

NORTHERN

INSIGHT

March 2024

Issue 99



**BRAVE & HEART: A GLOBAL CONSULTING
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Foreword

Welcome to the March edition of Northern Insight.

With Spring finally upon us and the prospect of lighter nights ahead we are delighted to bring you our 99th issue of the regions most comprehensive business and leisure magazine.

Our cover stars are consulting partnership Brave & Heart who provide tactical solutions for their clients across three key pillars – Digital, Strategy and People.

In a great issue for social event coverage look out for our features on the fantastic Lord Taverners Christmas lunch and the inaugural Awards evening for the Winn Group.

Within our popular Big Interview we talk to Chris Welch, Managing Partner of Sintons Solicitors.

Also look out for our new Built Environment section which we look forward to developing the months ahead.

On our travels we enjoy Sunday Lunch at the lovely Whitechurch in Durham and make a first visit to Osters in Gosforth.

We hope you enjoy another jam packed edition. Till next month...

M. J. Grahamslaw

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Forum helps mindset for businesses

The North Tyneside Business Forum held an event to address mental health in the workplace to help businesses banish the winter blues. The event, at Tynemouth 61, Guest House and Tea Rooms featured speakers offering insights and strategies for fostering wellbeing and resilience at work.

The speakers each brought a unique approach

to supporting mental health through their own expertise and years of experience. More than 60 North Tyneside businesses were represented at the event.

The speakers were Polly Brennan from Adventure Coaching Carole Crowe and Kelly Oliver-Dougall – Founder of Unisus.

Michael James, Chair of North Tyneside Business Forum said: “As a Business Forum we wanted to let people know that we are aware of how businesses are often very quiet in January, and the knock-on effect that can have on business mental health. Our Empowerment event was designed to supply high-level support and inspiration for the year ahead. We have some great businesses across the region who provide excellent support and the three speakers all shared some practical tips to help people banish the January Blues.”

“Mental wellbeing in the workplace is one of our key priorities and I’ve had some great feedback from members on the day who got some great tips from the sessions and enjoyed the less formal, relaxed environment.”



North East Hotel Manager Awarded 'General Manager of the Year' at Aimbridge Forum 2024

Paul Borg has won the coveted General Manager of the Year award at the Aimbridge Forum 2024. The two-day event — held in the Eastside Rooms, Birmingham, between Jan 31 and Feb 1 — featured delegates from across the global hospitality business, joining together to celebrate success, share insights and drive performance improvement across the board.

Paul has been in hospitality and hotel management for the last 25 years. Since 2016, he has held a variety of roles with Aimbridge Hospitality EMEA, culminating in a General Manager position at Newcastle’s Crowne Plaza.

His unwavering dedication to service excellence played a pivotal role in earning the prestigious accolade. This is underscored by outstanding guest satisfaction scores, as evidenced by Crowne Plaza’s first-class rating in ReviewPro, the dedicated software for monitoring customer satisfaction.

Outside of work, Paul is constantly finding ways to support the community. He’s an active mentor with the North East Hotels Association and championed the hotel’s festive campaign to donate toys to underprivileged families. Paul regularly delivers talks at local colleges, inspiring young people with his story and showcasing career opportunities within the hospitality industry.”



Olympic effort at Komatsu puts “athletes” on track for Japan...

Herculean performance from a squad of engineering Olympians has earned them a spot competing with the best in the world.

Two of the three Komatsu UK Olympic champions have secured places in the global contest, held in Japan, later in the year.

Callum Soul, Adomas Burba and Jason Embleton won gold in a series of nerve-wracking events at the firm’s Birtley factory. The “Technology Olympics” matches-up some of the factory’s brightest talents against each other, other competitors from the firm’s suppliers and other highly-skilled specialists from Komatsu companies across Europe.

The engineering experts are assessed on their

skills in three departments: welding, paint and assembly, with Callum, Adomas and Jason scooping honours in each, respectively. The challenges are designed to test and showcase precision, skill and concentration with judges strictly assessing quality and technical knowledge.

Paul Blanchard, Komatsu UK managing director, said: “The Olympics is something everyone looks forward to and while competition is intense, it is also a great way to bring workmates together and showcase the incredible skill and acumen at the same time. A lot of the Olympians seem to thrive in the competitions, and it’s great when you see past champions return and new faces emerge.

“Two of the three winners have all competed at our Osaka HQ before, so will be aware of what awaits in the global finals. Winning here puts them towards the top of their profession in Europe, winning in Japan makes them the best in the world.”

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Firm to launch 'Britain's greenest burger' after £1.5m investment

A plant-based food manufacturer is set to launch "Britain's greenest burgers" following a £1.5m investment.

MYCO's plant-based protein, Hooba, is produced from vertically farmed oyster mushrooms grown at the firm's huge new production site in North Yorkshire.

The purpose built 20,000sqft complex is the only site in Britain where the protein is both farmed and produced under the same roof - meaning MYCO's meat-free products create zero food miles.

And the sustainable range will be available to the trade by the end of March 2024, following the "significant" seven-figure cash injection that's allowed the firm to move into full production.

"The investment is a real game-changer as it has allowed us to move full steam ahead with our full range," said MYCO Chairman John Shepherd.

"We are currently meeting with buyers and the initial noises are incredibly positive.

"The goal is a trade launch in March, followed by a national rollout in supermarkets across the UK over the course of the year.

"That's an exciting launch and one which will place Hooba among the biggest plant-based protein products in the market."

And the firm's burgers beat household names like Linda McCartney, Beyond and Plant Pioneers in recent independent taste and organoleptic benchmarking.

At a packed industry event at the Leeming Bar production site in January, the Hooba burger was judged to have the best texture and mouthfeel - whilst crucially, guests also said it was the product they'd most likely buy.

"The feedback confirmed our belief that this is a special product that can disrupt the plant-based market," said MYCO CEO David Wood.



Jobs on the horizon as firm takes over huge space following 'lightning fast' growth

A printing and packaging firm's rapid growth has seen it acquire a huge space near a well-known North East site.

Since 2021, The Encore Group's packaging division turnover has more than trebled fuelling major expansion plans that are set to create new jobs.

However, unprecedented demand for the company's services has left the firm with a welcome headache - a lack of storage space.

That prompted the Wearside firm to snap-up a 103,000sqft unit in Peterlee, on the site of the former Walkers Crisps distribution centre.

The transaction, assisted by Kate Rickett of Muckle LLP, is part of a major multi-million-pound investment the firm hopes will help fuel further growth.

"We are thrilled with the new site and it will hopefully act as a catalyst for further growth," said Group Sales Director, Craig Allen.

"The last few years have been incredible across the business, and it meant that we ran short of space, so this site will initially serve as a much needed storage solution for both raw materials and finished products.

"However, that will free up space at our main site which will mean more manufacturing capacity and more new jobs created for the local community over the next few years."



Oculus HR victorious after ranking in the UK's Top 100 SME list

Oculus HR is celebrating after being commended as one of the UK's Top 100 SMEs in the UK.

Amidst hundreds of entries from a diverse range of sectors, Oculus HR has been ranked 47th overall in the prestigious list. To celebrate this sensational achievement, Director Louise Kennedy and her team will attend the coveted awards evening on 13th March in St Paul's, London and be included in the EB100 digital guide and online directory to a viewership of over half a million people.

The EB100 are ranked on a series of categories,

from community engagement to innovation and growth. These businesses are highlighted as sheer excellence within the SME community and showcased for their dedication to a thriving entrepreneurial Britain.

"The EB100 is evidence of the overwhelming entrepreneurial spirit in Britain. Across every sector, we have seen truly impressive businesses that are devoted to achieving in all areas," said Piers Linney, former investor on BBC's Dragon's Den and Co-Founder of Implement AI.

"Oculus HR are innovators in the British SME community and deserve the spotlight shone on them from the Elite Business 100," said Scott English, Brand Director of Elite Business. "This definitive league illustrates the crème de la crème of UK SMEs".

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Cover Story

How do you define company values? Start with the Heart

Brave & Heart shows us that successful company values ALWAYS start with your people.

Founded in 2016, Brave & Heart are a consulting partnership that provide tactical solutions for their clients across three key pillars – Digital, Strategy and People.

In the last eight years, they've evolved to a flexible hybrid organisation of over a dozen experts, using a blend of staffing models that create unrivalled flexibility.

In addition to their digital and strategy expertise, Brave & Heart have worked on many successful HR and People engagements, including EVP (employee value proposition) launches via their People pillar.

Due to their rapid growth, now was the ideal time to refresh their internal values and ensure that everyone in the team was aligned behind the same driving forces.

Using the same bespoke workshops and activities they've developed for clients, they were able to define values and behaviours that truly capture the essence of their company.

But don't take our word for it; let the Brave & Heart team talk you through some of their values themselves.

David, CEO: Deliver with bravery, act with heart

"When starting Brave & Heart, the key to our mindset was learning from the agencies we'd worked with when heading global digital organisations and elevating that. There was a constant frustration of "good enough" work, so Brave & Heart was founded to go beyond that and deliver with bravery. This means always taking our client's challenges to the next level with world-class execution and, most importantly, using our heart to do the right thing with them at the same time."

Rachel, Senior Account Manager: Be Collaborative

"Collaboration is part of our everyday life. I look after the team that services our Dubai client, a large multinational whose intranet we designed, developed, built, and now manage. Working globally across over a dozen regions with thousands of pages and over one hundred separate sites means we are constantly juggling global timelines, priorities and teams. This value ensures we work as one team: Brave & Heart and client partners, collaborating towards a common goal."

Lauren, Account Manager: Be Supportive

"I lead multiple areas in the company, including our Marketing and People teams. We support all our employees with real-world benefits and comprehensive training. Building on people work for other clients, we have taken a best-of-breed approach with a benefits points system, which has just launched to great feedback. On top of this, we provide mental health support as standard for all employees, as well as comprehensive personal and professional training packages that enable growth, supporting our team and our clients."

Wajeeha, Technical Manager: Be Modern

"Being modern is about making sure we deliver innovation solutions for our clients that are progressive and future-thinking. I oversaw the design and delivery of an end-to-end project management system for a key North East client using the Microsoft Power Platform and other exciting technologies. Not only was it delivered on time and budget, but it has changed how the whole company works, delivering a fresh, modern and exciting new way of working."

Olivia, Junior Account Executive: Be Focused

"Working with Brave & Heart means working across different challenges simultaneously. Although junior in the team, I have worked on intranet development, business strategy, digital decarbonisation, UX/UI improvements, and even led client meetings. Being focused is important with so much going on, ensuring I deliver on time and to the right quality."

CEO David Parkinson says, "I can't wait to see what 2024 brings us and how living our values will support our growth and client partner initiatives."

Need a new employee value proposition, business strategy or world-class IT systems development?

Find out more about Brave & Heart and their exciting work across People | Strategy | Digital at www.braveandheart.com/our-work



“

...We always take our client's challenges to the next level with world-class execution and, most importantly, use our heart to do the right thing....

L-R: Lauren, Wajeetha, Olivia, David, Rachel.

March = B-Corp month

March sees a worldwide focus for the B-Corp movement, where the community comes together to celebrate all it means and encompasses to be 'a B-Corp'.

Having certified as a B-Corp in 2023 our journey is an ongoing one, with a focus on continuous improvement towards our overall positive impact. Perhaps the most important aspect for any B-Corp and in our mind, should be for any business is, 'what impact are you making?'

The number of certified B-Corporations across the globe and specifically the UK is rising at a phenomenal rate. We are privileged in the North East to be surrounded by a large number of certified B-Corps and many pending. With the launch of a regional B-Impact Social Group soon, alongside the likes of the OG's, Robson Laidler, Sail Creative and Umi we have welcomed some recently certified businesses such as Tapered Plus and Muckle LLP to the community; ultimately showcasing the ever-increasing and wide variety of businesses choosing to get on board.

As a group, we hold regular events open to all those interested in using Business as Force for Good across the region. We held one in Tees Valley in November 2023, Umi hosted February's event in Durham and Scott Logic are hosting the next one on Tuesday 30th April in Newcastle, 4-6pm. Check out the event on Eventbrite to book a ticket. These events are open to all and are not just for B-Corp certified businesses – if you want to find out more and meet some of us – we would love to see you there!



Jessica Williams

You may also have spotted some of us in the press this month talking about how we are still striving for improvement in the impact we are making. For us, our annual Impact Report and mentality of continuous improvement alongside our KPIs are geared not only towards growth but closely aligned to the five B-Corp pillars. We set goals for each element to improve our impact; from reducing our landfill, travel, and overall personal and business carbon footprint to creating more links to our local communities, increasing our local supply chain to collating more feedback

from our customers. It is about making lots of little improvements across the board – always looking at ways to improve, after all recertification is only ever just around the corner!

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SANDERSON YOUNG



FOLLOWING IN THE FAMILY FOOTSTEPS



Harry Young has been promoted at Sanderson Young to a Regional Valuer with effect from February 2024. Harry, who is now 27, has worked for Sanderson Young for over 9 years, initially as a part time support during his university years and, since the summer of 2018, on a permanent full time basis once he completed his degree in Business Management and Marketing from Leeds.

He has experienced all aspects of the business over the last 9 years from tea boy to negotiator and from residential lettings to the sale of large country estates.

Harry is the youngest of three sons by the founder, Duncan Young and his wife Alison, who proudly celebrate 25 years of selling and letting homes regionally in the North of England

Harry commented "I'm delighted to expand my responsibilities in a valuing role and, whilst also staying committed to my negotiations in the Rare! department, I look forward to seeing more houses, not just in Newcastle, but throughout the region. It's one of the most rewarding and exciting roles within estate agency to guide owners from the very beginning as to how Sanderson Young

can make a difference to their home sale and not only maximise the selling price, but efficiently and smoothly move those clients from A to B.

I'm confident our experienced and mature team of sales support can continue to exceed the expectation of our clients and, through our proven marketing strengths, make a real difference to their sale. At 27 years of age I'm still regarded as one of the "youngsters" in the firm but I know I can go that extra mile to achieve similar high levels of success for my clients."

Harry will continue to be based out of the regional office in Gosforth and will join a very strong team of valuers including Duncan Young and the experienced minds and backgrounds of Penny Wright, Mandy Denning, Greg McCarthy and Gail McLean who oversees the lettings valuations.

If you are thinking of moving in 2024, Harry and the Gosforth team will do their very best to make it happen! You can contact Harry Young on 0191 213 0033 or email harry.young@sandersonyoung.co.uk



SANDERSON
YOUNG



Bridge End House

Berwick Hill, Ponteland

Sitting in the charming and historic village of Ponteland is this delightful detached country cottage with spectacular south facing views, in a private yet accessible position. Recently extensively renovated to an extremely high standard, the single level property benefits from an impressive open plan kitchen/dining room, modern lighting, solid oak doors and luxury bathrooms with 'smart' technology. Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax Band: D.



3 2 2 C

Price Guide:
£775,000



Julie Douglas
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SANDERSON
YOUNG



The Old Chapel

Dyke Heads Lane, Greenside, Ryton

The Old Chapel provides a stunning, contemporary residence which has been sympathetically developed over the past 2 years. This incredible, bespoke home is immaculately and stylishly presented throughout and offers wonderful, uninterrupted views over the surrounding greenery. Externally, the property has a lawned front garden, a small rear courtyard and a private roof terrace with BBQ area and space for a hot tub. Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax Band: F.

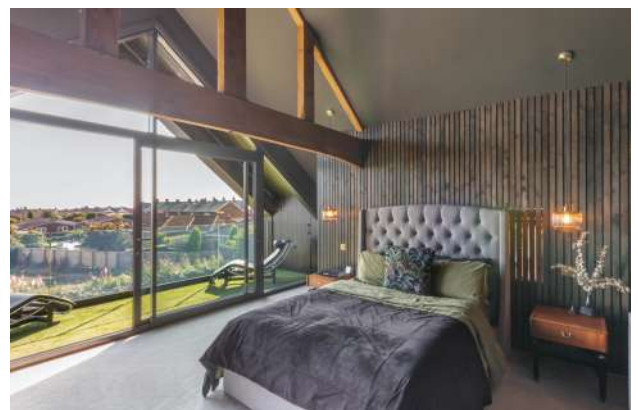


3 2 2 C

Price Guide:
Offers Over £795,000



Julie Summerbell
0191 213 0033
julie.summerbell@sandersonyoung.co.uk





SANDERSON
YOUNG



Woodbine Road Gosforth

This impressive, period family home is ideally situated to the south backing side of the sought after residential street of Woodbine Road within the very heart of Gosforth. Beautifully presented throughout, the three storey property boasts over 2000 sq ft of internal accommodation with many lovely features including marble fireplaces, plantation shutters and polished wooden floorboards. Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax Band: D.



4 2 2

Price Guide:
Offers over £585,000



Emma Lane
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emma.lane@sandersonyoung.co.uk

Leading tech firm CMYK | Business Technology celebrates ISO 22301 certification



Sarah Wharrier and Craig Pratt

CMYK | Business Technology are thrilled to announce a significant milestone having successfully attained ISO 22301 certification, a testament to the firm's unwavering commitment to excellence and resilience in managing business continuity.

The region's leading Managed IT Services and Business Technology providers recent accreditation was made possible by every member of the CMYK team for their hard work, dedication, and commitment to excellence. Together, CMYK have achieved a milestone that sets the business apart in the industry

and reinforces their promise to delivering exceptional value to their customers.

Technical director of CMYK, David Crosby said; "ISO 22301 certification is a significant achievement for any organisation. It demonstrates a commitment to ensuring business continuity and resilience in the face of potential disruptions, which is crucial in today's dynamic business environment!"

CMYK's UKAS backed, ISO 22301 is an internationally recognised standard that validates their dedication to ensuring the continuity of business operations, especially in times of uncertainty. This achievement underscores CMYK's relentless focus on safeguarding their customer's supply chains, providing them with the confidence that comes with a robust and reliable partner.

This certification is a result of the collective efforts of every team member at CMYK and adds to the businesses existing ISO 9001,

14001, 27001 and 45001 certification. This reflects CMYK's commitment to upholding the highest standards in business practices, risk management, and disaster recovery planning. By adhering to ISO 22301, it not only enhancing the firm's own resilience but also contributes to the overall reliability of the supply chains they play an integral part of.

David added; "This whole process has been a massive eye-opener for the business, hard work but worth the challenge. This has been a great effort by the whole team here at CMYK | Business Technology."

"We understand the critical role we play in our customer's success, and this certification serves as a symbol of our dedication to providing uninterrupted services. We believe that a resilient business is a trustworthy business, and we are proud to be a partner you can rely on".

www.cmyk-digital.co.uk



**The 2023
Lord's Taverners
Christmas Lunch**

Held in Newcastle Civic Centre back in December raised an amazing £60,000, this money will be used in the region and nationally to empower and positively impact the lives of young people facing the challenges of inequality.

The speakers this year were Mark Wood, Shay Given and Ieuan Evans along with Pete Graves and Justin Lockwood who were all brilliant!

Thank you to the event sponsors Wates Group and Lockton Companies.

Huge thankyou to all supporters and all who contributed to a fantastic event.

***For information on future events
please contact Regional Chairman
Jamiegraham@aarsleff.co.uk***





Maven invests a further £1 million in iPac Innovations

Maven Capital Partners (Maven") has led a £1 million investment in iPac Packaging Innovations ("iPac"). The transaction comprised of two investments from Maven-managed regional funds - including a £600,000 investment from the Finance Durham Fund (FDF), established by Durham County Council and overseen by Business Durham, and a £400,000 investment from the North East Development Capital Fund (NEDCF), supported by the European Regional Development Fund.

iPac manufactures sustainable thermoformed packaging, primarily used in the food and



pharmaceutical sectors, and has secured supply chain contracts with several tier-one food suppliers. The business supports an impressive

list of customers, with its products packaging fresh foods and produce for all of the major UK grocery retailers.



Lylalife gaining new customer insight with second North East fund investment

An ambitious North East continence product supplier is building up its customer service and business management resources after securing a second North East Fund investment through regional fund management firm NEL Fund Managers.

Lylalife supplies a range of high-quality urinary incontinence products which are delivered directly and discreetly to customers, with a monthly repeat order service available alongside one-off purchases.

The Durham-headquartered business received a six-figure investment from the North East Small Loan Fund Supported by The European Regional Development Fund in 2021 to help boost its marketing and customer acquisition, and it currently has a customer base of over 8,500 buyers right across the UK.

The management team has now gone back to NEL to obtain a further six figure investment, this time from the North East Growth Capital Fund, to support the development of a bespoke CRM and management reporting app.

Two new jobs are expected to be created as the business grows this year, which will take the Lylalife team into double figures, while the development of a number of new products is also being underpinned by the latest investment.

Further resources are also being directed towards digital marketing campaigns through a number of different channels.



Investment boost for the North East firm transforming diabetic retinopathy

North East bio-photonic research and development company PolyPhotonix has received a six figure investment from NPIF-FW Capital Debt Finance to assist a ground-breaking product which can help to save the eyesight of diabetes patients.

The Noctura 400 Mask is a non-invasive, low cost treatment for diabetic retinopathy, one of the most common causes of blindness. It is used by patients at home every night during sleep and delivers a low level of light through closed eyelids to prevent their eyes from dark adapting. This manages the nocturnal oxygen demand of the retina during the night and avoids the risk of retinal hypoxia, which is key in the mechanism of retinopathy development in patients with diabetes.

In clinical trials Noctura 400 has been found to improve or stabilise sight loss in diabetics. It is a home-based monitored treatment and costs a fraction of current treatments. The current treatment pathway is to simply monitor patients who have early signs of the disease until their eyes deteriorate and qualify for treatment. By offering the Noctura 400 sleep mask at this earlier stage, patients' vision is preserved, referrals into hospital clinics are reduced and the later stage expensive and invasive injections are avoided, saving around £3K per patient per year.[i]

PolyPhotonix has a customer services centre in Tees Valley as well as an office in South Durham. The company has received the investment from NPIF - FW Capital Debt Finance which is managed by FW Capital and is part of the Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund.



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L-R: New RL employees - Sarah Middleton, Georgina McAleavey, Anika Venayak and Emily Brace.

New Year, New Appointments at Robson Laidler Accountants

Robson Laidler Accountants in Newcastle and Durham has begun 2024 with a string of new and familiar faces to strengthen its team.

Emily Brace, a former Robson Laidler employee has rejoined the firm as healthcare senior after a stint at another local practice. Sarah Middleton, who previously worked at Robson Laidler from 2018 to 2021 has also returned as audit senior.

Their return marks a notable trend of "boomerang employees" at the firm, highlighting its appeal following a range of enhanced benefits and company culture initiatives and ability to attract and retain talent.

Georgina McAleavey is taking up the mantle as a new manager in the firm's business innovation department, managing client portfolios for small to medium sized businesses, and Anika Venayak is also a new accounts assistant in the growing healthcare department.

Robson Laidler head of people and culture Amy Park said: "We're delighted to start off the new year by strengthening Robson

Laidler with four new appointments and it's particularly humbling to see the return of two former employees. We are spearheading some exciting wellbeing and business growth projects currently and it's good to hear these initiatives are being narrated throughout the industry and as such we are seeing a rise in former employees wanting to part of our future.

"We wish Emily, Sarah, Georgina and Anika the very best of luck in their new endeavours with us and we hope to see them continue to grow with our firm."

Both Emily and Anika are joining the healthcare department, which has growth plans to attract more dentistry associates and practices within the next 12-months. The team has also seen an influx in new GP practice work.

Robson Laidler healthcare semi senior Emily Brace said: "Returning to my former workplace means I have been able to hit the ground

running in a more senior role. I've advanced my career by leveraging pre-existing relationships and networks while also harnessing experiences acquired elsewhere.

"I thought the grass might be greener, but I missed the positive company culture at Robson Laidler and the enhancements the firm has made to remuneration packages and work-life balance has pulled me back. I am so pleased I've returned."

Georgina, with the support of three other managers, will head up the 20-strong Business Innovation team with a strong focus on scalable businesses in the construction, tech, and retail sectors.

Whilst Sarah takes a senior position in the audit and assurance team, where her skills and input will make a positive difference on a busy line-up of upcoming public and private sector projects for 2024 and beyond.

As well as being the region's first accredited B Corporation, Robson Laidler currently holds the title of North East Accountancy Firm of the Year in the Medium sized business category. It was shortlisted in the Multicultural Apprenticeship Awards last year and continues to maintain its Excellence status for the Northern TUC's Better Health at Work Awards.

www.robson-laidler.co.uk



Bluestones Investment Group completes double acquisition

Bluestones Investment Group has completed its latest acquisitions with the purchase of New Zealand-based Home Recruitment (Home) and its sister business, based in London, Australasian Recruitment Company (ARC).

ARC was founded in 2003 by Jeremy Nicholls and Samantha Webster to help place candidates, often from Australia and New Zealand, as well as local talent, into positions across all sectors of industry, promptly securing an enviable global client list.

Samantha subsequently moved to New Zealand in 2015 where, along with colleague Minta Holton, who is also a shareholder in the business, established Home Recruitment.

Home specialises in helping talent returning to the country from working overseas secure permanent positions or seek new opportunities in New Zealand.

Jeremy moved to Australia in 2019, retaining his shareholding in ARC, and handing the day-to-day management of the business to its shareholding senior management team Holly Finlayson and Ruth Mojzis.

As a result of the acquisitions, Jeremy and Samantha will exit in quarter one 2024 with Holly, Ruth, and Minta continuing to grow the businesses working closely with Bluestones Investment Group.

Chester-based Bluestones invests in recruiters, recruitment companies, and staffing services organisations to help them scale, as well as providing a range of support services such as payroll and marketing. It currently has a portfolio of over 20 businesses across the professional services, healthcare, education, technical & engineering, generalist, and support sectors.

Bluestones Investment Group was identified as an ideal investment partner for the two businesses by Newcastle-based RG Corporate Finance (RGCF), which was instructed by Samantha and Jeremy to source potential strategic acquirers and in turn advise on the sale of both businesses.

Providing corporate finance advice to the shareholders of Australasian Recruitment Company and Home Recruitment was RGCF Partner and Head of Corporate Finance Carl Swansbury, CF Manager, Adam Tindale and CF Executive, Ben Kain.

Legal advice for the shareholders of Australasian Recruitment Company was provided by Newcastle-based Muckle LLP, led by Partner Matthew Walsh, Associate Solicitor Stephanie Brown, and Corporate Solicitor Olivia Tindale.

Legal advice for the shareholders of Home Recruitment in New Zealand was provided by Russell Weir, Corporate Lawyer at Auckland-based Simpson Western.

Accounts and tax advice was provided by Detlev Anderson, Director at Newcastle-based Kinnair Associates.

RSM Yorkshire's deal team provided buy-side advice on the deal, led by corporate finance partner Steve Hubbard, with support from corporate finance associate director Jonny Bywater and associate Joe Holt. Translink provided buy-side financial due diligence, with legal advice from Irwin Mitchell and, in New Zealand, by Tompkins Wake.

Asbestos Audit sets up in-house laboratory with second small loan fund investment

A specialist County Durham-based asbestos management firm is building up its in-house expertise after bringing in a second North East Fund investment through regional fund management firm NEL Fund Managers.

Asbestos Audit acts as both a main and sub-contractor on asbestos-related projects of every size, from processing single asbestos samples to managing asbestos for full industrial estates, and works on environmental projects with a range of clients right across the UK.

The Peterlee-headquartered firm secured a five-figure investment from the North East Small Loan Fund Supported by The European Regional Development Fund in 2021, which it used to help introduce a number of innovative new services and bring in the extra staff required to deliver them.

And now, it has completed a further Small Loan Fund investment through NEL, which is enabling it to set up and gain the required accreditations for its own testing laboratory within its headquarters that will be staffed by a team of five specialist technicians.

As well as allowing for more revenue to stay within the business, the new laboratory will also enable material samples to be tested more quickly while ensuring that quality standards are always maintained.

Asbestos Audit has more than doubled its workforce from 18 to 42 people



in the last two years, and is expecting to create a further 18 new jobs over the next twelve months, as well as to increase its annual turnover by around £2m to £5.5m in the same period.



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Tier One Capital's Fund Management team for Develop North PLC

Newcastle upon Tyne based Tier One Capital (TOC) is a leading provider of fund and wealth management services.

The TOC team specialises in managing institutional and high net worth investment funds and are the appointed fund managers to Develop North PLC, an institutional investment company listed on the London Stock Exchange.

Develop North PLC provides loans to the property sector and is a credible alternative lending source for property developers in the North of England and Scotland.

Since inception, Develop North PLC has created almost 3,000 jobs, provided over £70m of loans and supported 33 developments with a GDV of £183m.

Recent property developments supported by Develop North include:-

£3.8M senior debt facility to deliver a new ultra modern and environmentally friendly advanced crematorium on the outskirts of Glasgow for Horizon Ceremonies, creating 25 new jobs in the construction and operation of the facility.

Funding support for £9M Bede Homes Bill Quay development in Gateshead, facilitating the construction of 30 three and four bedroom family homes.

£3.4M senior debt facility to support the development by Homes by Esh for the construction of 34 family homes at Chilton Moor development, Tyne and Wear.

£1.2M senior debt facility with the Apartment Group to upgrade the Grade II listed building Croft Hotel and create a new wedding venue in North Yorkshire, creating 30 new jobs as part of the upgrade.



Ian McElroy, Chief Executive

Ian is one of the founding shareholders of TOC and a board member of Develop North PLC.



Jess Swindells, Managing Director

Jess joined TOC in 2017 and is a practising lawyer specialising in Banking and Corporate Finance.



Brendan O'Grady, Fund Manager

Brendan is a Chartered Accountant and corporate treasurer and joined TOC in 2017 and leads the Fund Management team.



Paul Crawley, General Counsel

Paul provides legal counsel to TOC's board of directors and senior management team.



Richard McEvoy, Head of Credit Committee

Richard is an experienced Corporate Banker providing lending process and governance advice to Develop North PLC.



Andrew Cawkwell, Credit Committee Member

Andrew is a Restructuring Solicitor and Certified Turnaround professional providing advice to Develop North PLC.



Mike Pott, managing director at RMT Accountants & Business Advisors

RMT Accountants & Business Advisors set for growth after joining national accountancy group Sumer

One of the North East's longest-standing professional services firms is set for expansion after becoming part of the UK's fastest-growing accountancy group.

RMT Accountants & Business Advisors has joined Sumer, a top 15 UK accountancy group which is investing in successful accountancy firms throughout the UK to create regional hubs which focus on the SME market.

Sumer has grown rapidly over the last year by completing 12 co-investment transactions and provides its hubs with access to enhanced technology and compliance support, as well as funding for further acquisitions and new opportunities for hub colleagues.

RMT's existing management team will continue to lead its development and has already begun investigating opportunities for growth with acquisition a key part of its future commercial strategy.

The Gosforth-based practice, which has always held clients at the core of its business, has expanded to a team of 120 across its various

service lines and is continuing to grow.

Mike Pott, managing director at RMT Accountants & Business Advisors, says: "This is a tremendous opportunity for us to make a real step change in our operations. We're excited to become part of a nationwide organisation with a clear strategy for growth and an absolute commitment to excellent client service.

"The Sumer shared ownership model means that its hub partners retain leadership of their practices and preserve their local identity whilst benefiting from the scale and resources of a national group.

"Sumer's ethos, values and approach match our own. With a highly skilled and expanding North East team, allied to everything that Sumer provides, we expect RMT to make significant progress."

Established in 1954, RMT Accountants provides

the full range of financial and business advisory services through its accountancy, specialist tax, medical and healthcare, corporate finance and recovery and insolvency teams.

It works with UK companies of all sizes, both within and outside the North East, including a range of international clients.

Sumer currently has over 1,000 team members spread across more than 40 offices and generates an annual turnover of over £100 million.

It is planning to continue its rapid growth through 2024 with further co-investments, together with the launch of additional services to benefit its SME clients.

Warren Mead, Chief Executive Officer of Sumer, adds: "Sumer is shaking up the UK accountancy sector by joining forces with outstanding regional firms who share our vision to champion entrepreneurs and owner managed businesses.

"We are unique because we are embedded in local communities, yet we're able to provide our clients with the benefits of national scale.

"Our mission is to champion smaller and medium-sized businesses, through the provision of quality accountancy and professional services, which we believe is vital to power our communities and the wider economy.

"RMT has an exceptional regional reputation for the quality of its services and its team. We're very pleased to be bringing such a well-respected brand into the UK's fastest-growing mid-market accountancy group."

www.r-m-t.co.uk



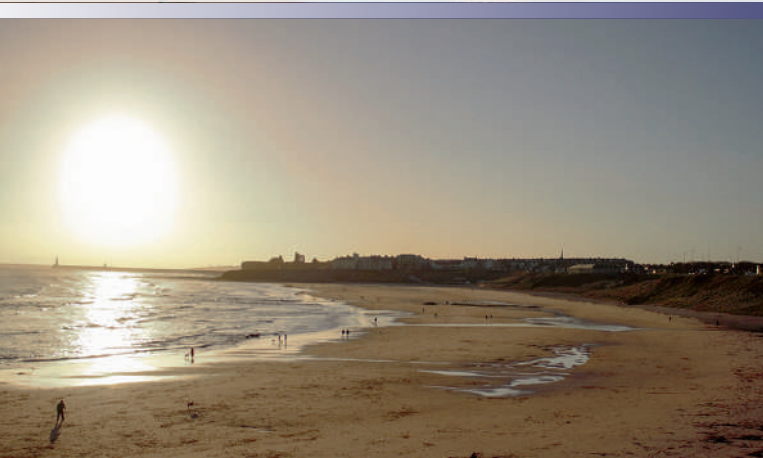
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How 2024 will shape up in the North East

As many companies approach their financial year end Andrew Marsh, chair of Vistage North East and Northumberland, NED and entrepreneur, rounds up what the region's business leaders are likely to see in 2024, based on 2023's performance.

Andrew says: "The key reflections for 2023-2024 are heavily shaping what the financial year of 2024-2025 will bring in expectations, themes and challenges for business leaders."

"According to Vistage and their in-depth survey results, more than half of all business leaders (56%) in the UK and Ireland believe that the economic conditions in the country have either improved or remained the same since the last financial year.

"This, however, flies in the face of what was expected post pandemic and indeed what many predicted for their own business and the general economy. In part it can be put down to general faith in the future recovering and business as usual returning to sectors quicker than anticipated. It is also in part to do with the resilience plans that were put into action as companies were put under unusual and immense pressure.

"Looking back, we started 2023 with an energy price crises, a slowing in economic growth and inflation, and it did seem as though geopolitical tensions were easing. There was a feeling of positivity. Light at the end of what had been a very long tunnel.

"But as a recent McKinsey report outlines, it seems that the business environment for many went the other way with uncertainty actually deepening throughout the year, in every sector. Some of this uncertainty allowed for growth of certain tech, and AI in particular started to gain a hold, although many are still approaching it with a sense of doubt and scepticism.

"The 2023 PwC survey stated that 47% of CIO's prioritised the transformation of their data platforms to drive business growth, and a boom is building on the back of that, but this is leading to challenges, and that did contribute to the fact that 2023 saw new and intense encounters take hold that many responded to well, whilst others simply did not.

"Another side of the transformations of digital platforms saw the growth in Cyber-attacks – 27% of SMEs fell victim and it was revealed that only 60% have a regularly reviewed cyber-attack plan in place. That alongside the increased impact of AI bringing the threat for jobs in the future caused unease, as did the pressure to achieve ROI for technology and training invested in to keep up with the competition.

"Return to office or continue to work from home decisions also took their toll – investment in office space or loss of team camaraderie and output levels became the debate topics at board level. Boards have also had Diversity, Equity and Inclusion as a main topic, with employers having to face the needs of their teams and their customers, which has weighed heavy on some in both time and cost.

"Despite all of those challenges, business leaders in the region are feeling positive about 2024 with 63% of Vistage's members anticipating that their firm's sales revenues will increase during the next 12 months, and 53% expect their profitability to increase too.

"There is a softer, more positive approach to cash due to elevated inflation and interest rates with a focus on consolidation and sustainability. Resilience offsetting those interest rates and higher input prices will become non-negotiable as direct challenges will include: domestic and international economic and political issues (29%); rising inflation (9%); the digital transformation process (5%); sustained supply chain disruption (5%).

"2024 is the year that the majority of tech firms will be paying back CBILS on bounce back loans which add extra pressure.

"Another key theme for 2024 is people. 56% of Vistage's UK members will be focusing on increasing the number of employees in their business - but they are aware that the talent shortage will continue. Due to this 29% of those surveyed are actively budgeting for larger pay rises in a bid to retain top talent and upskilling existing workers. It is expected that employers will have to offer creative benefits and reasons for talent to stay, for example, 4 day work weeks are likely to become routine. Mental health and wellbeing of workers must become a priority and senior leaders must ensure that all managers are good managers, skilled in conflict resolution to bed in teams and ensure a healthy culture.

"The use of AI will continue to grow but with a focus on using it to create more opportunity, not diminish it. Failure of development of AI platforms to the next level will come at cost to developers but also fuelled by the AI boom, data privacy regulation will need to accelerate too to be in line with GDPR.

"CFOs and COOs will need to become experts in cyber security and all teams will need to sharpen to ensure increasing productivity with what they have, to accelerate growth - CISOs, CTOs, and CIOs will become more critical in the journey to secure a bright future.

"In the main, organisations need to be and actually seem to be resolute to maintain a performance where they are operating with excellence. They also need to be focusing on continual improvement of performance to grow confidence on all levels, and if anywhere can do that, I am confident it is the North East."

More information on Vistage can be found by contacting Andrew on Andrew.marsh@vistagechair.co.uk



Andrew Marsh

The view in front

Last month Peter Neal, founder of Experience Bank Group, talked about how his peer group for existing and aspiring NEDs, Trustees, board advisors and consultants working at board level had swelled so much in numbers that the group had split into two cohorts with a third on the way in 2024.

To bring to life what happens in these meetings Peter shares blogs after the sessions, and in this article, you will find round ups of the first split meetings of 2024.

“January saw our EB peer group programme for existing and aspiring NEDs, trustees, board advisers and consultants working at board level split into two cohorts. The numbers have swelled significantly with constant requests to join - this way we can ensure each member gets valuable airtime. And, once a quarter, we all come together and catch up!

“In EB1’s session we welcomed new member Arif, who’s been involved in the Experience Bank for a number of years and recognises the support the group for existing and aspiring NEDs, Trustees, Board Advisors and Consultants at Board Level gives him in his roles.

“We start our sessions with a sign-in where we look at scores for how people in the group are doing business wise and in their personal lives. We also use this as an opportunity to raise any questions. The scores were all solid for January and words like, manic, slow, steady were all used to describe the start of 2024!

“Our amazing facilitator, mentor and coach, Andrew Marsh, asked us all to make a start on our outcome/intent statement i.e. what does ‘good’ look like by December 2024? The model is based on the 1-3-5 approach from Pete Wilkinson. For the next group meeting we all agreed to have finished our statement and objectives.

“We moved onto questions including an issue on company culture, especially in larger companies with multiple sites and geographies. The scenario is tension with the MD of an acquired business leading to friction between central finance and the local team. We undertook a wide discussion and looked at the Burke-Letwin Diagnostic Model as a way

of evaluating – we’ll be expanding on this next time as we were interested.

“Next we explored what CRM systems people are using. Systems like Hubspot, Salesforce etc were shared. However, when looking at the purpose of the system to track the sale/lead and project management/delivery, the discussion included Trello and other PM systems. The discussion made us question if one system could do all.

“In EB2 we were joined by new members Jonathan and Graham - Graham is a returning member who recognised the support the group for existing and aspiring NEDs, Trustees, Board Advisors and Consultants at Board Level gives him in his roles.

“Again sign-ins were done in person including introductions, how 2024 has started and questions to discuss. The group looked at their 1-3-5 like the other group and took time out to work up initial thoughts to revisit in February’s session. We then moved onto a few questions from the group. Firstly, Andrew joined up three questions as they overlapped. A query on doing your PR to raise profile, how do you get your first role, and curiosity on our view of the NED market in general. This was an open debate process. It was a really wide-ranging discussion including the dynamics and nature of the NED market in North East. 95% of all NEDs in SME are appointed via referrals/intros and we looked at

focusing in on your target sectors so you avoid being scatter gun.

“We then looked a question on the transition into MD from Commercial Director as a board making the change. We split into two groups to discuss and then fed the key inputs into the person asking the question. This lead into discussion on making sure agendas are good, appropriate and that all prep is done ahead of meetings. Andrew reminded us that a board should be more strategic than operational – think about driving a car, the rear view (i.e. the past) should be looked at but if you take your eye away from the view in front it can be catastrophic...! The front view and indicators are all about the future and where you can avoid disaster by applying good focus.

“Finally, we discussed the strategic demise and opportunity of print journalism in the North East. This morphed into Andrew sharing the PESTEL analysis - Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental and Legalisation. This is a perfect example of what a board should be discussing, and we look forward to feedback on the amends to our member’s board meeting agenda.”

If you would like to join our peer group, do get in touch with me on peter@theexperiencebank.co.uk





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Ongoing appointments ensure UNW Audit goes from strength to strength

In the wake of sustained growth and new client wins, Newcastle-based independent chartered accountancy and business advisory firm UNW continues to invest substantially in recruitment and the development of its audit team.

Following the successful integration over the last 12 months of Martin Cross at partner level, the firm recently also appointed Nicola Coleman as an audit partner. Having worked extensively with privately owned entrepreneurial businesses and not-for-profit entities within the 'Big 4' and for a regional independent firm, Nicola was recruited to support the firm's ongoing growth.

Nicola joins the existing audit partner team of Andrew Wilson, Fern Rivett, Dave Redhead, Anne Hallowell and Martin Cross, with the firm also announcing the imminent arrival of an audit partner currently heading up the audit division



Nicola Coleman (left) with members of UNW's 70-strong Audit and Assurance team

of a regional office within a 'Big 4' firm. Reflecting on the senior appointments, Andrew Wilson, Managing Partner at UNW said: "Given our continued success in attracting high-quality clients and our commitment to providing them all with the best advice and service, this investment at partner level is timely.

"Our partner team possesses a wealth of experience and expertise in delivering to our expanding audit portfolio. Furthermore, they have a track record of passing on their experience to the wider team, ensuring that we are developing our own talent to become the leaders of tomorrow. I confidently anticipate

promotions to partner level within the foreseeable future.

"We do not chase growth and we are not obsessed with numbers, but we know that if we have the best team, we will continue to progress. We are entering an exciting phase in the development of our business and are doing so from a position of real strength."

Speaking of her motivations for joining the firm, Nicola Coleman said: "What really attracted me to UNW is the strength of its reputation in the region for delivering service excellence and achieving the best results for its clients. With demand for our audit services now greater than

ever before, I feel like there is a real and exciting opportunity for the firm to continue to grow.

"UNW have recruited very well in recent years at apprentice and graduate level and have a great track record of developing exceptional talent. Ingrained in the team culture is a collaborative and supportive approach, with the ambition to be the best at what we do."

www.unw.co.uk

A problem shared is a problem halved: Why an outsourced finance director can help with more than just the numbers



Kingsmere Finance Directors L-R: Bob Evans, Steve Jones, Alister Brown, Geoff MacLauchlan, Harriet King, Nina Evans.

Staff mental health and wellbeing are rightly moving further up corporate priority lists. But increasingly, reports are showing that it is not just the workforce feeling the strain; CEOs, Directors, and managers are also increasingly being affected by the 'loneliness epidemic'. According to Deloitte, almost 70% of C-suite executives in 2023 were "seriously considering quitting for a job that better supports their well-being."

Geoff MacLauchlan is one of five outsourced Financial Directors at Kingsmere working with a wide range of clients, including C-suite, directors, and owner-managers, and he has seen first-hand how the support of an outsourced adviser can significantly benefit a business.

Business dream to nightmarish reality

Regardless of your role or seniority within a business, the past few years have certainly been tough. But for those in charge, it can start to feel like the waves keep rolling with little to no opportunity to take stock before the next one crashes down. Even the most resilient business owners and managers will begin to struggle.

