

NORTHERN

INSIGHT

June 2024

Issue 102



**Fratelli –
The Authentic Taste of Italy**

business | built environment | technology | media | education | arts | travel | leisure | health

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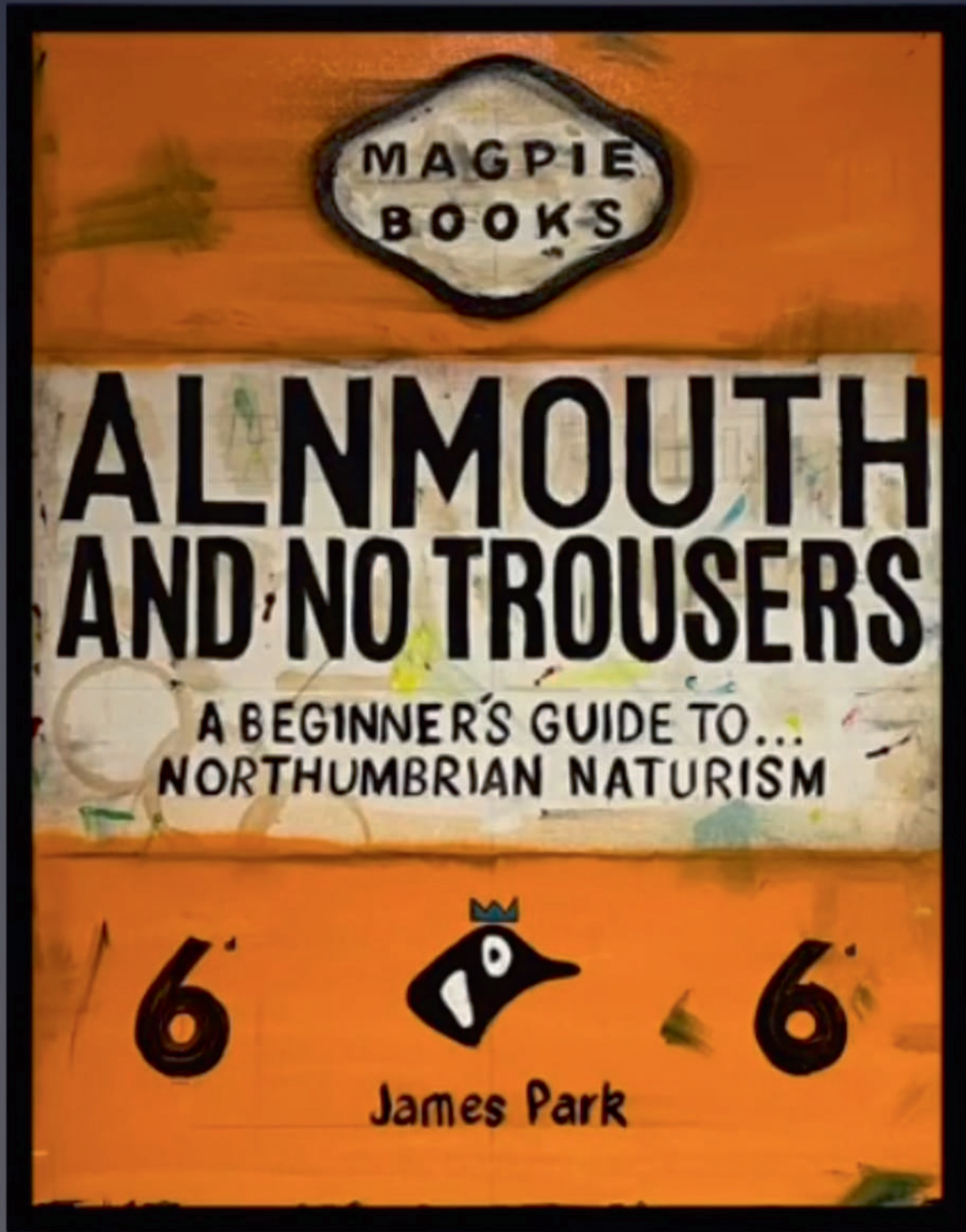
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CLIENT: Variety, the Children's Charity

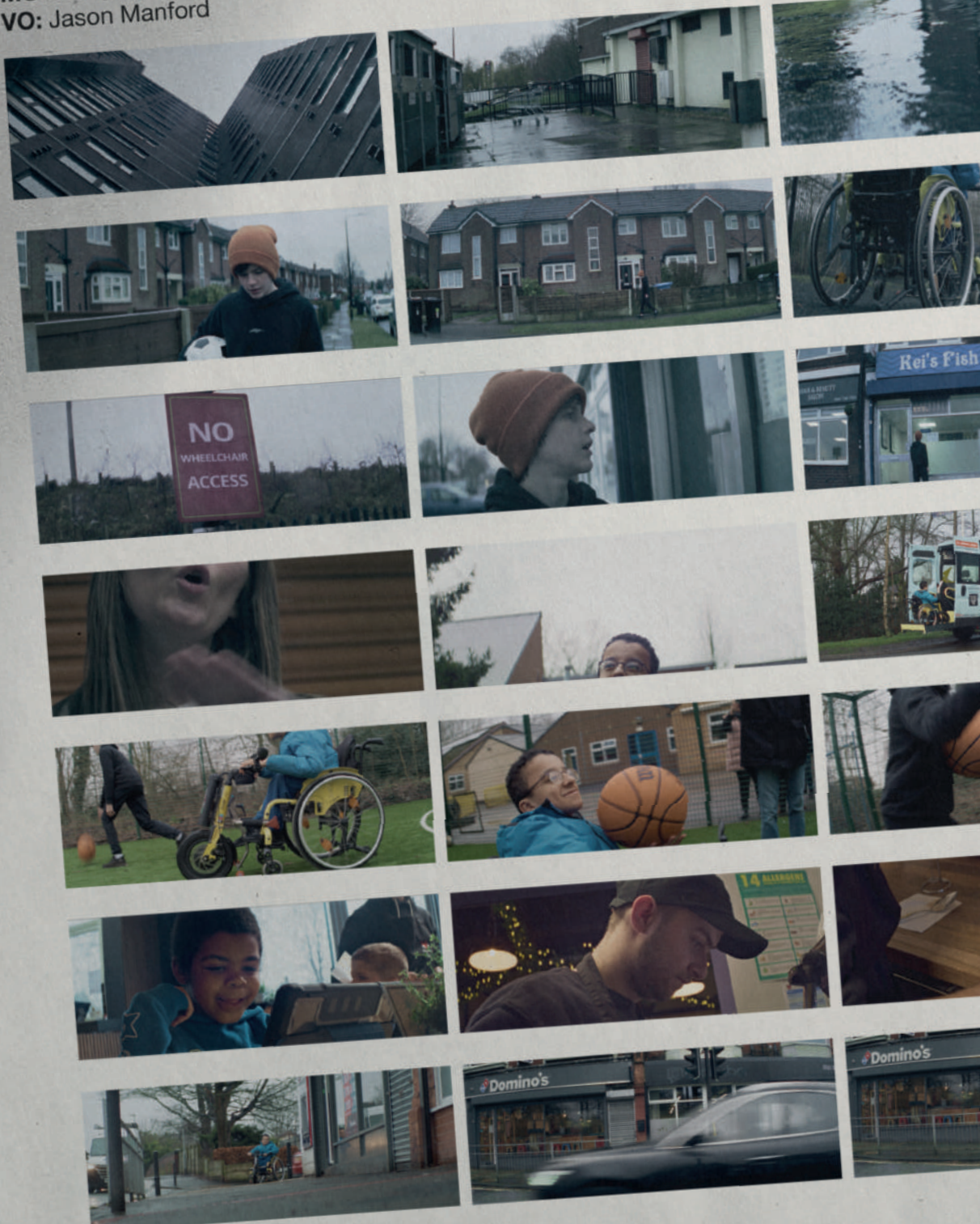
AGENCY: The Traveller and the Bear

PRODUCTION: re:production

DIRECTOR: Phil Hawkins

MUSIC: 'No Limit' by 2 Unlimited

VO: Jason Manford





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Foreword

FOREWORD

Welcome to the June edition of Northern Insight.

As we move into Summer we are delighted to bring you another vibrant issue packed with content, features and analysis.

Our cover stars are Fratelli in Ponteland who over the last seventeen years have carved an enviable reputation for serving authentic Italian and Sardinian cuisine.

In our popular Big Interview slot we profile Chris Birkett, CEO of the Winn Group, which as a company has local roots but has gained success on a national level.

Look out for our enlarged Built Environment section which includes a plethora of coverage from this crucial sector.

Within our leisure pages we showcase Sachins 40th anniversary celebrations and also sample a night of traditional Indian cuisine at Yuvraaj in Sunderland.

We hope you enjoy our 102nd issue.

*Thank you to all
concerned for the
fantastic support.
Till next month...*

MTG

Michael Gramshaw, Publisher
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Business Integrity gets pipeline firm new investor and King's Award for Enterprise

Frontline Integrity Ltd, a leading independent consultancy specialising in pipeline integrity management has received a substantial investment and has been honoured with the prestigious King's Award for Enterprise.

Founded by Brian Kerrigan and based at North Tyneside's Silverlink Business Park in early 2020, it has rapidly become a key player in the global energy and mining sectors, providing tailored consultancy services to ensure the safe and efficient transportation of products through pipelines. While initially focusing on consultancy, the company has expanded its offerings into niche cloud-based engineering software products to further enhance its service portfolio.

The recent investment has seen 2023 entrepreneur of the year Ben Ridgway acquire a minority stake in the business. Ben is the co-founder of the iamproperty group, a leading provider of technology solutions to UK Estate Agents. Over the past four years, iamproperty has experienced remarkable growth, with a workforce exceeding 600 professionals across the UK.

The investment will fuel the development of Frontline Integrity's software portfolio, aimed at revolutionising integrity management processes for pipeline operators through state-of-the-art, easy to use technology. Frontline Integrity has also been honoured with the King's Award for Enterprise under the International Trade category, testament to their outstanding achievements in innovation and business excellence.



North East commercial finance boutique expands to Tees Valley

Award-winning North East commercial finance boutique CCBS Group has opened its first office in Tees Valley, highlighting its commitment to supporting SMEs in the region.

The new office at Hastings House in Stockton will provide a base for the 6-strong team to support clients in Tees Valley and Durham and is in addition to their office in Newcastle-upon-Tyne where the business was established 10 years ago.

Peter Cromarty, Managing Director at CCBS Group, said: "This year we've made a commitment to Tees Valley so we can support businesses as they navigate the opportunities and challenges in the region like the Teesworks development, the Freeport and upcoming mayoral and national elections which may change the landscape yet again.

"We've seen a rise in business owners needing support with working capital so that they can capitalise on the opportunities on their doorsteps but we're also seeing SMEs with very complex financial situations who need specialist support to take their next steps. We're looking forward to getting to know our new neighbours and building strong relationships with both existing and new clients and intermediaries south of the region - so if you're in the area, our door's always open for a chat and cuppa."

The new office is located at Hastings House, 5 Falcon Court, Preston Farm, Stockton on Tees, TS18 3TS.

Newcastle Airport's private jet facility celebrates refurbishment

Samson Executive Jet Centre, Newcastle International Airport's exclusive private jet facility, has today announced the completion of a comprehensive refurbishment project.

Since 2022, the North East's largest executive jet facility has seen a significant increase in passengers opting to use its professional, personal and efficient aviation services.

As part of the refurbishment, the main executive departure lounge has been redesigned and extended to include more comfortable seating areas for passengers



to enjoy - complimented by flat screen televisions, a wide selection of magazines and free of charge refreshments.

Paula Ives, General Manager of Samson

Executive Jet Centre, said: "We pride ourselves in providing a professional, personal and efficient service - allowing our passengers to choose how, when and where they would like to travel.

"For arriving passengers, we are often their very first impression of the region, and for departing passengers we work hard to ensure we provide a first-class area that they can relax in before boarding their aircraft.

We are delighted to be able to share the results of the refurbishment project with our customers."



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FW Capital achieves its highest ever fundraising total of £72K for Pancreatic Cancer UK

FW Capital, together with the Development Bank of Wales (DBW), has raised £72K for its 2023/2024 charity of the year, Pancreatic Cancer UK. This is the largest total raised by the team over a 12-month period.

The teams at FW Capital and DBW have completed a variety of activities including taking part in Endure24, the UK's largest 24-hour ultra trail race where they covered a massive 505 miles, averaging out at 25.25 miles per person. Other achievements have included the North West team completing the 21 mile Preston Guild Wheel Walk in one day. Grant Peggie, FW Capital's Fundraising Manager, accomplished his own personal challenge covering 91 miles in the Fife Coastal Walk. Other fundraising activities have included staff participating in the Cardiff half marathon and three very successful fundraising balls in Newcastle, Manchester, and Cardiff.

Gary Guest, Fund Director at FW Capital said: "This is a massive achievement and amazing news to announce we've raised £72K for Pancreatic Cancer UK. This is a charity very close to our hearts, and nominated by colleagues after the loss of our dear friend and colleague Elaine Yarwood who lost her brave battle with pancreatic cancer in April 2023. We'd like to say a big thank you to everyone who has supported our efforts and to colleagues for enthusiastically



playing their part. We passionately believe in the power of giving back to charities and making a positive impact on society. I am so proud of everyone's work, support, and physical efforts to make this such an important and successful year of fundraising."

"We're also delighted to announce our new chosen charity of the year as the British Heart Foundation. We're gearing up again to get involved in a host of team and personal activities to push ourselves once again to raise money for another very worthy charity. Plans are also underway for our charity summer balls."



Sunderland bid celebrates a decade of success

From supporting business through the pandemic to game changing anti-crime initiatives to creating an exciting programme of events – just some of the achievements of Sunderland BID.

The organisation – which recently started its third term of office – is celebrating ten years of work in the city, which has resulted in more than £6.5m investment back into the city centre, increased footfall and helped create a positive image of Sunderland to a wider audience.

Working in partnership with organisations ranging from Sunderland City Council to Northumbria Police, the BID has played a vital role in being a voice for businesses, creating ways to boost the local economy and promote Sunderland.

"It has been a fantastic ten years and we are delighted to be able to continue with the work of the BID thanks to the confidence shown to us by the businesses that voted yes," said Sharon Appleby, Chief Executive.

"It is an extremely exciting time to be working in Sunderland with so much investment and development taking place and with such a positive future on the horizon.

Lumo marks five year partnership with apprenticeship provider, Train'd Up

Tyneside-based train operator, Lumo, celebrates that 95% of its workforce began as apprentices recruited through partnership with provider, Train'd Up.

Lumo's 95% milestone follows a five year partnership between Lumo and Train'd Up, which has seen many successes. This includes, 16 drivers in one cohort, the largest number of driver trainees Train'd Up has seen in its 20 years of operation.

The welcomed announcement follows news that the UK has seen 2.5% overall boost in apprenticeships in the last year. Yet, there is still work to be done in the North East due to an ongoing decline in uptake from 23,260 in 2018 to 18,450 in 2023.

To date, a total of 78 Lumo Customer Drivers and Customer Experience Ambassadors have successfully enrolled through the apprenticeship completing a range of training modules.

The custom designed programme prepares Lumo colleagues beyond their day to day roles. Additional ICT training is included to ensure they have the skills required to advance internally from day one and, adapt to the quickly approaching digital future.



The apprenticeship partnership with Train'd Up began in 2020, ahead of the business' launch date on 2021. It was created and, has continued to give the local workforce new opportunities and, the chance to develop new skills to readily enter the rail industry.

Martijn Gilbert, Managing Director of Lumo, said: "We take great pride in celebrating the fact nearly all Lumo colleagues have had the opportunity to train through our apprenticeship programme with Train'd Up.

"This was a founding pillar as the company began the process with Train'd Up ahead of our launch back in 2020. It has remained a key part of our colleague development approach as we want to continuously ensure that as many local people as possible have the opportunity to join the rail industry, regardless of their previous skill set or background."

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Cover Story



The true taste of Italy

Since opening in 2007, Fratelli in Ponteland has carved an enviable reputation for serving authentic Italian and Sardinian cuisine. Michael Grahamslaw met with genial host Fabrizio Saba to talk about his journey so far and future plans.





What inspired you to open an Italian restaurant?

Having arrived in England at the age of 17 I'd worked in a series of hotels, bars and restaurants and realised very quickly that this was something I wanted to do as a career. In 1988 I decided to stay and opened Sabatini in 1993 which was hugely successful and remained in the family for nearly 30 years and became one of Newcastle's most popular Italian restaurants ever.

Having lived in Ponteland for many years I knew there was a gap in the market and that this would be a lovely village to have a business so when the chance came up, we opened Fratelli in 2007.

What do you most enjoy about your role?

I am incredibly fortunate as I never think of running a restaurant as working it has just become my way of life. I certainly spend part of each day here and after so many years it is always heartening to welcome customers both new and old.

How do you ensure the authenticity of your recipes and dishes?

Through a select network of high quality, authentic suppliers we import directly from Italy and Sardinia whilst closer to home we have long standing relationships with local suppliers including Hodgson Fish, Warren Butterworth Catering Butchers.

How do you select your wines?

I suppose it would be fair to say that is a lovely aspect of the job. We visit vineyards across Italy and Sardinia and also have regular wine tastings with suppliers and sommeliers.

Tell us about your team?

We are very much a close knit family business with my wife (Carol), son (Cristian) and daughter (Gabi) all involved closely on a day to day basis. We are assisted by a wonderful team of management, kitchen and floor staff, many of whom have been with us for many years.

For first time visitor Fratelli what would you recommend for a starter, main course and dessert?

Firstly it would have to be four courses! If it was a big family meal a big serving of antipasto to kick off, a small plate of pasta to follow then grilled fish or meats and for dessert some Zuppa Inglese which is the most delectable Italian trifle.



What are your future plans?

We are forever in the process of reinvention and improvement. Following the pandemic we expanded our outside terrace which has proved to be hugely popular. This was followed by a recent refurbishment of our bar area.

We are always available for special occasions and corporate events and this is an area we'd like to grow going forward.

How do you like to unwind?

I love to watch cycling and motorsport and I really enjoy a family holiday.

What would be your last meal on earth?

Pasta with sea urchins washed down with a crisp glass of Sardinian white wine...hopefully not for a while yet though!

www.fratelliponteland.co.uk



L-R: Emma McDonald with Jessica Williams

Sales and Marketing

Just Williams is a certified B- Corp, we are also a sales and marketing organisation but its this B-Corp status that drives each and every one of our business decisions. We are on the Entrepreneur's Forum Scale Up programme and looking to grow the business over the coming years through adding additional team members and services. And as discussed in my last piece, it's not without its challenges.

So in a time where the world of recruitment remains more than challenging and organisations are reviewing expenditure with a fine tooth comb, dealing with the lack of grants and looking for returns above their average rates – what is the future of the outsourced model?

I could and regularly do argue on both sides and have only today been to see a prospect and recommended the need to take sales inhouse. Outsourcing is not right for everyone but here's why I still fly the flag for outsourced services and will continue to do so:

- **Recruitment** - It removes the headache of recruiting, upskilling, managing and retaining an internal team (see my last article!).
- **Cost** - Our solutions provide access to a sales professional, marketing professional

and administrator throughout the year are still more cost effective than hiring one full time position (based on market rates).

- **Expertise** - You hire a team when you outsource, a team of experts in their field and have access to all of them versus recruiting one person and having only their capabilities.
- **Experience** - Again, you have a whole team at your disposal along with their up to date experience across a range of other markets, sectors and geographies.
- **Market Knowledge** - working for a range of clients, an outsourced organisation is "in the know" regarding industry changes and can provide a view covering a wider perspective and can remove groupthink danger zones.
- **Networks** - An outsourced agency has a

wide network, which if like us, can open this to clients and encourage cross collaboration.

- **Data and Platforms** - we, like many agencies, work with lots of different platforms and CRM systems so provide insights and recommendations based on market knowledge and share best practices with our clients.

One size does not fit all and there are still organisations that require the team inhouse. I personally like to focus on what we are good at as a team and outsource the rest - I find it far quicker, easier, cheaper and less stressful to bring in experts to advise and do rather than spending hours working it out and then possibly executing it poorly and having to outsource in the long run. This is a lesson that took me longer to learn than I should have in a bid to save costs but has in the long term cost me more. I now always outsource!

If you are an owner managed business looking to grow your organisation through brand visibility, lead generation and impact - we would love the chance to chat and tell you more about the benefits of outsourcing your sales and marketing function!

Just Williams is an impact-led sales and marketing organisation working with owner-managed businesses to raise brand profile, lead generate and embed ESG.

***Just Williams – Sales and Marketing
www.justwilliams.co.uk***



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Sunderland Empire's Creative Learning Showcase

Local businesses were recently invited to watch Icons of the Empire! Where almost all the theatre's weekly classes (over 100 people aged 6 to 86!) took part in the showcase and the theme meant that there were performances inspired by acts from Charlie Chaplin to The Beatles and musicals from Phantom of the Opera to School of Rock.

Feedback from the show has been incredibly positive with audience members commenting 'I adored the diversity of the groups and seeing how many people feel like the Empire is part of their lives. It was magic!', 'it was clear just how much they were enjoying it and what a confidence boost they were getting from the experience' and 'My "goosebumpometer" was off the scale! I found it quite emotional watching all the performers.'

Our performers were also thrilled with the opportunity and remarked 'I can't believe I just performed on the Empire stage – not just anyone gets to do that, you know!' and 'thank you for including me in the show, I had the best time ever and can't wait to do it again'.

If your business is interested in supporting the work of Sunderland Empire Theatre Trust then please get in touch, PaulaMitchell@theambassadors.com



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AN EXTREMELY POSITIVE START



This year has started extremely positively for me personally, with a promotion within the company in a more valuation focussed role across the region. I now have over nine years' experience in the property industry and feel it is absolutely the right time to strengthen my local knowledge and practice further, in an area that I am truly passionate about.

At Sanderson Young we have seen a large spike in demand in the last few weeks, confidence seems to be returning and, as the housing market is always driven by buyer belief, this is a most welcome trend that we hope to see continue. In fact, in the first quarter of 2024 northern regions saw the most growth, with the North East at 2.3%. There has also been a hugely encouraging sign for buyers, with mortgage rates stabilising and forecast to fall, and the reimagined affordability and optimism that this brings to the marketplace is incredibly positive all round.

The initial flurry of activity since the start of 2024 has begun to settle; for us, demand has remained positive but this has been tempered somewhat by a lack of supply, which in turn has seen a drive up in market prices. However, I do hope to see this balance

out as the Spring/Summer market is always buoyant, when gardens are looking at their best, people are spending more time outdoors and also evaluating the potential need for more space. Traditionally these have always been the busier months for us, so we look forward to the supply finally meeting demand.

