for women in the North East with no recourse to public funds, championing and supporting young women as a volunteer for the Young Womens Trust CV review service and creating safe spaces and learning tools for professionals to gain greater insight into safety and safeguarding for women with intersecting identities are just a few highlights from her career so far. Additionally a successful class-action challenge against a police force on racism when she worked in law is definitely something she reflects on with pride and "any opportunities to inform anti-racism work always feel like the greatest wins."

Kai is looking forward to launching a couple of incredible campaigns developed with extremely talented and specialist partners this summer and she recently gave an interview to the Tribe Tesi blog saying "I've had a 5-year plan since I was 21 years old and I've just recently come to accept the adage, God laughs at our plans and gives us things we never could have imagined were for us. So now 15 years later I've stopped thinking about what's next and I'm focussing on being grateful and present here and now as well as being open to what's for me. Whatever it will look like, I know it'll teach me lessons I need to learn and that can only lead to growth."

For more information, visit www.abconnexions.org



#Inclusion by default...

Connect, Support and Promote - #Inclusionbydefault

All Party Parliamentary Group for Ethnic Minority Business Owners

Over the past few years, ABC has worked in collaboration with Diana Chrouh and the APPG for EMB, helping to conduct research about challenges faced by ethnic minority business owners and to develop a pathway to business support for these communities. Aiming to address barriers, promote inclusivity, and provide tailored assistance to foster the growth and success of ethnic minority entrepreneurs.

Peer Networks – Ethnic Minority Business Owners

Asian Business Connexions and the SME Centre of Excellence led a Peer Networks programme specifically designed for ethnic minority business owners. This programme aimed to create a supportive community where BAME entrepreneurs could connect, share knowledge, and receive mentorship, ultimately fostering their professional growth and enhancing their business prospects.

Enterprise Ignition

Asian Business Connexions is actively engaged in a programme focused on supporting Enterprise Ignition and fostering the growth of startups. This inclusive initiative aims to provide assistance and resources to entrepreneurs from all backgrounds, with a particular emphasis on empowering individuals from ethnic minority communities, ensuring equitable opportunities and promoting diversity within the startup ecosystem. (Find out more: [NatWest Programme](#) | [Abconnexions](#))

Weekly Show Business

Every Friday at 10am, ABC's founders, Ammar Mirza and Jalf Ali, host their Weekly Show Business radio show on the popular radio station of Spice FM (98.8FM). They discuss the news headlines, share their business insights, challenges and wins, and bring you all the headlines from the business world. Special guests have included representatives from Brewin Dolphin, Newcastle City Council and GemArts, among many others.

YABA & the Northern Asian Powerlist

Over the past few years, ABC has worked closely with Yorkshire Asian Business Association. YABA was created to provide a voice for the Yorkshire Asian Business community and provide a voice for business on a regional, national and international level. One of their initiatives is the Northern Asian Powerlist, which celebrates the contribution of Asian influence and impact across the North of England. Our founder, Ammar Mirza, was a judge for the Northern Asian Powerlist and is looking forward to judging this year's Powerlist too!



For more information, visit www.abconnexions.org



ABCurry Clubs...

Connect, Support and Promote - #Inclusionbydefault

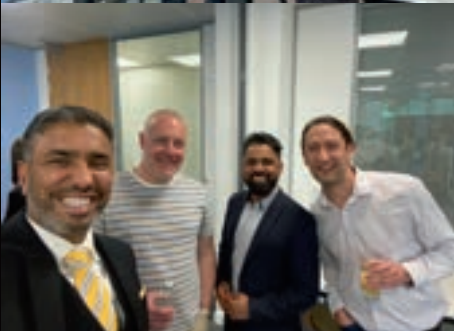


Over the past few years the ABCurry Club networking events have set the bar for the best networking events.

ABCurry Club is an informal yet informative social networking event which is always oversubscribed.

Previous Curry Clubs have been hosted by the Business Clinic at Northumbria University, the 101 Reserve Regiment, the SME Centre of Excellence and the Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha, Womble Bond Dickinson and Brewin Dolphin.

We are always looking for new venues, if you would like to host a ABCurry Club please get in touch!



For more information, visit www.abconnexions.org



Catch up with previous winners...

Connect, Support and Promote - #Inclusionbydefault

Amit Pandit

What did winning an ABC award mean to you?

Receiving the award was a significant moment for me, for various reasons. However, the most significant reason was being acknowledged and appreciated for the accomplishments of my team and me. This was especially meaningful to me as I recently returned to my hometown in the North East after living in London for almost twenty years.

What have you been doing since winning the award? What are your future plans?

After receiving the awards, we have intensified our efforts in International Development for Legal Tech staffing services. As

part of this, we have participated in conferences held in Chicago, New York, and London.

Moving forward, we aim to continue to provide our candidates and clients with the best experience possible. Additionally, we plan to expand our team by hiring new members for resourcing and business development roles in either Newcastle or Bristol.

Do you have any advice for this year's nominees?

It's best to focus on the aspects of your business that you enjoy and excel at, and try to outsource or bring in others who enjoy and excel at the other parts. This can help your business run more smoothly and effectively. It also means there's less chance of you burning out along the way.



“

I was delighted to have received the Chairman's Award at the ABC Awards last year. The AHSN provides bespoke 'innovation' support to the regional health and social care system with the aim of helping to address health inequalities, improve patient outcomes and drive economic growth. We are committed to supporting ABC's work on Inclusion by Default. The health sector still experiences significant inequality in care based upon ethnicity, as well as in the workforce. Inclusion forms a significant part of the work we do, and we are committed to supporting Inclusion By Default, enabling us to create an inclusive and equitable healthcare system for everyone.

*Dr Nicola Hutchinson,
CEO Academic Health Science Network North East and North Cumbria*



For more information, visit www.abconnexions.org



Catch up with previous winners...

Connect, Support and Promote - #Inclusionbydefault



Ponchi Kantt-Neaz

What did winning an ABC award mean to you?

I was deeply honoured and humbled. I have lived with imposter syndrome for many years, continually battling a web of endless challenges and the award

made me feel truly valued by the community. A big thank you to ABC for driving this remarkable initiative.

What have you been doing since winning the award? What are your future plans?

I continue to work for Fujifilm Diosynth Biotechnologies (FDB), a world leading and innovative developer and manufacturer of therapeutics with sites in Teesside UK, Europe and USA, focused on advancing cutting-edge technologies and supporting patients around the globe as the Executive Director, Commercial development for biologics and vaccine development. I head the commercial team in Europe, Middle East and Australia to support the drug development lifecycle. In tandem, I am pursuing Senior Leader Apprenticeship programme

at Henley Business School sponsored by FDB and I spend a lot of time on job and off the job learning.

In future, I intend to continue to focus my efforts in accelerating the growth and innovation within the life sciences and biotech industry as I have always been fascinated by the power of science and how it empowers society by unlocking answers to wicked problems.

Do you have any advice for this year's nominees?

Being nominated for the prestigious ABC award itself is vastly rewarding and the award ceremony is an inspirational experience. I hope to see that we continue to recognise others around us, weaving a culture of recognition and inspiration together for a better future.



Vikas Kumar

What did winning an ABC award mean to you?

It was a real privilege to win the ABC Award for Arts and Culture in 2016, and then to my huge surprise again in 2019! It was totally unexpected, and just to be nominated and acknowledged amongst so many incredible people across the North East is wonderful, and something I will always be grateful for. Both the awards I personally feel recognise the fantastic work of the whole GemArts team including my brilliant staff, volunteers, trustees, artists, partners, supporters and communities, it really is a joint

effort and celebrates our passion and commitment to culture and creativity.

What have you been doing since winning the award? What are your future plans?

Between both ABC Awards I was honoured and fortunate to be awarded an MBE in the 2017 Queen's Birthday Honours list for services to Arts and Culture, a truly humbling experience and something again I am immensely grateful for, especially to my parents, family and everyone at GemArts.

Continued...

For more information, visit www.abconnexions.org



Catch up with previous winners...

Connect, Support and Promote - #Inclusionbydefault

I have continued to work with my team at GemArts to build on our award winning, ambitious and inspiring artistic programme, bringing the very best South Asian and culturally diverse arts to the region including performances, festivals, commissions and workshops, collaborating with flagship venues, community spaces and regional, national and international partners; increasing arts engagement amongst under represented communities, and supporting artists at every stage of their career, ensuring that talent and artistic excellence is diverse, thriving and celebrated!

In terms of the near future, GemArts

award winning Masala Festival is back, from 17th – 23rd July 2023, celebrating South Asian creativity and cultural goodness!

Now in its 8th year Masala Festival 2023 will be bringing to venues and spaces in the North East the world class artists from across the South Asian diaspora. This year we are celebrating and exploring contemporary experiences of migration, identity, existence and place through music, dance, literature, poetry, films, exhibitions, workshops, events for children and families, and of course, delicious Indian food. We are really excited about this year's programme and looking forward to welcoming

audiences from across the region and beyond...we really do have something for everyone!

Do you have any advice for this year's nominees?

The ABC Awards is an absolutely great event, a highlight of the North East cultural calendar and it is lovely just to be nominated and profiled for all your hard work, so just enjoy the evening. ABC do outstanding work throughout the year – supporting, collaborating and celebrating the Asian and wider community – the awards is a celebration of that work and all those that have been nominated, keep on doing what you do and all the best!

Road to Recovery Trust

What did winning an ABC award mean to you?

The Award was given to The Road to Recovery Trust, which supports people on their journey of recovery from addictions. I was honoured to accept the Award as Chair of the amazing Board of Trustees. We continue to be very proud of this Award as we won it during the very challenging times of the Covid pandemic.

What have you been doing since winning the award? What are your future plans?

The RTRT is thriving now and we are offering more services to anyone that walks through our door. We



do not judge and offer a Safe Space Cafe to anyone who wants to come to George Street Social. More importantly, we save lives. Dealing with an addiction brings unimaginable challenges so we are here to help, guide, support and offer love. We have recently appointed an Executive Director who is working with our Operations Manager to take us on our next

stage of our amazing journey. Thank you ABC for supporting us on this journey.

Do you have any advice for this year's nominees?

To any of you questioning whether you should put yourself forward.... go go go...do not be ashamed of your achievements. Be very proud and let the world know! Good luck

For more information, visit www.abconnexions.org



ABC Awards Dinner 2023...

Connect, Support and Promote - #Inclusionbydefault



Join us for the Asian Business Connexions Annual Awards and Dinner - the largest inclusive celebration of its kind in the North East, dedicated to recognizing and honouring the significant and sustained contributions made by our Asian community across the public, private, and third sectors.

Any organisation that is keen to demonstrate their commitment to inclusion, can do so by partnering with us through the ABC Awards and help recognise the significant and sustained contribution of Asian communities across the North East.



Thursday 19th October 2023

6pm til late

Grand Hotel, Gosforth Park

Dress code: Black Tie/Traditional Asian Dress



Quotes from ABC Awards 2022

“

Lovely night last night at the #ABCAwards22. Brilliantly hosted and great entertainment but the star of the show was the unbelievable scran! Thanks for a great night.

“

I love this occasion. Just a great atmosphere every year. Congratulations to all nominees and winners!

“

Lovely evening last night at the #ABCAwards22. Well done for another great awards night, celebrating incredible individuals and groups. I always leave Newcastle inspired. Congratulations to all the winners.

For more information, visit www.abconnexions.org



Join us for the ABC Awards 2023 Dinner...

Connect, Support and Promote - #Inclusionbydefault



Tables and sponsorship opportunities are still available, join us for the 2023 ABC Awards Dinner – contact us now!

Perhaps you know someone who you think deserves an award?

- An enterprising business leader
- A life-saving doctor • An inspirational lawyer
- A hard-working taxi driver • A dedicated charity worker

It could be anyone!

Nominate them now to show your appreciation for their achievements and hard work.

Our categories include:

**Lifetime Achievement • Professional
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To get more involved, please visit:

www.abconnexions.org or give us a call on 01661 823234

For more information, visit www.abconnexions.org



2023 Annual



ASIAN BUSINESS CONNEXIONS

Awards & Dinner

19th October 2023

An Inclusive Celebration of the Asian Community from Across the North East

For over 14 years ABC has championed inclusion and this must-attend, sell-out event showcases the #InclusionByDefault and AWEsome (AsianWomenEnterprising) campaigns.

Any organisation that is keen to demonstrate their commitment to inclusion, can do so by partnering with us through the ABC Awards and help recognise the significant and sustained contribution of Asian Communities across the North East.

If you know someone who you think deserves an award, nominate them now!

Nominations



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ABC is a not-for-profit social enterprise that aims to connect, support and promote the Asian and wider community.



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SCAN ME





Shining bright: meet the Oculus HR team

Oculus HR have recently celebrated 10 years in business with Founder and Managing Director Louise Kennedy at the helm. As the multi award-winning company looks to the future with further growth and expansion on the horizon we take a closer look at the team behind Oculus HR.

Based in Sunderland the team which has grown to a dynamic five includes HR specialists and operations support. The experienced team provide innovative and flexible HR solutions to SMEs regionally and nationally through their dedicated and holistic approach. Building an extensive client list along the way which includes the Foundation of Light, Queensway Orthodontics, Tyne Coast College, Midas Cladding and Glendale Transport.

The team of five are committed to creating value to businesses, in particular SMEs to invest and develop their HR strategy. Offering outsourced HR and consultancy to SMEs across the region, covering all aspects of employment, including employment contracts, policies and procedures, performance reviews, disciplinary and grievance

meetings. With recent trends showing that HR is becoming ever more needed with the wide variety of legislative changes in addition to variations in working practices it has proven instrumental for Louise to build a strong and versatile team.

Louise Kennedy, Managing Director at Oculus HR said: "Building and maintaining a strong team is key. The team have a wealth of experience across an array of sectors and our clients have benefited from tailored support. A number of our clients have been with us since inception, and this is a real testament to the team. Even though we are an outsourced provider we pride ourselves on becoming a vital extension and in turn part of the business, this really is our USP, and this format has helped escalate our growth substantially."

The HR agency which takes a 'refreshing view' on HR continues to see year-on-year growth, a key part of the expansion plan is the further investment in staffing resources to service their growing and diverse range of client needs. Led by Louise, who was awarded Best Small Business at the Women Inspiring North East (WIN) Awards 2022, and Highly Commended Best Independent Business at the Sunderland Echo Business Excellence Awards 2022, Louise's track record is second to none.

Louise has particular experience in providing guidance on building HR strategies for future business growth and change, and is supported by Claire Dodds, Hayley Ramm, Deborah Ebdy and Eddie Kennedy as operational support.

It was recently announced that experienced HR professional and CIPD member Claire Dodds had joined the team on a full-time basis. Claire has been working in HR for over 20 years with specific industry experience in Retail, Software Technology and the Automotive industry.

Claire said: "Building relationships is key to success in any role but definitely in HR, you also need to be pragmatic and not just quote procedure and process, alongside being

approachable and listening and observing conversations."

HR Support Specialist, Hayley Ramm is CIPD qualified, with over 20 years' experience in HR across manufacturing, automotive and call centre environments. Completing a host of necessary HR tasks behind the scenes for the team of HR Consultants, Hayley says:

"No one week is the same, different clients, different SME's, different cases, all with new puzzles or projects to solve every week."

Deborah Ebdy has worked with the company for over five years, firstly as a consultant and more recently as an employee. Deborah has over 15 years' experience in the Education sector as a HR Manager. With extensive experience in managing mergers, site relocation and trade union disputes. Deborah was attracted to HR because of her interest to work with lots of different people.

Deborah said: "Working with new clients can bring so much job satisfaction as you can sense their relief when you are able to help and support them with issues which have been concerning for them."

Louise added: "We've hit 2023 running. From new clients, our successful podcast series to numerous award shortlists and wins, combined with a number of exciting developments in the pipeline. The future is looking very bright indeed, and I'm excited to be on the journey with such a dedicated and experienced team around me."

With a number of awards under their wing including news just landing that Oculus HR are a Finalist for the 2023 Great British Entrepreneur Awards & Community - Service Industries Entrepreneur of the Year category, this is one business journey we look forward to continuing to shine the light on in the years to come.

To find out more about the support packages available for businesses contact the team at Oculus HR: louise@oculus-hr.co.uk

"To eat well in England, you should have breakfast three times a day." Somerset Maugham



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How safe is it in your team?

By Annabel Graham, Executive and Team Coach, and Director of Successful Training, Leadership & Coaching Consultancy.

Last month I explored creating a high performance culture, and a key part of that is having trust and safety in the team. So, is your team or business a safe place to be?

What I mean is – is it psychologically safe? Are your employees able to ask for help, admit to a mistake or say they don't know without fear that they will be received negatively or ridiculed?

Not sure? Let's look at some signs of an unsafe workplace or team, the four elements of psychological safety, and what you can do to enable it.

What does an unsafe team/workplace look like?

- People don't speak up in meetings or challenge the leader, or another dominant person in the room as they don't feel safe to do so.
- People don't ask for help, or say they don't know in fear that their colleagues might think less of them.
- People feel excluded or judged, or the odd one out as they aren't part of the "in crowd". Yep – just like in school.
- People cover up mistakes as there is a blame culture and they daren't admit to screwing up.

Our fight, flight and freeze response gets triggered easily if we feel unsafe to speak up, take risks, make mistakes, or admit our development needs. This makes us nervous so we go into meetings, worried and waiting for something to happen or a backlash to kick in.

When this happens the amygdala, triggered by perceived threat, works overtime. In contrast, our pre frontal cortex, which governs our higher functioning and logical thought, gets impaired. This means we forget things, hold back, lose confidence and worry. And the more uncertainty or unpredictability there is, the more triggered we become.



Why is having psychological safety so important in teams?

For us to perform well as individuals, and within teams, we need connection. We need to feel we are safe and that we fit in and belong. This is down to the hormone Oxytocin, which enables us to build rapport, and connection.

Positive Psychologist Barbara Fredrickson has found that positive emotions like trust, curiosity, confidence, and inspiration broaden our minds. These enable us to be more resourceful emotionally, psychologically and physically. When we feel safe we are more creative, speak out more and have more diversity of thought.

Four aspects of Psychological Safety

Google observed 180 teams over five years, and discovered that psychological safety was more important than education or experience in creating high performing teams. For them, four key factors emerged.

1. **Inclusion:** Safe to be me. I am respected, treated fairly, valued AND included in the team, and allowed to be who I am without putting on a front.
2. **Learner:** Safe to learn. I am supported to grow. I can innovate, ask questions, experiment, learn from mistakes, and look for new opportunities.
3. **Collaborator:** Safe to contribute. I can bring my ideas without being ridiculed. I can explore, suggest, and participate without

fear of being dismissed or thought less of by others.

4. **Challenger:** Safe to challenge. I can speak up without punishment. I can challenge the status quo and speak up. I can share my ideas expose problems, invite disagreement and handle conflict constructively.

What can we do to enable this in our teams?

- **Speak Human to Human:** Connect and get to know people. Find out about them, ask great questions, share personal information so people can connect with you.
- **Take time to check in** at every meeting and find out how people are. Empathise and build relationships as much as you can.
- **Involve everyone.** Invite people into the conversation and make sure they are included. Don't have favourites, or shut people out.

If these are areas you need to take action on, then it's time for you to step up as a leader. People won't go first, so set the tone and create that environment, and role model psychologically safe behaviours.

If you want to create a psychologically safe environment in your team or business contact Annabel via LinkedIn, annabel@successfultraining.co.uk, or visit www.successfultraining.co.uk

Your opportunity to shape careers education for students in the North East

Denis Heaney, Enterprise Adviser Hub Lead at the North East Local Enterprise Partnership outlines how employers can partner with their local schools and colleges to help shape careers education.

It is quite common to hear employers expressing concerns that young people joining the workforce don't have the skills businesses require, and recognise a disconnect between the skills they acquire through school, college and universities, and those needed by the world of work.

Thankfully, things are changing. There are more opportunities for industry to work in partnership with academia to influence curriculum development, provide workplace experiences, and educate young people about the careers opportunities available to them.

One of the most successful approaches has been the creation of the Enterprise Adviser Network, a group of passionate and dedicated business leaders that work with schools and colleges to bridge the gap between education and employment, and work with teachers and young people to deliver quality careers education.

Here in the North East, we currently have 191 business leaders in our Enterprise Adviser Network, but we're looking to boost that number and partner more industry professionals with local schools and colleges.

One of the most common questions I get from businesses when speaking to them about joining the Enterprise Adviser Network is, 'how



Denis Heaney

much of my time will it take?' Well the good news is, no matter how much, or how little, time you have available, we can make it meaningful. I think employers often underestimate the positive influence they can make by engaging with education. It doesn't matter if it's 1% of your time or 100%, the support we offer ensures your time is impactful.

Being an Enterprise Adviser is about bringing like-minded people together to make a difference in education. And how people choose to do that can be very different.

We've had Enterprise Advisers join the Board of Governors to influence at a strategic level, and we've also supported Enterprise Advisers to consult on careers programmes in schools. Some Enterprise Advisers have provided a mentoring role to teachers and students, whilst others have helped deliver curriculum-based projects. Whilst the pathways have all been very different, the end result is always the same: better careers education for students, which leads to better outcomes.

An increasingly popular area of support is improving teachers' understanding of industry by providing time in the workplace. Teachers

– along with parents and guardians – are the biggest influencers when it comes to careers guidance. By helping teachers better understand the local economy, they are more equipped to connect learning to the world of work.

Our job at the North East Local Enterprise Partnership is to ensure the engagement businesses have with schools and colleges is as much about meeting business needs, as it is improving career outcomes for students. Employers have the opportunity to influence what teaching looks like, and how the curriculum can deliver the talent and skills they need to fill the jobs of the future.

I very much see the Enterprise Adviser Network as the vehicle for industry to engage with education.

If you or your business would like to find out more about joining the Enterprise Adviser Network and inspiring the next generation about the amazing career opportunities the North East, complete an Expression of Interest via www.northeastambition.co.uk, or email GoodCareers@nelep.co.uk

Recruitment specialists' partners with North East charity to support people into employment



Will Palmer (Central Employment), Angela Purvis (Changing Lives), Collette Bolton (Central Employment), Carys Ball (Central Employment), Rachael Gorse (Central Employment), Alice Fisher (Changing Lives)

Newcastle based recruitment specialists, Central Employment has partnered with leading charity, Changing Lives to help support and remove barriers to employment for people in the North East.

Working closely with the team at Changing Lives, the recruitment specialists will use their expertise and knowledge to assist those who use the charity's services to seek employment.

The team at Central Employment will provide applicants with their specialist services, including drafting CVs, interview techniques, coaching and work experience.

Since 2010, Changing Lives has provided four regional services to help people into employment, Get Ahead which

covers Newcastle, North Tyneside and Northumberland, Moving on Tyne and Wear, Reaching Out Across Durham (ROAD) and Step Forward Tees Valley.

All the initiatives have successfully placed people into a range of sectors including retail, construction, professional services, education, hospitality and health.

Will Palmer, director at Central Employment, said: "We are looking forward to supporting Changing Lives' employment initiatives.

"We are also delighted to present Changing Lives with a cheque for £5,000, which has been raised by staff through a number of fundraising activities, which will also help to support employability barriers, including financial and mental health issues.

"As a highly experienced recruiter, we can identify both the opportunities and the barriers to employment and working in partnership with Changing Lives, we will utilise our staff's specialist skill set to help bridge the gap into employment."

Alice Fisher, Corporate Fundraising Manager, Changing Lives, said: "This is a generous

donation and very much appreciated by the team here at Changing Lives.

"We recently met members of the Central Employment team and are looking forward to seeing how we can exchange best practices, as it is crucial that everyone leads a fulfilling life. In partnering with Central Employment, we hope to help people overcome the barriers they face when seeking employment."

Alongside the NHS and several councils, some of the region's biggest companies including Greggs, Eldon Square and Proctor and Gamble have recruited employees, aged between 17-65 made up of 63% of men and 33% of women, with 4% preferring not to disclose a gender.