Geoff has found that recruiting – and retaining – the right talent, and battling inflation are the most common struggles facing the businesses he works with. Business owners encountering these challenges can soon feel disheartened and unsupported with what was once their passion project.

"What we try to do in those circumstances is to bring some perspective," says Geoff. "Sometimes the perspective is, 'you're better off out of it'. But usually, with our experience we find the positives and identify openings that they haven't thought of as opportunities."

More than just the numbers

Geoff continues: "The most underrated function that an outsourced FD fulfils is that of a sounding board for those at the top, who may find it difficult to talk openly to their colleagues or have no one they can speak to openly about their business challenges. The outsourced FD is impartial, independent, and open-minded - providing an opportunity to explore new ideas with someone who is commercially aware and can provide a new perspective."

As outsourced Finance Directors, while they're initially brought in to support the business' finance function, chances are that Geoff and the team have also worked with organisations who have faced similar challenges. This uniquely enables them to provide advice and guidance based on experience, removed from any politics or nuances in the business.

Support and pragmatism are key

Having ploughed your heart and soul into making a successful business, it can be difficult to step back and let others help. While some business owners are good at managing everything, many have their specific talents which are underutilised when trying to be all things for all people.

"Most of the problems that we see stem from a

refusal to accept that they're not very good at something and continuing to follow the same old path" says Geoff, "they then get a double whammy - they're doing something that they're not good at and it's stopping them from doing what they are good at."

It's good to talk

Geoff's advice to those facing struggles at the top is "find people to talk to". Whether that's a networking group or another senior professional with experience and outside perspective, such as an outsourced FD.

"It's an old saying but it's very true: a problem shared is a problem halved," concludes Geoff, "you need to find people to talk to because, once you start talking it through, you find solutions which you couldn't see because you're so wrapped up in the problem itself."


It doesn't need to be lonely at the top, a sounding board, solid network of peers, and an outside perspective can bring the fun back into running a business.

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The Kingsmere team is actively on the lookout for like-minded FDs seeking a flexible, varied and impactful working life, as well as more junior support roles for activities such as management account production and bookkeeping.

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Emmersons Solicitors recognised at inaugural National Family Law Awards

North East law firm, Emmersons Solicitors, has been recognised for legal excellence, business diligence and customer care at a national awards ceremony held in January in Bristol.

The firm, which has offices in Sunderland and Newcastle, were announced as Family Law Firm of the Year- Regional and highly commended in the Boutique Firm of the Year category at the British Family Law Awards.

The awards ceremony took place for the first time at the Harbour House Hotel in the historic city of Bristol and was hosted by former BBC News anchor turned family mediator Joanna Gosling. The awards, which were launched by leading online news publication Today's Family Lawyer, was attended by hundreds of Family solicitors, mediators, barristers, legal suppliers and practitioners.

Firms are encouraged to submit entries detailing their approach to clients, people, technology, process, professional development and technical excellence. Submissions are then scrutinised by an independent and expert judging panel. The judges commented that Emmersons had "care and compassion for its clients" and are "clearly a very active firm with focus on legal expertise, community and its staff".

Jacqueline Emmerson, Director and head of Family Law at Emmersons commented, "On behalf of our whole team we are thrilled to have won in one category and to have been highly commended in a second.

"Applying for such awards means that you have something to offer, something that makes you stand out as a law firm. I was able to concentrate on how we go above and beyond for clients who are often experiencing the most difficult time of their lives."

Established by Jacqueline in 1998, Emmersons supports hundreds of clients every year through Divorce, and specialise in Collaborative Style Family Law, Expat Divorce, Child Arrangements and Same Sex Divorce.

Burnetts Solicitors supports Look Ahead in the North weekend

Burnetts Solicitors LLP has taken up the mantle of sponsor for Look Ahead in the North, an event organised by brain injury charity, Headway and held in March at the Calvert Trust, Kielder.

The event gives the attendees the opportunity to take part in a whole host of activities, covering everything from using a zip wire, archery to high ropes as well as enjoying the chance to socialise. And the support now given by Burnetts – which has been involved in the event for a number of years – will help ease the financial burden of bringing this ambitious weekend together.

Ruth Owens, Director of Services at Headway UK thanked the law firm for its sponsorship.

"LAN is a very special event that brings together brain injury survivors and their



families for a weekend of fully accessible outdoor activities, while building confidence and friendships," she said.

"It is the highlight of the year for many Headway members in the North East and Cumbria. The weekend brings together a community of brain injury survivors and their carers, to have fun, try new activities and experiences and to feel positive and excited for the future.

"We are so grateful to Burnetts for their vital support."

Young North East handball players get smart new look thanks to Hay & Kilner

Young members of a fast-growing regional sports club have received a welcome hand from North East law firm Hay & Kilner.

Players in the mini and junior sections at the Newcastle Vikings Handball Club are now wearing smart new playing kit that's been provided through a sponsorship deal with the Newcastle-based practice.

Described as football with hands and water polo without the water, handball is a fast-paced, court-based team sport played by people of all ages, and is especially popular across much of continental Europe.

The Vikings run weekly training sessions for junior players at the Beacon of Light in Sunderland on Tuesdays and at the Benfield Centre on Wednesdays, with anyone aged between three and 16 years-old welcome to come along to try it out.

Its senior section trains at the NuCastle Foundation Sports Centre every Monday and at the Benfield Centre on Wednesdays, with both men's and women's teams playing matches against other English and Scottish



clubs, as well as solely for leisure and enjoyment.

Marlen says "All our young members look great in their new sponsored kit and it's really giving them an extra feeling of belonging, so we're hugely grateful to Hay & Kilner for their support in making it available to everyone."

Ruth Fell, HR manager at Hay & Kilner, whose six-year-old son Charlie has been part of the Vikings junior section for the last two years, adds: "Charlie and his friends are so proud of their new kit and they all look great as they're hurtling around the court.

"This is a great way for Hay & Kilner to support a community sports club and we hope the new kit helps to encourage more North East kids to give handball a try."



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The Big Interview

Chris Welch

Keith Newman speaks to...

Chris Welch: Steering Sintons to new horizons

In the bustling legal landscape of the North East, one name stands tall—Chris Welch, the Managing Partner of Sintons, a distinguished Newcastle law firm with roots tracing back nearly 130 years. In this exclusive interview, Chris reflects on his journey with Sintons, the firm's evolution, and his perspective on the legal profession.

Chris joined Sintons in 2003 after a 16-year stint, 12 of which were as an equity partner, at another law firm. He was drawn to Sintons by its values, client-centric approach, and genuine care for its clients. The firm, then based in Jesmond with around 80 staff, captured Chris's attention not just for its reputation or size but for what it stood for. In 2004, Sintons moved to a new iconic location near to St James' Park in the heart of Newcastle, signalling the start of a transformative period of growth for the firm.

"The move from Jesmond to the city centre in 2004 was a springboard for what Sintons has become today. People took notice of us as we went from a modest Jesmond office to a prominent glass block in the city centre," said Chris. Riding that wave, Sintons propelled its corporate and commercial services to new heights.

Originally from the North West, Chris is the son of a clergyman, and his greatest inspiration comes from his parents, who taught him the values of hard work, compassion, and doing one's best. His legal journey began at Newcastle University where he forged a strong allegiance to the area and consequently settled into his working life. He has spent his entire career in the legal field, with Sintons being his professional home for more than two decades.

Chris's legal career initially revolved around corporate law, specifically mergers and acquisitions. Over the years, he transitioned to a more managerial role leading to his current position as full time Managing Partner. While he still maintains client relationships and undertakes some client work, his focus has shifted to overseeing the firm's strategic direction and managing larger projects.

Sintons has experienced substantial growth in recent years. The firm has seen a 30% increase in turnover over the last two financial years, reaching an impressive £16.9 million. It has also expanded its personnel, welcoming 30 new starters alone in the last fiscal year, bringing the total staff count to around 190. Chris's leadership and strategic business acumen has provided Sintons with clarity and direction, and his shadow of influence and people focused management style has encouraged his team to develop and thrive in today's competitive market.

Beyond corporate law, Sintons has made significant strides in new and diverse legal areas. The Neurotrauma Injury Department, dealing with life-changing injuries, has evolved into one of the top four claimant neurotrauma teams nationally. Just one example of how the firm has the capacity and the will to open and develop new emerging markets to benefit its clients' needs.

Community engagement and corporate social responsibility is also taken very seriously by the firm with staff encouraged to



volunteer hours provided by the firm to good causes and raise funds for the firm's chosen charity.

"Sintons takes great pride in its corporate social responsibility initiatives. We never forget that we're part of a community and it's good to give back which we do in several ways. We have a dedicated committee that organises charity partnerships and in the last two years we have raised around £30,000 for The People's Kitchen." Previous benefactors have included The Great North Air Ambulance, Daft as a Brush, and The Charlie Bear Appeal.

A significant ongoing project for Sintons is the current refurbishment of its office space. A seven-figure investment aims to create a modern, collaborative workspace with enhanced facilities. The first stage of this refurbishment, recently unveiled, has already gained acclaim, reflecting the firm's commitment to providing an optimal working environment for its staff and a welcoming, safe place for its clients. With more than a year in the planning, the whole refurb will be completed this summer.

"We're going to be celebrating our 130th anniversary next year which is a big milestone, and the new office improvements are an example of how we've evolved with the times and to the changing landscape of the legal profession and the business world. We're still going strong and we're excited to celebrate it with our team and our clients."

As Chris continues to steer Sintons toward new horizons, his dedication to the firm's values, clients, and community remains unwavering. The journey, he believes, is not just about growth but about evolving in a way that aligns with the firm's ethos and enhances the overall legal experience for both clients and colleagues alike.

sintons.co.uk

Solicitor of the Month

Northern Insight talks to...

Stephanie Rodgers TEP

Senior Associate Solicitor in EMG Solicitors' Wills, Trusts and Probate team.

What were your career ambitions growing up?

I didn't really consider the idea of being a lawyer until I completed my work experience in a local law firm at 16. During that work experience, several solicitors advised me to do a degree which interested me, and not just a degree in law because I was interested in it as a career. That was some of the best advice I have been given; it led me to a degree at Edinburgh University and then to the College of Law in York, both of which I loved.

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

I am a Senior Associate in the Wills, Trusts and Probate (WTP) team at EMG Solicitors, heading up the team in Gosforth. I advise on the full range of private client law matters including wills, estate planning, the administration of trusts and estates, as well as capacity issues such as powers of attorney and applications to the Court of Protection, and act for a wide variety of clients.

What I most enjoy about the work I do, is the amount of time I spend with clients, getting to know and building relationships with them and providing advice which can make a real difference to their lives. I feel privileged to be able to provide meaningful help and support at what can be a challenging and emotional time.

What is your proudest business achievement?

It is only two years since I joined EMG Solicitors, and in that time, there has been so much growth, both in terms of the size of our team and the number of clients we are providing a quality service to across the region. Last year, two of our fee earners completed their STEP qualifications which meant the whole WTP team across all our offices had the TEP accreditation. Since then, we have taken on two newly qualified solicitors, both of whom trained with the firm and had training seats with our team. It is always great when talented young lawyers choose to join WTP, as I know from my own experience what a rewarding area of law it can be, and it is a pleasure to help them develop and see the contribution they can make to our clients and the firm.

What changes do you see in your industry in the next decade?

Private client law is not a notoriously fast moving area, but I think that over the next 10 years there is likely to be a lot of change in this area and the law more generally, driven by increasingly digital lifestyles. The Law Commission has recently restarted a previous consultation focussing on the possibilities for electronic wills (which are not currently permitted by law). The Government has also confirmed it is committed to modernising Lasting Powers of Attorney and implementing a digital system for making and witnessing the documents.

What are you currently working on?

At any given time, I tend to be working on a number of files, covering a range of subject areas and for a variety of clients. At the moment I am advising several high net worth clients

and their families in relation to their wills and estate planning, assisting them in ensuring that assets can be passed on to the next generation in the most tax efficient way possible, while also at an appropriate time and in a manner which provides protection for assets and those beneficiaries who are due to inherit. This also involves providing advice in relation to lifetime gifting and the potential for using lifetime trusts to pass on assets.

Tell us about the team you work with?

I work closely with the two other fee earners in EMG's Gosforth WTP team, as well as with the wider WTP team in our offices in Durham, Penrith and Darlington – despite being geographically distant, there is a real feeling of being one team and it is a very supportive, enjoyable atmosphere to work in. Within the Gosforth office, I have worked with Associate, Emma Etherington, for many years, including in a previous firm and it has been wonderful to work with her and another former colleague, Samantha Edward, Head of WTP, again.

What advice would you give to your 18 year old self?

Don't worry so much about everything! Worry is such a waste of time and energy that can be much better spent on other things, and I wish I had realised that sooner.

It sounds trite, but I also put a lot of value of kindness – I would tell myself my mum was right (isn't she always?!) - *it is nice to be important, but more important to be nice*, as they say. At EMG we have five core values which we apply to our relationships with colleagues and clients, one of which is kindness.

How do you unwind outside of work?

There is not a lot of unwinding to be done with a three-year-old in the house, but when I get the opportunity, I love to catch up with friends over a glass of wine and try new restaurants. I also love to travel, and my husband and I can't wait to take our daughter on some exciting adventures as she gets older.

Favourite book and boxset?

I don't often re-read books, but I love the *His Dark Materials* trilogy by Philip Pullman and I am currently reading *The Book of Dust*. The final instalment is expected to be published sometime this year and I'm really looking forward to it.

It's hard to choose a favourite box set, but I recommend *Schitt's Creek* to anyone looking for something to watch. It has everything; comedy, emotion and some very memorable characters!

www.emgsolicitors.com



Stephanie Rodgers



L-R: Jason Wainwright, managing partner – Nicola Leyden, HR director – Debbie McCormack, director of operations – Hugh Welch, senior partner

A B-etter way to do business

Ben & Jerry's, innocent drinks and Patagonia are just some of the more well-known 8,100 B Corps, which sit across 161 industries in 95 countries. In 2024, leading regional law firm for business, Muckle LLP, joined the ranks – becoming the first legal firm in the North East and Cumbria to do so.

In a world where it is becoming increasingly important for businesses to play their part in driving societal and environmental change, B Corp certification has become a mark of distinction for companies prioritising purpose alongside profitability. Started by the non-profit B Lab, B Corp accreditation is awarded for social and environmental performance, transparency and accountability.

In practice, what does that mean?

Rather than focusing on a single goal of delivering a financial return, a B Corp adjusts this position so that employees, suppliers, the environment and the wider community also get a look in alongside profit.

Muckle's Senior Partner Hugh Welch heads up the firm's ESG programme and said: "Becoming

a Certified B Corp is a wonderful endorsement of all that we are doing. The B Corp Business Impact Analysis tool provides a comprehensive framework that supports continuous improvement. Our goal is to increase our initial score by a minimum of 10% when we are reassessed in three years' time. This isn't just a tick-box exercise for us – we started this journey because we want to be held accountable and to continuously improve.

Hugh said the idea of becoming a B Corp was first discussed some years ago, with the equity partners giving it their full backing in 2021: "It was key that the equity partners were all completely in favour of this journey – not least because there are legal requirements to the process such as amendments to our members' agreement in order to instill the B Corp philosophy within our constitution.

"Overall, we needed to change very little to achieve accreditation because running this firm with an eye on supporting the community is what we've been about for a long time. I wouldn't say we sailed through the process. It was challenging and demanding, but it seemed that we had most of the policies and procedures in place in the way we were already doing things. Purpose, with a capital P, has been part of this firm for a couple of decades."

P for Purpose

Muckle has long championed community giving. The firm's fund at The Community Foundation was set up in 2002 and has since given almost £700,000 to charities across the North East and Cumbria. The firm also encourages its people to give their time, with every employee getting two volunteering days a year and providing legal work pro bono.

One of the areas where the firm scored full marks was for the health, well-being and safety

of its people, mirroring the accolades the firm received in the last 12 months, including being named 'Best Place to Work' at the North East Business Awards and most recently maintaining its 'Excellence' accreditation from the Better Health at Work awards. It was also recognised for its work towards Diversity, Equality and Inclusion – winning 'Most Inspiring Employer' at the North East Chamber of Commerce's Inspiring Female Awards.

A growing community

In March, B Corps of all shapes and sizes will come together to celebrate B Corp month – an annual campaign aimed at raising the profile of the certification, as well as encouraging collaboration and best practices. Regional B Corps include Robson Laidler Accountants, Scott Logic, Just Williams, Sail Creative, UMi, Berghaus and Space Architecture.

Hugh said: "As a business committed to driving positive change, we understand the importance of collective action. It allows us to share knowledge, insights, and best practices, and by working together with other regional B Corps, we can hopefully use our influence to encourage and support more businesses in the North East and Cumbria to embrace this standard for sustainable business excellence.

"As a firm, we're excited about the opportunities being part of the B Corp community will bring. Our people are proud to work at Muckle, and that pride comes from seeing there is more to law than just making a profit.

"I also genuinely believe that business can and should be a force for good and I hope that we can continue to be that force through our B Corp accreditation."

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Paul Hughes – Senior Partner and Head of Corporate, Mincoffs Solicitors

Mincoffs revealed as region's most active deal adviser across 2023

Leading North East law firm Mincoffs Solicitors has secured the top spot in a prestigious annual league table, thanks to an impressive performance across 2023.

The Experian Market IQ M&A Report, which ranks firms based on deal volume, has named Mincoffs as the region's most active legal adviser in its FY2023 report.

Across 2023, the firm – which also ranked first in each of the quarterly reports last year – worked on 33 qualifying deals within the North East region.

Paul Hughes, senior partner and head of corporate at Mincoffs, is delighted to see the team's hard work pay off.

"Being named the North East's most active deal adviser across the year is an accolade we are extremely proud of and it is an excellent result for the team," he said.

"In 2023 we celebrated 75 years of Mincoffs, welcomed new members to the team and a string of new clients, so this ranking is a brilliant way to top off what was already a fantastic year.

"Providing a first class service is always a top priority and we look forward to continuing to deliver successful results for our clients across 2024."

Mincoffs Solicitors has provided expert legal services and advice across the North East and beyond for more than 75 years.

Alongside corporate and commercial services, the firm's offering includes real estate, dispute resolution, employment law, licensing and gaming, residential conveyancing, family law and wills, probate and trusts.

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Terminations and renewals: The commercial lease process

Whether you're a landlord or tenant, handling lease renewals should be at the top of your priority list. Sweeney Miller Law's Litigation Partner, Charlie Lynn, gives his top tips for getting the most from the lease renewal process.

Often a commercial tenant may wish to renew their lease to continue to operate their business from the same premises. A landlord may accept the tenant's request for a lease renewal; however, they do have the option to oppose the renewal pursuant to grounds contained within the Landlord and Tenant Act 1954 ("the Act").

Understanding the Act

Most commercial leases fall under the protection of the Act, under which the tenancy can be renewed on the expiry of the contract,

to avoid tenants being evicted with little to no notice. This is known as 'security of tenure'.

Leases protected under the Act can be renewed under the existing terms unless the landlord can successfully refuse renewal by relying on certain statutory grounds contained within the Act.

Landlord's notice

For a landlord to terminate the existing lease, they may serve a Section 25 notice in the prescribed form.

The landlord must specify one of the grounds

to terminate the existing lease, or if they do not oppose the grant of a new lease, they may set out the proposed terms for the same.

It is crucial that the notice is served in accordance with the existing lease provisions, failing which the validity of the notice can be called into question.

Tenant's notice

A tenant who is protected by the Act may request a new tenancy by serving a valid Section 26 request in the prescribed form.

When are court applications required?

It is essential that the lease is finalised before the expiry date put forward in the notice, otherwise a court application must be filed.

If matters proceed to court due to a dispute, the court will make an order to end the existing tenancy and either:

- Determine that the landlord has succeeded on its grounds of opposition, if any, or
- Direct the terms of the new lease.

Time is of the essence

The renewal/termination process should be contemplated between six and 12 months before the expiry date to allow both sides to start negotiations and, if these fail, start looking for alternative arrangements, such as new premises or a new tenant.

The longer you allow for your lease renewal strategy, the more breathing space you have for negotiations, any necessary property inspections, lease amendments, and the final document.

Ask the experts

Expert help at the start of the process is key to securing the best terms for the future.

While negotiations can take place informally directly between parties, getting early advice from an experienced litigation team removes the guesswork from the process and ensures that the right measures are in place for the future.

Commenting on lease renewals, Charlie said: "At Sweeney Miller Law, our Property Litigation team regularly helps both landlords and tenants as leases come to an end. We are also best placed to robustly assist with any litigation issues that arise when renewals become contested and dispute resolution becomes necessary, including assistance with any court applications.

Each lease is different, and we aim to ensure that our clients get the best possible outcome during the negotiations based on their circumstances and existing lease conditions. The team works with large established commercial clients, through to fledgling businesses that may have never dealt with a renewal before."

If you are a landlord or tenant coming towards the end of your commercial lease term and want advice from a team of experienced and pragmatic commercial litigators, get in touch today, call 0345 900 5401, email enquiries@sweeneymiller.co.uk or visit sweeneymiller.co.uk

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Winn Group hosts Inaugural Awards evening in Newcastle to celebrate outstanding achievements

Winn Group, a leading provider of accident management services based in Byker, Newcastle, proudly hosted its first-ever awards evening at the prestigious Newcastle Civic Centre. The company had a stellar year in 2023, reaching a turnover of £234 million and the workforce expanding to 650 employees.

Sponsored by a number of its business partners, the event was a resounding success, serving as a testament to the company's commitment to excellence and innovation.

In 2023, the company solidified its position as a key player in the industry and the awards evening was not only an opportunity to recognise the outstanding achievements of Winn Group, but also to express gratitude to its dedicated employees. Chris Birkett, CEO of Winn Group, expressed his pride and gratitude, stating, "The evening was a tremendous success. It was not just a celebration of the outstanding achievements of our employees, but also a testament to the hard work, dedication, and spirit of innovation that defines our company."

The awards ceremony, set to become a regular fixture in the Winn calendar, featured various categories, each recognising excellence and exceptional contributions within the company.

The winners of the inaugural Winn Group Awards are:

Exemplary Attendance: Finance Team

Customer Service Champion: Esther Wheatley

Innovation Excellence: Liam Parker

Rising Star of the Year: Laura McCombe

The People's Choice Award: Josh McKay

The Leadership Award: Paul Hewitson

Outstanding Achievement: Kieran Embleton

Employee of the Year: Chelsea Shepherd

Hall of Fame: Jeff Winn

Looking ahead, Winn Group is strongly positioned for continued success and growth and has a very bright future ahead. The company remains committed to upholding the highest standards of customer service, supported by an exceptional team of people.





Senior solicitor Jacqueline Emmerson returns to what she loves best

Jacqueline first started to assist divorce and wills clients over thirty years ago and has helped thousands of clients since then. For the past few years she was Managing Director at Emmersons Solicitors, the firm she founded 26 years ago. Whilst still dealing with a handful of cases, being MD meant a lot of her time was utilised on strategy and growth of the firm.

After eight years of running the firm the baton has been handed over to CEO Michael Robinson. He has brought a fantastic team to the firm by way of a Financial Director, Accounts Executive and appointing a Revenue Board.

This has meant that Jacqueline has been able to go back to helping clients, many of whom are business owners, property investors and professionals such as doctors and other lawyers. She has noticed a lot of kindness amongst her clients at times of great stress.

"I have a number of clients who have not been able to see their children since separating from their partner or spouse. This is very distressing for them but they do not want to pressurise their children at a time when their other parent is angry. One client said that whilst the couple could not make it work he had to reflect upon the fact that they were both good parents."

Jacqueline advises, "It is really important to seek help quickly in relation to your children. If their other parent is preventing you from seeing them then the faster you take steps to change this the better. Your children may be missing you terribly but are too frightened to speak up.

Initially I would write to the other parent setting out proposals for my client to see their children. If this fails then a referral to mediation can often help. This can be a good chance for the couple to settle their grievances and come to terms with the end of their relationship. It often results in much better outcomes for the children. Overall only 5% of our cases end up in court, which is a big win for all of those children out there waiting to see more of their parents."

If you require any further advice contact Jacqueline Emmerson and her award winning team at enquiries@emmersons-solicitors.co.uk



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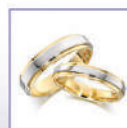
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Companies are composed of human beings...

They're not bad, they just make mistakes sometimes - like everyone does.

Deborah Henning discusses life as head of employment with Jacksons Law Firm.

In her long career, she has supported many employers, employees and trade unions with a wide range of legal cases.

Speaking of her desire to support managers as well as staff who need her help, she says: "Managers are human beings at the end of the day.

"I don't think employers are bad, I think they just make mistakes sometimes - like everyone does."

As an employment lawyer, Deborah and her team are ready to support both employers and employees when it comes to navigating the often tricky world of employment law.

And for Deborah, it's the human element she enjoys in her work.

"It's about people's foibles and trying to help them, whichever side of the fence they are on," she says.

"You are just trying to help the employment relationship, which is one of the most important relationships in people's lives."

It's a relationship that also continuously evolves, as people adapt to different roles and life stages outside of work.

Take, for example, recent changes to approaching carer's leave.

New regulations will come into force on 6 April, which will mean employees can request one week of unpaid carer's leave in a 12-month period.

"In the modern world, people are increasingly caring for older relatives," Deborah says.



"This change will be very important for that.

"It will be more difficult for employers to say "no" and they are going to have to give very considered reasons if they do refuse it."

Carer's leave also becomes a "day one right" which means employees can request it on the very first day of their employment with a firm, giving them more flexibility and options.

Deborah says good firms have been doing this for a long time anyway and the reality is, employees may choose to take paid holidays for their caring duties.

However, one change that Deborah does

see having a big impact on businesses is the imminent minimum wage increase.

For the first time, the National Living Wage will apply to all workers aged 21 and for those aged 21 and over, it increases by £1.02 up to £11.44 on April 1. Those aged 18-20 will also see an increase of £1.11 to £8.60.

"It's a big increase that's going to have knock-on consequences for employers, as other, more senior employees also seek a higher rate of pay," Deborah says.

There are also changes afoot when it comes to redundancy protection around pregnancy and



family leave, as the draft Maternity Leave, Adoption Leave and Shared Parental Leave Regulations 2024 have been put before parliament.

Deborah explains: "When you are on maternity leave, you have a right to be offered a job, if there's a suitable one, should a redundancy position arise.

"This new legislation is extending this protected period for women beyond what it currently is and extending it for wider groups as well."

The protection will run from pregnancy, plus 18 months from the first day of the estimated week

of birth or from the exact date of birth.

In other employment law news, the right to request flexible working will now become a day one right from April.

However, Deborah says it's best practice when you are going for a job to set out from the outset what days and hours you would like to work.

"It's best to be upfront at the negotiation stage," she says.

"But should the need arise, you can now request a flexible working arrangement from day one of your employment."

“

...It's about people's foibles and trying to help them...

For more information about any of these employment law issues – or any others affecting your business or workplace, visit www.jacksons-law.com

What's new in 2024? The ever-changing employment relationship

In the first of our columns covering topical legal issues, David Gibson, who heads up the employment team at Burnetts, is sharing his advice on the up-coming changes in employment law which will affect all businesses in 2024.

As part of the Government's response to the Taylor Review of Modern Working Practices in 2017 and adapting to the ever-changing employment relationship and trends, new legislation is set to be introduced this year.

These are some of the changes that will take place – and it's important that businesses and organisations are fully prepared.

Duty to Prevent Sexual Harassment

The Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Bill has received Royal Assent and is expected to come into force in October 2024.

What does this mean?

This Act will introduce an active duty on employers to take reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace. This is a step down from third party liability or the duty to take ALL reasonable steps but nevertheless it requires employers to take measures to protect employees in the workplace from sexual harassment.

This bill was introduced due to the increased number of people suffering sexual harassment at work and ministers have described this duty as “the beginning of a much-needed culture change.”

Therefore, employers can no longer take a backseat and wait until sexual harassment has occurred to instigate disciplinary action, they need to take proactive and preventative action.

If an organisation is found to have breached this duty, the Employment Tribunal will have the power to award a 25% uplift on any compensation awarded to the Claimant for sexual harassment. In addition, the Equality and Human Rights Commission can become involved and enforce this upon employers.

Enhanced Flexibility

Back in July 2023, The Employment Relations (Flexible Working) Act 2023 received Royal Assent. Expected to come into force on 6 April 2024, this

allows employees greater opportunities to make a flexible working request, including:

1. The obligation on employers to consult with the employee first before rejecting a request;
2. Ability to make two flexible working requests in any 12-month period;
3. Requiring employers to respond to the request with a decision within 2 months as opposed to 3 months.
4. Scrapping the requirement to set out a “business case” and the “effect” on the business in requesting the change.

Making it a “day-one right,” meaning that employees no longer need to have 26 continuous weeks’ service before making a flexible working request.

With many employees benefitting and enjoying the balance of hybrid working, it is likely there will be an influx in flexible working requests for those who are not currently afforded those benefits.

Do you have an updated flexible working in policy in place to ensure you deal with all requests fairly?

Requesting a Predictable Working Pattern

The Workers (Predictable Terms and Conditions) Act 2023 received Royal Assent on 18 September 2023, expected to come into force in September 2024. This Act gives workers and agency workers on atypical contracts, including zero-hour contracts and agency workers, the right to request a predictable working pattern.

This came about in an attempt to address the power imbalance employers have on employees engaged under these contractual relationships where there is often “one-sided flexibility.”

Family Friendly Leave

All of the following legislation has recently received Royal Assent, coming into force in 2024/2025:

- Neonatal Care (Leave and Pay) Act 2023 – paid neonatal care leave for up to 12 weeks.
- Carer's Leave Act 2023 – day one right to unpaid leave to care for a dependent.
- The Protection from Redundancy (Pregnancy and Family Leave) Act 2023 – greater protections from redundancy following a period of pregnancy, adoption or shared parental leave.

How can you prepare for these changes?

Ensure you have appropriate policies and procedures in place and that staff are aware of these. Where a request or an issue arises in relation to any of the above, make sure you deal with it fairly, promptly and consult legal advice if necessary. Each situation will, of course, be fact specific but this does not preclude the worker/employee the right from being treated fairly and equally. You should ensure that any decisions or actions made are well documented and that you have justifiable reasons for the action you took.

Our team have an engaging and well-established training unit which can help educate and prepare your workforce for these impending changes.

If you would like to discuss any of these upcoming changes, or employment law matters more generally, contact David who will be happy to help www.burnetts.co.uk/team/david-gibson



David Gibson

Employment Solicitor, Phoebe Gogarty of Swinburne Maddison, reflects on some changes to employment law in the last 25 years



Phoebe Gogarty

Employment law in England and Wales has seen significant progression in the last 25 years, particularly, the rights of employees have greatly improved. This is reflective of legal adaptations in response to societal shifts, technological advances and economic challenges.

In comparison to 1998 when Industrial Tribunals were rebranded as Employment Tribunals, the modern-day employee now benefits from an array of enhanced protections.

Minimum Wage & Written Terms

Employees now enjoy improved working conditions by way of increases to the National Minimum Wage, provisions for statutory sick pay, maternity and paternity leave, and enhanced protection against unfair dismissal. Furthermore, the Good Work Plan 2020 aimed to improve rights further by providing the right to a written statement of terms from day one of employment and the right to receive a payslip, itemising hours worked.

In 1999 the National Minimum Wage was introduced and set at a modest £3.60 per hour!

Family-Friendly Rights

Family-friendly rights have vastly improved from the position we were in 25 years ago. At that time, the Maternity and Parental Leave Regulations 1999 provided for an increase in the period of ordinary maternity leave from 14 to 18 weeks, and 29 weeks of additional maternity leave if the employee had at least a year's service. However, only the period of ordinary leave was paid.

TODAY... Eligible employees can take up to 26 weeks of 'ordinary maternity leave' and a further 26 weeks of 'additional maternity leave', the majority of which is covered by statutory maternity pay.

As for Paternity Leave, this was not introduced until April 2003 under the Paternity and Adoption Leave Regulations 2002. Beforehand, employees had no statutory right to take paid paternity leave which, by contemporary standards, seems outrageous! Many parents now opt to exercise their right to Shared Parental Leave (SPL) since its introduction in April 2015. SPL provides greater flexibility for families to share their entitlement to paid leave as opposed to the traditional structure of maternity and paternity leave.

Working Hours and Flexibility

Working families can also benefit from the status quo of working more flexibly, widely labelled as the 'new-normal' since the pandemic – (COVID-19 had to get a mention!)

Since its introduction in 2003, when it applied only to parents and carers, it was expanded in 2014 to all employees upon reaching 26 weeks' service.

Hybrid-working was under 2% in the 90s, compared to 62% in 2022.

This year, the Employee Relations (Flexible Working) Act 2023 received Royal Assent which will, upon its introduction in 2024, allow two requests per 12 months. Employees will no longer be required to suggest how to mitigate the impact of their request. This will fall to the employer to consider who must provide their decision to the employee within two months, not the current three.

Flexible working requests are expected to become a 'day-one' right. The above act will not reduce the 26-week eligibility criteria; secondary legislation will be required to implement this change.

Conclusion

The transformation of employment law over the past 25 years reflects our changing values and commitment to a fair and inclusive workplace.

www.swinburnemaddison.co.uk



Cambridge Mick takes on epic challenge to support The People's Kitchen in Newcastle

An exiled Geordie now living in Cambridge has pledged to support The People's Kitchen in Newcastle by embarking on a remarkable journey running the distance between Lands' End and John O'Groats in stages.

Mick Lazarus is no stranger to fund raising as last year he took on a three-day challenge simulating climbing the height of Everest for local charities.

Mick shares his motivation for this year's unique challenge, stating, "I've always set myself challenges and been keen on doing things for charity. Last year, I took inspiration from the Land's End to John O'Groats route, and this year, I decided to virtually cover the 874-mile distance by running in my home area."

Mick's training for the Land's End to John O'Groats challenge is underway, with daily runs covering four to five miles. He acknowledges the difficulties of training in adverse weather but emphasises the rewarding feeling it brings.

Choosing to support The People's Kitchen, based in Newcastle, Mick reveals his connection to the region: "I'm a proud Novocastrian and I moved down here many moons ago. The People's Kitchen does incredible work supporting vulnerable people in the area, and I want to raise funds to aid their important work."

People's Kitchen Trustee Maggie Pavlou said: "Even though Mick is no longer in our region, he is still doing what he can to help us. We wish him well in his epic run and when he virtually runs past Newcastle, we will all be out waving him on. His support is fantastic and we are very grateful."



Card from the King and visit from Mayor for Betty

Mayor Warren Taylor, on behalf of Blyth Town Council, has extended heartfelt congratulations and warm wishes to Betty Madderson on reaching the incredible milestone of 100 years.

Despite her age, Betty continues to live independently in Blyth, staying well-informed on current affairs and engaging in discussions with visitors. With a son, a daughter, five grandchildren, and two great-grandsons, Betty values the importance of family. To stay connected, she has embraced technology, using a tablet for video calls and emails with her far-flung relatives.

In the days leading up to her 100th birthday, Betty eagerly awaited a card from the King, a moment she shared with family and friends. The occasion was marked with decorations,

banners, bunting, and balloons adorning her house. Mayor Warren Taylor made a surprise visit, and Betty's family, friends, and neighbours joined in the celebration, toasting with tea, coffee, or Betty's preferred choice—a glass of sparkling wine.

"The day could not have been any better!" Betty said, expressing her gratitude for the love and warmth surrounding her. The festivities extended beyond the actual birthday, with a surprise visit from her grandsons and great grandson who live several hundred miles away.

Mayor Taylor applauded Betty's resilience, zest for life, and the positive impact she has had on the Blyth community.

"Blyth Town Council sends its sincere congratulations and best wishes to Betty on her 100th birthday, and we look forward to celebrating many more milestones with her. She's a real character and we are all very proud of her in Blyth," he said.

Oh Boy! Jamie gets in gear for Sir Charles Parsons School

Jamie Bell, the frontman of Newcastle based rock n rollers, The Baldy Holly Band, is about to swap his guitar strap for bicycle clips as he sets out on a mammoth cycle ride to raise much needed funds for a local school.

His epic 1000-mile journey from Lands' End to John O' Groats is not just a personal challenge for Jamie; it's part of his pledge to raise £60,000 to buy a mini bus with tail lift for the Sir Charles Parsons School in Walker. The school is for young people aged eleven to nineteen years old who have a range of additional needs including severe learning difficulties, complex learning difficulties and disabilities and profound and multiple learning difficulties.

Jamie has been involved with the school for several years and believes the new mini bus will be an important asset for the school.

"I've seen the vital work that they do at the school, and I've realised how essential it is to



the local community. I know that the young people enjoy field trips and educational visits, and the new bus will make these trips accessible to everyone at the school thanks to the tail lift," he said.

During his 10-day marathon sponsored ride, Jamie plans to raise additional money along the way by busking and playing a few impromptu numbers by his rock n roll heroes including Buddy Holly, Chuck Berry and Jean Vincent.

You can sponsor Jamie at www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/baldy-holly

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'Boxes of Joy' to be delivered to North East first time families thanks to six figure grant



North of Tyne combined authority has awarded £187,000 to The Children's Foundation to fund 750 essential Baby Boxes for first-time parents across the North East, including the first boxes to be delivered in Northumberland and North Tyneside.

Inspired by the original Finnish baby box, the box is the first of its kind to take a developmental approach to a child's wellbeing, rather than focusing solely on their physical needs. Each box is packed with stimulating toys and books which encourage playing, laughing, reading, singing and counting, as well as essential items such as a blanket, changing mat, bath towel and thermometer, to help families get started. The grant from North of Tyne Combined Authority will enable The Children's Foundation to provide 750 baby boxes to families across the region.

The North East has the second-highest rate of low income and deprivation in the UK after Inner London. The North of Tyne Child Poverty Prevention Programme seeks to reduce the impact of socio-economic disadvantage on babies through a focus on the first '1,001 critical days', which are the days from pregnancy through to the child's second birthday.

The Baby Box is an essential project for the region which aims to give every first time parent and their baby in the region the best start possible.

The project has been created by listening to children, parents, midwives, family nurses, GPs and experts on the, '1,001' critical days movement, to understand how important these early years are for shaping the rest of our lives. The project was launched by The Children's Foundation in March 2023, with the first boxes being delivered to families in Newcastle and Gateshead. This funding from North of Tyne Combined Authority enables the scheme to scale rapidly with the project now expanding into Northumberland and North Tyneside for the first time.

The Children's Foundation has a target of raising £1 million to make sure every child in our region gets the support that they need to thrive. Businesses in the region are invited to 'pay it forward' this Christmas by supporting the campaign as part of their festive community giving campaigns. Businesses can also purchase a box for a colleague heading off on maternity or paternity, and a second box will be donated to a vulnerable family right here in the region.

Sean Soulsby, CEO of The Children's Foundation said "Bringing a newborn home from hospital is an exciting, but often overwhelming time, and we want to remind parents, families, and carers that they are not alone during those critical early days.

"Over the last year we have delivered 110 Baby Boxes to first-time parents and this support from the North of Tyne Combined Authority is a game changer for the project, allowing us to rapidly scale the work we are doing to support first-time families across the whole region. The Baby Box is a great way to support healthy baby development through simple everyday moments and we are already seeing the real-world impact that they are having. Infant mortality in the North East is higher than the national average. The Baby Box may be a cost-effective scheme to help reduce inequalities in the North East and, in time, we hope that the scheme will be adopted across the whole of England.

"Positive experiences early in life are closely associated with better performances at school, good emotional development, improved work outcomes, and better lifelong health. Tackling these issues is vital to levelling up."

North of Tyne Mayor Jamie Driscoll said: "Having a child is beautiful and joyous, but as any parent will tell you, it is also stressful and expensive. Household budgets are severely squeezed right now.

"We are the first Combined Authority to use our investment fund to tackle child poverty. You can't build a resilient regional economy without providing security for families.

"Giving new parents a baby box is a great way to ensure our youngsters have the best possible start in life.

"This isn't just about providing the essentials, it's about nurturing early learning, wellbeing and a sense of security from day one. By focusing on a child's development in this way, we're laying the groundwork from them to do well at school, get a decent job and lead a fulfilling life."

Cllr Karen Kilgour, Cabinet Member for Education, Inclusion and Skills, and Deputy Leader of Newcastle City Council, added: "All children should have the best possible start in life, and investing in an initiative like this is an investment in our region's future.

"By supporting families during those crucial 1,001 days, we are paving the way for their children to thrive."

Individuals who would like to support the campaign and improve the health and well-being of children and young people in the North East can donate £3 to the Children's Foundation Baby Box campaign by texting 'MAM' to 70450.

To learn more, visit:
www.thechildrensfoundation.co.uk

Charity of the month

In the latest of these popular series of features we spoke to The Charlie and Carter Foundation



Why was the charity formed?

The charity was formed in November 2013 when little Charlie Cookson lost his battle against his life limiting condition at the young age of 2½ years. His parents Sarah & Chris Cookson had struggled both mentally, emotionally, and financially whilst they cared around the clock for their sick child. They knew that there was no financial support for parents in this situation, where parents have had to leave work or reduce their working hours to provide around the clock care for their child who has been diagnosed with a life limiting condition.

Their mission was to provide this support and directly pay their mortgage, gas, electric and provide food vouchers to allow them to spend quality time with their sick child, ensuring the time they have left with them is as stress free as possible. Sadly, the charity is unable to cure their child, but it can take away that heavy cloud of financial burden which has escalated due to their child needing their parents 24/7 to stay alive.

For five years Sarah & Chris dedicated their lives to their unique charity, financially supporting parents at the most devastating time of their lives. Then, The Charlie Cookson Foundation came into a new chapter after the birth of Charlie's baby brother Carter John Cookson. To the never-ending heartbreak of Charlie & Carter's parents, Sarah & Chris, their dream of having a family of their own was shattered once again.

Carter suffered what only could be described as a catastrophic event in the early hours of being born which led to him needing a heart transplant. He fought for 25 days, then he became too weak and sadly did not receive his gift of life. From this moment after the loss of Carter, The Charlie & Carter Foundation was born, now reaching out to families who have children needing their gift of life and raising awareness of the importance of organ donation.

These two special angels were here for a reason, to save so many lives and support many inspirational parents in their hours of need.



What type of fundraising events do you have?

We have an exciting calendar of events this year. In April we are hosting a networking afternoon tea, Trek for Charlie and Carter, and of course we have a team of runners taking part in the Great North Run in September. Alongside this we are part of Your Charity Lottery where you could be in with the chance of winning £1,000 each week.

What have been your proudest moments so far?

There have been many proud moments over the past 10 years, both Sarah and Chris receiving their MBE's in 2022 and 2023, which was an experience they will both never forget. They had an overwhelming feeling of their boys being by their sides when they were awarded their medals by The King and Princess Anne.

The 'frequent proud moments' are every time a phone call is made to our CCF Families letting them know that they are going to be financially supported. The relief and emotion both the parents, and us as a team, experience will never be taken for granted, the Foundation really does change lives.

What are you currently working on?

Our aim is to continuously provide financial support to the parents who care 24/7 for their sick child who is suffering a life limiting condition. Striving to provide not just financial support when their child is with them, but also bereavement financial support when they sadly can't fight anymore.

To do this our fundraising diary is full of exciting events and challenges.

We are celebrating Charlie's birthday in April and are encouraging business, schools, and groups to Wear Blue for Charlie and Carter in memory of the boys. Simply pick a date in April and ask staff to wear blue for a donation to the charity. You don't have to do a lot to make a difference!

We also have the Charlie and Carter Shop in South Shields, where we take all your very kind, pre-loved donations and find someone else to love them again for a small charge. Come and visit us and grab a bargain or have a clear out and donate any unwanted clothes, toys or bric-a-brac.

Our Charlie & Carter Market stall is run by the boys' Nana and her amazing team of volunteers. The market is around every Friday in the South Shields Market Place, 9am-2pm and is always packed with great bargains.



What does the future hold?

The future is full and bright for The Charlie & Carter Foundation, after celebrating 10 years of doing the work we do, we will continue to push their charity forward in memory of two very special brothers and to support many families who are in need of their financial support, whilst raising our platform to reach out to more parents who are struggling.