As we always do at Sanderson Young, we have also had huge success selling off market and this has been no different so far this year, with the most desirable areas in our city offering very exciting and lucrative sales between our more private clients.

I'm confident our experienced team of sales support can continue to exceed the expectations of our clients and, through our proven marketing strengths, make a real difference. I would be delighted to come out and appraise any new, existing or previous clients' homes, so please do get in touch.

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



SANDERSON
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Hazelwood Villa

Akenside Terrace, Jesmond

Hazelwood Villa is a fabulous, detached period home which has been extensively remodelled and updated by the current owners offering well proportioned and beautifully finished accommodation set over three floors. Situated on one of the most sought after streets in Jesmond, Hazelwood Villa is set back from Akenside Terrace with superb gardens to both the front and rear, and a detached double plus garage. Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax: G.



6 3 4 E

Price Guide:

Offers over £1.795 Million



Mary Walker

0191 223 3500

mary.walker@sandersonyoung.co.uk



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Adderstone Crescent Jesmond

This magnificent, 1920s Arts & Crafts style, three storey detached family home has tremendous architectural design and represents the very best that is available within Newcastle for luxury private dwellings. Externally, the large west facing rear gardens are very private with tall trees and paved seating areas perfect for dining al fresco. The former garage at the rear of the garden has been converted into a home studio/office. Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax: H.



6 4 6 D

Price Guide:
£4.95 Million



Ashleigh Sundin
0191 223 3500
ashleigh.sundin@sandersonyoung.co.uk





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Roseworth Crescent *Gosforth*

This stylish Edwardian end terraced home is situated within the heart of Gosforth's Conservation Area, only a stone's throw from the High Street, and enjoys a lovely open outlook. Thought to have been constructed around 1908, this beautifully presented period property boasts in excess of 2,200 sq ft of internal living space, a lovely block paved front garden and a delightful west facing courtyard garden to the rear. Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax: E.



5 2 2 D

Price Guide:
Offers over £635,000



Emma Lane
0191 213 0033
emma.lane@sandersonyoung.co.uk



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Westfield Gosforth

A rare opportunity to purchase a detached period home on the corner of Westfield and Westfield Grove, only a stone's throw from the Town Moor. This delightful property has been sympathetically renovated and remodelled to a high standard by the current owners in 2021, and benefits from a rear extension with a beautiful refitted modern kitchen. Externally, there is a mature south west facing garden, garage and driveway. Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax: G.



4 2 2 D

Price Guide:
Offers over £795,000



Julie Summerbell
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Chris Birkett: Steering Winn Group from Local Roots to National Success

Nestled in the heart of Byker, Newcastle, is the bustling headquarters of Winn Group, a testament to entrepreneurial spirit and community commitment. At its helm stands Chris Birkett, the CEO whose journey from the company's inception to its current stature embodies the essence of perseverance, growth, and unwavering dedication.

Winn Group traces its origins back to 2002 when Jeff Winn founded Winn Solicitors, seizing an opportunity to offer accident management services in the North East legal landscape.

Chris Birkett, with a background entrenched in insurance, joined the firm in 2006. At that time, the company boasted a modest staff of 25, primarily focusing on personal injury law. However, their vision extended beyond regional boundaries. Chris and his team envisioned Winn Solicitors as a national player, not merely confined to local boundaries.

From a practical standpoint, the services offered by Winn Group are straightforward yet invaluable. In the unfortunate event of an accident not of the client's making, the priority is to swiftly support them. They arrange for a like-for-like replacement vehicle, ensuring minimal disruption to their daily life while their vehicle is off the road.

Additionally, they facilitate the repair of their own vehicle, prioritising their prompt return to normality. Should injuries be sustained, their in-house legal team provides comprehensive support. Whether it's facilitating vehicle replacements, managing storage services, or providing medicolegal reports and therapy advice, their commitment to practical, client-focused solutions remains unwavering.

With a strategic outlook and Chris's industry connections, Winn Group rapidly expanded its footprint, transcending from a regional legal firm to a comprehensive insurance business process outsourcing provider. The journey was marked by significant milestones, including the acquisition of new accounts across the UK and a relentless commitment to innovation and service excellence.

Over the years, Winn Group's operations burgeoned, necessitating not just physical expansion but also diversification. From its Byker headquarters to additional sites in the immediate area – keeping it local and near to public transport routes for its workforce, the company's presence grew, accommodating a team that swelled from 25 to nearly 700 employees. These expansions weren't just geographical; they mirrored Winn Group's evolution into a multifaceted entity comprising legal, insurance, and administrative arms.

Despite its meteoric rise, Winn Group remains deeply rooted in its local community ethos. Through its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives, the company champions various causes, from supporting local sports clubs like Washington and Whitley Bay Football Clubs to backing charities like the North East Air Ambulance and the Bradley Lowrey Foundation. Chris Birkett's commitment to giving back underscores Winn Group's belief in leveraging success to uplift the communities it serves.

Looking ahead, Chris envisions continued growth and expansion for Winn Group. With private equity investments catalysing its ascent a decade ago, the company now eyes further avenues for investment to fuel its next phase of development. Ventures into new sectors like wills and probate services alongside its core insurance offerings signal a dynamic trajectory, promising sustained relevance and impact in the ever-evolving legal and insurance landscapes.

Beyond his professional pursuits, Chris is a dad and family man and a passionate supporter of Newcastle United. His affinity for the Northumberland coast, where he spends leisure time with his family and canine companion, underscores his appreciation for life's simple joys. Despite the demands of leading a workforce of 700, Chris remains deeply committed to fostering a culture of inclusivity and camaraderie within Winn Group, ensuring every voice is heard and valued.

"Managing 700 staff and hopefully expanding to 1000 staff towards the end of this year is a busy but enjoyable task. Our people are everything and I want our team to enjoy working for Winn Group. I want them to feel as though they are all included and that they've all got a voice. We've a very open management style with all the group directors on site interacting with the staff daily. It's something I'm very proud of."

winngroup.co.uk

The Big Interview

“

*...Our people
are everything...*

Chris Birkett



Investment boosts Brocksbushes premises

Corbridge-based Brocksbushes has received a funding boost to support the development of a new 30,000 sq ft building which will house a new modern Farm Shop, Deli, Butchery, Café and Playbarn, offering all year-round entertainment for children.

A family run business, Brocksbushes has been trading for 40 years, developing from selling home-grown produce from a flat-bed trailer to a thriving Farm Shop, Tea Room and “Pick Your Own Farm.”

Work is well under way and the development is expected to open in the summer and will

create 15 to 20 new jobs, taking the total team to nearly 50.

The current Farm Shop continues business as usual, selling local and home grown produce along with the Tea Rooms while the construction work continues. It is located just off the A69 to the east of Corbridge.

An undisclosed funding package for the new development has been provided by FW Capital using the North East Commercial Property Investment Fund. This is managed by FW Capital and backed by the North East Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). It aims to address the funding gap in the market and drive economic growth and create new jobs in the North East LEP area. Chris Dixon and Lesley Telford represented FW Capital and were introduced to Harry Dickinson by Richard Swan of ICE3 Group.

Harry Dickinson, Director at Brocksbushes said: “We’re passionate about the fantastic local produce that is made and grown in Northumberland and the development will continue our ethos of shop, eat, and pick local. The decision to expand came about because we are literally bursting to capacity and our current building has been extended multiple times but has reached its limit!”

NE Property developer benefits from funding

Redfoot Developments has received an investment boost of over £1.5million to develop four new executive stone-built family homes located on the outskirts of Alnwick.

Greensfield Farm is an exciting new housing development of beautifully designed four-bedroom homes in a countryside setting within easy access of the charming town of Alnwick. The funding to assist the development has been provided by FW Capital which manages the North East Property Fund (NEPF); an investment programme backed by the North East Local Enterprise Partnership.

Redfoot Developments is a new Northumbrian housebuilding company specialising in constructing high-quality homes in prime locations. The team is committed to delivering exceptional homes with high standard specifications, focusing on quality craftsmanship in sought-after settings. Greensfield Farm is being marketed by Northumberland Properties with prices starting from £695,000. The development is expected to complete in Spring/Summer 2024.

Charlie Maling-Dunn, Director at Redfoot Developments said: “This is our first development but as a team we have



extensive experience in the house building industry. Our focus is bringing high quality small developments to the area and Greensfield Farm is very well located in a picturesque setting. The land was previously a caravan park that we are regenerating to meet the local demand for quality new homes in this desirable market town. We’ve been very happy with the support from FW Capital whose backing is helping us to complete our first development as Redfoot Developments.”

Lesley Telford, Investment Executive at FW Capital said: “Greensfield Farm is a very well located site, bringing a very high standard of homes to the local area. Charlie has lots of experience in this sector and we were impressed with the plans for Greensfield Farm. It’s a great example of how the North East Property Fund is helping smaller residential developers meet the increased demand for quality new homes.”



RGCF bolsters its dealmaking team further with the appointment of new CF Director, Jen Bassyouni

Ryecroft Glenton Corporate Finance (RGCF) has further strengthened its senior team with the appointment of new Corporate Finance Director Jen Bassyouni.

Joining Newcastle-based RGCF from Deloitte in London, Jen has almost a decade of corporate finance experience providing transactional advice and support to shareholders of privately owned businesses, corporates and PE funds.

Jen is the second new CF Director to join RGCF in recent weeks, following on from Alex Simpson rejoining the firm from Mercia in April, bolstering the high level of senior expertise at the national corporate finance boutique and its reputation in the M&A market.

Originally from Canada, Jen entered the sector as a Manager in the Finance Transformation division of Deloitte in Alberta. She moved to the UK with Deloitte in 2018 as a Senior Manager in the firm’s M&A Accounting Advisory team, subsequently being promoted to Assistant Director in the firm’s Valuations and Modelling team in 2022.

Jen’s expertise and established reputation in the M&A sector further enhances RGCF’s team, which is made up of more than 20 corporate finance, Finance/Tax DD and transactional tax specialists and is planning to continue to grow in the coming months.

Jen Bassyouni said: “I am very excited by this new opportunity to join an agile, driven CF boutique, which has built a superb track record for the delivery of significant M&A transactions and exceptional advice for its clients. After several years of working in London, I’m really looking forward to being part of a team based in Newcastle, that advises clients nationally, and experiencing life and work in a new part of the UK.”



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Boosting Teesside with £68 million funding



L-R: Lindsey McMenamin (FW Capital), Lewis Blakelock (FW Capital), Cllr Julia Rostron (Chair of the Teesside Pension Fund Committee), Keith Charlton (FW Capital), Jo Whitfield (FW Capital) and Tony Cullen (FW Capital).

Unlocking valuable finance to empower future success for SMEs Joanne Whitfield, Fund Director at FW Capital talks about an exciting new fund to support Teesside businesses.

"Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are the lifeblood of our economy accounting for 99.2% of the UK's business population.* It is crucial that we invest in their success. We're stepping up our commitment to Teesside SMEs with the launch of a new £20 million fund which aims to tackle identified funding gaps in the region.

We have a strong record of investing in the North East and since 2013 we've invested close to £38 million into 62 companies in Teesside alone. Through The Teesside Flexible Investment Fund we will build on this track record and aim to provide total investment in the region of £68 million because the money from repayments and exits will be recycled into new deals.

Designed by FW Capital with investment from the Teesside Pension Fund, the fund will support economic development in Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Stockton-On-Tees and Redcar & Cleveland through a mix of property development funding, contract-related bond finance and finance to support management teams in buying a business.

There's lots going on in the Teesside area with exciting plans for regeneration and this new fund will unlock much-needed finance for SMEs and provide valuable investment for the future. We've seen first-hand how important it is to have the right backing and specifically created a fund that supports a variety of needs to match the diversity we are seeing across the region. Businesses know us for providing property development funding and bond finance in the North East and we're excited to be expanding our offering into supporting management teams looking to buy a business. Assisting the transition of business ownership safeguards this legacy for the future.

The fund will build on the success of our previous investment activities in the region and aims to make a significant economic impact in Teesside by providing local businesses with investment ranging from £100,000 to £3 million.

In providing this much needed alternative finance we aim to drive more opportunities and remove barriers for growth to local businesses resulting in job creation and economic prosperity. We're inviting businesses to contact us to discuss how we can assist them."

The new fund will follow the success of the Tees Valley Catalyst Fund, which FW Capital ran on behalf of the Tees Valley Combined Authority and ended in 2023. This provided bond finance, facilitating contracts of £78 million across Teesside. The new fund will also allow FW Capital to support property developers in Teesside, using its experience in funding residential and non-speculative commercial developments in other areas of

the North East.

Cllr Julia Rostron, Chair of the Teesside Pension Fund Committee, added: "FW Capital has been investing in local business and enterprise for over a decade, and has played a key role in supporting growth and generating prosperity.

"The new Flexible Investment Fund in partnership with the Teesside Pension Fund will build on that work with SMEs which will deliver much-needed new opportunities for further growth and the creation of high-quality, sustainable jobs."

The Teesside Flexible Investment Fund can be used for:

- Loans from £250,000 to £3 million for residential and non-speculative commercial developments. Providing up to 100 percent of build costs for suitable schemes with repayment terms available up to three years.
- Loans from £100,000 to £2 million for contract-related bonds including advance payment guarantees, performance, warranty, highways and water authority bonds. Repayment terms are available of up to two years.
- Loans and equity investments from £250,000 to £3 million for management teams seeking to own and run their own business. Investments are available between 1-5 years.

If you want to find out how we can support your business please contact us. Call 0191 269 6969 or email info@fwcapital.co.uk Or visit our website www.fwcapital.co.uk

*Source UK Small Business Statistics 2024 – Start Ups and FSB

Tier One Capitals 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.



Paul Gainford, director of commercial services.

Tips for staying on the right side of new Hospitality Venue Service Charge rules

By Paul Gainford, director of commercial services at RMT Accountants & Business Advisors

Practices around tipping staff in restaurants, bars and other such venues have long been a source of confusion and consternation for customers, business owners and their staff alike.

While customers may want to reward their servers for looking after them, it's often been unclear whether any or all of a venue's service charge will be passed on to them, or whether paying a tip by cash is the most likely way to ensure it ends up in the appropriate pocket.

But with the Employment (Allocation of Tips) Act 2023 having now received Royal Assent and due to come into force at the beginning of July, any confusion is about to (hopefully) be cleared up for good.

The Act was designed to make the distribution of tips, gratuity, and service charges fairer and more transparent across the hospitality industry.

The money involved here isn't just small change either, with the Government estimating that the new rules will allow more than two million workers to keep a total of £200 million a year in tips.

For relevant businesses, some preparation will be required for the forthcoming changes to ensure they're prepared for their

responsibilities under the proposed new tipping code of practice.

To this end, we're already working with several hospitality clients to ensure that they have everything in order in plenty of time.

The new code will make it unlawful for businesses to hold back or misuse service charges from their employees and will ensure that staff will fairly receive all the tips they have earned.

Though many businesses will already be operating in the spirit of the new legislation, this will ensure clarity across the industry going forward.

The Code of Practice, which follows alongside the legislation, covers several fundamental principles which outline how business owners will need to manage tips from 1 July:

- The allocation of tips made must be clear, objective, fair and reasonable to all workers.
- For the purposes of the allocations, a business can distinguish workers based

on a "clear and objective set of factors" and are not obligated to "allocate the same proportion of tips to all workers". This may be determined by seniority, job roles, or duration of service.

- A written policy on how tips are dealt with must be made available to all workers, including agency workers.

- Workers will have the right to request information about the number of tips generated and their own award value, with each worker being able to submit one such request in one three-month period. However, they are unable to request information on the tip amounts their fellow workers are allocated.

- The Code confirms the Tipping Act requirement that all relevant tips must be passed on at the latest by the end of the following month in which those tips are received. For example, relevant tips received on 23rd June must be distributed by 31st July. There is a degree of flexibility to the code, allowing businesses to tailor their own policies to the suit the circumstances in which they operate.

With these changes fast approaching, hospitality businesses should consider making the policy available as soon as possible, in the best way they can, and should be taking informed advice if they have any doubts about what they should be doing or how the new rules will impact on their individual operations.

For further information on the implications for your business of the new Code of Practice on tipping, or on any other aspects of managing hospitality sector finances, please contact Paul Gainford at RMT Accountants & Business Advisors on 0191 256 9500 or visit www.r-m-t.co.uk



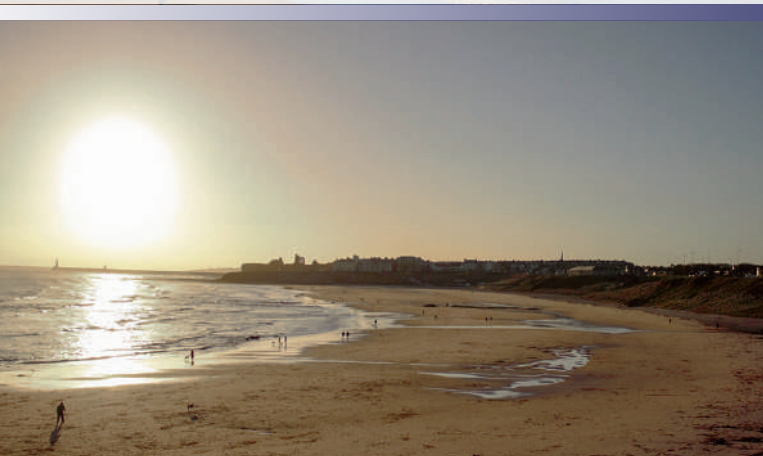
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Enable your staff's financial resilience

As well as being a Vistage Chair for the North East and Northumberland, a NED and entrepreneur, Andrew Marsh is a trustee for Citizens Advice Gateshead. He has a specific interest in ensuring that organisations operate under best governance, ensuring that all stakeholders including employees are treated well.



For this article he has linked up with Society Matters CIC - a social enterprise, registered as a Community Interest Company. The team there work on a number of projects including CPPP, a programme that aims to reduce child poverty in the region.

Andrew said: “70,704 children of school age living in absolute low-income households in the North East (22-23, DWP) - 39,290 of those are in working families. 17% of households nationally having a degree of food insecurity. And the number of Children in poverty in working families in the NE has risen from 56% to 67% in a decade. Also 21.5% of children where all adults work is still in poverty in the NE, doubling since 2014/15. (North East Child Poverty Commission, 2024).

“Quite simply, this should not be allowed to continue and it is up to leaders in the region, and employers, to take action to help.

“As the summer holidays approach, many families are facing real challenges aside from children wanting entertaining, including affording childcare and having to feed their children all three meals a day for six weeks, missing keenly the breakfast and lunches given whilst the children in school. Not all families can do this, as even in 2024 some employees in the region are being paid to live in poverty with a huge 16% of workers having issues feeding their family.

“Society Matters has been delivering the Child Poverty Prevention programme (CPPP), funded by the North of Tyne Combined Authority since September 2022, working with the employers in the region to help them meet their social requirement. In the future, the programme will be funded by the North East Mayoral Combined Authority.

“Through the programme Society Matters enable employers across the area to enhance the financial resilience of their staff. Employers can access:

- A confidential ‘Making Ends Meet’ survey which enables employees to understand better the situation their staff are in financially.

- A comprehensive strategic report and options for next steps from our toolkit, briefed by the Society Matters team.
- Provision of fully funded awareness-raising workshops and learning opportunities.
- Facilitated 121 problem-solving sessions.
- Invitations to exclusive peer learning and networking opportunities with other cross-sector industry leaders.”

Managing director of Society Matters, Stuart Fearn MBE, and his team work with employers closely under the thesis that if they can reduce the levels of in-work poverty, primarily by reducing the transactional cost of work, then that allows for more disposable income for households, and therefore children.

Stuart said: “We engage employers with a series of activities that identify areas where they can reduce the cost to the employee of working, or increase their revenue, and then enable them to take those actions through direct and peer-based support. We would, of course, like to engage with more businesses and work with them to enhance the financial wellbeing of their employees and welcome conversations with any employers in the region. One way to find out more is to join us at one of our events.”

North East Leaders for Change

- Leaders for Change is a dynamic network of passionate business leaders committed to driving meaningful impact, fostering collaboration and enabling change within communities in the North East. Coordinated by Society Matters CIC the network meets quarterly and covers important topics identified by the group, sharing best practice from members and hearing from key speakers on relevant topics.
- The Next Leaders for Change event is in June.
- Sign up here or scan the qr code below: tinyurl.com/Leadersforchange

Andrew concluded: “Through the funded support, North East employers have been able to collect data, create strategies and take action to improve the financial wellbeing of their employees. With the access to funded workshops and CPD for professionals on in work benefits and lived experience from Society Matters, there really is no excuse for any employer not to be taking this seriously. Please do sign up for an event or get in touch with the team.”

You can also contact Andrew for more information on andrew@marshbusinesstransformation.co.uk



Scan here

“

...Children in poverty in working families in the NE has risen from 56% to 67%...

Meet the Team at Raymond James, Monument...



Rob Brotherton

Rob Brotherton

*Chartered Wealth Manager,
Raymond James, Monument*

In today's rapidly evolving financial landscape, tailored wealth management advice plays a crucial role. As markets shift, technological advancements accelerate, and global events impact economies, individual financial needs become increasingly diverse. Generic solutions no longer suffice.

The personalised advice provided by Rob Brotherton and his Raymond James, Monument colleagues considers an individual's unique circumstances, risk tolerance, goals, and time horizon. Whether it's retirement planning, tax efficiency, protection or investment strategies, tailored advice ensures alignment with specific objectives.

Moreover, as financial regulations evolve, having an adviser who understands these changes and adapts strategies accordingly becomes essential.

Personalised wealth management provides resilience, adaptability, and confidence in navigating the complexities of our changing world.

Rob's journey into Financial Advice spans over an impressive 25 years and began with a keen interest in numbers, which led him to study business studies and specialise in finance during his university years. As part of his degree, he undertook a year long placement working in the Operations Team at a Newcastle based Investment Management firm. It was this experience which sparked a fascination with advice, investments, markets, and the broader economy, which eventually paved the way for his successful career in wealth management.

After graduating, he worked his way up from an administrator to a Chartered Financial Planner. This career path gave him experience of all aspects of the advice journey and he prides himself on providing clients with a high level of service together with clear, simple advice, minimising the use of unnecessary jargon. He has become a trusted adviser for his clients.

The move to join Raymond James, Monument was an easy decision for Rob. He was attracted to the culture of the firm and the way that clients' interests at the heart of everything they do. This aligned with his own ethos.