Angela Purvis, Employment Service Manager at Changing Lives, said: "Given the difficult employment landscape of recent years we're thrilled to have helped 800 people in finding gainful employment. All those we have helped have gone on to thrive in their new roles at some of the North East's most significant and best-known employers."

www.centralemployment.co.uk

Collaboration provides tech businesses with the key to attracting investment and venture capital



Sarah O'Mahoney and Neil Stephenson

Communications and marketing specialist, Bradley O'Mahoney, has partnered with Stephenson Ventures as it launches 'The vital ingredient for game-changing venture capital'.

The six-month programme is for fast growing companies - such as those in the tech sector - that recognise the quickest route to growth is via external investment and, in particular, venture capital.

Bradley O'Mahoney was established in 1991 and has assisted a vast range of clients in areas such as brand positioning and reputation management. Neil Stephenson, owner of Stephenson Ventures, is the former CEO of Onyx Group, which he exited in 2016 when the company was acquired in a deal reportedly worth £65 million.

Neil Stephenson, said: "Convincing investors that your business is a winner, depends on many factors, including the strength of your business plan and the confidence investors have in the management team. Getting the right level of investment at the right time in the growth cycle will be a game-changer for many companies, especially those wishing to look long term

towards an exit strategy.

"I represent a range of highly ambitious tech pioneers and businesses either as a coach, investor or non exec director and I advise them all on the key strategic issues they need to put in place if they are to be successful in attracting investment. Without doubt, one of the most important is that they have to focus on building their brand. Essentially, they need to punch way above their weight.

"When seeking funding they need to send a clear message that they employ the very best people, work for great clients and that, if they are not already, they will very soon be the market leader and out of sight of any potential competitors. Investors will pick this up and it will build confidence that they have before them a strong management team and a great business proposition, both of which they can invest in."

The programme is one of three that Bradley O'Mahoney has developed. The other two are CEO Strategic Profile Building and Employer of Choice - The War for Talent, which focusses on the power of brand to attract the very best talent in the jobs market.

Sarah O'Mahoney, director, Bradley O'Mahoney, said: "Each of these programmes are designed to meet the most crucial challenges that businesses face and the crucial role that brand positioning can play in helping a company differentiate itself in the market in terms of its products, services or as an employer.

"We are launching 'The Vital Ingredient For

Game-Changing Venture Capital' at a time when the tech sector is booming across the North of England, with many companies looking for external investment. We wanted to bring real value to our proposition and we have certainly done that by collaborating with Stephenson Ventures, which will provide clients with a clear insight as to how and when to look for investment. Backed by own skills and expertise in brand building and presentation skills, we believe we have a fantastic opportunity to fill a gap in the market."

The programme, which can be adapted to meet individual needs, includes the following:-

Strategic advice from Sarah O'Mahoney and Neil Stephenson. A video featuring the management team that can be sent to potential investors as a first glimpse of the business and also placed on the company website and social channels. Preparing the management team for first stage interviews with investors to include presentation skills and production of materials. A review of website and social channels to ensure these 'front of house' channels are providing investors with messages that build confidence and show a company that has a clear position in its chosen market. Preparing the senior management team for interview by the news media and building a positive profile of the business and its management team in important media in advance of seeking funding.

www.bradleyomahoney.co.uk
www.stephensonventures.co.uk



What makes training a joy?

We have been asking ourselves this constantly as we strive to make all of our development programmes a joy from start to finish. This is important to us as we really believe you, your team and your organisation should feel positive and fully engaged in any development programme.

We really believe that everyone has the opportunity to grow and develop and we want that development experience to be an exceptional one.

To help us understand this in a little more detail we have had to take an in depth look at what we do, how we do and most importantly asking lots of why questions:

Why is this important for our clients?

Why is this important for our team?

Why is this important for us as a business?

Why is this important for our clients?

This made us really look at the drivers and motivators that our clients have. We work really hard to understand these things and we do this by:

- Looking at outcomes, we speak to senior teams about why they want to run training.
- We speak to people we are training (before we write the training material) to understand why they want to attend (and what concerns they might have).
- We look to understand if organisations are looking for a quick fix or if they want a long-term partnership and culture change (the latter is where we spend our time).
- We understand why this important now, and why this is important in the longer term (this helps us support the strategic and operational development needs).
- We provide a degree of challenge to ensure that our clients “why” gives them the best return on investment, return on time and the best outcomes.

Why is this important for our team?

We really want our team to be fully engaged and love what they do, we help them really engage by:

- Letting them shape delivery methods and approaches for each client (hands on discovery led learning, not death by PowerPoint).
- Helping them creating useful workbooks for the development programme that have longer term use and benefits (long term learning, background reading and actions plans).
- Supporting them in delivering material that will stretch learning in each session (we very often get calls months after delivery telling us about the long term benefits of doing this).

Why is this important for us as a business?

The temptation here is to talk about the surface level outputs – happy clients, referrals, repeat business, and yes these are all important to

us. There is something much more important though, it’s knowing we have done a great job for our clients and that we have helped individual, teams and firms improve in a significant way. Hearing and reading feedback that talks about the cultural shift, improved performance, better engagement and positive outcomes is what it’s all about for us. These are the things that keep us coming back for more!

As a footnote, it’s worth noting the things that really don’t make development programmes a joy, and they are:

- **Sweets** – who doesn’t like a good sweet? Lots of people, we now offer fruit and healthy snacks as we go.
- **A good lunch** – a big lunch just leaves you wanting to snooze! A healthy light lunch.
- **Fun (without learning)** – it’s nice to go away with a smile, but where is the learning?
- **Learning (without fun)** – we need an element of fun as this really helps with learning and embedding what is learned.
- **Training done to you** - You might have experienced this, training that is simply forced onto to you while you are held prisoner for the day. This is painful for you being trained and it’s painful for trainer to deliver, we simply don’t do this.

Development programmes should leave you enthused, informed and curious about what next, what else to learn, and how else to grow. Let us know what makes training and development programmes a joy for you. We would love to hear your perspective and share some of the things we have learned over the last 13 years.

To find out how your development programmes can be more of a joy, speak to Nevil: nevil@newresults.co.uk, connect with him on LinkedIn or visit the website www.newresults.co.uk

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Dealing with inner issues

At Gedanken, we regularly support people facing business and personal challenges. Sometimes it's cash flow, sometimes it can be how to structure the organisation, sometimes leadership challenges and the best way forward. As often as not, however, it can be the "inner issues" that exist within all of us as we each face personal challenges.

Whether these are thinking styles, limiting beliefs, or just the world is not stacked as simply as those who the author Debbie Ford calls the "light chasers" would have us believe. Yes, for some life is a real challenge, and the definition of success is less about how well we scale organisations or however successful at a financial level they are, it is more about how those at the helm face personal challenge, adversity and come through this.

I remember as a young social worker, the sense of frustration when working with many people who face all forms of disability, mental and physical. For many, it seemed to me, their functionality was restricted, not by the limitations of their personal pathology, so much as a unreceptive society that was failing to see that people could make a contribution if the right attitude of mind existed amongst us all to include all. A wheelchair is neither a barrier to learning or earning. Missing ramps or lifts however, may be, in order to access the building wherein it takes place. Happily much of this has changed but there is still a good way to go. In taking a positive view of what people can achieve, I was frequently disheartened by the wholesale disregard for people facing physical and mental challenges in the world of work, often pigeonholed into specialist schemes which, although better than nothing, often became repositories of problems, rather than challenging the status quo to produce solutions in everyday work environments.



Jason Jarvis

It is with this in mind, I'm pleased to be working with a great small accountancy company, Jason Jarvis and Co, based in Wrexham. Jason is a man of kindness, integrity and ability – oh and yes, adaptability! Jason has faced degenerative problems within his spine over the last decade, which have resulted in the significant loss of use of both his legs and some restriction in one hand. He requires the use of a wheelchair. As an accountant, Jason is highly diligent and knowledgeable. Not infrequently he would work weekends to make sure

his clients got their needs served. This is something that many accountants often do, but with Jason's challenges, he felt even more strongly the need to emulate his peers. "For some considerable time, I felt I had to compensate for the sense that I was less able-bodied than my peers", Jason adds "It was only by doing some deep introspection work, I became aware that my reduced ability to easily go out, network, mix with clients, can be more than made up for with my online presence and work ethic". Working now 'virtually' across the country, and with an absolute determination for his clients to experience a new level of quality and almost seamless delivery, his client base is growing on a weekly basis.

Gedanken has worked with Jason to encourage him to take on a new approach. Entrepreneurial pursuits are often lonely ones. The pressures of being a leader, wealth generator, employer, and other business roles can be a heavy burden and easily result in isolation. The challenges of having to manage disability, can make this feel even more so. "The opportunity to experience coaching has made me review who I am, and where I am, and what I offer" Jason asserts, "within a very short time, I recognised, I could advance my work and efficiency with appropriate support technology".

Furthermore, whilst offering accountancy services to all, the recognition of entrepreneurial challenges in Jason's own particular personal situation, has turned into something that is extraordinarily useful in that he now offers a specialist service to business people facing disability, illness, or mental health problems. "Some of my clients truly benefit from someone who 'gets' the challenges they face" Jason remarks. "They need informed, sensitive accountancy support to better manage, not only their business environment, but the vicissitudes of their personal conditions and that impacts the bottom line. Knowledge of benefits, grants, tax reliefs, and other factors are critical, if you are to better manage your business as a disabled person and also account for those times when one's productivity suffers by virtue of being unwell or less productive than one otherwise would be".

Jason has not regretted taking this new step into a bold new offering within the industry. When we examine words, the key statement in the term disability, is "ability", getting hold of that, removing the barriers, so one's skills and talents may be expressed as part of creating a fulfilling entrepreneurial journey for those who face just a bit more challenge than many others.

gedanken.co.uk



“

...the key statement in the term disability, is “ability”...

Dr David Cliff

Newcastle knows how to throw a spectacular party!

By Atul Malhotra, Chief Operating Officer, Malhotra Group PLC

For this month's comment piece, NE1 has teamed up with the Malhotra Group to get an insight into why major events are so important for the hotel and leisure sector in the city.



It is no wonder that the city has been voted the best for a night out and regularly features in international guides as one of Europe's best city break locations. We have it all – big events, a fantastic cultural and retail offer, and a city that is transforming before our very eyes.

Over the last month, the city has shown what it is made of and has come alive with big events hosted at St. James' Park. From sporting occasions like Magic Weekend hosted at the start of June, with a record breaking attendance of over 63,000, to stadium music concerts like Sam Fender's iconic weekend take-over, these events fill the city's hotels, restaurants and shops and bring a vibrancy to the city that lasts longer than the events themselves. The build-up to both events lasted for weeks with shops, restaurants and hospitality venues providing offers and promotional activities to capitalise on the interest and excitement.

Newcastle is the only Premier League club to have retained its stadium in the heart of the city. Steeped in history, the famous ground is the beating heart of the city, the 'castle on the hill' overlooking the city centre.

Visitors and supporters are within a short walking distance of all Newcastle's amenities and can, and do, take advantage of the city's wider offer before and after each event. Match days are something to behold. Being in the city is electric. Seeing the throng of thousands of 'Toon' supporters moving through the city to the stadium is awe-inspiring. As well as the spectacle and the atmosphere it creates, it also delivers an economic boost to business with an average Premier League home match generating a £2m spend.

What is exciting is seeing the stadium used outside of match days and in the off-season for other major events. The potential is enormous and we must seize the opportunity. Having this premier event venue in the heart of the city is wasted if we don't

start using it more, we need to capitalise on what is a relatively untapped asset. We have demonstrated our capabilities and now we need to ramp up and work to attract other events and to consider what else we can host here.

Hopefully the UK and Ireland's bid will secure the Euro 2028 Football Championships which will bring a number of games and tens of thousands of supporters to the city. And, thanks to Newcastle United's recent successes and our return to UEFA's Champions League, St. James' will host at least three European home matches next season. This is great news for the city and puts us back on the global map, bringing visitors from across Europe and beyond.

Events like these showcase the city to a national and international audience and boost visitor numbers – we just need more of them.

The Sam Fender concerts in June delivered an economic boost of £15m, 43% of which was spent outside of the stadium. They also delivered a major boost to our business here at the Malhotra Group, raising the average room rate for the whole week by 34%, compared to the previous 9 weeks of the financial year.

Magic Weekend also ramped up trade, although the increase was slightly smaller this year. This was due in part to the rail strikes which happened over the Magic Weekend and prevented many people travelling to the city. We still saw an increase of 25% on the average room rates.

These events deliver for the city and wider region, and we urge NE1 and other civic leaders to continue their commitment to attracting and securing big events for Newcastle and the region. We must pursue these opportunities doggedly and continue to attract the best events to our city.



“

*...These are truly
exciting and
transformational
times for
Newcastle city
centre...*



One thing we must be aware of is the need to coordinate scheduling. Having Pink perform at the Stadium of Light in Sunderland on the same weekend as Sam Fender diluted the impact and the potential for visitors. This has a knock on effect on accommodation demand in the city.

In future, better communication with Sunderland and other outlying cities is essential to ensure we can all maximise visitor attendance from North East events.

Thankfully, plans for the new exhibition and conference centre on the Gateshead Quayside will also have a major impact on visitor numbers and event staging in the North East. It will play a significant part in growing the market for events and conferences, which is essential for the city as the hotel sector enters a period of rapid expansion.

Barely a week goes by without a new hotel being announced in the city. Newcastle is already well served for quality hotel accommodation across all price and style ranges with a vibrant and diverse offer. There are currently 34 hotels in the city centre, with plans for another eight over the coming years with big branded hotel chains announcing their arrival into the city together with independent boutiques.

We also have our own plans approved for two new hotels, one 110-bed, five star hotel that will extend from the Cloth Market to Grey Street with bars, restaurants, retail and rooftops, with another on Pilgrim Street that will be transformed into 21 luxury apartments, as part of a high-end, luxury apart-hotel, again with a bar, restaurant and rooftop offer included. In addition, we will also be restoring the city's historic original music hall Balmbras to its former glory.

This is great news for Newcastle especially with the introduction of brands like Dakota to the Quayside, the Moxy, and the new Gotham Hotel which will all provide something new to the city and extend the current offer.

But the reality is to sustain the sector with this huge influx of new hotel bedrooms, we must increase the size of the market. We need to generate more events and create more reasons to visit. We need to be bold and ambitious about what we can host and throw a lot of weight behind our efforts. Without this, we simply divide what we have amongst an ever-growing number of providers.

This benefits no-one.

We also know that to make it work, hotel operators need to be given a little more freedom on event weekends to extend



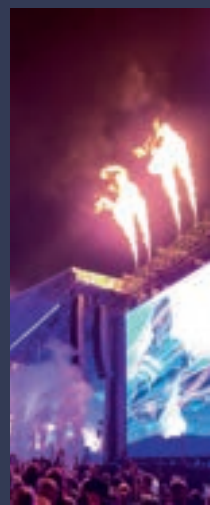
and adapt our offer to cater for the incoming audience. Flexibility on opening times and licensing would allow us to cater more effectively for these visitors.

These are truly exciting and transformational times for Newcastle city centre and we are encouraged by recent music and sporting events that the market can grow.

Big events bring in business and publicise the city all over the world. This is a huge double whammy with economic benefits from the event itself, and the promotional benefits of free, third party advertising and endorsement which takes the message about what Newcastle has to offer to a wide, global audience.

Newcastle is a great city and people who visit fall in love with the place and its people, and are always keen to return. Having new hotels, events and a full programme of activities in the city gives people more reasons to return. We just need to up the ante.

www.newcastlene1ltd.com



Innovation and Resilience: Paving the way for the future of North East manufacturing

By Rachel Skeoch, Director,
Truenorth Marketing

From coal mining and shipbuilding to advanced manufacturing and electrification, our region has continuously demonstrated resilience and adaptability.

Today, the sector stands at the threshold of the future, fuelled by modernisation and driven by the relentless pursuit for excellence. Innovation and resilience are shaping the path forward for North East manufacturing, enabling it to thrive in an increasingly competitive and dynamic, global landscape.

Embracing Technological Advancements

Innovation lies at the heart of the region's manufacturing industry. The sector has embraced technological advancements such as automation, artificial intelligence (AI) and the Internet of Things (IoT), to enhance productivity, streamline operations and deliver exceptional products. By integrating smart manufacturing technologies, manufacturers can optimise processes, reduce costs and achieve higher levels of efficiency. Furthermore, the use of AI and data analytics enables manufacturers to gain valuable insights, make informed decisions and predict market trends with greater accuracy.

Collaboration and Partnerships

The future of the region's manufacturing is being shaped through collaborations and partnerships. Manufacturers are joining forces with research institutions, universities and industry bodies to drive innovation and accelerate product development. Collaborative initiatives promote knowledge exchange, fostering a culture of continuous learning and improvement within the industry. By pooling resources, sharing expertise and leveraging diverse perspectives, manufacturers can overcome complex challenges and unlock new avenues of growth. These partnerships also facilitate the transfer of advanced technologies,



Rachel Skeoch

enabling companies to adopt cutting-edge solutions and stay ahead in the global market.

Investment in Skills and Training

To ensure a prosperous future, manufacturers must recognise the importance of investing in its most valuable asset—its workforce. Companies are actively focusing on upskilling and reskilling employees to align with the demands of evolving technologies and changing market dynamics. By nurturing a highly skilled workforce, the industry can enhance productivity, drive innovation and maintain a competitive edge. Training programmes, apprenticeships and collaboration with educational institutions play a pivotal role in equipping workers with the knowledge and skills required for the industry's future.

Empowering Electrification

The UK electrification industry is experiencing a remarkable surge as the country embraces a sustainable and low carbon future. With the Government's ambitious targets to ban the sale of new petrol and diesel cars by 2030, the demand for electric vehicles is rapidly increasing. This shift has led to the development of a robust EV technology, manufacturing and infrastructure ecosystem in the North East, poised to play a pivotal role in reducing carbon emissions and promoting sustainable transportation and making it a critical sector for achieving the country's climate goals.

Resilience in the Face of Uncertainty

The region's manufacturing industry has demonstrated remarkable resilience, navigating through uncertain times and emerging stronger. The ability to adapt quickly to changing circumstances has been crucial in maintaining competitiveness. Manufacturers have diversified their supply chains, reducing reliance on single sources and enhancing resilience against disruptions. Additionally, investing in agile manufacturing systems and flexible production processes enables rapid adjustments in response to market demands. By fostering a culture of innovation and resilience, the sector has proven its ability to weather storms and emerge as a robust and dependable contributor to the UK's economic growth.

Conclusion

Innovation and resilience are the cornerstones of the future for the north east manufacturing industry. By embracing technological advancements, fostering collaboration, nurturing a continued culture of resilience and investing in skills and training, the industry is paving the way for growth and success. With an unwavering commitment to excellence, the region's manufacturing sector is poised to seize new opportunities, overcome challenges and continue its journey of transformation in the global landscape.

www.truenorth-marketing.co.uk

The value of commitment when navigating the job market

Bryony Gibson, Director of Bryony Gibson Consulting, talks about the importance of conducting yourself professionally before, during, and after a job search.



Bryony Gibson

It never ceases to amaze me how small the North East business community can appear to be. For the most part, I believe this is one of our major strengths but when it comes to searching for a new job, the closeness of the professional community places added emphasis on the way you behave at every stage of the process.

From the initial allure of a new opportunity to attending a job interview, or how you exit a business, the commitment and integrity you show to current and future employers has the potential to propel your career forward or leave a mark on your professional standing for some time to come.

So, what is the best thing to do if you start to get itchy feet? Well, the natural temptation is to quickly pull together a CV, fire up an online job board and begin submitting applications to see if you can secure an interview. If that sounds like you, before you go any further, I suggest you pause for a breath and take the time to work out exactly what it is that you are not happy about.

Ask yourself what the reasons are you want to leave your current role. Would you like to solve the issues and stay? Are you convinced it's time for a change and genuinely ready to start a new chapter in your career?

If you think some factors can be adjusted and will make a positive difference, I encourage you to be brave and speak openly with your line manager. Whatever the motivation for change - money, progression, culture, work-life balance - it is better to understand the scope for this to happen before committing to speculatively attend an interview or use a job offer as leverage when you kick-start the conversation. No employer - current or future - will ever thank you for that.

And with plenty of exciting opportunities around, good people do not stay on the market for long so, while the conversation might seem daunting, whatever the outcome, you will have been honest and transparent from the outset. Whether you ultimately stay or go, you will have conducted yourself professionally and maturely and gained respect in the process.

In contrast, opting for what seems to be the less confrontational route of finding a new role, resigning and hoping to hear how important you are and that your employer can grant you that elusive pay rise and the flexibility for remote working is the type of negotiation that only serves to erode trust.

In my time as a recruiter, I've seen many people surrender to a flattering counter-offer. Again, it's

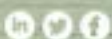
the easier choice but invariably in those cases, the true problems don't go away. Once your employer is over the short-term worry of losing you, often, the way they view you will change; particularly when it comes to future promotions and salary reviews.

This is why it pays to be authentic and true to whatever course of action you choose. There is profound wisdom in embracing a commitment to your employer until you have explored all the options and are genuinely sure it is the right thing to move on.

When embarking on the recruitment process without a commitment to it, you have to consider your long-term career and reputation which is on the line anytime a prospective employer invests in you by meeting or offering you the chance to join their team.

And while people understand when an offer is turned down in favour of an alternative move, how you behave will affect the opportunities available next time you come to the market. Staying with your existing employer can leave a bitter taste in people's mouths. Nobody appreciates feeling like they have had their time wasted and your reputation and integrity are hugely important in a place as connected as the North East.

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



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Brandon William Stokoe

Semi Finalist from Jesmond Dene House announced

The semi-finalists for the 2023 Craft Guild Chef Awards were recently announced, and among them is Brandon William Stokoe of Jesmond Dene House. Stokoe's exceptional culinary talents have earned him a well-deserved spot as a semi-finalist in these prestigious awards.

The Craft Guild Chef Awards are highly regarded in the culinary industry, and being selected as a semi-finalist is a significant achievement. The awards recognize outstanding chefs and their contributions to the industry by focusing on their skills, creativity, and overall mastery of the culinary arts.

Jesmond Dene House, where Stokoe works, is a luxurious boutique hotel located in Newcastle upon Tyne. The hotel's restaurant, which features Stokoe's culinary creations, has received numerous accolades for its exceptional cuisine and service.

Stokoe's skills and creativity in the kitchen have been honed through years of experience, training, and hard work. His passion for cooking is evident in every dish he creates, and his dedication to his craft is second to none.

As a semi-finalist in the 2023 Craft Guild Chef Awards, Stokoe has the opportunity to showcase his skills and compete against some of the best chefs in the industry. Jesmond Dene House, where Stokoe works, is undoubtedly proud of his achievements and looks forward to supporting him as he progresses through the competition.

Brandon William Stokoe's inclusion as a semi-finalist in the 2023 Craft Guild Chef Awards is a testament to his incredible skills and passion for cooking. Jesmond Dene House is fortunate to have such a talented chef in their midst, and we wish Stokoe all the best as he competes in the semi-finals.

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what life is all
about and it
costs nothing...*

In conversation with...

Sarah Thackray

Co-founder and director of BeaconHouse Events.

What were your career ambitions growing up?

I wanted to work as a translator or at the BBC in back stage production. I always loved languages and I grew up living close by to White City so those two careers seemed the obvious options as a young teen.

Tell us about your current role?

I'm the founder and director of BeaconHouse events, an event management agency based in Byker, Newcastle and working nationally with clients. In my director role I am responsible for the financial management and performance, business strategy and business development.

What is your proudest business achievement?