How do you get involved?

There are so many ways to get involved and if you are interested in supporting The Charlie and Carter Foundation, we would urge you to get in touch. Visit our website for information about events or to make a donation, www.thecharlieandcarterfoundation.co.uk

If you would like to have a chat about how you or your business could get involved, please email Laura on laura@ccfemail.co.uk or call us on 0191 466 1428.





NE Youth raises 21k at their annual Burns Night Supper

For over 30 years NE Youth have hosted a Burns Night Supper. This years event saw 300 guests gather at The Grand Hotel, Gosforth to enjoy a fantastic night of highland dancing displays, the piping of the haggis, poems from Robbie Burns and Scottish reeling into the wee small hours!

This event is one of NE Youth's main fundraisers, its no secret that most charities are finding things hard in the current climate and events like this are vital to ensure they can continue to support young people across the North East.

Northern Garden Sheds sponsored the event.

Dave Clayton, Managing Director at Northern Garden Sheds, said: "After many years of supporting NE Youth, we feel Northern Garden sheds are now in a position to do more and give more back to our local area and NE Youth is a charity close to our hearts that provides the perfect platform for this."

The event raised an incredible £21,000 net of all costs which will make an significant difference to so many young people's lives here in the North East.

Jon Niblo, CEO of NE Youth wanted to thank all of the attendees, table hosts, companies and individuals who donated auction prizes and the brilliant main sponsors: Northern Garden Sheds.

If you want to help young people across the region to realise their potential and feel you could support NE Youth in some way please contact:

Jon Niblo: jon@neyouth.org.uk • www.neyouth.org.uk





North East women connect to reboot 2024 business goals

With Q1 now underway, it's time to press pause and reflect - before things only get busier. Employee wellbeing and a productive mindset are two key factors that can feel the strain when workloads inevitably increase as 2024 revs into gear.

That's where an 'Activated Mindset' session steps in, helping businesses support their employees to help align with those big new year business ambitions.

Introducing a brand-new ladies networking event in Sunderland, combining practical tips from a live masterclass with Unbreakable Mindset Method® Coach Jude Daunt, Wellbeing Guest Speakers and demos, alongside informal networking with the opportunity to make valuable new connections in the North East.

If you're a business based in the North East already feeling your own motivation wane, attending an 'Activated Mindset' session could help pave over any obstacles that have already surfaced in 2024.

"Employees at all levels, not just board level, face fears and anxieties, creating mental blocks that hinder creativity and growth," Activated Mindset co-founder Julie Turnbull explained.

Rallied together by Sunderland PR agency founder Claire Pickersgill, local business women gathered at Roker's Coast Bar on Wednesday 31st January for a January Reboot, with all event funds heading to the Dragonfly Cancer Trust.

Claire Pickersgill, Founder, House of Hype & Co: "Working together with Julie to bring this event to life, this evening embodies the power of conversations and building relations. The business community in the North East is exceptionally welcoming and intertwined and we wanted to create a supportive platform for business leaders to take a moment to focus on their mindset and wellbeing.



Jude Daunt (Jude Daunt Coaching), Julie Turnbull (Activated Mindset Online), Claire Pickersgill (House of Hype & Co).

Photo Credit: Alice Slee Photography

2023 was a busy and turbulent time for many businesses, and the January reboot after a very long month is the perfect tonic to focus on 2024. We hear a lot of hype around wellbeing and mindset, but they really are key factors to support productivity and growth."

Attendees included representatives from Sunderland Empire, Sunderland University, Northern Spire, Oculus HR, Sarah McKenna HR Recruitment, The Foundation of Light, Pure Bliss, Lloyds Bank, Tailored Leisure Company and McNally and Thompson.

Speaking on the evening on behalf of Activated Mindset, Jude Daunt gave tips and tricks to help motivate attendees feeling the January slump.

As Jude explained on the night: "Remembering January the 1st or even around that time. How excited did you feel? Where do you feel you are now? What do you think that you're doing that's causing that drop either in your productivity, or your mood or your mindset?

Have that little marker in the sand to say do you know what, I need a reset. Something needs to change. What are my habits and actions? Think about where you know you're sabotaging yourself. Start to unpick that and be really vulnerable with yourself. Have that mental check-in."

Tara Mackings from Tailored Leisure has already tried some life coaching before tonight: "My key takeaway from this evening is to write more effective to-do lists, definitely continue working on myself and not self-sabotaging - and

potentially continue on the life coaching journey. Hearing from Jude tonight, I want to do more work on that. It just excites me!

I know that I am doing things that are impacting both my personal and professional life and if I want to get my business where I want it to be, I do need to look at myself and invest that time to work on myself."

Louise Kennedy from Sunderland-based Oculus HR has previously worked with Jude: "I'm really interested in the mindset, what we do, how we react and how we respond to things. Mindset has such an important part to play in business, to be able to get into the right mindset to be able to put the business, me, and the family all together and work. I'm a big supporter of the mindset element."

Julie Turnbull, Co-Founder, Activated Mindset said: "Raising awareness of mindset well-being is crucial in the corporate world and we are privileged to have so many powerful business ladies here tonight to share some of our tools with."

"As we explored during this January Reboot Session, we champion coaching for success at Activated Mindset Online. With targeted support, we boost confidence and empower every individual to take control and rewrite their own success story. We believe in reaching every level, ensuring that each person in the corporate landscape thrives mentally and professionally."

To find out more: activatedmindset.co.uk

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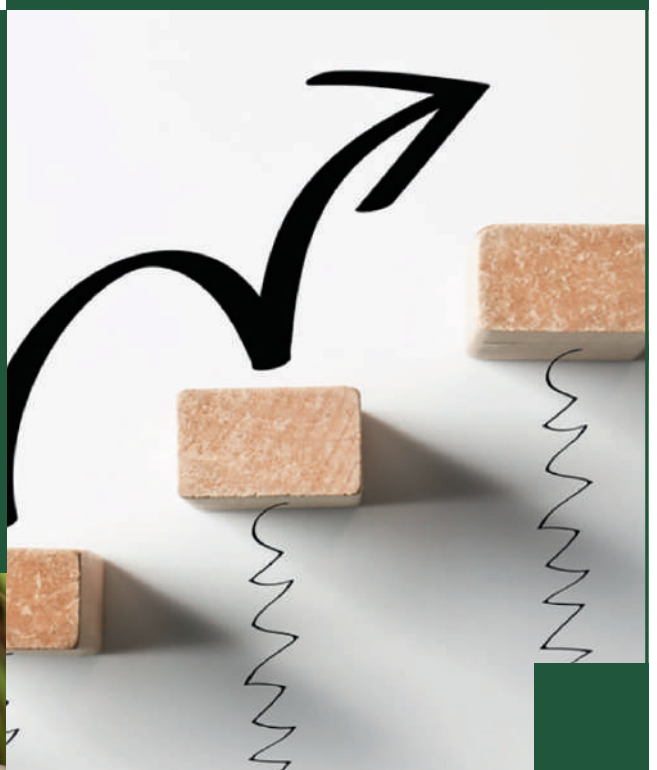
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Newcastle's top recruitment firm receives prestigious three best rated award for the 5th consecutive year

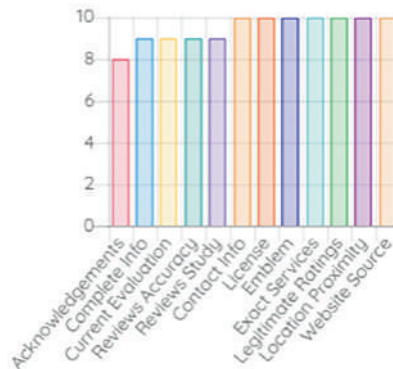


Newcastle based, Central Employment, a leading recruitment services provider, is proud to announce its significant achievement in being given the coveted Three Best Rated award for the fifth consecutive year.

This latest recognition comes in tandem with exciting developments at Central, including a successful rebranding, relocation to state-of-the-art offices, and continued growth in the industry.

Rebranding for a Purpose:

In its pursuit of continuous improvement and greater brand recognition, Central recently underwent an invigorating rebranding initiative. The new brand identity captures the essence of what sets them apart – trust, expertise, and innovation. The modernised logo and thoughtfully crafted messaging portray a dynamic and forward-thinking organisation that connects businesses with their future employees with seamless precision.



New State-of-the-Art Offices:

As part of its commitment to providing exceptional service to clients and candidates, Central has relocated to a new state-of-the-art office space at Portland House – a move that marks a new era for the company. The sophisticated and contemporary design of the offices reflects the firm's passion for creating an environment that fosters collaboration, creativity, and productivity. The new space is equipped with cutting-edge technology and enhanced facilities, ensuring that the team at Central can continue to deliver outstanding results.

Continued Business Growth:

Central's exceptional growth trajectory is a testament to its unwavering dedication to achieving remarkable outcomes for both

clients and candidates. Since its management buyout in 2015, the business has consistently expanded its client base, successfully connecting outstanding candidates with some of the most prominent businesses in the North East.

The Dedication of the Team:

Behind this outstanding achievement lies the hard work and dedication of Central's team of recruitment specialists. Their expertise and industry knowledge, coupled with a genuine passion for matching talent to opportunities, have been instrumental in the company's continued success. Their commitment to providing exceptional service throughout the entire recruitment process has earned Central the loyalty of both clients and candidates alike.

The Three Best Rated are handpicked local businesses. Based on a 50-point inspection businesses are rated on their reputation, reviews, history, complaints, ratings, satisfaction, trust, and cost.

Managing Director, Paul Ponton said "We are honoured to receive the Three Best Rated award for a fifth consecutive year". "Central is immensely grateful for the trust and loyalty we have with our dedicated and experienced team, our clients and candidates. Their trust, support and loyalty have been instrumental in our success".

www.centralemployment.co.uk

NorthStandard solidifies commitment to North East after strong first year post-merger



Paul Jennings and Jeremy Grose, Managing Directors of NorthStandard

Leading global maritime insurer, NorthStandard, has announced its further commitment to its headquarters in Newcastle upon Tyne and the wider region – following strong results in its first year of operation.

Following the merger with the London-based Standard Club last February, the newly formed organisation has gone from strength to strength to provide stability in the industry despite turbulent times.

NorthStandard has gone on to become a leading force in world shipping, with its first annual

report post-merger confirming a turnover of over £654 million (US\$825 million) – an increase on the previous year as well as a reaffirmed S&P 'A' rating.

As well as its commitments to the maritime industry, NorthStandard is determined to support local communities in and around

its Newcastle headquarters – announcing its new CSR strategy and more than doubling its dedicated charity fund to over £317k (US \$400,000). The funds will be used across several charities, including a continued partnership with the Greggs Foundation's Breakfast Club initiative.

Newcastle-based Managing Director, Paul Jennings said: "With the challenges to free and open seas now a feature of mainstream news reporting, the 12 months since NorthStandard's formal launch had only amplified the critical role that the P&I system plays in stabilising world trade,

"Based on these excellent results, NorthStandard will continue to evolve its post-merger strategies on digitalisation, sustainability, portfolio diversification and recruitment, and double down on efforts to help governments, regulators, and shipping understand each other's challenges."

NorthStandard has also recently announced its continued expansion across the globe, opening a new office in South Korea, its eighth in the region, to continue growth in its Asia Pacific network.

Fellow Managing Director, Jeremy Grose added: "The last 12 months clearly demonstrate that the service benefits of our combined talents, enhanced resilience of scale and continuing financial discipline are more than meeting member and customer expectations."

north-standard.com





L-R: Cate Weathersen, Pavan Bhardwaj.

Career change opportunities for Pavan and Cate

Two North East people in their early twenties who felt unsuited to their initial chosen careers have embarked on a different path in the diversity and inclusion sector after securing apprenticeships with eQuality Solutions Group (eQS).

Pavan Bhardwaj, 23, left a degree course in electrical engineering at Durham University to start an apprenticeship in business administration and Cate Weathersen, 21, has u-turned on her job as a carer to take-up a customer service apprenticeship.

Team leader at eQS, Jack Fisher, 25, appointed Cate and Pavan and he, himself, started at eQS as an apprentice, aged 16. He says apprentices are vital to a rapidly growing business: "Apprentices bring a freshness and energy to the team. They have a lot of enthusiasm and curiosity to learn, progress, and impress. The skills we teach them are transferrable, of course, but they are also tailored to our company's specific needs and values which is something you can't usually get from an experienced employee who has learned their craft at a different business."

eQS, which is a national company with a head

office in South Tyneside, is a leading, global provider of diversity, equity & inclusion (DEI) services and products including consultancy, needs assessments, assistive technology (AT), training, e-learning, mentoring, coaching and inclusive recruitment – across workplaces and educational settings.

Pavan started looking into apprenticeships after realising his electrical engineering degree was too narrow a field for him and he was attracted to the concept of earning whilst learning. Pavan was involved in advocating and campaigning for disabled and LGBTQ students at university so the vacancy for an apprentice at DEI firm, eQS, piqued his interest.

He said: "Given my passion for improving student welfare, this role is perfect for me. Part of my job is helping students apply for Disabled Student Allowance and supporting them on that journey which can be tricky to navigate.

I'm glad I made the move because business administration skills and qualifications open many doors, in many sectors and I'm enjoying taking on more and more responsibility."

Cate worked as a carer in a care home for two years after completing a Level 3 Health and Social Care NVQ and although she liked the fundamentals of the carer role, she found achieving a work-life balance that worked for her, difficult due to shift patterns.

Cate, who lives in Hebburn, said: "I have always liked the idea of apprenticeships and a friend who is an apprentice recommended this route to me. Changing from a very active, hands-on role to an office position was scary because it's so different and I didn't know what to expect but to be honest it's actually better than I imagined. I like the structure it brings to my life, I'm enjoying learning how the business works and how I can add value to it."

Gateshead Council is delivering the apprenticeships on behalf of eQS.

Formed in 2006 in the North East of England, eQS has grown rapidly from a £6m turnover and 40 employees in 2020, to £15m turnover and nearly 100 people across seven companies, including four companies it has acquired. eQS aims to scale to £50m and 250 employees by 2028 and is actively seeking acquisition opportunities.

[e-q-s.com](https://www.e-q-s.com)

New accessible defibrillator installed at football ground in Hartlepool

A new defibrillator has been installed at Hartlepool United giving access to life-saving equipment to the thousands of people who visit the Suit Direct Stadium.

The public access defibrillator is now in place, and is available 24/7 to anyone in the area who needs it.

Now, the club have seen the defibrillator installed at the Suit Direct Stadium on Clarence Road thanks to McVickers Electrical Contractors after Red Sky Foundation raised the money supported by Teesside based companies K2 Construction Management and Wilson James Limited.

Kelly Clarkson, Operations Manager at Hartlepool United FC, said: 'As a club, we're committed to having a positive impact on the communities that we serve. As part of our agenda, installing the defibrillator means local residents and visitors will have access to potentially life-saving equipment, so it's just a wonderful addition to our club.'

'We are really grateful to Red Sky Foundation for the equipment which hopefully will never be needed.'

'At Hartlepool United we want to be involved in the community and we have a huge following, many of whom live near the club. It was important to us to accept the defibrillator that can be used by anyone who needs it at anytime.'

It is the second defibrillator donated to the club after the youth team received one to have pitch side as part of a £100,000 Red Sky Foundation

giveaway when the charity donated hundreds of the devices as part of a grassroots football initiative.

Co founder of Red Sky Foundation, Sergio Petrucci set up the charity with his wife Emma in 2020 after their little girl Luna received life saving cardiac surgery at the Freeman Hospital in Newcastle. Their charity now helps hundreds of families living with complex heart conditions, providing care and support for those in need. The couple widened their programme to increase the number of public accessible defibrillators and over 500 units are now available for use in a medical emergency.

Every year more than 30,000 people suffer a cardiac arrest in the UK, and only one in 10 people survive. Research shows for every minute a person spends without CPR and defibrillation, their chances of survival drop by 10 per cent.

For more information about the locations of your nearest defibrillator and to learn CPR in 15 minutes visit: www.redskyfoundation.com



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for more information, scan the qr code or visit:
abconnexions.org/abc-2024-annual-awards-dinner



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Ammar Mirza CBE

From the Tyne to Tomorrow: My inclusive innovation odyssey in the North East

Once upon a time, nestled between the rolling hills and the rugged coastline of the North East, I embarked on an adventure not just of distance, but of discovery. It's a tale of transformation, driven by the twin engines of innovation and inclusivity, set in a region famed for its industrial past and now charting a course towards a tech-infused future.

My journey through the landscapes of innovation has been as varied and vibrant as the North East itself. From the early days, tinkering in tech start-ups that felt more like tight-knit families, to spearheading community initiatives where every brainstorming session was a potluck of ideas and ideals. These experiences weren't just steps on a career path; they were leaps into a world where innovation is the key to unlocking a society that works for everyone.

Innovation in the North East isn't a dry, dusty concept confined to the pages of a report; it's alive, pulsing through the streets of Newcastle, the quayside of Sunderland, and the market towns and villages that dot the landscape. It's in the air, invigorating the region with a sense of possibility. According to the UK Innovation

Survey, innovative businesses report staggering benefits, from boosted productivity to increased resilience. But the true measure of innovation, I've found, lies in its impact on the community.

Take, for instance, the time we introduced a smart mobility app designed to make public transport more accessible. The app was a hit, not just for its sleek interface, but for how it brought people together. Stories poured in, from the elderly couple who discovered a newfound independence, to the group of students who organised a city-wide treasure hunt using only public transport. **It was clear: innovation had turned everyday travel into a shared adventure.**

Or consider the healthcare initiative that used the Yohlar Framework and AI to predict patient flows in hospitals. It sounded like something

out of a sci-fi novel, yet the real story was far more compelling. I remember the hospital staff's amazement as they found themselves able to spend more time with patients, leading to smiles all round. **It was a reminder that at the heart of every innovation is the potential to touch lives.**

As my odyssey continues, the landscape of the North East serves as both backdrop and inspiration. Here, innovation isn't just about creating new technologies; it's about it underpinning the whole of our society, ensuring they add colour, texture, and warmth to the lives of all its members.

So, as we stand on the cusp of tomorrow, looking out over a horizon bright with promise, let's pledge to keep the spirit of inclusive innovation burning bright. **Let's create a future where technology serves not just the few, but the many, crafting a North East that's not only known for its industrial might but celebrated for its digital dynamism and inclusivity.**

The North East's story is far from over; in fact, a new chapter is just beginning. It's a story we write together, with every new idea, every leap of faith, and every shared success. **And in this story, everyone has a starring role. So, here's to the next adventure—may it be as inclusive, innovative, and inspiring as the region we call home.**

Ammar Mirza CBE is Chair & Founder of Asian Business Connexions, Chair of the NELEP Business Growth Board, Honorary Colonel of 101 Regiment RA and holds various positions across the public and private sectors.

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Director

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www.threerivershealthandsafety.co.uk

The Health & Safety Executive guidance document in relation to "The Health & Safety (First-Aid) Regulations 1981" has recently been updated with amendments in February 2024.

The Health and Safety (First-Aid) Regulations 1981 require employers to provide adequate and appropriate equipment, facilities, and personnel to ensure their employees receive immediate attention if they are injured or taken ill at work. These Regulations apply to all workplaces including those with less than five employees and to the self-employed.

What is 'adequate and appropriate' will depend on the circumstances in the workplace. This includes whether trained first-aiders are needed, what should be included in a first-aid box and if a first-aid room is required. Employers should carry out an assessment of first-aid needs to determine what to provide.

The Regulations do not place a legal duty on employers to make first-aid provision for non-employees such as the public or children in schools. However, HSE strongly recommends that non-employees are included in an assessment of first-aid needs and that provision is made for them.

On our website www.threerivershealthandsafety.co.uk you will find a Free First Aid Requirements Calculator tool to identify and determine exactly how many first aiders you require and what type of training they require, this could be the (EFAV) Emergency First Aid at Work 1 Day Course or (FAV) First Aid at Work 3 Day Course. (Both of these courses we offer along with a suite of others including IOSH Working Safely & IOSH Managing Safely.

Our suite of training courses can be delivered at your premises to minimise disruption to your workplace or at our training centre's across the North-East. Simply input a few details about your workplace and then the calculator creates a bespoke, printable report that breaks down your first aid requirements and recommends suitable training – perfect for demonstrating that you have completed a thorough needs assessment.

The third edition amendments in February 2024 include the following: emphasise employers' responsibilities to take account of employees' mental health in their first-aid needs assessment. Change the term 'catastrophic bleeding' to 'life-threatening bleeding' with more guidance on what employers should do if they identify this as a risk in their workplace.

Picture: Chris Booth



Lucy Anderson (Steel Benders sales manager), Darren Metcalfe (Parnaby works manager), Phil Anderson (Steel Benders operations director) and Ian Parnaby (Parnaby process manager).

Steel Benders - strong partnerships working together

Two North East businesses are to mark the 20th anniversary of working together on the latest large scale processing plant to be transported around the world.

Middlesbrough's Steel Benders UK have been forming all shapes and sizes of steel for Chilton's Parnaby Cyclones since 2004.

Parnaby then fabricates the parts to form the recycling plants that are then transported to different areas of the globe.

Parnaby has delivered a 400-tonne per hour wash plant inside the Arctic Circle, a glass washing plant to Italy and to the copper mines in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

And Steel Benders have processed the steel in almost every project carried out by Parnaby – highlighting the excellent partnership between the two companies.

Ian Parnaby, the process manager at Parnaby, said: “We have also delivered mineral processing plants to Indonesia, China, Canada, South Africa and placed a recycling plant to France and New Zealand.

“We are effectively separating the organics from aggregates and a lot of the kit that we are using, almost on every plant, comes from Steel Benders and then we send it around the world to the required destination.”

Steel Benders have successfully worked with Parnaby since company founder Malcolm Cooper developed a relationship with the then works manager, Keith Metcalfe, at the Chilton Industrial Estate, near Ferryhill two decades ago. Since sales manager Lucy Anderson joined Steel Benders in 2008 she has managed the contract and remains the point of contact for Parnaby's current works manager, Darren Metcalfe, who took over the reins from his father, Keith.

Lucy said: “Relationships like this are fantastic for the business and fantastic for the area too. Each project starts with design and comes to me, broken into segments, and then we quote before moving onto the purchase element where Darren knows we can deliver.

“There are always hurdles to overcome and we will find solutions. Parnaby and Steel Benders have a great working relationship and the staff have built a strong rapport going back two generations.”

Parnaby Cyclones celebrated its 50th anniversary last year when it was founded by Ian's grandad, Derek. Ian and his father, Adrian, run the operation along with his brother, Ben.

The family run business has County Durham at heart.

Ian said: “We are proud of what we do here. When items are delivered we will have an experienced skilled person among our 60-strong workforce to assemble parts into its final form.

“We are a project based-company solving problems for clients dealing with very difficult materials in various sectors. Our history was traditionally working in the coal industry until we diversified into recycling.

“Now our large-scale processing plants have large tanks, processing vessels, which require large plates and parts to be formed to suit our needs – and that is where Steel Benders come in.

“It is great to be able to work with a company on our doorstep. It is convenient for us and we are both supporting local businesses in the area - so everyone is a winner.

“The relatively close proximity between the two sites means less transportation, a lower carbon footprint and we are both having positive impacts on recycling applications as well as steel industries globally.”

Steel Benders bend and profile items such as cylinders, concentric and eccentric cones, buckets, lobster backs, stair stringers, Parallel Flange Channel (PFC), Circular Hollow Section (CHS), Rolled Steel Angle (RSA), Universal Beam (UB) and Flat Bar. From an offshore perspective it has huge experience of items like anode rings and transitional pieces.

For more information and to look at Steel Benders' services check out steelbenders.co.uk

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Eothen Care Homes enhances the lives of older people by providing experienced and specialist care at our three North East care homes

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*"We laugh together, we comfort one another.
It's absolutely amazing."* A resident at Eothen Whitley Bay

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When the Bough breaks

Systemic breakdown in organisations has a cascade effect, but often hides in plain sight for a considerable time, Dr David Cliff explores what happens when things are broken.

“When the Bough breaks...down will come cradle, baby and all”, is a children's lullaby. Unfortunately, it accurately serves as a metaphor, for the failure of our personal social services to protect children adequately these days. I can remember reading the Maria Caldwell enquiry in 1973. The same rhetoric of improvement was there in the multiple recommendations with the laudable, but unrealistic mantram of, “this must never happen again”. Unrealistic because it did, Victoria Climbié, baby P, Rochdale, the list goes on...

Our NHS system shows increasing systemic failure, with different parts of a leviathan system, incapable of interacting with each other. Ambulances queue outside of hospitals, A&E can't move people into beds, blocked by people who need social care. Social care itself is an overlapping system, not quite healthcare, not quite something else. The Covid enquiry has ably highlighted in order to protect the NHS, ministers summarily discharged our elderly to, in many cases, fatally, cross infect their peers back in their care homes.

Systemic failure occurs when public expectations and that of customers have to be maintained in defiance of the operational and resource realities that exist for an organisation. An organisation such as the NHS that is politicised, has to become all things to all people and virtue signals where the gaps lie. It must deal with cancer, age, mental health and even change the physical gender of people in a world of increasing rights and individual preferences are championed more by globalised market forces, than any notion of community. We see in reality, getting to an NHS dentist, whatever your gender and racial identity, is for many, a bridge too far.

Law enforcement has seen the same thing. In times of increasing focus on human rights, international tensions, hate crimes and other socially constructed criminal activities, the baseline issues around burglary, shop lifting, domestic violence et cetera, rarely now see either great preventative or detective work in the physical spaces people dwell.

Of course, that would never happen in the private sector! Yet the high street has given way to online shopping, banks reduced to “hubs”, mid contract price hikes and offshore or centralised customer services abound whilst shareholders and CEOs receive bonuses at odds with the unhappy, depersonalised lived experience of so

many customers. Complaints are increasingly met with formulaic responses, often with an upsell/upgrade as the solution on offer. Small wonder there is a groundswell for Martin Lewis to be PM!

Scores of well-paid service executives stand in front of the cameras saying they are committed to what they are paid to do anyway, as if it is a statement of virtue and a vindication for any failure in the system they oversee.

Many people no longer want to live in the truth, preferring instead the simulacrum of how things ‘should’ be rather than how they really are. All of us are constantly finding our realities reframed by our political classes who, rather than being honest, offer rhetorical sound bites and the ritual blaming of a “Global Pandemic”.

With an impending election, the Tories abysmal handling of the economy is deflected onto Covid and Ukraine and oh yes, the ‘bogeyman’ of the Labour Party when in power. Whilst fiscal management is a constant issue that transcends any individual government, accounting for your results on the stewardship of another organisation, 13 years ago, simply doesn't wash anywhere else.

When systems collapse, they affect real people in communities. They realise how powerless they are to influence events; direct action is inhibited by increasing legislation to limit public protest. Organisations often use the digital world to move into nameless, faceless leviathan structures with an email address rather than a human name to contact when there are difficulties.

Those with vested interest continue to plough a furrow of their own self-promotion, whilst increasingly creating distance from those they serve, only for the disasters to be discovered later, at even greater human and financial cost. We only need to look at the situation with the Post Office as a case in point to validate that position.

I am all for being positive about the future, but for some it serves as denial in the here and now. We must call things out as they are. Sadly, realists these days are increasingly seen as spectres at a feast where the starving are told by the caterers that smaller, more costly portions are good for you!

www.gedanken.co.uk

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...For many people, we no longer want to live the truth...

Dr David Cliff



Why you should consider career changers to fill your skills gaps

Millions of people each year are embarking on a total career change – the team at Talentheads explain why they could be the solution to your recruitment and talent development needs.

When seeking team members, there's a temptation to always go for what's tried and tested.

Industry experience. Relevant qualifications. Technical expertise.

But there's a growing area of the workforce that may possess none of these – yet can be your talent success!

Last year, around 1.7m people in the UK switched sectors and embarked on a career change. A 2019 poll showed that on average, we think about changing careers ten times a year – while around a fifth of us are considering retraining.

Since then, the rise of AI, the covid pandemic and current economic changes have all likely pushed more of us into thinking about the opportunity of a career change.

Undoubtedly, as an employee, the prospect of changing careers can be daunting.

You can feel as if all the technical experience, skills and progress you've made during your career to date is not as relevant as once thought.

Yet that couldn't be further from the truth.

Career changers often bring with them far more than they realise – and it can be the soft skills that can really help them stand out from the crowd.

Increasingly, we are hearing from businesses who claim that soft skills are a becoming harder to find.

They've encountered candidates who may have bags of relevant experience, but don't have the active listening and business communication skills for team collaboration for example.

Some struggle with teamwork. Others struggle to make decisions – nor are they natural leaders – while they lack traits like resilience, adaptability and empathy that are harder to scout out during the recruitment phase.

And this is where turning to career changers can help your business grow.

These are candidates who are often dripping with soft skills that, whilst harder to quantify on paper, can be just as beneficial to your business.

And the best thing about soft skills? It doesn't matter what sector they are working in – they are highly transferable.

Career changers can be a major asset to your

brand or business – and we know because we've just hired one ourselves.

Emily Martin joined Talentheads as our operations support and talent development advisor. Yet before that, she was a regional loss prevention manager for a national retail chain.

The roles are very different. But what Emily has – and what made her stand out – are the transferrable soft skills that showed us she'd be a great fit for our business.

She is a problem solver and a natural organiser, with experience in leading teams and coaching people to enable development for both organisations and people.

Firms looking to fill gaps where strong soft skills are a prerequisite could do a lot worse than looking at staff from different sectors who have retrained to help fill them.

And perhaps businesses need to start taking more of a 'glass half full' approach to candidates who have retrained, not merely viewing them as team members who need more training for the technical elements of a job – especially given that's the side that is probably easier to teach.

Plus, these are often the candidates who can fill those harder-to-plug gaps in your business where leadership, decision making and expertise is crucial.

For businesses, it is a growing sector that is ripe for picking – and if you are one of the 20 per cent mulling over a career change, then Emily's advice is clear.

'Don't be afraid to step outside your comfort zone – you may not have the direct experience required but chances are you have a huge number of portable skills to bring to a new environment.'

talentheads.co.uk

Why managers need to do less managing – and be less like David Brent



At the turn of the century, the office was a very different place. For one, there was no remote working. For most offices, there still wasn't even the internet. And the way bosses managed back then differed greatly to the modern workplace.

If you'd asked someone in the year 2000 to summarise their boss, I'd wager that the picture they painted would be far less flattering than one created by the modern worker. After all, there's a reason that the TV show, *The Office*, hit home when it was released a year later.

But the world has changed immeasurably since then – and there isn't any space for a David Brent in the modern office.

Back then, managers were often just like Brent – albeit without the dad dancing. They could be a bit overbearing. They felt staff couldn't work without their input. Often the approach was to hit staff with the proverbial stick, rather than trusting them to deliver.

Since then, we've realised just how wrong they got it.

And increasingly, I'm realising a good manager doesn't manage at all. They coach.

Your staff usually know their jobs. They know how to do them. They've got decades of education and training behind them, and the skills to deliver.

And crucially, they should be trusted to deliver – after all, if they don't, then there's always someone waiting in the wings.

So why do they need a David Brent barking orders? How does that get the best out of anybody? Well, it doesn't.

What does get results is the softer approach.

Staff will deliver more for your business if they are motivated. If they feel listened to. If they are encouraged and empowered.

And that can be the 'X factor' into turning staff who simply do their job into staff who excel in their job – and accelerate your business.

David Brent never had this approach, nor did a lot of managers back then.

Despite being called managers, they actually struggled to manage as they couldn't connect with their staff.

They weren't curious. They didn't try to understand their staff's wants and desires – instead, they tried to shape their team around them.

Like Brent, they'd be rightfully viewed as dinosaurs in the increasingly remote modern office.

What that modern workplace benefits from are managers who can find ways to connect with their team. Managers who want to understand and tap into their teams' driving forces.

I recently filmed a video on managing difficult people, where I sat down with another business coach – Anth Quinn – and we established that the reality is the problems around managing tricky staff often come from the top.

If the pandemic taught the business community anything, it is that we all need to be more flexible, be it from where we work or how we work.

That's the unavoidable reality of the modern office.

That's why in 2024, I'm working on a new campaign called 'The Changing World of Work'.

I want to encourage leaders and managers to find out how they can coach – rather than manage – their team and how that can ultimately grow their business.

So be a coach, not a manager.

And don't, whatever you do, be a Brent.

kinnery.co.uk

Are you ready for Annual Salary Reviews?

Bryony Gibson, director of Bryony Gibson Consulting and specialist recruiter in public practice, shares her thoughts on the trends and insights in the accountancy profession that will help you prepare for the annual review season.

Am I paying my staff enough? What is the appropriate inflationary rise? How do we compare with our competitors? These are just some of the questions I am regularly asked as the accounting profession moves from the hectic tax season to the world of annual reviews.

It would be easier if I could give an exact answer, but there are many variables to consider. So, while I prepare our Annual Salary Review (available in March), I wanted to share an insight into trends from the past 12 months that will help you remain competitive in the market and supportive of your team.

KEY TRENDS

Despite a slowdown in inflation, the cost of living is still driving people to search for new roles that increase their income. Of course, many more factors influence job seekers, but salary is an important part of the jigsaw and as a good employer, you must get the balance right.

With a high demand for good people, there remains an easy temptation to switch for more. It wouldn't be the primary motivation for my career choice, but pound signs have definitely been driving a desire for change.

Interestingly, the gender pay gap is still prevalent in accountancy. According to the ONS, the median hourly full-time pay gap increased to 7.7% in 2023, so there is still a lot of work to be done. To ensure you support your female staff, I encourage you to remember this at review time.



Bryony Gibson

Employers continue to find staff training a challenge when people work from home. You simply don't learn as much remotely, and we have found that some employers' expectations for delivery have fallen short of what they are paying.

Candidates have also found challenges when switching jobs linked to home working. When required to be in the office full-time during their probation and to work in a hybrid way thereafter, it doesn't always fit with the lifestyle they have established. Adjusting their routine for 3-6 months can be a barrier to accepting a new role.

The Big 4 and national firms have a clear advantage as they can offer more flexibility. Not as reliant upon staff being in the office, they offer a range of working patterns, something much harder to achieve for smaller accountancy firms.

Having said that, there has been an upturn in the level of interest in smaller firms due to the attraction of less overtime and the ability to "switch-off" at the end of each day, avoiding the pressure and demands that often comes with the larger firms.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

In 2024, the accountancy sector will continue to face candidate shortages. Coupled with a scarcity of new skills that are changing the way the sector

operates - data analysis, technology integration, and AI - we expect salaries to continue an upward trajectory.

With bonuses introduced more widely to combat this, the biggest attraction for our candidates is the balance between salary and flexible work patterns, with firms offering consolidated hours or a four day working week having the upper hand.

We expect to see this level out in 2025 as what people want is to be able to live in the same way as they have been doing. With 60% of monthly salaries spent on essential purchases and one in five unable to save each month, most monetary requests are linked to being able to live comfortably rather than greed.

Undoubtedly, the best investment any business can make is in its people, but it needs to be the right people. Whatever you choose to do with your annual reviews, I urge you to also place a renewed focus on your recruitment process.

If you can get this right, you will see improved productivity, a better culture, and increasing levels of client and customer service, which all go to directly improve the bottom line and keep your team happy.

For public practice advice and expertise, get in touch:
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With succession planning at the forefront of this well respected and professional accountancy firm they are looking to offer a qualified auditor the opportunity to join as Manager with progression to the senior leadership team.

Capable of overseeing a small audit and accounts team you will manage the delivery of audit engagements from planning through to completion and review of statutory accounts. This role suits an individual eager for responsibility and career growth.

Applicants will be qualified (ACA/ACCA/CA) with the relevant experience in audit and accounts from a practice. We are looking for a professional with passion and enthusiasm alongside the communication skills needed to engage with clients. **Quote Ref: 2239**

OUTSOURCING SENIOR

Newcastle, £30-40,000pa

With a refreshing, relaxed and friendly work culture this accountancy firm are seeking an ambitious Accountant with statutory and management accounts experience to join at an exciting period of development and growth.

Whether you are a newly qualified ACA/ACCA searching for your next challenge, or AAT qualified (with a minimum of 3 years practice experience) this opportunity offers a huge amount of job satisfaction, development and progression.

Working with SME's as part of a specialist outsourcing team you will tailor services to each client, resulting in a varied list of responsibilities. The beauty of this role is the diversity and freedom to forge close relationships, understanding each business and advising accordingly with commercial decisions. One of the benefits of working in practice is that there will always be a challenge and new client to get to know, this role goes one further and enables you to get much closer to a business, often only afforded to those who work in Industry. **Quote Ref: 2242**

SENIOR ACCOUNTS MANAGER

Durham, £40-55,000pa

A great opportunity with responsibility and a breadth of accounting work with this dynamic County Durham practice. Your main objective is to hold responsibility for the review of year end accounts, management accounts, tax returns, VAT returns and other accountancy services.

Through your years of experience you will be able to effectively ensure timely completion of services to a high standard, taking the lead with clients, attending meetings and supervising the department.

You will be ACA/ACCA qualified with a minimum of 2 years post qualification, with knowledge in both accounts and tax. As a natural leader you will have strong interpersonal skills with the confidence to hold meetings and converse with business owners. Leading the team, the position is office based. **Quote Ref: 2238**

PRIVATE CLIENT TAX MANAGER

Newcastle, £42-55,000pa

An accountancy firm looking to appoint a tax professional as part of an experienced leadership team of Managers, Directors and Partners. Responsible for jointly leading a small team of tax assistants and seniors with their day to day portfolio of compliance. This will entail reviewing returns, technical guidance, workflow, billing and ensuring deadlines are met. You will also have your own portfolio of complex personal tax compliance and associated advisory work.

Working with HNWI, Directors and families you will encounter challenges that will test your knowledge, leaning on your peer group when required for technical assistance.

We are looking for someone who is CTA/ACA qualified with a minimum of 5-6 years UK tax experience and a confident Manager both with staff and your clients, technically strong and able to work independently and as part of a team.

Scope to achieve progression to Senior Manager and beyond is readily available. **Quote Ref: 2235**

To express an interest in any of the above vacancies, or for a confidential discussion about your career, please contact Bryony Gibson, Bryony Gibson Consulting, on 0191 3759983.
www.bryonygibson.com

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Tyne Bridge restoration – A lesson for the region

By Stephen Patterson, Chief Executive, NE1 Ltd

I think we all breathed a collective sigh of relief when the Government approved the release of the £35 million funding for the long-awaited restoration of the Tyne Bridge. This money comes at a time when Newcastle is enjoying an exciting renaissance the likes of which hasn't been seen since the heady days of Grainger and Dobson in the 19th Century.

Today a monumental transformation is taking place with multi-million-pound developments across the city including Pilgrim Street, the Helix, Stephenson Quarter and the public realm improvements on Northumberland Street and the city's retail core.

Add to this the new Metro fleet and now the much-needed repair and resurfacing of the Tyne Bridge and we have a comprehensive, city-wide rejuvenation, all progressing at the same time.

While we are delighted by this and relieved that the investment has been secured, the rusting Tyne Bridge stands as a regional symbol of how not to plan infrastructure investment at a national level.

These investment 'buses' arriving all at once, cause their own issues, with projects competing for finite space and time in the schedule and creating inevitable inconvenience. The future prosperity and growth of Newcastle and the rest of the country shouldn't be run this way.

The money granted to the Tyne Bridge is for essential maintenance, to halt terminal decline and ensure that it is still standing in another 100 years. It is not designed to improve transport times, add capacity or economic growth.

Investment for economic growth and future prosperity should come in the form of ambitious, long-term, costed plans for the next Tyne Bridge, the next Tyne Tunnel or the dualling of the A1 North. A continuous and sustained investment that provides a degree of certainty and stability, paired with local ambition and local priorities, is what will unlock the true potential of the region and provide the flag for both the public and private sectors to rally behind.

Whichever political party is in power at the end of this year would be wise to dispense with this ridiculous beauty parade of central government funding that requires local Councils to pitch against each other for cash, based on criteria set in Whitehall. This piecemeal approach serves no one.

Historically, the UK has always under-invested in infrastructure for growth, and nationally there now needs to be a consistent and sustained approach to address this.

Just as the Tyne Bridge is symbolic of the national Government getting things wrong, the plan to reopen the Leamside railway line is a shining example of the region getting things right. The proposed £600 million project, championed by Transport North East, is a shining example of great forward-thinking and the type of investment that's needed. The estimated cost for the whole line is equivalent to the amount spent on one new tube station in London.

The Mayoral election in May provides the perfect opportunity to amplify the region's voice. On its own, the new Combined Authority won't be a silver bullet for all the region's woes but it will be a hugely positive step in the right direction and will act as a catalyst for the region to provide its own solutions to problems that have long been dodged or ignored.

Public-sector investment is crucial to encouraging confidence and future opportunities for growth in the private sector. NE1's Bigg Market regeneration illustrated this perfectly. This award-winning project with its £3.2 million investment from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, NE1, Newcastle City Council and partners unlocked a further £17 million from the private sector and created 330 new jobs.

We celebrate wholeheartedly the cranes over Newcastle, knowing they represent the most significant transformation to the city since the 19th century. The future awaits, and I hope our next Government will help us grasp it.

www.newcastlene1ltd.com



Stephen Patterson

All change!

Change has been a topic of discussion over the last weeks and months with clients. And all of it at a gallop!

- For some it is organisational change - structures, working practices, business models.
- For some it is people – change in CEO, directors, leaders, owners.
- For others it is their job roles - either starting new ones, or realising old ones are no longer fit for purpose.
- For others, it's processes, ways of working and approach.

And all of this is happening in a world that is changing rapidly in so many ways, with the AI discussion touching nearly every social media post and article so it seems. Change though is more complex than one thing ending and another starting, and we often underestimate the impact of transition. Change and transition are different terms and focus on different elements, but are both equally important. Leaders need to be aware of, and attend to, both for the organisation and employees.

What is Change?

Change is about moving from one start to another. It is often a specific event, situational and is often linear and can be very practical, changing something, bringing something new in or letting go of something. We may bring this in and chose to do it ourselves, or may be done to us. Each will have an impact on how receptive we are to the change, manage it and transition through it.

The Impact of Transition & The Stages

William Bridges refers to transition as the process people go through in response to change. It's a letting go, and is about reorientating ourselves internally to the change. This inner transition can be personal, psychological and emotional.

Often those planning change either forget that people need to transition, or don't build enough time into the change process to allow that transition to happen fully. The more people are enabled to transition the more accepting and embracing they will be of the change.



Annabel Graham

Endings

The first phase of transition is recognizing what we're losing and learning to handle those losses. This means figuring out what's ending, what we're leaving behind, and what we're keeping. These losses could be relationships, ways of doing things, team members, or locations.

Neutral Zone

The second phase of transition is the neutral zone. It's the in between stage between old and new. It's important as this is when people move away from old ways of thinking, being and identities, to new ones. This can be confusing because the old familiar things are gone, but the new things haven't settled in yet. People might feel uncertain, anxious, and confused during this time. It can affect their behaviour and how they work:

- People might feel more stressed, less motivated, and might not perform well.
- Old problems might come back, causing more issues, with different emotions on display: some stay quiet, some create problems, and others might feel emotionally overwhelmed, get mixed messages, and have unclear priorities.
- Disagreements might increase among colleagues, affecting teamwork.

How then do we move forward from this stage?

New Beginnings

This stage is about having new ideas, values, and attitudes. It's like having a burst of energy

towards something new. Well-managed changes help people find new roles, new identities, understand their purpose, and feel renewed, clear on how they can contribute to the new world.

Successfully leading Change and Transition

If then you are embarking on or leading change within your organisation, here are some top tips for success.

1. Tell the organisation why the change is happening.
2. Listen to those affected by the change and understand how it impacts them.
3. Review if the organisation is ready for the change, and how to improve that readiness.
4. Explain to the team that the change might bring uncertainty and that it's okay not to have all the answers yet.
5. Train leaders to handle the change and its impact on individuals.
6. Keep track of how people are doing through the different stages of change.
7. Be available for people to talk about their worries or get guidance.
8. Help individuals know how they can help with the change and why their role is important in the organisation.