Rob is a logical thinker by nature and loves to solve problems for clients, especially as no two clients are the same. Providing tailored, individual, personalised advice to

clients is important to Rob, given the ever-changing nature of the industry and a move by some firms to model solutions, which can sometimes overlook the client's personal needs and objectives.


Originally from Lincolnshire, Rob has lived in the North-East since 1995 and feels at home in the area. His support of Manchester United has led to some playful teasing from his Newcastle supporting colleagues!

Rob is a Chartered Fellow of both the Chartered Insurance Institute (CII) and the Chartered Institute and Securities and Investment (CISI). Outside of work, Rob has always been a keen sportsman, although admits that his preference now is for nothing more strenuous than a round of golf.

Rob's expertise and commitment to helping clients achieve their financial aspirations make him a valuable asset to the Raymond James, Monument team.

For more information about Raymond James, Monument, and how its expert team could help map your financial future, email RJUK-Monument@RaymondJames.com, call 0191 303 4260, or contact us via our website.

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The Super Meeting

Once a quarter the two cohorts of the EB Peer Group for NEDs, Trustees, Board Advisors and Consultants acting at Board Level join forces for a 'super meeting'.

This time the event was hosted by Great North Air Ambulance Services (GNAAS) at their headquarters in Eaglescliffe, Stockton.

Founder of The Experience Bank Group, Peter Neal, gives us an insight into the activity undertaken by the members of the continual professional development opportunity:

"This month's joint session of EB1 and EB2 was a great success, even if our facilitator Andrew Marsh could not be there in person. Covid hit him hard and it was best for all that he kept his distance!

"That did not stop us all having an impactful

session, and below you will find a round up of what we discussed. A huge thank you to David and Ashleigh at The Great North Air Ambulance Service (GNAAS) for their time and wonderful hosting of our meeting.

"We started our session with some informal catch-up networking over coffee, before being given an insight into GNAAS, from CEO David Stockton. As well as painting the picture of the charity's history, David talked us through the impact of the service and the funding required. Covering a huge area, collaborating with several NHS Ambulance Trusts and other emergency rescue services, it cost circa £9 million per year to keep the charity going, the vast majority of which comes from legacies and public donations. Last year the team delivered 2100 interventions bringing help, hope, and comfort to those in the most traumatic of needs.

"There was an alert whilst we were being given a tour of the base, and within just a few minutes we witnessed the crew mobilise and the helicopter take off to provide emergency, pre-hospital trauma care at an RTA incident near Peterlee. We sent the crew on its way with all of our best wishes for a successful intervention.

"We then returned to the warmth of the training room where we watched a harrowing video about Jack and his family, one family whose lives would not be the same without the intervention of GNAAS specialist trauma doctors and paramedics.

It's safe to say there weren't many dry eyes in the house!

"Following a break where we had a light lunch together, Andrew joined us remotely and we tackled one member's question on what is appropriate remuneration and incentivisation for a NED. We expanded the question to look at the situation within a PLC and an unlisted company setting by way of comparison.

"Andrew reminded us of the seven obligations of a director, and we split into groups to discuss the merits of stocks, shares, day rates, salaries, options, discounted options, and bonus/equity plans. We all agreed that it was important to think carefully as a NED before accepting shares as this could put you in conflict with a number of the seven obligations, including remaining independent. Andrew also shared with us the Independence Test as an example of where the conflict would lie.

"We then spent the remaining time looking at the seven key skills of a NED – we mapped out where we currently are in the areas and where we need to be, breaking off into groups to discuss how we can each individually achieve this."

If you think that you would like support as an existing or aspiring NED, Trustee, Board Advisor or Consultant at Board level, then do get in touch as I am launching the third cohort this summer: peter@theexperiencebank.co.uk



Sarah Furness

Understanding the responsibilities and liabilities of becoming a charity trustee

By Sarah Furness, Partner at Hay & Kilner

“The passion, skill and experience people bring to charity trusteeship determines not just the success of individual charities, but contributes in great part to the health of our communities and the cohesion of society.”

The words of Charity Commission chief executive Helen Stephenson reflect the key role that trustees play in ensuring that charities’ operations are always carried out as they should be.

Trustees have ultimate responsibility for the affairs of their charity, with the professional and leadership expertise they offer on a voluntary basis often being crucial to a charity’s success.

Anyone can become a charity trustee, subject to certain limited exclusions, and people do so for a wide variety of reasons, from personal interest in/experience of a particular issue through to helping with

their personal/professional development or simply wanting to make a positive difference to their community.

It’s estimated there are around one million trustees in the UK, with a further 100,000 trustee vacancies available, so there’s plenty of opportunity to take on such a role if you want to.

However, it is not something to be taken on without proper consideration, as it comes with a range of practical and legal responsibilities of which you need to be fully aware in advance.

Trustees must ensure a charity is solvent,

well run and delivering its charitable outcomes for the benefit of the public. They can incur personal liabilities from their role, particularly if they allow their charity to ‘mission drift,’ so that it is not being run to achieve its intended charitable purposes.

Trustees must also ensure they and their charities comply with their charities’ governing documents and their legal duties, and for anyone taking on such a role, familiarising themselves with the often-onerous obligations of the Charity Commission is advisable.

Trustees must always act in a charity’s best interests, deciding what will best enable the organisation to carry out its charitable purposes, and they must act responsibly, reasonably and honestly in managing the charity’s resources.

This is done by ensuring inappropriate risks aren’t taken with its assets or reputation, that it doesn’t overstretch itself financially and that particular care is taken when investing or borrowing. Avoiding conflicts of interest is absolutely essential!

An additional consideration comes with the recent publication of guidance by the Charity Commission on accepting donations, as there are circumstances in which they must be refused or returned.

These include where they are from illegal sources or come with illegal conditions, where a donor did not have the mental capacity to decide to donate, or where the donation cannot legally be given, such as when someone is gifting property that is not theirs to give.

At a time when many charities are struggling to fully fund their operations, turning down donations may be a difficult thing to do, but with the responsibility of complying with the charity’s legal duties and best interests, it’s a decision that trustees must be ready to make and stand by.

The personal commitment required to carry out the role also needs to be considered, in terms of preparing for, attending and actively participating in trustees’ meetings, as well as fulfilling whatever other responsibilities you’re asked to take on.

Trustees are regularly asked to sit on sub-committees and it is important that they don’t consider their roles to be box-ticking exercises – hands on involvement is very much required.

Becoming a charity trustee can be an immensely rewarding experience, but there is a great deal of personal accountability that goes with it and it’s essential that anyone taking on this role does so with all of the required information and facts at hand.

Hay & Kilner offers a comprehensive training package which provides detailed guidance on charity trustees’ legal responsibilities and liabilities, as well as practical ideas and strategies to support them in their role.

For further information, please contact Sarah Furness at sarah.furness@hay-kilner.co.uk or call 0191 232 8345.



Ward Hadaway's new Managing Partner outlines plans to double in size

A leading Northern law firm's new Managing Partner today announced plans to achieve 100% growth within the next ten years.

Steven took over the reins on 1st April 2024 from Martin Hulls, who stepped down as planned at the end of his second three-year term. Steven has been a partner at Ward Hadaway for 12 years.

Steven commented, "I am extremely excited and honoured to take on the mantle of Managing Partner and I'm looking forward to building on the firm's proud heritage built over more than 35 years. The management board and I have very clear ambitions for the firm, that I am keen to articulate and advocate internally and externally.

I am determined to achieve substantial growth in each office, growing our turnover by over 50% within the next five years, and 100% in 10, in order to leverage our scale to continue to support organisations of all shapes and sizes".

Steven joined Ward Hadaway's insolvency team in 2012. In recent years as Head of the Commercial Dispute Resolution (CDR) Department, he has grown it to become the largest across the firm. He has spearheaded a strong recruitment and growth strategy across all three offices. To ensure a seamless succession, he has been Deputy Managing Partner for the last year, working alongside Martin on all firmwide initiatives. And he has played an active leadership role in the Responsible Business Board, which oversees and charts the firm's ESG agenda.



Robson Laidler Accountants listed in The Sunday Times Best Places to Work

Robson Laidler Accountants has been named as one of the Best Places to Work in the UK for 2024 by The Sunday Times.

With a team of 94 staff across its two offices in Jesmond and Chester le Street, the accountancy and business advisory firm made the list and is thrilled that its efforts to improve workplace happiness have been recognised.

Amy Park, director of people and culture at Robson Laidler said: "We are completely overwhelmed to have been named in the Sunday Times Best Places to Work Awards and to be nationally recognised as an employer with the highest employee engagement and wellbeing levels alongside big names such as Octopus Energy and Easyjet Holidays.

"What makes this accolade even more special is the fact it comes directly from our people. There's no judging panel or swish submission to decide who makes the Best Places to Work list; it is based on honest feedback from our staff. I'm incredibly proud to work with amazing people across our business, who always show such passion and commitment to their work and clients and to supporting each other.

"We believe that a company's strength lies in its people, and that happy and engaged staff are the cornerstone of a successful business. We take pride in our diverse team and inclusive environment. Based on the insights gained from this year's feedback, we are committed to enhancing Robson Laidler, ensuring it continues to be an even more exceptional place to work in the years to come."

Managing Director Graham Purvis said: "We run the business on the triple bottom line principles of People; Planet; Profit. We set, measure and review goals to ensure we continue our business as a "force for good", living our purpose of "making a positive difference to people's lives. I couldn't be prouder of this achievement as it embodies everything we are striving for – to be an employer of choice."



Books stack up for digital accountants

New jobs and further growth are on the horizon for an award-winning accountancy firm after its books stacked up solidly last year.

Beach Accountants, based on Hebburn's Monkton Business Park, has created four new jobs after a successful 12 months for the business.

The recruitment drive, which will take its headcount to 16, follows a 25% rise in company turnover last year.

Underpinning this growth has been the onboarding of new clients and 'increasing demand for its digital-first accountancy services.'

The company made a conscious effort to digitise its operations and offer an alternative to more traditional accountancy methods in 2019 and is now seeing the investment bear fruit.

Gavin Spencer, founder and director, said: "We saw a real shift towards digital accounting begin to occur, so we made a strategic decision to become a digital-first practice.

"It not only meant we could provide a more responsive service to our clients, but also help them grow and be more environmentally friendly by slashing costs and their carbon footprint, all while remaining fully compliant.

"It also means we can provide them with updates on their financial performance in real-time, at the press of a button, which is something our clients really seem to value and I think has been a key driver in the increased demand for our services over the past 12 months."



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Andrew Brough

Lawyer of the Month

This month Northern Insight talks to...

Andrew Brough

Managing Director and Costs Lawyer at Brough Partners in Newcastle.

What were your career ambitions growing up?

When I was in secondary school, I completed a work experience placement in a local accountancy firm which I really enjoyed, so thought I'd ultimately pursue a career as a Chartered Accountant or something similar. However, I ended up studying a joint honours degree in Accounting & Law at Newcastle University which presented many different career paths which I had not considered previously. I then ended up working as a Law Costs Draftsman for a national company for over a decade, before ultimately qualifying as a Costs Lawyer.

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

As Managing Director and Costs Lawyer at Brough Partners, my role is certainly varied. As well as supporting a range of costs law cases in Court of Protection (COP), Inter Partes and Legal Aid, I also have responsibility for business operations including client liaison, file allocation and progress to completion to financial matters and staff training.

There are many parts of the role I enjoy such as helping to secure great outcomes for our clients and supporting and developing team members to achieve their full potential.

What is your proudest business achievement?

Looking back, it was leaving the comfort of a steady position with a firm I had worked with for over 10 years and taking the plunge of setting up in business. I'm really humbled and pleased that the business has continued to grow, with lots of repeat business from existing clients, which has allowed me to recruit, train and manage a small team.

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

When I started my career, almost all files we worked with were on paper. However, our office and the majority of instructions we now receive are paperless files. So now, more than ever, as a company we are embracing new technology and adapting to the ongoing commercial needs of our clients.

What are you currently working on?

My current workload varies from a seven figure costs dispute concerning a medical negligence matter, to numerous ongoing civil Costs Budgets as well as many Legal Aid public to family law costs cases.

Tell us about the team you work with.

Aside from being the Managing Director of the business, my main role is that of being a member of our fantastic team – working together, exchanging ideas and supporting them and their ambitions. A large part of our brand and culture is also

about personal development and training and helping our people achieve their goals and be the best they can be.

Following our recent appointments I'm proud to say we are now a team of six talented costs law specialists in Court of Protection (COP), Legal Aid and Inter Partes. We have also recently welcomed Ana Matos to the team as our new Head of COP too to support our growing client base.

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

Work hard and respect your elders.

What's the best piece of business advice you have ever been given?

Build a sound foundation and grow slowly and carefully.

Where do you see yourself in 10 years' time?

It would be great if the business has continued to make steady and ongoing progress over that time period, creating new opportunities for individuals joining us, whilst also providing an excellent customer experience for our solicitor clients. Also, I would still very much like to be involved in the overall strategic direction of the company, but hopefully the day-to-day management side will have been delegated by the time we get to 2034.

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

The Late Lord Denning – He had such a great legal brain, with a strong pursuit for social justice.

The Late Sir Bobby Robson – to see what it was like managing football clubs such as Barcelona, Newcastle United and the England national side.

Mike Tyson – to find out if he really is the baddest man on the planet!

The Late Freddie Mercury – A great singer and all-round entertainer.

How do you unwind outside of work?

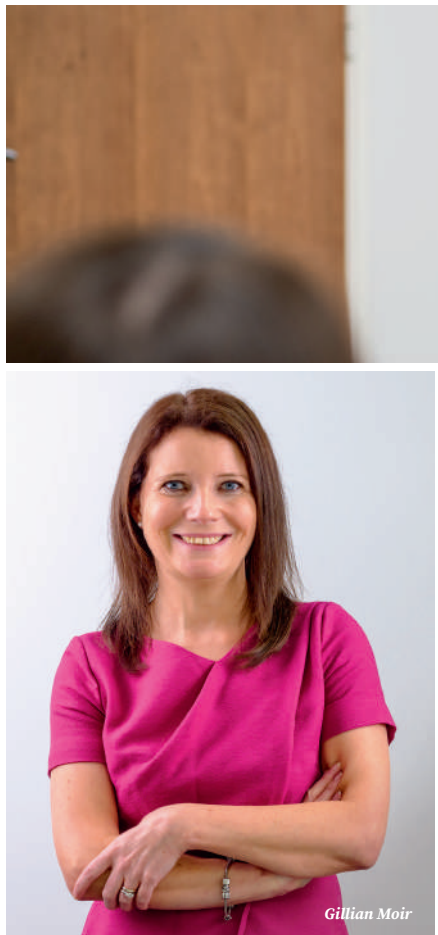
Running, fell walking or gym workouts.

Favourite book or film?

Film wise...it would have to be *Apocalypse Now!*

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Key legal developments shaping the Commercial Property Industry in 2024 and beyond



Gillian Moir

Amidst ongoing cost-of-living concerns and economic uncertainty, Gillian Moir, Partner at Swinburne Maddison LLP, delves into anticipated legal shifts affecting the UK's commercial property industry in 2024 and beyond.

Law Commission Consultation on the Landlord and Tenant Act 1954

The 2024 consultation, initially set for 'as soon as possible,' faces postponement until Autumn. This delay is perhaps a sign of the scale Law Commission's challenge. The stagnant 1954 Act, untouched for two decades, awaits overhaul, with the extent of reform still uncertain.

Anticipated in the review are various facets of the 1954 Act, aiming to align them with contemporary commercial lease practices, including:

- Extending commercial leases after the contract term ends, and a tenants right to a new lease (known as "security of tenure").



- The parties' ability to contract the lease out of the security of tenure provisions of the 1954 Act;
- Utilising commercial properties to rejuvenate town centres.
- Landlord criteria for terminating commercial leases.
- The Court's procedure and considerations for determining new commercial lease terms, including duration and rent.

Building Safety Act 2022

The Building Safety Act (BSA) 2022, among the most significant legislation of recent times, applies to new developments of at least two dwellings, standing 11 meters or higher. This applies to some mixed-use development and residential blocks.

While media coverage has focused on dangerous cladding and leaseholder protections, building owners and management companies face increased safety responsibilities. Legal ramifications will evolve as courts interpret the Act, influencing standard drafting and due diligence.

Development agreements must now balance BSA requirements with construction documents, considering competency standards for developers and their teams.

Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES)

Most buildings require an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC), detailing energy efficiency and recommended improvements. Since 1st April 2023, commercial properties must meet an "E" rating to be let, with plans to increase to "C" by April 2027 and "B" by 2030.

Recent government announcements suggest a relaxed timeline for these changes.

Commercial property owners, especially landlords, should prioritise energy efficiency to future-proof their buildings.

Abolition of Stamp Duty Land Tax multiple dwellings relief

In its Spring 2024 budget, the government revealed plans to end Stamp Duty Land Tax (SDLT) multiple dwellings relief (MDR) from 1st June 2024.

MDR applies to linked property transactions meeting specific criteria, fixing the SDLT rate to the average consideration. After June 1, 2024, MDR will only apply if contracts were exchanged before 6th March 2024, without subsequent variations, or if substantial performance of the contract happens before June 1, 2024. Additionally, the government stated no changes to SDLT treatment for mixed property purchases (residential and non-residential).

Green Leases

The real estate industry demonstrates heightened environmental awareness. We anticipate a rise in "Green Leases" for commercial properties. Such agreements facilitate collaboration between landlords and tenants to minimise environmental impact.

As there's no universal template, each "Green Lease" tailors to the parties' objectives and property specifics. Clauses may include regular energy performance assessments or more stringent targets for energy efficiency.

For additional details or guidance on the topics discussed in this article, or for help with any commercial property issue, feel free to reach out to Partner Gillian Moir. You can contact her by phone at 0191 384 2441 or via email at gm@swinburnemaddison.co.uk



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What's the plan?

By Nicola Nutley, Burnetts Solicitors

We find ourselves posing this question to our clients, particularly those with family businesses and agricultural businesses, on an increasingly regular basis.

This a huge step forward from years gone by when discussing the future was a subject to be avoided or at least, put off for another day.

Discussions surrounding succession are now more frequently on clients' minds and we think there are some key factors as to why the landscape has changed:

The bank

There is no more effective way of motivating clients to deal with a challenging subject than if money is at stake. This is very relevant in the agricultural and farming sector where much longer term loans are made to businesses. When lending to this sector, most banks will now insist that a succession plan is in place, for example, a 25 year loan facility where the youngest partner in the business will turn 65 during this term; some lenders are stipulating that a succession plan is drawn up and put into effect as a condition of the loan offer. A comprehensive succession plan must therefore be done in order to obtain funding.

Bad press

The press started publicising court cases where families were at war over disputed Wills and "Promissory Estoppel" claims (for example, *Spencer v Spencer* [2023] EWHC 2050). These cases highlighted the problem with not having wills and formal, written plans and agreements in place. Broken promises are now actionable legal cases with clear precedents for others to follow.

The next generation

Gone are the days when the only motivation a young person working in a family business needed was the quiet reassurance that "one day, this will all be yours". In a generation that focusses more on the here and now, it is no surprise that younger members of families with successful businesses are asking the succession question much earlier

than their parents did (if they ever dared to raise it!).

Given that succession questions are now being asked more frequently, what are the answers being given? We can break these down into three main categories:

"I don't know"

Fear of the unknown weighs down on the minds of the best of us. The last few years have been turbulent for most businesses with covid, lockdowns and the aftermath and then a period of high interest rates and inflation. You can start to see how uncertainty surrounding the future of a business would have a negative impact on someone's wellbeing. However, not knowing what the plan for the future is can sometimes be a good thing; it allows you to start from a blank canvass. With the right professional support from your trusted advisers, you can explore the options and make an informed decision from there.

"Well, Peter is going to get the farm and Paul is going to get a house paid for"

The difficulty with knowing what you want for the future is that most clients have come to this conclusion without appreciating the wider implications. It is not uncommon for clients to write their Wills leaving legacies

for those children who are not involved in the family business. Many of these legacies are simply not viable and the end result is that the farm, or the shares in the family company, would have to be sold in order to pay out the legacy. When presented with this net impact, clients often state that this is the last thing they want!

"I'll bring Peter into the business when he's ready"

Define ready? What do you mean by bring him in? What assets are in the business? Leave it too long and Peter will have gone to work somewhere else. Do it too early and without proper advice and Peter's divorce settlement will devastate the business.

There is no doubt that succession planning is increasingly at the forefront of clients' minds. Early input from your professional advisers remains key if you are going to look after the best interests of all those involved.

If you would like to discuss succession planning in a family business or an agricultural/farming business, please contact Nicola Nutley, head of our Newcastle office and she will arrange for one of our colleagues to get in touch: nnu@burnetts.co.uk • 0191 9174697 www.burnetts.co.uk



Nicola Nutley

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What can we learn from the construction sector about dispute resolution?



Gillian Scribbins

The construction sector is renowned for having particularly complex projects, which can leave greater room for potential disputes. However, in terms of avoiding litigation, there are more similarities between construction and your industry than you may think. Gillian Scribbins, associate solicitor in Muckle LLP's dispute resolution team, explains more.



Think about this question – why do we have contracts?

The lawyer's answer might be something like "to manage risks and liabilities, and set out clear obligations of the parties", but the practical answer might be "to keep everyone in check and on task under threat of clear, specified consequences if things go wrong".

Enforcing those contractual consequences is much easier said than done.

Dispute resolution in construction

The construction industry is good at coming up with practical ways to resolve disputes without having to incur the time and costs of going to court. Top of the list is adjudication. Whilst we encounter a fair amount of wariness due to the sometimes unanticipated decisions made by adjudicators, what they do is get you an independent decision, and fast.

More recently, we have seen one standard form contract providing the option of a Dispute Avoidance Board.

A Dispute Avoidance Board is meant to be made up of a representative from each party and a third, independent, pre-nominated individual who acts as chair of that board. Their job, should the senior executives have been unable to decide upon a resolution, is

to consider the dispute at hand and make a recommendation, for the disputing parties to implement.

It is an excellent idea in principle. It is not uncommon to find a dispute settles when clients manage to get key (and slightly removed from the project in question) decision makers of the opposing parties into a room together.

This is a departure from adversarial adjudication, and provides a formal resolution procedure in the overarching spirit of collaboration and good faith being wound into construction contracts.

Construction bods in the know will be aware that the JCT has released the 2024 version of its standard form Design & Build construction contract, last updated in 2016. In a similar approach, the JCT 2024 standard terms make collaborative working, working in good faith and addressing non-collaborative behaviour a mandatory condition, breach of which in theory would be suable for financial damages.