Probably guiding the business through the tough years of the Covid pandemic and having our strongest results to date in the recovery year 2021-22. The events sector was certainly not the best sector to work in when lockdown hit! By cutting a lot of costs (office space, subscriptions, using the furlough scheme and careful management) we got through it and came out stronger as a team.

How has your industry changed in the last decade?

Virtual conferencing was always there, but its popularity was excelled by Covid making virtual the only option for many months. It's certainly here to stay and has its real benefits, as long as the format and audience engagement are always kept in mind.

While we have always been environmentally conscious and responsible at BHE having delivered an event with a carbon footprint report back in 2009, sustainability has quite rightly become more and more of a central focus across the events industry. Minimising the carbon impact of events is now considered essential by many and we're proud to lead the way in making sustainable change for the events sector.

What are you currently working on?

So much! June has been a mammoth event month for us. Amongst many events -including an international marketing conference with Joe Wicks motivating the audience - we have just delivered a new tech festival for the North East - TechNExt, which aims to showcase and celebrate North East tech whilst inspiring the next generation of talent.

Some of our other current projects include events for digital construction sector for our client The NBS, a new employee engagement programme for CF Fertilisers, Newcastle Strategic Solutions and we're now in our seventh year delivering large scale events with our national sustainability certification client Planet Mark.

Alongside our event portfolio we're really pushing on our own ESG strategy, focusing on being a business that does the right thing at the right time for the right reasons. It means a lot to me.

Tell us about the team you work with?

BeaconHouse Events would be nothing without its experienced team of event pros. We have a fantastically talented team of event managers, coordinators and office staff who keep the ship sailing in the right direction, always finding new opportunities and ways to deliver for our clients. It wouldn't be possible to achieve what we do without the hard work and commitment from our brilliant people.

What is the best piece of business advice you have been given?

Have confidence and back yourself! I am naturally rather risk averse, not a usual trait for a business founder perhaps, so people I trust and respect in business pushing me to have confidence in my own convictions and showing they believe in me really drives me forward!

What has been your biggest challenge?

I lost my husband to a brain tumour more than five years ago now which was indescribably tough. I think often of him and how proud he'd be of me and our brilliant boys as they grow up now in our new family unit. The unwavering and constant support of my business partner Catherine, colleagues, family, clients and friends all helped prop me up and carry me through. I learnt that kindness is what life is all about and it costs nothing.

Who are your heroes inside and outside of business?

I find inspo from many people and places! Everyone offers something different so there is no one hero for me.

How do you unwind outside of work?

Spending time with my kids and partner - ferrying the kids to sporting fixtures or to their friends' parties mainly! Playing netball, seeing friends and family and volunteering for our local junior park run where I'm about to become a run director!

Favourite Book and Boxset?

I really enjoyed *Money Heist* on Netflix as I speak Spanish so it's good to keep the language cobwebs at bay! We're currently watching *Colin in Accounts* on iPlayer too which I would really recommend if you want a laugh.

www.beaconhouse-events.co.uk



Sam Spours (centre) with some of her team.

Homegrown workers or recruitment from abroad – a place for everyone?

The UK has a long and proud history of welcoming migration from across the world, and many of our most beloved institutions, such as the NHS, are a magnet for foreign-born workers.

However, recent migration figures have sparked a significant debate regarding the best approach for businesses looking to grow their workforce – whether to bring in trained individuals from overseas or invest in nurturing domestic talent.

The debate is multifaceted and, in all honesty, depends on various factors; there is no one-size-fits-all answer. While recruiting overseas talent can provide immediate skills, expertise and

diversity of perspective, investing in developing domestic talent can lead to long-term benefits such as sustainability, cost-effectiveness and knowledge retention.

The UK's recognised skills shortage has been a significant driver in the need to recruit overseas talent, particularly in sectors such as hospitality, technology, healthcare, engineering and finance.

This shortage, coupled with the need for diverse expertise and experience, has made international recruitment a vital part of recruitment strategies in these sectors. Additionally, hiring staff from different countries can offer fresh perspectives, cultural diversity and a global mindset, all of which can be a huge advantage for companies operating in our increasingly globalised world.

The healthcare sector, for example, has for many years relied heavily on overseas professionals to meet staffing requirements.

The demand for trained medical staff often exceeds the local supply, leading to a continued reliance on international recruitment, and healthcare workers, of all levels, from abroad contribute significantly to the provision of medical services in the UK.

However, in part due to our exit from the European Union, efforts are increasingly being made across industries to develop more homegrown talent to fill the skills shortage.

Taking this approach, investing in the development of domestic talent is clearly a good thing overall, whether it impacts on migration figures or not. By providing training, education, and career advancement opportunities, businesses can cultivate a skilled, sustainable workforce that is aligned with their specific

needs, values, and culture, as well as providing a long-term benefit for the country as a whole.

It is also, ultimately, more cost-effective compared to recruiting from overseas. Training and upskilling existing employees or hiring locally can reduce all sorts of expenses that accompany relocation, visa processing and cultural integration.

Something else we in the recruitment industry have noticed over recent years is the rise in apprenticeship programmes and vocational training, both of which routes also have a dramatic effect on nurturing homegrown talent. And while degrees currently leave students in thousands of pounds of debt, these initiatives provide hands-on experience and industry-specific skills, all while paying a wage.

We're also noticing a growing emphasis on promoting science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education in schools and universities; another area in which the UK has a noticeable skills gap. By encouraging more students to pursue STEM fields, the UK can cultivate a talent pool that can meet the demands of technology-driven sectors, which will only become more prevalent over time.

Building a talent pipeline within the country ensures that valuable skills and expertise remain in the local workforce, offering a more resilient, sustainable option for the future of industry in the UK.

If you are looking to recruit and would like help sourcing the best talent for your business, get in touch with the team at Talentheads via email on hello@talentheads.co.uk or call on 0191 300 8688.

Plastic Mouldings Northern: For all your plastic material handling solutions

The main output at Plastic Mouldings Northern Ltd (PMN) is the production of vacuum formed plastic parts, which sees PMN supply high quality and often very intricate moulded parts to an array of industries. Operating on an expansive site spanning 3 acres and 65,000 square feet of indoor storage, efficiency and experience comes as standard from PMN.

The company is at the forefront of innovation and diversification, spotting new market opportunities is a key mechanism of growth at the established Bishop Auckland based manufacturer.

Alongside their vacuum forming operation PMN are one of the UK's leading suppliers of plastic packaging solutions including euro containers and provide a more cost-effective and yet still durable option for customers.

Over the years PMN have established themselves at the forefront of premier plastic material handling solutions and the array of standard and non-standard Euro Stacking Containers are used across all industry sectors. These plastic stackable boxes are ideal for simple storage solutions alongside use in highly sophisticated automated systems and save you money when used for returnable packaging.

Made from strong plastic these containers store, protect and safely make products portable for food, logistics and industrial activities. The standard size across the industry is 600 x 400, and the USP at PMN is the range of sizing which varies from 800 x 400, 1000 x 400 to 1200 x 400, each in three different heights.

The longer Euro Stacking Containers are very rare due to the cost of tooling, however investment in tooling and machinery is at the heart of the operation, thereby ensuring PMN have viable and bespoke options for customers.

The Euro Stacking Containers have a unique reinforced stacking system, alongside the choice of standard and customised divider sets and are very popular in automotive and engineering sectors. An understanding of the needs of customers is paramount to everything done at PMN and the team offer the best solution for each project to ensure complete customer satisfaction.

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A well deserved visit to Downing Street

A leading Hartlepool businessman enjoyed a special visit to Downing Street as recognition for the incredible work Orangebox Training Solutions does in Hartlepool and across the UK.

Simon Corbett, Orangebox's CEO, and his wife Hayley, accepted an offer from No 10 after being nominated as a Community Business Champion by the town's MP Jill Mortimer.

Simon and Hayley were shown around the Palace of Westminster, more informally known as the Houses of Parliament, before heading inside No 10 where they mingled with other business leaders and chatted with Chancellor of the Exchequer Jeremy Hunt.

Simon said: "It was a day we will never forget; a surreal day. When you reflect on a day like that, it makes all the hard work of the last seven years worthwhile. It is nice to feel valued and appreciated.

"I set up Orangebox seven years ago and I've never worked so hard in my life. It is 24 hours a day, seven days a week, kind of work. At times it feels relentless, especially in this economic climate, but an occasion like a visit to No 10 Downing Street makes everything feel worthwhile.

"I am genuinely honoured and privileged for Orangebox to have even been considered. It has made me reflect on the work we do to help others and our journey so far.

"It's so nice to take a step outside of the business and look inside at the work we do, it's nominations like this that allow me time to do this."

Orangebox trains around 4,000 learners per year across the country and aims to make a difference by getting people into employment. It works closely with other businesses, has strong links to charities such as Hartlepool's Alice



Orangebox Training Solutions CEO Simon Corbett and his wife Hayley outside No 10.

House Hospice and sponsors grassroots football teams.

The Chancellor Jeremy Hunt said: "Local businesses are vital for our economy, our day to day lives and our communities. Creating jobs, supporting growth in a huge variety of sectors, their tireless hard work does not go unnoticed.

"As Chancellor, I see the contribution that local businesses make across the country to all our cities, towns and villages and this is something we can all be proud of. Not only do they bring immeasurable value to the economy, but they are also the heart and soul of so many of our communities."

Orangebox has also sponsored the Hartlepool Heroes community awards for the second year in a row in June and such links and decisions have not gone unnoticed.

MP Jill Mortimer said: "It was an absolute pleasure to be able to invite Simon and his wife Hayley to a reception in Downing Street.

"It is so good to see the hard work he has put in over seven years to make Orangebox a successful Hartlepool start up.

"I am very proud of my constituents, Orangebox's training programmes are making huge improvements to the skills and training

of individuals and businesses in the local area, nationwide, and internationally."

After the visit to Downing Street, Simon and Hayley went back to the Houses of Parliament with the Hartlepool MP.

Simon said: "Two months ago I received the invite from Jill Mortimer's office for all the work in Hartlepool that Orangebox does.

"To have attended a reception at 10 Downing Street with Jeremy Hunt was special. We networked, spoke with other businesses in the room and met Jeremy Hunt, who once had his own training company. The occasion is driven by Prime Minister Rishi Sunak.

"All of our conversations, particularly with our MP Jill, were about positive impacts for Hartlepool and how such occasions help to put Hartlepool on the map.

"I am so proud of being a Hartlepool businessman and I do everything I possibly can to help the people of Hartlepool, drive investment and Hartlepool growth. I want that to continue."

For further information about how Orangebox can help you or your business check out www.orangeboxtraining.com

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Newcastle software developer earns Great Place to Work® Certification

Long-established North East software development experts Leighton has officially been certified as a Great Place to Work®.

This esteemed recognition underscores Leighton's dedication to cultivating a positive people-first company culture and its commitment to employee well-being.

The certification process conducted by Great Place to Work® included a thorough evaluation of Leighton colleagues' experience, satisfaction, and engagement through its Trust Index™ survey.

To achieve the certification, Leighton had to achieve a survey score of 65% or higher. Notably, Leighton scored an outstanding 97% for the statement: "Taking everything into consideration, I would say this is a great place to work" and an impressive 95% overall.

"We are incredibly proud to be recognised as a Great Place to Work. This certification is a testament to our unwavering commitment to fostering a supportive and inclusive workplace where our employees can thrive and contribute to our customer's success" said James Bunting, CEO of Leighton.

Great Place to Work® is the global authority on workplace culture, employee experience and leadership behaviours proven to deliver market-leading revenue, employee retention and increased innovation.

Leighton places great importance on employee well-being and offers a comprehensive range of benefits and initiatives to nurture colleagues and help them feel and do their best. Flexibility and choice are central to Leighton's culture, empowering colleagues to take ownership of their work and career development.

"Our people are at the heart of what we do, and they enable us to deliver exceptional software solutions for our customers time and time again," said James.



Thousands attend TechNext Festival 2023

Over 2000 people took part in over 60 events at the TechNext festival 2023 and the message was clear – the North East is open for business.

Thousands of people attended TechNext festival events across the North East from 19 – 23 June, with delegates travelling from as far afield as Singapore to discuss opportunities for the region's economic development and future skills in tech. The festival, organised by regional tech network Dynamo and its partner Sunderland Software City, hosted events from Teesside to Northumberland, discussing topics including AI, tech for good and workplace wellbeing while celebrating the businesses and individuals that make the North East a driving force in the tech sector world-wide.

One of those delegates in attendance was the Minister for Technology and Digital Innovation, Paul Scully. The Minister joined CEO of Sunderland Software City and Dynamo North East, Dr David Dunn, on Monday 19th June as part of an event focused on money, investment and business support for technology and digital start-ups in the region.

Speaking about the festival Minister Scully said, "The UK's digital sector employs nearly 2 million people, having grown by a staggering 66% between 2010 and 2019. At the TechNext festival, I saw first-hand how much of that growth is being driven by some of the North East's most dynamic tech businesses.

"I also met with some of the North East's best tech talent to learn about the innovation taking place across the region and hear how Government can support the tech sector in the North East as it continues to grow

"The message is clear – the North East is a powerhouse, and it's open for business.



Tech agency comes to the rescue with quick client fixes

A Teesside tech agency is making a name for itself by offering fast, effective solutions for clients' coding problems.

MGC Agency, which was launched in 2014, maintains and supports hundreds of innovative projects, from eCommerce platforms to mobile apps, websites, and software across the globe.

Managing director Chris Carroll, who has 23 years of development experience on major brands, is passionate about helping clients resolve the smaller problems that many larger agencies do not focus on.

He said: "My career to date has been in building websites and mobile apps, but, with MGC, we've transitioned into maintenance and support due to the constant feedback from clients who were encountering issues with their existing tech.

"So often, they were finding that software would cost an arm and a leg to build but then developers just disappear and they can't fix it when things go wrong, preferring to offer redevelopment as a solution. We offer the service to help develop what they have, something other agencies shy away from.

"For every minute an e-commerce website or mobile app has technical problems, it can cost thousands in lost revenue – that's not a little problem. We offer a rapid response, with someone at the end of the phone ready to get onto the problem in as little as three hours, as opposed to the 10 days we see with traditional ticketing systems."

MGC offers a range of packages, giving clients unlimited fast and flexible solutions to whatever issues arise. There are no contracts or expensive tie-ins, and clients can get in touch through multiple channels, including phone, email, or a dedicated support portal.

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Talking Tech and Digital

In the latest of these popular series of features Michael Grahamslaw talks to...

Jon Place

Owner, Integrity Technology Services

Did you always plan on having a career in the world of technology?

Not really. Like many youngsters in their final years of school, I still had very little idea what I wanted to do after school. I had a slight interest in computing which was amplified just as I was about to leave school in 1992, Microsoft released Windows 3.1 which was widely seen as the first real useable version of Windows and would transform the computing world. I also observed how vendors were starting to sell new computers with this new product pre-loaded which is still what we see to this day. This new application (as it was back then) would make a once complicated computer far more user friendly, basically any idiot could now use a computer without having to remember a ton of commands! This really caught my interest and from then I signed up for an IT apprenticeship with Coniston Computers who supported VAUX breweries at the time.

Why did you decide to launch Integrity back in 2010?

After working for several IT firms since 1992, I realised that my ambition wasn't being reached. On top of this, some of the ways and practices that these firms employed just didn't sit well with me. The only solution was to go it alone and set up a business that aligned more with what customers were asking for. After a meeting with David Cliff from Gendakan, a new company was formed based on my view, morals and values, which I'm extremely proud to say still flow through the business to this day.

What tips would you give to someone looking to work in the industry?

For me, it's experience. Get an apprenticeship as soon as possible and stick with it. A Level 3 or Level 4 is a great qualification to start with, you may start by answering calls and doing passwords resets but IT is a fast moving industry and opportunities will soon come along.

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

We're currently working with the North East Institute of Technology to increase their delivery of digital courses which will be provided from their fabulous new facility in Washington. Due to the scale of the project I'm regularly at their offices to help with various aspects of the tech side which I really enjoy.

Tell us about your team.

I really am blessed with a great team, we're like a group of pals who happen to work together. I've known Dave since I was 16 and at the earliest opportunity I brought him into the company. The rest of the team all started as apprentices and have grown with the company. We have a very fair and respectful working culture and due to the low staff turnover we are able to forge personal relationships with our customers.

What are your plans for Integrity?

Over the years, we have been very focused and specialised in providing IT support & advice services, however in recent times we have been approached by clients to supply comms and telephony services. Feedback from clients is that three or five year contracts are no longer desirable therefore we have invested in a great VoIP platform which we can offer to clients on the same flexible terms that we provide IT services – monthly and annually.

What's your favourite piece of technology?

I think it has to be the modern day mobile handset which, lets face it, is like a super computer in your hand! From this small handheld device I can take high res images, videos, watch movies, access all my work systems, data, bank accounts and it will even translate for me when I'm on holiday abroad! I remember my first mobile back in 1995 while working for Newcastle Computer Services, it was like 'wow', I can make and receive calls on the move but to think what these devices can do now is incredible.

Do you have any heroes or mentors?

I've always had a great deal of respect and admiration for David Cliffe and Alastair Baxter who opened my eyes to a new world and way of working when creating the business. I will never forget the encouragement, inspiration and confidence that I needed and received in order to take the plunge. Sadly, Alastair passed away in 2017 but his work is still dotted around the building and I still often refer to our notes.

When not working, how do you like to relax?

I've always enjoyed cycling, I think this stems back to the freedom it would give me as a child before I could drive, and the feel good factor still exists. I will cycle to work whenever the English weather permits and I'll often take a detour on my way home to fit in a few extra miles!

What's your fondest career memory?

A big career turning point for me and a time that I'll never forget, was in 2004 when I took the gamble to leave full time employment and go it alone. Working for ITPS at the time, I had honest & open discussions with the team and I left with respect and understanding from my peers.

What's the best piece of business advice you've received?

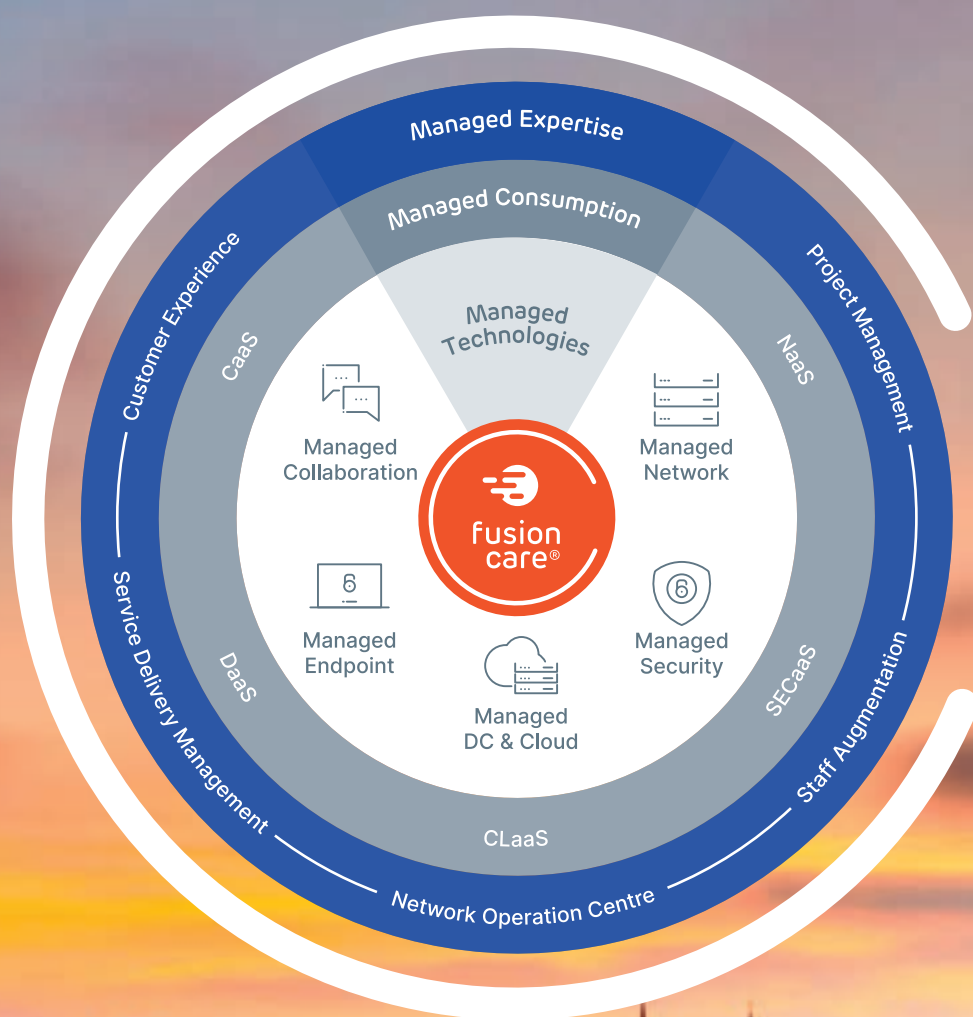
I think marketing of your business is totally underestimated and hugely important. I was once told, 'Never set out to be the cheapest, set out to be the best', great advice which I still live by now.

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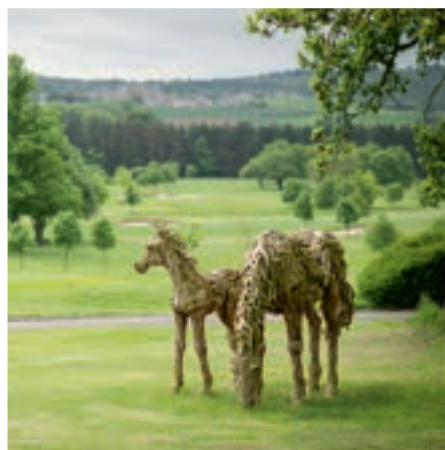
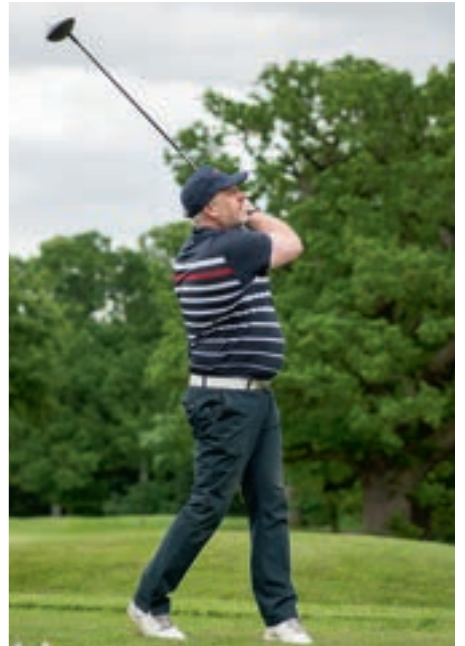
Synergi & Unifi Golf Day

Leading North East cloud solutions and managed services provider Synergi welcomed organisations from across the region to their first golf day of the season.

Held at Close House, the event saw Synergi and Unifi customers learn about the most prevalent cyber threats of 2023 and how to combat them, the ROI organisations are seeing from digitising their processes and how the Unifi team are empowering businesses with Microsoft Dynamics.

The team at Synergi and Unifi are proud to have hosted the event and look forward to welcoming more customers later in the summer to compete for the Synergi Cup.







The long-term value of brand building for B2B tech businesses

By Andrew Young - Founder and Director of The Pulse Rooms

In the fast-paced world of B2B technology, businesses often prioritise short-term sales and immediate results. However, a crucial aspect should not be overlooked—the long-term value of brand building. Developing a strong and recognisable brand can yield significant benefits for B2B tech businesses that extend far beyond immediate sales.

At The Pulse Rooms, we work with innovative technology companies to deliver brand-led growth. In this article, we will explore why focusing on building and growing your brand is essential and how it can provide lasting value in the ever-evolving tech landscape.