If this or other topics resonate with you and you'd value a thinking space for you or your team, contact Annabel via LinkedIn, annabel@successfultraining.co.uk, or visit www.successfultraining.co.uk

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To grow or not to grow – that is the question

Kathryn Rodgers, face2faceHR talks about the pitfalls of growing a business.

“Hiring is always a big decision for my clients, and I love seeing their teams grow. However, like all other aspects of life, recruitment decisions don’t always turn out the way we expect – and in a small team, running a lengthy formal procedure isn’t always an option.

“Offering an employee, a settlement agreement to sidestep formal processes and legal complications requires delicate handling. It's crucial to approach the subject cautiously to prevent the conversation from being used against you in potential legal proceedings. Employers typically rely on two mechanisms for such discussions: the 'without prejudice' common-law principle and 'protected conversations'. Understanding their nuances is key to making an informed decision.

“The 'Without Prejudice' rule shields discussions aimed at resolving disputes from being used as evidence in legal proceedings. However, its application is contingent upon an existing dispute, such as ongoing legal proceedings or a foreseeable likelihood thereof. Merely labelling a conversation as 'Without Prejudice' doesn't guarantee protection. Consequently, discussions initiated amid grievances or disciplinary actions might not qualify.

“Protected conversations were introduced to facilitate discussions even in the absence of a formal dispute. By designating a conversation as 'protected', employers aim to shield its details from being admissible in

future legal claims. Yet, this protection is limited primarily to 'routine' unfair dismissal claims, excluding other potential claims like discrimination or breach of contract. Improper

conduct during the conversation, such as coercion or intimidation, could also invalidate the protection.

“In instances where neither protection applies, seeking professional advice becomes imperative. Despite the limitations, analysing the likelihood of a claim and the employee's disposition toward it aids decision-making.

If the employee is discontent and likely to accept a settlement, even if the conversation isn't technically protected, it might still be worthwhile. Offering an attractive settlement could mitigate the risk of a legal claim.

“In conclusion, navigating settlement discussions demands a thorough understanding of legal safeguards and potential risks. Employers must tread carefully, weighing the benefits against the risks. While legal protections offer some cover, seeking expert guidance ensures informed decision-making, safeguarding both the business's interests and employee relations.”

For no-nonsense advice on all HR matters, contact Kathryn Rodgers, face2faceHR on 07946 330 025.



Kathryn Rodgers



Jackie Latham

New Trustee for Charity Support Organisation

A charity that focuses in providing support to 700 other charities and VCS groups has expanded its web and digital know-how with the addition of a new Trustee to their board.

Jackie Latham of Jackdaw Web Design has joined the board as a Trustee at North Tyneside VODA, who provide support, advice and training to volunteers and voluntary/community groups operating in the borough.

Jackie, who has grown closer to the organisation as a member of its SectorConnector programme, is an award-winning web designer also based in North Tyneside. For more than five years, Jackie has been working closely with North Tyneside VODA offering its members low-cost, cost-effective websites, ensuring they can reach their target audience.

She said: "Having been part of SectorConnector, an exciting collaboration between business, voluntary sector and the public sector in North Tyneside to share skills, volunteers and resources, I have grown to understand North Tyneside VODA and the great work they do.

"In my own business I focus on supporting charities and community groups, especially those whose websites should pay attention to accessibility. Helping those people reach their audience, the people they essentially help, is my passion. So, to have the opportunity to bring my skills, experience and understanding to North Tyneside VODA was an exciting opportunity I couldn't pass up."

Jackie joins a host of experience on the board from a range of sectors all bringing their support to the good cause. Jess Evans, chair of the board said: "The active contribution of Trustees is essential to the continuing success of VODA. Becoming a Trustee is not only a great way to give back to your local community and share your experience in a way that helps many. It is important to bring a range of skills to the board - Jackie ensures we have a voice about web and digital activity, online accessibility and she already has experience as a trustee. It's a bonus that she already understands our organisation and we are all looking forward to working with her going forward."

More information on opportunities at VODA is available at voda.org.uk/vodas-board-of-trustees



RMT adds Hamza and Charlotte to growing team

RMT Accountants & Business Advisors is continuing to grow its expert team with two new appointments.

Hamza Mahmudov has joined Gosforth-based RMT as an audit senior, while Charlotte Baron has been recruited to the practice's commercial services team as a payroll assistant.

Hamza holds a degree in accounting from Northumbria University and brings a decade's worth of industry experience to his new role.

He has worked with several well-known professional services firms around the region, and is now responsible for planning, preparing and delivering audits for businesses of all sizes.

After completing an English Language degree at Sunderland University, Charlotte changed tack to start work in the payroll sector with a small North East firm.

She has five years' sector experience and, alongside payroll processing, she is working on issues relating to company pensions and the healthcare payroll sector.



New commercial manager lifts Port of Sunderland

Port of Sunderland has appointed experienced industry specialist, Sven Richards, to oversee its commercial operations.

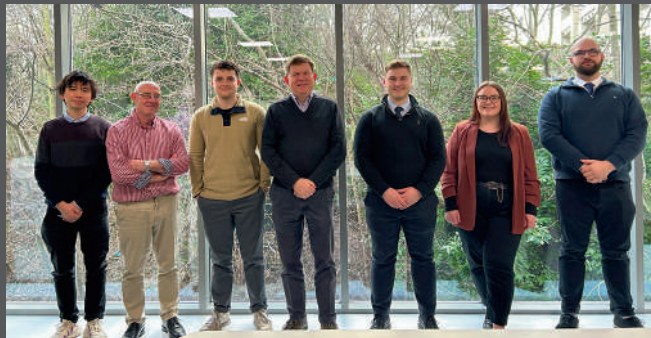
Sven spent just under three years at Cumbria's Port of Workington prior to joining the port, where he held the position of port manager.

Prior to that, he was the port operations manager for Port of Tyne, where he worked for nine years.

Sven's newest challenge however will see him join Port of Sunderland at what is one of the most exciting junctures in the municipal port's history.

Significant private sector investment from a plethora of businesses in recent years has provided a major boost to the port, and with further investments in the pipeline, Sven is excited about the future.

"It is a real privilege to have been appointed commercial manager at Port of Sunderland," he said.



New year begins at a cracking pace for TGA

TGA Consulting Engineers (TGA), an expert provider of consulting engineering services working at the leading edge of carbon reduction technologies, has begun the year at a cracking pace by expanding into new office accommodation in West One, Forth Banks, close to Newcastle's Stephenson Quarter to accommodate its growth strategy.

The move is accompanied by six new appointments and the promotion of three existing staff to provide more project support for its growing project pipeline.

The new recruits include Michael Dunlavy, who is a principal mechanical engineer; Jack Atkinson, a senior electrical engineer who joins from a similar regional consultancy with a 1st Class BEng (Hons) degree; Ed McNaught, a well-known and highly experienced healthcare specialist who is a Fellow of the Institute of Healthcare Engineering and Estate Management; Harry Ross, a graduate building performance engineer; a trainee mechanical engineer, Adam Au, who has moved to the UK from Hong Kong to further develop his building services engineering design skills; and Josh Shell, who joins as a trainee electrical engineer.

Three existing staff members have also been promoted: Courtney McGee becomes a senior Revit technician, Luke Collins, who has been promoted to BIM Co-ordinator from a senior technician role and James Davison, who arrived at TGA in 2019 when he joined with over 16 years of experience, has been promoted to Associate with responsibility for developing the specialist lighting design department.



Leading EU and competition partner joins Knights as business targets North East growth

Professional services business Knights has bolstered its Newcastle office with the appointment of one of the UK's leading EU and competition lawyers, Neil Warwick OBE.

Neil works with listed companies on precedent-setting merger clearances; multi-national organisations on brand maximisation and compliance. He was awarded an OBE in 2018 for services to the economy in the North East and charitable work.

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Why accredited training could be the key to unlocking employee potential

Michelle Storey, Accreditation Manager at the awarding organisation NCFE, explains what accredited training is, how it works, and why it could help your business to stand out from the crowd.

If you've not heard of accreditation before, don't worry. You're not alone.

Accredited training allows individuals to achieve a certification following completion of a course of your own design in a particular skill or sector – while also receiving a stamp of approval from a recognised awarding organisation.

This approval ensures that the learning programme or qualification is fit-for-purpose, rigorous, and quality assured, and without accreditation, the same level of recognition cannot be gained.

Here, I'm going to answer some of the most common questions when it comes to accredited training, and hopefully inspire you to think about how it can add value to your organisation.

Who can benefit from accredited training?

Anyone can! Any business, organisation, provider or educational setting wanting to offer a bespoke or personalised development opportunity to their employees or learners can get involved with designing a programme which can then be accredited or endorsed.

What are the benefits of accredited training?

There are several benefits to accredited training, such as that it:

- is bespoke.
- increases an individual's skills.
- can improve staff retention.
- provides a stamp of approval.

Many off-the-shelf training programmes or qualifications are broad in nature and contain aspects of learning that aren't always relevant to learners or employees.

Accredited training, however, allows organisations to develop their own training and tailor all aspects of a course to the context of their sector or business.

Accredited training can improve specific soft skills or technical skills amongst learners or employees, helping to provide a pool of talented individuals who are armed with the knowledge to go above and beyond in their career or roles.

Encouraging your workforce to advance their personal and professional development can also help improve staff retention, as it displays a commitment to helping employees push themselves and grow.

What types of accredited training are there?

From an NCFE perspective, we split our accredited training into two types, depending on the needs of the organisation – Customised Qualifications and Endorsed Programmes.

Customised Qualifications are unregulated qualifications that are written and developed by an organisation, before being accredited by NCFE as the awarding organisation.

They contain learning outcomes and assessment criteria, measured through relevant assessment methods.

Once developed, these qualifications are

the intellectual property of the qualification provider – you. It's also important to note that as these qualifications are unregulated, they will not appear on the register of regulated qualifications – however, accreditation by an awarding organisation provides recognition of their suitability and quality.

Where a full qualification is not required, an Endorsed Programme – which consists of a series of informal activities carried out in-house by a programme provider – is instead endorsed by NCFE as the awarding organisation.

Activities range from seminars, to workshops, to paper-based materials – and crucially, contain no learning outcomes or assessment criteria. Again, recognition of an Endorsed Programme by an awarding organisation ensures that it is fit-for-purpose and high quality.

What could I do?

The options are endless, but don't just take my word for it. One example, The National Talent Academy, provides online courses that equip learners with the essential skills they need to start a successful career. Its NCFE-endorsed courses are designed to support post-16 learners in colleges, schools, traineeships, and apprenticeships.

David Jaffa, Founder of the National Talent Academy, explained why they chose to make use of NCFE's endorsement services to help them achieve their vision: "We wanted to create essential skills courses of excellent quality at a price that every school, college, and training provider can afford. By choosing NCFE's endorsed programme route, that is what we now have."

"Having an NCFE endorsement demonstrates to schools, colleges, and training providers that our courses are robust and high quality. Learners are keen to get their certificate and are proud of their achievement. The NCFE-endorsed certificate increases learner engagement and motivation and helps learning centres 'sell' the benefits to learners."

If you would like to know more about accredited training, Customised Qualifications, or Endorsed Programmes, visit www.ncfe.org.uk/learning-for-work/accreditation-and-employer-services



Helen Butler

When is the right time to focus on HOW I run my business?

It's more than likely your business started with a conversation about something that was missing in the world and 'what' you could do to fill the gap.

Alternatively, you may have built your business from a passion to do things differently or better. Your 'why' is often the subject of how you got to where you are today. Simon Sinek even wrote a book about it.

In those fast, exciting early days, there's rarely time to think about the 'how' of running your business. But it's this part of the journey that I want to focus on.

It's perfectly acceptable for things to be reactive and organic during the start-up phase. You're proving the concept, building your brand and customer base, and establishing where you can make the biggest difference.

But once there's a team, however small, or a range of products or services, or you want to

expand into different markets, having a clear idea of 'how' you do things (and capturing it) is essential.

What do I mean by 'how'?

The 'how' of running a business is all to do with what goes on behind the scenes. Imagine you're bringing in a manager: how would you do things? How would you help them understand where information was held, how to find things, who needed to know what and in what order everything should happen?

When I work with clients, we approach things using four pillars:

- Planning
- Process
- People
- Performance

Of course, each of these includes many more moving parts.

Every function of the business needs a plan, feeding into the overarching business plan which communicates your strategic direction. Processes consist of repeatable tasks and activities; how you manage your people creates your culture, and tracking and measuring your performance is critical to ensure you meet the right standards of customer satisfaction and maintain the right levels of profits, income and outgoings and a healthy cash flow position.

However, all are interrelated and all need one thing: consistency.

Having a consistent approach to how you run your business means you are putting all your resources into continually moving forward. The alternative is different people interpreting tasks or activities in different ways, duplication of effort, a range of outputs and standards and the potential for things to get forgotten.

How do I know I'm getting it right?

All businesses are different and the optimal way to operate will become clear as you gain greater visibility through planning, capturing key processes, and using your systems to report and analyse performance and other outputs.

However, there are a couple of questions I always ask business owners which you could consider:

- 1.** Are you spending more time or money on something than you should be?
- 2.** Are you losing time or money where you shouldn't be?
- 3.** Are you wasting time or money on any part of your business?

I often find business owners have a perception of how the business is running, and often that perception is that things are running well, but when we conduct an audit and uncover the detail, the results are not always what they expected.

So how well do you truly know what's going on in your business?

If you've grown, you can be assured that you've lost the granularity you started with. If you've got more people working in the business, you will have lost some of the consistency you started with.

Don't dismiss the 'how' stage of running your business. Scaling a business means scaling any problems or issues too so it's critical to understand what's going on before you grow.

If you're interested in getting a better understanding of how your business is currently running, contact helen at helen@simplesimplifiedoperations.co.uk

It's a family affair

The countdown is on for the world's biggest and best half marathon, with over 57,000 participants eager and ready to trek the iconic 13.1-mile route from Newcastle to South Shields as AJ Bell's Great North Run approaches its 42nd year.

There are still a few places available to show your support by teaming up with The Three Tumours Charity for the event.

The Three Tumours are dedicated to raising awareness and providing support for those who suffer the debilitating effects of brain cancer.

Among those dedicated to this imperative cause is Richard Marston, teaming up with his children Jordan Marston and Ayesha Arundel, who will be lacing up their running shoes to make the journey across the iconic Tyne Bridge and along the North Sea coastline in solidarity with The Three Tumours to help make a significant impact for brain tumour sufferers and their families by raising awareness and funds to support vital research, treatment, and care.

It truly is a family affair, and their passion and dedication for the cause is in-keeping with the insurmountable spirit of the founders and the ethos of the charity.



Liam, Ayesha, Jackie, Richard & Jordan

To them, the Great North Run is not only a personal milestone, but also a celebration of the legacy of those who made a detrimental impact, as well as an indomitable show of community as the event has firmly placed itself as the heart of the North East.

Richard Marston said: "As a family, the Marston's lost a very dear friend; George Elliot, to this horrible disease, so, we will be running this, with him in mind. If anyone wishes to sponsor us, you can donate on Facebook, just look for my name."

If you are passionate about making a difference and want to join Richard, Jordan and Ayesha in participating in this spectacular feat - team up with The Three Tumours and join them at the starting line on the 8th of September!

Get in touch with The Three Tumours via Facebook or send an email to support@thethreetumours.co.uk and find out how you can get involved and make strides towards a brighter future.

www.thethreetumours.co.uk

Supporting Roles: Blueline Taxis, Week2Week Apartments, and JAM Marketing elevate North East Adult Panto

A thank you from Liam Glendinning, from NE Adult Panto:

Celebrating the support of Blueline Taxis, Week2Week Apartments, and JAM Marketing in the success of North East Adult Panto's Big Dick Whittington, starring Katie Price.

"As the curtains close on another successful season of the North East Adult Panto, at the Exchange 1856, North Shields, it is with great pleasure and heartfelt gratitude that we extend our sincerest thanks to Blueline Taxis, Week2Week Apartments, and JAM Marketing for their invaluable support.

"These esteemed organisations have played vital roles in ensuring the success of our production, 'Big Dick Whittington and His Pussy,' by sponsoring, providing exceptional transport and accommodation services for our stars such as Katie Price, and handling the crucial PR and marketing aspects.

"Blueline Taxis, one of the largest taxi services in the North East, has been instrumental in facilitating the smooth transportation of our cast, crew, and guests throughout the panto. Their reliable and professional drivers have ensured



that everyone involved in the production reached their destinations safely and on time. Blueline Taxis' commitment to excellence and their unwavering support of local arts and culture have made them an invaluable partner, and we are truly grateful for their sponsorship.

"Week2Week Apartments, renowned for their exceptional home-away-from-home serviced accommodation, has been a true haven for our performers and guests, including Katie Price. Their selection of ideally located apartments and houses in and around Newcastle upon Tyne provided our out-of-town cast members and visitors with a comfortable and convenient place to stay.

"Week2Week Apartments' commitment to creating a welcoming and homely environment has made them the preferred choice for both leisure and business travellers, and we are delighted to have partnered with them.

"JAM Marketing, the creative force behind our sponsorship and PR efforts, have been instrumental in securing the support of our valued sponsors and ensuring our production received the attention it should. Their expertise in organising sponsors, handling the PR, and marketing aspects of the pantomime has been invaluable. JAM's dedication to excellence and their tireless efforts in promoting the panto have contributed significantly to its success.

"We extend our heartfelt thanks to Blueline Taxis, Week2Week Apartments, and JAM Prints and Marketing for their unwavering support and sponsorship. Their contributions have been instrumental in making the North East Adult Panto a resounding success, bringing joy, laughter, and entertainment to our audiences. We are immensely grateful for their partnership and look forward to continued collaboration in the future."

Emotions are *THE* untapped business resource

When you first encounter Paul Cheetham, the first impression you get is that he's the sort of bloke you could enjoy a few beers with. He's a Newcastle Utd fan, he's born and bred in the North East, he loves the region and the people. He understands how we do business.



And, as far as we can remember, he's the only person we've ever met who's got a glowing reference on their website...from his mother! When I asked Paul about this, he told me "When I created my website, I was looking for some good quotes from people who could vouch for me and so I thought who better than my Mam? She even said I was good-looking, but that is definitely through 'Mam-tinted-spectacles'! I kept the quote in the final version of my website, as I felt it reflected that I like to bring some humour to my work, while also taking what I do for my clients seriously."

Paul is also one of those people who is informative and entertaining to listen to, especially when it's a topic that can be initially rather difficult to grasp... Emotional Intelligence (EI). So, I asked Paul to enlighten me on what the heck this EI stuff was and how he got into it. "In my 30-year career in HR across

a range of sectors, I got to see a lot of human behaviour that wasn't conducive to successful outcomes...and I include myself in that! Back in 2017, I went on a week-long immersive course in EI, which changed the trajectory of my life. As a then 46-year-old bloke, I truly saw for the first time how emotions were shaping behaviours for me and for others - both in the workplace as well as in their personal lives. It was a bit of an epiphany! To be able to recognise and understand emotions and then use that data to make decisions that would make a positive difference for me and for others was really powerful. In summary, EI is simply being more intelligent with emotions, although it isn't always simple to put into practice!

I was curious as to why EI would be something that businesses would be interested in, and I could see the gleam in Paul's eye. He passionately explained "The best reason I can give is 'Emotions drive people. People drive performance.' Yet, workplaces still focus on technical training and don't provide any support to harness and channel a core part of ourselves, which is our emotions. Our emotions give us energy and provide data as to what is important to us. Our anger, joy, contempt, fear, reluctance, acceptance, curiosity, antipathy etc. are indicators as to how we view the job we have, the work we do, the people we interact with, the life we are leading but left ignored we will just be reacting based on well-worn patterns rather than making conscious, deliberate choices...leading to less than optimal outcomes"

Paul continued "Also, research shows that your level of EQ (Emotional Quotient, which is the emotional equivalent of IQ) is strongly linked to success. The great thing is that with regular practice you can grow your EI/EQ which will support you to be more effective, have better relationships, increase wellbeing and enhance your quality of life. Who wouldn't want that?"

It's fascinating stuff, and it's only when you listen to Paul that this starts to make sense. Granted, it's very easy to be sceptical at the start...Paul will admit that...but it's only when you really start to think about why we react to things in certain ways and how we may be able to have an influence on those emotions and why those emotions occur in the first place, that you can see how, if you fully understand your emotions and can learn how to use them, that your life and work really can improve.

For example, we'd suspect that everyone reading this will know someone...perhaps they work for you, with you, or perhaps they're a friend or relative...and it's blindingly obvious that they're incredibly talented with a real gift for what they do, but unfortunately the way they behave or interact with colleagues means they always fall short. In other words, they could help themselves and everyone else around them to be hugely successful...but they're not because they can't control their emotions which affects what they do and everyone around them. Shame. What a waste.

This is where Paul earns his corn. I asked Paul who he would typically work with and how he works with them. "My work is almost exclusively business to business and so I consult with organisations to help them shape an organisation-wide culture of EI, I create and facilitate bespoke team EI sessions and I do 1-2-1 coaching. As I first got to 'cut my teeth' in a tech business, my speciality is working with people who have strong technical or professional discipline such as accountants, engineers, lawyers, marketers, developers etc. I learnt that although I couldn't teach them anything about their chosen profession, I could help them amplify and direct their abilities to 'be more joyful and successful through the power of EI' - which is my mission.

So, has this article got you thinking? Good. That's the first step... you've recognised that there just might be something in this Emotional Intelligence thing...

If you or your business wants to tap into the power of your people and their emotions, then get in touch with Paul.

w: www.paulcheetham.co.uk

e: paul@paulcheetham.co.uk

LI: www.linkedin.com/in/paulcheetham1



“

*...Emotions
drive people.
People drive
performance...*

Paul Cheetham



Brown & Brown Office Launch

Brown & Brown were delighted to welcome local businesses to their launch event in Alderman Fenwick's House, it was a good networking session enjoyed by everyone.

The stunning venue constructed in the early 17th century on Pilgrim Street will be the firm's home for the foreseeable future. Brown & Brown Newcastle's base started with two teammates, but after the office move they are now on the look-out for ambitious talent to join the team. As they grow, so the team will grow, and the opportunity to become part of one of the world's most successful brokerages will be a draw for talent looking to develop their insurance careers.

Neil Thornton, Managing Director, Retail for Brown & Brown, said the new operation will spearhead further expansion in this part of the world.

"For a major city, Newcastle is underserved by broking, and we want to put that right. Our primary focus will be commercial, corporate and not-for-profit clients, although we will look to augment this with other propositions such as high net worth in due course."







An honest partnership

By Rob Lynas

At Lynas Engineers, we are incredibly proud to be partners with a range of organisations across our region. Whether they be professional and working collaboratively with other companies, or out in our communities supporting their growth and development – it's part of who we are, and as a business what we want to do.

In the seven years since Lynas Engineers was founded, we have been fortunate to make and maintain some incredible relationships and to do a lot of good at the same time.

Our Preferred Partners program is scaling new heights and 2024 will see the return of our Constructing Links exhibition event, bringing together like-minded businesses from the built environment sectors to work closer together than ever before (more on that another time!). Having recently hosted a Partners breakfast discussing the importance and value of ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) in a contemporary organisation, I am even more driven now to do as much as we can, as an organisation, to ensure our community partnerships are just as strong as our professional ones.

The January Partner's breakfast was attended

by 20 representatives from across the network, from a wide variety of organisations. And whilst it was obvious that every company, and indeed, every individual had had varying experiences of charity and community partnerships – what was evident was the drive to do more with what they have or what they can facilitate. Conversations flowed easily, sharing learning and opportunities and we were proud to welcome representatives from Middlesbrough Football Club Foundation and Redcar and Cleveland Volunteers Development Agency, on behalf of Saltburn Solidarity Foodbank. These are just two of the organisations we have chosen to support in recent years and in a variety of different ways.

In 2023 Lynas Engineers officially adopted the Middlesbrough Football Club Foundation as a charity partner. Their work is vast and affects so many different parts of our community, from the youngest to the oldest in our region. At Lynas Engineers, we wanted to find a partner that would facilitate support not just to one need, but to many – and we welcomed Middlesbrough Football Club Foundation.

As a lifelong Boro fan, this was a natural partnership – but what has been more encouraging has been the support and engagement from the whole Lynas Engineers team, and now we are in the process of planning an entire year of events and engagements that go much further than simply a financial donation – we are cultivating a true and honest partnership and it is testament to the Foundation, its work and our incredible team that we are able to commit to such an exciting calendar.

Paul Shepherd, Business Development Manager for the MFC Foundation said; "Lynas Engineers understand that they are part of their local community and want to make a difference to the people that live here. Without the support of businesses like Lynas Engineers the Foundation would not be able to deliver the programmes we offer to people across Tees Valley."



Rob Lynas

Whilst every organisation is different, with varying priorities and resource, what is key to note is the rising need for companies to support more, in any way they can. We have been fortunate enough to be able to not only offer financial contributions to MFC Foundation this year, but historically we supplied bespoke shopping bags to Saltburn Solidarity Foodbank, rallied donations for their Christmas Appeal and significant community and development opportunities across the region. I know we are not alone in wanting to do more, or as much as we can, to support others; whilst remaining conscious of being a scaling business – but even more apparent is the increasing appetite within business to be facilitators, as well as funders. Historically, finding a partnership that is both impactful and meaningful has been a challenge – but with rising awareness, increased need for community services and an ever-evolving landscape across the North East, being aware of what we can all do is the first step in creating more sustainable and honest partnerships that benefit all.

lynasengineers.com

The right to the REAL living wage

The right to earn at least £12 an hour for your time, energy, and skill. Agree or disagree?

Companies like Capita, BrewDog and many others, many in our own region, don't agree. They have pulled out of their commitment to pay people fairly or have never chosen to pay people fairly in the first place.

Now, if you're reading this magazine, you are likely to be earning a wage above the real living wage. You may be detached from the understanding of what earning £12 an hour for your time, energy and skill means. You may also be responsible for deciding the salaries in your organisation.

£12 an hour, working full time is a salary of £23,712, after tax is £19,662 a year.

The people making the decisions about salaries, are taking home significantly more, and let's not forget about their bonuses and perks on top! Take Capita, their CEO took home £1.7m. His bonus is a 300% salary bonus and not forgetting pension contributions in addition. One person! And he won't pay the people that the company depend on to deliver the service a few pennies! Most people on the real living wage and below, forgo their pension as that is a privilege, they need that money to eat now, they can't afford to think about tomorrow.

The people making the decision to pay the real living wage have no understanding of the decision they are making, only how it will affect profits and therefore their bonuses. Privilege abusing and protecting privilege, sacrificing the disadvantaged, and widening the wealth and health gap.

At £12 an hour, at full time you take home £1639 a month.

For one person it covers their basic bills, but doesn't take into account other needs such as clothing or health requirements, never mind living a life.



As one person it's just manageable. Add a child into the situation or a chronic health condition and costs rise considerably, you are living under the poverty line.

Worse still, if you are NOT paying the REAL living wage, you are likely to be paying people £10.42 an hour or less at minimum wage. Meaning your employees ARE living on the poverty line or below; working for you and not being able to meet their basic needs.

Organisations, business owners, directors, are all responsible for their employees and how that responsibility really does affect people and society.

Your CSR and ESG activities are irrelevant, if you are not paying staff fairly, you are not being socially responsible. Any budget allocation to these areas of the business should come after paying your staff fairly. Being socially responsible is ensuring your staff are not living

in poverty. Imagine being an organisation that supports a charity that focuses on poverty and your staff themselves are living in poverty.

If your organisation doesn't pay the REAL living wage, a basic £12 an hour, ask yourself this question:

Would I work for £12 an hour, accepting the lifestyle £12 an hour provides, would I survive?

Then why do you expect others to?

If you need further insight and support on this matter, there are a number of organisations including Kind Currency, in the region that can support, please do investigate Society Matters and Living Wage Foundation.

But most importantly, it's about doing the right thing. Better business matters.

www.kindcurrency.co.uk

Local views from local people improve health services



The Healthwatch team in Eldon Square.
Photo Credit: Highlights PR

As part of an independent network of 152 Healthwatch's, the Healthwatch Newcastle team provides community engagement, research, evaluation, and assessment services within the fields of health, wellbeing, and social care.

They also provide training and skills development for their teams of volunteers and the wider community. Traditionally office based, the team has made a conscious decision to reach out to the people who they serve out in the community.

Hannah Farr, Healthwatch Newcastle Lead Officer, explained why the team were going more community-based with an accessible approach to gathering vital information.

"We were aware that being office based wasn't the best way to communicate with people who want to share their experiences and thoughts on health and social care in the City. The office can create a barrier for some people, and we want to be inclusive to all. We've teamed up with several community locations where we know people feel safe and secure visiting. The idea is that we will become a regular visitor and engage with the public ensuring their voices and needs are heard."

To seamlessly facilitate the transition, the team have conducted a comprehensive mapping exercise, dividing Newcastle into a number of locality areas. Using a Google map tool, they have identified various venues, organisations, and

places that could serve as touchpoints for the community. The process involved pinpointing key locations in each locality area that align with the needs and characteristics of the local community. Selected venues include family centres, libraries, and local community centres, ensuring accessibility and familiarity for residents. The outreach team are targeting underserved groups such as women, young people, refugees, and asylum seekers.

"We've tried to make sure the venues that we have picked are accessible and that there are no physical barriers to stop any member of the public from accessing our service. It's a reciprocal approach too as we can partner with already established organisations and offer our support to them too. It's about fostering partnerships and building a network to enhance the impact of our services," said Hannah.

The team recently trailed the concept in Eldon Square and were delighted with the response from the public.

"We loved talking to everyone and building up rapport with shoppers. Many completed surveys which will help us to identify any improvements needed to local health care services. The trial was encouraging and as a result we are basing ourselves in locations across Newcastle."

Yvonne Probert, CEO of Tell Us North (CIC) who oversees Healthwatch operations said: "Our role is to ensure social care and health, commissioners and providers listen to the views of their local communities so that we can seek continuous improvements to their services. The best way to do that is by integrating ourselves deeper into the fabric of the community and becoming a part of everyday life for the people we serve. We encourage everyone to come along to a drop-in and share your views of health and social care."

www.healthwatchnewcastle.org.uk



The Newcastle Healthwatch team can be found at the following locations:

Mondays

North Newcastle- Fawdon Community Library 2-4pm (Fawdon Park Rd, Fawdon, Newcastle upon Tyne NE3 2PL).

19th February.

Central Newcastle - Newcastle City Library 10am-2pm (33 New Bridge St W, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 8AX). **4th March.**

Tuesdays

Outer West Newcastle - Outer West Library 10:30am-12:30pm (18 W Denton Way, Newcastle upon Tyne NE5 2QZ, in the temporary cabin in the car park)

13th February, 27th February, 12th March, 26th March.

Wednesdays

East Newcastle - Pottery Bank Community Centre 10am-12pm (Yelverton Cres, Walker, Newcastle upon Tyne NE6 3SW). **21st February, 6th March, 27th March.**

Inner West Newcastle - Cornerstone Community Centre 10am-12pm (62-64 Armstrong Rd, Benwell, Newcastle upon Tyne NE4 7TU)

21st February, 6th March, 20th March.

Thursdays

Central Newcastle - Northumbria University Students' Union 11am-3pm (2 Sandyford Rd, NE1 8SB). **14th March.**

North Newcastle - High Heaton Library 2pm-4pm (Newton Pl, Newcastle upon Tyne NE7 7HD).

29th February, 28th March

Fridays

North Newcastle - Jesmond Library 10am-12pm (St George's Terrace, Jesmond, Newcastle upon Tyne NE2 2DL).

23rd February.

North Newcastle - Tesco Extra Kingston Park 1:30pm-4:30pm (Brunton Ln, NE3 2FP). **23rd February.**

A low-angle photograph of a tall building under construction. The building's steel framework is visible, with multiple floors showing red safety railings. A large crane is positioned at the top of the structure, extending across the upper part of the frame. The sky is a mix of orange and blue, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The overall composition is dynamic, with strong diagonal lines from the building's structure.

NORTHERN

INSIGHT

The Built Environment

construction • commercial • residential • architectural

The Built Environment

In the first of a new series of interviews with leading figures within this crucial sector Michael Grahamslaw spoke to...

Michael Henning

Director, Todd Milburn Chartered Surveyors and Construction Consultants.

Did you always envisage a career within the Built Environment?

At 16, I wanted to leave school but like many at that age, without a clear career path in mind. Careers guidance led to an interview for a Quantity Surveyor position, which intrigued me. Delving into information from the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), I decided to pursue this route. I spent four rewarding years learning the ropes in private practice. Later, I gained great experience within North Tyneside Council Architects Department, expanding my skills in a multi-disciplinary environment. I pursued my professional qualifications part-time, achieving Chartered Surveyor status in 1988.

Transitioning back to the private sector with RNJ, I rose to partner before joining a client, Rivergreen Developments. This gave me invaluable experience managing development and construction projects. I then joined Summers Inman, becoming a Local Director, before establishing Henning Project Management in 2014. In 2017, I merged with Todd Milburn, assuming the role of Director in the company. Fair to say it's been a long and winding road but they're always the most interesting routes!

Tell us about your current role.

I spend around 75% of my time working with a great range of clients in a Project Management role and 25% of my time in a Cost Consultancy and Quantity Surveyor role. I'm also North East Regional Chair of the RICS, promoting engagement and acting as a voice for the local members.

Tell us about your team.

We have a small but highly skilled team!

Mark Berry, my Co-Director, has been with the company since 2013, excelling in all sectors, especially in conservation and heritage fields. After 30 years at Todd Milburn Colin Anderson stepped back from being a Director and into a consultancy role in 2023. Jim Benson is our highly experienced Principal Designer. Dan Tipping is our Senior Building Surveyor and Project Manager bringing exceptional expertise in the commercial, education, utilities and healthcare sectors. Our Office Manager Anne Smith keeps the team running smoothly.

We've most recently taken on Thomas Robinson. We quickly recognised his talent during a placement year and he's joining us permanently while finishing his degree part-time at Northumbria University. It's so encouraging to see fresh talent coming through and we're looking to create more roles this year.

What are you currently working on?

We have several exciting projects at the moment across the region in all sectors. Notable projects I'm working on with Newcastle City Council include the refurbishment of the historic Grainger Market and the development of the Forth Yards area adjacent to the Utilita Arena. Also The Pattern Shop in Stephenson Quarter which is the conversion of a Robert Stephenson railway heritage building into modern sustainable office space.

What are your proudest career achievements?

I've worked on some fantastic projects, from the external refurbishment of Lindisfarne Castle in the 1990s to the new headquarters of the Newcastle



Michael Henning and Helen Craddock of Preneur meeting Steven Bartlett

United Foundation, NUCASTLE, in 2022. My most memorable project was the commercial management of a new data centre in Stockholm in the early 2000's - a fantastic place and experience.

What is your favourite building?

Undoubtedly Durham Cathedral. The view of it when travelling on the East Coast mainline is something I will never tire of!

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

The industry has seen a hard couple of years as a consequence of the challenging economic conditions but if the predicted increases in consumer spending and business investment happen, the outlook is much more positive. The drive to net zero must continue and the wider economic and social impact of developments will become much more of a focus.

What does the future hold?

Further expansion and maintaining our excellent reputation for work on local projects.

Who would be your four ideal dinner guests?

Entertaining storytellers and people who seem like they'd be great company, so Billy Connolly, George Clooney, Emma Stone and Steven Bartlett. I've listened to them all on audiobooks and podcasts and they'd keep the conversation lively and interesting! I met Steven Bartlett earlier this year but a second chance for a proper chat would be good.

How do you like to unwind?

Socialising, watching films and playing the guitar badly. I'm a season ticket holder at Newcastle United, although is that unwinding? I also love to sample the excellent red wines on offer from my 'local', the superb Jesmond Wine Company.

Favourite Boxset?

The first one I was hooked on, 24.

Favourite Book?

Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance by Robert M. Pirsig which I first read when I was 17 - it's had a lasting impact on me. I actually gave a copy to Steven Bartlett. He hadn't heard of it but I hope he reads it. We can discuss it at our dinner!

www.toddmilburn.co.uk





Michael Henning



Chartered Surveyor's new office opens in Barnard Castle

Jonathan Wallis, an established and experienced land agent covering the Yorkshire Dales, Teesdale, Durham and Northumberland, has opened a new office in a prime location in Barnard Castle. The expansion comes after just over six successful years of operating his own business and marks a significant milestone in his journey.

The new office, now located in the heart of Barnard Castle town centre, is a testament to the success and expansion of Jonathan's land agency business.

Jonathan specialises in rural property, with a focus on agricultural property, farms, and land. His expertise extends to advising landowners, tenants, and land occupiers on various matters, including property valuation, landlord and tenant advice, claims involving utility companies or land development for residential and commercial purposes.

The new office's prominent location on one of the town's main streets enhances the visibility of his business, making it more accessible to clients and the community.

Jonathan's team includes Helen Presley, his PA, secretary, and office manager, who has been with him since 2019. He also works alongside Victoria Linsley, a qualified chartered surveyor with expertise in residential property. Jonathan's loyal springer spaniel, Mabel, is also a full-time member of the team, providing unwavering support and companionship.

And then there were six...

Time is running out for buyers looking for a new build home on one of the North East's most sought-after developments.

There are only six houses left at Miller Homes North East's Oakwood Grange site at Hazlerigg.

And their prime position, at the heart of a mature residential area just six miles from Newcastle, means potential buyers are lining up to view them.

With excellent transport links along with a wide range of local amenities, Oakwood Grange has proved popular with first time buyers and families looking for more space as well as those wishing to downsize.

Each of the remaining six homes is fully detached and the four bedroomed Denwood and Asterwood properties have a single garage while the five bedroomed Denford and Beechford house styles have integrated double garages.

And Miller Homes has launched a trio of incentives to speed up the buying process and save buyers money.

These include an offer to pay the first year's mortgage and meet the cost of carpets or a deposit match scheme – designed to help those struggling to save sufficient funds for a deposit get their foot on the property ladder.

If a potential buyer has saved five per cent of the total property price



Living Local Estate Agent is moved by Prestigious Award

Living Local Estate Agents in Winlaton has recently been honoured with a prestigious award from the Best Estate Agent Guide. This accolade distinguishes Living Local as one of the top 500 Estate Agents nationwide, a remarkable achievement considering over 13,000 Estate Agents were assessed across the country! The rigorous evaluation process involves mystery shopping and assessment of performance criteria.

Unlike many awards in the estate agency industry that can be self-nominated or involve fees, the Best Estate Agent Guide relies on an impartial judging process. The evaluation encompasses various criteria, including property marketing, customer service and results. Living Local's commitment to excellence has positioned them among the elite in the North East, showcasing their dedication to providing a top-notch service.

Emma Mansell, owner of Living Local was delighted with the award, stating: "Buying or selling a house is a huge part of your life and there's a lot at stake. Every Estate Agent will claim that they are the best, but this award proves that we are providing a truly excellent service. We work in a transparent way so that everyone knows from the start what we will do and how we do it.

Living Local were judged on the service they offer as well as their marketing technique which includes high-quality photographs, accurate floor plans, and engaging video tours to ensure potential buyers are captivated by the listings.



of their desired Miller home, the company will match it up to £20,648 – making the journey to homeownership or property upgrade smoother and more accessible.

And the third incentive is part exchange with the possibility of a contribution to the deposit.

This effectively makes Miller Homes the buyer of the 'old' property – saving estate agent fees and the associated stress of selling a home.

Sales director Lauren Angus said the incentives, allied to the "obvious" benefits of the Oakwood Grange mean "now is a great time to buy and complete the community at this beautiful development.



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A charming Grade II Listed conversion with a detached stone cottage nestled in Northumberland

Set within a cluster of similarly converted outbuildings at the rural farmstead of Ulgham Grange, No. 4 offers a detached stone-built characterful property and a unique living environment.





This is an enchanting family home with period features including vaulted ceilings, exposed beams, feature stained glass windows and stonework.

Four bedrooms, three bathrooms, a games room and spacious living room together with a large dining area make this the ideal property for those that need space, tranquilly and easy access to Tyneside and beyond. There is parking for multiple vehicles and extensive gardens.

There is the potential for supplemental accommodation in the charming detached two-storey stone outbuilding, which offers a compelling project for development as well as adding value to the entire property. Already

served with utilities, it would perfectly lend itself to multiple potential uses such as a holiday let cottage, a multi-generational living annex, a garden office, a garden kitchen with bar and games room, an art studio and such like.

**To find out more information about
No. 4 Ulgham Grange Farm, Ulgham NE61 3AU
contact Strutt and Parker Morpeth**

01670 516 123



On the market at £795,000



Residential reawakening: An increase in residential housing market performance from youngsRPS



The residential housing market in the North of England has been experiencing a notable upswing since the start of the year, with key indicators pointing towards positive growth and increased demand compared to January 2023.

This trend is particularly evident in the data collated by our residential teams in both North Yorkshire and Northumberland. We delve into the statistics to understand the factors contributing to this improvement.

Seller/Vendor Confidence

As the market gradually rebounds, sellers are finding renewed assurance in the market. One of the key metrics reflecting the positive momentum is the substantial increase in the total number of properties instructed. In Northumberland, there has been a commendable surge of 25%, highlighting a growing confidence among property owners in the region. Even more astonishing is the phenomenal 111% rise in North Yorkshire, indicating a significant uptick in property transactions and a renewed interest in the North as a desirable residential location.

A Wider Audience

The rise in viewings attended is another noteworthy aspect of the market's improvement. Our Northumberland team experienced a 21% increase in the number of viewings attended, signalling heightened interest from potential buyers. North Yorkshire, however, has seen a remarkable 98% rush in viewings attended,

showcasing a robust demand for properties in the area. These numbers reflect a shift in buyer behaviour, with more individuals actively exploring the housing market.

Diverse Property Portfolio

The diversity of available properties in the North of England contributes to the market's resilience and appeal. Both youngsRPS North Yorkshire and Northumberland offer a diverse portfolio, ranging from traditional homes to modern apartments, catering to a broad spectrum of buyer preferences. This diversity is crucial in attracting a wide range of prospective homeowners and investors.

Sales Completed

Perhaps the most compelling evidence of the North's strengthening housing market lies in the impressive growth in completed sales. Northumberland has witnessed a commendable 13% increase in sales completed, indicating that not only are more properties being listed, but a higher proportion of them are successfully making it to the hands of new homeowners. North Yorkshire, however, steals the spotlight with a remarkable 50% swell in sales completed, showcasing a remarkable turnaround and a flourishing property market.

Factors Driving the Recovery

Economic easing fed by falling interest rates, although still elevated compared to historic lows experienced in recent years, a foretold end to the energy price hikes, and increased employment opportunities in the region have instilled confidence among buyers and sellers alike.

The recent House Price Index published by Halifax affirms a 1.3% rise in house prices in January, a very reassuring fourth consecutive rise in a row, with an annual rise of 2.5% nationally. Yorkshire & The Humber and the North East both show

healthy increases in house prices of 2.8% and 2.0% respectively.

In addition, the attractive landscapes, coupled with more affordable housing options compared to other parts of the country, make the North an increasingly desirable destination for those looking to settle down. As people increasingly prioritize quality of life and work-life balance, the North's residential housing market appears to be aligning perfectly with these evolving preferences.

On The Rise?

The statistics offer a compelling narrative of a resurgent residential housing market in the North of England. The notable increases in total properties instructed, viewings attended, and sales completed underscore a newfound vibrancy in the property landscape.

As the North continues to outperform expectations, it positions itself as a strong contender in the competitive housing market. With a positive trajectory marked by significant growth in key indicators, the North of England is proving to be not just a region on the rise but a compelling and attractive destination for prospective homeowners.

William Thornton, Head of Residential Agency concludes: "We have certainly seen a reassuring increase in confidence with buyers making a tentative return to the market. More prospective buyers are likely still monitoring news coming from the Bank of England in the hopes of further lower interest rates and in turn more affordable mortgage deals. Nonetheless, the current momentum suggests that the North's housing market is presenting a very promising outlook."