A recent case (Re Compound Photonics Group Ltd) has given a warning to the construction industry that where parties have contracted to operate in good faith, that dishonesty and bad actors to those contracts can and should be held to account.

In short, the name of the current game is collaboration and dispute avoidance – a common sense approach which we like to think must be working in the majority of construction cases. Whether there is any real consequence of failing to have early warning conversations, collaborate or act in good faith will remain to be tested case by case.

But what does this mean for me?

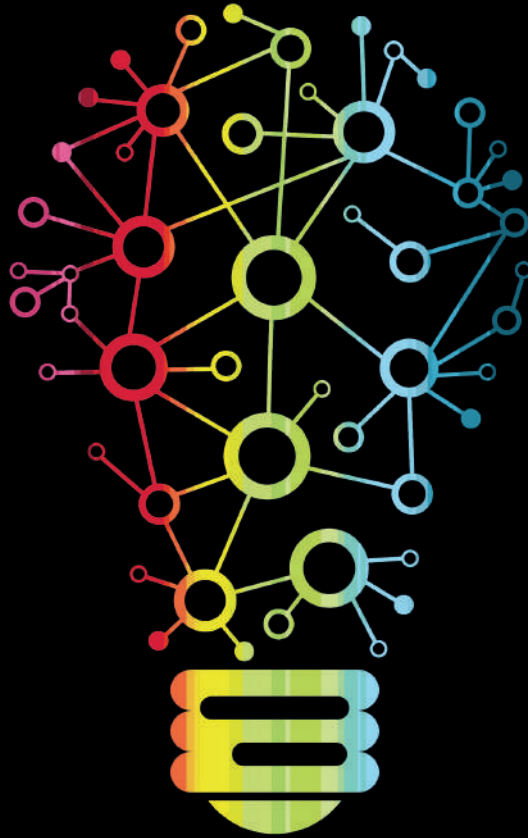
Whilst these forms of dispute resolution are specific to the construction industry, the same principles can apply across all sectors.

It's important to remember that, with the best will in the world, disputes do happen. Despite or notwithstanding any intended collaboration, parties do have a right to take matters to a court, which no clever contract drafting can overrule.

The solution?

Good contracts, good contract management, accurate record-keeping and, failing all that, a carefully thought-through resolution strategy.

For more information on construction law disputes, or general dispute resolution advice, contact Gillian using gillian.scribbins@muckle-llp.com or 0191 211 7955.



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Lydia McCaslin

Will my digital assets be passed on to my family?

Lydia McCaslin, partner and head of wills, trusts and probate at Mincoffs Solicitors, advises on the importance of considering digital assets when preparing a will.

You are likely to have considered what you would like to happen to your property and physical possessions after your death, however you may have given less thought to your digital assets.

More of our lives are stored online now than ever before, from social media accounts holding years and years of memories, to financial information tied up in online banking.

Accessing these accounts from numerous devices anywhere in the world certainly offers a new level of convenience, but also

comes with a unique set of complications when it comes to wills and estate planning.

One issue involves the security and privacy measures put in place by the platforms themselves. While these are integral to ensure your data is safeguarded online, without proper planning then these same protections could block loved ones from accessing important information after your death.

Additionally, more and more people are choosing to go paperless when it comes to bills and accounts, which can make it difficult for an executor to know if all assets have been accounted for.

While printing less documents and statements may be better for the environment, the lack of a paper trail can result in those close to you needing to spend considerable time contacting the companies involved, with no guarantee they will be able to help.

Another thing to consider are your online accounts which family and friends may want to access for sentimental value, such as social media or music streaming sites.

Some platforms, such as Facebook, Apple, Google and LinkedIn, allow users to set up legacy tools. Google, for example, allows you to allocate an inactive account manager, who can gain access after a period of inactivity predetermined by the account holder. Taking advantage of these measures can

provide peace of mind, knowing that family members will be able to access photographs and important files stored on a Google Drive or have the option to memorialise a Facebook account.

However, it is also important to consider how much access you would like to give your loved ones as you may have some files stored in the digital sphere that you would prefer to keep private or have destroyed upon your death.

Outlining this clearly as part of the estate planning process can minimise further distress during what is already a very difficult time for those close to you.

Accounting for digital assets in your will can be complicated and it is worth noting that not all digital assets can be gifted. It is therefore important to discuss your options with a solicitor so they can talk you through the process in depth.

This will ensure that you have peace of mind that your digital assets are properly dealt with after your death.

For friendly, trusted advice on leaving digital assets or making a will, contact Lydia McCaslin at Mincoffs Solicitors, on probate@mincoffs.co.uk or call the office on 0191 281 6151.

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Mayor Officially Inaugurates Sweeney Miller Law's New Sunderland Office

Mayor of Sunderland, Councillor Dorothy Trueman, officially inaugurated Sweeney Miller Law's relocated Sunderland office at a ribbon cutting ceremony in April.

The firm's colleagues, clients, and connections celebrated the opening with drinks and canapes in the new premises, Sweeney Miller House, a stone's throw from the banks of the Wear.

Managing Partner, Surbhi Vedhara, commented: "It was a pleasure to welcome the Mayor to our relocated premises for our official opening and to celebrate with our wonderful clients and team!"





The First Anniversary of Europe's Unified Patent Court

Launched in June 2023, the Unified Patent Court (UPC) is a specialised court established to handle patent disputes in Europe. So far 341 Cases have been initiated, the majority involving patent infringement and challenges to patent validity.

The unified judicial system of the UPC aims to simplify and streamline the litigation process relating to European patents. It offers a central forum for a wide range of patent-related matters including infringement claims, challenges to the validity of patents, requests for injunctions, and revocation actions. Notably, a decision of the UPC will have effect in all participating EU member states.

The UPC has divisions in Paris and Munich, as well as various local and regional divisions located all over Europe. Notably, despite the UK's departure from the EU, UK-based European patent attorneys holding certain additional qualifications are permitted to represent parties before the UPC. At Hargreaves Elsworth our attorneys possess all of the requisite qualifications, allowing us



Dominic Elsworth

to represent our clients before the UPC.

Compared to traditional patent litigation across Europe, which often involves multiple proceedings in different European countries, the UPC offers a quicker and more cost-effective resolution process.

Court fees at the UPC are set at a fixed rate, determined by the value of the claim in question, and small enterprises may qualify for a 40% reduction in court fees. Additionally, recoverable costs are subject to caps based on the claim's value. Having a comprehensive grasp of these costs from

the outset of UPC proceedings is a real advantage. It not only provides parties with clarity but also facilitates the assessment of financial risks associated with litigation.

Overall, the UPC, in combination with the Unitary Patent, offers a unified and streamlined approach to resolving European patent disputes, making it an attractive option for resolving patent disputes in Europe.

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Should my law firm be on social media?

By Elena Manukyan, Founder: Socially Legal, Social media for lawyers & law firms

Social media and law firms aren't exactly a match made in heaven. You have a combination of a busy, and overworked industry, many of whom aren't very well versed in the ins and outs of social media, and an ever-changing social media landscape that makes it difficult to keep up.

Lawyers are busy, often stressed, and carrying the burdens of their clients' cases. It's no wonder that the last thing they want to worry about are the latest social media trends, or the latest TikTok algorithm update. But by failing to take social media into consideration are they missing a trick, and more importantly, a vital source of leads for their firms?

Traditionally law firms have relied heavily on referrals from sources, their previous or existing clients, paid search engines such as Google, and in some instances, email marketing, although the latter isn't as common as you may think, with many law firms hardly ever sending worthwhile newsletters to their databases.

In 2020 I started my own law firm, yes, during the Covid-19 pandemic. It really wasn't the best time to start a business, let alone a law firm specialising in personal injury, but law and personal injury is all that I knew, so I went for it, what was the worst that could happen? But I had a slight problem in that we were still in full lockdown, unable to even spend Christmas with our families, let alone network and regenerate leads for a brand-new business, that relied on people being out and about and having accidents.

At the time I had almost no professional network, or a very small one, we'd spent a year in lockdown, and I had no idea where to turn to get my business off the ground. But I had used social media, mainly for personal use, for some time, and I realised that people were spending more and more time on social media thanks to the lockdown.

I decided to start posting about my business on Instagram and LinkedIn, at the time TikTok wasn't the platform that it is now, and I started to generate leads. I was over the moon, so I leaned into it as much I could to the point that it would often mean I got busy directly as a result of my social media activity. This was great but as business owner will know, when you get busy, it brings to light other problems that need addressing, like staffing and resources.

As lockdown eased and things returned to 'normal', I started networking in real life a lot more, but the reliance on social media never went away. As I got busier in the law firm I wanted to outsource my

social media activity to an agency, but I realised very few agencies specialised in law firms, or really understood the client demographic that I wanted to target.

In 2023 I decided to launch an agency specialising in legal marketing, specifically in social media, and helping law firms utilise social media for their firms.

Going back to the original question, should my law firm be on social media, the answer largely depends on whether your target audience are on social media. Most people use some form of social media, so it's likely that your target audience are on social media.

The next step would be to identify which social media platform would be most relevant to you and your business. If you target businesses, then LinkedIn is your platform, for B2C consumers you should consider a platform like TikTok, which has been growing in popularity unlike anything else we've seen in a while. Identifying your ideal client profile shouldn't be too difficult, it's likely you already act for these clients within your business, so using the data you already have in the business is a great place to start.

Personal branding or thought leadership seems to be growing in popularity, but is it all it's made out to be? That really depends on your objectives. Business owners need to be careful to avoid being the 'main character' or the 'hero' in their content, because that's reserved for their customers. Businesses are there to be the guide, something that is often lost when we think of personal brands. Knowing what to post requires an article of its own, because speaking to your target audience means first understanding them, which requires an element of social listening.

If you'd like to know more, please reach out, I offer free, zero obligation consultations for all legal businesses.

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What could Employment Law look like under a Labour Government?

Nathan May-O'Brien is a Solicitor at specialist employment law firm, Collingwood Legal. Nathan considers the potential employment law reforms which a Labour Government could seek to implement.

Recent opinion polls put the Labour Party ahead of the Conservative Party in terms of popular support. With the latest date for a general election being 28 January 2025, current projections suggest that the Labour Party may well win such an election and be able to legislate.

While we await the manifestos from the political parties, we do have some indications of what a potential Labour Government could do in terms of employment laws based on previous policy documents and speeches from Labour leadership.

1. Zero Hours Contracts

The Labour Party has consistently opposed zero hours contracts. In its *New Deal for Working People* it was proposed that Labour "will ban zero hours contracts". However, the Guardian has recently suggested that there will be no outright ban and instead the practice will be allowed to continue provided it is not "abused" with some minimum standards expected from employers. It is thought that workers may be given the option to "opt-in" to zero hours working arrangements.

2. The "right to disconnect"

Deputy Leader, Angela Rayner, suggested last year that "constant emails and calls outside of work should not be the norm" and the Financial Times reported that such a policy was "likely" to appear in any manifesto. It is not known what form such a policy would take, save that it was suggested that any policy would learn from the experience in other countries. France, for example, introduced the right to disconnect in 2017 with workers being protected from detriment should they not respond to an email out of working hours.



Nathan May-O'Brien

3. Banning "fire and rehire"

The practice of fire and rehire has come under much scrutiny in recent years with a new statutory code of practice due to come into effect by July 2024. The Labour Party has previously committed to outlawing the practice. However, it is not currently clear whether the practice of dismissing an employee for rejecting an amended contract will be explicitly outlawed or whether the Labour Party will simply commit to strengthening the remedies and updating the currently proposed code of practice.

4. One "worker" status and day one rights

Perhaps most notable of the commitments in its *New Deal for Working People* was a commitment to create a single status of "worker" as opposed to the current statuses of "worker", "employee" and "self-employed". Moreover, such workers would receive "basic protections" including "rights to sick pay, holiday pay, parental leave, protection against unfair dismissal and many others" from the first day of their employment.

It appears that should the Labour Party form the next government, it will consult further on creating a single worker status, but it is not clear whether the removal of

qualifying periods from, for example, unfair dismissal will take place regardless. Such a move would greatly expand the risks for employers dismissing an employee as the current 2-year qualifying period would no longer apply. It is thought that there will be a form of exception for staff who are in their probationary period, but it is not clear how such an exception would operate.

Comment

There are other proposals the Labour Party has made in the past, including reforms to Trade Union legislation and extending the time limit to bring Employment Tribunal claims. It will be important for employers to review the content of any manifesto as while reform has been on the agenda while in opposition, the actual content of the policy commitments may be different when it comes to a general election.

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Cancer Charity improves Mental and Physical Wellbeing

Maureen Elliott, a specialist cancer nurse for more than 30 years and founder of the Live Well with Cancer charity, has embarked on a transformative journey to redefine cancer support services through the introduction of wellbeing books and innovative community engagement initiatives.

For almost five years, North Shields based Live Well with Cancer charity has been a beacon of hope and support for individuals and families affected by cancer. The charity was founded after the closure of an NHS 'Living with and Beyond Cancer' service, despite it winning accolades and recognition for invaluable contributions to cancer care. Fuelled by a relentless commitment to meeting the unmet needs of cancer patients, Maureen forged ahead with determination and resilience by setting up the charity.

The charity's first products were their North Tyneside and Northumberland mindfulness colouring books, which allow the reader to connect with the moment as they colour their way through the landmarks of the region. They have since partnered on The Wellbeing 9-a-Day, an innovative wellness journal that encourages people to improve their health and wellbeing, offering a holistic framework that individuals personalise to their wants and needs as they build a healthier lifestyle.

In addition to her ground-breaking work with Live Well with Cancer, Maureen is the driving force behind North Bank Cafe, a cherished community hub in Nile Street, North Shields.



The Bernicia Foundation Passes £1m Milestone Supporting North East

The Bernicia Foundation has passed the milestone of £1m in grants, helping communities and young people, just months after celebrating its fourth birthday.

The charitable arm of Bernicia, the North East housing association, has just gifted the region its one-millionth pound of support for projects that deliver lasting community benefits and help inspirational young people reach their goals.

The Foundation awarded its first grants in February 2020, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Through its Inclusion and Inspiration Grants, the Foundation supports charities, third-sector organisations and individuals across the North East.

In surpassing the £1m milestone, the Bernicia Foundation has now supported thousands of people across the region during a period of unprecedented economic and social challenge. Inclusion Grants of up to £10,000 have been awarded to 95 charities, charitable companies and constituted voluntary and community organisations, while Inspiration Grants of up to £1,000 have been awarded to 33 talented young people, with a further £200,000 in targeted emergency COVID-19 support given to local authorities to deliver to community support charities.

The people and projects supported by The Bernicia Foundation's grants include charities tackling poverty relief, working with people with addictions and their families, disability support, job creation, health activities, support for care leavers and neurodivergence schemes as well as talented young sports people and musicians.

Hay & Kilner colleagues conquer the darkness to raise £1,000 for Great North Air Ambulance



Colleagues at North East law firm Hay & Kilner have conquered the night to raise hundreds of pounds for a vital regional charity.

A ten-strong team completed a 20-mile night walk from Newcastle to Wylam in Northumberland and back to raise money

for the Great North Air Ambulance Service (GNAAS).

The team left the firm's headquarters on St James' Boulevard and headed along the south bank of the River Tyne through Blaydon and Ryton as darkness fell before reaching the welcoming halfway point of the

Boat House pub in Wylam around 8pm.

The return journey took the team back into the city along the north side of the river, and after around seven and a half hours on the road, they got back to their starting point just before 1am.

Around £1,000 in sponsorship from friends, colleagues and business contacts has now been added to the total that's been raised so far this year, which currently stands at more than £3,200.

Members of the firm voted to adopt GNAAS as their dedicated charity for 2024 and are organising a series of individual and team-based activities to raise as much money as they can for their chosen cause.



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Get into Volunteering

It's National Volunteers Week 3-9th June - did you know according to ONS research 16.3m people formally volunteered last year and almost one in five (17%) people reported volunteering at least once a month! The voluntary sector contributes about £20bn to the UK's GDP- but more than that it helps to improve millions of lives.

Mark Johnson is a retired professional who had a senior role in a local youth offending team. He was aware of one of NE Youth's programmes Odysseus Mentoring Project (OMP)- when he retired and felt it was the perfect opportunity for him to offer meaningful support in the community without all the paperwork and responsibilities that go alongside being a member of staff.

Mark uses his love and passion for sport and fitness to be a role model and motivate young people to change their attitudes and behaviour for a more positive future for themselves.

Mark commented: "I was aware of a programme (OMP) through my professional working career and understood the model in terms of how it worked and knew it would be a good fit for me in retirement. I act as a mentor for a young 16 year old boy and it's the second young person I've worked with within the Odysseus Mentoring Project. Mentoring is about advising, befriending and guiding. It's not about being an authority figure but supporting someone and leading by example.

I have an interest in helping so the mentoring project as a voluntary interest is quite a good fit with me. I am not involved in the formal case management of the young person or assessing risk, but with the experience that I've got, I am able to provide



Mark Johnson



him with a platform and good sounding board for anything he wants to discuss."

Volunteering is very rewarding. There is something about how much involvement you have with the young person but to actually see the model working in terms of what I bring from consistent contact. There are some really good discussions and reflection on his part, with the changes in the way he thinks about things and how I can support that. The way it makes me feel is really gratifying and very rewarding in terms of capitalising on the experience I had in my working life previously. Volunteering has taken away a lot of the stresses and allowed

me to have a really positive affect.

When asked about any advice Mark would give to someone thinking about volunteering- he suggested: "You should be realistic about what it is you can achieve but don't underestimate the fact that the value and importance of what you actually do bring such as life experience. Sometimes in a subtle way, to be able to influence, direct and shape a young person's thinking is an absolutely crucial role. Where the volunteering with NE Youth fits in is that there's work done in terms of the referral and how the young person is prepared for mentoring. Each part of the system works really well and it is a superb opportunity for anyone."

There are also a lot of young volunteers in the region- like Ava, who is 14, she volunteers at DAY - Durham Area Youth who provide youth provision across several villages on the outskirts of Durham.

Ava said when asked about her volunteering role: "I love volunteering at junior sessions and events at Durham Area Youth. I help staff set up and support young people to engage in group work. I also help those who don't want to take part in activities. My role is a support youth worker. I really feel I get something out of it like giving back to the community. I would encourage people my age to have that conversation about volunteering- it will make you feel good."

neyouth.org.uk
www.durhamareayouth.org.uk



TINY LIVES

Tiny Lives supports babies and families on ward 35 at the Royal Victoria Infirmary which is the neonatal intensive care unit. The charity offers a safety net for parents who have entered a world completely out of their control.

Why was the charity founded?

Tiny Lives was set up to ensure the best possible outcomes for premature and sick newborn babies. Born in 1983 Tiny Lives was the brainchild of Dr Hans Steiner a paediatrician who with Dr Edmund Hey took care of babies at Newcastle's Neonatal Unit, which at the time was based at the Princess Mary Hospital. As Tiny Lives grew into an independent charity and developed, we recognised the huge impact that having a premature or sick newborn baby has on a family and to ensure the best outcome for that baby we needed to extend our support to the family that is incubator side.

Which areas do you cover?

Currently our support is available to all babies and families who spend time on the Neonatal Unit at the Newcastle's RVI. The unit looks after babies from across the North East and Northern Cumbria. Babies are often transferred to the RVI from other hospitals in the Northern Neonatal Network, which stretches from the borders of Cumbria and Northumberland into North Yorkshire and as far south as Northallerton.

What types of events do you have?

The annual Tiny Lives Ball is one of the most important events in our fundraising

calendar, bringing together prominent faces from the business community, hardworking medical staff and parent supporters of the charity for a night of amazing entertainment, delicious food and live music – all to raise vital funds. This year the event will take place on Saturday 5th October 2024 at Hilton Hotel, Newcastle/Gateshead. For more information or to book contact louise@tinylives.org.uk or 07904 511226.

What is your mission?

Having a premature or sick baby can be one of the most difficult and life changing challenges a family can experience. Tiny Lives is here to help ensure the best possible outcomes for babies and their families throughout their neonatal journey. We recognise the neonatal journey is different for every family. For some, it may start during pregnancy and for some it may continue long after discharge. Tiny Lives supports babies and their families throughout this journey.

What have been your proudest moments so far?

Being discharged from hospital with a newborn baby can be daunting and being discharged from hospital after your baby has had a neonatal stay can come with further

anxieties and concerns. It can also be an isolating experience for parents when their baby has additional needs. Back in 2019 Tiny Lives were proud to introduce our post discharge support for our families in the form of our Parent & Baby classes. Open exclusively to families who have spent time on the neonatal unit, the free to access Tiny Lives 'Meet, Chat, Learn' sessions, offer play-based learning, development groups and support networks where our parents can come together, share experiences and learn new skills, to support them and their baby. Our work supporting families once they have returned home from hospital now also includes a self-referral counselling service to help parents process their emotions following their experience with neonatal care.

What are you currently working on?

Around one in seven babies born in the UK each year are admitted onto neonatal units, meaning a huge proportion of the North East workforce has experienced neonatal care with their baby, because of this fact Tiny Lives is proud to have developed a Neonatal Awareness Training Session. The training, designed to support businesses by educating them about the potential impact of Neonatal Care on their employees.

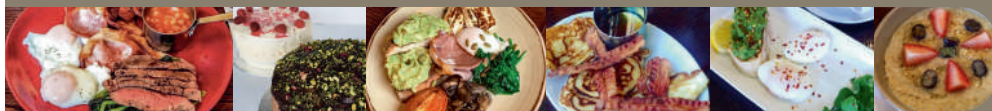
How do people get involved?

If your workplace may be interested in taking part in this free training session, or would like to become involved in fundraising or volunteering please contact Rachel Hardwick, Fundraising & Engagement Manager at rachel@tinylives.org.uk. 0191 230 2112.

www.tinylives.org.uk



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Heartfelt guidance, when you need it most

In an exclusive interview, Jackie Marston sits down with Deborah Mitchell, the driving force behind Deborah Mitchell Independent Funeral Services, to delve into the heart and soul of this unique venture.

Deborah, thank you for joining us today. Can you tell us a bit about what inspired you to start your own funeral services business?

The inspiration came from a deeply personal place. I wanted to create a space where families could find solace and support during one of the most challenging times of their lives. Being the only female-owned independent funeral directors in Washington, Tyne and Wear, I saw an opportunity to bring a different perspective and level of compassion to this important industry. Having worked for other funeral directors, I just thought it could be done in a more heartfelt way.