Trust and Credibility

Building a reputable brand in the tech space establishes trust and credibility among potential clients, partners, and industry influencers. Customers are more likely to choose a familiar and trusted brand when making business decisions, especially in complex tech sectors. A well-established brand with a proven track record fosters confidence and reduces perceived risk. By investing in brand building, tech businesses can differentiate themselves from competitors and become the go-to choice for customers seeking reliable solutions.

Thought-Leadership and Industry Influence

A strong brand presence enables B2B tech companies to position themselves as thought leaders within their respective industries. Through content marketing, industry events, and expert contributions, brands can share valuable insights and establish themselves as go-to sources of knowledge. By consistently demonstrating expertise, businesses can influence the industry conversation, shape perceptions, and gain a competitive advantage. Thought leadership not only attracts potential clients but also opens doors to strategic partnerships and collaborations.

Customer Loyalty and Advocacy

Brand building plays a crucial role in fostering customer loyalty and advocacy. Tech businesses that consistently deliver exceptional products,

services, and experiences create a positive reputation that resonates with customers. Loyal customers become brand advocates, recommending the company to their network and expanding their reach. A strong brand can forge an emotional connection with customers, leading to long-term loyalty and repeat business.

Adaptability and Future Growth

In the rapidly evolving tech landscape, adaptability is crucial for long-term success. Growing a strong brand allows B2B tech businesses to remain agile and adaptable in the face of changing market conditions. A well-established brand can expand into new markets, diversify its product offerings, or pivot its business strategy while maintaining its core values and customer base. A recognisable brand acts as an anchor during times of uncertainty, providing stability and resilience.

The Importance of Investing in Brand Building

While immediate sales and short-term results are essential for B2B tech businesses, neglecting the long-term value of brand building can be costly. A strong brand presence in the tech industry establishes trust, credibility, and thought leadership, leading to increased customer loyalty and advocacy. By investing in brand building, B2B tech businesses can secure a competitive advantage, form lasting relationships, and thrive in a rapidly changing industry.

To find out how The Pulse Rooms can help your tech business to achieve brand-led growth, email hello@thepulserooms.com or go to www.thepulserooms.com



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Tolent development site purchased out of administration

Following the closure of Tolent Construction and its subsidiaries earlier this year it has been announced that their sizeable residential development site in Sedgefield has been purchased by Fallowdale Homes.

Fallowdale is an integral part of the highly regarded and award-winning property developers Rushbond Plc who have developed multiple schemes across the Leeds City Region for almost 40 years. They are focused on delivering high quality homes and committed to developing exceptional, sustainable communities.

The £30m Hardwick Grange development comprises some 100 homes, where half of the scheme is yet to be completed. Fallowdale Homes has purchased the site from the administrators of Tolent and will complete the development.

Georgina Maud from Fallowdale commented "Fallowdale Homes is delighted to purchase this terrific development and secure its future. We have really ambitious plans to expand Fallowdale and the Hardwick Grange scheme is an ideal fit for our business.

"These high-quality homes have very strong appeal to homeowners and the design, quality and environment are exceptional. We are keen to ensure that the existing residents continue to feel that they are in a safe pair of hands during this time of change."

Tim Reeve of Advent Developments added "Advent is active locally and we have found there is strong demand for really high-quality homes. Sedgefield is an attractive town and the Hardwick Grange scheme has a superb range of detached family homes".

Walker Morris Solicitors represented Fallowdale in the purchase, and marketing of the homes will shortly recommence with LSL New Homes.



Property group completes major Durham acquisition

A North East property investment group has completed the multi-million-pound acquisition of a major County Durham industrial site.

Ward Group Investments, the eponymous investment group headed up by entrepreneur Andrew Ward, has purchased four buildings on Bowburn North Industrial Estate which were marketed at £4,500,000.

Comprising a total of 200,343 sq ft of workspace, the four units are adjacent to the A1(M) and sit just north of the new Integra 61 development, home to Amazon's Durham fulfilment centre.

Three of the four buildings are already let, with PC Henderson Limited, Katem Logistics and Personal Hygiene Services Ltd all having operated from the estate for over five years.

The fourth unit, Unit 2, stands vacant, however the team at Ward Group Investments are confident that – once refurbished – it will offer an 'appealing proposition to businesses seeking to capitalise on the area's growing reputation for last mile logistics'.

"We are delighted to have closed this deal," Andrew said. "Over the past two years, we've grown our portfolio significantly with a number of strategic acquisitions across the UK and the UAE and this is yet another high-quality development to add to our ever-growing list.

"The North East and particularly County Durham are perfectly placed for businesses seeking to capitalise on the growing demand for last mile logistics and investment opportunities don't get much better than this. It's perfectly placed adjacent to the A1, provides access to a skilled workforce and offers some of the most competitive business rates in the UK, it's absolutely perfect."

New online tool to discover commercial properties in Sunderland

Sunderland City Council has launched a new property search tool for businesses, showcasing commercial premises available to rent or buy across the city.

With a number of developments in the pipeline, including the completion of Maker & Faber next year – two Grade A office buildings overlooking the River Wear – the new online tool makes it easy for businesses of all sizes to

discover new and existing premises.

Listing commercial opportunities at Riverside Sunderland and at locations across the city, the property search tool can be accessed via the MySunderland website, showcasing everything from property types, sizes, features, amenities and relevant contact details.

Over recent years, Sunderland's ambitious regeneration programme has created new opportunities across a wide range of sectors including manufacturing, digital, business and professional services, and the creative industries.



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Andy Rapmund

Summers-Inman secures two education projects with Aura

Award-winning project management and cost consultancy, Summers-Inman, has been appointed to two education projects in Newcastle on behalf of building consultancy and delivery partner for Newcastle City Council, Aura Newcastle Ltd.

The projects, won through competitive tender, were judged on value for money, quality and workmanship, effective management and social value. They form part of an ambitious programme of investment by Newcastle City Council in the education estate.

In the first case, Summers-Inman secured the role of quantity surveyor and principal designer on a project at Gosforth Park First School to increase the capacity of the school from 225 to 300 pupil places.

Gosforth Park First School, which is part of Gosforth Schools Trust, caters for pupils aged 4-9 years and also offers nursery provision with 52 part-time places.

The expansion will see the current school expanding into the adjoining former Broadway East First School site following the relocation of its pupils and teaching staff to a new school site at Newcastle Great Park.

The former Broadway East First School building will be remodelled and refurbished before occupation from September 2024.

The remodelling works to be undertaken include creating a new entrance, a lobby, a general office plus three additional offices, a group room, staff facilities and toilets together with a new staff car park and associated footpaths. Internally, the refurbishment works relate to existing classrooms in both schools as well as replacement windows, doors and roof finishing. Newcastle City Council also wants to increase

pupil places at Thomas Bewick School in West Denton. Thomas Bewick is a specialist school for pupils with autism aged 3 to 19 years and is part of the Prosper Learning Trust. This project will create new classrooms, learning spaces, dining facilities and therapy rooms for an additional 48 pupils at Thomas Bewick through renovation of part of the former All Saints school building on an adjacent site. This will help to meet the increased need for specialist places for children with autism.

On this project, Summers-Inman's brief has expanded to include responsibility for project management, quantity surveying and principal designer roles with a similar schedule of remodelling and refurbishment works to those at Gosforth but on this occasion, with the addition of a PV array on the roof.

Commenting on the consultancy's appointment, Summers-Inman associate director, Andy Rapmund, said: "We have already worked on three primary schools with Aura and are pleased

to be able to continue our working relationship with the Aura team following its appointment by Newcastle City Council to deliver several schools in the city as part of the first SLR Schools batch.

"These latest appointments allow us to draw on our expertise in the education sector to ensure the projects are delivered on time and to budget. If all goes according to plan, the Thomas Bewick School remodelling and refurbishment should be complete by November 2023 with Gosforth Park First School ready in time for the new academic year in September."

Howard Davies Project Manager at Aura Newcastle Ltd said: "The demand for school places across Newcastle has been growing in recent years.

"The local authority has a statutory duty to provide enough good school places for the children of the city and has been working with schools and trusts to create additional spaces, which is what we have been procured to do in this case.

"We are committed to delivering this work to programme and are pleased to be working again with Summers-Inman and the rest of our project team who are all highly experienced and competent."

Both projects are at RIBA stage 3, reviewing the detailed designs to confirm costs prior to starting construction work.

Other members of the professional team include Space - architect, CK21 - Civil & Structural Engineer, JCP Consulting Engineers - MEP engineer, Apex - Acoustic Consultant.

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Images courtesy of Space Architects

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In conversation with...

Kevan Carrick

Kevan is co-founder of JK Property Consultants and is one of the most respected property and investment experts in the North East.

What is your role?

I am co-founder along with Jennifer Welch. We met via the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors and established JK Property Consultants LLP in 2007.

What is the main purpose of JK Property Consultants?

Despite the complexities that we are now seeing in the market, there is always a way forward and our role is to advise clients how to manage change, while standing by our culture and values, which are based on responsible and ethical business.

We have extensive experience in areas such as investment, acquisitions, regeneration and development, landownership, viability and funding, dispute resolution, purchase negotiation, expert witness, rent reviews, mediation arbitration and expert witness.

What is your proudest business achievement?

As part of a team of advisors, I played a role in the establishment of the Tyne & Wear Development Corporation in 1986. I was involved in its strategic direction, reporting directly to the Secretary of State. My work included the regeneration of the East Quayside at a time when Newcastle was not recognised as a prime office destination. With others, I purchased all the land for the Corporation, established the commercial scheme and saw this through to delivery. In total, we made available 300,000 sq ft of offices on the Newcastle Quayside. Half of the site was also sold to Wimpey for apartments with an overall value of £300 million.

I was also proud to be asked by Newcastle City Council to advise on a market strategy for St James Boulevard and Gallowgate, to include a plan for one million sq ft of property – which, today, includes landmarks such as the Helix.



Kevan Carrick

What type of projects are you currently working on?

We are exceptionally busy and are currently on our fourth consecutive dispute advising as expert witness regarding land for housing through option agreements, which have a total value of £350 million.

We have also received instructions for the sale of a 10,000 sq ft prime office building at Team Valley, the letting of the 15th century Merchant's House on Newcastle Quayside, 30 acres of former industrial land in South Shields, three acres in Jarrow town centre and advising on the development of a farm steading for housing and commercial use.

What are the biggest challenges in the market at the moment?

The property market, through the impact of the economy and government intervention, is being disrupted greatly and going through a period of turbulence and change, which means investors are currently nervous and confidence is low. The region has to do as much as it can to help stimulate growth. We must come together for

the benefit of us all and the enlarged combined authority together with an elected Mayor can be the catalyst we need to move forward.

The drive to sustainability in buildings will be a challenge in finding ways to create viability. This cost/value approach will require guidance and delivery of changes.

What do you think are the opportunities going forward?

The region experiences lower peaks and troughs in the property market and it always bounces back. There is great talent and an entrepreneurial spirit in the North East and I am confident that those projects that are currently locked or on hold will be released and will flourish. We have vast potential when it comes to the renewables sector and if we can control costs and not sacrifice quality, we have a real chance to create a thriving regional economy.

Kevan Carrick is a Chartered Surveyor, accredited mediator, and co-founder of JK Property Consultants LLP
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Head of Residential Agency announced as former Home Group National Residential Property Valuer, William Thornton

youngsRPS has appointed William Thornton, The Home Group former National Residential Property Valuer to head up their residential property division.

The recent shakeup of youngsRPS' residential team including the appointment of Valuer Cheryl Scott, formerly of Rook Matthews Sayer and Louise Murray previously JW Wood Estate Agents to their Hexham town centre office, has been a strategy designed to uphold a team of local experts with traditional values of honesty and integrity to achieve the best outcome for clients whether selling, buying, or renting a property.

Graeme Bruce, youngsRPS' Managing Director, says of William's appointment; "William joins our professional team of trusted estate and letting agents working across North Yorkshire and the North East. Based in our Hexham office he will work across all regions, and in collaboration with the Residential, Commercial, Rural and Development teams and we have no doubt that his fresh approach can only aid us in our aim to set industry standards and fix further growth."

Meet William Thornton

Without further ado let's meet the man in question, William Thornton, who shares his thoughts on the current North of England property market and his plans for working with the team to further strengthen market presence.

How long have you specialised in residential property? Tell us a little about your Estate Agency experience.

Having worked in residential property sales and lettings across the North East, North Yorkshire and Cumbria for over 10 years, with success marketing a broad range of properties from farms and estates to family homes and apartments when previously based out of Corbridge and Carlisle for Smiths Gore and then Darlington when at Savills. Before taking up my previous role as a national property valuer for Home Group where I specialised in the valuation and marketing of new homes and affordable housing.

My experiences to date have guided me to a well rounded understanding that homes are so hugely important to families and individuals, as a stable home at the centre of your life gives you the confidence and platform to excel.

What will your role as Head of Residential Property at youngsRPS look like and what areas does the team as a whole cover?

I am very fortunate to be joining an experienced and dedicated team at youngsRPS who offer market leading property advice in both sales and lettings. I would like the excellent service we offer our clients to continue whilst looking to grow our strong regional presences in Hexham and Northallerton. I look forward to working closely with both teams to drive the agency business forward whilst making sure our high standards remain intact.

What's happening with the region's residential property market right now?

The regional markets remain active which is encouraging as we continue to face strong external pressures that are causing turbulence in the national property markets. Buyer confidence and affordability concerns lead many conversations as the ongoing financial changes in mortgage markets continue to impact all homeowners, buyers, and landlords. Activity as mentioned is still strong in the northern markets with again the favoured and most popular locations the ones that offer buyers their desired setting whilst also being near to commuter transport links as more and more people return to office-based working.

What non-negotiables do buyers seem to be looking for?

The most active buyers currently are family purchasers, many still looking to improve on their family living spaces and outdoor areas with the post lockdown desire for better living still the preference of many families in the market.

And finally, in an ideal world, how would you like to see the market progress?

The northern market as stated is in better health than most with buyers and sellers still seeing competitive interest driving the market forward. I would like to see the property market released from the external shackles currently holding it back, with better financial products supporting and aiding buyers in their pursuit of their dream homes.

youngsRPS residential team are always happy to discuss your property needs and offer free property valuations to ensure you have a clear picture of how the market looks for you.

Call us on 01434 608 980 or email hexham@youngsrps.com



Louise Murray, Sales Negotiator and Cheryl Scott, Valuer/Sales Negotiator – Hexham branch.



William Thornton, Head of Residential Agency

Vital community hub visit from Police and Crime Commissioner



L-R: Kim McGuinness (Northumbria Police and Crime Commissioner), John Johnston (Bernicia Chief Executive), and Gill Smith (Northern Learning Trust Chief Executive).

A Northumberland community hub opening the door to opportunities and employment for local people welcomed Northumbria Police and Crime Commissioner Kim McGuinness to find out more about its vital work.

Since it opened 12 years ago, the Newbiggin Learning Hive has helped scores of people in the seaside town into employment and gain educational qualifications, as well as supporting them with confidence and aspiration building.

The Newbiggin Learning Hive is one of three estate-based facilities operated by North East housing association Bernicia, bringing communities together by promoting social and financial inclusion.

Kim met with Bernicia Chief Executive John Johnston and Gill Smith, Chief Executive of the Northern Learning Trust charity which has specialist support staff based in the Newbiggin Learning Hive.

The centre offers a range of initiatives, including life skills and educational support, training to help people prepare for job interviews, as well as free internet access to assist with job searches.

It also plays an important role in the lives of local people looking for everyday advice and

support with finances during the cost of living crisis.

Newbiggin Learning Hive volunteer Stephen Hooper tends to the centre's flower and fruit garden, which he says offers sensory therapy to people visiting the hive.

"There's nowhere like this in Newbiggin where people can help you get your CV up to date – people come in here panicking about bills and Universal Credit and the team has done so much to take that strain away from them," said Stephen.

"This place is so valued. It's the perfect place to come if you need help to search for a job or get help filling in forms – the staff here have done so much for me."

Kim said: "This place really gets it – they understand local people and their needs.

"Whatever challenges life is throwing at them, whatever circumstances they are in, it's a place welcoming them with the learning and support opportunities needed to improve their lives.

"Whether it's help with low self-esteem or to get a job to improve family finances, the people here are ready to come up with a plan offering a helping hand and bringing solutions to their problems.

"This is a great example of the type of hub every community needs – working to build up people's optimism for the future. I am very happy for the people of Newbiggin who have benefitted over the last 12 years and long may this vital work continue."

John said: "It was fantastic to meet with Kim at the Newbiggin Learning Hive, to explain the work we are doing in communities to promote financial and social inclusion.

"We discussed the range of initiatives she is developing as Police and Crime Commissioner to support local communities like Newbiggin, helping bring people together and increase their aspirations."

Bernicia is investing an additional £2m over the next three years as part of a range of initiatives that will deliver £15m worth of added social value across the region. This includes establishing an in-house employability team – experts who are building a talent pipeline, working with regional employers, schools and colleges to fill job vacancies and ensure local communities can access them.

www.bernicia.com



Neil Turner

Changing mindsets

By Neil Turner, director, Howarth Litchfield

I have written a lot recently on green issues and the reduction of carbon use in our buildings. We all struggle to understand the jargon of carbon zero, net zero etc, but how do we go about implementing changes in our individual lives or our business that will make a real difference?

Most people now recognise that we all need to help the environment and reduce energy use but how we do that without impacting on business competitiveness, or making life less enjoyable or simply not doing daily 'stuff'?

We live in unprecedented times in the North East with high energy costs supporting a cost-of-living crisis and basic foods at all-time highs; yet consumer spending remains high with house prices still growing in this region, so how do we get people to consider making changes to how they lead their overall lives?

As an architect I am aware of the dichotomy of my role in society. I encourage people to design and build wonderful new houses, factories, surgeries, and schools. All of them use raw materials, energy and carbon.

However, most architects and the wider construction industry is working very hard to think about all the decisions we make on design and construction. There are no easy decisions. If it's a refurbishment of an old building then we need to look at how to improve, re-use and refresh the structure. Far better to use an old building and make better use of it than simply knock it down. Of course, we still need to build new, for example, building a surgery to cope with changing demands for patients or a factory to build new green technologies.

This region and the wider country are highly innovative. We have some of the best universities (in the world) with research units looking at ways to generate, create and save energy.

In the North East, our industries are ideally placed for the production of batteries, wind turbines and for recycling. Nissan's success over the last 36 years has shown that cutting edge products can be made in the region and their investment in new technologies helps support a great many other companies. We can be both green and successful.

At HL we look to create a work environment

that leads by example. We generate a large proportion of our own energy use at our studios in Durham. We constantly review the latest information, technologies and build methods for our project in our environmental group. This information is then transferred to everyone in the practice. So, when we assist clients in their building projects and they want to hear about reducing waste, using less energy and improving performance, we can share some of our own experiences and knowledge.

So, to be competitive, attractive to employ and to win new commissions, all companies need to have a green edge - not tokenism or fake interest but a deep-rooted belief in sustainability.

Changing mindsets doesn't happen overnight but looking closely at how we run our business, schools, factories or consultancies; might just show us that we can be more efficient, better run and use less carbon. That can only be a good thing for the region and the environment.

Neil Turner, director, Howarth Litchfield can be contacted on 0191 3849470 or email n.turner@hlpuk.com www.howarthlitchfield.com



Office image credit: Sky Images

Architects designing AirView Park's vision become first new owners of phase two



Mike Clark (centre) of Tynexe Commercial Ltd and Dysart Developments, developers of AirView Park, with Laura Halewood (left) and David Davies (right) of Sadler Brown Group.

One of the North's leading architectural design consultancies has become the centre of its very own visionary masterplan after relocating its headquarters to AirView Park, a new 175,000 sq ft commercial development currently in phased construction.

Newcastle-HQ'd, Sadler Brown Group, was commissioned in 2018 by developers, Tynexe Commercial Ltd, to design, plan and deliver the long-term vision for AirView Park next to Newcastle International Airport.

This unique, office-led development is considered to be an important strategic site to generate economic growth, attract inward investment, encourage stronger trade and export opportunities, and create new jobs in the North East. It includes multiple phases of commercial buildings providing high quality office space to local SMEs, as well as larger national and global organisations looking for a northern regional presence or a UK head office with bespoke build opportunities.

With the next stage of Sadler Brown's strategic growth plan now being implemented, the company has become the first occupant within AirView Park's recently completed phase two, purchasing modern space to better position itself for continued expansion.

Such growth is being supported by major new regional and national projects in the pipeline,

with the new HQ base being used to attract the next generation of young architects, retaining their skills within the region, and boosting the local economy.

David Davies, Director of Sadler Brown Group, explained, "This is the start of an exciting new chapter for Sadler Brown, and enables us to push forward and make the step change to accommodate our needs and facilitate growth.

"The team is delivering significant, private and public sector masterplanning, feasibility and design projects up and down the country in sectors including transport and infrastructure, veterinary healthcare, education, leisure and hospitality, and more, as well as our core of signature residential dwelling designs for many private landowners throughout the UK. So, this was the right time and a great opportunity to acquire a fit-for-purpose space that was designed by ourselves, for ourselves.

"Approximately 20 of our team will work at AirView Park but with the cycle, bus, Metro, airport and direct A1 commuter links literally on our doorstep, we can easily link up with our other UK offices and those in Europe too. This is a huge plus point in terms of accessibility and offering shorter transport times, especially for visiting clients, as well as providing our team with greater connectivity and flexibility.

"Our offices have been deliberately designed to be mindful of and provide us with what we need now and in the future, in a post-pandemic landscape. This is evident throughout the other phase two buildings too, as all offer fluid, open plan work areas, multi-functional spaces, sustainability features and innovative yet economical energy systems.

"Outdoor space to support wellbeing is also a key priority these days and we now have this in abundance. We are only a quarter of the way

through delivering the overall AirView Park vision, so for an architectural practice to become part of its own design project is something really quite special. Being at the heart of a very successful development is also a great opportunity too and we are looking forward to meeting our new neighbours."

One of Sadler Brown's Lead Architects helping to deliver the AirView Park development is Laura Halewood, who since graduating from Strathclyde University and returning to the North East, has become one of the next generation of young design professionals putting Newcastle and the wider region on the map.

Having originally joined the company as a summer placement, Laura worked on the original masterplanning stages of AirView Park. Fast forward six years, and she is now a fully qualified Architect, has helped deliver phases one and two, and is now leading the designs for future phases at the Woollington development.

Mike Clark of Tynexe Commercial Ltd, developers of AirView Park, added, "It's great to see Sadler Brown Group now moving onto site, especially given the integral role they have played from the start in developing our plans and realising our vision. They are the first of many new tenants choosing AirView Park now that office space in phase two is available for occupancy, and given the enquiries coming through, we expect more to follow shortly."

Commercial property agent for AirView Park is Naylor's Gavin Black. For more details regarding office units available (phase two), please call Chris Pearson on 0191 466 1349, or to discuss bespoke build potential and future phases, please contact Tynexe Commercial Ltd's Development Director, Mike Clark, via LinkedIn.



Jan Dale

Urban BASE celebrates a decade of work with igloo

Leading North East estate agency Urban BASE is celebrating a decade of working with the UK's leading regeneration developer, igloo.

The Durham and Newcastle based agent has helped market and sell some of the most exciting place-making schemes in the region, particularly within Newcastle.

Jan Dale, director and founder of Urban BASE, explained: "Our incredible journey with the wonderful team at igloo started a decade ago in 2013, at a meeting with chief executive Peter Connolly and David Roberts. Their passion for urban regeneration was there to see from the outset.

"Since that time, we have continued to be their North East agent across some of the most exciting residential projects that have regenerated key parts of Newcastle."

These include the Malings development in Ouseburn (76 homes) and Steenbergs in Ouseburn (28 homes).

With major award-winning regeneration projects across the country, igloo's reputation as one of the UK's leading sustainable developers continues to strengthen. The company continues to grow and recently made a number of senior appointments in the North East to help steer its continued growth.