***Statistics taken from youngsRPS and Halifax House Price Index January 2024**

www.youngsrps.com

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Neil Turner

Planning Rules – changing for the better?

By Neil Turner, Director, Howarth Litchfield

The Housing Secretary, Michael Gove has issued a consultation on new permitted development rights which, if allowed, would let homeowners build bigger extensions without the need for planning permission.

Some of the proposals seem really radical: for example, scrapping the rules that limit an extension to 50% of the land surrounding it, or curtilage as it's known. Extensions would be wider, taller and able to wrap around houses.

The aims are part of the government's desire

to 'shake up planning rules' and to increase development with emphasis on the use of brown field land - a point I have made in previous articles in Northern Insight. I would support any rule changes that speed up the process, but not at the expense of consideration on the quality and size of all developments.

The government wants to increase the number of new houses with the ability to change offices into homes, which again, is very sensible at first sight.

However, I have my concerns from a number of different perspectives and have seen other professions voicing concerns.

So, what of the proposals? For example, an extension on the rear would be allowed up to the same height as the highest point of the original, as long as it's not seen from the front street. Larger ground floor extensions wrapping around a house would be allowed. Loft conversions would not be limited to 40sqm in a terrace or 50sqm in other houses.

My concern is that our estates and terraces are already under pressure from poor additions and changes. The character of semi-detached houses changes when every house is extended so that they almost become a terrace street by default. Large roof extensions create poorly proportioned houses looking down on neighbours.

The government is consulting until 9th April

and wants to encourage flexibility. However, the risk is over development of houses. I have seen commentary from lawyers and agents warning of the potential for more issues and conflict between neighbours. Rights to light, access for scaffolding, objections and disputes could be the unintended result.

Ideally people would move from one house to a larger house, as they move up the property ladder. But the high costs of housing and the associated costs in terms of stamp duty land tax, and fees has led to more people wanting to alter their homes. The fact that building works are expensive as well doesn't help this matter.

The planning system is under pressure, but from a lack of experienced planning officers to cope with the current demand for applications. We need greater investment from central government to enable local authorities to improve the entire process.

Changes to permitted development need careful thought, rather than simply allowing houses to be changed without any professional consideration - by architects, surveyors, planners or guide regulations.

Neil Turner, Director, Howarth Litchfield can be contacted on 0191 3849470 or email n.turner@hlpuk.com www.howarthlitchfield.com

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Kevan Carrick with Jen Welch, JK Property

Need for improved housing provision in 2024

Kevan Carrick of JK Property Consultants says that if the North East is to achieve its economic growth target and increase jobs, the provision of all types of housing is important, so growth is not frustrated.

Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, has announced plans to 'supercharge' development across the UK, as part of the recently unveiled National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

There is an acknowledged need, for over a decade, for 300,000 houses to be built each year, yet successive governments have failed to meet this target.

Change is certainly needed.

I have dealt and am still dealing with disputes between landowners and house builders on land price.

The challenge arises from the wording of the option agreements entered several years prior to allow the housing developer to secure planning consent. The delay is mainly because of the complexity of securing planning consent. The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors will be publishing, for consultation, a draft guide on the formation of heads of terms for such development agreements.

The introduction of the Regeneration Act 2023 and the update of the National Planning Framework, have set policies aimed at reforming the delivery of planning consents. The challenges remain the need to resource the planning service at councils, increasing costs for housing construction through inflation, higher standards for construction and sustainability and the requirement to pay for infrastructure, social need such as schools and community health provision and the environmental costs of dealing with the treatment, where there are high levels of phosphates and other agriculture fertilisers. Part of the challenge is the present unstable

housing market. Prices and rents are increasing. The challenge is predicated by a continued undersupply of houses. An example is the recent increase in mortgage and rent for the occupier, in some cases £400 to £500 per month. This fuels demand for higher pay at a time of austerity where businesses are hard pressed to agree. This is forecast to be ameliorated by lower interest rates as forecast by Capital Economics: "Lower interest rates pave the way for a stronger 2024".

The answer lies in the government and local councils meeting a determined target to build more homes of the right type, location and, just as importantly, of the right quality.

This will not be easy. The cost to comply with improved sustainability, increasing construction standards, plus new legislation requiring a greater contribution for infrastructure and increased affordable and social homes, will contribute to higher costs. A tight housing market and finance means lower returns for house builders and land owners.

All will require the effective introduction of planning improvement, partnership working amongst the stakeholders of councils, land owners and house builders to remove litigation from the process and work toward a facilitated process to be quicker and thus at a lower cost to deliver more housing.

jkpropertyconsultants.com

Building a great future

*By Neil Ramsey, director secretary,
Northern Counties Builders Federation*

Northern Counties Builders Federation (NCBF) has committed to an ongoing appraisal of the key issues facing North East-based SMEs in the delivery of construction projects in the region.

Adapting to customer and social demands within an ever-changing business environment, is a challenge our members are more than capable of.

We have a diverse membership, from new and rapidly growing members such as RE:GEN Group and Able construction, to the well-established, such as Brims and Walter Thompson. Add to this firms such as Compass Developments, Sendrig Construction and NB Clark and we are an influential and powerful body.

All members provide data to assist the NCBF to identify key issues. We are particularly interested in data around daily productivity and delivery challenges, upon which, we set our goals and objectives.

Our focus for 2024, is to attract talented individuals into the industry and we will drive this in a number of ways.

- In 2023, we relaunched the North East Schools Wonder Challenge, alongside Constructing Excellence North East and a number of support partners. It is a call to action to schools within the NELEP areas of Tyne & Wear, Northumberland and Durham to challenge year 9 and 10 students to form mini construction companies. The challenge raises the profile of the construction sector amongst schools and highlights the career opportunities available.

- We will also highlight the sector and the jobs available within it, to individuals looking for a

career change or who are mature entrants. In line with this, RE:GEN and others are offering boot camps on how to become career ready, providing opportunities via social enterprise.

- Another key aim is to highlight to women the variety of roles available to them. Our senior vice president, Angela Carney, is passionate about encouraging women and young people to learn more about the sector and is an active member of the regional branch of the National Association of Women in Construction. (NAWIC).

- By working closely with other influencing organisations, such as Constructing Excellence North East (CENE), Construction Industry Council (CIC) National Association of Women in Construction, (NAWIC), GenerationforChange (G4C) and Construction Alliance Network (CAN) and participating on working groups and sub committees, we are able to contribute to wider industry debate.

- We will work with a number of North East colleges such as Hartlepool and Sunderland, to improve communication between the industry and the training colleges, so the correct training can be provided and opportunities for full time employment or on-the-job training, can be on offer to the students either at the end of the training or during it.



Neil Ramsey

Commercial Focus (Payment)

- Challenges to companies, including cash flow, becomes more prevalent when working within the supply chain of large contractors. Using the combined influence of the members of CAN, we will continue to influence procurement organisations to ensure fair payment terms are not only included in any primary contacting arrangements, but within the subsequent supply chain contractual agreements.

Commercial (Regional Focus within Procurement)

- We will lobby procurement organisations such as NEPO to ensure North East companies are recognised as able to carry out significant contracts within the region, and to make sure the regional contractor base brings greater value in terms of employment and wealth retention.
- We will also engage with the major construction clients in the region (mainly public services) to convince them of the value of using regional construction companies within framework agreements to carry out their projects.

www.ncbf.uk



Hall Estate, also sourced furniture made from reclaimed wood and utilised a variety of natural materials to complement the overall aesthetic of the house.

"We have tried to keep the entire house as natural as possible," said Becki. "We've used pendant lights made of rattan while windows are simply dressed with cotton voiles - which filter the light beautifully - on natural wooden poles.

"The aim throughout was to create a feeling of tranquillity, said Becki, "and understated luxury.

"This isn't about shiny, hard surfaces, it's about mellow wood, and butter-soft fabrics that you would never guess had been manufactured from plastic bottles.

"We've taken great care to source furnishings that are as beautiful as they are environmentally-friendly and the lounge rug is just one example of that.

"Large, rectangular and in an antique Persian-style, in muted shades of green, blue and cream, it too, is made from recycled plastic bottles - but it is stunning to look at and to feel underfoot."

Phase two at Longridge Farm comprises around 165 two to five-bedroom homes and Lauren Angus, sales director at Miller Homes said the location had "already proved extremely popular.

"You really have all the benefits of semi-rural living," he/she said. "The development is surrounded by open countryside, and close to the coast while being only a very short distance from Newcastle.

"Buyers are increasingly keen to be closer to nature and these new houses have been created to the highest standard with some really fantastic features and they are also energy efficient - and that matters more than ever."

The Skywood show home is open from 10.30am to 5.30pm between Thursday and Monday.

For further information about homes at this, or other Miller Homes North East developments, visit www.millerhomes.co.uk

Ready, Steady...Eco!

Home buyers are looking to build a greener future in houses which put energy saving firmly in the frame...

If ever two issues could be said to sum up the current zeitgeist, they are the climate crisis and the escalating cost of living.

Both have huge social impact and both are making their presence felt in decisions we make daily about everything from food and travel to clothing and our own home environments.

So, it is little wonder that house buyers are increasingly looking for homes which offer energy saving features that both minimise environmental damage and reduce running

costs - or that builders, such as Miller Homes North East, are responding to that challenge.

The recently unveiled four-bedroom detached Skywood, at Miller's Longridge Farm development, at Bedlington, is packed with features - from solar panels to a state-of-the-art ventilation system - designed to save energy.

And the green theme has been echoed in its interior - with curtain fabrics made from recycled plastic bottles and locally handcrafted china and ceramics.

The Skywood showcases the second phase of the Miller Homes development and is i

Designed to maximise natural light, its lounge leads directly to a spacious kitchen diner with French windows to the garden, while an adjoining laundry room helps separate household management from leisure space.

The upstairs layout has also been designed to offer versatility with space for home working - and interior designer, Becki McClurry, has used a calming colour scheme of soft green, blue and teal, alongside neutrals, throughout.

She and her team from Q Interiors, which provides an interior design service at Blagdon



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The versatility and creativity of Neil Hood Bespoke

Neil Hood Bespoke has recently completed several notable projects showcasing their expertise in brass/copper finishes, bespoke metalwork, and intricate designs.

1. Roof Tops Bar in Newcastle United

Applied brass/copper finishes to enhance the ambiance of the Roof Tops Bar, adding a touch of luxury and sophistication to the space.

2. Hindu Temple Handrails

Custom brass handrails were crafted for a Hindu Temple, demonstrating meticulous attention to detail and cultural sensitivity in design.

3. Carlyle Square Industrial Gates

Bespoke industrial gates featuring distinctive rivet accents were installed at Carlyle Square, showcasing both functionality and aesthetic appeal.

4. Dorset Mild Steel Balustrade

In Dorset, we created a bespoke mild steel balustrade, combining durability with elegant design to enhance safety and aesthetics.

5. Centre Spine Staircase Installation

Currently in progress is the installation of a bespoke centre spine staircase, featuring steel treads clad with stone.

6. Laser Cut Balustrade with Timber Handrail

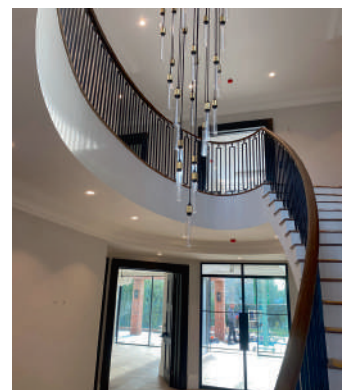
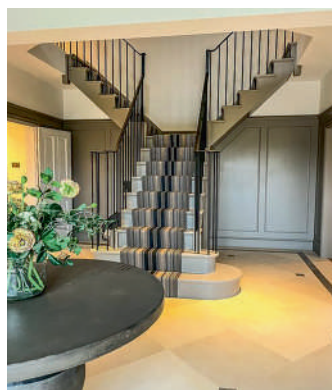
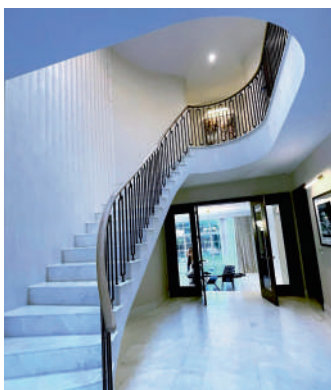
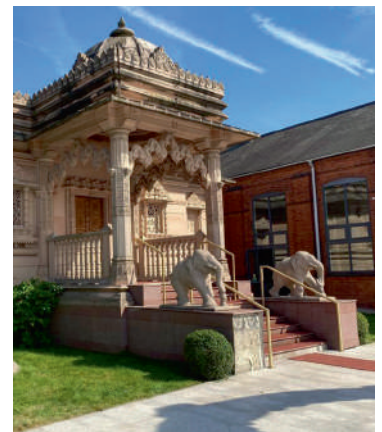
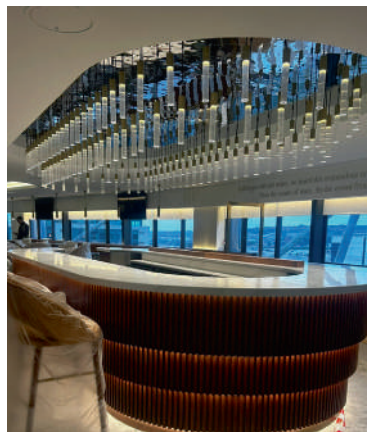
Utilising advanced laser cutting techniques, we crafted mild steel balustrade profiles complemented by a timber handrail stained in French polish, blending modernity with traditional craftsmanship.

7. Feature Balustrade in Hampstead Hill

Currently installing a feature balustrade in Hampstead Hill, Neil Hood Bespoke is employing a chemical darkening process finished with beeswax, adding character and charm to the surroundings while ensuring longevity and durability.

Throughout these projects, Neil Hood Bespoke demonstrates versatility, creativity, and a commitment to delivering bespoke solutions that exceed client expectations.

If you're impressed by our commitment to innovative design and quality craftsmanship, then call us on 0191 417 0997 or email info@neilhoodbespoke.co.uk www.neilhoodbespoke.co.uk



Kenton Food Bank celebrate over purchase of new CAZ compliant van

Kenton Food Bank is this week celebrating over the purchase of a new CAZ compliant van thanks to a grant from a local charity and Newcastle Council.

The old van which was non-compliant with the city's Clean Action Zone has now been replaced with a new vehicle which will be exempt from any fines whilst going into the city centre to collect huge food parcels and items. The new van - a Mercedes Sprinter has been funded with a £17,500 grant from the NE3 based LGA Charitable Foundation and a £4,500 vehicle upgrade grant from Newcastle City Council. An additional £900 has been raised by local residents via crowd funding.



Kenton resident Brian Dickinson who runs a building company, WDL and is an annual donor to the food bank, said: "I'm relieved that the bureaucracy has been sorted out and that we now have a happy ending."

Kenton councillor Stephen Lambert said: "We're pleased that Kenton Food Bank has got a new van which will enable it to pick up and bring back large food parcels from the city centre. The food bank is doing a fantastic job in providing weekly food parcels to over 600 local residents, not just in Kenton but across the NE3 and NE5 districts, helping to alleviate hardship, hunger and disadvantage."



750 new trees planted on Nuns Moor meadow

"750 new trees planted on Nuns Moor North Meadow in two hours by 30 volunteers is a great achievement" says local Montagu resident Lesley Middas.

The tree and hedge planting event took place recently on Nuns Moor Meadow organised by the Gosforth based Northumberland Wildlife Trust in partnership with The Freeman of the City, NE Forest and Newcastle City Council.

Dozens of local residents, including youngsters, helped out with the planting of saplings assisted by local Kenton councillors and Chi Onwurah MP. 750 new trees were planted and follows on from a project based at nearby Newcastle United golf course where 1.4km of hedgerow was planted last week.

Lesley said: "It was amazing to be part of this important project to improve our local environment."

The Town Moor is seen as the "green lung" of the city with experts believing that the planting of over 1,000 trees and hedges will improve biodiversity, air quality and helping to address climate change.

Local councillors Ged Bell, Stephen Lambert and Paula Maines of the Kenton Committee, said: "Improving the local environment is a core priority for us. This was a great project to be involved in. Boosting the number of trees will bring big environmental and health benefits to Montagu and Kenton residents."

The continued adventures of...

Ziggy

and Cally!



Hi everyone,

This damp weather is no good for my old bones – doesn't seem to bother my little sister who still runs around and nips my ears. Been for some lovely beach walks but it takes me a while to recover these days.

See ya, Ziggy.

Q. Several years ago I had my windows replaced with double glazing. After a few years, the south-facing ones became subject to occasional, unsightly internal misting.

As there was a ten-year guarantee I claimed for renewal of the windows. The insurance company claimed that the condensation was normal and therefore refused the claim.

A. One of the great unspoken truths of sealed double-glazed units (SGUs) is that eventually they will all mist up. The time scale should be twenty-ish years in a perfectly made and installed window. But in poorly made ones it can be a lot less. Five months has been reported!

So, in a way, the condensation is 'normal', in that it will happen eventually in all windows. But I would have thought you could expect that a ten-year guarantee would reasonably cover you against misting within that time.

It depends on the insurers' small print, I suppose.



Please send me your building queries through facebook - @WDLne, website: wdlnortheast.co.uk or through my Dad's good pal Michael Grahamslaw at Northern Insight on mjgrahamslaw@outlook.com

First-ever CyberNorth Innovation Centres to be piloted in Newcastle and Durham

CyberNorth has today announced a landmark moment which will see the roll out of two pilot Innovation Centres in Newcastle and Durham as a result of funding secured from the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT).

The funding will enable CyberNorth and key partners to pilot the initiative and provide proof of concept for further roll-out across the region. The Innovation Centres will provide a vital platform to pioneering early-stage businesses allowing them to pursue and accelerate their growth trajectory in the cyber security field.

The venture will see CyberNorth collaborate with one of the UK's most successful FinTechs, Atom Bank and co-working space provider floe to house businesses as part of a six-month package of support to help foster innovation and growth. The funding announcement swiftly follows the highly successful Aspire CyberFest 2023 event, which brought together over 350 business leaders and tech experts from the region. Parliamentary Under Secretary of



State (Minister for AI and Intellectual Property) Viscount Camrose addressed the conference and highlighted the vital role played by the North East's cyber security cluster, CyberNorth, and local tech companies in fuelling the growth of the region's cyber security sector.

Phil Jackman, Director CyberNorth said: "We are delighted to have secured funding from

the DSIT, this is a ground-breaking moment for cyber security in the region. As a catalyst of support in the North East, the aim of CyberNorth is to bring the cyber sector together, whilst championing the region nationally. The roll-out of the 'physical' Innovation Centres is a big step and see our plans and collaborations with partners across the North East build further momentum.



IT & cyber security specialist Trustack Ltd embarks on acquisition strategy to grow North of England footprint

Trustack Ltd, the North East-based IT, cyber

and incident response specialist, is embarking on the next stage of its scale up ambitions with a new acquisition strategy.

The business, which has its head office in Cramlington and satellite sites in Houghton-le-Spring, County Durham and Manchester, is targeting further growth in the North of England.

It has engaged with RG Corporate Finance to develop and implement the strategy to engage with potential partners along the M62 corridor

from Manchester to West and South Yorkshire.

Trustack was formed following a merger of three well-established and well-respected companies in 2019 and provides end-to-end managed IT services. It specialises in various IT solutions and services, with a strong focus on cybersecurity and incident response. Their offerings include a range of managed services designed to enhance the security and efficiency of business IT infrastructure.

Trustack continues to develop market-leading solutions for its clients, which has resulted in strong growth since its inception. The business is continuing to invest in, and scale its operations, and now employs 55 people. It achieved turnover of £10m in its most recent financial year ending 2023.

Trustack has built a robust client portfolio of companies and organisations across the UK, including Beyond Housing, which provides affordable housing for more than 30,000 tenants, and the Collingwood Business Solutions as well as a collection of professional services firms.

As part of the acquisition strategy, RGCF is undertaking a market analysis programme and strategic review, which is led by Corporate Finance Partner Nick Johnson, supported by Corporate Finance Senior Manager Connor McBride and Corporate Finance Executive Ben Kain.

Tech. Talent. Together.



Accelerating Time-to-Market with POCs, MVPs, and Agile Development

By Claire Cundill, COO, Leighton

With more and more businesses facing increasing pressure to innovate quickly, respond to market changes and meet ever-changing customer demand, agility is becoming more of a necessity.

Whilst agility can mean many things, we take it to mean an organisation's ability to quickly adapt to changes in its environment. Whether it be market conditions, customer preferences, technology advancements, regulatory requirements or competitive pressures.

For us here at Leighton agility is at the heart of two essential tools that can impact an organisation's ability to do all of the above. Proof of concepts (POCs) and minimal viable products (MVPs). These concepts enable rapid innovation and swift market entry, empowering businesses to meet customer needs effectively.

Agile Methodologies and Their Benefits

In the context of what we do (custom software development), agile refers to a set of methodologies and principles that prioritise flexibility, iteration, collaboration and responsiveness throughout the development process. This ensures teams can respond swiftly to evolving requirements and market trends and fosters a culture of continuous improvement, where feedback drives iterative development cycles. This ultimately facilitates rapid delivery of high-quality software solutions.



Claire Cundill

Selecting a Development Approach: POC versus MVP

Whether you're a start-up trying to bring a product to market quickly, or an established enterprise embarking on a programme of digital transformation, selecting the right development strategy is key for achieving your goals, however agility is at the centre of both approaches.

Selecting the appropriate approach involves careful consideration of factors such as project objectives, resource constraints, time-to-market requirements, and risk tolerance. Making the wrong choice can lead to wasted time, effort, and resources, while the right approach can accelerate innovation, mitigate risks, and increase the likelihood of success.

The Role of POCs

POCs play a crucial role in the early stages of product development. These prototypes allow businesses to validate ideas, assess technical feasibility, reduce risks, and align stakeholders before committing to full-scale development. By proving the concept's viability early on, businesses can make informed decisions and mitigate potential risks.

Leveraging MVPs for Quick Market Entry

MVPs offer a streamlined approach to product development, focusing on delivering core functionality to early adopters. By prioritising rapid iteration and gathering feedback from real users, MVPs enable businesses to enter the market quickly and iterate based on market demand. This approach minimises time-to-market while maximising the product's value

to customers. Unlike a fully-fledged product, an MVP is deliberately minimalistic, focusing on delivering the most critical functionalities necessary to solve a specific problem or fulfil a key user requirement.

Integrating Agile with POCs and MVPs

Agile methodologies complement POCs and MVPs by providing a framework for iterative development and continuous improvement. By adopting agile practices such as sprints, daily stand-ups, and retrospectives, teams can effectively manage POC and MVP initiatives while maintaining a focus on delivering value to customers. Collaboration between cross-functional teams ensures alignment throughout the development process, leading to faster delivery and higher-quality outcomes.

POCs and MVPs can serve as valuable tools for accelerating time-to-market and driving innovation, but despite the benefits of agile businesses may encounter challenges along the way. Common obstacles include resource constraints, shifting priorities, and resistance to change.

By integrating agile methodologies with POC and MVP initiatives, businesses can effectively manage complexity, mitigate risks, and deliver value to customers faster but must prioritise communication, transparency, and adaptability. By fostering a culture of experimentation and learning, teams can navigate obstacles effectively and drive successful outcomes.

leighton.com

Talking Tech and Digital

Over the past 2 years this platform has proven to be one of our most popular features. This month we were delighted to talk to ...

Jorge Aguilera

*Managed Services Director at Forfusion,
a Cisco Gold Partner with a difference.*

Have you always envisaged a career in the world of technology?

From a young age, I've always had a natural aptitude for studying, and it quickly became apparent that my interests aligned perfectly with the dynamic and rapidly evolving world of technology.

My career journey has been deeply rooted in my early fascination with computers and gadgets. Witnessing the advent of the internet while I was completing my studies and the subsequent integration of mobile phones into our daily lives was truly transformative for me. I vividly remember the excitement of getting together with a friend who was lucky enough to have a personal computer and learning basic commands of Microsoft MS-DOS.

When starting university, I was convinced I wanted to get into telecommunications. Initially, I was more interested in the electronics side of things, but as soon as I was exposed to the world of Networking and Cisco, I realised that my future lay in this area.

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

At Forfusion, we're developing a new customer portal to simplify service delivery, reduce issue resolution times, and proactively address potential IT issues. By leveraging automation, AI-driven insights, and proactive monitoring capabilities, we aim to provide better visibility, control, and performance for our customers.

The development of this platform is an exciting opportunity for us to improve IT Managed Services and customer experience, reflecting our commitment to innovation and continuous improvement.

Tell us about your team.

My team is responsible for managed services including managed service operations, customer success, and software development. These teams work closely together to achieve exceptional outcomes for our customers.

The managed service operations team ensures the smooth functioning of our customers' IT environments, leveraging IT service management platforms and related insights to automate, manage, and deliver integrated IT services and digital experiences. This team works in tandem with the customer success team, which focuses on relationship management and ensuring customers succeed using our products and services.

Our software development team plays a pivotal role in customising tools and developing purpose-built solutions to meet our customers' specific needs. This collaborative approach allows for the seamless integration of customer-centric metrics and workflows, enabling proactive issue resolution and tailored customer support.

By working together, the teams at Forfusion ensure that the managed services provided are robust from an operational standpoint and aligned with our customer's success and satisfaction.

What are your long-term plans for the business?

Our long-term business strategy emphasises building trusted partnerships with our clients and delivering cost-effective and sustainable solutions. This customer-centric approach reflects our commitment to growing our business while providing impactful and enduring managed services.

The managed services team is poised to focus on continual service improvement (CSI) actions and recommendations, ensuring that the

IT managed services we provide evolve alongside the dynamic needs of our clients. This involves a proactive approach to identify areas for enhancement, which may encompass innovative technologies, new consumption models, and lifecycle-related considerations.

What's your favourite piece of technology?

I'm afraid I won't be very original with this as I'm quite into the Apple ecosystem. I love the iPhone and MacBook not only for work but also for my entertainment outside of business. I can't wait to get my hands on Apple Vision once it's available in the UK.

Do you have any heroes or mentors?

Yes, I'm fortunate to have benefited from a diverse range of mentorship experiences thanks to multiple individuals who have played a significant role in my professional development. These mentors have provided guidance, shared their expertise, and offered invaluable insights that have influenced how I approach my work and career growth. From seasoned professionals who have provided me with industry-specific knowledge and advice to colleagues who have supported my personal and professional development.

In particular, I'd like to mention David Rovira, who mentored me in my early days working with Cisco technologies in Barcelona's IT industry. His guidance has profoundly impacted me; I'm grateful for all the support and advice I've received throughout my professional journey.

What's your fondest career memory?

There have been many highlights but moving to London in 2012 was one of the most important. While working as part of an EMEA distributed team, I took the opportunity to relocate. It was a big decision, but my partner and I loved London, so it was easy to make.

It's difficult to explain what this life change has meant to us and how an experience like this can professionally and personally enrich you. If there is one thing I'd recommend to anyone, it's to experience working in other countries embracing diversity and different cultures.

Would you change anything in your career so far, based on what you know now?

I'd mention a couple of things. Firstly, seeking mentorship earlier in my career. The benefits of mentoring, such as refining leadership philosophy and identifying critical skills for potential future roles, are invaluable for professional growth and success.

Secondly, to have experienced living and working in another country earlier than I did. I moved when I was 32 and can't recommend it enough to young professionals to try doing this as early as possible. It opens your mind and fills your soul with knowledge.

www.forfusion.com

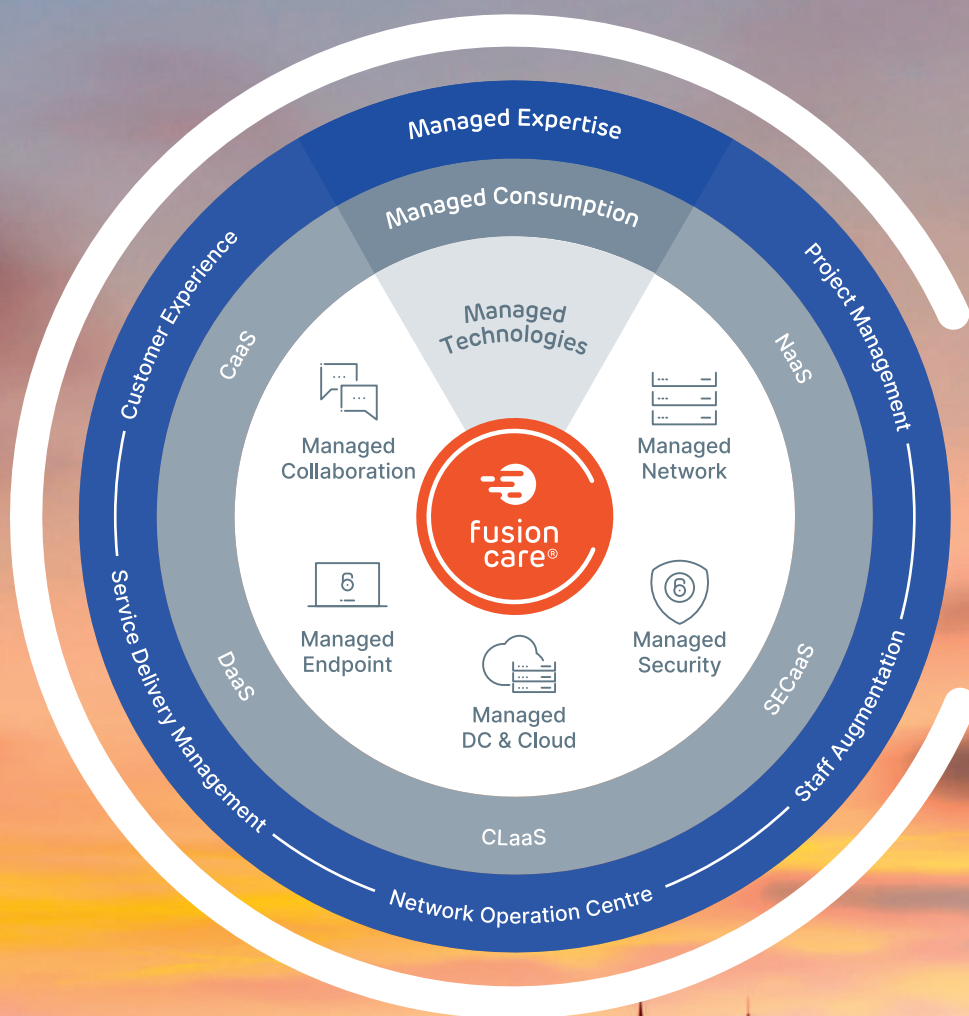


Jorge Aguilera



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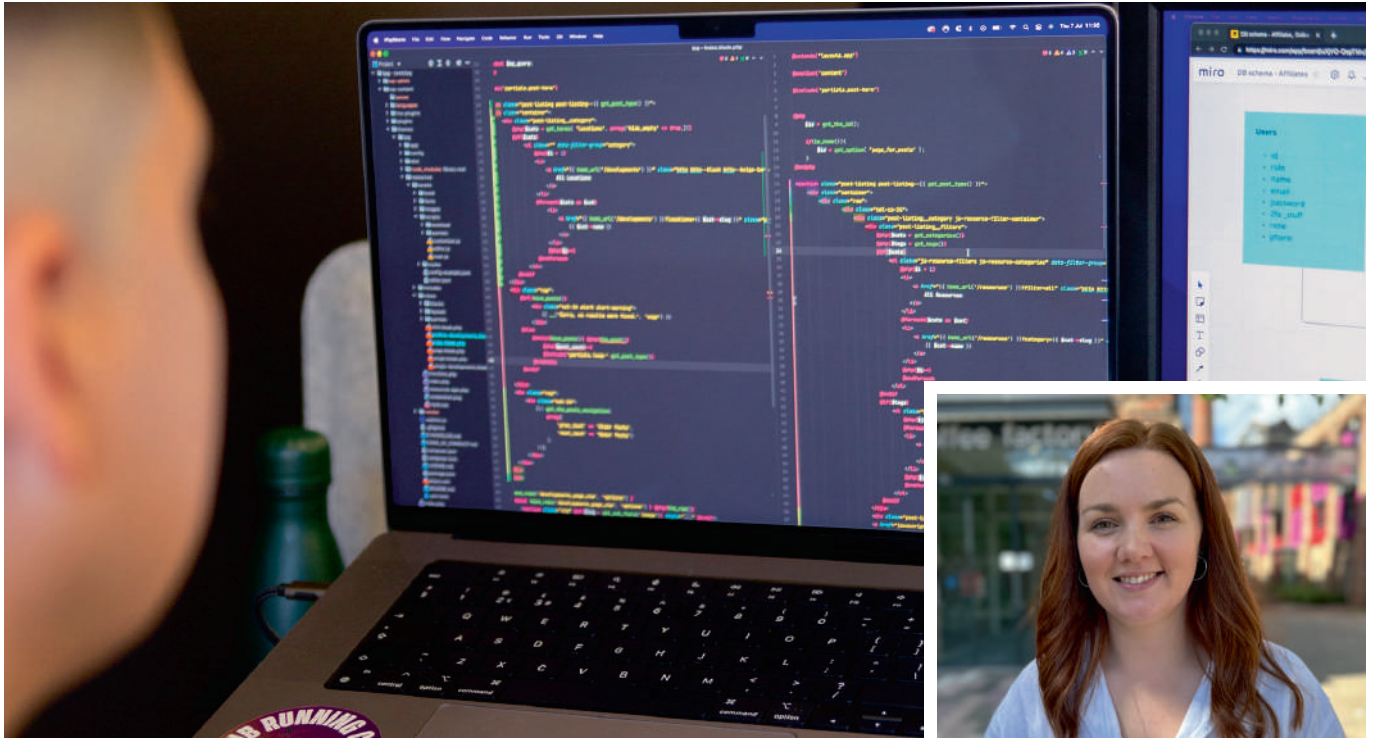
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Why digital transformation is a must for North East B2B businesses in 2024



2024 is set to be a crucial time for digital transformation for North East businesses.

In the wake of the explosion of technologies like AI, companies around the world now have access to new digital tools. Locally, increasing amounts of funding are being made available to support the region's already thriving tech industry - and in turn boosting growth and innovation in other sectors.

With a wealth of legacy industries in the region looking to adapt to the digital age, digital transformation is inevitable. Ellen Hedley, co-founder of Vida Creative, tells us why B2B companies need to embrace digital transformation in 2024.

1. To reach a wider audience

Whatever the industry, the B2B buyer journey is becoming increasingly digital so an online presence is essential.

Whether it's researching services, or looking for a company to work with that matches their values - your customers are doing this online so you need to be there too.

Even if most of your business is won in face to face settings, implementing online channels as a fundamental part of your business and marketing plan means you'll reach more potential customers.

This also allows you to unlock new revenue opportunities by expanding your reach and brand awareness into locations you may not have reached before.

2. To streamline and stand out

In a landscape where there's fierce competition in many sectors, being as efficient as possible is an absolute must. Digital solutions that automate workflows, streamline processes and reduce manual tasks can transform the way you work for the better.

If you can improve your internal efficiency, and save time and resources, this will allow your team to focus on more value-added work for your clients.

Digital tools and platforms can also automate lead generation and qualification. Embracing this frees up time for your sales teams to do the vital work of building meaningful relationships.

Using online advertising and content marketing can also raise your brand's awareness and authority with otherwise hard-to-reach influencers and decision-makers. A great way to attract more high-quality leads and boost the sales pipeline.

3. To humanise your brand

People buy from people - and the more 'human' and authentic you can be with your marketing, the more effective it will be.

If you're automating repetitive manual tasks, then you can put that saved time into creating more meaningful interactions with your customers.

For example, if you can automate elements of your cold sales outreach activity, then you have more time to spend getting out and talking to the people who are interested in what you have to offer. No more being stuck in email admin hell for days on end.

4. To reduce costs and improve ROI

Going digital is often way more cost-effective than doing things the traditional way. Yes, you have to pay for software, but you can record data that you wouldn't otherwise have.

This data will allow you to review your marketing campaigns in more detail so you can quickly see what works and what doesn't. You can then increase or reallocate spend as needed to save costs and improve return on investment.

Digitising processes can ensure compliance in some industries too, keeping your business assets more secure and providing clear records.

5. To future-proof your business

Whatever you might feel about technology, the fact is that the digital world is here to stay. The quicker that your company embraces its digital potential, the better position you'll be in to grow and adapt in future.

Digital solutions themselves are scalable and adaptable. They enable you to stay agile and move with changing market trends to ensure your business remains competitive.

Taking steps into a more digital way of doing business is the next logical step - and could open up a whole new world of opportunities for you!

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Andrew Buckingham

Didn't look to the Horizon during acquisition?

By Andrew Buckingham, Senior Software Consultant, Waterstons.

It's been difficult to avoid the recent resurfacing controversy over the Post Office Horizon system, another failed government IT project, due to the ITV drama 'Mr Bates vs the Post Office'.

Horizon is a £1 billion IT system that enables UK Government departments to make social security payments, it was used by state-owned Post Office and its franchise-like sub-postmasters.

This piece of software was responsible for:

- 4,000 people being falsely accused of fraud or mismanagement.
- 700 people being prosecuted.
- 200 people being sent to prison.
- Three people's deaths.

But why? And how is this a lesson in acquisition due diligence?

The media has reported Fujitsu as the developer of Horizon, and much of the public anger is directed at them. This organisation that generates a net income of \$1.2 billion, was generally unknown by the public until the recent ITV series – watched by 20% of the UK population. Now, the business is now directly linked with the system that ruined thousands of lives.

Fujitsu has been subject to reputational and financial penalty for an IT system that they didn't directly create, but were in fact 'stuck with' due to their own lack of due diligence during acquisition.

Horizon was actually developed by ICL which was wholly acquired by Fujitsu in 1998 – when the system was already a failing project and subject to Parliamentary review.

It would appear Fujitsu either didn't adequately assess Horizon as part of the ICL

acquisition, or hoped to turn around this core failing product. While there doesn't appear to be any evidence of the latter, we can only surmise that the due diligence did not adequately extend into its technology products, and now, 25 years later, presents a possible \$1 billion financial liability and incalculable reputational damage.

Technology, software products and the services that are built upon them, are now such a critical factor in business value and valuation, there is an increased need for greater consideration as part of a well-rounded business appraisal and due diligence activity.

Is this a mistake your business can afford to make?

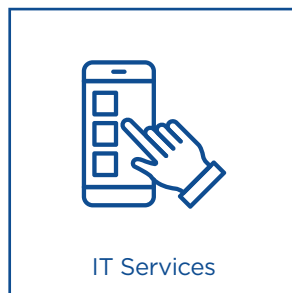
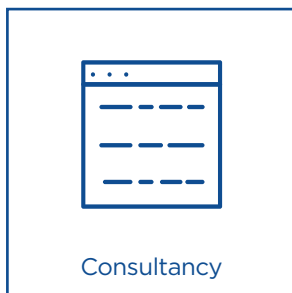
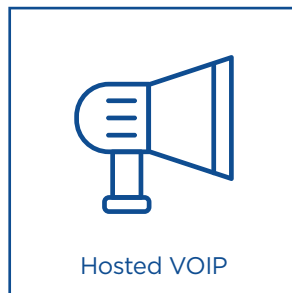
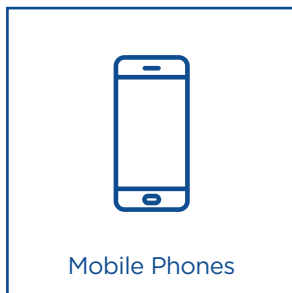
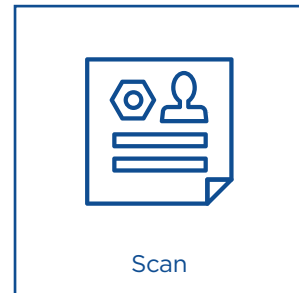
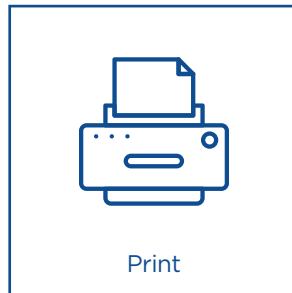
When looking to the horizon of any deal, thorough technology due diligence is vital to not only understand the true deal value, but to uncover things that may cause significant damage in the future.

To find out more about due diligence and value creation in mergers and acquisitions, get in touch with our expert bruce.watson@waterstons.com

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Advancing personalised learning with technology

By Richard Coates, Co-Founder and Managing Director of Lumanorth and BentoBot.

Personalised learning is not a new concept by any means. Educationalists and Learning and Development practitioners have long been aware of the need to tailor learning to the individual to target specific educational needs.

However, personalised learning has been accelerated with the advent of new and emerging tech in recent years that makes this approach more feasible, practical, and efficient than ever before.

Thanks to advances in technology and the development and availability of learning platforms, (now more accessible and more widely used than ever before in both education and workplace settings), personalised learning is less of a standalone strategy, and more an embedded element of an individual learners education/training program.

Personalised learning is no longer an intervention applied to help individuals with certain learning requirements, but rather a mainstream approach, which importantly is easily scaled with the right technology facilitating delivery.

Technology has accelerated this approach in particular by enabling i) access to learner data, ii) giving visibility of knowledge and knowledge gaps, and iii) by providing overall performance insights for both the learning provider and the learner, while providing a convenient and easily deployable tech platform.

The benefits offered by new-age learning technologies are many, however, and include:

- Learners can work through content at their own pace and at a level that is best suited to them.
- They can build their own learning programmes, selecting 'playlists' based on their interests and individual needs, putting self-initiated learning at the heart of this approach. This leads to far greater engagement and typically better learning outcomes.
- Practitioners can create learning programmes with ease, selecting and mixing learning content to produce relevant learning modules that can be implemented and scaled effectively.
- Tracking performance is made so much easier with technology, supporting education/workplace practitioner observations with performance data and insights that help provide context and detailed analysis of the individual's progress, as well as comparisons to group/team/function/department data for context.
- Learning content can blend a range of different formats and delivery modes, helping to keep the learner engaged throughout.
- By delivering learning programmes via a cloud-based system, learners can access their individual programmes when and how it suits



Richard Coates

them, be that from a computer, tablet or mobile.

- With bite-sized micro-learning modules, learners can work in short-bursts, maintaining concentration levels, plus they can make use of short 'free' periods effectively.

AI-powered learning platforms provide the most advanced means of personalised learning, providing suitably adaptive content, presenting it to the individual, and drawing from an extensive suite of learning content.

Our own platform, BentoBot, powers up the individual's performance with bite-sized, multimodal learning, leveraging AI to specifically target individual knowledge gaps and personalise the learning journey.

Added to that, it incorporates gamification, maximising reward psychology and effortlessly engaging learners, while motivational elements such as leaderboards can help drive individual progress.

This new-age tech brings real ROI to educational organisations and employers.

To find out how to advance your learner's progress using BentoBot, visit www.bentobot.com and request a demo.

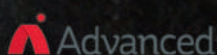


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Peterlee battery manufacturer champions future talent

A global battery technology supplier, headquartered in the North East, has welcomed 10 apprentices to the business.

Alexander Battery Technologies (ABT), which designs and manufactures customised rechargeable battery packs for a range of industries, has developed apprenticeships across the business in various departments such as administration, engineering, and marketing. The apprentices work on live projects, working closely with customers and ABT's wider supply chain network.

The training programmes are designed to bridge the current skills gap in the battery technology sector, particularly in electronics engineering.

By offering permanent employment opportunities post-apprenticeship, the Peterlee-headquartered manufacturer is not only investing in the professional development of young, local people but also ensuring a sustainable talent pipeline for the future.

The international company, which operates in key sectors including robotics,

telecommunications and e-mobility, currently employs more than 120 people and expects this to grow significantly in the next few years.

Amy Jefferson, HR manager at Alexander Battery Technologies, said: "As a people-led organisation, our apprenticeships are a cornerstone of our long-term strategy to futureproof our workforce in the fast-changing battery technology industry.