Can you share with us what sets Deborah Mitchell Independent Funeral Services apart from other funeral directors in the area?

At Deborah Mitchell Independent Funeral Services, we pride ourselves on offering heartfelt guidance, especially when it's needed most. What truly sets us apart is our dedication to serving our local community with integrity and compassion. We believe in honouring every individual's unique journey and ensuring that their final farewell is a reflection of their life and legacy. We are committed to sustainability,

striving to minimise our environmental footprint by offering eco-friendly options and utilising locally sourced materials and services whenever possible. This supports our community and reflects our values of responsibility and care for the environment. With us, families can find peace in knowing that their loved one's farewell is not only meaningful but also mindful of our planet and community.

It's clear that your commitment to personalised service is unwavering. Can you tell us more about the services you offer and how you support families through the funeral process?

From the moment families reach out to us, we're here to provide guidance and support

every step of the way. Whether it's arranging a personalised service, honouring veterans with special discounts as a thank you for their service, or ensuring that every family's wishes are respected and fulfilled, we strive to exceed expectations. Our funeral service packages start at just £1295, making quality care accessible to all. We have also built a dedicated ceremony room where those who want a more intimate funeral can utilise.

How can families reach out to Deborah Mitchell Independent Funeral Services for support?

Families can contact us directly 24 hours a day on 0191 722 1263 or visit our premises at 41 Station Road, Columbia, Washington NE38 8LY. They can also reach out via email at info@dmfuneralservices.co.uk or visit our website at www.dmfuneralservices.co.uk for more information.

Thank you so much for sharing your insights with us today, Deborah. We wish you all the best with the official opening of Deborah Mitchell Independent Funeral Services on 6th June 2024.

At 1pm on 6th June, a special tribute will be held to honour those who sacrificed themselves at the Normandy landings. The tribute will feature the Last Post bugle call and Reveille, commemorating their bravery and service. This event also marks the 80th anniversary of this historic occasion.

dmfuneralservices.co.uk



Deborah Mitchell



OFFICIAL LAUNCH EVENT

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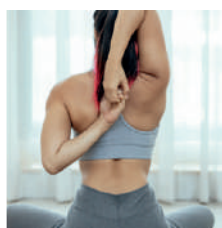
Step into care with Gosforth Family Chiropractic!

We recently had a fantastic time at the North East Expo at Newcastle Racecourse, where we connected with individuals and business-owners eager to learn about what makes us tick.

It was truly an honour to share insights on the wonders of chiropractic care with so many attendees. Our team is passionate about empowering patients to live pain-free, healthy lives. Whether your discomfort is a fleeting annoyance or a persistent issue, our dedicated staff will guide you towards optimal relief every step of the journey.

At Gosforth Family Chiropractic, we pride ourselves on being a warm, welcoming practice with a family-friendly atmosphere. Your wellbeing is our top priority, and we're here to put your body in safe hands.

If you would like us to visit your place of work to explain the benefits of good chiropractic care – then contact us at care@gosforthfamilychiropractic.com



Thank you from the bottom of our hearts

We would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to everyone who attended our exhilarating race night recently! Your incredible support and generosity have helped us raise a staggering £1800.

We would like to give a special thank you to Prime Wills and Trusts for their sponsorship of this event. Their support greatly contributed to the success of the evening and we are immensely thankful for their partnership.

We are absolutely thrilled by the overwhelming response from our community, and we couldn't have achieved this without each and every one of you. Your presence and contributions made a significant difference, and we are truly grateful for your involvement.

Once again, a massive thank you to all the attendees, volunteers, and supporters who helped make this event a resounding success. Your passion and dedication are truly inspiring.

Keep an eye out for updates on how your generous donations are making a difference. Together, we can continue to create positive change and transform lives.

If you would like to volunteer for events and fundraising activities with The Three Tumours, contact us on our website – www.thethreetumours.co.uk

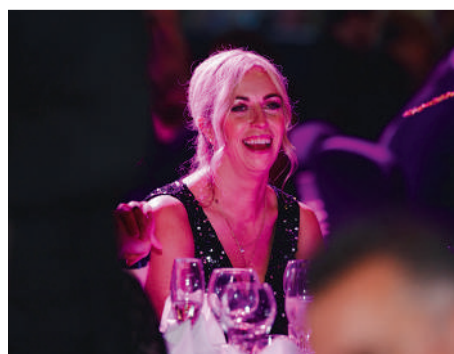


Local businesses win charity awards

BBC's Reverend Canon Kate Bottley presented 46 businesses with 'Shared Value' Awards at Oasis Community Housing's Black & Gold Ball, recently held at Hilton Newcastle Gateshead.

Almost 300 people attended the homelessness charity's annual fundraising event, which recognises the support and successes of its corporate partnerships.

Over £44,000 was raised for Oasis Community Housing's life-changing work with men, women and families facing homelessness across the North East and South East England.





Hard work and talent rewarded, as six staff promoted

A North East Law Firm is celebrating the success of employees through six promotions, as it rewards them for their hard work, effort and talent.

Jacksons Law, which has offices in Teesside and Newcastle and a presence in Sunderland, has promoted four solicitors, as well as two members of staff in HR and finance.

The promotions recognise the hard work and effort of these individuals, who include John Bewick, Karl Medd, Beckie Talbot, Emily Skillcorn, Isabelle Waddell and Caroline Harrison.



Newly qualified solicitor joins the top-ranked dispute resolution team at Muckle LLP



Leading North East law firm Muckle LLP has strengthened its Tier 1 dispute resolution team with a newly qualified solicitor.

Georgia Barber, who joined Muckle on a training contract in 2022, completed a history degree at Newcastle University before studying a Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL) and a Legal Practice Course (LPC) at Northumbria University.

Her recent qualification builds on Georgia's previous experience as a commercial paralegal at Premier League club, Brighton & Hove Albion Football Club, where she worked on transfer

and loan agreements, player contracts, consumer ticketing terms and conditions and a variety of sponsorship agreements.

During her training contract at Muckle LLP, Georgia took seats in the commercial real estate team, in which she advised on sales, purchases and leases for large home development clients, and the commercial team, where she advised on and drafted a broad range of commercial contracts.

Georgia has now qualified into the dispute resolution team, where she is advising on a range of commercial disputes.



Court of Protection Solicitor joins Hay & Kilner

North East law firm Hay & Kilner has added specialist knowledge to its award-winning private client team with the appointment of solicitor Zoey Phillips.

Zoey is a Court of Protection solicitor, looking after the property, financial and personal affairs of individuals who don't have the mental capacity to do so themselves, whether through an acquired brain injury or a longstanding health condition.

She completed her academic and professional legal qualifications at Northumbria University and has worked in practice in the North East ever since.

As well as assisting Court-appointed 'deputies' working for clients across the North East and Cumbria, and acting as a deputy herself, Zoey is also called upon to make expert statements in cases across the UK.

She also works with people wanting to become lay deputies for family members and assists with complex applications to the court following this type of deputyship appointment. Hay & Kilner's private client team



was picked out as a 'Tier One' firm in most recent edition of legal industry 'bible' The Legal 500 and was named as Private Client Team Of The Year at the 2022 Northern Law Awards.

New Staff At Healthwatch

Healthwatch Gateshead and Healthwatch Newcastle have appointed two new members of the team.

Healthwatch are the independent voice for people from Newcastle or Gateshead who use health and social care services such as GPs, a dentist, hospital, or a care home. Their role is to ensure social care and health commissioners and providers listen to the views of their local communities to facilitate continuous improvements to their services.

Courtney Peel from Ashington has been appointed as the Business Services Manager to manage day to day administration, policies and procedures and data protection. Lewis Brown from Newcastle has been appointed to the role of Information and Communication Officer.

Lewis will be responsible for developing and implementing the communication strategy to raise awareness of local Healthwatch initiatives, update information on the website, manage social media channels and coordinate marketing and PR activities for the organisation.



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Gareth Jones and Gemma Holmes

Fresh faces as Talentheads find the 'perfect' candidates to head up expansion

Talent acquisition and development firm Talentheads has enjoyed rapid growth since launching in 2020 and has now opened a second office in County Durham. Founder Sam Spoors discusses how the award-winning firm found the 'perfect candidates' to help launch the new site.

We are halfway through 2024 – and what a year it has been so far at Talentheads.

We've grown. A lot.

Following a record 2023, this year we've expanded further, opening a second office in County Durham which is now in full swing.

We've grown the business, but also the Talentheads team – and we couldn't be more thrilled with the results. Two senior staff members with a wealth of experience have joined us and will play key roles in supporting our new base at Durham Workspace.

At the helm will be Gareth Jones in his role as Lead Talent Partner, while Gemma Holmes joins us as our new Business Development Manager.

Gemma has already hit the ground running by making invaluable connections and opening doors throughout the local business community as she builds our client base.

And Gareth will be the backbone of our exciting new operation South of the Tyne. Bringing 15 years of invaluable recruitment

industry experience to Talentheads, Gareth's track record is exceptional.

Having started at an agency, he has recruited for almost every corporate role under the sun – from admin and HR to directors and marketing experts – whilst also working alongside directors in FTSE 250 firms.

Gareth has also managed teams of up to a dozen people, and both his strategic and leadership experience will assist growing businesses in the area in identifying, hiring and retaining their talent.

And here at Talentheads, that is our bread and butter – and why as a business we've grown year-on-year since launching in 2020. Our model is fresh, unique and has disrupted an industry which was in desperate need of a shot in the arm. Talentheads is that shot in the arm. We recruit to retain – not just to fill a role. And we are not just a recruitment company – we are talent acquisition and learning and development specialists.

The Talentheads team embeds itself in your business to find candidates who don't

just shine on their CV but who match your company's values.

This attracts staff who want to grow with your business, and who won't hand in their notice after 18 months.

We ensure this through our trailblazing Talent Success Cycle which we use to develop, coach your and retain your staff. Our clients adore this model. It frees them up to grow their businesses and saves them a fortune.

We don't charge agency fees, which to date has saved clients over £1.2m, and, by recruiting to retain, businesses avoid having to fork out for another round of recruitment a year or two down the line.

We also practice what we preach.

Both Gareth and Gemma were recruited following the same methodical approach that we undertake for any of our clients.

As such, we know that both of them are the perfect fit to help our expanding client base and to grow the County Durham office to the same level as our Northumberland HQ in Morpeth. For us, both sites are equal and they will both provide the same award-winning services that have fuelled our rapid growth over the past four years.

And Gareth and Gemma are just the first names through the door of our new space. As it grows, we anticipate further appointments as Talentheads becomes the go-to name for talent acquisition, learning and development throughout the North East – and beyond.

If you would like to chat with the team at either our Northumberland or County Durham offices about how we can help you solve your people puzzle, please visit www.talentheads.co.uk

Do you know the National Minimum Wage?

Bryony Gibson, director of Bryony Gibson Consulting, shares some advice to help you ensure your business adheres to the new regulations.

On 1 April, the National Minimum Wage (NMW) increased and there are strong rumours that the North East will become the next regional enforcement target for HMRC.

Extended to domestic live-in workers and with employees aged 21 becoming entitled to the National Living Wage (previously 23), it means the minimum pay workers must receive depends, predominantly, upon their age:

21 years+ - £11.44
18 - 20 years - £8.60
Under 18 - £6.40
Apprentice - £6.40

As a sign of intent, the government recently named and shamed over 500 businesses for failing to pay the NMW. Highlighting major high-street brands, it was a message that nobody is exempt. It doesn't matter about your size or whether a role is part-time, casual, agency, or trainee. By law, everyone must be paid the NMW for their time.

With beefed-up penalties as part of the crackdown, miscalculating employers face the prospect of a £20,000 fine, a financial penalty worth 200% of any underpayment, and being made to repay arrears dating back six years.

While their policy suggests the emphasis is cooperation and compliance, under the National Minimum Wage Act, criminal

sanctions can be reserved for the small minority that are persistently non-compliant and refuse to cooperate.

Regional Wage Enforcement

In place from 2022, if HMRC intends to target the North East it is due to central data that suggests workers are likely to be paid below NMW or intelligence gathered, which can include complaints made by workers.

When pursuing a new area, typically HMRC floods the region to gather intelligence and identify businesses that require a 'nudge'.

The first sign of being under review is to receive a letter asking you to check your compliance. With no actions or dates, it can easily be missed. If so, it will be followed by an offer to perform a free 'health check' of your NMW compliance. Failure to take up the offer will lead to a formal enquiry.

What do you need to do?

Broadly speaking, as an employer, you should try to undertake the following:

1. Conduct a review to assess the state of your NMW compliance.
2. Create a risk register of what is in place and identify the areas where further investigation is required.
3. Sample-check payment records to see if there are any periods where you could be at risk of underpayments.
4. Based on the data, build an action

plan and a more robust and controlled environment (policies and working records) moving forward.

5. If you have discovered an error and underpaid a worker in the past six years, recalculate their pay and pay the shortfall. The most important thing is to ensure steps are taken to rectify any issues immediately. Coinciding with the NMW increase, on 7 April, there was also a rise in the range of statutory payments.

It would pay to re-look at your family-friendly statutory payments, including Maternity & Paternity Pay, Adoption Pay, Shared Parental Pay, Parental Bereavement Pay, and Sick Pay.

Changes to the NMW and statutory payments usually come into force each April, so keeping a legal checklist that you review annually will ensure you stay on top of obligations and don't get caught out.

If targeted, remember that the HMRC's initial calculations may apply incorrect assumptions without access to all your information. I suggest seeking professional advice throughout the process to ensure you are not unfairly reprimanded and your reputation as an employer is not unnecessarily put at risk.

By taking these simple proactive steps, you can avoid the risk of legal penalties, protect your reputation, and ensure fair treatment of your employees.



Bryony Gibson

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Unparalleled success - NE Expo at Newcastle Racecourse!

Fresh Start Events hosted the North East Expo at Newcastle Racecourse this month, and oh boy, what a turnout! The event drew in a sea of enthusiastic business folks, marking the first of two annual gatherings.

With a surge in interest and support, this year's expo needed a bigger playground, prompting a change in venue with that decision by the organisers proving spot-on!

The Newcastle Racecourse welcomed more guests than ever before, turning the expo into a buzzing hive of activity.

Lorraine Gordon from Fresh Start Events, the mastermind behind the event, couldn't contain her excitement, saying, "We're over the moon with the overwhelmingly positive response! This year's turnout was off the charts, with both visitors and exhibitors raving about the fantastic experience."

Attendees were spoiled for choice with over 150 exhibitors and a whopping 1050+ visitors, doubling the numbers from previous years. Plus, with 16 seminars featuring local, regional, and national speakers, everyone had a chance to dive deep into diverse topics throughout the five-hour extravaganza.

Exhibitors struck gold, mingling with a diverse crowd, and soaking in the latest trends, products, and solutions from industry bigwigs. Local exhibitors *Terence South* from *ISR Laser* – www.isrlaser.com and *Phil Hayden* from *Silk Route Spirits* – www.silkroutespirits.co.uk shared their success stories, with Terence reporting a jam-packed stand and Phil attributing their popularity to a generous splash of rum and gin (though we suspect their charm had something to do with it too)!

The North East Expo is the go-to event for small and medium-sized businesses across Tyneside, Wearside, and Northumberland, so mark your calendars for their next shindig on 14th November 2024, back at the Newcastle Racecourse. Trust us, you won't want to miss it!

Lorraine teased, "We aimed for the stars this year and boy did we reach them! But hold onto your hats, folks, because November's



event is going to be even bigger and better!"

Geeta Patel-Ral from JAM Marketing echoed the sentiment, declaring, "Hands down, the best exhibition in years! Well-organised, well-attended, and brimming with curious visitors. It's a must-have on our annual event checklist!"

For more info and to secure your spot, visit www.freshstartevents.uk - 0191 511 1467 or connect@freshstartevents.uk

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In Conversation With...

Northern Insight spoke with

Laura Gillespie

Director, Gillespie Recruitment as her firm celebrate their third anniversary.

Reflecting on the past three years, what are the biggest accomplishments of the business?

Our biggest accomplishment is getting to year four. I had been told so many times that new businesses rarely get through years two and three so to have achieved those milestones is something to be proud of.

The great relationships we have with our clients is something that I am also very proud of and grateful for, most have been with us from the beginning and it is great to see their businesses grow.

I wouldn't be where I am today without the support of my team and also my amazing network who offer support, advice and friendship along the way.

How has the business evolved since its inception, and what notable changes have occurred?

Starting in an incubator unit at NE BIC and within 10 months upsizing to accommodate our existing team, with capacity to grow. Year two saw the launch of our national healthcare division and adding a dedicated marketing person to the team has improved our online presence massively.

What challenges did the business face in its third year, and how were they overcome?

Year three was the most challenging. Running a business and being accountable for people is the hardest thing I have done, and I have learnt so much along the way. The candidate marketplace is tough. It has changed since the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis. Clients are having to be so much more flexible in what they offer.

Can you share any memorable moments or milestones from the past year?

Definitely the move into our current office, from the Incubator unit into a great space which will give us the opportunity to expand!



Laura Gillespie

Advertising for Artists for one of our global clients and increasing our reach on social media by 900%!

How has the business impacted the local community or industry over the past three years?

We are proud to be in Sunderland, our team are local, and we recruit heavily in the community. We are proud to support local charities.

What lessons have been learned since the business started, and how have they influenced your decision-making?

Cashflow is king! People don't always do what they say they are going to do. We tend to look at things more closely these days before making decisions that will impact business.

In what ways has customer feedback shaped the direction of the business?

We ensure our clients and candidates have the best experience possible, and it is lovely to get their feedback on how we have supported them. Both refer us to other businesses or people who are looking for jobs which is fantastic.

How has the team grown and developed since the business began?

We have grown the team organically and are now a strong team of five who all share the same goals and vision and are excited about what year four will bring.

What are the goals and aspirations for the business moving forward into its fourth year?

We are committed to working as hard for our clients and candidates as ever. We will continue to grow our client base across the UK whilst building new relationships here in the North East.

Lastly, how will the business continue to innovate and stay competitive in the coming years?

By keeping an eye on employment trends, making sure we use all of our resources and continuing to look at new technologies. We will stay competitive by doing what we say we will do whilst being open, honest, and passionate!

gillespierecruitment.co.uk

Why we must think differently when it comes to local skills needs

Michelle Storey, Accreditation Manager at awarding organisation NCFE, explores the opportunities for colleges, training providers and employers when it comes to creating their own qualifications and serving the needs of their local communities.

Meeting local skills needs has always been key, but the pace of change for regulated qualifications can often be too slow for the demands of industries that are trying to stay ahead in their sectors.

The world of work, the economy, and skills requirements are changing rapidly, yet it still takes two years to develop an apprenticeship standard. Add another year for market adoption and a further year to produce knowledgeable, skilled and productive apprentices in the workforce, and we're effectively asking industries and occupations to stand still for four years.

That's just one of countless examples as to why our skills system is falling further behind the pace of change. Something needs to happen if we're to at least catch up, if not get ahead.

Industry knowledge

This is where accreditation has a big role to play. It can boost the curriculum and provides an opportunity for colleges, training providers and employers to co-create new customised qualifications that meet sector-based skills gaps. Despite this, it still feels like a not very well-known or explored solution.

The fantastic thing about further education is that it's filled with subject experts and industry knowledge. If this is then combined with expertise in designing qualifications, new courses can be created that directly meet the specific skills needs of different industries.

These bespoke qualifications can be aligned with Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) to speak to broader regional skills gaps. Learners benefit thanks to receiving a

branded certificates that act as a difference-maker when progressing in their chosen career, and colleges, training providers and employers retain full ownership and intellectual property of the courses they write.

Endorsed programmes

If designing a brand-new qualification is overkill for what a particular industry or sector requires, there's also the option to have workshops, seminars and short courses endorsed by an awarding organisation which don't have formal assessment criteria.

At NCFE, we recently developed the option to have branded digital credentials that allow learners to have an online recognition of their achievements. This provides a portable and detailed account of the skills they've gained.

Whether it's fully customised qualifications or endorsed programmes, accredited training has the added benefit of being a point of differentiation, such as in tender submissions. It's also valued by Ofsted thanks to the programmes being externally validated by an awarding organisation.

In addition, customised qualifications can also be used as the training course element of a Skills Bootcamp - flexible courses supporting employers wanting to retrain existing staff in order to develop new business or upskill and expand roles. Skills Bootcamps also support individuals who are self-employed, and any employed or unemployed adult looking to gain new skills to enable them to progress.

Awarding body accreditation can be used to add credibility to Skills Bootcamps, assuring participants and stakeholders of their effectiveness. With digital credentials alongside, participants can show how they've directly benefited from completing a



Michelle Storey



Skills Bootcamp and allows them to clearly demonstrate their skills and knowledge.

Staying ahead

With greater devolution high on the election agenda, it's likely we'll see increased powers heading to our regions to help them tackle localised skills and training needs.

Reducing the influence of Whitehall will help to speed things up, but by thinking innovatively, colleges, training providers and employers can take more control of their own unique offering and needs and better support the varied communities and industries they serve.

[ncfe.org.uk](https://www.ncfe.org.uk)

Kathryn Rodgers

From empathy to flexibility - Employers' role in employees' marital struggles

Navigating marital troubles is challenging and can spill over into professional life.

Here are five tips from Kathryn Rodgers of face2faceHR on how employers can support employees during these testing times. It's not always possible to commit to these, but it's something that all businesses need to consider.

Open Communication Lines - The end of a relationship can disrupt an employee's work output. Employers must understand if external factors like marital issues contribute to performance decline. This should be done delicately, fostering an environment where employees feel secure discussing their problems. Employers also need to look out for domestic abuse signs, such as personality changes or frequent, unexplained absences.

Display Empathy - Marital issues can distract employees and affect their work. Supporting them during this phase can lead to a productivity boost over time. Employers should exercise patience and avoid rushing a performance improvement process, which could add to the employee's stress.

Grant Flexibility - Employees may need time off to manage new family dynamics or handle legal matters in a marital crisis. Employers can consider offering parental leaves, sabbaticals, or flexible working hours, working from home options etc., to help employees balance their work and personal challenges. Legal regulations limit the frequency of

flexible work requests, but being more accommodating can be mutually beneficial during such times.

Careful Documentation - Employers must remember that any documentation related to the employee's performance or compensation must be disclosed in legal proceedings. These documents should be prepared with this in mind, and confidential information like client-related data should be private.

Understand Legal Aspects - While there are no specific legal protections for employees facing marital difficulties, related issues like mental health problems could qualify as a disability, giving the employee additional safeguards. Changes in childcare responsibilities could lead to potential sex discrimination claims if requests for flexible working arrangements are unjustifiably denied. Employers should also be wary of potential interference from the spouse in the employee's professional matters, as these may require investigation.