The business has appointed Joe Broadley as

North East development director to oversee existing projects such as Stephenson Quarter, and the Pioneer in Newcastle, while also looking for other opportunities. He will be working alongside Insiyah Khushnood, who has been appointed as senior development manager and will be leading many future phases at the Ouseburn.

Jan Dale added: "We're delighted to continue to work with igloo on projects across the city from the iconic riverside scheme at Malmo Quay (58 homes) to Stephenson Quarter, as well as Helix in the west of Newcastle.

"igloo is the leading regeneration developer of sustainable, mixed-use neighbourhoods for communities. We have experienced this together across the North East, witnessing them provide the most amazing homes that have formed completely new, lively communities.

"It's a genuine privilege for us to work with igloo on such highly considered developments. They're a developer that invest in creating new communities, places that people love and thrive within. Their approach and commitment to sustainability is also good for the environment and the world we live in."

Jan recently visited Leeds with the igloo team to see at first hand the award-winning Ironworks project where the developer has been praised for creating striking sustainable schemes alongside distinctive office space.

Urban BASE is also undertaking supporting work with Siglion at Vaux in Sunderland where the city is being transformed to provide new housing for the future of the council's strong development plans.

Elsewhere, Urban BASE was recently appointed by Banks Group to help launch its new dedicated regional housebuilding company. Banks Homes is set to start work later this year on nine luxury homes in the centre of the prestigious Mount Oswald development after securing planning permission from Durham County Council.

This appointment for Urban BASE follows the agent's success with establishing Chapter Homes for Durham County Council along with Centaurea Homes for South Tyneside Council. Urban BASE is also supporting award nominated Forric Homes building quality bespoke homes in beautiful village locations. Jan and her team continue to support award-winning County Durham housebuilder Homes by Carlton.

Urban BASE undertakes all aspects of residential sales, rentals, market appraisals (valuations), property management, marketing of land and new-housing developments.

For more information please contact Urban BASE and the team will be delighted to discuss their exceptional new home services to developers nationwide - contact www.urban-base.com

In conversation with...



Matthew McCarrick

Matthew McCarrick

Managing director at McCarrick Construction and board member of Northern Counties Builders Federation.

Can you tell us about McCarrick Construction and your role as a board member of Northern Counties Builders Federation?

As a regional main contractor, McCarrick Construction has been creating spaces to live, work and learn across the North-East for seventy years. We employ our team directly, which is sadly rare in the construction industry these days, but it works extremely well for us. Some of our veteran tradesmen started here when my grandad was still running the company and that level of experience and loyalty is invaluable. We also run an award-winning apprenticeship programme and it's very rewarding to see our experienced team members with 30, 40 and even 50 years of service passing on their skills to our apprentices and trainees as they work together to deliver complex and challenging projects.

As a board member of NCBF I have a platform from which to support other SMEs across the North-East construction industry. We have to constantly push to ensure regional project opportunities are available to our capable local contractors and are not just hoovered up by the big names in construction who have more marketing budget. Having worked for a tier 1 multi-national for the first 14 years of my career, hopefully I bring a bit of insight from the other side of the table.

What are the biggest challenges and opportunities facing the construction sector?

One of the biggest challenges the industry is facing is without doubt the skills shortage. As part of my role with NCBF I sit on the board of CAN (Construction Alliance North East) and was recently invited to a Parliamentary select committee to discuss the skills shortage and how to attract more young people to higher education and apprenticeships. The construction industry still needs to work on its reputation and encourage school and college students to look into the diverse job roles available in the sector – it's sometimes seen as a last resort, which is incredibly frustrating. We also find that the younger generations aren't all as committed as we'd like, which is possibly more of a sociological problem. Given all this,

it's more important than ever to nurture the talent we find and provide a stimulating and rewarding work environment for them.

What can be done to bridge the skills gap in the construction sector?

McCarrick Construction have historically had great success in employing apprentices – most of our senior team starting with us as apprentices and developing their careers according to their ambitions, to wide ranging management roles. We take on apprentices every year but a lot of other companies are either unwilling or unable to make that commitment. Again, this is an imbalance in part down to larger companies not directly employing staff anymore; you're not going to be able to train apprentices if you don't employ any skilled labour directly yourself, and the smaller outfits don't always have the capacity – at that level it can literally come down to whether there's space in the van as 16-year-old school leavers won't have their own transport. So medium-sized companies like ourselves are doing the heavy lifting in terms of training up the next generation and we could do with more support as this is really important work.

www.mccarrickconstruction.co.uk



Maximising your property potential- Styling to sell

For most of us, our homes are our biggest asset. If you are planning to put your home on the market, you not only want to get the best price but also encourage lots of viewers through the door.

Your estate agent will potentially advise you of certain things that may need attention, but we would encourage you to go through your home and look out for anything that needs addressing.

Any repairs that have been on your list, make sure they are completed, any decorating you have been putting off make sure it's done. When you come to have viewings if these things aren't completed your potential buyer could be looking at how much these things will cost them and put in a lower offer.

So, before you get the Estate Agent out, ensure your home is looking all sparkly and at its absolute best.

If you are confident and are going to style the home yourself, here are some tips you might like to follow:

● **Deep clean** - First and foremost, ensure your home is spotless. It might seem obvious but give your home a good clean throughout, paying particular attention to the windows (inside and out) and any mirrors. Bathrooms and kitchens should be spotless. If the task is too big, you could bring in a local cleaning company to carry out a one off deep clean.

● **Declutter** - Hopefully, you are going to be moving soon, so get rid of anything that doesn't have a use or look good. That includes items that you keep moving from one place to another. You could even make some money by putting items up for sale on Marketplace or Gumtree etc or giving to a charity. Minimise the number of personal items and family photos, your potential buyer wants to imagine themselves in the space. This again may seem obvious, but you should put all clothes shoes and washing away. If you have pets, tidy away toys, and beds for the photographs and more importantly the viewers. The same goes for children's toys, tidy as many away as possible.

● **Styling** - Put yourself in the buyer's shoes. Look at each room through the eyes of a potential viewer to ensure that they can see the space. Is the furniture placed in the best position? Once you are happy with the layout, a bit of styling is potentially needed. One of the best ways to restyle a room is to remove all the accessories and then place a few items back in the room (put the other items into storage or use them in another room).

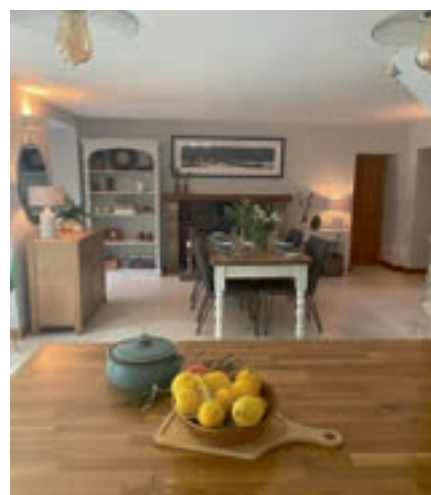
● **Budget** - You don't need to buy lots of new things for your home but if your bedding is looking tired, purchase new neutral bedding and always ensure it's ironed. Candles and diffusers are a nice addition and where possible, place fresh flowers for the photography and viewings.

● **Garden** - Make sure it's as tidy as possible and that your front door and front garden are looking good.

And finally - Plump up any cushions, tidy beds, add some flowers and ring the Estate agent.

If you don't have the time or feel it's still too big a job and you want a bit of help, drop us an email or call we'd be delighted to help. We've already helped a few clients sell their homes.

If you have any questions or would like help with a project, contact us for your complimentary initial consultancy at www.willowandmaine.co.uk/page/contact Instagram @willowandmaine www.willowandmaine.co.uk





Samuel Marriott-Dowding shortlisted for Great British Entrepreneur award

Sunderland-based digital communications agency, **Marriott Communications**, have received shortlist success in the upcoming **Great British Entrepreneur Awards 2023** where CEO, **Samuel Marriott-Dowding**, has been shortlisted for “Creative Entrepreneur of the Year.”

Samuel said “We are absolutely thrilled that once again our creative work is being recognised and commended, and we can’t thank our clients and partners enough for trusting us to lead their creative strategies and achieve their communications goals. It is such an honour to be shortlisted in such a prestigious and renowned entrepreneurial community. Marriott Communications has been extremely fortunate to have worked with so many clients and partners who believe in our vision and our fiercely creative spirit. This has been an exciting year of growth for our agency, and it is fantastic to see our work being recognised nationally.”



Mowden announce MIRA Marketing sponsorship

Darlington Mowden Park RFC are delighted to announce a new sponsorship agreement with North East marketing agency **MIRA Marketing**. The exciting new agreement will see **MIRA** work with the club to provide a wealth of marketing and advertising support throughout the 2023/24 season.

Speaking ahead of the launch of the new partnership, MIRA Marketing CEO Stuart Bramley said: “We are thrilled to embark on this exciting journey of brand expansion. With our recent growth, we have set our sights on forging strategic partnerships, and we are honoured that we can support Mowden Park as our first collaborative marketing venture. As we join forces with Mowden Park, we will leverage our expertise to empower their marketing and contribute to elevating their esteemed brand.”

Formed in 2018, MIRA Marketing are a full service and performance driven Digital Marketing Agency in Newcastle, specialising in ppc, email marketing, social media & CRO. With a range of clients on both a regional and national scale, MIRA have quickly expanded to become one of the fastest-growing marketing agencies in the North East.

The new partnership will also include the launch of “Mowden Monthly” – digital newsletter aimed at giving club supporters an exclusive behind the scenes look at what’s on at the Arena. As part of their sponsorship MIRA will benefit from a range of advertising opportunities at Mowden Park’s 25,000 seat Darlington Arena.

Tom Bulmer, Marketing & Sponsorship Manager at DMP added: “We’re thrilled to have Stuart and the MIRA team on board for the 2023/24 season. They have a proven track record with a range of big brands and I’m sure they’ll make a big contribution over the coming months.”

M.A.D. 10th Anniversary

M.A.D Communications, an independent, women led copywriting, PR, and social media agency, based in the heart of the North East of England, is celebrating its 10th anniversary, a significant milestone that very few businesses reach.

Working with businesses of all shapes and sizes across the UK and around the globe, M.A.D Communications creates bespoke campaigns and creative content for a broad range of clients, across a diverse range of sectors.

Starting life as a lecture room idea in 2013, when founders Marie Donnelly and Amy Armstrong were studying an M.A in Public Relations at Sunderland University, M.A.D has grown year on year and has continued to thrive, despite a global pandemic.

Marie Donnelly, Founder, M.A.D Communications, said: “It’s been an incredible journey and such a huge learning curve – we still can’t get our heads around the fact it’s been 10 years, especially when so many businesses don’t make it to this point. It really does feel like only yesterday that we were sat in our lectures, only dreaming about M.A.D and all the things we wanted to achieve. It was definitely worth it to take that giant leap of faith.”

Amy Armstrong, Founder, M.A.D Communications, added: “So much has happened over the past 10 years. From winning business awards and moving into our first office space to securing prestigious contracts and expanding our reach to global clients, we are incredibly proud of what we have achieved.

From content creation, design, and social media through to digital marketing, press, and email marketing, the passionate, knowledgeable and talented team at M.A.D specialise in providing highly engaging content and campaigns that inspire action and position brands at the forefront of their customers’ minds.



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O springs into step with double figure growth and raft of new hires

Newcastle-based O.agency, whose client portfolio includes Husqvarna, Fentimans, Womble Bond Dickinson and Fenwick, celebrates a year of double digit growth in the last 12 months and a string of new client wins across both its consumer and corporate teams.

To accommodate continued growth the creative communications agency has welcomed several new people to its team so far this year and made multiple promotions, with further hires planned for the rest of 2023.

Ten new roles include a newly appointed Head of People and a Marketing and Business Development Manager, PR Account Managers, Account Execs and graduate interns, who will be joining its in-house Ocademy grad programme in the autumn. The agency will also be recruiting further hires into its social media team over the coming months, with a Head of Social role currently advertised.

O was awarded regional 'Agency of the Year' 2022 at December's North East Marketing Awards, in recognition of its strong, sustainable growth, its future leadership programme and its inclusive and thriving agency culture that has recently been awarded an advanced 'North of Tyne Good Work Pledge'.

Kirsty Ostell, who was appointed Managing Director in 2022, said: "Creating even more opportunities for our team and new roles for the creative sector in the North East is something we're extremely passionate about. Our mission is to help as many young people as possible have a great start to working life and build ambitious careers in the region and so



we're investing even more in our training and development programmes over the coming year led by our new Head of People.

"We've had a busy and exciting start to 2023 and we're ambitious for the continued growth and great client wins we've seen over the last three years. Our client list includes some of the North's most ambitious brands and a growing list of global tech businesses, so we are delighted to keep adding to our community of ambitious client partners."

Hat-trick of award wins for digital & media agency Bonded at Prolific North Champion Awards 2023

Bonded Agency is delighted to have taken home three awards at this year's Prolific North Champions Awards, bagging the coveted Integrated Agency of the Year (Medium), Independent Agency of the Year (Small), as well as B2C Campaign of the Year (Large).

The trio of wins for the Newcastle-based digital and media agency coincide with a move into a dedicated new office space to accommodate its growing team, marking another year of remarkable growth for the company which is only in its second year of operation.

The Prolific North Champions Awards recognise exceptional businesses, teams, and individuals who have played a pivotal role in positioning the North as a hub of creativity and digital excellence. With fierce competition among the region's most well-respected agencies and in-house marketing, digital, and media teams, the awards have become a cornerstone of peer recognition within the industry.

The hat-trick of wins, on top of being a finalist in another five categories makes Bonded the most-awarded of the night.

Steve Underwood, managing director and co-founder of Bonded, said: "It's brilliant for the team to be recognised for the great work that we do. Two of the wins were agency awards and that's a testament to the whole team and what they have achieved over the 21 months we've



been going. Last week we finally moved to our new office, and now we've won three awards! We've worked so hard for this."

"To win another award for the campaign with a longstanding client is the icing on the cake and proof that our core value of focus on forming strong connections with our clients, enabling

us to do our best work, is absolutely the right approach."

"Huge congratulations to all of the winners, once again proving that a great community of experts here in the North continues to deliver world-leading results and expertise."



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Make identifying change drivers a management mission

Wadds Inc. works with ambitious creative agencies and communications teams dedicated to achieving growth with social impact. Its focus is on helping management teams build a future proof, differentiated market position that exploits emerging opportunities, manages risk, embraces innovation and navigates economic volatility.



Sarah Waddington CBE

Here director Sarah Waddington CBE looks at how and why agencies should be embracing future and foresights work, not just for themselves but for clients too.

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, foresight is: “the ability to judge correctly what is going to happen in the future and plan your actions based on this knowledge.”

In a nutshell, it’s the reason why every management team wanting to stay in business should be regularly conducting a strategic analysis of its market position. This means looking internally and then externally at the micro and macro forces that affect how (and in times of crisis whether) the company can continue to service client needs.

If change is the only constant, staying ahead of the drivers of change needs to be a management mission. It’s certainly a core part of what we bring to the non-executive director role at Wadds Inc., where we advise on company direction, helping to deliver external data, insight and objectivity to the Boardroom table.

What could the future look like?

There are a number of tools to help strategic analysis. The key to remember is that none of them offer a crystal ball but, by asking the right

questions, help you understand market shifts that you may need to respond to.

Aside from risk assessment being a clear part of the UK Corporate Governance Code, the Institute of Directors (IoD) says: “Success can be limited or enhanced by unexpected events both internally and externally.”

So, by knowing what to respond to and when, you have a chance to maximise performance, exploit opportunities and minimise risks as they arise. You also have a chance to evolve even before or as customers do by predicting latent demand.

Strategic issue tracking

The ‘Three Horizons’ model that can be found at Gov.uk is a useful resource and looks ahead at how strategic issues change over time.

Horizon One is the here and now and highlights issues that are usually central to current policy. Horizons Two and Three is where management teams should be focusing, looking at issues and faint market signals that are increasing in relevance over time. The aim is to adapt organisational policy and strategy in advance of future need by identifying what is driving the change and reacting appropriately.

These Three Horizons overlap nicely with McKinsey’s Horizons, which take a company from extending its core business model, to

building a market by developing new ones and then creating new, more visionary options.

Futures and foresight work is a core skill for communicators

Creative agencies, like all organisations, have a multitude of choices when it comes to growth prospects, but this area is particular pertinent as future and foresights work sits neatly within their services and capabilities. The work isn’t just valuable for the agency itself, but can help clients build resilience and growth too through the provision of this information.

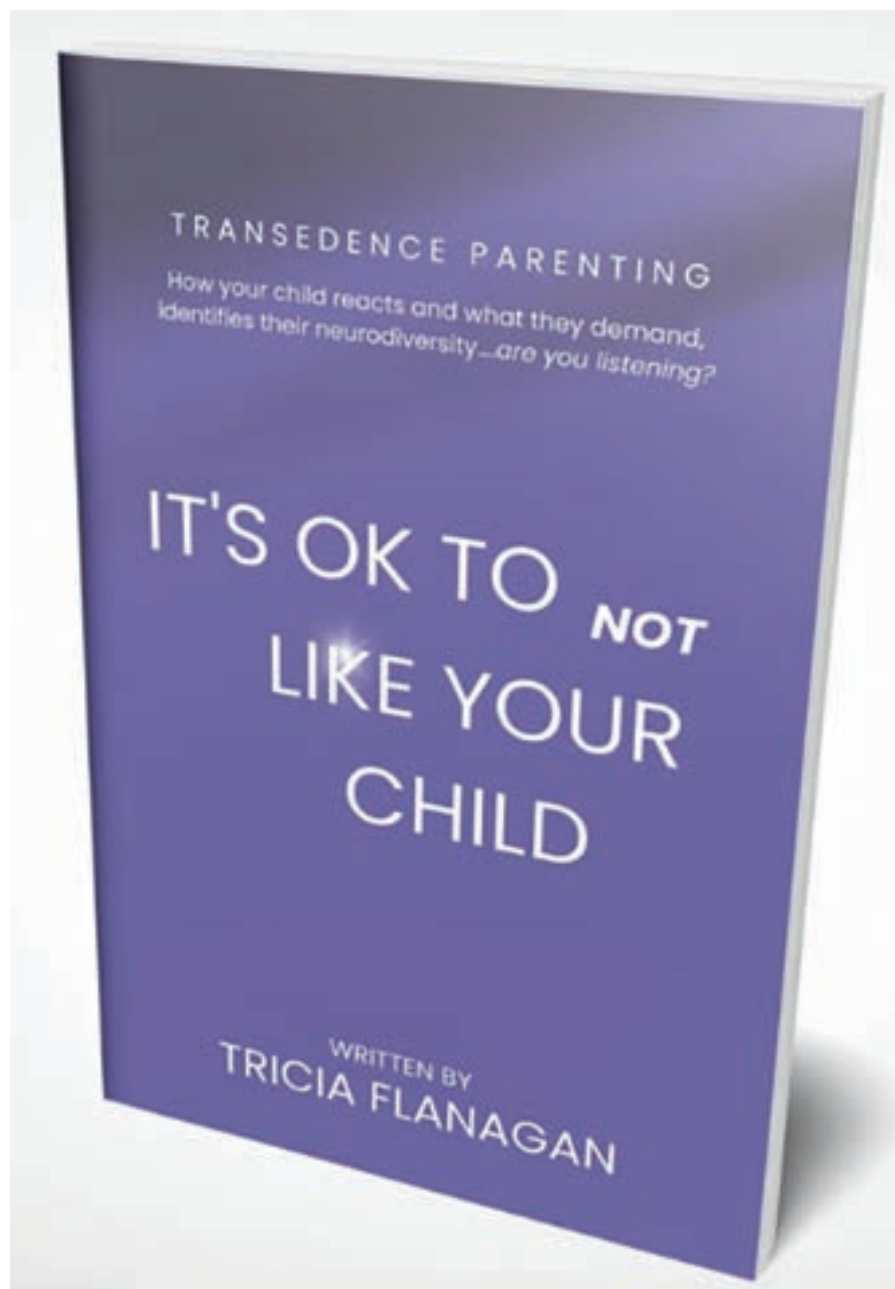
‘The Role of Public Relations in Strategic Planning and Crisis Preparedness’, a joint 2023 report from the IoD and Chartered Institute of Public Relations, states that when employed as management function, public relations can: “not just help businesses navigate economic and political turbulence, but also thrive and grow.”

If you’d like to book Sarah to run a futures and foresight workshop for your agency or clients, or are looking for an experienced non-executive director to bring diverse thinking to your Board, please contact Sarah Waddington via 07702 162 704 or sarah.waddington@wadds.co.uk

For more information, visit www.wadds.co.uk

Transcendence parenting, it's OK to not like your child

A Durham woman, Tricia Flanagan, has released a book with a quirky title, which is ideal for parents, carers, foster parents, teachers and anyone in a responsible position when it comes to giving children the best start in life.



Louise Davidson, working mum to three children under ten, gives Northern Insight readers the low down on the new behavioural modification programme, which does not require a specific parenting style/model and will enable others to benefit from the author's experience and insight.

"On picking up the book which has a nice, bright cover, the pre-ambles promises that 'the journey through Transcendence Parenting, It's Okay To Not Like Your Child book will be enlightening as you learn who your child really is, what they need from you and how to understand their and your own complex behaviours. Complete with anecdotes, suggestions and advice, the reader can study each human need, take reflection exercises/activities and complete tasks that help them know what their children need and what we can do to support those needs.'

"With three children myself I am painfully aware that each of my offspring have different needs and things that make them tick, so I open the book keen to read something that will change my life as a parent.

"As I am also reviewing the book, I was

determined to keep a balanced view, looking for positives and things that could be better too.

"Straight off, the author is painfully honest. True stories from her own experience litter the pages, and it is very clear this woman has lived and breathed this process in her own home. I felt like if we had a coffee together, we would have lots to chat about.

"Her advice and focus on the needs of children is easy to read, and to digest, and I often found myself nodding or exclaiming out loud as something on the page resonated with me.

"I have to be honest and say I didn't do the exercises as I am not really that kind of person. I benefit from reading, so I was pleased to see that the exercises did not overtake the book format and there is lots to read, without having to 'do'. If you are like me though, don't let the fact there are exercises to complete put you off buying this book, as the content is well worth the investment. We are all different though, and when I mentioned the exercises to another mum in my friendship circle, she seemed very keen to do them!

"I have taken some advice from the book and applied it to how I parent my three, but the biggest benefit to me, is to know I am not alone.

"All parents, even the best, have challenges. Tricia very clearly outlines it is how to deal with them and is very clear that it is not about stopping a child's natural personality coming through – hence it's ok to not like them, as long as you love them and do your best to provide to their real emotional needs.

"I definitely recommend it for people with younger children and can see it working well in solving the pain of some teenage angst years. I can also see teachers and grandparents getting lots of benefit, as well as professional carers. For the price, it is great value.

'My only advice is to keep it out of sight of children's eyes, as I had to answer a multitude of questions about the title. It opened up a great conversation with my eldest!"

Transcendence Parenting, It's OK To Not Like Your Child is available to buy on Amazon as an ebook or paperback.

Marketing and Media Matters

In the latest of these popular series of features we talk to...

Jennifer Jordan

Jennifer Jordan PR

Did you always envisage a career in the Media Industry?

I'd always been interested in the media industry, even as a consumer when as a teenager I would spend all of my pocket money on magazines to pore over interviews with my favourite musicians and actors. My initial career choice was journalism; I loved writing and pop culture, and it felt like a perfect fit. After deferring and then cancelling my place at Liverpool John Moores University to study for a degree in journalism in 2009 however, I ended up taking a slight detour to discover what I wanted to do.

In 2010, I enrolled on the Events Management with Arts and Entertainment degree course at Sheffield Hallam, where modules of the course dedicated to marketing and events promotion really captured my interest and ignited my passion for marketing.

What has been your career path so far?