"Each division within the business hosts an apprentice who is given structured development and mentorship support as they progress throughout their training. Over 10% of our workforce are actively involved in training programmes - something we're really proud of.

"By investing in apprentices, we're not just filling immediate roles but helping to maintain our competitive edge globally too."

Apprentices are enrolled in a variety of courses, ranging from degree apprenticeships to

Level 3 and Level 4 apprenticeships. ABT has established key partnerships with local training providers who provide classroom learning with on-the-job skills gained at ABT's facilities.

For example, the company's engineering apprentices attend classes at East Durham College one day per week and spend the remaining four days working at ABT. Conversely, administration apprentices engage in online learning modules while on the job. Other training partnerships include those with University of Sunderland, Teesside University, Paragon Education and Skills and QA Training.

To further enhance the success of its apprenticeships, managers at ABT are involved in an apprentice mentoring course. This initiative aims to refine their mentoring skills, fostering a culture of continuous learning and development across the organisation.

Ellie Filip, 19, an engineering apprentice at ABT, said: "I'm enjoying my apprenticeship and learning so much whilst getting a lot of support from the wider engineering team.

"It's not just about the technical skills I'm acquiring but also about the confidence they instil in me to tackle challenges.

"Every day is different and exciting which motivates me in my role and continued career path - I really look forward to coming to work."

For more information about Alexander Battery Technologies, visit: www.alexandertechnologies.com

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The Culture Review *By Ivan Hollingsworth, Founder of Centric Consultants*



The push for greater representation and fairness in the workforce has sparked important conversations about what equality means, and while most organisations will say that they are making positive steps toward increasing diversity and inclusion in their workforce, the hard work doesn't stop when there is more diversity at the table. In 2024 leaders need to embrace what an equitable environment looks like within their team, rather than simply focusing on equality.

Rather than treating everyone equally, equity acknowledges the unique challenges and barriers that different individuals face. In a diverse workforce, not everyone has had the same opportunities or experiences. When businesses prioritise equity, they recognise that individuals may need different resources, support, or accommodations to reach their full potential, and to push the business forward.

This approach not only fosters a more inclusive and supportive work environment but also sends a powerful message to employees that their individual needs are valued and understood.

The first step in creating an environment that values equity is fostering a culture of psychological safety across your team. To make progress towards an equitable environment, managers and leaders need to get comfortable with the fact that some of the conversations you have to have to make progress might be a little, well, uncomfortable and force you to examine some hard truths about your business. The only way to have honest conversations is to create space for people to raise concerns, questions or ideas in a non-judgmental and nurturing environment. By building a culture that holds psychological safety as a core principle, you will encourage problem-solving innovation and creativity; basically, the harder it is to voice problems, the harder it is to solve them. Advancements don't just come from behaviour

and belief change, investment in structure and policy change will embed your commitment across your business and create a platform for learning and growth. Create a structure that holds people accountable like networks or focus groups, initiate reverse mentoring between leaders and team members from underrepresented groups, and practice leading with humility.

If you're committed to starting the conversation about what an equitable environment looks like for your business, I would highly recommend the book and podcast below.

BOOK: *Blindspot: Hidden biases of good people* by Mahzarin R. R. Banaji and Anthony G. Greenwald

In *Blindspot*, the authors reveal hidden biases based on their experience with the Implicit Association Test, a method that has revolutionized the way scientists learn about the human mind and that gives us a glimpse into what lies within the metaphoric blindspot. The title "good people" refers to those of us who strive to align our behavior with our intentions. *Blindspot* aims to explain the science in plain enough language to help well-intentioned people achieve that alignment. By gaining awareness, we can adapt beliefs and behavior and "outsmart the machine" in our heads so we can be fairer to those around us. Venturing into this book is an invitation to understand our minds.



PODCAST: *Brene Brown's Dare to Lead* with Patrice Gordon

In this episode of the hit podcast *Dare to Lead*, Patrice Gordon discusses reverse mentorship, a practice that sets up a junior team member, often a member of an underrepresented group, to mentor senior staff. Following Patrice's TED talk on how reverse mentorship can help create better leaders, she talks through best practices and how to set up a programme that provides psychological safety for individuals and the organisation.

Ivan Hollingsworth is the founder and director of Centric Consultants - a business founded in a bid to tackle 'culture-washing' and support business leaders to build strong, sustainable, high-performing teams based on trust and psychological safety.

Do you ever feel too busy to read everything out there and find it difficult to choose where to start? Each month Ivan will share his best business reads on key topics that can help business leaders address key challenges in the coming years, including reducing staff burnout, attracting and retaining people, and increasing team performance.

For more insights on what company culture truly means, and how to can implement change across your business follow Centric Consultants on LinkedIn or email Ivan directly at ivan@centric-consultants.com



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Mediaworks appoints new search director to lead SEO delivery

Mediaworks has strengthened its senior team with the appointment of a new organic search director.

Jack Minot, who has formerly held roles with the likes of Honcho, Sticky Eyes and Unrvld (formerly Delete), has relocated to the North East to take up the position at the Gateshead-headquartered digital marketing agency.

Brett Jacobson, founder and group CEO at Mediaworks, said: "We're thrilled to secure someone like Jack, who has such a massive passion and knowledge of his craft in SEO and search. It's a rapidly changing environment and Jack slots perfectly into our operations that thrives on staying ahead of the curve. "We have a diverse range of client partners across the UK, in industries such as tech, housing, finance and healthcare and he's already having an enormously positive impact on our team and our clients' performance in the short time he's been with us already."

Jack, who formerly lived in the south of England, but has moved with his family to the North East, added: "I'm incredibly excited to be joining such a dynamic and creative digital agency. I cannot wait to help Mediaworks shape and achieve its future growth ambitions in organic search. There are so many tremendously skilled and talented people here who I know will help our partners exceed their digital and commercial objectives.

"I've arrived at an environment that clearly embraces a potent blend of strategic thinking, creative planning and data-led execution and measurement. These are exciting foundations that will help us further elevate what I believe is achievable with SEO delivery at Mediaworks."

Founded in 2007 by Jacobson, the full-service agency now has 180 staff, following rapid expansion in the last two years. It delivers a range of services across SEO, PPC, web design, brand, content and digital PR from its HQ in the North East of England and its centres in Leeds, Manchester, Edinburgh and London.

Horizon Works strengthens design team with senior appointment

North East-based international B2B marketing company Horizon Works has appointed Peter Willis as Senior Creative Designer.

Peter, who has nearly 30 years of experience in the design industry, will be spearheading brand development for Horizon Works' clients and delivering creative work across digital and print.

Horizon Works, which was founded in 2010, is headquartered at Northumberland Business Park near Cramlington. The company works with innovation and technology-led businesses that are creating solutions of worldwide importance.

Peter has worked for a number of major North East England-based design and creative agencies during his career, delivering creative projects for both B2B and B2C clients. He has supported organisations in the transport, education, data infrastructure, legal and recruitment sectors, among others.

A highly accomplished artist, Peter also contributes illustrations to children's books in North America, and is known for his creative work in the sport and charity sectors. This has included working alongside The Athletic correspondent and renowned football journalist George Caulkin on a fanzine for The Sir Bobby Robson Foundation.



Samantha Vassallo, Managing Director of Horizon Works, said: "We're delighted to have a designer of Peter's exceptional talent on board at Horizon Works.

"He is a well-known and highly respected figure in the design industry and brings with him a wide range of creative skills, and a deep understanding of developing brands and delivering high impact, visually striking and memorable campaigns.

"Peter's role will be integral to the marketing support we deliver to our clients. His appointment will help us to build on our track record of shaping brands that strike a chord with target audiences and creating engaging visual content for innovative, pioneering businesses."



New business podcast launches in Newcastle

A new podcast has launched out of the North East, hosted by Stuart Bramley, the founder of MIRA Marketing. The podcast "Brains Behind Brands" invites successful business owners and entrepreneurs to

share their journeys and stories.

The show is aimed at anyone looking to unlock the secrets of success within the business world. The podcast takes listeners on a journey through the minds of successful entrepreneurs and business owners, revealing the strategies, challenges, and insights that have led them to the top.

Stuart Bramley said "I'm thrilled to be launching this podcast as I believe it's a fantastic way to share the stories of successful business owners and entrepreneurs. I'm passionate about helping businesses grow, and this podcast is a great platform to share valuable insights and strategies with others, whether they are in their journey as a startup or established business owners."

So, if you're looking to learn from some of the most successful people in business, be sure to tune in to "Brains Behind Brands".

Available on Spotify, YouTube & Apple Podcasts. Search Brains Behind Brands.



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Four senior recruits appointed at Cool Blue to support rapid business growth

The Newcastle-headquartered agency, which celebrates its 25th anniversary this year, has welcomed four new members to manage the growing demand for its creative marketing and design services.

Experienced public relations professional Taimar Askew has been appointed as account director to spearhead Cool Blue's presence in the North East, maximising local partnerships and developing its offering in the PR, social and influencer space. Taimar was previously head of digital PR at Mediaworks and has worked in the communications sector for seven years.

Also joining the Newcastle team is Ryan Brkovic-Davis, taking on the role of lead creative. His previous experience working for various agencies across the UK and New Zealand has seen him deliver projects for the All Blacks Rugby team, Nando's, Virgin Atlantic and Lloyds Banking Group. Ryan brings a wealth of design knowledge for digital and print, from brand creation and website to animation and magazine production.

Enriching its central London office, which pays special attention to the interiors sector, Cool Blue has appointed Katie Wilson as associate director. With over seven years of experience and strong market knowledge in luxury lifestyle, Katie will lead operations in the south and grow its presence through creative PR campaigns and brand strategy. She joins the agency having previously worked at Houston as an account director.

Also joining the team in London, Emma Wright has been welcomed as senior account manager to support Cool Blue's continued development in the fast-growing interiors and lifestyle division. Emma's expertise lies in executing influencer campaigns, developing public relations strategies and managing launch events having worked previously with the likes of Smeg, Sanderson and Morris & Co.

Highlights PR Highlights Coast Fest 24

Keith Newman of North Shields based PR firm, Highlights PR has announced that he has added Coast Festival 24 to his impressive list of music and entertainment clients.

Coast Fest 2024 will take place June 21 to 23rd with headliners including The Selecter and Badly Drawn Boy. The Coast Fest has recently received prestigious recognition at the UK Festival Awards in Manchester where they won the Best New Festival Award.

Coast Fest will embrace a fully family-friendly approach, welcoming parents and guardians to bring children on-site to enjoy music, activities, and special guest performers. The festival will also reintroduce its wheelchair viewing platform, enabling individuals with mobility issues to savour the festival atmosphere and all it has to offer.

"I'm delighted to be able to work with



the team behind this unique grassroots festival to ensure they get the very best media coverage possible. I attended last year looking after PR for the Sunday for Sammy Trust who sponsored part of the event, and I was very impressed. Music is very important to me and its great being able to work and enjoy myself at the same time," said Keith.

Tickets are available from www.skiddle.com/festivals/coast-fest



Radio Northumberland Calls for Volunteers to Support Expansion to DAB Broadcasting

Radio Northumberland, a community radio station based in Bedlington, is seeking dedicated volunteers to contribute to its growth as it endeavours to broadcast on the DAB airwaves. Established 12 years ago, the station relies entirely on the efforts of volunteers to host shows and manage behind-the-scenes activities.

In preparation for its upcoming bid to

feature on local DAB networks, Radio Northumberland is actively seeking individuals to assist in fundraising efforts. The station aims to secure funds for essential licenses, insurance, and day-to-day operational expenses.

Director Keith Newman expressed the station's need for additional support, particularly in the areas of marketing and advertising. Keith said, "We have a great presenter team who produce their own shows and we also have a fantastic community profile. Where we need additional support is in marketing and advertising." He continued, "We are looking for someone who has time to spare, perhaps with experience in helping organisations raise funds through sponsorship opportunities. While we can produce adverts and host competitions, we need someone to reach out to local businesses interested in advertising to help us cover our costs."

Radio Northumberland boasts a well-respected and established presence in the community, and Director Keith Newman warmly welcomes individuals who are passionate about supporting the station to join their team.

For those interested in contributing or learning more about volunteer opportunities, please contact Radio Northumberland through their Facebook page.

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Jeff Lyall: Humanising a Tech-Driven World

Bonded is the digital and media agency that prioritises connection. Join us as we connect with a different member of the team each month to get their take on all things digital media.

Bonded's Content Manager, Jeff Lyall, shares his thoughts on the secret to gaining sustained website traffic, why he's not riding the AI bandwagon quite yet, and why it's becoming more important than ever to build human connections.



As a Content Manager, what do you wish more people knew about Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)?

Many businesses (understandably) still look for shortcuts and hacks to get sustained traffic to their sites. We can all sometimes be susceptible to thinking that it's possible to get ahead quickly by jumping on the latest trend or marketing gimmick.

Unfortunately, there are no shortcuts, and brand building is still the name of the game. There's nowhere this is more salient than in organic search, where search engines want to show customers brands they know and are familiar with. So it might take time, but the biggest brands usually stand the test of time — and that's agnostic to whatever channels they've primarily used to promote themselves.

Always align your channel-specific efforts to brand building, and you'll be doing better than most of your competitors.

Are there any upcoming developments in the field of SEO that you are excited by?

Generative AI will continue to be an overused buzzword throughout 2024. It is, however, often

centred around things like content generation, which realistically is going to be a minefield. Not just copyright issues, but the complete lack of human creativity, empathy and intuition that these tools will really struggle to offer.

For me, I see the benefits coming from what computers have always been best at — boring, repetitive tasks like making sense and pulling insights from large sets of data, spotting trends over time, and saving humans from monotonous labour. Being able to query a tool on which pages could use a content refresh, based upon data from multiple sources and the entire 'bigger picture' — that's much more of a tiny, real-life application that'll make my day a little easier.

What does 'Connection' mean to you?

Digital marketing is a saturated landscape, with increasingly commoditised offerings. Bonded's core value of human connection, in a world where automation is currently being touted as the future really resonates with me. It's an ancient adage that 'people buy from people', so knowing that the business prioritises genuine relationships with its staff and clients sets it apart.

Many will accept the narrative that automation will lead to a lessened human involvement in marketing but conversely, I strongly believe we're going to have a bigger part than ever to play, and that's a real differentiator for us. Since day one we've always been about the value of deep personal connections, and for me, that's the perfect antidote to a tech-heavy and all too often impersonal industry.

And finally, what do you like most about working at Bonded?

The people! I'm constantly learning from some of the best in the industry, being challenged in unique ways, and most importantly, having a laugh with a canny bunch of people.



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DID YOU HEAR THE ONE ABOUT THE
two creatives who
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GEORGIA & AMINA @ CRAVENS

Amina Javed and **Georgia Leggott** are two of Cravens' talented young creatives, working as a double act from both the agency's London and Newcastle offices. To help push their creative and presentation skills they attended a comedy course at last year's Edinburgh Festival. We caught up with them about what they learned and whether comedy stardom beckons.

So, why a comedy course?

G: Comedy allows me to express myself creatively while also bringing joy to others. I believe laughter is a powerful tool for connecting with people and navigating through life's challenges, so I wanted to hone my skills and learn from professionals in the field. Plus, who doesn't love a good laugh?

A: Why not? There's no better way to learn than when you're having fun. In all seriousness, the proven process that professional comics use to write, perform, and approach stand-up comedy involves a spectrum of skills that hold significant relevance to creatives in advertising.

How did it help with your creative thinking?

A: It showed that you can create properly impactful ideas that connect with your audience whilst putting a smile on people's faces at the same time too.

G: Humour is the key to getting people on board and engaged with an advert. The world's a pretty gloomy place at the moment and there's lots of serious things on people's minds, so being able to put a smile on someone's face with a bit of humorous creativity really helps.

What was it like standing up and delivering a routine in front of people?

G: Oh my, I'm normally full of energy and words but that first moment getting up on the stage and hoping people might actually find me funny really pushed my self confidence into a new space. Trusting myself was the hardest part.

A: Nerve-racking but exciting. The main question that ran through my mind is, what if no one finds this funny? But there is a certain kind of thrill when you do get a laugh.

Do you think it's given you any ideas on how to get up and present your own work more?

A: Definitely. It's all in the delivery. After re-performing and editing our routine with the help of the tutor, it was clear to see that our jokes could be ten times funnier when adding the right emotion to it.

G: 100%. I certainly think I'll get to the point a lot quicker now for sure.

Tell us a little about yourselves...

G: I got into art direction not to write words, so my copywriter wrote this... :)

Georgia is the skilled art director on our team. Despite amassing an absurd amount of Pinterest boards, Georgia's sharp eye for aesthetics is really handy when it comes to crafting a compelling campaign. Her journey into advertising is fuelled by a passion for visual storytelling, her love for Harry Styles, and the opportunity to work with Amina every day.

A: I enjoy words—writing them, reading them, and even admiring them when a designer does a good job. Thanks to an alchemy of good literacy, a slightly overactive imagination, and traditional training during my Masters in Creative Advertising, I discovered that creative copywriting was the perfect fit for me. It never gets boring. The industry is constantly evolving and pushing boundaries, making it exciting to come up with the next idea that will make a big impact.

Amina, you're based in our London office and Georgia you're in our Newcastle office, how do you bridge the divide when working together?

G: Zoom and the train.

A: Making sure we're always communicating with one another so we're on the same page.

Will we be seeing you at any open mic events anytime soon?

G: I think I'll leave it to the professionals.

A: Of course, in the audience.

Go on then, say something funny...

A: I told my computer I needed a break, and now it won't stop sending me vacation ads.

G: Would you like a knock knock joke?

To see how Cravens can create proper impact for your brand, visit cravens.co.uk

Marketing and Media Matters

In the latest of these popular series of features we spoke to...

Adam Blenkinsop

CEO at Revolution.

Did you always envisage a career in the Media Industry?

No, it happened by accident really. I never really saw myself working in an office-based role. Back at the end of 2007 I had applied to join the police and had also applied for a visa to move to Canada - I was keeping my options open!

In the meantime, I was offered a role in the North East as a web developer and with the increasingly turbulent global economic situation developing I decided to take that opportunity. That was the last interview I ever did.

What has been your career path so far?

I started my web career working for the ICT Curriculum Support Team in Northumberland County Council. My role there was to build educational games for kids in schools and support the roll out of a new Learner Management System across all schools in the county. From there I joined Revolution as their first web developer. I worked closely with Gill Burgess to build out the digital offering and grew with the business over the following 15 years, leading the digital team, becoming a director & shareholder and ultimately taking over as CEO in 2022.

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

Growing, and growing quickly, as we have done over the last few years is very challenging in a whole host of ways. Whether it's about building a culture, an elite team, process efficiency or the human side of business, there's always so many things that need your attention. Being ruthless with my time and having laser focus on the strategic objectives and our vision of becoming the UK's leading revenue growth specialists has certainly helped.

Who do you respect most in your industry?

The people I respect most are usually people I've worked closely with and had the opportunity to learn from and helped me grow. I've had the good fortune to work with some really great teams and individuals over the years but Matt Johnson at Form over in Liverpool would be pretty high up my list. Him and his team really helped me drive the business forwards when we started working with them a few years ago.

What is your greatest strength?

I think I have at least some of the qualities that make me a good leader. I try to be a facilitator as much as possible and built an environment that allows the people around me to flourish and perform to an elite level. I'm good at communicating a vision and simplifying the complex so that people can really focus on what matters most. I'm a fairly good problem solver which I think is really important in my day to day.

What is your biggest weakness?

I can be quite impatient at times. Sometimes it feels like my mind is moving at a million miles an hour. Earlier in my career I often found myself becoming frustrated when things didn't

progress as quickly as I wanted them to. I've worked really hard on trying to change that and be more patient when I need to be.

What has been your proudest achievement?

Having been part of Revolution for the last 16 years has been a huge privilege for me. I'm exceptionally proud of the business that we've built, especially in the face of significant adversity. We've lived through the 2008 financial crisis, global pandemics, wars, cost of living crises, energy crises and come out of the other side. We've got an excellent team and most importantly we consistently deliver huge amounts of value to our customers, helping them to grow their businesses. I couldn't be prouder of that.

What are your future career aspirations?

I'm not really looking too far into the future in regards to my own career. My aspirations are secondary to the aspirations I and my SLT have for the business over the next couple of years. We've grown quickly over the last two years and don't have any intention of slowing down. We're in the process of expanding our footprint across the UK and breaking into some key European and North American territories. Alongside that, we've recently launched a sister business and are about to launch our own SaaS product in the next couple of weeks. I'm excited about all of those challenges and I'm not really looking beyond achieving our next set of objectives at the minute.

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

I'd love to answer this question without mentioning AI but I think it's inevitably going to have a big impact on the industry, the challenge is working out how to harness it in a meaningful and useful way. It's one to monitor closely. I think the biggest shift we've made over the last few years has been moving away from commoditized services of a traditional marketing function and focussing entirely on the growth trajectory of our clients. For us, it will be a case of doubling down on that and continuing to cut through the noise and only focus on the real difference makers.

How do you like to unwind?

It feels like there's not too much time to unwind at the moment between running the business, planning my wedding and juggling family life. When I do get some down time I love to travel, I try to tick somewhere off my bucket list every year. Closer to home, I'm into motorsport. For the last 4 or 5 years, me and my dad have been rally driving which has been a great way to blow off steam. It's something that my dad used to do when I was a baby and I grew up watching a lot of rallying so it's been really nice to do that together now that we're both older.

www.revolutiongrowth.co.uk



Adam Blenkinsop

...Spring brings reasons to celebrate...

The nights are getting shorter and the days longer – a good enough reason to celebrate- Highlights PR's Keith Newman asked some of his RADAR members to tell us what their business is celebrating.



My business is celebrating my writings and video being featured on the Mysterious Universe Podcast. I discovered this by accident via a comment on a YouTube video. I also discovered that my work had been featured on it quite a few times. I feel this is very positive and I am glad that it shows that the writing and promotion I do is working. I have written 710 books: the 711th almost out at the time of writing: The Book of Peace by S Rob. I now write as Simon Rob as well as S Rob. I feel this is also something to celebrate because I simply had written so many books, they were difficult to find and thought I needed to write under a different but similar name for different writings of a different nature. All in all, a lot to celebrate. S Rob now also writing as Simon Rob

Simon Rob, Author, Wervamp Media,
Find us on Amazon.



We've been involved in an innovative pilot scheme aimed at enhancing teenage engagement - the HAF Plus (Holiday Activities and Food) programme. It has completed successful trials in four regions of the country and the results of this ground breaking initiative were unveiled at a special event at the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art in Gateshead. The conference featured guest speakers, presentations, and insights from local businesses that supported the young people, emphasising the collaborative effort to empower and engage the teenage community.

Our young people are vitally important to us all and we've given young people across Northumberland and North Tyneside a voice and encouraged them to help in the co-design of a local and national HAF Plus framework which can be rolled out nationally.

Chris Johnson, Leading Link, www.leadinglink.co.uk



We are celebrating that our first Health Literacy Talks are going ahead in Byker Pantry from the end of February! This is super exciting and enables us to reach out into the community.

Dr Ceri Sutherland Idos Health and Well Being www.idoshealth.co.uk



Spring is in the air - A great reason to celebrate. Bulbs are so brave! They dig their way through so much dark dirty soil in the coldest times of year to then cheer us with their glorious colours. Snowdrops, tulips and daffs ~ are all working to let us know that spring is on the way and lighter nights are coming. I hope you have the best of spring times, full of hope and light and joy. If times are dark, then my books will help. They help you to find your own light and transform the burnout into balance. So each springtime, I see the triumphs of my clients and readers as things to really celebrate as they have dug their way out of the demanding times to be brighter. After being very ill for more than two decades with severe M.E. I was told repeatedly by medics that I wouldn't be well enough for work. I am very grateful to be celebrating 12 years in business and having published five books within that time.

Dr Rebecca Williams Dinsdale
www.drrebecca.org.uk

My business is celebrating a new development. I have a permanent stall on Newcastle Quayside. The most exciting thing about this is the variety of people I get to meet. And how much fun it is. My products are perfect for the quayside as many of the landmarks that are featured are in that area. It's also a great opportunity for me to test new ideas and get a sense of what products people want next. Something that is very difficult to do when you just sell online. I cannot wait to see what the year ahead holds, and my mind is full of all of the new designs I want to create.

Corinne Lewis Ward, www.powderbutterfly.com



I'm celebrating helping a client with a simple technical problem. He'd bought a radio microphone for his podcasts and couldn't seem to get it to work. I diagnosed the issue and loaned him a special cable so that he could do the podcast while he ordered a new cable online. Delighted to help.

Daniel Wilkinson, DW Media
www.thedwmedia.co.uk



We are into our 30th year of business, which is a testament to the dedication and teamwork within PMP. Similarly, we are celebrating Gavin Willis' 25 years with us! As we honour both milestones and wonderful achievements, we are taking this year on as the year of opportunity and seeing how much further we can go. The print industry has changed so much over the last 30 years, and it is about ensuring that we stay up to date and relevant to be able to compete and remain strong for the next 30 years. If your business is celebrating this year, and requires materials to promote that, whether it is a pop up banner for an event or you wish to do a large flyer drop. Get in touch with us and we can help you celebrate the right way.

Rebecca Thompson
sales@pmpnameplates.co.uk



This month I'm excited about the launch of my new business 'Stanley Creatives'.

Stanley Creatives is a community interest company, we are a theatre production and events company that aims to bring theatre out into the community, so it becomes accessible to everyone regardless of financial or geographical barriers. We are also supporting new writing and using performance as an important part of training programmes that will benefit organisations and businesses. We have three directors, me, Maggie Martin and Polly Brennan.

Alison Stanley - Stanley Creatives

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

Are you on the media's RADAR?

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Become a member of Highlights PR's RADAR programme.

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Special bonus for RADAR clients:

- Interview on Radio Northumberland
- Crisis PR management advice
- Feature in Highlights PR's newsletter
- Exclusive offers on PR, media training and more
- LED advert beamed from the floating office



Contact Keith Newman for more details.

Visit him on his floating office

keith@highlightspr.co.uk

07814 397951

www.highlightspr.co.uk





Sali Midjek-Conway



Veronica Swindale

Strategy Vs Tactics

It's so easy to jump into tactics, as quite honestly, they can be the most fun to plan, but the strategy should always come first, and if you are working in marketing and communications, you need to be good at both.

Paying attention to strategy in the first instance can prevent wasting your time and money on the wrong tactics; using guesswork and intuition about what will work isn't always the best plan. This is where PR Smith's SOSTAC® planning framework comes in, as a simple-to-recall and easy-to-apply model.

We are pleased Sali Midjek-Conway has joined the nesma team to facilitate these masterclasses. So you can get to know her better, I asked her to tell us more about herself and why she thinks everyone can benefit from having the SOSTAC® framework in their back pocket.

Sali, tell us a little about yourself...

I am a mum of two children, who are my greatest achievements. I love chocolate and eating out, and I am a big fan of Joe Wicks' Body Coach app, where I regularly do HIIT workouts - essentially to offset the chocolate and eating out!

Professionally, I am a Chartered Marketer and accredited communications professional of the CIPR and have worked in marketing and communications for approx. twenty-two years now, during which one of my favourite projects was launching the first-ever higher education institution at Wembley Stadium. I am also Chair of the CIPR NW Committee and a Vice-Chair on the CIM NW Board.

How did you get where you are today?

I would say with a combination of ambition, tenacity and enthusiasm. I have always put my hand up for all sorts of projects and activities throughout my career where possible - including volunteering. I didn't go to university after my A levels, and so studied at night school as a part-time student, which probably fuelled my determination to succeed further and quickly, owing to my impatience! I love learning new things and continue to enhance my professional development daily.

When planning/starting something new, what is your BIG question?

What will success look like? What's the big goal we're aiming for? I am a strategic thinker, so I think more broadly than just about the campaign or project in front of me. So many strategies and projects can often be based on aims - what we intend to do - rather than stating actual SMART objectives or KPIs that indicate when and by how much or what/who, etc. I have found that asking these questions and understanding the overall purpose of delivering a strategy or project usually uncovers a distinct goal that helps reach the expected results rather than making assumptions and hoping for the best. Or, as I have heard it named, "Spraying and praying!"

Who do you think would benefit from these masterclasses?

PR Smith says that SOSTAC® provides a "reassuring sense of order" to any plan, which sums up the benefits of having this model as part of our planning toolkit wonderfully. The masterclass takes you through each stage of the model, along with case studies, quizzes and debates to help apply the knowledge with context for your role no matter what sector you're in.

What do you think is the real value of understanding this framework?

Time saving and accuracy. These are massive benefits when you work in a busy marketing environment! SOSTAC® is easy to recall and encourages you to stay focussed on what you're working towards. It is also easy to apply in any situation. I have even used it during an interview once to structure my response on the spot to a question that required me to set out how I would approach a particular task/challenge - I only had 5 minutes to prepare, so it was perfect to ensure I covered all the bases in my response. Ideally, in marketing planning, you'd spend longer! For me, the model's simplicity, combined with the ease of recall, makes it practical to apply.

What's your favourite thing about SOSTAC®?

Action - this is what I now understand much better than I did before I did the Certified Planner course. I was always a little confused about the difference between Tactics and Action - assuming they were similar. But now I realise how comprehensive the model is in ensuring a plan succeeds! To see what Action stands for, I'll leave it for you to look online or, better still, come to one of the masterclasses to find out!

If you are interested in these nesma online masterclasses co-hosted by PR Smith himself, contact Lydia: 07734 222 254, hello@nesma.co.uk.

The next online SOSTAC® Principles (Beginners 1-day) is happening on Wednesday, 17 April, 9 am - 4 pm, and the SOSTAC® Certified Planner (Advanced 2-day) is Wednesday, 24 April and 1 May, 9 am - 4 pm.

www.nesma.co.uk

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Evaluating board performance: Assessing effectiveness to strengthen governance

Wadds Inc. supports creative agencies with company direction and differentiated propositions. Here non-executive director Sarah Waddington CBE looks at how you can evaluate your board to ensure it is working effectively on your behalf.

In last month's magazine, I wrote about how to structure a board and the pitfalls to avoid. In this article, I want to explore how to evaluate your board's performance. It's a common governance risk found in organisations of all sizes.

An excellent place to start is with the Higgs Review 'Good Practice Suggestions', which were published in 2003 to provide guidance on the role of the Chairman, non-executive directors and any nomination and remuneration committees.

The section on performance evaluation sets out clear questions that, when answered, show how well the board and its individual members are working.

The areas that require focus include:

- The board's composition and skills.
- Its performance against objectives.
- Its contribution to the development and testing of strategy.
- The board's role in risk management.
- Whether the matters reserved for the board are the right ones.
- Its focus on conformance.
- Its engagement with any standing committees.
- The effectiveness of its communication with stakeholders.
- How the board has managed any crises.

While the UK Corporate Governance Code is only applicable to listed companies and then purely on a comply or explain basis, it also provides some useful best practice guidance. This recommends alignment between corporate culture, purpose, values and business strategy and promotes integrity and diversity in business.

It states that the board, individual directors and committees should all undergo an annual evaluation. If needed, the chair should act on any weaknesses by proposing new board members or asking directors to step down.

The chair is a crucial part of this process and should be evaluated by the non-executive directors, led by a senior independent director who has secured the executive directors' views in advance.

Ian Davidson is chairman of Wadds Inc. client Cravens, the UK's oldest independent creative consultancy, where the team has recently strengthened its board. He said: "Having grown successfully over the last three years we have continued to invest in evaluating and, when needed, changing the composition of our board.

"This has helped us avoid group think, achieve the right diversity of experience and maintain fresh perspective. It's given us real confidence that we have the appropriate support in place to deliver our expansion plans as we extend our services and push into new sectors."

If any of this resonates and you'd like professional advisory support to help structure your business and achieve your growth plans, please email sarah.waddington@wadds.co.uk. I'll be happy to help.
www.wadds.co.uk



Sarah Waddington CBE



Sarah Walker and Sarah Dale

We're here for long term relationships!

SASS media Ltd are ready to take your PR campaign or business project to new heights!

Sarah and Sarah had been friends for more than 16 years when they set up SASS media Ltd – and they're hoping to develop the same long-term friendships with their clients!

As you may have read in previous articles about us, we believe every business has a story to tell – maybe even several stories!

We can tell them through press releases we send to journalists about you, or by writing case studies for your websites detailing what your customers say about you.

We're also here for regular blog posts, award nominations if you want help putting yourself forward – the list is endless really.

We're open to helping SMEs, charities and public sector organisations, whether you need a one-off press release or writing task to be completed

or a bigger strategy – and we're particularly skilled when working in the areas of health, charities and education.

However, what we're really interested in at SASS media Ltd is creating longer term conversations about your brand, between you and your many stakeholders – and the creation of lasting, positive relationships.

Here's an example. If you're an NHS trust or organisation going through service changes, you're likely to need to have several different conversations with lots of different people – patients and their families, people who live next to your hospitals, councillors and MPs, your governors and many other stakeholders – not to mention the media.

It can be a very demanding task to co-ordinate all of these different messages, which essentially carry the same important information, but need to be tailored differently depending which of your stakeholders you are targeting.

Even if you have your own marketing or PR team, they may need extra hands, eyes and ears on a particular project, to enable your organisation's reputation to be managed and promoted as effectively as possible.

That's where SASS media Ltd come in to help and support your organisation!

We'll create a stakeholder map for your project or service change and work out the best ways to communicate with all of the different people who are interested or invested in what you have to say.

We aim to keep conversations running effectively and smoothly and reinforce the good reasons you have for changing a service or creating a new one.

We can help with things such as advising on stakeholder events, presenting to the media – including pre-empting their questions and how you might respond – how you can use your social media through the duration of this particular project or service change and whether bespoke newsletters or advertising in print publications are likely to be beneficial to you.

We can write press releases and press statements, information for your website, letters to councillors and MPs, patient information leaflets Q&A documents – basically anything you can think of that requires words – and ensure your message is clear and consistent, whoever you are speaking to.

It's through working on longer term projects like this that we build our best relationships with clients – and we're keen to create many more happy and successful ones.

Like all good relationships, it all starts with a nice cuppa!

If you'd like to talk to us with a bigger PR campaign in mind, give us a call and arrange a no-obligation free consultation – we'll even provide the tea and biscuits!

Call now on 07896 894538 or visit www.sassmedialtd.co.uk

Sunderland to Chicago: PR agency's female founder selected for women's only US Trade Mission

12 women-led businesses from the UK are invited to celebrate International Women's Day at Chicago's Consulate General, including House of Hype & Co. Founder and Managing Director Claire Pickersgill.

With Claire set to represent the North East on a Trade Mission to Indianapolis and Chicago, this pilot initiative aims to boost women's participation in International Trade by connecting UK female founders with their US counterparts.

Designed by the Department of Business & Trade Women's International Network (WIN) programme, the trip will see House of Hype & Co. participate in a full B2B itinerary to bolster the connection between the US and the UK's female-led businesses.

According to a 2019 Review of Female Entrepreneurship commissioned by HM Treasury, far less female-owned and led businesses export than male led ones. That means, if women were to scale their businesses at the same rate as men, up to £250bn of new value could be added to the UK economy.

Sunderland-based PR agency, House of Hype & Co, work with clients to get audiences talking positively about their business through a range of channels and concepts to enhance their reputation, growth and increase business opportunities. With House of Hype & Co. already

co-hosting a series of sold-out ladies only networking events in the North East in 2024 in partnership with Activated Mindset Online, this trip sees Claire take another strong step forward for supporting women in business.

Founder Claire said: "This really is a pinch me moment and I'm so excited to represent the UK as part of the trade mission, not only is it a great opportunity for myself and the business but I'll also have my client's objectives on my mind too for the visit, alongside promoting Sunderland and the North East as a great place to do business.

Connections and collaborations are at the heart of everything we do at House of Hype & Co. and I'm very excited about the new relationships that will be forged through the trade mission."

Introducing the Women's International Network (WIN Programme)

"Imagine a world where female-led businesses soar to new heights, where opportunities are boundless, and your success knows no limits.

WIN is a movement poised to revolutionize the business landscape for female entrepreneurs like you. We're here to shatter barriers, embrace opportunities, and empower you to take your business to extraordinary heights."

www.hypeco.co.uk



Claire Pickersgill

Photo Credit: David Wood

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Community Collaborations

For this month's column, I sat down with Mark Ellerby-Hedley, Sexual Health Improvement Practitioner from Solutions4Health, to discuss their work in the local Newcastle community as well as their collaboration with The Eagle Bar Newcastle - a collaboration in which Marriott Communications is supporting with our PR services.

Mark had this to say: "The Newcastle Sexual Health Service transferred from Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals to Solutions4Health on October 1st 2023."

Solutions4Health are committed to delivering an excellent integrated sexual health service in Newcastle, working with community partners to engage with people who find it difficult to access services in the city centre.

Many people do not realise they have been at risk of HIV infection. Symptoms can take many years to develop. This is why it is important to be tested.



Samuel Marriott-Dowding

Testing is easy, free and confidential

Testing for HIV is now easier than ever with many options of how you can get tested. Sexual Health Services 4 Newcastle offered a 'Rapid HIV Testing' event, where you get the result within 10 minutes on the Melissa Bus, which was located outside The Eagle Bar Newcastle, on Friday 16th February between 2pm – 5pm. They were able to offer support on a range of sexual health matters, including access to PrEP & PEP, STI Testing and contraception.

It's important to know your status

Testing is the only way to know for sure if you have HIV or not. People sometimes live for years unaware that they have it.

If you've never tested, or it's been more than a year since your last test, it's a good idea to test now.

It's advised to test once a year – or more often if you've had unprotected sex with more than one partner.

Testing puts you in control of your health

If you have HIV and don't know it, you're more likely to pass it on. But if you know your status, you can make sure you and your partner are taking steps to stay healthy.

For example, if you have a positive result, your partner could take PrEP while you start treatment.

And if you have a negative result, you might choose to use PrEP yourself.

Get the treatment and support you need HIV medication and medical care is free in the UK, if you have HIV, the sooner you start treatment, the better.

Taking effective HIV medication as prescribed and getting an undetectable viral load means you can't pass on HIV to your partner, even without a condom. U=U (Undetectable = Untransmittable)

With early diagnosis and the right treatments, most people with HIV live a long and healthy life."

For more information, please visit
www.sexualhealthservices4newcastle.co.uk



Personal Brand: Why we think you should grow yours in 2024

In the relentless world of business, establishing a memorable presence is essential to ensure your brand stands out from the crowd.

Growing your personal brand can help you to amplify your visibility, build trust with your target audience and establish yourself as a thought leader in your industry - it's not about shameless self-promotion, but about increasing awareness and creating meaningful connections.

Your personal brand, defined by your opinions, style, and values, offers a platform to share expertise, passions, and experiences that give value to your audience. Whether online or offline—via platforms like LinkedIn, podcasts, or public speaking (yep, your personal brand goes beyond the internet!) It reflects who you are and what you stand for.

Despite its importance, personal branding often flies under the radar. Yet, every interaction shapes your reputation, amplifying your voice and impact within your industry.

At Petite Agency, we specialise in personal brand management, empowering entrepreneurs to authentically showcase who they are and make them stand out in their industries.

Whether you realise it or not, most successful people, whether creators, entrepreneurs, freelancers, or celebrities, are masters of personal brand.

From the realms of business to the world of celebrity, let's take two of the biggest personal brands out there right now as an example; Steven Bartlett and Taylor Swift.

Now, why are we mentioning these two together?

Are they in the same industry? No

Do they have the same talents? No

Maybe their backgrounds are similar? Nope.

The one thing they have in common is their passion for building their personal brands.

Steven Bartlett, a business mogul and host of the UK's No.1 podcast, The Diary Of A CEO,



Annabel Hughes and Maddy Howe (Social Media Account Managers at Petite Agency)

offers blunt yet inspirational advice to young entrepreneurs. His unconventional approach has positioned him as the voice of a new generation of business leaders, captivating audiences beyond aspiring entrepreneurs. As Maddy says, "His content always makes you stop scrolling and read. Whether it's a quote, a trailer for his new podcast episode or an investment on Dragon's Den. You don't have to be an aspiring entrepreneur to engage with his content - and that's the beauty of personal brand."

At the heart of Taylor Swift's personal brand lies authenticity. Transitioning seamlessly between genres, she stays true to herself, connecting with fans who admire her vulnerability and openness. Annabel emphasises that "Taylor's willingness to share both highs and lows creates a genuine connection with her audience, making her not just an idol but a relatable friend. Over time, through each "Era," Taylor's authenticity has gained the admiration from millions, highlighting the significant impact of growing a personal brand."

Now that we've covered the importance of personal branding and highlighted some exceptional examples, are you ready to elevate your voice and leave your mark in 2024?

Let's take a look at three of our top performing (and easiest) content pillars to get you started with your personal brand posts on LinkedIn this March:

Build authority | Talk about your work; Goals, Results, What, How?

Growing your personal brand involves building authority through transparent communication about your work. Share your goals, achieved results, and the intricacies of your process to showcase expertise and authenticity. By discussing not just the 'what' but also the 'how'

of your work, you create a relatable narrative that establishes trust and positions you as a credible figure in your field.

Your Background & Journey | How did it all happen?

Remember, authenticity is key in connecting with your followers. Posts showcasing your journey from humble beginnings to current success, such "Then and now" or "How it started vs how it's going," resonate with your audience, offering inspiration and insight into you and your business.

People genuinely care about your journey (honestly, we mean it). Celebrating your milestones, whether it's training, team growth, promotions, or even moving to a new HQ, it's great to showcase all of the highs and lows along the way - True authenticity right there!

Behind The Scenes | What are you up to in business?

Remember the age old saying "People buy from people" Well, it's still true - Even in the digital world. Sharing behind-the-scenes glimpses of your professional life not only humanises your brand but also creates a deeper connection with your audience. By showcasing the authentic, day-to-day aspects of your business, you transform "salesy" posts into friendly exchanges, making your audience feel like they're a part of your story rather than just consumers in a transaction.

So, the question is - Are you ready to start building your personal brand?

If you're inspired by any of our content tips, we'd love for you to tag us in your posts on LinkedIn! Thanks for reading.

Linkedin: @petiteagency



Metrocentre integrated campaign.



Helping brands be less ordinary.



Pupils jump for joy at being named gymnastics champions

Primary school pupils who competed in their first ever gymnastics competition were jumping for joy after being named South Tyneside Champions 2024.

St. Bede's Catholic Primary School, in South Shields, which is part of Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust, entered Year 1 and Year 2 pupils into a gymnastics team for the event at The Urban Factory, Hebburn.

The children each learned a gymnastics routine to perform individually before the expert judges, including forward and teddy bear rolls, step turns, stretch jumps, back supports and many more movements and balances.



The St Bede's pupils soon stretched to the top of the leaderboard with their accurate and fluent routines.

The gymnasts will now represent South Tyneside in the Gymnastics County Finals in June, in what promises to be an exciting opportunity for the children.



Plans for Seaburn play park approved

Plans to develop a new outdoor children's play park with input from Seaburn schoolchildren have been approved by Sunderland City Council's planning committee.

Sunderland City Council's Full Cabinet voted in favour of plans for a new play park near to the former Pirate Play Park site last year, and on 5 February 2024 the proposal was approved by planning committee.

Located just off Dykelands Road and Lowry Road, the park will include play mounds, sand pits and planted areas, as well as traditional play features such as swings, slides and roundabouts, tall towers, climbing boulders, bridges, and aerial walkways. In-line with the Council's ambition to 'make the city's playparks more inclusive', it will also include bespoke play equipment for those with accessibility challenges, ensuring as many families as possible can enjoy the facilities.

The construction of the play park is expected to begin in mid-February ahead of its opening in early Summer. Cllr Kevin Johnston, portfolio holder for dynamic city at Sunderland City Council, said: "We are thrilled that positive steps are being taken to move forward with the plans for the new play park at Seaburn."

"Our seafront has benefited from millions of pounds of investment over recent years, and this is yet another development which will add to its ever-growing list of new additions."

"With a diverse range of restaurants and bars, the award-winning beaches and green spaces to stroll, there really is something for everyone at Seaburn and this new play park will only enhance its offering."