In a world where the legislation of employees and employers changes, regularly, is it time for your business to bring in the cost-effective experts at face2faceHR?

Kathryn Rodgers - 07946 330 025. www.face2facehr.com

Is your business prepared for the summer?

At HR Dept, we provide support and advice to small and medium businesses so, with summer (and hopefully better weather!) fast approaching, we are aware that a lot of businesses need to consider how this period will be managed.

Summer, like Christmas, is one of those crunch periods when many employees are competing for limited blocks of time away. So, have you thought about how you will manage your staff through the summer holidays?

What's your annual leave policy?

This is the most basic step but it is worth checking you have a policy written down. While there are statutory rules you have to adhere to, your policy will guide you and staff in how annual leave works in your business.

For example, how to prioritise annual leave? First come, first served is a pretty fair way to do this, but maybe a rota system may suit your business better? Your policy may explain minimum staffing requirements, or busy times when leave will be refused for everyone. Conversely, it may include a shutdown, when everyone must take some of their annual leave.

Use HR software

If you are not already using HR software already to manage annual leave, you will consider it a godsend when you try it out! It will keep track of all annual leave, letting employees self-serve their own requests, and giving you an easy way to approve or decline them.

Even better, it is not just limited to annual leave management and will take the stress

away from a whole load more of your HR admin.

Other leave entitlements

One of the main factors in busy holiday periods is school holidays, and the need for working parents to look after their children. There are other leave entitlements that can be used if they run out of annual leave – most specifically unpaid Parental Leave.

This entitles parents to up to four weeks a year (taken in whole week blocks and normally capped at 18 weeks in total per child). They must have worked for you for one year to qualify and give 21 days' notice. You can ask them to postpone it if there is a good business reason but, if it relates to school holidays, they may have little choice.

For those who have another caring need – say someone with a disability or an elderly relative – Carer's Leave could be an option, giving up to a week per year as unpaid leave as a day one right. It can be taken in as little as half day increments.

Another form of leave – Emergency Leave for Dependents – is not an appropriate mechanism for the summer break as it is

limited to unforeseen circumstances, not long-anticipated school holidays.

A longer-term solution could be designing term-time-only flexible roles.

Reserve staff on standby

One way to keep your business staffed during peak holiday season is to develop a reserve of stand-in experienced staff. This could be through a relationship with an agency, suppliers who can pick up slack or perhaps staff who have retired but would appreciate a little work on the side.

Above all, try to be fair with your annual leave policies: Fair to all staff whether they have children or not – everyone needs a break; but fair to your business needs too and the employees who are left behind to hold the fort.

If you need help implementing any of the above or would like any other HR support, please get in touch.

Alison Schreiber, HR Dept, Durham & Newcastle South. Call 01325 526 036 or email: alison.schreiber@hrdept.co.uk



Alison Schreiber



Tech for good: New charity website portal matches volunteering with businesses

Employee volunteering days have become the norm, and The Teesside Charity has applied technology to manage and match employees' volunteering hours with volunteering opportunities.

The Teesside Charity bridges the gap between the charities and businesses of Teesside by bringing together those who can help people in need to make the region a better place in which to live, work and do business.

The charity's key function is to financially support community groups and charities based within Teesside that promote social wellbeing and provide support to those who find themselves at a disadvantage in society. These include, but are not exclusive to, those living in poverty or living with a disability, the homeless, those recovering from an addiction and the long-term unemployed.

One aspect that the charity focuses on is volunteering opportunities for businesses and individuals, but with limited resources. Matching volunteering opportunities with businesses was difficult to organise with high numbers of volunteering hours available and little resource for individual charities to connect. After gaining a place on the 'Design for Growth Volunteering Challenge', The Teesside Charity received funding to create a volunteering portal on their website that simplifies how businesses can manage their employee's volunteering hours.

The portal has been welcomed by the business community and is already matching volunteer hours to opportunities from charities within the Teesside region. Website visitors can shortlist a selection based on location, manual or desk-based positions, trusteeship opportunities, and individual or team options.

The portal is simple to use and can be accessed 24/7, the user can choose the type of volunteering option and organise their

placements themselves, saving valuable time for The Teesside Charity.

Diane Williamson, charity manager said: "Our primary aim with the portal is to be able to share with our corporate donors' ways for their teams to give back to their community by volunteering, but in a simple way, where users can access opportunities without relying on our team's intervention. "We've adapted the categories and opportunities over time. We keep in regular contact with charities and groups for new placements and share those with not only our corporate donors, but our wider supporters, and actively engage with ad hoc requests from new contacts. The new portal has made it efficient and helps charities get in front of new audiences."

Rachel McCulloch, associate director and practice manager at Active Chartered Financial Planners, a business utilising the charity's new portal, said: "The volunteering portal has been a fantastic asset; it has really pushed forward our ESG policy. Everything is in one place and it's easy for our team to use and sign-up to volunteering opportunities. As soon as we shared the portal with our employees, four people signed-up straight away. The portal has opened our eyes to the wide range of charities out there and it's very humbling. A lot of our team didn't know what type of volunteering opportunities were available and it has shown the different ways they can help a charity."

To find opportunities and make a difference today, visit www.teessidecharity.org.uk/get-involved/volunteering



The Power of Pausing

How often do you do that, in your work and life? Pause, stop, listen, recover and regroup? And what would be different if you did?

As you read this we'll have reached June. For some this will end Q1 of your financial year, for others it's half way - and it came about fast! Strategies will be in motion and revenues may or may not be where you wished. Plans may have unravelled, and success may seem a long way off.

This pattern is a familiar one. June is also the half way point in our calendar year, marked with the solstice.

The Summer Solstice reminds us to turn inward and find the nourishment needed to grow and evolve. It is a time to pause and wait for the energy planted in the Spring to reach full bloom. In business, this may mean we need to be patient. We may see setbacks, as we can't predict what the environment may bring. It will though bear fruit though as the year progresses.

Pausing, allows us to recognise what we're noticing, what lessons we've learned, and where we still need to focus for the rest of the year.

Increasingly this doesn't happen. The speed of customer demand, technology and change, our scattered attention and a myriad of demands from work, family, and life keep us always on and busy. This doesn't serve us well.

Pausing is built into many things around us, yet we resist it; don't make space for it. Consider:

- **Daily our bodies need to rest.** Sleep is proven to be crucial to our functioning. The time we sleep is when the cleaning and repair teams in our bodies come out. They tidy up, repair our organs and tissues and makes sure we're ready to go again the next day. Get too little - we deplete our energy and health.
- **Exercise:** in all forms of exercise, there is a period of recovery. This could be a rest between sets in strength training, walking and stretching at the end of a run, or suvasana (corpse pose) in yoga, when we rest to take in the energy generated in practice.
- **PC System Back ups:** ironically, we've even programmed pausing into our machines.



Annabel Graham

Why then do we fail to plan in times to pause, rest, regroup and recover for ourselves? Everything around us tells us it's worthwhile, yet we still fail to value being still?

So I invite you to do just that, and to focus on three things.

Pause

- Listen inward and outwardly - what do you notice?
- What patterns do you see repeating? Notice these without judgement.
- What sense and meaning do these give you?

Recognise

After you have paused, start with the good stuff (send your critical inner voice on a short holiday).

- What has gone well for you? What successes have you had, what have you achieved?
- What or who has helped you achieve these successes, and how can you lean into this more?

- What have you put in motion that is yet to bear fruit, where must you be patient?

Focus

Finally regroup, and decide where your attention will serve you best.

- **Stop:** What patterns and plans do you need to release as circumstances have changed.
- **Start:** What must be set in motion to enable you to gain momentum?
- **Continue:** What is difficult that you may be of service to you if you lean into it?
- **Accept:** you can only control what is within your sphere of control; stop worrying about everything else.

So find the time. It may be 5 minutes at the end of the day, an hour in the week, or a half day or day alone or with your team, when you pause and review. I guarantee it with be worthwhile.

Annabel is an Executive and Team Coach, Leadership Facilitator and Coach Supervisor. Contact Annabel via LinkedIn, annabel@successfultraining.co.uk, or visit www.successfultraining.co.uk

When everything becomes just a transaction

Dr David Cliff examines the value of courtesy in business practice and the impact it has on customer loyalty and the bottom line.

The adage that “courtesy costs nothing” was coined at a time when we still had notions of gentler social contact, a time when words like “etiquette” were still in common usage and its rules practiced. These days however, we’ve become more distant, more ‘transactional’ through the use of technologies and correspondingly, many people have become socially de-skilled, failing to appreciate the importance of courtesy.

Employers often talk about younger staff members in particular, who seem to lack the common courtesies of a telephone call, seeking face-to-face contact etc, preferring instead to fire off the odd email that is purely functional, rather than has anything to do with the relationship with the customer in mind.

Sure, the box is ‘ticked,’ but such practices do little to enhance the relationship between customer and supplier, which is crucial to customer satisfaction and lifetime customer values to an organisation. Customer relations has become for many, a templated, scripted exercise born of the overuse of technologies that have reduced the quality of social skills in people. As psychologist and philosopher Eric Fromm, stated as far back as the 1970’s, social skills are not innate in humans, they must be practised and quickly atrophy when unused.

Courtesy is about maintaining attentiveness to the fact that a business relationship is more than the functional transaction ensuring the supply of goods and services for legal tender. It works on the basis that these exchanges are artefacts of human emotions and representative of the desired relational content of the players lives, at least in part. Every action has a meaning and purpose that transcends the behaviour itself.

Ring a customer occasionally, a call being truly based on human interest, rather than sorting gripes, or do you want to upsell to them, is quickly discerned by customers. They can tell the difference between suppliers with whom they have a relationship and those who are simply there to functionally service them. Some customers, of course have the same mindset and so business relationships often take place on an entirely mechanistic, ‘bat for bat’ technological exchange basis. Such transactions require careful mindset

adjustment by those involved as those who seek meaning in their business relationships can easily find themselves disappointed by such processes.

Getting to know our customers and understanding how they like services delivered requires both automated and human systems to encompass the value of choice and the idiosyncratic nature of people. Most of all, however, it requires real human interest. Checking in, acknowledging any difficulties, addressing these, and even the odd genuine ‘how are you?’ communication, are part and parcel of providing some element of connection and maintenance of a relationship that exists.

Every customer touch point needs to be handled sensitively, respectfully, with high levels of communication and attentiveness to the fact that somebody has placed their faith in you and your organisation.

Courtesy is a business practice that is fundamental between customer and supplier, workplace relationships and an absolute in terms of quality leadership practice. There’s a Zen to it that needs to be thought through. It’s something that acknowledges the identity and value of each and every customer in a world that constantly seeks to unitise people to fit scale up models.

This is why at Gedanken, we’ve enhanced the personalisation agenda amongst our service offerings. It’s easy to do, we’re not that big but, it’s important that we observe our fundamental relationship maxim which is “keeping the humanity in a busy world”. This does not mean that we’re not consummately efficient, rather we recognise there are humans on the receiving end, and we need to think carefully about their experience of us and the journey we take them on.

It’s often a subject that comes out in coaching, it may not use the word courtesy, but it comes out in other “code” such as customer satisfaction or even the grizzles that occur around getting paid or the customers expectation of added value. Yes, courtesy, and the need for it is coded in all sorts of ways and the wise entrepreneur recognises this.

www.gedanken.co.uk

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*...many people
have become
socially de-
skilled...*

Vulnerability as a Tool for Empowerment

Due to Covid and then having my focus directed on growing my new businesses, from 2020 to the end of 2023, I hadn't participated in any speaking events.

At the end of last year, a former client invited me to speak at their upcoming event. Despite not having fears of public speaking, the three-year hiatus left me with some nerves. Typically, I rely on a trusty slide deck, but this venue wasn't equipped for me to have a screen.

Although not my finest moment in motivational speaking, I managed to navigate through it. Subsequently, I found myself speaking at other events without screen provisions. By the third occasion, I hit my stride, feeling at ease. Consequently, when asked to headline an event for 120 people a few months ago, I was asked if I needed a screen and, feeling extra confident, I declined.

On the event day, I hastily messaged the organisers to determine the duration of my slot, which turned out to be 50 minutes followed by Q&A. Riffing for nearly an hour with a perimenopausal brain was not the ideal foundation for an inspirational talk. So, I quickly created a slide deck but unfortunately getting a screen at the last minute was not possible.

Knowing I would have to refer to the slides on my iPad and having to pause to look down at them, with the audience just sitting there looking at me, I feared it would look like I didn't know what I was talking about. As the room started filling up, I started to panic a little that this wasn't going to be up there as one of my greatest moments. So, here's what I did:

I put my fear in the spotlight. I started my talk by telling everyone the above anecdote and how I would be looking at my notes to make sure I covered all I wanted to say. It allowed the audience to feel what I was feeling and for me not to worry about what they were thinking because I had controlled the narrative.



L-R: Jude Daunt, Julie Turnbull, Claire Pickersgill

Image by Alice Slee Photography

It was probably one of the best talks I have delivered in my career to date.

When you allow yourself to be vulnerable, you open up to those around you and to your own personal growth.

This is one small example of how we can grow if we allow ourselves to be vulnerable enough to put our insecurities on a pedestal.

Like many of you reading, I am someone who actively avoids networking, so it might surprise you to read that myself and two co-founders, Julie Turnbull and Claire Pickersgill, have launched a networking event called the Ladies Collective. Let me state two things: one, it's the opposite of traditional networking, and two, there is a connection to the above...

Networking can feel icky because everyone's sole purpose is to sell themselves; it's ego-driven and nothing feels genuine.

The Ladies Collective is different because it's not about selling; it's about support. What we actively encourage is that you come together to empower each other, and to do that, you need vulnerability – being vulnerable to

share if you're struggling and where you might need support.

You can't grow if you can't admit where you need support and then be brave enough to seek it.

Imagine if everyone adopted this approach in your business right now, leaving egos and judgments at the door, and being open and honest about what they need or what they are worried about. I invite you to get vulnerable; now it doesn't need to be on a stage; you can do this just with yourself. Start by admitting to yourself where you are struggling and think about what support you need to be able to grow, then take one action over that this month.

For 1-1 Coaching Visit
Jude Daunt Coaching
www.judedautcoaching.co.uk
If you want a unique coaching programme for your employees visit
www.activatedmindset.co.uk
For details of the next Ladies Collective contact Claire Pickersgill on LinkedIn

Kindness must become an Olympic Sport

I recently returned from Paris. The city was full of Olympic buzz, as they prepare to host the event this Summer. Infrastructure taking shape across every renowned Parisian site from the Eiffel Tower to Versaille Palace. Ready for the world to see this incredible city in all its glory. But there was something missing.

The city of love, is apparently not so loving! Homeless people and migrant camps were nowhere to be seen. Social cleansing has become the norm for the Olympics. The UK conducted the same practice ahead of 2012.

Human rights, along with empathy, are not part of the plan when it comes to planning for this global event.

And whilst we allow this act to happen, the problem only gets worse.

Social cleansing creates significant problems:

1. Moving the homeless and migrants from their 'homes' causes vulnerable people severe distress. Stress that creates further damage to their mental health and their wellbeing.
2. Homeless charities loose contact with the individuals they are supporting. The homeless individual is now without that much needed support to protect them.
3. Migrants are prevented from being able to process the paperwork they need. They potentially get lost in the system, preventing them from attaining legal status and support.
4. It reduces the ability to support, change and reduce these social issues.
5. It costs money, resources and time, putting added pressure on that country and city.

Hiding problems is not a solution, it just causes further issues.

Society needs to wake up and be confronted with reality.

Seeing the problem and accepting the problem enables empathy, thus enabling an opportunity to create change.



You may argue that seeing people homeless and desperate for asylum isn't nice?

Of course it isn't!

But denying there is a problem, is ugly.

It's unkind.

Events like the Olympics are a powerful opportunity to create a legacy of kindness.

Changing the make up of society not to upset those that are privileged enough to attend the Olympics harks back to the days of Workhouses. As history has taught us, Workhouses weren't designed to support the most vulnerable as depicted at the time, they were created to remove the poor from the streets for the benefit of those more fortunate. And to use and abuse them, vulnerable men, women and children.

Slave houses, where people went to die.

Social cleansing creates a rose tinted visual of the world, a world we want to see. A visual of how it should be. But removes the opportunity to create that world.

Seeing is believing after all.

Seeing the desperation of homelessness isn't nice but it evokes thought, discussions, and change.

Much the same as we can't hide the problems we have a responsibility to resolve in our



businesses, we can't hide them, they won't go away, they just get bigger.

There'll be many businesses benefiting from the Olympics, supporting the Olympics, even just posting about the Olympics. Businesses with social policies, businesses who say they support the homeless, poverty eradication and the protection of human life. Businesses saying they are kind but aligning themselves with such significant unkind action.

But businesses have a platform to challenge this Olympic event, and support the eradication of social cleansing.

To enable kindness.

The best sport of all.

www.kindcurrency.co.uk

The Silent Saboteur in Business



Helen Butler

An emerging pattern, from conversations with business owners over recent months, is the avoidance of engaging in difficult conversations. This avoidance is far from a trivial issue; it represents a significant obstacle that can harm the overall health of a business.

When leaders shy away from addressing issues such as underperformance or guiding their teams through strategic changes, it dramatically impacts the company's ability to grow and operate efficiently.

Confronting challenging issues directly isn't just helpful—it's essential for long-term success. These conversations allow owners and leaders to tackle and anticipate future challenges, understand deeper organisational needs, and refine operations. More importantly they enable problems to be resolved immediately and establish a foundation for sustained success.

As a leader, it is your responsibility to initiate these tough conversations. Taking ownership of these discussions shows commitment to the health of your business and sets a standard for openness and proactive problem-solving within your team.

It's crucial to look beyond the discomfort of the moment and focus on the long-term benefits these conversations can bring to your business.

I understand why these conversations are avoided. The fear of conflict and the potential to damage relationships can be daunting. However, the consequences of avoidance are far more severe. Unaddressed issues can fester, eroding team dynamics and undermining trust across the business.

Critical conversations often overlooked

1. Performance-Related Discussions: It's uncomfortable to confront someone about underperformance, but necessary. Avoiding this can demoralise your committed team members and drag down overall productivity.

2. Strategic Decisions: Delivering tough decisions, such as redundancies or significant strategy shifts, requires courage and clarity. These conversations are crucial for maintaining trust and respect within your team.

3. Regular Feedback: I always emphasise the importance of continuous, constructive feedback. It drives innovation and improvement. Without it, your business risks stagnation and missed opportunities for growth.

The impact of avoidance on your business

Avoiding these essential discussions can inadvertently foster a toxic culture where accountability is absent and problems are ignored. This neglect can manifest in several harmful ways:

- It can deteriorate team morale, leading to a disengaged workforce.
- It often results in missed deadlines and project failures, directly impacting your business outcomes.
- It may reduce your credibility as a leader, as employees lose trust in your ability to manage effectively.

Practical tips for handling tough conversations

- **Prepare Thoroughly:** Always enter these discussions with a clear understanding of the issues and your objectives.
- **Communicate with Empathy:** Express your points clearly but with empathy. Remember, these are challenging discussions, and approaching them with compassion ensures they remain constructive.
- **Follow Through:** Consistent follow-up after the conversation demonstrates your commitment to resolving the issue and supporting your team. It helps solidify the changes and shows your dedication to improving the situation.

Avoiding difficult conversations might seem like a shortcut to maintaining peace but ultimately sabotages your business. As a leader, embracing these challenges not only resolves immediate problems, but can also strengthens your team, ensuring your business doesn't just survive but thrives. These discussions are opportunities for growth and improvement—embrace them.

simplifiedoperations.co.uk

The power of Action Learning Sets for modern leaders

In today's fast-paced, often remote, work environments, leaders need to prove the tangible impact of training on their team and organisation more than ever before – and even more so for public sector and not-for-profit organisations where scrutiny on spending is acute.

Vicky Arnold, Head of Client Organisation Development at People Spark Solutions is here to tell us about one of the most powerful tools for embedding learning and facilitating real impact in your business – Action Learning Sets.

“Action Learning Sets – or ALS – were pioneered in the 1940s at The National Coal Board and based on their proven success, the technique is now used all over the world in a huge range of sectors including health, banking, retail and professional services. They are an unsung hero in the team development toolbox – especially for teams that are time-poor and working remotely – and we at People Spark want to shout about it from the rooftops!”

So what are Action Learning Sets?

Action learning is a powerful problem-solving process that develops leadership, team and organisational capabilities at the same time. It involves small groups of 5 to 7 people, usually peers with similar levels of experience and seniority, committing to

work together on a real challenge facing their organisation and taking tangible action to find solutions. It is built on six essential components:

1. Real, urgent challenges: The group tackles significant issues that stretch the participants. When we tackle real world challenges, the stakes are high and there are real consequences for failure. This generates buy-in from participants rather than asking them to work on simulations or scripted scenarios where there are no consequences if a solution isn't found.

2. Diverse teams: Participants should be from diverse backgrounds – they may be from different departments, organisations or simply a dynamic mix of personalities based on MBTI segmentation. Diversity leads to creativity and this is essential for problem-solving and innovation.

3. Insightful questioning and dialogue: Team members are encouraged to find solutions through a structured process of questioning, supported by a balance of challenge and support from their peers.

4. Action-Oriented Approach: Teams must take action on the challenges they are working on, ensuring that learning is tied directly to practical outcomes.

5. Focused Learning: Over time, as trust builds within the group, they learn together by reviewing both results and processes.

6. Facilitation: An action learning coach ensures that the team adheres to the ground rules and focuses on generating actionable insights.

Vicky continues: “The built-in reflection is what sets ALS apart from other training techniques. This needs to be fostered by the coach, the organisation's stakeholders and the participants. The group needs the time to step back and reflect on the process and the outcomes because simply taking action is not enough. In order to truly learn as adults, we need to relate the training to our own experience and question how to apply it to our own needs and environment.

“Our top tips for any organisation thinking about implementing ALS are to make sure you work with an experienced facilitator so that the group adheres to the ground rules and can clearly identify learning opportunities in the process, always ensure the participants are a diverse group of peers, and choose a real challenge for them to work on so there are clear benefits and consequences for finding – or not finding – a solution.”

Get in touch with Vicky at vicky@peoplesparksolutions.co.uk for a no-obligation chat about ALS or any of our coaching and learning opportunities. www.PeopleSparkSolutions.co.uk



A seeker of joy...

Dr Rebecca Williams Dinsdale is a Lifejoy Coach and author of five books. She has a unique approach to coaching which has helped countless people find joy in their lives.