Like many people in this industry, I started out with unpaid internships whilst at university, where I definitely got to experience the benefits and hardships of intern life! I was lucky enough to get internships at the Sheffield Documentary Festival, St Luke's Hospice events department and at a music venue called SOYO. After university, I took a creative internship with Stockton Borough Council assisting the arts and culture department on the Stockton International Riverside Festival (SIRF), whilst also helping with the social media marketing for the first Mima Live programme, before finally taking a full-time job as an SEO Content Writer at Visualsoft.

I knew that I wanted to work directly with the media and promote my clients on a larger scale, so I took advantage of this by applying for a Digital PR Consultant role at Newcastle-based agency Evolved. After almost a year and a half there, I took the plunge and went freelance as a digital PR and marketing manager for hire.

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

Since working for myself I have realised that many businesses will get in touch about working on a project with me, only for me to spend time on a proposal and get tumbleweeds back. This 'corporate ghosting' is a new challenge for me and has meant that I now ask prospective clients to check out my website and services first to ensure that I can offer what they're looking for.

Who do you respect most in your industry?

The digital PR industry is ultra tough, so I respect my previous managers and mentors immensely for sharing their experience and helping me grow. I'm also a part of a fantastic freelancing community, and the members who are so keen to offer advice or practical help have been invaluable to my journey so far.

Which fictional media character can you most relate to?

I'd say Anne Hathaway's character in the film *'The Devil Wears Prada'*. Like Andy, I have definitely felt out of my depth at times professionally, but have gained confidence in myself and abilities, and now see my worth at work.

What is your greatest strength?

I would say that I am incredibly perceptive, personable and I have an ability to communicate well with people of all levels - which is essential in digital PR when you can be speaking with agencies, clients and journalists everyday.

What is your biggest weakness?

I can sometimes jump in feet first and get started on a project without taking the time to slow down and assess the overall strategy before beginning work. This can result in me starting up different tasks all at once and then having to take a step back to see what order of priority I need to place them in.

What has been your proudest achievement?

Clients taking a leap of faith in me at the beginning of my freelance journey has to be up there. One particular client followed me from an old agency I worked at as they were so pleased with my individual work, which is the highest praise you can get! Also, landing client coverage not once but twice in The Times.

What are your future career aspirations?

My goal is to work in the arts or charity sectors (or a crossover of both) either as a specialised digital marketing freelancer or in-house as part of a marketing team. I'm currently working on the Last Train Home festival for Tracks Darlington which is an excellent opportunity for me to move back into the area of marketing I'm most interested in.

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

Digital PR and link building itself is becoming more challenging and our industry will need to adapt quite soon. I think the focus will have to move beyond the objective of simply gaining links for clients, and move towards a more holistic marketing strategy.

How do you like to unwind?

As a classic introvert, I like to read books and watch films to relax, with a daily walk around my local park or beach to keep me sane whilst working from home.

jenniferjordanpr.com



“

*...I respect
my previous
managers
and mentors
immensely for
sharing their
experience and
helping me
grow...*

Jennifer Jordan

In conversation with...

Kathryn Wharton

KLW Marketing Consultancy

“Kathryn, thanks for joining me for this month’s interview.”

I am sure most marketers know that you have pivoted successfully from being an archaeology graduate and working at the Great North Museum into becoming a seasoned marketing professional in the technology sector.



Veronica Swindale

What was it that attracted you to marketing for your career?

I love that marketing is all about people. Without understanding a business's stakeholders, existing customers and target markets then any marketing you implement won't be a success. As a thinker and a doer, marketing allows me to look across the business landscape on a strategic level and then implement the right tactics to achieve their growth objectives.

What steps did you take to help you on your journey?

Through a skills assessment I discovered I had really strong human skills to support a career in marketing but lacked some of the technical knowledge. I completed my CIM I Certificate in Professional Marketing with nesma to give me more understanding of the theory. Alongside that, I consumed books, podcasts, attended webinars and sought guidance from marketing professionals to help me build my career.

What attracted you into the marketing tech space?

I made the bold move during the pandemic to join a tech company because I wanted to be at the forefront of cutting-edge technology. I was intrigued to learn more about how this was being utilised across businesses and the complexity of marketing it to clients.

One of the initiatives you set up is the Women in Tech North East community. Why did you decide to do this?

When I joined the tech sector, I looked for a network of like-minded people for support and couldn't find one so I joined forces with some other women to create it. We run quarterly events and have an online community of 900+ individuals. On LinkedIn, search Women in Tech North East to join the community.

How do you think we should be preparing our marketing teams?

Marketing teams need to spend time with the sales team. This will provide invaluable knowledge about the commercial side of the business, give direct access to prospects, understand the nuances of the buyer's journey, which will ultimately lead to a smarter marketing strategy and greater return on investment.





To what extent have employers/employees changed recently?

I think the biggest expectation in the workplace now is flexibility. Employees want to be able to do their work at a time and location that works for them. Employers set clear guidelines on what will and will not work for the business and communicate this effectively. I am really impressed with the approach Atom Bank used to implement their changing working practices and think other businesses can learn a lot from them.

You are fantastic at managing your own brand through physical events and social media networking. How would you recommend starting to do this?

My advice would be to start small. Set yourself a realistic goal of posting once a week on LinkedIn or attending one event a month. When I am sharing content I always try to ensure it is either educational, helping someone else or is entertaining (but professional).

What are your immediate next steps?

I'm about to embark on another bold move and launch my own marketing consultancy. I see a huge opportunity to use my skills and experience to support SMEs with their marketing strategy to accelerate their growth plans. If you'd like to know more about this then drop me an email kathryn@klwmarketing.co.uk.

Thanks Kathryn, we wish you every success for this new phase of your marketing career!



Want to learn more about Consultancy, and responding to business issues by facilitating changes within the organisation, then have a look at the CIM Marketing Leadership Programme: nesma.co.uk/qualification/cim-marketing-leadership-programme.

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...Summer is here, time for ice lollies and cold drinks...

Highlights PR's Keith Newman asked some of his RADAR members to tell us what the coolest thing is that has happened to their business.



My fundamental coolest moment of Leading Link is the 15-year young leaders celebration held at Alnwick Garden Pavilion last year.

Young people, staff, trustees, and partners joined us to celebrate the most key successful ingredient we have here at Leading Link, the

Young Leaders Programme.

It was fantastic to catch up with so many young people (some not so young anymore) and find out what they are all doing now. It was also extremely humbling to hear how being part of Leading Link had made a positive impact as

their aspirations and confidence developed.

My mum always asked me when I was going to get a proper job, but this has to be the most rewarding and diverse role ever. How cool is that!?

Lyn Horton CEO, www.leadinglink.co.uk



The coolest thing for our business so far this year has been working with FIRST on the Startup Awards North East. Our team worked together to produce a live stream for their LinkedIn so attendees who couldn't make it could still watch along from home or their offices.

*Daniel Wilkinson
www.thedwmedia.co.uk*

I am absolutely thrilled to share that my design has been selected for the St Oswald's Wild in Art Sculpture Trail! As a passionate artist, I feel incredibly honoured to have the opportunity to showcase my work to a wider audience and make a positive impact on the community. My design is a celebration of summer colours, and I cannot wait to bring it to life on a beautiful and fun Shaun the Sheep sculpture. Getting the notification that my application was successful was one of the coolest days in my business. I am beyond excited to begin working on this project and to see my design come to life in a public space. This is a dream come true.

I am confident that this experience will help me grow as an artist and expand my creative horizons. I cannot wait to see the final result and share it with the world!

*Corinne Lewis-Ward
www.powderbutterfly.com*





Summer 2023 is building up to be a very special one for us! We have recently been awarded funding from Comic Relief, The National Lottery Community Fund and The Ballinger Trust to expand our work and engage more people than ever on our adventure programmes! Participants will be climbing high and cooling off on our new giant paddle board!! To get involved just email paul@off-the-grid-cic.uk

Paul Kirkpatrick
www.offthegrid-adventures.co.uk

I think that the coolest thing that has happened to me this year is that I was nominated and accepted as a United Nations Women UK Delegate.

As someone who loves connecting people and helping them to achieve their goals, this opportunity to help champion for gender equality and working to develop and uphold standards, is just amazing. Most of the connections I make are online but who knows, one day I may even get to visit New York City.

Karen Goldfinch, Your Business Pilot
www.yourbusinesspilot.co.uk



I've had lots of cool things happening in my business. From the very first French class that I set up and started teaching, to the nomination for the Spirit of North Tyneside Award during the Covid pandemic. I've had great success helping my GCSE and A level students achieve 9s and A and A* in their exams. But for me the coolest and the most impactful are the small gains. The people who come out on a wintry evening in the dark to learn French with me. The people who have participated in creating a vibrant community of French learners, that I am privileged to be part of. I've been so honoured to work with some of them for over 10 years. I love watching them succeed in learning French. I learn so much from them that I have to say that is the best thing about running my business.

Barbara Allen, barbara@linguaforme.co.uk
www.linguaforme.co.uk

Last month our RADAR members appeared on BBC TV, BBC Radio, Local TV and many magazines and newspapers. To find out more about the benefits of becoming a RADAR member, contact keith@highlightspr.co.uk or call Keith on 07814 397951.

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Gareth

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Jessica Williams with Alfie

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Jessica Williams

Just Williams and Just Williams Sales Academy

How did you get in to sales & marketing?

I've always been in it – aren't we all? From a child you learn how to develop relationships, communicate, negotiate and position yourself to achieve. That said, I had an eleven-year stint in the world of Banking, a two-year stint at the Entrepreneurs' Forum learning from the best before I set up Just Williams. One of the biggest challenges business faces is how to grow – the traditional method in sales and marketing is to hire someone full time which can be fraught with risks for both parties. But as we've evidenced, there is an alternative. Just Williams started life as a Sales Consultancy and has since grown into a sales and marketing agency. I love engaging with people, and their businesses and helping them prosper and thrive.

Who or what inspires you?

Just Williams is ultimately my brother's (Gareth) legacy, as is the Just Williams Sales Academy launched a few years later. The business enables me to keep his memory alive and for that, I'm forever grateful. I love reading and audiobooks, Brene Brown is one of my go-to's along with podcasts from Running pod and some weird and wacky ones too. It's so important to surround yourself with people to look up to, learn from and ask questions of – it's how we all grow.

What advice would you give to anyone interested in getting into sales & marketing?

Sales is not a career of choice for many and whilst I didn't really get into it intentionally, I love the variety. For me, all roles involve traits and skills from sales and marketing, from dealing with internal and external stakeholders, new business development, account management or customer service in all forms. The skill set required for these gives a sound foundation for future careers or indeed for a long-term career. Sales and Marketing have grown closer together than ever before and are fundamental to whatever your business may be, product or service. It gives you a seat at the table so as I always say – you can have the best product or service in the world but if you can't market it and no one knows about it – you're on borrowed time.

What is your favourite part of your job?

My team and the clients, without a doubt. I love the journey we have been on and now looking back, even the rocky bits (which have been plenty) and it's what makes us who we are today. I love what we stand for and our ethos as a pending B-Corp, we are passionate about using Business as a Force for Good. The growth we achieve for our clients and our renewal rates say it all. I'm also pretty pleased with the recent Just Williams Sales Academy Conference – it makes me enormously proud to know we've achieved the delivery of such a conference after only a few years and been able to inspire so many (check out the feedback if you don't believe me!) – I have to let you into a little secret too, I love presenting and being on stage!



What has been your most memorable moment to date relating to your business journey?

You'd get a different answer here if I had a glass of red wine in my hand, but one thing I think we are all bad at is celebrating the small wins. Running a business is hard, it's relentless and it's all-consuming. It's also enormously rewarding, an emotional rollercoaster and I'm proud of it all good and bad. Winning awards, hiring the best people, diversifying, being asked to share my journey, mentoring others – the list is endless; and that's without wine!

What are your favourite magazines?

Business or pleasure? OK so business is *Northern Insight* without a doubt – love their monthly publication and all Mike achieves, and not just because we are a regular contributor! *High Life North* is a good one to look out for too. I love to cook in my spare time (so pretty infrequently) so I treat myself to a food magazine and a wellness magazine called *Simple Things* on a monthly basis. Few things beat a Sunday morning with coffee in the garden flicking through a magazine.

What's the future hold for Jessica Williams?

I love what I do and have some exciting things in store for both companies over the coming years. I'm also in the midst of creating a new solution for start-ups looking to start their sustainable journey, so watch this space. I'm climbing Mount Blanc next month and have two international marathons later this year and already have some big challenges planned too. I like variety, I love to challenge myself mentally and physically and I love exploring so I imagine all three will feature in my future along with maybe some more awards, perhaps an acquisition (teasing you, I know) and, definitely some big fundraising.

Jessica@JustWilliamsLtd.co.uk
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@JustWilliamsLtd
@JustWilliamsSa1
justwilliamssales.academy
justwilliamsltd.co.uk

uniquemagazines.co.uk



David Lowes

David Lowes

Greencroft Dog Day Care

David has earned a remarkable reputation for delivering exceptional services with Dogs. Not only does the facility cater to individuals who require dog day care while they work, but it also extends its support to the elderly and those with disabilities.

The center has become an indispensable asset in the local community by assisting individuals in need of dog day care during hospital visits, respite care, and socialisation requirements for their dogs.

Here David tells us about his taste in music, art and culture.

Who is your favourite author and why

Conn Iggulden, he's a British author who writes historical fiction, including the Emperor series and Conqueror series. I've read lots of his books and the passion he shows in his stories is amazing, his books make you feel like you are there is the thick of it, he's a very talented writer.

What would be your three Desert Island Discs?

My Girl (The Temptations), *Club Tropicana* (Wham), *I Won't dance* (Frank Sinatra).

Who is your favourite film star and why?

John Wayne (The Duke) I really loved all the old Westerns with him in them. Who can forget "True Grit" or "Comancheros"? A larger than life character who never made a bad movie.

What are your top three films? Tell me about them.

Star Wars, *Rocky* and *John Wick*.

Star Wars has been in my life since I was small and was years ahead of its time. I always wanted to fly the Millennium Falcon.

Rocky was inspirational to me as I was training and the music really got you going (go Rocco)...

John Wick is one of the most recent films but I just love the way Keanu Reeves has developed the character and there is so much energy going on in the film. It's an amazing movie.

Which poem left a lasting impression on you?

Daffodils by William Wordsworth with those memorable first words "I wandered lonely as a cloud." Beautiful.

What box sets have you enjoyed?

Black List, *American Horror Story*, *Designated Survivor*.

Who is your favourite artist or performer?

Peter Kay. He is such a funny guy and relates

stories which we are all familiar with. Who would've thought you could make a career joking about garlic bread?

What is your favourite venue?

St James' Park (The Cathedral on the Hill). Football is a passion in the North East and where I live, support is split between the two big clubs. I love going to St James' and even more so now when the team are up where they belong.

Which musical instrument do you particularly enjoy?

Guitar, I wish I could play one but I am useless at reading music. Some of the dogs in our care can play better than me. Perhaps we could form a dog band?

From the world of Arts and Culture who would be your ideal dinner party guests?

Andy Warhol, Elaine Page, Michael Angelo, Pavarotti, Lady GaGa. Socrates, and Tony Bennet. That would be quite a party with a diverse range of views and experiences. That's what makes life good and it also reminds me a bit of the different dogs we get to care for on a daily basis. We see all sorts of breeds playing together and it always makes me and our staff smile. Life is good with dogs – perhaps I'll just have a dinner party with them!

Greencroft Dog Day Care is at Unit 11a Greencroft Industrial Park, Annfield Plain, Stanley DH9 7YB. Call 0191 3898353 or Email david.lowes@greencroftdogdaycare.co.uk

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Newcastle College University centre set to invest almost £6m into higher education facilities



Newcastle College University Centre is set to invest almost £6million into its facilities over the next three years, giving students access to cutting edge technology.

As part of leading college group NCG, the University Centre has been awarded a share of £6million of funding from the Office for Students (OfS) to invest into developing its Higher Education (HE) facilities.

The funding will be used to create HE Hubs for construction, engineering, energy and digital technologies, designed to help close the region's skills gaps at higher technical levels in these industries.

Building on the University Centre's commitment to creating the workforce of the future and developing talent for the region, these new facilities will enable it to respond to changing skills needs and new technologies in these sectors, providing enhanced learning experiences and ensuring its graduates are ready for the jobs of today and the future. The first year of development will see the completion of HE Hubs for Digital Technologies. On Newcastle College's Rye Hill campus, the ground floor of the University Centre will be converted to include digital learning facilities, flexible teaching spaces and bespoke digital labs specifically dedicated to cyber security and immersive technology.

Following this, the focus will turn to a significant project to rebuild, refurbish and equip Construction, Engineering and Energy facilities, creating three high-spec CAD/BIM suites. This will establish Newcastle College University Centre as a leader in technical higher education and provide students with facilities that will support them to excel.

South Shields school is basketball champion for third consecutive year

A South Shields school basketball team has won a South Tyneside competition for the third year running.

Pupils at St Bede's Catholic Primary School, which is part of Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust, were crowned South Tyneside Basketball Champions 2023 at the Vertu Motors Arena in Newcastle. This is the third consecutive year the primary school has claimed the title.

The St. Bede's Y5 team won seven games in a row initially to qualify for the finals night in Newcastle, where the four best teams met in South Tyneside.

Team coach and Y3 teacher Brian McVittie said: "We beat an excellent Cleadon side in a tense semi-final. Our team showed its defensive qualities for long periods with Cleadon applying a lot of pressure; but the pupils still had the quality to create and convert the only basket of the game."



The District final was played in front of a huge crowd at half-time in the Eagles game against London Lions. St. Bede's got off to a flying start in the final, as they scored two baskets in the opening minute. The St. Bede's players continued to play superbly and added a third basket to claim the title with an impressive 6-0 win. Captain Alice Queenan, nine, said, "It was amazing playing at the Eagles home ground in Newcastle and a proud moment to lift the cup with my family watching on in the crowd."



School is top of the class for innovation in the UK – and top ten in the world

A County Durham primary school has been shortlisted as one of the 10 most innovative in the world.

Sedgefield Hardwick Primary Academy has been recognised by T4 Education's World's Best School Prizes as one of the top ten most innovative schools globally - the only school in the UK to be shortlisted in this category.

Headteacher Paul Taylor said: "As part of Laidlaw Schools Trust, innovation is at the heart of everything we do. An innovative approach to education nurtures a culture of curiosity, exploration, and problem-solving, equipping children with essential skills for their personal, academic, and professional growth.

"Our school was shortlisted as we have eradicated traditional, passive learning styles and ignited a wildfire of academic and character success among our pupils. Our unique approach progressively builds knowledge and skills in a logical, sequenced manner to create independent learners, and has resulted in consistency, high expectations, and innovative thinking.

"I am immensely proud to lead our fantastic team at Sedgefield Hardwick. Each day, I am reminded of the incredible potential within our pupils and the transformative impact our dedicated staff and supportive community have on their lives."

The World's Best School Prize for innovation was launched by T4 Education to celebrate schools that make a difference. Sedgefield Hardwick, rated by Ofsted as outstanding, was shortlisted in the top ten from thousands of global entries, and could be in line for a prize of \$50,000.



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The magic of music

By Geoffrey Stanford, Headmaster at Newcastle Royal Grammar School

At the Royal Grammar School, Newcastle we have recently celebrated the centenary of the organ which was donated to the school as a war memorial by Sir Arthur Monro Sutherland. It stands proudly in our main hall, an impressive sight with its gold painted pipes and the names of those who have fallen in conflict carved into its wooden panels.

It serves as the focus for our annual remembrance events but it has also played a key role in the various assemblies we have held to mark the jubilee, the death of Queen Elizabeth and the coronation of King Charles.

Learning the organ requires a very particular dexterity as it has three different keyboards played with hands and another played with the feet, even before one takes into account the range of different stops that allow the player to conjure a variety of different sounds from the instrument. One needs to be a reasonably competent pianist before venturing onto the instrument but, over the last four years, we have had three of our musicians reach a standard to apply for organ scholarships at Oxford with another trying in the coming year. As you may imagine, this means that they can be found practising before and after school and sometimes during break and lunchtime too.

Those schools that are fortunate enough to have such an instrument, would most likely have a Christian tradition and the organ would typically be housed in a chapel. While the RGS was

originally founded in the precinct of St Nicholas' Cathedral, these days in Jesmond we are very much a secular school with representatives of all faiths and none. The RGS is also unusual in that the design of the main hall means it serves as a thoroughfare on both ground and first floor of the building. This means that the sight and sound of the organ being played is part of the normal daily lived experience of every pupil coming through the RGS.

At the other end of the school buildings, again in a main thoroughfare just outside the new library, is a new purpose built assembly space called the Agora which serves as a performance stage for regular lunchtime performances of a variety of genres, for example allowing aspiring singer songwriters to share their talent. This shows the warmth of our school community as a growing number of pupils and staff make time in their day to come and listen. Through supporting their contemporaries who stand up to perform our pupils also learn to respect and believe in each other. Such shared experiences

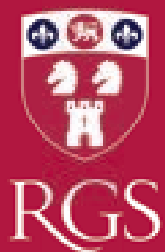
are what make the RGS so special, helping build the sense of belonging that is a core pillar of our ethos.

I often say that academic results should be the consequence of a good education, not the purpose of it. For the vast majority of our pupils, engaging in musical activities, whether as audience or performing in the wide variety of musical ensembles available, has nothing to do with the academic qualifications they might pursue. However, music is so much part of human culture and these regular experiences of live music develop breadth of understanding and appreciation.

As a result, our pupils will be far more rounded individuals. Most importantly, music at the RGS creates an environment to stimulate creativity that students will take with them for the rest of their lives, as well as providing social and mental health benefits for those around them too.

www.rgs.newcastle.sch.uk





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Association of Education Advisers return to York

This month saw Les Walton, Executive Chair of Newcastle based Association of Education Advisers (AoEA), lead their sixth Annual Summit, 'Connecting Educators', an international conference bringing together members and eminent speakers from across the whole education sector.

Featuring keynote speeches from Dame Alison Peacock, CEO Chartered College of Teaching, Lord Jim Knight of Weymouth, former Minister of State for Schools and Steve Munby CBE as well as presentations from 20 AoEA Associates sharing great practice from their own work.

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Find out more at our Open Morning: 7th October 2023

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End of year report

By the time you read this, we will have packed away the accoutrements of school life for this year. What a year it has proven to be for Durham High School, and here are some of our 'High'lights:

September 2022

The official launch of our new school video at Speech Night went down splendidly, as did the new venue. After over fifty years- minus the Covid years- we decided that the Sports Hall was no longer fit for purpose for the most important event in the school calendar. The venue was deemed a great success and- as of July 2023- we are planning the next one in the exact same spot. Note to self for the next event: it was very hot on stage and the unnatural fibres of the academic gowns rendered the wearers being almost stuck to the seats...

October 2022

The dreaded ISI called...That is, the Independent Schools Inspectorate came, a full year after we were due to be inspected. I was so relieved when the call came that I thanked the other person on the line: he probably thought that I had partaken of the photocopier fluid that day...Anyway, after three gruelling days, we received the results: full Compliance- phew- and Excellent in all areas. In the independent sector, there is no grade such as Outstanding, so this was the highest we could achieve. We were so relieved and thrilled, and we wanted to sing it from the rooftops. However, we were under strict instruction in the feedback session that we could not say anything specific to the staff at large. So, I had to virtually hide myself away until the report came out, lest my grins would give us away.

December 2022

The glorious Nine Lessons and Carols were held at the Cathedral. It was magnificent, with the choir sounding so beautiful that there was barely a dry eye in the house by the end of 'O



Simone Niblock

Come All Ye Faithful'. As I walked to the pulpit, to read the Ninth Lesson, there was a millisecond of panic as I almost tripped over my gown, and I realised that it had grown twelve inches longer because I was wearing my husband's. Anyway, crisis was averted, the Principal did not trip, and the students did us all proud. Result.