To involve the local community on this project, Sunderland City Council challenged pupils from Seaburn Dene Primary School to come up with original ideas that would create an imaginative and stand-out play area for families to enjoy.

After an influx of fantastic designs made by the schoolchildren of Seaburn Dene Primary School, the overall winner of the competition was awarded to brother and sister duo, Sophia Nixon, aged nine, and Henry Nixon, aged four. The standout design was a 3D model created by the Nixon's which included a zip wire, a netted climbing area, and a lighthouse slide that would provide sea views from the top.

Mr John Howe, head teacher at Seaburn Dene Primary School, said: "The children loved getting involved with this community project, it really allowed them to use their creativity and imagination to work up their dream play park."



Outstanding for Corpus Christi Catholic Primary

Corpus Christi Catholic Primary School is proud to announce that it has been judged as 'OUTSTANDING' by Ofsted, in every single area, following a recent inspection.

The Catholic primary, based in Bensham Gateshead, has 233 pupils and is part of Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust, which supports five secondary schools, one middle school, one first school and forty-one primary schools in the Hexham and Newcastle Diocese.

Pupils at Corpus Christi are noted for their exceptional behaviour – displaying kindness, respect, and articulately expressing their thoughts and feelings.

Key highlights of the report showcase the

school's leadership, which demonstrates exceptional ambition for all pupils and fosters an environment where children thrive. It also notes the introduction of a highly ambitious curriculum reflecting the school's commitment to providing students with the ability to understand global issues and articulate their learning effectively.

The report states that lessons at Corpus Christi are not only informative but also engaging, reflecting the expertise of the staff in teaching. The school surpasses expectations in everyday provision for pupils, creating an environment where praise and encouraging language are integral to every conversation.

Corpus Christi is also recognised for excelling in catering to the needs of students with Special Educational Needs (SEND), ensuring they receive the necessary support for success. The Ofsted report specifically acknowledges the outstanding provision for pupils with SEND.

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NPS



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A photograph of two young girls in school uniforms. The girl on the right is looking up and smiling, while the girl on the left is looking down at a book they are holding together. They are both wearing blue and white striped shirts. The background is a blurred wooden wall.

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Barney celebrates 'Excellent' success

A unique education system that prepares today's children for the world of the 2060s and '70s has won the highest praise from official inspectors.

The Independent Schools Inspectorate awarded Barnard Castle School the top rating of 'excellent' for both 'Academic Achievement' and 'Personal Development'.

The achievement follows the introduction of 'A Barney Education', an innovative approach to developing a dynamic curriculum for its 730 pupils, aged four to 18.

'Barney', as the School is affectionately known, provides an inspirational, compassionate and unpretentious environment in which young people develop character, becoming confident, resilient, intellectually curious, tolerant and driven, with an undercurrent of humility, leaving them ideally placed to thrive in a rapidly changing world.

A six-strong team of inspectors spent three days at the Senior and Prep schools, exploring every facet of learning.

They scrutinised compliance in key areas including the quality of education, the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of children, welfare, health and safety, the suitability of staff, the premises and the standards of leadership and management.

Inspectors examined the curriculum, observed 80 lessons and sampled work, from Reception class to Sixth Form. They analysed parent, pupil and staff surveys, spoke with pupils, staff and governors, experienced countless extra-curricular activities, House meetings and Chapel and also visited boarding houses and the Academic Support department. In each area the school was awarded 'excellent'.

Headmaster Tony Jackson said: "This was a rigorous and comprehensive inspection and we are unbelievably proud of the outcome, which is validation of everything we endeavour to do.

"Our children are preparing for a rapidly changing world and are having to contend with adversity on a local and global level. Throw into this mix the volatile and ubiquitous nature of social media and technology and it is clear that we need to evolve constantly to meet their learning needs as we prepare them for work in the 2060s and 2070s."

Inspectors highlighted the excellent quality of academic learning and pupil achievement, praising children's communications skills, their engagement with learning, their self-confidence and understanding of how to improve their performances further.

They also noted pupils' progress and skills across the curriculum including reading, writing and numeracy. They commented on how children expressed themselves with increasing sophistication and their expertise in public speaking, their ability to apply their knowledge

and think logically.

Inspectors picked up on the School's sense of spirituality and community, the inspiring surroundings, pupils' morals and positive attitude towards each other, their excellent, courteous and well-mannered behaviour, their awareness of social issues and diversity, their contribution as global citizens, including charity work, the high degree of student input into school life and their understanding of how to stay safe, both physically and mentally.

The "comprehensive and experienced" pastoral care team was singled out for praise, being described as a "huge strength of the school, embodying the values and ethos they wish to promote".

The report also stated: "The excellent personal development of all pupils is a direct result of the values and ethos of the school. This is driven by the senior leadership team through the innovative use of assembly and tutorial time, endorsed by the governing body, thus fulfilling the aim to develop young adults with character."

Mr Jackson added: "It is a pleasure to work alongside so many talented professionals and be part of such a special, unique community, and we are excited about what the future holds for our School."

To learn more about a Barney Education and its 'Excellent' provision, the school is hosting a Whole School Open Morning (Saturday 2nd March 2024) and a Sixth Form Information Evening (Tuesday 27th February 2024).

You can book your place by contacting a member of the school's welcoming Admissions Team on 01833 696030 or by emailing admissions@barneyschool.org.uk

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in all areas
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Inspectorate, 2023



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The importance of philanthropy

By Geoffrey Stanford, Headmaster of Newcastle Royal Grammar School.



We recently held a Philanthropy evening at the RGS, inviting members from all corners of our school community to celebrate the diversity of the RGS in a bid to drum up continued support for RGS Bursaries and RGS Partnerships. Attendees included existing donors and corporate partners as well as a range of alumni, current and former parents, hosted by RGS students.

The premise of the whole event was a shared ambition for social mobility in the North East and at the heart of this, is our newly launched 'RGS Gives' campaign.

Recognising that the ability of 1 in 16 students to attend the RGS is made possible through the support of many donors, our guest speaker for the event was one of our Sixth Formers, who shared his own RGS experience. He started his speech declaring: "Good evening, my name is Charlie and I'm going to build rockets!". As an exceptional, Y13 means-tested bursary student with university offers to read aerospace engineering, Charlie relished the opportunity to express his sincere thanks for the generosity of donors, who have shaped his life into a trajectory once unimaginable.



For me, the most important thing about the RGS is the people who make the place what it is and very much at the heart of this wonderful community are the bursary students, who each add so much to the collective experience of all pupils. In the coming admissions round, we anticipate increasing bursary numbers from 84 this year to 90 in September as a result of the continuing generosity of donors. However, as in every year, we have far more deserving candidates apply than we can possibly find the funds to support. This is particularly important to me because I understand the benefit of bursary support being transformational across generations.



My education and life chances were made possible as a result of my father receiving such support; so, my thanks to our donors came not merely from the perspective of a Headmaster glad to be able to offer opportunities to talented young people but also as an indirect beneficiary of the same philanthropic generosity.

Since the establishment of the RGS Bursary Campaign in 2002 hundreds of deserving young people have been awarded these highly sought after funded places. As we approach our 500th year in 2025, Nigel McMinn, Governor and Chair of the RGS Bursary Campaign, reminded everyone during his speech: “Thomas Horsley, five-time mayor of Newcastle, founded RGS as the City’s first school to provide a free education for the brightest students in Newcastle – those with the most potential, just like Charlie.” That early philanthropic vision of ‘doing good’ in the City has been a constant throughout and the social purpose of the school still today is absolutely front and centre in our vision of raising aspirations and attainment across the region.

We have also initiated RGS Partnerships projects to address academic disparities more widely across the region as the state schools we support are doing great work in the face of extreme, systemic issues. Funding received from The Reece Foundation, British Engines and TSG enable the school to employ specialist Partnership teachers in areas like robotics, mathematics, physics, and computer science. In the past year over 100 schools, 10,000 students, and 750 teachers have benefited, demonstrating direct positive outcomes of our RGS Partnerships work.

Our Philanthropy evening encouraged everyone to reflect on how their own personal contribution plays a part in how we collectively improve the North East’s education landscape. It is the cumulative impact of so many acts of generosity, however big or small, which leave an indelible fingerprint on the life of so many individual children. I am truly grateful to each and every one of our donors.

www.rgs.newcastle.sch.uk

Kenton School celebrates diversity with EAL Hub

Kenton School, a member of Northern Leaders Trust, has embraced its multicultural student body, with a focus on those navigating English as an additional language (EAL). With a commitment to providing outstanding education to every child, Kenton School has implemented innovative strategies to support its growing EAL community.



Proud of its diversity

Since 2019, the percentage of EAL students has more than doubled, currently comprising 33.5% of the student population. With over 631 students speaking over 25 different languages, the school celebrates the array of cultures that contribute to its inclusive environment.

The belief that every student deserves access to high-quality education is central to Kenton School's ethos. Because of this, the school has established its EAL hub, led by Katy Fawcett and Yousra El Zaltini, which offers dedicated language support. The hub is led by expert EAL support workers who, between them, are fluent in 10 languages and provide a nurturing environment where students can thrive academically and developmentally.

Challenges overcome

Despite the challenges posed by language barriers, EAL students at Kenton School have excelled academically since the hub's introduction. In 2023, they achieved record examination results, boasting a Progress 8 score of +0.84. This success can be attributed in part to the outstanding attendance rates of EAL students, surpassing the national average (92%) at 93%.

Kenton School's principal, Sinead Green says: "I am proud to highlight the progress that we have made in our EAL provision. Similarly to our motto, 'All different, all equal', which underscores our commitment to celebrating diversity, our EAL hub exemplifies our dedication to ensuring that every student thrives at Kenton School, regardless of the challenges they face.

The EAL provision at Kenton School transforms students' lives, allowing them to transition smoothly into their new school."



Ayesha

Teaching and Learning strategies

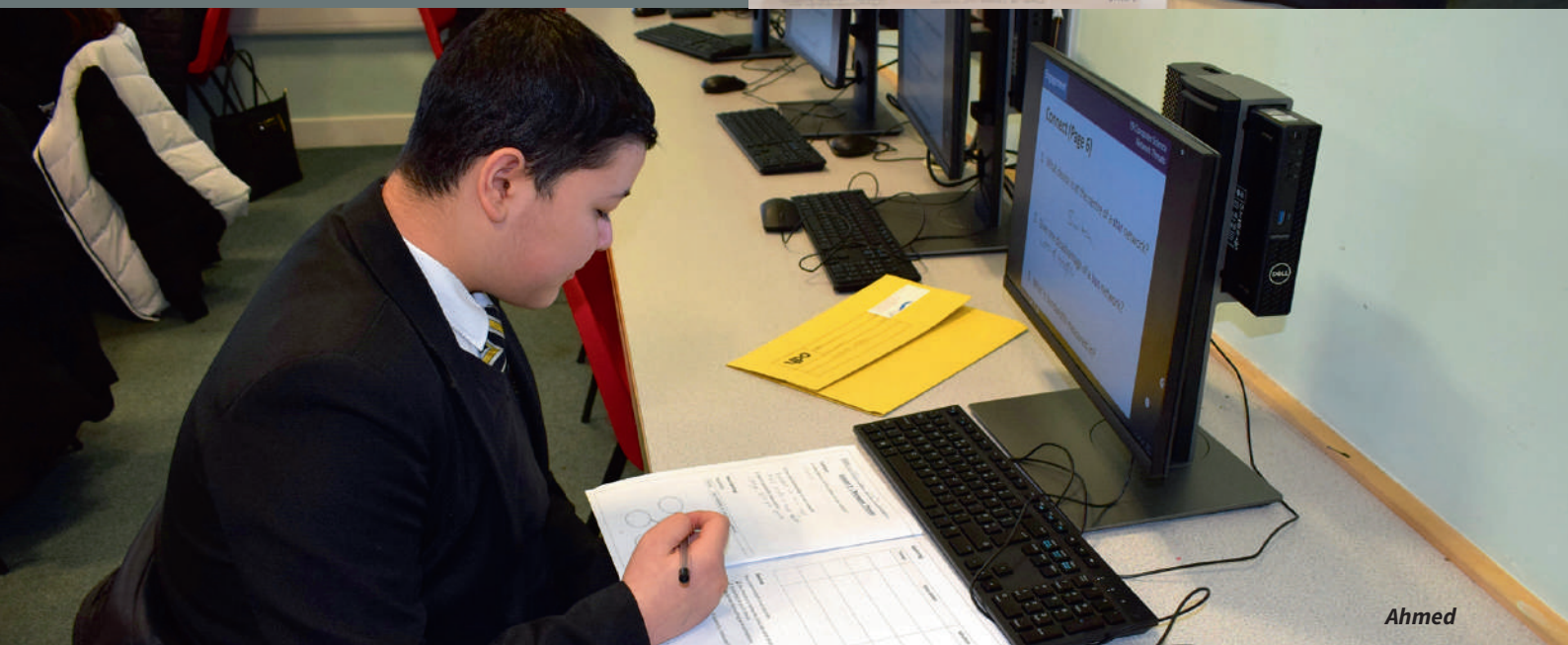
Emphasising four core Teaching and Learning strategies, the school ensures that EAL support is provided through a multitude of techniques. These strategies include:

- **Dual coding** – which uses pictures, words and symbols to represent a word.
- **Trans-Languaging** - the ability to think and use multiple languages at the same time.
- **Substitution sheets** - a table which provides a range of model sentences for students to choose from.
- **Vocabulary slides** - highlight key words relating to the curriculum with the provision of its definition, etymology, synonyms, prefix, suffix and supporting photograph.

To effectively cater to the varying proficiency levels of EAL students, Kenton School utilises a band system, ranging from Band A to Band E. Band A students are new to English and those in Band E are fluent and can operate across the curriculum to a level of competence equivalent to a student who uses English as their first language. Students are allocated to the bands through baseline tests, which enables targeted support to facilitate their linguistic development.



Nour



Ahmed

A great example of the effectiveness of the EAL support is Year 11 student Ayesha. Originally from Pakistan, Ayesha spent ages 3-12 living in Spain, followed by a move to England and Kenton School in 2021. When she arrived, she was proficiency Band A and bottom set in all subjects, struggling to manage tasks which someone with English as their first language wouldn't think twice about, for example: "I couldn't even understand my planner to know where my lessons were."

Three years on, she is thriving and her predicted grades for GCSE English, Maths and Science are all strong passes or above.

Ayesha hails her success to the supportive environment at Kenton School, saying: "The best thing about Kenton School is the way staff pay attention to me. They've shown me better methods of learning and are always very friendly." Ayesha wants to study Psychology at Kenton Sixth Form and attend a British University before returning to Spain.

Kenton School's approach to EAL provision exemplifies the transformative power of education in bridging linguistic and cultural divides. By embracing diversity and fostering an inclusive learning environment, Kenton School paves the way for every student to reach their full potential, regardless of background or language proficiency.



Duaee



Brendan Tapping

Handling crises in education

Schools have faced unprecedented challenging times in recent years from the Covid pandemic to RAAC forcing some schools to close or partially close due to safety concerns. Brendan Tapping, CEO of Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust – a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) with 30 schools across East Durham, South Tyneside, and Sunderland – shares his insights.

What significant challenges have the Trust faced in recent years?

Covid was an unprecedented challenge; things changed very quickly, and we had to be fluid to adapt. The safety of everyone was paramount, as was providing a high-quality education and ensuring there was a clear line of communication with parents and carers.

Our biggest challenge was to provide high quality education in a safe way for pupils and staff whilst also providing reassurance to staff, pupils, and their families. We had to make sure that we had appropriate policies and procedures in place and worked collaboratively to ensure they were considered responses, not knee-jerk reactions.

Three of our schools are currently affected by RAAC (St John Bosco Catholic Primary School, Sunderland, St James Catholic Primary School, Hebburn and St Bede's Catholic School & Byron Sixth Form College, Peterlee). This has caused significant challenges. We have had to plan at short notice for alternative venues for pupils to be taught face-to-face, liaise with the DfE, sort transport, deal with the logistics of health & safety, safeguarding, IT access, catering, toilet facilities and cleaning, as well as provide virtual learning, where needed.

How did the Trust face and overcome these challenges?

Covid and RAAC are both examples of live situations. They're both unprecedented, they have both involved changes in policy from the DfE and internally within the schools and the Trust and they have both required input from our central team such as finance, estates, catering and communications.

To overcome these challenges, we have had to show an enormous amount of resilience and adaptability. We have worked tirelessly behind the scenes to ensure pupils' education remains high quality and face-to-face as much as possible. This has meant other schools in our Trust working with the RAAC-affected schools to offer practical support by providing alternative venues for children to be taught and by providing peer support.

Covid meant a move to online learning and having all those resources in place already meant that we could tap into them when RAAC forced us to close and move some education online. However, face-to-face learning is always the priority and we have focused on getting all pupils back to this as quickly as possible.

What support has been put in place for pupils and staff members because of the RAAC crisis?

The children that are having to cope with the RAAC disruptions have already had to deal with Covid. Parents are worried about their children's education and exams, as well as their wellbeing, and we understand their frustrations. We will continue to do our best to provide the highest level of support we can to our pupils and families.

For our staff having had to face Covid and RAAC, I'm conscious that they could become crisis weary. Our people will always go that extra mile, so we need to make sure they are taking breaks and time for themselves. Everyone at the Trust also has access to online support and counselling.

What are the key advantages of being in a MAT, particularly in a crisis?

Headteachers can lean on each other's professional experience and work together. The heads not affected by RAAC had no hesitation in providing support, and there are lots of opportunities for peer learning and the sharing of best practice. Being part of a MAT means schools have access to our central team which gives them access to professional support such as IT, finance, HR, estates, catering and communications. This is invaluable in times of crisis.

What personal attributes are required for a strong senior leadership team?

I work with wonderful people who are thoughtful and kind. Personal attributes needed are positivity, a can-do attitude, people who suggest a range of solutions, a team willing to challenge and ask the 'what if?' questions – all these things are vital.

www.bccet.org.uk



Pupils from St. John Bosco Catholic Primary, Sunderland enjoying the grounds at Gabriel House, Sunderland where they are currently being hosted by the Sisters of Mercy convent.



Pupils from St James Catholic Primary School, Hebburn in one of the classrooms at St Joseph's Catholic Academy, Hebburn where they are currently being hosted.

Maths - an enabling tool for life

By Mr Will Scott, Principal at Dame Allan's Schools, Newcastle.

Maths education has returned to the forefront of public discussion recently, with research from education charity Teach First discovering that 54% of girls and 41% of boys lack confidence in maths. Fears have arisen that this aversion will put off pupils who are academically able to pursue careers in maths - and indeed, in STEM subjects more broadly - resulting in fewer opportunities and a notable gender bias.

Similarly, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak continues to champion a more long-term maths education up to age 18, arguing that 'maths needed to be made more accessible so children do not fear it.'

My experience of school-taught maths was probably pretty standard (40-odd years ago) but, although I have no great skill in maths today, I am probably more interested in maths than I have ever been. When I was young, I loved numbers. So much so that my parents bought me a book to keep me quiet - Figuring: the joy of numbers by the "human computer" Shakuntala Devi, where I did indeed find enjoyment in manipulating numbers, finding patterns and wrestling with mental arithmetic.

But why are we so concerned with maths taking any sort of priority in education today?

Primarily, maths is an enabling tool for life - in fact it is a multi tool. It has a lens for examining problems and a screwdriver for disassembly and reassembly of puzzles. It also has a hammer for smashing nonsense. And a light for finding your way in the dark. A bit like being able to read, write, listen and speak, maths is helpful for life. Rather than a monster to be slain, it should be seen as a companion, something that will help us along our way.

Of course, there are other useful subject tools - I can think of a few that I use from time to time, such as physics - electricity; speed, distance and time. And chemistry - cooking and painting; biology - species and evolution; geography



Will Scott

- rivers, mountains and cities. In fact the list just goes on. So why should maths command our attention for more time and longer in our learning lives?

It is important to note that maths will present learning opportunities for all of us throughout our lives. It is around us everywhere regardless of whether we recognise it or not and it underpins an understanding of many other technical matters. For example, even basic financial literacy will go a long way towards supporting children through later life.

Additionally, a bit like having a strong command of English, a confident user of maths has another language, a way of understanding the world and communicating with others. And that world is becoming increasingly full of opportunities for people that 'speak' maths, even if it is not at the core of the role such as in science research, or coding. And so education must develop to prepare our young people for the world.

In my opinion, this doesn't mean that everyone needs to do maths until age 18, but it does mean that our missed opportunity grows each and every year that young people leave school, college or university without a confident ability in maths.

And so what is the solution? As well as the importance of offering an engaging maths curriculum, I believe it starts at home. Parents make a decisive difference to their children's confidence with maths. How do we know this? Because cultural attitudes to maths are the only significant factor which describes the differences between maths scores in the UK and higher performing countries.

What should we do differently as parents, therefore? Here are my tips for parents of boys and girls alike:

- 1.** Don't let children hear that parents didn't enjoy maths, or do well at it - that's a ready made excuse.
- 2.** Do engage children in numerical puzzles and games, mental maths challenges and the like. And don't hesitate to beat them, until they beat you!
- 3.** Insist that getting things wrong is not failure. The only failure is not trying.

To find out more about Dame Allan's Schools, from Nursery to Sixth Form, please visit dameallans.co.uk

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RADISSON
MEETINGS



Northern Pride unveils first performers for Pride in the City

Drag icons, a 90s favourite, top DJs and leading tribute acts are all among the line-up unveiled today (Thurs 15 Feb) for this year's new look Northern Pride.

Pride in the City, presented in partnership with NE1, will see the annual celebration move from the Town Moor to various locations across Newcastle over the weekend of 19-21 July.

And at its core will be the Northern Pride Arena at Central Park, Times Square, where an exciting and eclectic mix of performers will take to the stage across the weekend.

On Friday 19 July Pride will launch with Proud Karaoke, brought by the team behind the popular Kroud Karaoke.

The evening will be hosted by acclaimed drag queen, Ophelia B, with tickets available from £7.50p each.

On Saturday singer Whigfield – best known for her 90s hit Saturday Night – will take to the main stage, alongside Kelly Llorena and Little Mix tribute act, Little Fix.

The arena will welcome back its popular stage takeovers, with Newcastle Mela returning for a third year.

Local talent showcase event - The Future is Queer - will head up one of the takeovers, along with Queerdo.

Sunday features an award-winning line up, with a live DJ set from acclaimed performer, Fat Tony, Ginger Johnson who won season five of Ru Paul's Drag Race UK and 2023 The Voice winners, Jen and Liv.

And "swifties" will not want to miss Totally Taylor – a tribute to Taylor Swift.

Day tickets for the Saturday and Sunday event start at £15, with more names to be announced in the near future.

Director of Northern Pride, Ste Dunn, believes the programme will have something for everyone. "We have put together a really exciting mix of entertainment that will have great appeal to people of all ages," he said.

Tickets are on sale now from www.northern-pride.com

A match made in Heaven

Newcastle Theatre Royal has announced a new co-production with multiple Olivier and Tony Award winning producer David Pugh and Cunard that will see multi award-winning West End sensation *Pride and Prejudice** (*sort of) by Isobel McArthur after Jane Austen launch a new UK tour in the North East.

Let the ruthless matchmaking begin when *Pride and Prejudice** (*sort of), a unique and audacious retelling of Jane Austen's most iconic love story, written by Isobel McArthur – one of the most exciting new talents in theatre today and who has just received acclaim in Stratford at the RSC for her new production of *Fair Maid of the West* – co-produced by Newcastle Theatre Royal with David Pugh and Cunard and directed by Isobel McArthur opens at the Grey Street venue later this year (Thu 19 – Sat 28 Sep 2024) before embarking upon a nationwide 35-date tour.

This will be the theatre's first co-production for more than 10 years and will see the triumphant launch of the



Oliver and Evening Standard Award-winning comedy *Pride & Prejudice** (*sort of) by Isobel McArthur at Newcastle Theatre Royal, where it returns after its 2023 sold-out run that received five-star reviews and standing ovations.

Men, money and microphones will be fought over in this irreverent but affectionate adaptation where the stakes couldn't be higher when it comes to romance. The show features a string of pop classics including 'Young Hearts Run Free', 'Will You Love Me Tomorrow' and 'You're So Vain'.



Let's Caper

The Caper, the popular mini-festival takeover of iconic buildings in the North East, is coming to Sunderland. In what is believed to be a world first for a civic building, Sunderland's new City Hall will host the inaugural Let's Caper@CityHall on Friday April 5th, from 7pm to midnight.

Set up to showcase a whole range of local and regional creative and cultural talent, each Caper programme includes great local food and bars, five bands, four comedians, dance lessons, DJs, live art, and an artisan night market: all in one night and all under one roof.

A packed programme on April 5th will see The Futureheads headlining the music line-up playing in a transformed-for-

the-night Council Chamber. They will be supported by the brilliant up-and-coming Sunderland singer songwriters Lottie Willis, Isabel Maria, Lily Mac, and Sara Leilah, each playing a set.

The best of North East comedy will be hosted upstairs by the ever-brilliant Alfie Joey, with Steffen Peddie and Sunderland's own Nick Cranston and Alex Redman keeping the laughs coming across the evening.

And if dancing's your thing, you're in luck as before the bands come on the Council Chamber will be the venue for Michael Jackson dance lessons provided by Sunderland's EL Dance Studio. Director, Matthew Bourne-trained Emily Lewis said, "Think learning to moon dance and the moves from Smooth Criminal, and Bad! People love learning something new and learning a new dance with a big group is just so much fun. We can't wait for the Caper."

The evening will also see Pop Rec's all vinyl DJ set playing out in City Hall's fabulous glass and steel atrium, and don't be surprised if, as well as the individual dancers, there's some Sunderland College-inspired more coordinated moves: think flash mobs perhaps!

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Putting your business in the spotlight with Sunderland Empire

Affectionately referred to as the 'West End of the North East,' Sunderland Empire has been a beacon of entertainment throughout its 117-year history.

The beautiful Grade 2 listed theatre attracts a dedicated audience from across the region, drawing in over 300,000 visitors annually to a variety of productions, including West-End musicals, one-night concerts, comedy, ballet, opera and more.

Proudly embracing its Wearside heritage, Sunderland Empire is dedicated to developing lasting and reciprocal partnerships with businesses across the North East, which has led to the establishment of the 1907 Corporate Club. This membership program offers businesses a unique opportunity to connect with potential customers while treating clients or rewarding staff with premium experiences at an array of spectacular shows.

Expanding Sunderland Empire's B2B opportunities enables the theatre to assist businesses in strengthening corporate relationships by harnessing the impact of theatre. This is achieved through a variety of customised options tailored to suit a businesses' needs and marketing goals.

Members of the 1907 Corporate Club enjoy exclusive benefits, including premium seating, dedicated hospitality packages, private pre-show areas and brand awareness.

Over the past year, the 1907 Corporate Club has welcomed an array of businesses, such as Ocado, Creo Comms, and Uber Eats to name a few, providing them with exposure to captive audiences through a range of in venue, print and digital advertising options.

The exciting partnership options extends further; from sponsoring the family favourite pantomime, to Ambassador Box or Lounge sponsorship with naming rights, and numerous other possibilities.

Few experiences compare to the exhilaration of a breathtaking performance live on stage. A show has the power to transport us from the mundane routines of daily life, offering a precious form of escapism. This remarkable experience becomes even more memorable when shared with



colleagues, potential clients, or friends, thanks to the generous ticket allocations available within the membership.

With a stellar lineup of West End productions scheduled for the upcoming year, including *Pretty Woman*, *& Juliet*, *Only Fools and Horses*, and the return of *Wicked*, alongside other anticipated productions to be announced, it is the perfect time for local businesses to show their support for the arts and align their brand with an industry leader.

In addition to sponsorship, businesses can support Sunderland Empire's award-winning Creative Learning department. A team dedicated to promoting access to performing arts for individuals of all ages, abilities, genders, races, and backgrounds.

Supported by the registered charity, the Sunderland Empire Theatre Trust, the team has gained national recognition for its diverse range of engaging projects and tailored experiences. They strive to reach those most in need by offering bespoke classes, services, and experiences to diverse groups, individuals, and schools in the region.

As a not-for-profit department, the team are dedicated in their fundraising efforts to ensure they can continue delivering excellence across community and educational engagement. With the support of local businesses, they can continue to deliver enriching experiences to the community through tailored classes, services, and experiences.

By engaging with Sunderland Empire, local businesses not only gain exposure, experience excellent performances, and network with other members but they can also contribute to the cultural vibrancy and educational enrichment of the community.

For more information on opportunities at Sunderland Empire, please contact PaulaMitchell@theambassadors.com



Paula Mitchell



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Culture Club

Jamie Bell

An award winning, international performer and songwriter and the charismatic front man with The Baldy Holly Band.

When Jamie is not rock ‘n’ rolling all over the world, he spends a lot of his time fund raising for charity. His latest adventure is cycling Lands’ End to John O’Groats to raise money for a school in Newcastle. Here, Jamie tells us about his taste in music, art, and culture.

Who is your favourite author and why?

At school, I remember reading Buddy, by Nigel Hinton. This was about a teenage lad, on a rough council estate, struggling to come to terms with his parents’ divorce and his love hate relationship with his father, a loveable rogue, whom he idolised. As a teenager I related to this, but what really captivated and intrigued me, was the accompanying weekly drama series, that we were allowed to watch as part of our curriculum. This featured Roger Daltrey as his Teddy Boy father, who loved Buddy Holly and named his son after the legend. Inevitably, the soundtrack was all Buddy Holly and was start of a musical love affair with his great music! My mother read Catherine Cookson Novels, which I would promptly become engrossed in, the minute she was finished.

What would be your three Desert Island Discs?

Buddy Holly’s *That’ll Be The Day*, which was inspired by John Wayne’s famous line, in the film *The Searchers*. A two-minute, pocket battleship of Rhythm and Blues, slick backing vocals, and cutting Stratocaster guitar, that sounds as fresh now, as it must’ve done in 1957.

Elvis Presley’s Gospel classic - *Lead Me, Guide Me*. This is the King at his most vulnerable, begging the Lord for wisdom. A stunning vocal, lyric and melody, perfect for spiritual guidance and strength when the dark skies close in. I love it.

God Only Knows. Brian Wilson’s masterpiece. The harmonies, the complex, classical chord progression and the hauntingly beautiful lyric... breath-taking.



Jamie Bell

Who is your favourite film star and why?

James Dean. He only made three films, but what a style icon. Rebel without a cause especially, literally influenced a generation. He exuded moody sex appeal and that hair style. As a kid, I wore the blue jeans, red jacket, and even had that quiff. If only he’d lived longer.

What are your top three films?

Grease. Is there a more feel-good film? Sometimes we will throw in a couple of songs from *Grease*, the floor fills every time!

La Bamba. Ritchie Valens untimely death at 17, when he had just made it big and lifted his family from poverty. So sad and moving, yet also such a triumphant story, in that his musical legacy lives on. I had the pleasure of performing for the Valens family in the USA and remain friends to this day.

The Scent of a Woman. Al Pacino’s finest hour, playing retired Colonel Slade, blinded because of juggling with hand grenades, going on his final trip with young aide Charlie. Some of the lines and acting in that film are stupendous!

Which poem left a lasting impression on you?

In Flanders fields by John McCrae.

I was always brought up on tales of my Great Grandfathers service in the First World War and I was taught to respect the sacrifice of the fallen. This poem with its haunting imagery of death at the front, has always moved me and continues to, to this day.

What box sets have you enjoyed?

Roots, the original series, Band of Brothers, and I have to admit, my wife got me engrossed in the *Thorn Birds*!

Who is your favourite artist or performer?

The late, great Charles Hardin Holley, aka Buddy

Holly (his original name was Holley, but the e was accidentally dropped on a recording contract, and it remained as Holly). A musical chameleon who had only 18 months to make his mark on the music world. Chart domination followed swiftly by tragedy. Yet his influence is still felt today. Every day is a Holly day!

What is your favourite venue?

The Surf Ballroom in Clear Lake Iowa. A musical time machine, set in the ‘50s. To stand on that stage and perform, where Buddy Holly played his final show. Priceless.

Which musical instrument do you particularly enjoy?

I am a guitarist of many years’ experience (amazing what 3 chords can achieve!) I love my Gibson guitars and own a few. In particular, I have a Gibson J200 true vintage, the exact 1957 model that Elvis played, although I’d be a rich man, if it was the one he owned!

From the world of Arts and Culture who would be your ideal dinner party guests?

The Everly Brothers for some heavenly background music, Marilyn Monroe and Jayne Mansfield serving drinks, Gordon Ramsay cooking up a storm Buddy Holly, Elvis Presley, Frank Sinatra and Al Jolson debating the best style of music, Henry the 8th, Julius Caesar, Alexander the Great and Napoleon debating who had the biggest ego, and Jesus Christ, explaining to everyone where they went wrong, and to do unto others, as you would have done unto you. I think that would be one hell of a party.

To help Jamie on his fundraising journey for Sir Charles Parsons School:
www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/baldy-holly

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Jason Isaacs

Jason Isaacs and his mini big band is coming to town

Jason Isaacs, the ITV Peoples Crooner award winner, is set to make a triumphant return to his hometown for a one-off gig at the iconic Tyne Theatre and Opera House on June 8, 2024. Fresh from the Cayman Islands, Jason is bringing his Mini Big Band to deliver a night of classic tunes and unforgettable performances.

Born in Newcastle, Jason's musical journey began when he received a saxophone as a Christmas gift from his parents, sparking a passion that would shape his life. With his band leader Darren Irwin, Jason has assembled an all-star band comprising some of the finest musicians from the UK, predominantly hailing from the North East of England.

The show promises an evening of timeless

rat pack classics, including hits like 'Come Fly With Me,' 'Mr. Bo Jangles,' and 'Ain't That a Kick in the Head.' Expect to be serenaded with the enchanting sounds of Louis Prima, Bobby Darrin, Andy Williams, and Elvis, along with a few surprises, all delivered with Jason's award-winning vocals and cool saxophone playing.

Having honed his musical skills through years of dedication and self-teaching, Jason's journey took him from Bangkok to New York, playing with notable figures like Blue Lou of the Blues Brothers and sharing the stage with the legendary Tony Bennett. His musical adventures continued through Munich and Marbella, ultimately leading him back to Newcastle, where he embraced his love for the rat pack classics and big band accompaniment.

Critics have praised Jason Isaacs for his

commanding stage presence and exceptional talent, with endorsements from respected figures like Pete Waterman, Steve Norman of Spandau Ballet, and West End Producer Roger Bruce.

The upcoming performance at the Tyne Theatre & Opera House promises to be a night of high-energy entertainment, with Jason's Mini Big Band delivering a show that captures the spirit of the swinging era. Audience engagement and fun are at the forefront of the performance, ensuring a memorable experience for all.

Don't miss your chance to witness Jason Isaacs and His Mini Big Band in action. Tickets for the June 8, 2024, show are available now at Tyne Theatre & Opera House. www.tynetheatreandoperahouse.uk



Nurturing Young Talent – Silk Route Spirits

Silk Route Spirits are dedicated to using the young talent in the region, which is why they have joined forces with an inspiring creative designer at Beach Design, Hally Mason.

Silk Route Spirits Entering the world of opportunity through the branding of high-quality spirits dedicated to the Silk Road Trading Route.

The company is well-established and focuses on creating beautiful, botanical flavoured gins.

After conceiving the idea in the beginning of 2022, the business was up and running by the end of that year. Two committed gin lovers with big goals share their journey with others, creating opportunities within their brand and encouraging the younger generation to walk along the Old Silk Road.

Hally is a 22-year-old, a fine artist now working at Tallantynes Gallery in Morpeth, worked on the Silk Route Spirits brand while working at Beach Design as a junior graphic designer. Hally took a big part in creating the business' iconic branding on the bottle, stating, "I helped design the Silk Route dragon and creature concept and executed the illustration."

After prompting Hally to share her inspiration, she revealed "Due to the gin brand being



directly inspired by the trading route of the Silk Road the design was heavily influenced by the vibrant colours of the spices and fabrics traded."

Each bottle displays many colours of blue hues alongside pale greens, yellows, or deep purples. Hally's passion to create something unique to Mark and Phil's brand is echoed after expressing that they wanted to create "a design that would stand out against competitors when it sat on the shelf."

The opportunity given to Hally allowed her to beautifully illustrate her art. Despite no longer working at Beach Design who support Silk



Hally Mason

Route Spirits with their design material, the time spent working alongside Silk Route Spirits encouraged a window of creative freedom that led down many artistic roads which the Silk Route Spirits team would like to share with other young learners. Silk Route Spirits' rum bottle is currently being finalised, where it will once again showcase another design that Hally took part in creating. After her experience working on the Silk Route Spirits illustration work, Hally has since voiced: "Whatever I end up doing, I just know it has to be art."

www.silkroutespirits.co.uk



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“

...When it's run properly, a pub is an excellent business and is worthy of investment...

Lots of cheer at Blackrose Pubs

Pub ownership and management on tap.

It's highly likely that a decent percentage of you reading this will have visited a pub over the last week or so. For some of you it might be a sharpener after work or perhaps you're going there on an evening with friends and family to watch the match on TV or grab some traditional pub food.

No matter what your reason, you are likely to see some familiar faces and enjoy some hospitality.

Pubs are...and always will be...a central part of a community. Sadly, a staggering number of pubs have closed over the last few years...but perhaps that shouldn't have been the case.

"Without doubt the pub industry...much like the rest of the hospitality business...is going through a tricky time," said Daren Knipe, Managing Director of Blackrose Pubs. "But a lot of those pubs shouldn't have closed...they didn't need to. It means that the community loses a vital facility. It's the usual story, if you take something for granted you don't appreciate how important it was until it's gone.

We believe we could have saved a lot of those pubs by looking at their business model and seeing where changes could...and should...have been made before it was too late. The biggest problem is that a lot of pubs are stuck in a rut and don't move with the times. They need to anticipate how market trends vary and ensure that they take note of what customers are looking for. There is no reason why a lot of those pubs could have thrived."

Daren is an ideal person to know what works for pubs...and what doesn't. He comes from a family of landlords and landladies...he started work collecting glasses in a working men's club before joining Whitbread at the age of 18. Within a year he'd become a manager and by 2000 had joined Scottish and Newcastle as an Area Manager. In other words, he's seen the pub business from several angles...from landlords, to supplier, to regional manager and has extensive knowledge of how a pub can move with the times.

And now he's in a position to put his experience to use.

"Towards the end of last year, I purchased the Blackrose Pubs business brand. The portfolio is a mixture of pubs we own outright and pubs we operate on behalf of clients. In some cases the client will just be an owner/manager who needs help to run their own single pub; in other cases we run pubs on behalf of other companies.

We can also tailor what sort of assistance we provide. We can run their entire operation or we can help them with certain aspects of the business like accounts, payroll, dealing with suppliers and ensuring the best deals; recruitment, stock management, marketing, HR, auditing etc.

Nothing is 'off the shelf.' If a client wants us to run their operation, we research their business and what the local



community is looking for. We can also look at their costs. In other words, if a pub or an operating company needs help...we're there to provide it."

Blackrose Pubs is a company worth watching. Within the next year or so, Daren is intending to add up to 100 pubs to firm's portfolio. It'll be a mixture of pubs owned by a chain and pubs which are owned by a single person. He's also looking to assist individuals and businesses which are looking to invest in pubs.

"When it's run properly, a pub is an excellent business and is worthy of investment. We can help investors with every aspect of the pub business and run pubs on their behalf. We can boost their investment and help them expand. We operate as their partner."

So, if you are looking to invest in the pub business or perhaps you need some help and advice about your current business, the best idea is to speak to Daren and his team at Blackrose Pubs.

Go onto their website, www.blackrosepubs.com where you'll find all of their contact details.

**All of this has given us a thirst.
Mine's a pint of light ale please.**



Hotel Indigo Newcastle transformation takes shape with new owners' plans

KE Hotels, a growing independent hotel owner and operator, has announced its innovative plans for the transformation of Hotel Indigo Newcastle this Spring.

Since taking over the property in March 2023, KE Hotels has embarked on an extensive £2 million refurbishment project planned to upgrade their guest's experience and redefine the hotel's position within the industry and city centre.

The ongoing renovations include hotel rooms, reception, lobby, and connecting restaurant. The rooms, undergoing a modern and inviting redesign, will look to create a more homely atmosphere with well-equipped interiors. The lounge and hotel reception areas are also being renovated to offer guests a more friendly and seamless experience, ensuring that every guest feels at home from the moment they arrive.

KE Hotels upgrade for Hotel Indigo Newcastle focuses on creating an environment and service that provides more than just accommodation but a memorable experience for those visiting Newcastle. The new and improved Hotel plans to cater to a wider audience, from those travelling for business and looking for a relaxed and well-connected space to those visiting the city, whether that be for an event, night out or weekend away.

Located right in the centre of Newcastle, Hotel Indigo's prime location is the perfect destination for those visiting the region, with easy access to local attractions and public transport.

KE Hotels has also expressed its dedication to building strong connections with the local community, creating Hotel Indigo Newcastle as a welcoming hub for both locals and visitors.

Sunderland Rugby Club celebrates 150th anniversary

A landmark anniversary for one of the UK's oldest rugby clubs will be celebrated by the publication of a special booklet to mark the occasion.

Sunderland Football Club – now known as Sunderland Rugby Football Club – has been in existence since the 1873/4 season – and still operates today from Ashbrooke Sports Club.

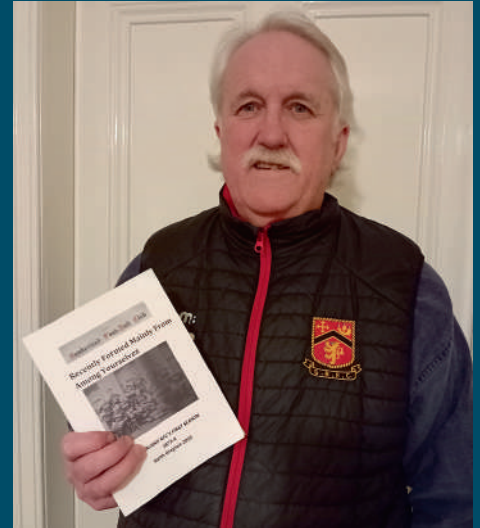
And now sports and local history lovers can enjoy a look back at the remarkable history of the organisation, thanks to the support of digital print company, WTTB.

The anniversary booklet has been compiled by local historian and writer, Keith Grigson, who has also been in charge of the Ashbrooke sports archive for the past 40 years.

"We are very lucky to have an extensive amount of information and we couldn't really let this occasion pass without using it," said Keith.

Along with charting the history of the club, the booklet features the remarkable story of Alfred Hudson, a member of the original rugby side and who's kit was found intact in the bottom of a trunk by sheer chance by one of his family members.

Still in first class condition, there are talks of parts of it being displayed at the World Rugby Museum at Twickenham at some point, with hopes that it will also be exhibited in Sunderland later this year.



"Given that most players at that time would have one set of kit that would have to last them their whole career, it's amazing that it is in such incredible condition," said Keith.

"Again, it was a story I felt needed to be told as part of the booklet."

When he decided to produce the booklet Keith approached Louise Stephenson, Managing Director of WTTB which is based at Sunderland BIC, and whose son William is a rising star at the rugby club.

"Louise was fantastic and has produced the booklet for us so we can not only give some copies away but also sell them to help support the club," he said.

"I am really grateful for her brilliant support."

Europe's biggest scare convention heads to the North East...

The North East's award-winning scare attraction can add another accolade to its list – after being chosen to host a prestigious convention.

Psycho Path, based at Lintz Hall Farm, County Durham, was last year voted the best scream park in the country by ScareCON – Europe's only convention dedicated to the fast growing scare attraction industry.

And now ScareCON has announced that this year it is bringing the event north – and holding it at Psycho Path.

The convention has previously been held at leisure outlets such as Thorpe Park and Alton Towers, but on June 5, Psycho Path will welcome hundreds of people from all sectors of the industry and community who congregate annually at the event to discuss and swap ideas, discover new innovations and buy props for their attractions and shows.