Can you tell us what led you to become a life coach?

I've always been a seeker in life. A seeker of joy, hope and wisdom but to have those things in life they need to be underpinned with courage and resilience. Learning to be resilient can be a demanding task and I found that my daily life was full of lessons that could be shared to help other people. When a ton of illness hit me and more than twenty years of severe M.E. ruined much of life, there were great lessons of courage and coping strategies to be found. My university asked me to give talks to their new students about keeping going when their degrees became difficult ~ suddenly I knew I had found my purpose. People kept asking me for help, so I wrote my first book and started to have my first 1-2-1 clients. I've gathered a comprehensive range of qualifications since then and four more of my books have been published but really it is the hard-won experience and empathy that are the most helpful to my clients.

Could you share a bit about your personal journey and how it has shaped your coaching approach?

Life is about listening, learning, and loving well. My life has been a rollercoaster of imposed restrictions, reductions, and resourcefulness. I listened to many medics, gurus, and experts about dealing with life and found that the people who really understood suffering and struggle were rare. I developed my own coaching and counselling system called L.I.F.E.J.O.Y which stands for Love, Integrity, Fortitude, Energy, Joy, Order and You.

My 1-2-1 sessions are shaped by the needs of the client, and we go at their pace. They are a safe space and allow for all their emotions and often we laugh a lot too. I want to look



Rebecca Williams Dinsdale

Photo credit - Rachel MacClumpha

after my clients as if they were my family members. I have a Lifejoy toolkit that can be tailored to fit an individual with their unique circumstances. I always start with new clients by asking them to write a list of 100 blessings in their lives. It takes time to learn to savour the tiny treasures of normal life, but it is vital to appreciate what you have before you can work to have more.

"Thinking well, living well, and loving well" are powerful aspirations. How do you guide your clients towards achieving these goals?

Every client is different, but they all are dealing with some level of exhaustion and need to build sensible structures into their lives. This might need to be about learning how to manage limited energy, insert kind boundaries or find the ability to say NO THANK YOU more often. Thinking well is the foundation for all my work: when we think calmly, wisely, and logically then we have the superpower to make good decisions. The more decisions we can string together, the stronger we become. After that, we start to notice that our health and well-being can improve and most importantly our relationships deepen.

What advice would you give to someone who is considering seeking the help of a

life coach but may be unsure if it's right for them?

I've always sought out wise and good people in life. If you're thinking about some form of coaching or counselling, I would say, well done for getting that far ~ it's a huge sign of maturity and good luck with it. Try to find someone whose values align with yours and that you like. Having a pleasant time whilst working together is crucially important. Check their qualification and read their testimonials too. My Mentor, Jackie Webster from Soul Purpose Mentoring has been invaluable to my well-being and progress.

Finally, what do you find most rewarding about your work as a life coach?

I feel very fortunate to have been able to be well enough to be able to work. My intention is to use all the immense challenges we have endured to a good purpose that can help other people. Helping others is a form of healing and seeing their light shine brighter is a great blessing. Every week, I have the great privilege of seeing brave and brilliant souls make progress despite considerable challenges in their lives. That is something to cherish and celebrate.

Find out more at www.drrebecca.org.uk

Hottest ticket in the North East - The new take on Women's Networking

A forward-thinking trio of business leaders from the region have made their mark on the North East networking scene with their powerful and unique approach to supporting women to connect, collaborate and thrive.

One to watch, the newly formed 'The Ladies Collective' partnership returned with their second in a series of sold-out networking sessions dedicated to providing a supportive environment to aid women's personal and professional growth with wellbeing and mindset at the core.

Reaching new heights female business leaders from across the region aligned at Newcastle's 3Sixty to join The Ladies Collective, a collaboration between Claire Pickersgill from House of Hype & Co. and Julie Turnbull and Jude Daunt from Activated Mindset Online.

The Ladies Collective has been building momentum since a successful launch event in January 2024, and tickets were snapped up swiftly after the announcement of the Spring Reset event.

By spending an inspirational evening helping local businesswomen to realign their goals, The Ladies Collective have crafted a unique opportunity for female business owners to gather together and re-evaluate their current mindset.

Guests experienced empowering sessions led by visionary speakers in mindset transformation, crystal healing, business tarot reading by Debbie Stoke and beauty advice

and treats from the team at H Beauty, Harrods plus the opportunity to make valuable new connections at the sold-out event.

Claire Pickersgill, Founder, House of Hype & Co: "We are in absolute awe at the response to our new networking concept, we really didn't expect the reception we have had from female business leaders across the region. The growth and demand has snowballed very quickly and we are working behind the scenes on some really exciting developments to support the demand.

Cultivating connections is key and the networks that are organically forming through The Ladies Collective are so inspiring to see. The demand is not just North East based, we have requests to take the concept to Manchester and Edinburgh and also on an international scale so we are really excited for the next stage of growth."

Julie Turnbull, Co-Founder, Activated Mindset



L-R: Jude Daunt, Julie Turnbull, Claire Pickersgill

Online said: "We're feeling empowered and inspired all over again! This was our second sold-out gathering, and the enthusiasm is contagious. We're all about prioritising ourselves, focusing on mindset, and nurturing wellbeing. In the often-lonely world of women in business, we've created a warm, welcoming space where support and growth go hand in hand.

According to a KPMG study, 75% of female executives need a mindset shift to thrive, and we're here to make that happen. After our last event, the interest has gone global, and we couldn't be more excited about the journey ahead."

That's where these events with The Ladies Collective step in, helping women in business to break through limiting beliefs and align with their big business ambitions through an evening of uplifting speaker sessions, joining the next Ladies Collective event is a must for women in business.

Faye Docherty, Head of Development and Partnerships, Foundation of Light commented: "The Ladies Collective; Julie and Claire have a fantastic way of elevating their events, and I believe much of this comes from being surrounded by truly inspirational women. The Ladies Collective really focus on sharing the importance of being the best version of yourself to be able to give the best of you to your business.

It's inspiring to find yourself in an environment where you're able to be unapologetically yourself and engage with likeminded women; learning and sharing in their stories of progression and growth, which in turn, inspire your own."





Stephen Patterson

New Mayor, new future for Newcastle and the North East

By Stephen Patterson, Chief Executive of Newcastle NE1 Ltd

The North East Mayoral elections in May signalled a major turning point for Newcastle and the wider region, providing a springboard for the future success of the North East.

We are now on the cusp of something extra special and we congratulate Kim McGuinness on her new role as the first North East Mayor and look forward to working with her over the next four years to ensure that the city and the wider region realise their full potential.

That the local authorities are coming together and working for the common good represents a seismic shift in the political tectonic plates of the region. The strength of voice provided by the new Mayor and the Combined Authority will be critically important in sustaining momentum for ongoing major projects, and will inject new dynamism, enthusiasm and ambition for crafting a long-term vision for the city and the wider North East. This will set the direction of travel for the region for years to come.

By speaking and campaigning collectively, the region will wield significant influence nationally, and amplify the combined voice of the North East.

There is a sense of urgency and a desire to see the new Mayoral authority accelerate existing projects and get new ones off the ground. Projects such as the Washington Metro Loop and Leamside Line, Gateshead's Conference and Exhibition Centre, and Homes England's Quayside West residential-led scheme are all strong examples of ambitious projects that will make a substantial contribution to the future economic prospects of the region.

There is a renewed optimism for and in the city, as it undergoes a once-in-a-generation transformation. With cranes towering over Newcastle's skyline, dramatic progress is already being made on sites across the city including Pilgrim's Quarter, the Helix, the Stephenson Quarter, and the £37.5 million investment currently transforming Newcastle's retail core.

Investment comes in waves, and the economic stars have aligned to make this a tsunami. It presents a huge opportunity that must be grasped. But these projects have been years in the making, and transformation on this scale takes time. We now need to start discussing the longer-term vision for the region. We need to identify the next pipeline of major projects that will turn the dial and build on what has been achieved to date. We need to map out and create our hopes and vision for the future.

Abraham Lincoln said 'The most reliable way to predict the future is to create it'. The region is awash with opportunities, and the convening power of the Mayor, combined with the strength provided by the seven local authorities working together, creates the best possible environment for the region to chart its course, make its case, and secure the investment the region needs, and deserves.

Progress will not be easy, nor should it be. The region will have to fight tooth and nail to secure each and every opportunity presented. We are competing nationally against combined authorities who are equally as ambitious and committed to their future prosperity. We need to be equal to, or greater than that challenge.

It's early days, but so far, the new Mayor and Combined Authority appear to have hit the ground running and seamlessly transitioned from a combined authority of three to a combined authority of seven. No doubt this is the result of a dedicated team focused on the task at hand, and it bodes well that we have solid foundations on which to build an ambitious future.

It has been a long time coming, but finally, as a region, we can project strength, unity, and an unwavering desire to grow and reach our full potential.

www.newcastlene1td.com



Safecall

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Joanna Lewis

Whistleblowing reports increasing in workplaces as modern slavery emerges as a new area of concern

The number of whistleblowing reports across the UK continues to rise with modern slavery emerging as an issue among organisations, according to a new report produced in the North East.

Whistleblowing continues to play a crucial role in exposing misconduct within organisations with areas of concern including risk-taking behaviours, deteriorating corporate governance, substance abuse and bullying.

However, it is the issue of modern slavery that stands out as a matter of concern in Safecall's Whistleblowing Benchmark Report 2024. It is the first time that modern slavery has appeared as a statistically significant area of concern within organisations since the report started in 2019.

Report author Greg Ogle, operational excellence manager at Sunderland-based Safecall, said: "There has been growing concern among UK businesses regarding modern slavery over the past year, and the findings of our Benchmark Report support this as an issue. Construction companies have been identified as hotspots for reports surrounding modern slavery.

"It should be noted that the emergence of modern slavery reports does not mean it has suddenly become an issue for the first time, rather it is an indication of a growth in awareness and confidence in raising such concerns."

He added that whistleblowing requirements have been extended to supply chains in many national legal frameworks. This means that organisations must take proactive

measures to identify and eradicate these exploitative practices from their supply chains.

The annual Safecall Benchmark Report highlights the rise in reporting rates, the trends, and areas of reported wrongdoing in different sectors. The data contained within this annual report – based on anonymised data from more than 1,000 organisations with over five million people in total – is aimed at helping companies and organisations understand the trends in misconduct.

During 2023 there was a sharp increase in the share of reports from the education sector, and the logistics and manufacturing sectors. Safecall observed a decrease in reports from the construction and healthcare sectors.

Safecall – a leading independent, specialist whistleblowing and compliance services provider – says the post-pandemic environment has accelerated greater awareness and appreciation of whistleblowing. In turn, this is driving a worldwide growth of this specialist business sector.

While legislation (notably the EU Whistleblowing Directive) and compliance are among the drivers of change, many businesses and organisations are discovering that whistleblowing improves workplace

environments, in turn helping employees feel respected, experiencing benefits to their overall wellbeing.

Greg explained that more employees are being encouraged and empowered to do the right thing and report wrongdoing at work; likewise, more employers are recognising the ethical benefits of supporting staff to report wrongdoing safely.

The latest Report, which covers 2023, reveals that Safecall received reports from more than 130 countries across the world. The company also received the greatest number of reports it has ever recorded.

Joanna Lewis, Safecall managing director, said the one thing abundantly clear from this year's Benchmark Report, is the importance of organisations offering multiple reporting channels to employees. Through Safecall, employee can raise concerns either by telephone or a dedicated online portal.

Provision of a whistleblowing hotline is still key for organisations that want to capture as many reports as possible from their employees and stakeholders.

Joanna Lewis added: "Implementing a whistleblowing hotline optimises trust in your organisation and ensures your whistleblowing policy has true reporting channel choice. By offering a choice to your employees when they make a report, your organisation can demonstrate your commitment to combatting wrongdoing and empowering the voices of your employees.

"I am pleased to see more companies and organisations see the benefits of creating a safe space for employees to live and work. Employers are increasingly seeing how such services protect the integrity of an organisation as well as the reputation of a brand."

For more information and a full data breakdown, visit: www.safecall.co.uk/resource/whistleblowing-benchmark-report-2024

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Ammar Mirza CBE

National Stealth Service - Exceptional Minds, Extraordinary Outcomes!

Frontline staff within our NHS are the heroes in the spotlight, rightly celebrated for their direct impact on patient care. However, behind every frontline clinician is a dedicated team working behind the scenes tirelessly to ensure the best possible service and care.

For years, I have been involved in the Health and Life Sciences sector from a commercialisation perspective, working with world-class organisations, care providers and supporting frontline organisations. It wasn't until my involvement with the Academic Health Science Network, now Health Innovation, that I fully appreciated the vital role of the teams behind the scenes, particularly involved in technology and innovation.

The NHS employs over 1.3 million people, with nearly 40% working behind the scenes to keep the health system running efficiently. Among these are our technology and innovation teams, who play a crucial role in transforming healthcare services, constantly and consistently making things better.

My experience collaborating with Health Innovation Teams across North East and North Cumbria has been eye-opening. We enhanced the Innovation Pathway using the Yohlar approach, a framework designed to streamline and enhance the adoption of new technologies in healthcare, supporting

current systems and paving the way for future advancements.

A cornerstone of our efforts has been the introduction of the Health and Life Sciences Pledge. This focuses on bringing organisations from across the region together to adopt the Power of 3™ and better communicate, collaborate and celebrate. Encouraging, enabling and empowering more and better innovation that ultimately leads to saving lives and improving livelihoods.

My recently, commission is helping support the delivery of the Digital Strategy with Chief Information and Technology Officers from across North East and Tees Valley. This strategy integrates advanced digital solutions into various health services, ensuring that technology is both supportive and transformative. The dedication of each team member in navigating healthcare digitalisation reflects the shared commitment to excellence and innovation.

To highlight the scale of our efforts, consider this: the North East and North Cumbria

Integrated Care System (ICS NENC) is the largest of the 42 systems in England. In fact, it's larger than 30 countries and serves over 3 million people! These impressive statistics underscore the importance and impact of our work.

The impact of these behind-the-scenes teams cannot be overstated. Their work might be less visible than that of frontline staff, but it is equally vital. From developing software in order to manage millions of patient records securely, to implementing systems for real-time data, these teams are the backbone of our healthcare system.

As we face new health challenges, the role of technology and innovation within the NHS will only grow in importance. It's crucial to support and invest in these teams, ensuring they have the resources and recognition they deserve. Through their exceptional minds, we achieve extraordinary outcomes, making the NHS a global leader in health innovation and care.

So, while the applause often goes to those at the front, let's also recognise those in the shadows—the strategists, technologists, analysts, and other unsung heroes of the NHS. Their dedication and hard work enable our frontline heroes to perform their best. Let's celebrate every contributor to our healthcare system, for they all play a part in our nation's health and wellbeing. Thank you for all you do and the way you do it.

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.



Ammar Mirza CBE Awarded '**Community Pioneer of the Year**' at Muslim Business Awards

Ammar Mirza CBE has been recognised as the Community Pioneer of the Year at the esteemed Muslim Business Awards, celebrating his exceptional contributions to the community and business landscape.

As a multi-award-winning enterprise and innovation expert, Ammar's dedication to fostering growth and empowerment has left an indelible mark in the North East.

Ammar Mirza CBE has been instrumental in establishing and scaling several thousand businesses, spanning diverse sectors including property, edtech, health-tech, and investment support. His expertise in organisational growth is widely acknowledged, earning him recognition as a leading authority in the field.

With a versatile career across public, private, and third sectors, Ammar has been a driving force for change and progress. He is considered the most influential Asian in the North East of England and holds pivotal positions such as Chair of the Business Advisory Board on the UK Government Body - North East Local Enterprise Partnership.

Moreover, Ammar's commitment to social impact is exemplified through his roles as President of the Federation of Asian Business and as Founder and Chairman of the not-for-profit social enterprise Asian Business Connexions (ABC), most recently working on the 'inclusion by default' campaign, on a mission to make the North East the most inclusive region in the UK by the end of 2025.

As Honorary Colonel of the 101 Regiment Royal Artillery British Army, Ammar Mirza CBE demonstrates his commitment to serving not only the business community but also his country.

He is also the Chair of the Health and Lifesciences Pledge, championing initiatives for societal betterment.

Ammar Mirza CBE's illustrious career is marked by numerous accolades and achievements. Notably, he launched the Primary Inspiration through Enterprise (PIE) Project Charity in 2013 whilst the Chair of Governors at a Primary School, paving the way for innovative educational initiatives.

He also developed the world's first level 6 formal qualification in Business Model Innovation (Yohlar), underscoring his commitment to pushing boundaries and driving progress.

Beyond his professional endeavours, Ammar is deeply involved in community initiatives, serving as a Patron of Charlie Bear for Cancer Care Charity, the Cadet Apprenticeship Scheme, Chair of the Progression Forum and sponsoring various local football teams.

He is also a sought-after keynote speaker, advocating for inclusion and innovation at various events.

Commenting on the recognition, Ammar expressed gratitude, stating, *"I am deeply honoured to receive the Community Pioneer of the Year award. This recognition is a testament to the collective efforts of all those who strive for positive change and impact. I am committed to continuing my work in driving innovation, inclusion, and empowerment in our communities."*

For media inquiries or interview requests, please contact:

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The Culture Review

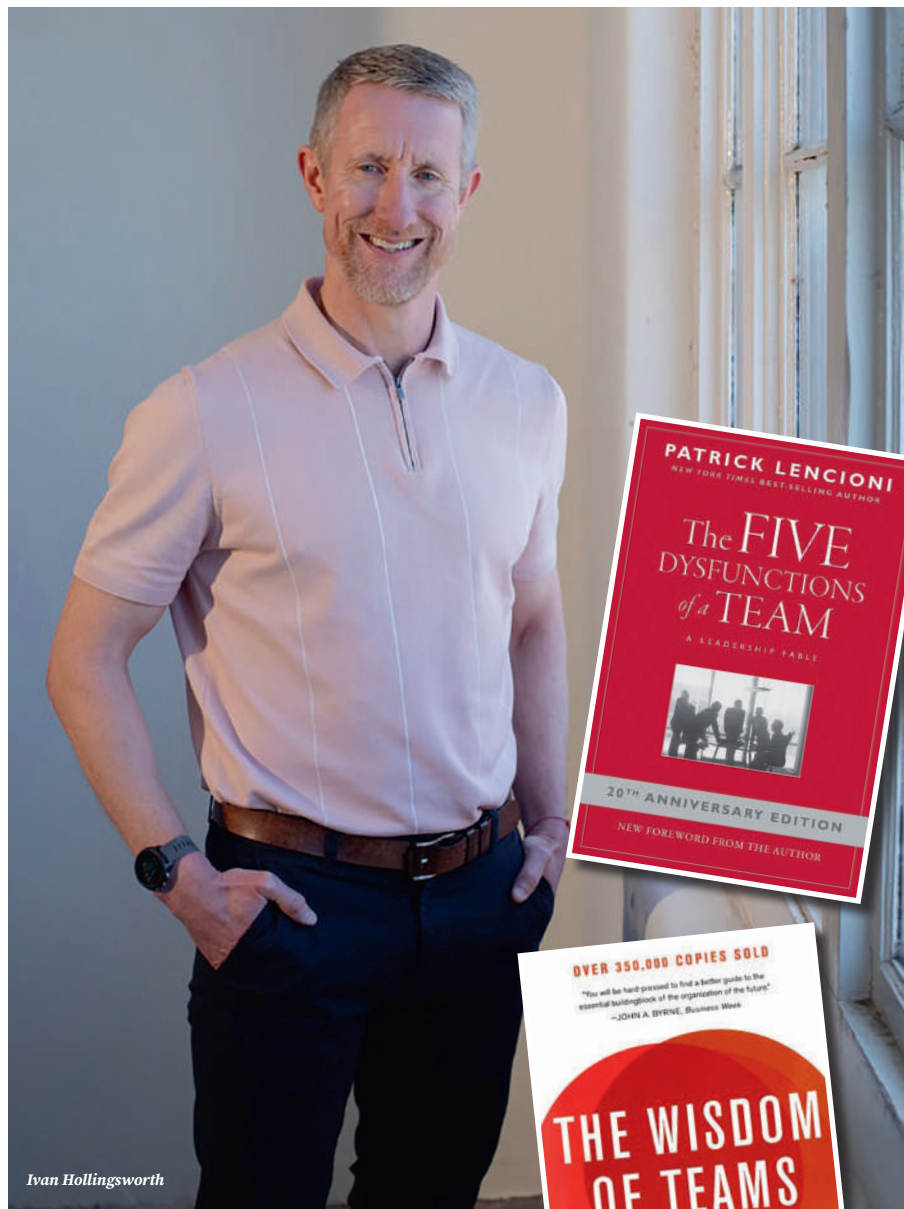
Why teamwork isn't always the answer...

With Ivan Hollingsworth,
Founder of Centric Consultants

When is a team, not a team?

While it might sound like the start of a bad joke, one of the reasons that you may be struggling to create a thriving team is that you might not actually have a team at all. It's important to consider if you are a team or a group of people who are simply working on the same projects or spending time in a shared environment (which is ok, we just need to call it what it is and act accordingly). A real team is a small group of people with complementary skills who are committed to a shared purpose, who succeed or fail together, and who hold one another accountable.

Teams need to exist for a specific reason and to build a thriving one, sometimes we have to go back to the drawing board and look at whether we have the foundations in place and whether a team approach is, in fact, the correct one. Real times have high levels of interdependency and embrace uncertainty together, whereas working groups exist to share information, perspectives and best practices, but are not reliant on each other as a collective. Both ways of working have their place, but be careful you don't fall into the trap of creating a 'pseudo team', where you claim to be a team, but lack the emotional commitment and shared purpose of a real team and without the efficient processes and individual responsibility of a working group. These complications are often the result of hybrid or remote working which are complicating an already tricky issue by placing us physically apart from each other, or where leaders think everything must be a 'team', so manufacture them. The risk in creating a team, when none of the key elements exist, is it leads to a lack of clarity at best and a dysfunctional/toxic environment at worse.



Ivan Hollingsworth

Once you have decided that forming or developing a team is the right decision for what you want to achieve, from there you can go on to ensure that that team thrives. If your team is dysfunctional, toxic, or coasting you need absolute clarity on what behaviours you need to be truly high-performing and slowly build the necessary environment to embrace agreed behaviours to move in the desired direction. Research shows that truly high-performing teams are measured by more than just their sales figures. They view their teammates as more trustworthy, they work more efficiently, develop better connections, and view each other as more competitive.