February 2023

Before February half term, we had our production of School of Rock at the Gala Theatre. It was decided that we should do production with a double cast, with the main leads doing two nights each out of four. I saw all four performances performance, and the audiences roared their approval each night. Many people commented that it was one of the strongest they had seen, and I would concur with this. Unfortunately, I had a sore throat for a week afterwards as I had whooped myself hoarse each night.

May 2023

The dreaded exam season started in May, with little fuss and much resilience on the part of our students. The Upper Sixth did not sit GCSEs, as they were the recipients of TAGs, but they approached the examinations with a degree of resilience that would make Andrea Duckworth, the academic who coined the term 'Grit', as proud as Punch of them.

Overall, a brilliant year thanks to the superb teaching and wonderful students at DHS. Of course, a school doesn't ever really stop, and, as I write, I am sitting with a schedule for the Results Days in August. Roll on 2023-4, but please don't come too quickly as I am looking forward to my holiday...Spain...

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.



WE ARE 'EXCELLENT' IN ALL AREAS

ISI INSPECTION REPORT - OCTOBER 2022

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GIRLS 3-18





Addressing digital skills gaps: why employers can be at the forefront of the challenge

The Essential digital skills framework launched during a global pandemic at a time that acutely exposed people's digital vulnerabilities. David Redden, Product Manager at the educational charity and leader in vocational and technical learning NCFE, discusses why there's still stigma attached to digital shortfalls and how employers can do more for their employees.

While there's always been evidence pointing to a problem, it wasn't until we were isolated and our only means of communication became digital that our weaknesses were truly placed under a spotlight.

Whether it was suddenly working from home or trying to conduct a video call with your nearest and dearest, people's limitations were there for all to see.

Since the pandemic, the move to a more digital world has continued. Where once shops had 'cash only' signs, now you're more likely to see 'contactless only'.

Recruitment for jobs is online, doctor's appointments are online and, while millions have improved their abilities, there's still a massive proportion of the population who lack the essential digital skills needed in everyday life, work, and education.

During that period, I led a project at NCFE to launch its new Essential Digital Skills qualifications and had the pleasure of engaging with organisations such as FutureDotNow - working with them to address the lack of digital

skills in the country.

It was during FutureDotNow Fest, while addressing an audience on the need for employers to ensure their staff have the digital skills to do their day-to-day roles, that I felt a sense of hypocrisy. I became aware that I was telling them to do something that NCFE itself wasn't currently doing.

Chastened by this feeling, I approached our executive board with the idea of allowing all NCFE colleagues the chance to sit an initial assessment in Essential Digital Skills and, based on their results, the opportunity to progress and complete the qualification.

Being an educational charity with a core belief to not leave any learner behind, NCFE threw its weight behind the initiative and the results have been fantastic - seeing over 200 employees take up the challenge.

From a company perspective, it was reassuring that so many came out with a high level of digital skills but, even better, 23% of those that took part expressed an interest in progressing to the qualification.

This meant they're boosting their skills and establishing their knowledge in this area to give them greater competencies to perform their roles, as well as develop new areas of awareness outside of work.

If a company like NCFE that operates a hybrid working policy had almost a quarter of its workforce feeling the need to develop their digital skills, how many people in other organisations would also benefit from this support?

In 2017, the European Commission estimated that more than 1.2 million UK businesses are underperforming due to "insufficient digital awareness and lack of necessary skills". The Department for Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport's report in June 2019 - No Longer Optional: Employer Demand for Digital Skills - found digital skills are becoming near-universal requirements for employment.

Acquiring specific digital skills makes career progression, as well as a pay increase, more likely. In certain fields, job seekers need to develop digital skills related to specific technical tools of their chosen discipline to advance their careers.

However, what's key for employers is providing their employees with a basic level of digital skill and creating the platform for them to progress.

Embedding digital skills from top down is also essential. There's still some shame attached to admitting you're not digitally confident, but it could easily be the chief executive lacking the skills.

Whether you're a large, medium or small employer, now is the time to start looking within your own organisation first, just as NCFE did, to identify the level of digital skills you have currently, and what actions you can take to make an improvement.

Learn more about how NCFE can help you by booking a Skills Builder demo at www.ncfe.org.uk/skills-assessment/skills-builder



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South Tyneside primary wins International School Award for the third time

A primary school in Jarrow has been awarded the British Council's prestigious International School Award for the third time running.

St. Bede's Catholic Primary School, which is part of Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust, won the award in recognition of its exceptional work in international education.

Teacher Anne-Marie McQuillin, who coordinates the international dimension at the school, was presented with the award at a celebration at the Houses of Parliament, where she was joined by Jarrow MP Kate Osborne.

From sharing penpal letters with students at their partner school in Noisy-le-Sec in the Parisian suburbs in France to taking part in the European Christmas tree decoration exchange, the school's international curriculum is rich and varied. The pupils also learn about books, festivals, music, food and other faiths from around the world as part of their international learning.

Anne-Marie McQuillin said: "We believe that international learning is key to ensuring that our pupils become responsible citizens and show respect towards others. Our children love learning about the world, different languages and ways of life. As well as developing respect



for diversity and difference, our international work is as much about appreciating our similarities and understanding that we are all one.

"Gaining the award for the third time running is a fantastic achievement and is testament to our school's commitment to embedding a rich and creative range of international work."



South Tyneside schoolchildren jumping for joy after athletics win

Athletics stars at a South Shields primary school have won a South Tyneside competition.

Pupils from Years 3 and 4 of St. Bede's Catholic Primary School, which is part of Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust, were crowned the Y3/4 South Tyneside Athletics Champions 2023 at the District Athletics Championships held at Monkton Stadium.

The event had 33 teams competing, with St. Bede's A team winning with an incredible score of 1,354 points, and St Bede's B team finishing in a respectable fifth place.

All competitors took part in the 400m run, 50m sprint, long jump and howler throw.

"Amazingly, St. Bede's five girls in the A team all came in the top nine out of 137 girls competing on the day; while four of St. Bede's boys came in the top six boys overall out of 142," said team coach and Y3 teacher Brian McVittie.

"There is a lot of interest in athletics at St. Bede's, so much so that St. Bede's entered three teams into the event, with the B team finishing as high as fifth, almost medalling too.

"I was so proud to see our children achieve personal best performances and keenly supporting each other throughout the day. Their behaviour was exemplary. It was also great to see so much support for St Bede's from our school community inside the stadium, which really helped inspire our teams."

The St. Bede's Y3/4 athletics team will now go on to represent South Tyneside in the county finals on Tuesday 20th June; where they will compete against the best teams from Newcastle, North Tyneside, Gateshead and Sunderland.

St. Bede's A Team captain Eliza Woodhouse, who is nine and in Year 4, said: "It was great getting the opportunity to compete at Monkton Stadium alongside my friends and I was delighted that we were champions."

Mr McVittie added: "I was very proud of the whole squad, as everyone showed a great attitude in training and were so determined on the day of the event. It will be great representing our district at the County Finals.

"It is great to see many of our children continue to stay active and join local sport clubs such as South Shields Harriers."

Sunderland school opens community allotment on site

Young children with green fingers are usually the sign the paints have come out in reception, but for this group of children, it's digging into fun at the allotment that has given them green fingers.

The excited youngsters from St Mary Magdalen Catholic Primary School in Seaham were given the chance to water plants, look for worms and learn about growing vegetables at a new community allotment at St. Aidan's Catholic Academy in Sunderland.

The venture between the two schools, which are both part of Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust, is part of St Aidan's drive to be more sustainable.

The allotment is thriving with two large polytunnels containing potatoes, peas, spring onions, broccoli, carrots, lettuce, pak choi, tomatoes, chilli, peppers, French beans and rocket. There are also six raised beds outside with onions, garlic and broad beans growing, and 15 flowerbeds.

St Aidan's Catholic Academy RE teacher Anna

Armstrong said: "The allotment was set up in March 2022 to work towards the St Aidan's three sustainable development goals, which are action on climate change, good health and wellbeing, and reduce hunger.

"Additionally, we want to work with the local community to create a safe, post-Covid space for all members of our community to enjoy. We want to build cross-generational relationships by working with local nurseries, primary schools and care homes, and support those in need by distributing produce grown on site. Special thanks must go to our lovely volunteer, Lynne Reay, who is the grandmother of one of our pupils, whose help has been invaluable."

Now the allotment is thriving, Mrs Armstrong and the wellbeing team she leads, have started hosting community events.

"The afternoon with St Mary Magdalen was brilliant," she added. "Everyone had fun and, most importantly, everyone played their part in making a difference.

"We have also had visits from a local nursery and the wellbeing group led all the activities. The children loved tricking the worms to come out from underground by doing the bird dance."

As part of the recent community visits, 20 reception pupils from St Mary Magdalen Catholic Primary School visited St Aidan's Catholic Academy to engage in a range of gardening activities including a tour of the polytunnels where the youngsters learnt about what was growing and had a turn at watering the vegetables; planting flowers; decorating raised beds with colourful chalk; followed a worm trail searching for fun facts about worms



hidden around the garden; and listened to a story, Superworm by Julia Donaldson.

Reception teacher Joanne Robson, from St Mary Magdalen Catholic Primary School, said: "We had such a lovely afternoon. Congratulations to Anna and the boys for a successful event. They were an absolute credit to you."

www.bccet.org.uk

St Aidan's & St. Anthony's Catholic Sixth Form, Sunderland

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Theatre Royal announces outstanding new season

Show-stopping West End musicals, fun for all the family, hilarious comedies and breath-taking dance are all part of the jam-packed new season announced by Newcastle Theatre Royal.

The multi-award winning musical *Come From Away* will make its North East debut at Newcastle Theatre Royal with a much anticipated two week run (Tue 6 – Sat 17 Aug 2024). This smash-hit show shares the incredible real-life story of the 7,000 air passengers from all over the world who were grounded in Canada during the wake of 9/11, and the small Newfoundland community that invited them into their lives with open hearts.

Comedy takes centre stage as we welcome back Stewart Lee for one night only (Sun 11 Feb 2024) following a sell-out three night run of *Basic Lee* earlier this year. The laughs keep on coming as *Mischief* make a welcome return with their riotous twist on a timeless classic in the smash-hit *Peter Pan Goes Wrong* (Mon 12 – Sat 17 Feb 2024).

30 years since the launch of the trailblazing TV station, the Globelink News team are back as North East actor Stephen Tompkinson joins fellow original cast members in *Drop The Dead Donkey* (Tue 21 – Sat 25 May 2024).

There's plenty for all the family to enjoy. From one of the producers of *SIX* comes the kick ass-pirational stage show *Fantastically Great Women Who Changed the World* based on the popular children's book by Suffragette relative Kate Pankhurst (Wed 21 – Sun 25 Feb 2024). Younger audiences are in for a real treat as they join an intrepid family in *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* (Fri 23 – Sun 25 Feb 2024) and the fun doesn't stop there as the *Heelers* make their stage debut in *Bluey's Big Play* (Fri 8 – Sun 10 Mar 2024).

The animals escape from the zoo and find themselves on an unexpected journey in *Madagascar – The Musical* (Wed 10 – Sat 13 Jul 2024). Join Alex, Marty, Melman, Gloria and those hilarious plotting penguins as they meet in the musical adventure of the lifetime.

Celebrating the 25th anniversary of the popular film, *The Full Monty* returns (Tue 27 Feb – Sat 2 Mar 2024) to tell the heartfelt story of a group of lads trying to regain their dignity and pride as they look to make ends meet.

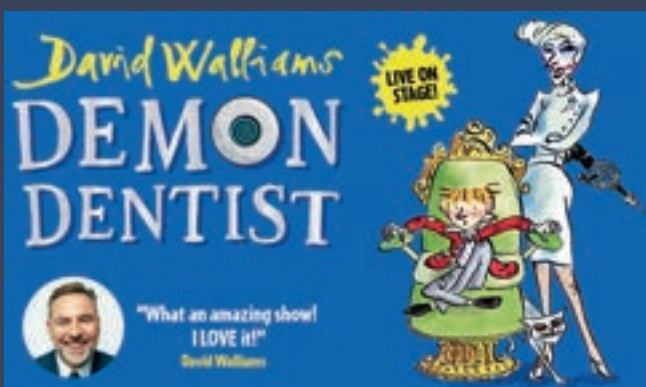
More information and tickets can be purchased at www.theatreroyal.co.uk or from the Theatre Royal Box Office on 0191 232 7010.

The Shoe Shaker Fest, a nostalgic celebration of 1990s dance music, is set to take place in Northumberland

Organised by Kathie Turnbull, the owner of The Three Horse Shoes pub in Cramlington, the festival aims to transport attendees back to the era of 90s dance music. Renowned DJs from around the world have been confirmed to play their tracks, promising an unforgettable experience for music enthusiasts.

The event has already attracted ticket bookings from far and wide, with expectations of drawing thousands of attendees and boosting the local economy. Kathie plans to diversify future festivals by incorporating music from different decades and genres to cater to a wider audience. The festival boasts an impressive line-up of renowned 90s DJs, with more than 10 original DJs scheduled to perform. Confirmed acts include Andy Whitby, Sash, QFX, Dream Frequency, Ultrasonic, Kelly Lorena, and many more.

Kathie's experience in event management and her team of seasoned professionals will ensure a successful and safe festival. Ticket sales are now available for music lovers to join the Shoe Shaker Festival on Saturday August 5th . www.shoeshakerfest.co.uk



Jaw-dropping family fun comes to Sunderland!

The bestselling children's author David Walliams and the award-winning Birmingham Stage Company have teamed up for a brand-new production of *Demon Dentist*. This is their latest collaboration after *Gangsta Granny* and *Billionaire Boy*, both of which received Olivier award nominations.

Demon Dentist begins with strange things happening in Alfie's town! Children are leaving their teeth for the tooth fairy and waking up to find odd things under their pillow! Alfie and his friend Gabz are determined to get to the bottom of the mystery – but no-one could have dreamed what they'll discover, when they come face to face with the demon dentist herself in this amazing children's adventure!

The show arrives at Sunderland Empire on July 13th.

Blagdon Gallery



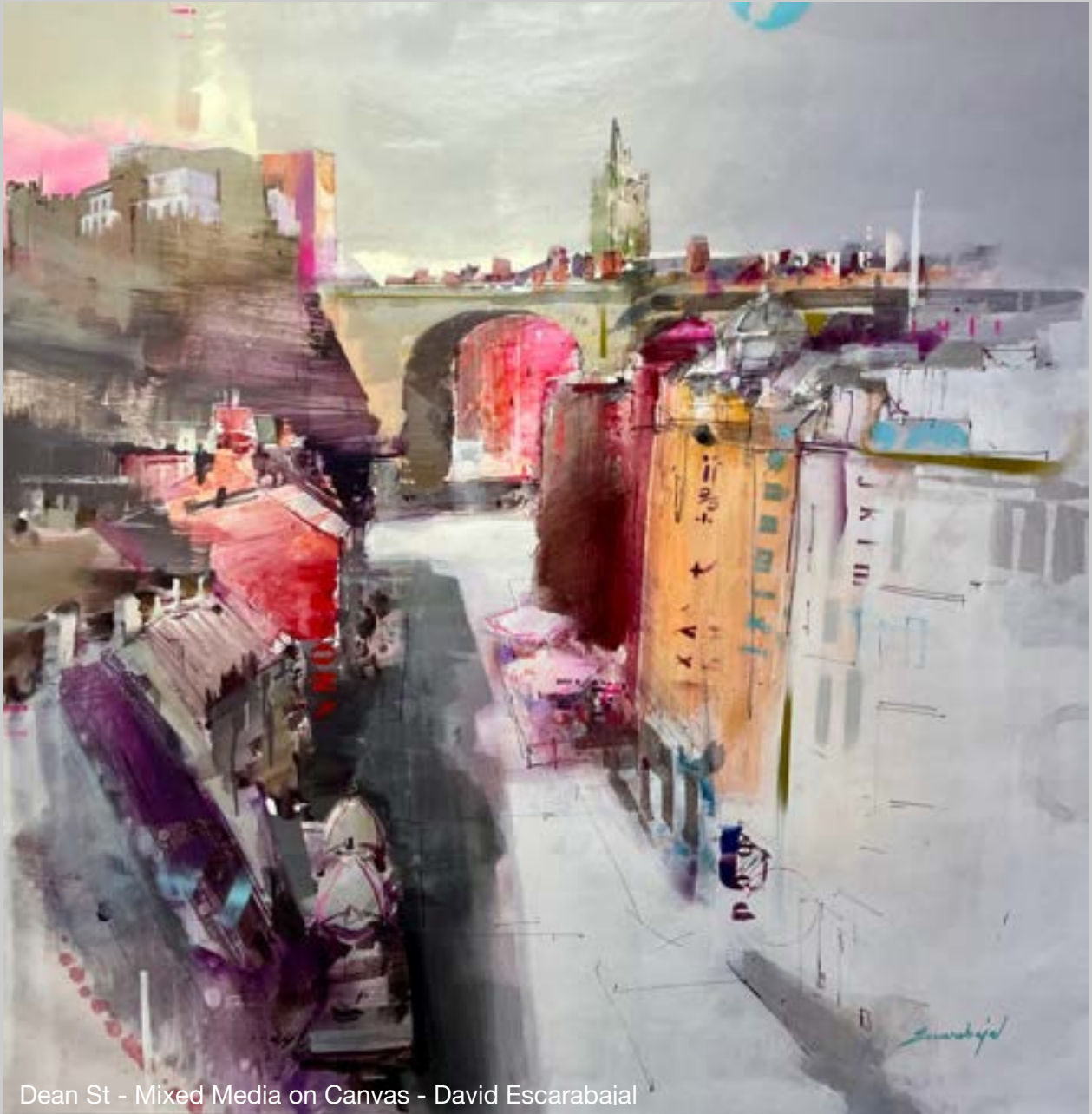
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Alexander Millar

Meet the artist...

In the latest of our series Keith Newman of Highlights PR talks to contemporary artist...

Alexander Millar

about his route into art, his trademark "Gadgie" and his galleries in major cities in the UK and USA.

How did you get into art?

It was later in life; I had a job I hated on a building site and later I became a window cleaner. Some 30 years later, I went through a marriage break up and my mental health suffered. I was living in my car as I was homeless, when I met a lovely old lady who taught me to believe in myself. She taught me meditation and within weeks opportunities with my artwork started to come my way. The biggest thing at that time was an exhibition I did in Glasgow that sold out within hours. I've never looked back since.

Tell me about "The Gadgie".

The Gadgie has such an appeal because everyone had one in their family they can relate to. When I first started painting him, I used to imagine my dad walking away from me into the light and I suppose this back view means that it could be anybody so that everyone can imagine the character is someone personal to them.

The anonymity seems to appeal to people more than a facial view as the Gadgie becomes my customers own relative, their mum, dad, grannies, and grandpas. Subconsciously, I've painted him from the perspective of the viewer being a child looking at him from their point of view.

He's a popular chap and he's been sold all over the world to collectors and fans alike. It's amazing to think that he started off as a small figure in the background of my paintings and one day I decided to highlight him, and the Gadgie was born.

My portrayal of the Gadgie has evolved from a dark and grey silhouette to a more colourful, happier character with a spring in his step. I've come to realise this represents the time I was in a depressive state and now as my own life is more colourful, then so is the Gadgie.

Tell us about your UK galleries.

I prefer to sell my work through my own galleries and online wherever possible as it makes my work more personal. I love chatting to visitors who pop in and it's really not all about selling. It's about building a relationship, providing excellent customer service, and engaging with my customers.

My first gallery was opened in Glasgow some four years ago after we had successfully trialled a number of pop-up shops. Since then, we've moved to a lovely location on Buchanan Street which I visit as often as I can.

Living in Newcastle, I'm so pleased that I've opened a gallery on one of the UK's most beautiful and magnificent streets – Grey Street. I'm right opposite the iconic Theatre Royal and I love watching the Geordie people come and go.



You previously opened a gallery in New York City too?

I did a museum show at the New York Fire Department Museum and when I was there, we hired a fantastic space on Fifth Avenue that had once been an old Speakeasy club. Lots of people visited us and it was an amazing feeling to have a gallery space on such a prestigious street. It even came with accommodation so my whole team stayed there with me. We had that gallery for two years until COVID came along. Ultimately, I would like to open a third gallery in either Birmingham or London.

What's next on the agenda?

We do a lot of sales online, but many people like to physically see the artist at work in the studio. For those that can't get to a gallery, I need to do more videoing of me painting. People like to watch the formation of the painting taking place and see the textures and the ideas behind the artwork.

I'm going to be doing a few more landscapes, particularly industrial scenes. These take me back to my apprenticeship as a lad when I left school. I remember those cold winter mornings when I had to work outside and sometimes the sun would come out and just illuminate where I was working. It was so beautiful that it would take my breath away. That's what I want to recreate and take my client's breath away with the beauty of the art work they've received.

Alexander Millar Fine Art has a comprehensive collection of paintings, drawings and prints over three floors in a classic Georgian building on one of the UK's most beautiful shopping streets. Alexander Millar Fine Art, 55 - 59 Grey Street Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 6EF

email: NCL@alexandermillar.com



Mandi springs into new health business

A dedicated NHS nurse practitioner with a passion for fitness and holistic well-being, who injured her back during pregnancy is using all of her core strength, flexibility, and business acumen to open a unique Pilates facility in the heart of her home town.

Mum of two, Mandi Bandali has opened Springs Studio, on Gosforth High Street where she has introduced the revolutionary Reformer Pilates method to her growing clientele. Springs Studio aims to provide a transformative fitness experience that prioritises back and joint health while offering customisable resistance options.

Springs Studio was born out of Mandi's personal journey, where she experienced severe back pain during pregnancy and sought a fitness solution that would be gentle on her body. Pilates proved to be the ideal path to regaining her fitness level without the risk of injury, and she went on to pursue further training in Pilates, driven by her desire to help others achieve their fitness goals and overall well-being.

"I'm thrilled to bring Springs Studio to Gosforth High Street and introduce these versatile pieces of equipment which improve strength, flexibility, and balance in all ages," said Mandi. "We aim to create a welcoming environment where people of all ages and fitness levels can benefit from this transformative workout. Whether you're a professional athlete, an older person looking to stay active, or someone seeking a safe and effective fitness routine, my three Pilates instructors and I are here to support you on your journey."



The Castle Inn Bamburgh under new ownership

The Castle Inn, Bamburgh, is officially under new ownership. The business will be operated by Kymel Trading Limited, the current operators of The Lord Crewe Bamburgh (five-star rated and one AA rosette winner), Spanish City, Whitley Bay, and Trenchers of Whitby.

Kymel Trading Limited has been actively seeking new ventures since they began operating The Lord Crewe in late 2021. With its ideal location and evident potential, The Castle Inn presented the perfect opportunity for the company.

Kyle Mackings, CEO of Kymel Trading Limited, explained: "Since we began operating The Lord Crewe in late 2021, we have been actively seeking new ventures in the area.

"From its iconic castle to its award-winning beach, Bamburgh is undeniably one of the best destinations in the UK. The Castle Inn is just up the road from The Lord Crewe, and we're very excited about the plans we have in store for the business. We look forward to sharing more information over the coming months."



Ad Gefrin presents a new Dry Gin

Ad Gefrin proudly introduces Thirlings Dry Gin, a classic spirit crafted and bottled in the heart of Northumberland. Following the distillery's inaugural whisky blend – Tácsbora – launched at the end of last year, Thirlings Dry Gin is the second spirit to be offered by England's northernmost distillery.

Thirlings Dry Gin is more than a beverage; it is an invitation to embrace the traditions of the past while celebrating the vibrant present. Crafted with meticulous care and using botanicals with a Northumbrian heart and Anglo-Saxon soul, Thirlings Dry Gin is a testament to the flavours of Northumberland, from the evocative Cheviot Hills to the sweeping coastline. Each sip captures the essence of Ad Gefrin's natural surroundings: heather and pine from the hills, elderberry and dill from the hedgerow, and Irish moss and sea buckthorn from the coast.