This venue will give delegates the opportunity to visit a number of Psycho Path's scare experiences, explore an expanded range of vendors and attend talks.



And the event will culminate in the annual Scare Ball, which includes an exclusive afterparty event as well as the live award ceremony – plus a surprise act.

ScareCON has a reputation for moving around the country to ensure all areas of the UK are covered, and the ever-growing presence of scare events in the North East has ensured this year's event will take place at Psycho Path.

"Delegates love the fact that we can move the event around to different venues, which means that more of the scare attraction population can see different events that they may not have been able to visit before," said Michael Bolton of ScareCON.

Director of Psycho Path, Christiano Crawford, said the team were thrilled to be hosting the convention.

"This is an incredibly exciting event to be welcoming to the North as well as on a personal level for us at Psycho Path – it's a real feather in our cap to be honoured."



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No exchange necessary

By Jackie Marston

I was invited to try out the Sunday lunch menu at Browns at the Exchange 1856 in North Shields recently, after we held an event there, which featured the lovely Katie Price. It was an adult pantomime, and it was a tad on the rude side, but boy it went down well with the audience, so much so that it's pencilled in again for 2025!



The venue is absolutely lovely and outside Browns is a smashing little beer garden-type area, which I should imagine is awesome in the summer. The doors all open too, which would make it a great place to enjoy long boozy weekend afternoons. It has bistro-style vibes, a bit like an upmarket wine bar that you feel comfortable in, in a formal dress or a pair of jeans.

I ordered an espresso martini and hats off to the guy that made it, it was one of the nicest I have ever had. The froth on the top was there to stay and the taste was sublime.

Richard started his meal with a Scotch egg, which was perfectly done, with runny yolk and nice, peppery sausage. It was served with chilli jam and a big hit with hubby. I went for the tomato, goats' cheese, and caramelised onion tart. This was served with a leafy salad, tangy balsamic vinegar and was delicious, but too large a portion for me, to be honest. Hubby sorted that problem out!

The main course is the star of the show here though, I chose lamb and Richard went with the trio meat special, which consisted of chicken, pork, and beef. All four meats were as tender as they could be and cooked to perfection. There was honey roast carrots on the plate, which were

crunchy, sweet and a great accompaniment to the lunch. It also came with suede, mashed potatoes, crunchy roast potatoes, a giant Yorkshire pudding and mixed greens. This was a lovely, seasoned-perfectly plate of food and every mouthful was divine. The gravy was tasty too, which is always a must for me.

We decided to try the sticky toffee pudding with ice-cream for dessert, which was as light as a feather, which is just as well, as there was a lot of food and great value for money. The ice-cream was lovely and creamy too, with two generous scoops.

The whole bill came to £80.40, which included a small white wine, a medium red wine, a pint of lager and an espresso coffee, which we thought was exceptionally good value for money.

The staff are great too, really polite, and knowledgeable. If you think that the Quayside is the only place for a good Sunday lunch in North Shields, then think again, Browns is definitely worth a visit.

Browns restaurant at the Exchange 1856, North Shields.
www.brownsattheexchange.com
 0191 432 5341.



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Sunday bliss

By Michael Grahmslaw

My daughter Holly is a recent Durham University graduate and the cathedral city has long been a firm favourite of the Grahmslaw clan.

Therefore the chance to return and review Sunday lunch at Whitechurch was an opportunity that we grasped.

On a warm February day my wife Lisa and I made the short journey down from Northern Insight HQ to a venue we remembered well.

A stone's throw from the main University campus Whitechurch prides itself on serving fresh locally sourced produce whilst offering a unique dining experience for patrons who appreciate high quality ingredients and a commitment to local farmers and suppliers.

Upon arrival we were greeted by the cheeriest of welcomes and shown to a comfortable table.

The venue has a lovely rustic feel and was already busy with an eclectic mix of families and students.

The impressive outdoor area was also buzzing with groups enjoying a rare glimpse of Winter sunshine.

Booking ahead for Sunday lunch is highly recommended and it was easy to see why when I saw some of the hearty grub being served whilst we perused the bill menu over a lovely glass of chilled white wine.

With a choice of four starters, four main courses and four desserts the menu is gloriously simple and effective.

I kicked off with roasted red pepper and tomato soup. This was a delicious and comforting dish full of aromatic herbs and spices. Served with two chunky slabs of sourdough bread it provided the perfect pick me up after the excesses of the previous night.

Lisa opted for cod and spring onion fritters drizzled generously with a rich hollandaise sauce. This added a luxurious touch to the dish providing richness and tanginess to perfectly complement the flavours of the crispy fritters.

She pronounced it delicious.

If the starters were impressive then the main courses were no less so.

Lisa chose Chicken Supreme which was beautifully cooked with the meat tender and juicy. I opted for beef rump which was lean and full of flavour.

Both dishes were accompanied by roast potatoes, carrots, cheesy leeks, braised peas and piping hot gravy. Special mention must be made for the most amazing Yorkshire puddings which had a light and airy texture and crisp outer shell. They provided the perfect accompaniment to this fabulous meal.

The dessert menu was equally mouthwatering feeling replete we sidestepped till next time. I made a mental note to try the Tiramisu cheesecake on return.

Service was friendly and attentive throughout.

Whitechurch is part of ZEN Group which also includes TANGO Social Bar and Kitchen, Zen (Thai Asian Dining) and The Rabbit Hole (Cantonese Fusion Dining) The owners Sam Gadd and Zak Newton have excited plans for the group in 2024.

Definitely one we'd recommend. If only every day could be like Sunday.

For further information visit their excellent website www.whitechurchdurham.com



Welcome to our world

Four amazing venues in Durham



With the acquisition of Whitechurch, the brand new opening of Tango, the outstanding refurbishment of The Rabbit Hole and the original and best pan Thai-Asian dining sanctuary, Zen coming up to it's 18th year of service, it really is exciting times for Zen Group and diners in Durham.

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The race for the best seat at the restaurant is over

Everyone gets the best view. We've all been there. While one side of the table is admiring the view or watching the steady flow of people coming and going, the other side is facing a wall. It can make or break the entire occasion.

But, what about if everyone had the best seats and the most interesting or dramatic view?

How about sitting amongst the sand dunes on a Northumberland beach, or what about looking down onto Grasmere from the top of the Lion and the Lamb, or following the route of Hadrian's Wall.

And why not have to worry about what you should eat.

There is a solution. Why not have a meal prepared by a top local chef...and why not enjoy that meal in a place where everyone can enjoy the scenery?

Oh and you'll have been directed along the route by an experienced guide who knows some of the best places in the region to grab those stunning views.

A healthy walk in the fresh air with lunch provided along the way. That is exactly what you get with Chris Reay and his team at Fells' Kitchen.

Chris has been a chef in the North East for over 25 years and in 1998 he formed his own company...Epicurus (www.epicurus.co.uk)...which has grown into a highly regarded catering, equipment hire and staff hire company.

"The idea initially started as something I was doing with friends and family," said Chris. "We'd go for a hike and, because of my background as a chef, I was invariably 'volunteered' to sort out the catering. Word spread as to what I could do and before I knew it I had people asking whether I could also provide them with lunch in a remote area. I've spent many years walking and camping in The Cheviots and The Lake District, so could always suggest somewhere really interesting and frequently in a place where they'd never been.





And that was when I set-up Fells' Kitchen. I lead people out into the hills or coast, and serve them lunch. I cook them a gourmet meal over a wood fired stove.

And you'll be in safe hands. Chris is a qualified Mountain Leader and can now safely take groups of people into the hills and mountains of the UK.

It's hard to think of a more relaxing but healthy way to clear your head and get some exercise when you also know that at some point Chris will create a true gourmet meal which is very likely going to have a backdrop that you could never expect to see in a High Street restaurant.

And of course, having been a time-served chef for over 25 years, you can ask Chris to come-up with something that is your favourite dish, or perhaps there's something you'd like to impress your partner with. Or how about using Chris as a works outing? Put it this way, your clients or colleagues won't forget the unique experience.

Oh...and if you are by chance reading this and love the idea of what Chris can provide...but you come from outside the North East of England...not a problem. Chris is happy to travel anywhere in the UK by prior arrangement.



The best idea is to go onto Chris's website... www.fellskitchen.co.uk...and check out the shop page for general bookable experience days.

Alternatively, for private bookings, you can contact him directly to discuss possible dates & locations. This is best if you have a group of up to 6 or 8 and want to organise a special birthday, corporate day or event for someone.

Fells' Kitchen – catered outdoor adventures; a unique experience of exhilarating exercise with nature as your background, and then relax with a meal prepared in front of you by one of the region's most experienced chefs.

Want to get a flavour of what Chris is up to with Fells' Kitchen...go onto Instagram @fellskitchen or follow him on Facebook @fellskitchenadventures





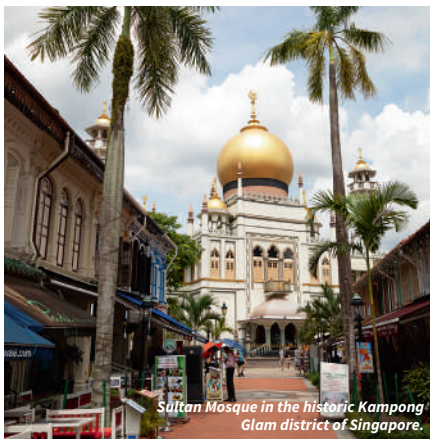
Hitting the roof in Singapore

By Stuart Forster

Singapore is by no means short of rooftop experiences. Whether it's bars, swimming pools or observation platforms, the island's tropical climate helps make it pleasurable to spend evenings outdoors in a destination that many travellers visit only fleetingly, between long-haul flights.

At the Smoke and Mirrors cocktail bar, on the roof of the National Gallery Singapore, I gaze through the pleasantly warm night in the direction of Marina Bay. Jets of water, illuminated blue, are blasting upwards accompanied by music in the Marina Bay Sands' Spectra light and water show as the iconic buildings behind shift colour.

My presence, you may think, must be a reward for detailed pre-trip research? It's pure serendipity that I'm here witnessing the nightly 8.00 pm spectacle. As I discover, there's another at 9.00 pm plus a further one at 10.00 pm on Fridays and Saturdays.



Earlier, I learnt that Allied troops were forced to parade along St Andrew's Road, directly in front of the art gallery, following the surrender of Singapore to Japanese forces in February 1942. The freshly revamped Battlebox – a museum occupying the wartime command bunker, in Fort Canning Park – conveys the story of blunders and bad decisions that lead to one of British military history's most humiliating episodes. Singaporeans suffered during the brutal occupation that followed, as is documented in the free-to-visit Fort Canning Heritage Gallery.

As someone who appreciates contemporary architecture, I also made it my mission to go online and book a visit to the CapitaSpring skyscraper at 88 Market Street. The result of an impactful collaboration between Bjarke Ingels Group and Carlo Ratti, the 280-metre tall mixed-use building presents panoramic views from its 1-Arden Sky Garden on the 51st level. Open from Monday to Friday, the building also warrants visiting to experience the Green Oasis, a four-storey vertical garden between the 17th and 20th levels. It is ingeniously integrated within a framework that gives the impression some powerful giant has twisted girders to give trees and shrubs space to flourish.

CapitaSpring is free to visit, unlike the SkyPark Observation Deck on the 56th level of Marina Bay Sands, which presents paying guests with fine views of the nearby Gardens by the Bay, ships idling in the Singapore Strait and, of course, the Central Business District's skyscrapers. By contrast, only residents have access to the world's biggest rooftop infinity pool on the 57th storey. That means I can't take a dip in the pool that appears in the film *Crazy Rich Asians*.

Not quite a rooftop view, my plush bedroom

on the 20th floor of the Mandarin Oriental, Singapore – which reopened in September 2023 following a comprehensive refurb – is an ideal spot for observing a golden sunrise beyond the Singapore Flyer, the giant Ferris wheel that stands 30 metres taller than the London Eye, and the three towers of the Marina Bay Sands.

Simon Wong, the co-founder of Singapore Sidecars, explains that the iconic resort hotel's design represents a mountain. To high-rolling Chinese gamblers who believe in Feng Shui that is significant: it means the casino fortuitously lies between the water of the bay and the ersatz mountain.

Simon steers me along streets on a restored Vespa scooter. The sidecar is an exhilarating way of following stretches of the street circuit that Formula 1 cars lap during the Singapore Grand Prix. As we idle outside of the Neo-Classical building that was formerly Singapore's General Post Office and today houses the five-star Fullerton Hotel, Simon points up at the rooftop overlooking Fullerton Road and identifies it as a choice spot for viewing the race.

We then rattle past the Raffles Hotel towards Kampong Glam, the district that houses the Sultan Mosque and whose lanes are dotted with stylish boutiques and cafés. Simon explains that the street we're travelling along, Beach Road, was so named because it was by the waterfront before land reclamation during the Victorian era.

To round off the day I head to Lau Pa Sat, a market where dozens of stalls sell Singaporean street food. On Satay Street I order skewers of succulent chicken grilled over charcoal and check my phone. With so many good rooftop bars in Singapore, there must be one nearby for a nightcap.

Travel information...

Visitsingapore.com has information about places to visit, food and events in Singapore.

Singapore Sidecars (sideways.sg) sightseeing tours offer insights while heading between key attractions.

Getting there...

Emirates (emirates.com) flies from Newcastle to Singapore via Dubai.

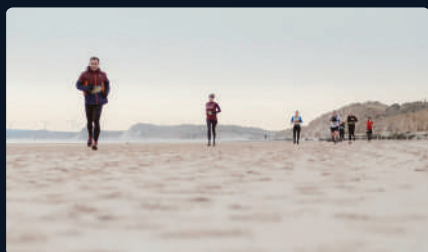
British Airways offers flights via Heathrow (britishairways.com) while **KLM** (klm.co.uk) routes through Amsterdam.





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Exciting times ahead for Sanderson Arcade as we head into Spring

There are many reasons to be excited about the shopping experience we can offer at Sanderson Arcade as we head into the Spring – and hopefully some warmer weather and brighter nights.

We will soon be welcoming a series of new stores to our lovely centre in Morpeth that is sure to enhance the shopping experience for visitors.

Sanderson's department store is stepping aside to welcome three new retailers – The White

Company, Oliver Bonas and a third store which will be announced soon.

Luxury lifestyle retailer The White Company are due to open their newest store in early Summer – and shoppers can look forward to browsing through the company's stylish and unique collection of lifestyle products – ranging from elevated essentials for your home and wardrobe to luxury gifts.

The retail chain will be bringing its uniquely warm and minimal style to the town for the first time, offering a carefully curated range of must-haves from best-selling signature bath treats and candles to cosy cashmere socks and pyjamas.

Shoppers can expect to find everything they need for the bedroom and that perfect night's sleep right through to inspiration for those family moments and sharing stories around the dinner table.

There will also be a wide range of nursery must-haves and other products for the little ones via the store's much-loved The Little White Company brand. The shop will be located opposite the busy M&S store and adjoining the town's main car park.

Accessed from the picturesque outdoor piazza within the heart of Sanderson Arcade, the centre is also home to other premium brands including Phase Eight, Mint Velvet and Hobbs.

Meanwhile, the independent lifestyle store Oliver Bonas is also due to be opening a store at the popular centre in the coming months.

The homeware and fashion chain will stock the latest in fashion, accessories, jewellery, homeware, furniture and gifts.

The White Company and Oliver Bonas will also be joined by a third retailer, which will be confirmed at a later date, and further compliments the retail offering and overall shopping experience at the centre.

The trio of new stores comes as everyone at Sanderson Arcade is also looking forward to celebrating our 15th birthday in November.

We have big plans to celebrate the occasion, so please keep an eye out on our website and social media accounts for further details.

In addition, we are open to enquiries from any business looking to take office space with us in 2024. Any interested parties can contact Olly Jansen at olly.jansen@dransfield.co.uk

Sanderson Arcade was developed by Yorkshire based regeneration specialists, Dransfield Properties, in 2009. Still owned and managed by the company the team have brought a broad mix of more than 40 well known high street and quality independent shops and eateries to this part of Northumberland.

The shopping centre is open 7 days per week with onsite parking at Stanley Terrace, 3 hours free with parking disc (Monday – Saturday) and all-day Sunday.

For more information on Sanderson Arcade opening times, events and activities head to our website, www.sandersonarcade.co.uk

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FRI 23RD FEB	Retro Decades Disco Includes Village party food & disco	£20pp	2 FOR 1 TICKETS
SAT 9TH MAR	ABBA Duo Live Tribute Show Includes 2 course dinner & live act	£30pp	
FRI 29TH MAR	Back to the 90's with Phats & Small Includes Village party food & live act	£25pp	
SUN 28TH APR	Club Classics Live Singer & Sax Party Night Includes Village party food, live act & sax player	£25pp	
FRI 10TH MAY	Retro Decades Disco Includes Village party food & disco	£20pp	
SUN 26TH MAY	Ultimate Divas Live Tribute Show Includes 2 course dinner & live act	£30pp	
FRI 28TH JUN	Retro Decades Disco Includes Village party food & disco	£20pp	
FRI 12TH JULY	Take That Tour Includes Village party food & live act	£25pp	
FRI 26TH JULY	Skools Out for Summer Disco Includes Village party food, disco & DJ	£20pp	
SAT 31ST AUG	80's Boogie Bingo Includes disco & DJ	£15pp	

VILLAGE

BOOK TICKETS HERE:



Terms and conditions apply. Events are subject to change. Event details are correct at time of print. Take That and Olly Murs Tour is excluded from all discounts. Offers cannot be in conjunction with any other offers or discounts.



Motel Mexicana is bringing the latin love...

Eagle-eyed passers-by will have noticed an intriguing new frontage on a Newcastle building.



The former Bijoux night club is currently adorned with bright and colourful imagery and symbols along with the cryptic message “good things are coming.”

It may all be happening behind closed doors at present, but not for much longer as Easter weekend will see the launch of Motel Mexicana, bringing together everything that is fabulous about Latin food, drink and music.

The credentials of the team who are behind this new Mosley Street venue are impeccable.

Nigel Holliday and Matt Smyth are co owners of one of Tyneside's most celebrated clubs, Tup Tup Palace, Psycho Path, the award-winning scare attraction, and many projects within the hospitality sector. And they have joined forces with Andrew McGuigan, formerly of world renowned advertising agency Saatchi & Saatchi, who has relocated to the North East.

And they are using all of their expertise to create a new kind of venue, which will transport guests from Columbia to Venezuela, from Mexico to Spain – in fact virtually every Latin - influenced country on the planet is being tapped for inspiration.

The group took over Bijoux, which had been empty for around nine months and are currently hard at work, transforming the four floors into something very special.

Nigel said that the aim was “to create a venue which would be exciting and fun with lots of live music, great food and drinks” aimed at attracting both a young and older crowd.

Although there’ll be an exciting range of drinks and cocktails on offer, not surprisingly tequila will feature heavily.

“First it was gin and then it was rum and now tequila is definitely the next big thing,” said Nigel.

“There’s lots of celebrities who have created their own brands – everyone from George Clooney to Kendall Jenner – and we are going to reflect that huge amount of interest in the spirit.”

“We are going all out to create a really brilliant Latin vibe, bringing in influences from across South America as well as Mexico and Spain,” he said.

Matt and Andrew’s wives, who are from Spain and Columbia respectively, are also involved, ensuring that every aspect of Motel Mexicana is authentically Latin.

The initial plan is for the venue to be open from 4pm until late Sunday to Friday and then from noon until late on Saturdays.

The second phase will see the third floor turned into a motel, with one large, multiple occupancy bedroom – again with the same



Latin style – which can be booked for large groups.

The fourth floor will become a roof top garden bar with plans to install a retractable glass roof and which will make it a perfect

outdoor space.

“It’s something really new for Newcastle and we have brought all of our joint experience in creating places and events with the wow factor to Motel Mexicana,” said Nigel.





Head over to Osters

By Michael Grahamslaw

Being a huge fan of Jesmond's Lovage – which has quickly captured the hearts of local foodies – I was excited to visit their sister-venue, Osters.

The restaurant sits at the heart of Gosforth High Street and offers diners a local, independent eatery to eat, drink and relax with friends.

Much like Lovage, which was recently awarded Michelin Guide status, Osters has culinary aspirations but keeps things real with homespun dishes sourcing local produce and foraged ingredients.

Its menu is simple, seasonal and fresh.

My last visit to the venue was to the old Pizza Express site, and it's fair to say it's had quite the 'glow-up' since.

The dining area comprises many nicely-spaced tables with old-school table lamps creating an immediate elegance and intimacy. Brown leather seating is perfect for kicking back while various nautical bric-a-brac hints at some of the seafood dishes to follow.

Most invitingly, there's also a well-stocked bar featuring our favourite wines, beers and spirits.

It would be a bottle each of Peroni Red for my

son Jack and I, a crisp palate opener. It's also worth noting their homemade 'Cocktails of the Week' which reflects desire to get creative while catering for current drinking trends.

But, what of the food?

Honestly? It's the type of menu where most things look appealing. Its menu is neatly divided into Meat, Fish and Vegetarian starters with a selection of snacks and starters preceding this.

First up, Jack would enjoy the lobster ravioli with fish cream and bottarga. I meanwhile kicked off with the king prawns, Nduja ragu and focaccia sourced from the local, Pink Lane Bakery.

This was washed down with a lovely bottle of Picpoul de Pinet.

Following on, Jack chose the Yorkshire duck breast with spiced carrot puree, salted celeriac and red wine jus. I opted for the R&J sirloin steak with bourbon peppercorn sauce, hand cut chips and charred baby gem lettuce.

Complementing this, we each enjoyed a small glass of house red which set the meat off exquisitely.

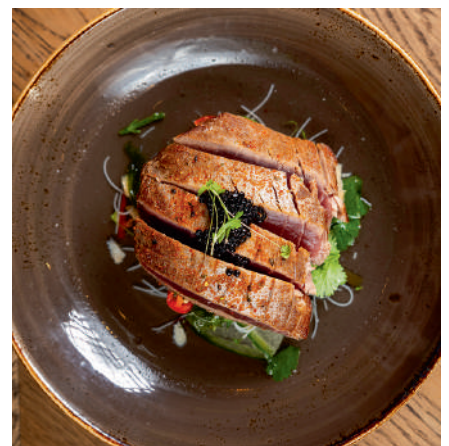
This had been so good a meal, we really wanted to round off in style. A dark chocolate tart with pistachio brittle and vanilla ice cream would provide a fitting finale.

Heading into the warmer weather, Osters is bound to serve up a host of fresh, homemade dishes befitting of the seasonal shift.

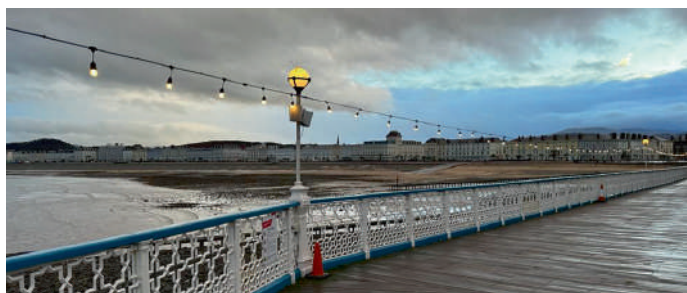
If your current dining out routine is in need of a spring clean, then this classy venue is well worth a look.

Gosforth has a new haunt for foodies.

For more information, visit www.osters.co.uk



Places to go...Llandudno and Conwy



When I visited the Conwy Valley, staying at Llanrwst, in November, I was not expecting to be back in the area so soon.

Recently, the Association of European Rail Agents, met in the Imperial Hotel, Llandudno, and I was able to have a walk along the whole pier, and pay a visit in the evening to nearby Conwy. It just confirmed what I had always thought, that this is a really special area to visit, and on the way back home my ticket only cost £20.95 which was a real bargain. I don't know what the outward fare from Yarm, or Sunderland, or Darlington might be because I was coming from a prison near Bury St Edmunds, which is another story.

On the way back, I had to divert via Edinburgh to attend a funeral, and therefore made a journey from Wales into England and Scotland, and then back to England again on a stopping service from Edinburgh Waverley to Chester-le-Street, all punctual and uncrowded despite the strong winds. Other North East stations are available.

So, back to Llandudno. I stayed two nights having travelled north on the Avanti West Coast service towards Holyhead, alighting at Llandudno Junction three miles to the south of the main resort, and actually quite close to the mediaeval town of Conwy. It used to be known as Conway until the Welsh usage prevailed as Conwy. The connecting train to Llandudno delivered a handful of passengers to the Queen of the Welsh resorts. It's a few minutes walk to the front and I checked in at 2045 which, as it happens, is the time for last orders in the restaurant. My colleagues had arrived and eaten earlier, and having dropped off my stuff in room 422 I went out on the ultimately unsuccessful search for something to eat.

The Imperial Hotel has a gym and a pool for the use of residents, and in the off season offers rooms for £69. That includes a good breakfast, but on the morning of my departure I only had a cup of coffee as the restaurant only opened at 0730, and my train was 0743. The town's good hotels are all on the Promenade, and the shops are one street back, many featuring Victorian verandahs which can be used to avoid the rain, if there is any! I found the Post Office where Alan Bates used to be postmaster before being evicted and leading the campaign for justice for subpostmasters. The man should be awarded a CBE.

Come March, all the attractions will be trading, but the Pier – longest in Wales – is free and open, and also the Home Front Museum which allows visitors to experience the sights and sounds of the Second World War. The mountain adjacent to the town is the Great Orme, which can be ascended on foot, or by tram, or by cable car. The tramcar waiting in the bottom



station is just ready to depart it seems, but it will be a few weeks yet.

I took the bus three miles to Conwy, and returned by train. Cadw, the Welsh version of English Heritage, looks after the impressive Castle, built 1283-7 which is open all year, alongside Aberconwy House, a fourteenth century merchant's house in the care of the National Trust. The Smallest House in Britain, a tiny red building on the Quay, reopens on 24th March, known as "The Smalls" although once occupied by a 6ft 3in fisherman. There is a nominal charge, but it doesn't take long for the tour. It makes the Anker's House in Chester-le-Street look positively palatial.

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Alex Nelson (Ticket Guru)

For help with bookings, email alex@nationalrail.com



Charlotte Gibbons

Luxury candlemaker with a social scent

Decorative and fragrant candles have become must-haves for many homes. When Charlotte Gibbons set up Worthy Wax to meet the growing demand for luxury, scented candles she wanted to add another ingredient to the mix.

How did the Worthy Wax story begin?

Our journey began in our family kitchen, with two little ones running around. Amidst the lockdown, the world seemed to stand still, and we found ourselves seeking creativity.

What started as a simple idea rooted in a love for candle making and a desire to make a positive impact on our local community evolved into something extraordinary. Initially selling to friends and family, our hand-poured candles gained rapid popularity. Within a few months, we were able to make our first substantial donation to the Gateshead food bank, and that's when we realised the potential of our venture.

Two years and countless candles later, we take pride in creating not just beautiful candles, but ones that can stand alongside the best in the market. More importantly, our candles serve a greater purpose by giving back to the community. At least 10% of profits will continue to be donated to Trussell Trust food banks.

Where does the name Worthy Wax come from?

The inspiration stemmed from a friend's comment on how our candle crafting contributed to a noble cause. We were drawn to this idea and the philosophy behind establishing a luxury brand, leading to the inception of Worthy Wax. Our emphasis lies on crafting premium products. Considerable effort has been invested in perfecting the various components, ranging from the use of all-natural soy wax and selecting the appropriate wicks, to crafting handmade ceramic jars and choosing the scents.

What's the product range?

Our collection features 12 signature scents crafted with the finest fragrance blends, housed in a bespoke handmade ceramic jar with soy wax and a cotton wick. You can choose between two sizes: the Classic, offering an estimated burn time of 60 hours and ideal for most rooms in your home, and the Large, designed as a luxurious and oversized centrepiece specifically for your coffee table, boasting around 120 hours of burn time.

How did you develop your fragrances?

Developing our fragrances was the fun bit! We wanted to develop a collection that had something for everyone. Layering fragrance to create our own signature scents was essential to achieve a strong, long-lasting aroma.

How do you see the candle sector and business developing?

Despite the competitive nature of the candle market, the potential for growth and innovation remains vast. Today's consumers seek not just candles, but experiences. The luxury candle market is rapidly expanding, especially with an emphasis on distinctive designs and superior fragrances, making them ideal gifts. Beyond the consumer sphere, there's potential in niche markets such as events, weddings, and spas.

We are excited to announce the latest addition to our collection: scented wax melts. We are also considering introducing refills for our ceramic jars. Numerous other concepts are under way, with plans for development over the next year or two.

We've recently established our first studio workshop here in Newcastle upon Tyne, marking a significant step forward in our journey.

How can readers shop and buy your candles?

Our full collection is available through our website, offering delivery services throughout the UK. As we grow, we anticipate selling our products in boutique stores nationwide.

How do you relax?

Running a business takes up a lot of time, and Worthy Wax is no different. But honestly, I love it. Experimenting with scents and refining our products is surprisingly relaxing for me. Still, I do make sure to carve out moments for family and friends. There's also something about getting stuck into home projects and a bit of DIY that I find really satisfying and calming.

More details here: www.worthywax.co.uk

Enhancing the pregnancy experience: The benefits of Gosforth Family Chiropractic Clinic

Pregnancy is a joyous journey, but it can also come with physical discomfort. Gosforth Family Chiropractic Clinic offers specialised care for pregnant women, addressing bodily changes and promoting overall well-being. Discover the remarkable benefits this chiropractic centre brings to local expectant mothers.

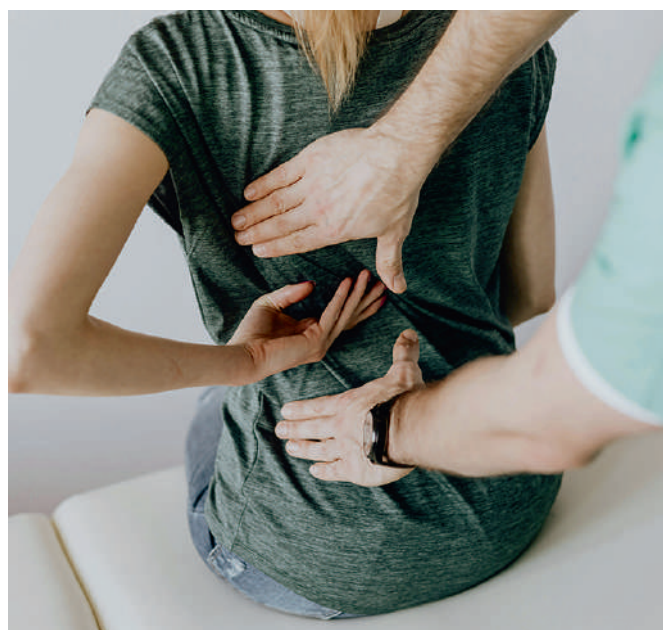
During pregnancy, women often experience musculoskeletal discomfort, including lower back pain, pelvic pain, and postural imbalances. Gosforth Family Chiropractic Clinic understands these challenges and provides relief through safe and gentle adjustments tailored specifically to pregnant women. With their expertise, expectant mothers can embrace the journey with greater comfort and ease.

Proper pelvic alignment is essential for the positioning of the baby and a smoother labour and delivery process. Gosforth Family Chiropractic Clinic specialises in promoting pelvic alignment and balance during pregnancy. Through their techniques, they minimise complications and help pregnant women feel more comfortable throughout their pregnancy.

Back pain, sciatica, and joint discomfort are common complaints during pregnancy. Gosforth Family Chiropractic Clinic offers gentle and effective chiropractic adjustments to alleviate these pains. With its focus on the unique needs of pregnant women, the clinic provides safe and non-invasive pain relief, enhancing the overall pregnancy experience.

Through specialised adjustments, they help reduce stress, improve sleep quality, and enhance overall well-being for expectant mothers.

Preparing the body for labour is essential. Gosforth Family Chiropractic Clinic focuses on pelvic alignment and balance, assisting expectant mothers in this preparation. Their chiropractic adjustments optimise pelvic function and nervous system communication, potentially leading to shorter labour times and reduced intervention rates, empowering women during childbirth.



Gosforth Family Chiropractic Clinic understands the importance of a collaborative approach to prenatal care. They work closely with you to offer full diagnosis and treatment plans to ensure you are getting the level of care you deserve.

For more information on Gosforth Chiropractic – Call 07359 188 567 or email care@gosforthfamilychiropractic.com

Nuvo Wellbeing is an award winning social enterprise established in 2008 to encourage increased fitness levels, personal development and healthy lifestyle choices – helping people and communities to feel positive, be active and live well.

We currently have a range of affordable or free dance and fitness programmes running across the region, including Children's Dance Academies, Dementia Friendly sessions, Adult Learning Disability Sessions and community dance and fitness classes.



To find out more about our services, our book a class head to: nuvowellbeing.com



The Nuvo Wellbeing 15th Anniversary Awards

Nuvo Wellbeing is an award winning social enterprise established in 2008 to encourage increased fitness levels, personal development and healthy lifestyle choices – helping people and communities to feel positive, be active and live well.

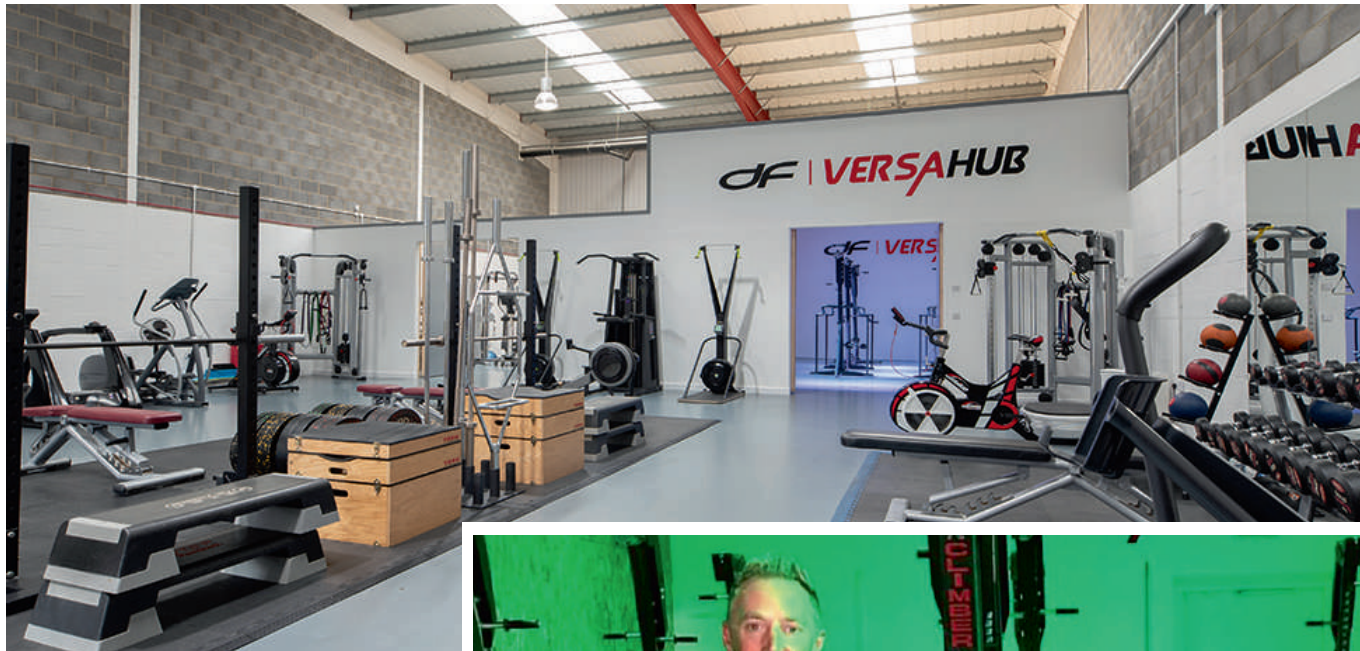
The team and Nuvo Wellbeing's wider community recently had a wonderful evening celebrating the Nuvo Wellbeing 15th Anniversary Awards. An evening celebrating the collective effort which makes Nuvo's work exceptionally special, with 150 guests who have played a role in the organisation's journey, helping reach over 48,800 beneficiaries.

The highlight of the evening was undoubtedly the dance performance by Nuvo community programme attendees. Their energy stole the show, showcasing the power of inclusivity that defines Nuvo Wellbeing.

The team at Nuvo Wellbeing would like to express a heartfelt thank you to everyone who made the evening so memorable, including Michael Flatley, the organisation's global patron, for his contribution, and to the wider community for allowing Nuvo's work to continue making an impact.







Time to reboot!

For the sake of your health, longevity of life and the ability to help fight illness look to reboot your unhealthy habits.

Treat it as a positive challenge and take pride in pushing yourself out of your comfort zone, knowing that the benefits could save your life. Many people have no idea how or where to start, both with food and exercise.

Here are just a few ideas to reboot your habits:

- Go through your cupboards and put all sugary snacks such as chocolates, biscuits, cakes etc into a bag and get them out the house, this will stop temptation. Rather than throw them away, why not donate them to a good cause
- Make a positive decision to avoid any soda drinks eg coke, lemonade or energy drinks. They are laden with sugar and are dangerous for your health, never mind your waistline. Even the zero sugar versions have ingredients that will make you crave.
- With many people working from home and the office during the week, rather than eating the normal e.g. sandwich and crisps at lunchtime, be more prepared and eat a lighter meal such as lean meat/fish with salad. If you are serious about making positive changes you will need to put more effort into your organisation.

Removing bread and snacks at lunchtime will consistently cut the amount of calories you are eating each day, therefore over the coming weeks will have a positive impact on your waistline.

- Buying, rather than making a salad at lunchtime will mean it's often accompanied with



David Fairlamb

a sauce. Although you may think you are eating healthily, the sauce may increase the calories to more than your original sandwich and crisps.

- Increase your portion sizes by adding more protein, you may raise your eyebrows at this but as long as the food is natural and healthy, it will keep you fuller for longer, therefore avoiding unhealthy snacking later in the day.
- If you are in the habit of snacking after your evening meal. Eat half your meal at the usual time then the rest later at a time you would normally reach for a snack.
- Keep drinking plenty of water which will keep you feeling full and hydrated, 2-3 litres per day.
- By eating minimal amounts of food for days and being constantly hungry hoping your weight will drop, is wishful thinking. In the end you may well feel awful and your metabolism may slow down, meaning you will end up storing more fat in the long run. Being consistent works in the long run, quick fixes don't!

Training

- If its body shape, weight loss and general fitness you are looking for: short, sharp quick workouts are the perfect way to train. Over training to compensate for a bad diet often

works in reverse and remember, you can't out train a bad diet.

- Vary your speed, pace, rest times plus the type and amount of training. Your body will get used to the same type of training, if you want results, progress your sessions and mix it up, it also stops the monotony of repeating the same workouts.
- Doing hundreds of stomach exercises per day will not make your stomach flat, stripping the fat off through a healthy diet will.
- If you are looking to improve the look of your arms, make sure you work the back of your arms (triceps) as much as the front (biceps). But remember you need to pull your body fat down first to really see a change in shape.
- Try my VersaClimber classes, they work the full body and treble the calorie burn of other aerobic machines, all in a hugely motivational 30 minute session, check my website for details.
- Working big muscle groups such as legs and bum will help supercharge your metabolism. Squats and lunges in their various forms work very well.

www.davidfairlambfitness.co.uk

David's summing up...

Stay positive, be patient and keep strong, the results are in your hands

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David Fairlamb

THERE AIN'T NO MOUNTAIN HIGH ENOUGH!

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David Fairlamb Fitness

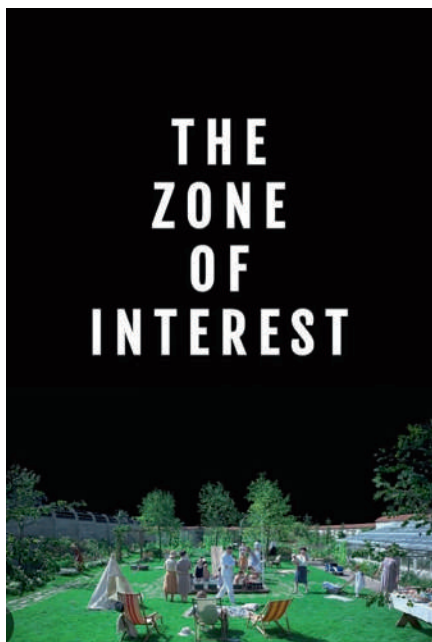




Barry Speker

The Last Word

The Year of the Dragon was celebrated in fine style in Newcastle's Chinatown. Despite the rain, vast crowds gathered in and around Stowell Street to enjoy the procession, the Lion and Dragon dances, Kung Fu demonstration, Ap Chow rowing and the ear-splitting fire-crackers. The displays seem to improve every year.



Congratulations to Jimmy Tsang and the North East Chinese Association, Edmond Ng and his Choy Lee Fut Kung Fu Club and everyone else involved.

Oppenheimer 8 Barbie 0 - not the score of an American Football game, but the respective successes in the BAFTAs. The major winner was Oppenheimer winning awards for best film, best actor and best director. Reassuring that cinematic achievement was recognised over the highest grossing flimflam and also BAFTA avoided wokeish gesture-voting on the altar of inclusion.

The haunting Jonathan Glazer film *The Zone of Interest* was also rewarded, being the first to win both best British film and best film not in the English language. In German and based on a novel by Martin Amis, it depicts the Commandant of Auschwitz, Rudolf Höss and his wife Hedwig creating an idyllic family mansion, garden and swimming pool just outside the walls of the extermination camp.

Hedwig with banality enjoys the spoils from murdered victims. The film avoids showing what is happening in the camp but this is depicted by horrific sounds from over the wall, largely ignored in the Höss household. It creates a chilling atmosphere and demonstrates the way mass murderers can totally ignore the magnitude of their inhumanity.

The death of Alexei Navalny shows the horrors of modern totalitarian regimes which self-perpetuate and prevent opposition or criticism. Navalny became internationally well known for his attempts to challenge the evils and corruption of Putin's regime.

The documentary about him revealed his optimism and courage. Having survived nerve agent poisoning, he chose to return to Russia to continue campaigning. Inevitably he was imprisoned and consigned to a Gulag in the Arctic where he died aged 47 in mysterious circumstances, his body not being released to his family. Hundreds of Russians have been detained for laying flowers for Navalny at a monument to victims of Soviet era oppression.

Where are the UN resolutions about Russia's onslaught against Ukraine and the millions displaced and killed?



When did Gaza become a British domestic political issue? A by-election in Rochdale has been turned into an election about Gaza. Some voters in the constituency, including Muslims, are asking why no one is talking about Rochdale.

What is clear is that Sir Keir Starmer and the Labour Party are being held to ransom by Muslim groups coordinating pressure on election candidates and more worryingly on MPs and councillors with large Muslim populations who are pressing for a particular stance to be taken about a foreign conflict.

Keir Starmer displayed initial sympathy and compassion for Israel after the barbaric massacre by Hamas on 7th October, and continued to accept that Israel has a right to defend itself against the further threats of repeated terror and also to recover the hostages still held in Gaza.

Starmer has been pressurised to call for a ceasefire and, like those pushing him, to ignore the reality that Hamas does not want peace with Israel and is intent on continuing its policy of destroying Israel and murdering all Jews there, and elsewhere.

The immediate result may be the election of the demagogic and violently anti-Israel George Galloway as MP for Rochdale. His invective will be even worse than Azhar Ali.

The Two-Act play, *Seconds Away*, scripted by Ian La Frenais with music and lyrics by Jimmy Nail, provided a stimulating and hilarious night at the Live Theatre. It relates the story of Fighting Frankie Tanner, a former heavy-weight boxing champion and his tragic fall from grace and the impact on his fractured family.

It is set in Newcastle but is not all doom and gloom. There is much humour and pathos as well as excellent new music, backed by musical director Peter Tickell, with Lindisfarne's Ray Laidlaw on percussion and Micky Crystal and Mary Macmaster.

A joint project with Bill Kenwright Productions it deserves a wide audience - The West End or Broadway? -with sub-titles.

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