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Thirlings Gin is available in person from Ad Gefrin Anglo-Saxon Museum and Distillery, and online at adgefirin.co.uk plus a few selected stockists – see website for details. RRP £39.00

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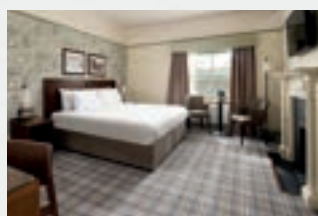
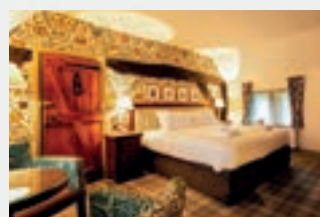
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Les Reay (Owner, Catering Units) hands over their bespoke vehicle to Zak of Tango Durham, which has recently opened.



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Enjoy a Summer of sport at STACK Seaburn

Summer is a time when the spirit of sportsmanship ignites the hearts of millions around the world. It is a season of intense competition, thrilling victories, and shared moments of jubilation. In the midst of this vibrant atmosphere, STACK Seaburn, the iconic leisure and social destination on the Sunderland coastline, is embracing the summer of sport and capturing the essence of athletic passion and community spirit.

Starting with Wimbledon, STACK will be showing the key matches on the big screen, featuring national treasure Andy Murray, as well as international favourites, Djokovic and Kyrgios. The leisure and social venue will be serving the traditional Wimbledon drink, Pimm's by the glass. Carrying on the strawberry theme you can tuck into pancakes stacked high with Strawberries and Nutella or quench your thirst with a strawberry milkshake from YOLO Coffee & Kitchen.

From 20th July, STACK will be supporting the Lioness' during their campaign at the Women's World Cup. The venue will be showing all of the Lioness' matches on the big screen, which is visible from the lower plaza and the benches on either side of the screen on the upper plaza. Following on from the busy crowds that turned up to watch them win the Euro's, it's worth reserving your table online to get the best seats in the house!

This year, STACK will be an official fan zone for the Women's Netball World Cup, which will kick off on 28th July, showing the England matches on the small screens located in the upper plaza. Teaming up with Netball England, STACK will be working to do mini netball tournaments and skills classes on the beach in front of the iconic venue.

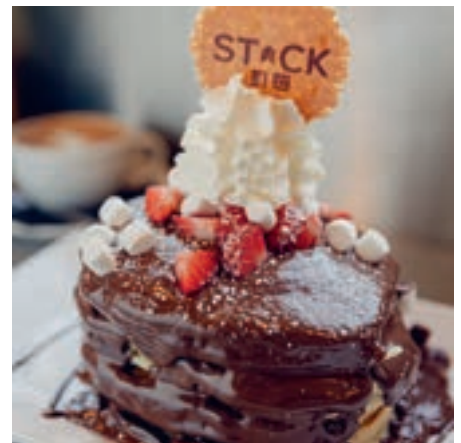
All this activity is sure to make anyone hungry. Supporters and revellers alike can enjoy an

array of delicious street food from one of the many independent street food traders. Varying from delightful Greek gyros through to wonderful bao buns; pizza to fish and chips, there is something for everyone to feast on whilst supporting their sporting heroes.

Additionally, STACK is working with local businesses such as SR Functional Fitness, University of Sunderland and Red Sky Foundation, encouraging and supporting sporting activations on the beach, such as beach netball games, circuits classes plus much more.

Alongside all things sport, the famous leisure venue will provide summer holiday entertainment for kids of all ages across the six-week summer holidays. Performances will include some of children's most favourite TV shows and animated movies, celebrating the characters of Paw Patrol, Mickey and Minnie Mouse and Encanto to name a few. And every Thursday a 'Kids Festival' will provide plenty of fun and activities for children to enjoy. There is plenty going on this summer to provide a good distraction for the kids, so parents can indulge in STACK's tasty street food and delicious drinks.

STACK welcomes walk-ins to the venue, however for main events it is suggested to book to guarantee a table, via their website www.stackseaburn.co.uk





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NE1 event to shape business plan for the next five years

NE1, the Business Improvement District company for Newcastle city centre, has published a consultation document outlining its proposed plans and priorities for Newcastle city centre over the next five years. The plans were presented to an audience of invited businesses at a breakfast briefing session.

In September, businesses will be balloted on whether to support NE1 to develop and deliver these agreed priorities and set the agenda for the city until 2029

If businesses vote 'Yes' to reinstating NE1 for a fourth term, it will guarantee more than £10m ring-fenced investment for the city. The money will be spent improving and shaping the city centre, at a time when Newcastle is undergoing transformational change.

1,400 businesses in Newcastle have received the consultation document and NE1 is now asking for feedback to help shape its strategic direction for the next five years.

NE1 is asking businesses for their views on the following key priorities:

- Providing a stronger voice for business; continuing to lobby locally and nationally to increase investment in the city
- Improving access and links to the city; including parking and public transport provision as well as regional and national links
- Getting the basics right; ensuring Newcastle is cleaner and safer, with increased police visibility and response
- Curating the experience; celebrating the different areas and quarters of the city that make Newcastle unique while providing operational assistance and support for businesses
- Events; delivering and supporting events to drive footfall, spend, and raise the profile and perceptions of the city
- Promoting; delivering heavyweight marketing campaigns to attract visitors, with a year-round focus on digital and social media marketing for the city's businesses
- Greening and sustainability; delivering permanent and temporary city centre greening and biodiversity, as well as waste rationalisation and communal recycling.

If successful in the ballot, NE1 will focus on these key themes and actions to create the best possible trading environment for the city's businesses for the future.

Stephen Patterson, Chief Executive of NE1 Ltd said: "It is a hugely exciting time for the city and NE1. Over the past six months, we have been discussing the challenges and opportunities facing the city's business community and we have now launched our formal consultation on business priorities for the next five years.

"We will be contacting all of our businesses to test and refine these priorities. It is an opportunity for each business to influence and shape NE1's plan for the future.

"It is remarkable what the business community has collectively achieved over the past five years, and there is much to look forward to. The economic foundations of the city are strong and Newcastle is on the cusp of something special. It is crucial that the voice of business is heard at the highest level when decisions are being made that will have a lasting impact on the city. Now is the time for business to set the agenda and chart a course for the city until 2029."

Timetable for the consultation and the ballot

Consultation issued 15 June 2023
 Consultation closes 14 July 2023
 Business plan issued 4 September 2023
 Ballot papers issued 18 September 2023
 Ballot closes 19 October 2023

Businesses wanting to give their views should contact Stephen Patterson by email at Stephen.patterson@newcastlene1ltd.com, or by phone on 0191 235 7092.



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£30 for two people or £36 with a glass of Prosecco each



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Here comes Lasun

By Holly Grahamslaw

Looking to celebrate my partner Josh's birthday, I recently visited Lasun Indian Cuisine. Situated on Dean Road, Lasun really is a hidden gem within South Shields' extensive Indian food offering. Proudly serving its loyal customers since 2010, it is easy to see why diners regularly return to Lasun for its impeccable service, delicious food and lively ambience.



Upon arrival, we were instantly impressed by the venue's atmosphere. Lasun boasts luxury and comfort in abundance, with plush velvet seating, ambient lighting and ornate gold furnishings combining to make an opulent space. The restaurant, however, maintains a family-friendly, cosy feel and was notably full of diners on a weekday evening.

Lasun offers the finest Indian cuisine, with an extensive menu of both classic favourites and creative dishes. Head Chef, Tazul Islam, boasts 20 years' culinary experience and offers immense attention to detail, having spent years perfecting his unique spice combinations and flavours. The venue also remains affordable, offering a Sunday-Friday special menu of a starter, main course, rice dish and dessert for only £15.95pp.

The restaurant clearly prides itself on offering outstanding customer service. All staff were friendly and welcoming and were on hand to accommodate any needs or special requests. After a warm welcome, we enjoyed a tasty bottle of rosé and some homemade poppadoms and house pickles, whilst we waited in anticipation for our starters.

To start, we sampled the delectable platter for two. Served on a sizzling plate, the dish comprised a mix of chicken, lamb and king prawn tikka, as well as onion bhaji, nestled on a bed of mixed vegetables. The platter also included a tangy lamb-tikka kebab wrapped in a scrumptious omelette wrap. With both artful presentation and mouth-watering flavours, the dish demonstrated the high standard of cooking Lasun is really capable of.

Following up, the restaurant provides a plethora of choice. Customers can delight in a range of classic favourites, such as Roghan Josh, Jalfrezi and Dupiaza, in addition to a host of innovative meat and seafood specialities, many served straight from the tandoor clay oven.

On this occasion, Josh devoured the delicious Chicken Tikka Bhuna, a thick, medium-base dish spiced with tomato, chopped onions, garlic and fresh coriander.

Meanwhile, I tasted the Aloo Gosht, a unique dish made up of tender lamb chunks, baby potatoes and fresh green chilli. Both mains were absolutely exquisite and were mopped up nicely by a generous helping of fluffy pilau rice and peshwari naan.

Despite feeling replete, we finished off proceedings with some tasty ice cream, coffees and liqueurs, which rounded off a thoroughly pleasant evening spent at Lasun.

All in all, Lasun Indian Cuisine offers exceptional service and flavoursome food from its easily-accessible location in South Shields. The restaurant also caters for various events, such as work functions and family gatherings, whilst remaining a popular destination for takeaway lovers too. It seems that Lasun really does offer it all.

Lasun Indian Cuisine can be found at 50 Dean Road, South Shields, NE33 4DZ. For more information, visit their website www.lasun.co.uk, or call 0191 454 5111.





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★★★★★ *Tripadvisor review*

"Flavours were outstanding"

★★★★★ *Google review*

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Make this one a Sardinian summer

By Michael Grahamslaw

The arrival of the warmer weather prompted a visit to Fratelli restaurant in Ponteland as the Grahamslaw clan continued their ongoing love affair with Italian food.

The restaurant – which sits stylishly above Sainsbury's in Bell Villas – showcases a sun-soaked selection of authentic Sardinian food inspired by the motherland of owner, Fabrizio Saba.

Inside, lies a modern, adventurous experience. The dining area is a large, capacious space yet it still manages to retain a lively atmosphere. There's a sumptuous mezzanine for parties and private dining, not to mention an al fresco dining terrace where one can enjoy some Summer sun.

One thing that is always guaranteed is a warm, Geordie-Italian welcome which makes the restaurant a favourite for everyone – from families to Newcastle United footballers.

With impressive wine cabinets built into the bar, it felt rude not to kick off with a icy, chilled bottle of vino Bianco (white wine to you and me). Fratelli stocks an impressive range of Sardinian wines in addition to all your other Italian favourites.

Kicking off we shared a sharing plank of fritto misto – a delightful medley of crispy fried seafood. Golden brown calamari, grilled seabass and plump king prawns were perfectly cooked and a tangy white aioli which really awakened the palate.

My son Jack, feasted on his favourite Mozzarella con Caponata – bufala mozzarella with a sweet and sour vegetable relish.



The classic gamberoni all aglio completed this pretty picture – a testament to simple Italian cuisine done right.

Following on, mains were of a similar high standard too. Daughter Holly's Sardinian style paella was a risotto-like revelation loaded with chicken, salami, prawns, mussels, clams, cherry tomatoes, peppers and peas and singing with fresh saffron.



For pizza enthusiasts, the pizza diavolo was a standout choice. The thin and crispy crust provided the perfect canvas for the combination of spicy pepperoni, chili flakes, and gooey mozzarella. Each bite was an explosion of flavors, showcasing the restaurant's dedication to creating authentic and mouthwatering pizzas.

The spaghetti con vongole, a classic Italian dish, demonstrated Fratelli's commitment to using fresh and high-quality ingredients. The pasta was perfectly cooked and complemented by a light, aromatic sauce, allowing the delicate flavours of the clams to shine through.

Rounding off, arrived the Agnello Toscano – a real Sardinian showstopper featuring lamb cutlets served with sautéed potatoes and a red wine, rosemary and sun blushed tomato sauce.

Topping off a tremendous meal was an epic slab of homemade tiramisu which was shared between Lisa and I alongside coffees.

After a memorable meal, we left in high spirits (four sambucas sorted this) and were left to reflect on what a great addition Fratelli is to our region. The restaurant continues to dazzle locals and those from further afield.

Sardinian sun continues to shine on Bell Villas.

For more information, visit www.fratelliponteland.co.uk



Places to go...Harewood House



Harewood House, one of the greatest stately homes in the region, is located between Leeds and Harrogate, and is best reached from the northeast via York and the local service via Knaresborough into Harrogate. The bus station in Harrogate is adjacent to the railway station, and the regular luxurious bus service 36 goes to the gates of the property every 15 minutes, and half-hourly on Sunday.

Whilst the £2 single is available now until October, it gets better: buy a PlusBus ticket to Harrogate and it covers Harewood in both directions for the same £2. Yet more amazing, as part of a promotion to encourage people to come by bus, there's a full 50% off the admission price for people who come by bus, train, or walk or cycle (not recommended from the North East).

The main house is set back from the road and it's a 20 minute walk across rolling parkland, as improved by Lancelot "Capability" Brown. A useful alternative is available by phoning up for one of the electric buggies to come and collect you at the entrance. It's free, and all you have to do is ring a mobile number given on an A-board near the entrance to save you walking the entire distance. The entrance kiosk will give you a useful map to find your way around the estate, and you can visit attractions in any order you choose, bearing in mind that last admission to the house (both "upstairs" and "downstairs" is 1515, whereas other places stay open to 1730, and the site closes at 1800. Harewood is open every day until Christmas.

The self-guided tour of the House is all on the ground floor, with staff in many of the rooms to answer your questions. No expense was spared in building the House and there are palatial bedrooms, grand libraries and receiving rooms all built to impress the visitors of the time, and today. There's an interesting temporary exhibit about celebrated portrait painter Joshua Reynolds and his work. The family live on the first floor which is inaccessible. Then you go down to see the kitchens, sculleries, servants' rooms and storage areas.

Dark secrets have been revealed in recent years about how the building of this fine house was financed. The Lascelles family, who acquired the Estate in 1738 were up to the neck in the abominable slave trade, and had slave plantations in the West Indies. To be fair to the Trust that administers the Estate, they do explain the nature of the trade and a couple of queries I had made to their archivist were answered fully in a few days.

The House was designed by Robert Adam and John Carr and completed in 1771.

Elsewhere on the estate, the Walled Garden can be reached via a footpath around the lake or by using a chain ferry across the lake. The extensive estate includes the exterior set for Emmerdale, the TV soap. The original Castle dates from 1366, and All Saints Church is worth a visit.

It's a full day out but, of course, if you want to break your journey in either direction at Harrogate or York, you are free to do so. The Harewood Arms near the Estate entrance is worth a visit if you just miss a 36 to Harrogate. Time for a quick drink and there will be another one along soon.

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www.nationalrail.com

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The very Funky Indianwali!

The Funky Indianwali was established in 2020 during Covid by business-owners Kam & Nedhi Chera. The husband-and-wife couple are the brains behind the concept and work together as a team, with their staff to supply their high-end bespoke catering for all occasions.

Offering event catering, bespoke home cookery, pop up food trucks, and corporate hospitality, they cater locally and internationally to their clientele.

Kam and Nedhi have cooked for Bollywood royalty, the Indian men's, and women's International Cricket teams as well as celebrities, high-profile business tycoons from India, are even prepared to stay on-site to fulfil their requirements.

Funky Indianwali also have corporate contracts with Tyne & Wear Museums and Archives at nine of their regional venues.

In addition to the above, Nedhi offers training workshops on Zoom and sell their Indian gift hampers and spice kits from their on-line shop.

For more information about Funky Indianwali, go onto their website: www.funkyindianwali.com

Bring it Barista Boho!

Friday July 7	<i>The Peabodys, 7pm til late</i>
Saturday July 8	<i>Spiritual Night with Ocean Zen, 7-9pm</i>
Friday July 14	<i>Cocktail Masterclass with Proud to Drink, celebrating Rum Mojito Day, 7-9pm</i>
Saturday July 22	<i>Bards of Boho – poetry & spoken word from Dean Jolly of Write out Loud, 7pm til late</i>
Friday July 28	<i>Big Si's House of Laughs comedy night, 7pm til late</i>
Friday August 4	<i>The Peabodys, 7pm til late</i>
Saturday August 5	<i>Spiritual Night with Ocean Zen, 7-9pm</i>
Friday August 11	<i>Cocktail Masterclass with Proud to Drink, celebrating 90's cocktails, 7-9pm</i>
Friday August 25	<i>Big Si's House of Laughs comedy night, 7pm til late</i>
Saturday August 26	<i>Bards of Boho – poetry & spoken word from Dean Jolly of Write out Loud, 7pm til late</i>

The Peabodys

The Peabodys were formed in 2016 by Keith Peabody (guitar and vocals) and John Peabody (guitar and vocals). They are a Country Americana band with influences from a range of genres of music like Bluegrass, Western Swing or even a little bit of the Blues. The magical element to the Peabodys is they can perform as a two or even a seven piece depending on their availability and the space provided. Overall, they are a group of likeminded individuals, quirky, random and of all ages, but they love to play, perform and make a pretty amazing sound together, come and see what you think!

We will also be adding new events soon including Sip & Paint Nights, Mosaic Workshops, business networking events & Quiz nights so keep checking our website for dates of new events.

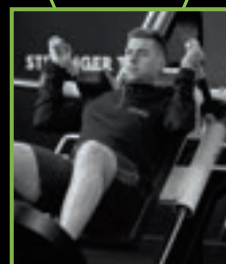
Events can be booked on their website: baristaboho.com/events



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The EX Factor

Tiredness and exhaustion are prevalent issues in today's society, often linked to lifestyle, mood, and accumulated stresses. While certain factors have always contributed to feelings of fatigue, modern life seems to have intensified these pressures.

Living in a digitally connected world where constant activity is the norm, many of us find ourselves caught in a perpetual cycle of busyness, rarely taking time to rest and recharge. As a result, common behaviors that contribute to tiredness have escalated, including excessive alcohol consumption, reliance on caffeine, long work hours, extended commutes, reliance on processed or sugary snacks, lack of exercise, and inadequate relaxation time.

In order to combat tiredness and fatigue, it is crucial to assess and modify our diet and lifestyle choices. Making positive changes in these areas can significantly improve our energy levels and overall well-being. Here are some tips to help you in your quest for renewed vitality:



David Fairlamb

Avoid Toxins: Minimize the consumption of substances that drain energy, such as sugar, caffeine, and alcohol. Instead, focus on nourishing your body with fresh, natural foods like lean meats, fish, vegetables, fruits, salads, and eggs.

Hydration: Ensure you stay adequately hydrated throughout the day, as even mild dehydration can lead to tiredness. Aim to drink enough water to keep your body functioning optimally.

Revamp Your Lunch: Opt for protein-rich meals instead of carbohydrate-heavy options to avoid the afternoon slump. Incorporating lean proteins will provide sustained energy and prevent sudden energy crashes.

Increase Fruit and Vegetable Intake: When feeling tired and craving unhealthy foods, your body may actually be seeking proper nutrition. Consume at least five servings of fruits and vegetables daily to provide your body with essential vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants.

Refined Sugar-Free Breakfast: Swap sugar-laden cereals and fruit juices for breakfast options that offer a slower energy release, such as porridge or eggs. This will prevent energy spikes and crashes, keeping you feeling fuller for longer.

Regular Exercise: Engaging in physical activity not only boosts energy levels but also provides a sense of well-being. Aim for regular exercise sessions that you enjoy, as they can invigorate both your body and mind.

Positive Environment: Surround yourself with supportive friends and create a positive, happy environment. Spending time with loved ones and engaging in activities that bring you joy can uplift your spirits and increase your energy levels.

Stress Management: High levels of stress and constant anxiety can drain your energy. Incorporate stress management techniques into your routine, such as visiting a spa, practicing yoga, or taking a break from email and other work-related tasks. Prioritizing relaxation and self-care will help recharge your energy reserves.

www.davidfairlambfitness.co.uk

David's summing up...

By implementing these tips and making conscious choices to prioritize your wellbeing, you will be well on your way to combatting your tiredness and fatigue.

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Barry Speker

The Last Word

What better way to mark a glorious English summer than the first Ashes test and the optimism of a nation. There was far more at stake than the 4" high Ashes trophy and much debate about whether there is still appetite for the lengthy Test five day format as opposed to the cut and thrust of T20 and limited overs cricket.

With the aggressive and combative approach of this buccaneering team led by courageous captain Ben Stokes and head coach Brendan McCullum, the English side's performance provided a thrilling test match even if at the nail biting finish, Australia edged over the line to go one up in the series.

The game attracted more interest and involved a new generation in Bazball and in the thrills and strategy rather than bashing boundaries.

Certainly controversy on the reasons for grabbing defeat from the jaws of victory - the declaration in the first innings, delaying taking the new ball, the missed catches and so on.

What matters is making us care about the game and now (nearly) everyone is checking on the Test score.

The announcement by the Prince of Wales (we need to get used to this meaning William not his father) that he intends to tackle the national problem of homelessness is a great credit.

He is launching a five year plan to address the problem and is looking at making some crown lands available for housing - a suitable response to Nimbies around the country who oppose erection of social housing in their areas and thwart the Government's house-building targets.

A very deserved Tony award to Jodie Comer for best leading actress for her performance in *Prima Facie*, now playing on Broadway. At the ceremony in New York the presenter wrongly referred to her as 'Julie' but there is no doubt that Jodie has established herself internationally, having already won two BAFTAs and an Emmy. She is the only performer in the play, taking all 20 parts. It is a credit to her skill that Suzie Miller, author of *Prima Facie*, was reluctant to cast her because having watched Comer in *Killing Eve*, Miller was convinced that Jodie was Russian.

Fortunately the ability of fine actors to portray roles and pretend to be someone else is still recognised and valued, despite challenges from those alleging cultural appropriation or insisting that only a character of the same sex, age, race or orientation can be portrayed by an actor similarly identified.

The recent sad death of Glenda Jackson reminded us of her many fine performances from *Women in Love*, *A Touch of Class*, *Elizabeth I* and latterly as *King Lear* at the Old Vic in 2016 - not to mention her starring role in the *Morecambe and Wise Show* as *Cleopatra*. She won two Oscars but was too busy to collect either.

Her performances as herself in the House of Commons as Labour MP for Hampstead and Highgate (1992-2010) did not win similar accolades. Put this down to poor scripts



from her neighbouring MP Jeremy Corbyn.

Two years after the last lockdown, the UK Covid-19 Inquiry hearing has begun. It will be of vast scope with no estimate of when it will end. In his opening, Hugo Keith KC, Counsel to the Inquiry described it as 'an inquiry into myriad decisions and complex decision-making' and 'not limited to a single event'.

Baroness Hallett, the presiding judge who chairs the inquiry says her chief role is 'to determine whether the level of loss in the broadest sense was inevitable and whether it could have been done better'.

The Grenfell Inquiry concerned the deaths of 72 people in one night in one small location. The inquiry started in September 2017 and is still not concluded.

The Chilcott Inquiry into the Iraq War lasted six years.

Covid involved 220,000 deaths, and continuing, and encompassed the whole country. The judge is dividing the task into modules. 1 Preparedness, 2 Decision-making, 3 Impact on Health Service, 4 Vaccines and Therapeutics, 5 Procurement, 6 Care Sector.

Vast numbers of interested parties, individuals, families, relatives, politicians, scientists, companies, experts with many being legally represented.

Dame Hallett talks of a tight time frame but this seems extremely optimistic. Where will the protagonists be when the report appears?

One overriding lesson for inquiries is to be warned of 'the powerful and distorted beam of hindsight!'

For now, a few years of solid work for the many lawyers.

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