The Wisdom of Teams

by Jon R Katzenbach and Douglas K Smith

The Wisdom of Teams is the definitive work on how to create high-performance teams in any organization. Having sold nearly a half million copies and been translated into more than 15 languages, the authors' clarion call that teams should be the basic unit of organization for most businesses has permanently shaped the way companies reach the highest levels of performance.

The Five Dysfunctions of a Team

by Patrick Lencioni

Patrick Lencioni begins by telling the fable of a woman who, as CEO of a struggling Silicon Valley firm, took control of a dysfunctional executive committee and helped its members succeed as a team. Lencioni offers explicit instructions for overcoming the human behavioural tendencies that he says corrupt teams.

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. 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

Spotlight on Business Communication: A Glowing Success at ShowBiz24: Rise&Bloom



Jon Malton, Michael James, Moira Barnes, Simon Moyle, in front at ShowBiz24: Rise&Bloom. (NTC)

In a vibrant display of innovation and networking, North Tyneside Business Forum's flagship event, ShowBiz24: Rise&Bloom, turned Wallsend Town Hall Chambers into a hub of entrepreneurial excellence on Thursday, May 16th.

With an overarching mission to empower local businesses, the North Tyneside Business Forum offered an immersive experience designed to equip participants with vital tools for thriving in today's competitive landscape.

A Morning of Mastery

Drawing around 50 businesses, the event featured a series of compelling presentations, each shedding light on different facets of business communication. Attendees were treated to insights on public speaking, closing sales, and effective sales strategies, making for a morning brimming with actionable advice and networking opportunities.

Moira Barnes, from Moira Barnes Sales Consultancy, kicked off the session with her expertise on closing sales, leveraging over

three decades of experience. Following her, Jon Malton, an influential leader known for steering top-tier companies to success, captivated the audience with his strategies on commanding attention and resonating with any crowd.

Inspiring Transformation

The highlight of the event was the keynote address by Simon Moyle, CEO of Vivup. Simon's narrative of transforming a modest business of 17 employees into a national leader in employee benefits and well-being was nothing short of inspirational. His strategic vision and market acumen have not only expanded Vivup's scale but also its impact, fostering innovative solutions and partnerships that cement its industry leadership.

Reflecting on the event's success, Michael James, Chair of North Tyneside Business Forum, said, "We had three excellent speakers, each offering unique perspectives on how to excel in business. The theme focused on mastering sales through powerful storytelling, and each speaker delivered engaging, influential, and educational insights. It was a great event."

Networking and Collaboration

Beyond the formal presentations, the informal networking sessions proved to be a significant draw. Attendees relished the opportunity to connect, forging new contacts and potential collaborations that promise to benefit their businesses.

"As well as learning effective communication techniques, many attendees enjoyed the networking sessions and were delighted to find new business partners," said Michael James. "This is one of the key advantages of joining the North Tyneside Business Forum. We host numerous networking events throughout the year. Membership is free and open to any business with a trading address in North Tyneside. Although supported by North Tyneside Council, we operate independently, led by local businesspeople."

Next Steps

The North Tyneside Business Forum's next events are a welcome Coffee Morning for new members on 9th July, and a Summer Social open to all member North Tyneside businesses on 10th July. Venues and details for obtaining tickets are available from business.forum@northtyneside.gov.uk or check the website www.northtynesidebusinessforum.org.uk.

Get Involved

The benefits of joining the Forum include networking, events and the annual awards in November.

For more information on how to join the North Tyneside Business Forum and participate in future events, visit www.northtynesidebusinessforum.org.uk, email business.forum@northtyneside.gov.uk, or call 0191 643 6000.

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I see no ships

(Lord Horatio Nelson – April 2nd 1801)

Let's be brutally honest here... ships are probably something that you're not really aware of unless you live within sight of a major river or near a dockyard.

That's the problem with shipping. We're only really aware of ships when we're on a ferry, on a cruise liner, or when they hit the news.

But, just for a moment, take a glance around your office, home, or factory. A very large percentage of everything you can see will have arrived in the UK on a ship. In fact, 95% of the world's trade is carried by sea.

"My stock phrase when I speak to anyone about the marine industry is...no shipping, no shopping," said Kate Gillespie from NorthStandard. She's aiming to develop the wealth of talent and experience at NorthStandard to provide the certainty to keep world trade moving.



Kate Gillespie – NorthStandard, Head of NorthStandard Academy

Quick bit of background

NorthStandard is a Newcastle-based company which, in a nutshell, insures ships. The company was formed in 2023 from a merger between North P&I Club (P & I stands for Protecting and Indemnity) and Standard Club, both clubs with their own centuries old history dating back to the 1800's. The merger has made NorthStandard the second largest P&I organisation in the world. They're based on the Newcastle Quayside with a global footprint that spans the world and offices covering all main shipping regions, including Asia (China, Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Japan), Australasia (Australia and New Zealand), Europe (UK, Ireland and Greece), and the USA.

"One of the problems we face is that people aren't aware of what we do," adds Kate. "It's only when we start using figures as an example, that they realise just how important the marine industry is to everyone. We insure, in some shape or form, approximately 260 million gross tonnes (this is the metric the P&I industry uses to measure the vessels they insure) worldwide across all sectors.

We also play a major role in the International Group of P&I Clubs which is an association of underwriting clubs insuring around 90% of the world's vessels. From big ships like oil tankers and dry bulk carriers, to smaller vessels like fishing boats and specialist craft NorthStandard provides the reassurance, confidence and certainty of an insurer who has covered, experienced – and managed – the best (and worst) that shipping has brought to the world.

From when you get up in the morning, have some fruit and cereal, hop into your car, turn on a computer or TV, and operate some machinery, there's a very strong possibility that all of it will have arrived by ship."

Kate is leading a brand new initiative in her role as Head of NorthStandard Academy.

"I'm creating a training pathway which allows everyone at NorthStandard see how they can progress and develop within their role. It's something which applies to every P&I business but we are especially keen to attract people from the North East. We're based in this region and want to encourage as many people from the North East to get involved in the marine industry.

The training academy pathway will allow people to enter at the bottom and work their way up. People who're already in the P&I



organisation can enter further along the pathway. We'll be going to schools, colleges and universities to explain precisely what we do and hopefully encourage students to find out more and see the marine industry as a future career. The pathway will show how they would progress. It will also show how the various cogs within the marine industry make the whole machine work."

The NorthStandard Academy will help people understand the marine industry language, Kate and her team will do that by having internal sessions at the NorthStandard offices, but will also be heading out to go on board ships to get some hands-on experience and see how a ship functions. The academy will also show the various roles which keep the marine industry moving.

Earlier this month, the Academy team took 20 NorthStandard colleagues on a whistle stop tour of the complexities of the shipping industry and the crucial role of P&I associations play in keeping world trade moving, culminating with a ship visit, courtesy of DFDS.

One attendee commented: "Seeing the real thing has brought the shipping industry alive and has made me feel more passionate about working in the club. We are all making a difference in our own ways."

If you want to find out more about NorthStandard, P&I insurance, and how to become an important cog in a vast shipping machine that keeps the world shopping visit north-standard.com or search 'NorthStandard' on LinkedIn





L-R: Gary Gilby - Commercial and Purchasing Manager, UNIPRESS (UK), Toby Bridges - Executive Chair of NBT Group, Prof Robert MacIntosh - Pro-Vice Chancellor in Faculty of Business and Law - Northumbria University, Dr Alireza Shokri - Associate Professor in Operations and Supply Chain Management and Director for the Centre for Digital Supply Chain Excellence, Vincent Robson - Business Development Manager - Faculty of Business and Law, Northumbria University

Launch of Centre for Digital Supply Chain Excellence

World-leading research expertise is at the heart of the Centre for Digital Supply Chain Excellence, launched by Newcastle Business School at Northumbria University.

The university sees strong commercial potential for the game-changing solutions the Centre will allow businesses operating in a vast range of sectors that are supply chain dependent.

It is funded by the Digital Supply Chain Hub program, supported by the Digital Catapult.

The first testbed project focuses on the spare parts supply chain, in a collaboration between the Centre for Digital Supply Chain excellence, the NBT Group, Vytech Solution, Troy Group, Womble Bond Dickinson and North East Automotive Alliance.

Professor Robert MacIntosh, Pro Vice-

Chancellor for the faculty of Business and Law at Northumbria University and chair of Chartered Institute of Business Schools, said: "Supply chains are hugely significant in a whole range of sectors and the new Centre for Digital Supply Chain Excellence is an exciting resource for the North East.

"It brings together insights from practice and world-leading research expertise to test and deploy innovations in our digital and physical hub, driving best practice and improving efficiency for our partners. Importantly, it will also allow our students to acquire insights and skills from some of the leading players in industry, which is key to the ethos of the Newcastle Business School at Northumbria University.

"We invite any public or private organisation, from any sector, to join us in the Centre for collaborative work, such as networking, flagship programmes and projects, funded-projects, CPD courses and consultancy, for example."

The Centre is a physical and digital space attached to the Research Group associated with the Department of Marketing, Operations and Systems (MOS) and Newcastle Business School at Northumbria. It looks to address the pressures on manufacturing, service and public sectors and their supply chains caused by competitive market, geopolitical issues, the pandemic, environment and energy crisis.

With an initial focus on the manufacturing supply chain, the digital testbed enables the development of an agnostic digital twin of an entire spare parts supply chain, accessible to a wide range of sectors, including the NHS, FinTech and construction.

Northumbria University's Dr Alireza Shokri, Associate Professor (Reader) in Operations and Supply Chain Management and Director of the Centre for Digital Supply Chain Excellence said: "The Centre offers an exciting opportunity to co-create knowledge, impact and innovation to excel supply chain and operations of organisations in any sector. For example, the testbed provides a digital platform to test and try innovative supply chain solutions without disrupting the real-world environment and has a number of objectives.

"With the opening of the Centre and the first testbed in place, we want to move quickly to a position where we can identify strategic partners who can enhance the potential of the project, regional and national stakeholders who will promote the work we are doing and both trade bodies and businesses for whom continual innovation in operations and supply chain performance, is critical to them."

For further information:
alireza.shokri@northumbria.ac.uk
www.northumbria.ac.uk



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Naylors Gavin Black appointed to market major strategic Teesside Airport scheme

Teesside International Airport Limited has appointed commercial property consultancy, Naylors Gavin Black, to market its 2.8 million square foot business park at Teesside International Airport, within the UK's largest Freeport.

Following a competitive tender process, Naylors Gavin Black has been selected to generate international and national interest in the strategic site which aims to bring significant inward investment into Teesside.

Naylors are working alongside Colliers International and aviation real estate specialist, AREA.

The site has 2.8m sq. ft. of industrial and warehouse accommodation earmarked to come forward, with 135,000 sq. ft. of that space having obtained detailed planning permission and a further 550,000 sq. ft with outline consent. A 25,000 sq. ft. property has already been completed and detailed discussions are progressing with a number of interested parties.

The landlord is open to a wide range of potential tenants including aviation supply chain businesses, manufacturing, energy production, logistics and data centres. The site sits within Teesside Freeport, the first and largest Freeport in the UK, which offers an array of benefits for end users.

Victoria Ashby, head of property and development at Teesside International Airport, said: "Naylors impressed us by demonstrating their innovative approach to marketing which has resulted in an excellent track record of lettings on similar schemes, making them an ideal agent for the site."

Newcastle-based Naylors Gavin Black is a member of the Commercial Property Network (CPN)- a collective of privately owned commercial property firms which span the UK - giving the firm a presence in every UK region.

Keith Stewart, partner and head of agency at Naylors Gavin Black, comments: "This is an incredibly exciting scheme to be involved with. We're looking forward to helping spread the message far and wide that Teesside is open for business and we have best-in-class properties in a well-connected location with quality labour pools, for ambitious businesses."

Esh Construction's 'Constructing Careers' Initiative for Tees Valley Residents

Working in partnership with Middlesbrough College and Thirteen Group, Esh Construction have launched a new 'Constructing Careers' programme as they commit to raising aspirations for Tees Valley residents who may be in underrepresented groups, through teaching entry level construction skills.

As the inaugural programme reaches its conclusion, the cohort worked through Construction Industry Training Board modules before sitting exams to attain their CSCS card, which provides proof that individuals working on construction sites have the appropriate training and qualifications for the job they do.



View of the future as Maker & Faber glaze out

The only new-build office buildings due to complete in the North East this year have glazed out, marking a milestone moment in their construction.

The final panes of glass have been installed at Maker & Faber, two super-sustainable Grade A offices in the heart of Riverside Sunderland, representing an important stage in the Legal & General-backed scheme's development.

More than 1,000 individual windows have been fitted to the buildings, which will deliver some 150,000 sq ft of new city centre office accommodation when they open in late summer 2024.

The buildings, which are being constructed by Sir Robert McAlpine, will now move into an internal fit out phase, as they prepare to welcome tenants later this year. Both buildings have feature glazing, ensuring that occupiers benefit from plenty of natural light, known to increase a sense of wellbeing among employees.

Property development manager, Landid, which is delivering the building on behalf of investor Legal & General, has placed a firm focus on creating a space that will foster happy and productive employees.

James Silver, managing director of Landid, said: "Maker & Faber will be two wonderful buildings, providing an inspiring workspace for the hundreds of people who work from them".

The buildings are being actively marketed by commercial property agents Knight Frank and JLL.



Esh's Social Value Manager for the North East, Kate Marshall said: "We know there is a huge skills gap in our sector, particularly in the Tees Valley area, therefore by working with Middlesbrough College we have been able to tailor the Constructing Careers programme to the area's needs."

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Miller Homes announces a new development on Wearside

Miller Homes is to create 165, three to five bedroom, new build homes at Blakeney Green, Chapelgarth, Sunderland.

The brand new development is set to appeal to buyers of all ages and among the housing styles central to the scheme are the four bedroom Skywood, and Kirkwood and five bedroom Denford and Grayford.

Each features open plan kitchen and dining spaces with French doors leading to the garden along with separate laundry rooms and flexible space for home working.

All homes incorporate a variety of high specification energy saving features such as external electric vehicle charging points, flue gas and waste water heat recovery systems and solar PV diverters which divert excess electricity to the hot water cylinder. Four miles from the centre of Sunderland, Blakeney Green is fringed by mature trees, with open countryside stretching to the South and views of the coast to the East.

The development offers rapid access to Durham, Sunderland and Newcastle and to all major road, Metro and rail transport networks. Amenities within half a mile of the development include Doxford International Business Park, supermarkets, pharmacy, Post Office and spa and leisure facilities such as sports centres, pubs and restaurants.



Northumberland housing company announces ambitious growth plans

A Northumberland-based housing developer has announced plans to double its turnover to £80m and further increase its workforce. Having recently grown from 40 to now 70 employees it now has ambitions to take this to over 100 employees within the next year.

To hit its targets, Ascent Homes will add four new sites across the North East. This expansion will bring the developer's portfolio of sites to 14 by 2027, equalling approx. 1,300 homes - a significant milestone in the organisation's growth journey.

Paul Errington, Director at Ascent Homes, said: "With our homes being in the stunning county of Northumberland, we have seen people across the UK showing an increased interest in our beautifully located developments, especially since the pandemic. This has fuelled our ambitions for sustainable expansion, not just in Northumberland but across the wider region. Our growth is supported by newly secured land opportunities, which will enable us to introduce new and affordable housing solutions to more communities across the region."

Ascent Homes is the housebuilding arm of Advance Northumberland. It is an agile Northumberland-based housing developer dedicated to delivering developments that have a genuinely positive impact on those who live in and around them.

Current developments are located in Alnwick, Blyth, Choppington, Ellington and Wooler, with plans to develop more in Berwick-upon-Tweed, Bellingham and Hadston this year.

Paul continued: "A key part of our growth plan is focused on the expansion of our skilled team. By the end of the year, we're aiming to increase our headcount to over 100 employees."

Banks Group stays in peak condition with 'Better Health at Work' Award success

A North East employer's long-term commitment to improving the health and well-being of its workforce has been recognised with the highest level of accreditation in a regional health initiative.

Property, energy and mining firm the Banks Group has been awarded the 'Maintaining Excellence' level in the Better Health At Work Awards, a partnership programme created by all 12 North East local authorities, the TUC and local NHS providers.

The programme aims to promote health and wellbeing in workplaces, and to recognise and celebrate the hard work and commitment of regional employers making the effort to improve the health of their workplaces and their employees.

The Banks Group is one of just a handful of regional employers to achieve the 'Maintaining Excellence' standard, which recognises firms that have been engaged with the Award for long enough to have



achieved a pass at all levels via the completion of a criteria document, portfolio and full workplace assessment.

The family firm first became involved with the Award in 2012 as a way of promoting health and well-being among their workers, as well as to their families, fellow employers and the wider community.



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opportunities as
we grow...*

Angela Carney

The Built Environment

In this new series of interviews with leading figures working within this crucial sector Northern Insight spoke to...

Angela Carney

MD of Carney Consultancy

Did you always envisage a career working in and around The Built Environment?

I'm a third-generation civil engineer in the family. So, being in the built environment was never really a question.

Tell us about your current role.

I am the MD of Carney Consultancy a health and safety consultancy and training organisation for the built environment and a director of Carney CDM, our new sister company, which undertakes CDM advisory and Principal Designer roles.

Tell us about your team.

We have a team of 13 and we are actively recruiting for another three staff as well as starting a graduate recruitment programme to hire a graduate for each of our companies. We are a mix of age ranges with a current ratio of five men and eight women. We have a recruitment plan to increase the number of women in the technical roles.

What are you currently working on?

Designing a graduate recruitment plan and programme to attract the next generation and the growth of both companies over the next five years.

What is your proudest career achievement?

I'm very proud we invest heavily in the development of our team. Our senior health and safety consultant, Sarah James, is an example of this. Before she came to us, Sarah was struggling to get her previous employer to invest in her training. After four years with us she achieved NEBOSH Certificate and Diploma, NVQ Level 6, Chartered membership status with IOSH, as well as doubling her joining salary. Sarah has now been given a fantastic career opportunity which could take her all over the globe. We could never offer her that currently, so she can now take this new role with confidence in her technical and competence as a health and safety professional, due to our investment in her.

What is your own favourite building?

Locally, Grey Street, Newcastle. How often do we really take the time to stop and look at the beautiful buildings on Grey street? Nationally, it would be the Houses of Parliament. I'm not particularly political but the architecture and detail is outstanding and it's a building that has really stood the test of time.

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

If we don't proactively start changing our image as an industry we will struggle to recruit more people. The training and attracting of new people must start with employers training

more people from scratch. This means investing time and money, rather than continually taking the easier option of poaching other firm's staff.

There are some fabulous companies out there already doing this and while we all, at times, need to recruit established, experienced people, we need all companies to participate in attracting and training more new people and having a detailed training programme for trainees/apprentices, so they are involved in their own career path.

What does the future hold for your two businesses?

If we can attract the next generation and ensure we provide a suitable work environment to keep them engaged and happy then, along with our ambitious growth plans, our two businesses can really blossom. My fellow directors never thought, just a few short years ago, that by the time they were in their early 30s they would be business owners and directors, so there are endless opportunities as we grow.

Who would be your four ideal dinner guests?

Marcus Child, a motivational speaker who just lit me up and reignited the fire in me for business. *Pink*, she's just awesome. *Nelson Mandela*, a person who can learn to forgive the way he did, has so many lessons to share. *Dali Lama*, he's so insightful and inspirational.

How do you like to unwind?

Honestly, in peace walking the dogs in the woods, or reading books that ignite my passion for learning and developing as a mother, wife, friend and a leader.

Favourite Boxset?

The Inbetweeners – anyone who has seen it will know why. I guarantee it will make you laugh, whether you want to or not!

Favourite Book?

Dale Carnegie *'How to Win Friends & Influence People'*, first motivational book I read as a senior engineer and is the foundation of many of the other books I have read. I bought it for my fellow Directors and, although the lessons are from 1930s, they are as relevant today as they were then. Business is first, and foremost, about people.

www.carneyconsultancy.co.uk



Leanne McIntyre

Leanne takes up finance manager role

Fast growing, County Durham-based, Asbestos Audit, has announced the appointment of Leanne McIntyre as finance manager.

Leanne, from Blyth, will be responsible for financial planning, data analysis, payroll, bank reconciliation and credit control. With an accountancy degree from Northumbria University, Leanne has previously worked in a range of finance and supply chain roles with organisations such as Procter & Gamble and earthmoving attachment manufacturer, Miller.

The appointment follows shortly after a second round of investment for Asbestos Audit, from the North East Small Loan Fund,

which is paving the way for targeted and sustainable growth.

Specialist services provided by the firm include asbestos surveys, asbestos sampling, asbestos removal, contaminated ground testing and remediation, demolition and project management.

The company is committed to achieving a £7 million turnover by 2025, through a strategic focus on key sectors, active participation in national frameworks and a strong emphasis on sustainable development.

With operations spanning 13 locations across the UK, Asbestos Audit expanded its workforce from 19 to 60 staff in 2023 and ongoing hiring initiatives are underway to support the expansion of its specialist environmental, demolition and training services.

Ben Pickard, managing director at Asbestos Audit, said: "We have huge ambitions for the business and they will be achieved through sound investment in equipment, processes and people. Recruiting talent and expertise to either join, or support the leadership team, is an ongoing commitment. To this end, we welcome Leanne, who will ensure we have strong and robust financial controls,

including data, upon which we can make both strategic and commercial decisions."

Leanne, said: "There is a great sense of focus and energy at Asbestos Audit and I am delighted to take up the role of finance manager. The last 12 months, alone, has seen the company scale dramatically and with the strong leadership team that is in place, I am sure 2024 and beyond will be equally exciting."

In 2023 the company relocated its headquarters from Sunderland to Peterlee, alongside an operational base in County Durham, for its growing asbestos removal and demolition departments and its asbestos consultancy has expanded its offering with a new in-house asbestos laboratory and air monitoring division.

The company has also witnessed a huge surge in project engagement, scaling up from 5,000 to 25,000 in the past year and has achieved recognition on a national scale by securing significant frameworks with clients such as SITEC, City Fibre, Landmarc MOD, Esh Group and SCCI Alphatrack.

www.asbestosaudit.co

Graduate recruitment programme is launched



L-R: David Wadds, Angela Carney and Martin Crammond, Carney Consultancy with Caroline Morton (seated) director at Carney CDM

North-Tyneside based, Carney Consultancy signals plans for expansion as it launches a graduate recruitment scheme.

Aimed at attracting the next generation of health and safety consultants, the company will hire a graduate for Carney Consultancy and its sister company, Carney CDM.

Established in 2002, Carney Consultancy specialises in construction and engineering, providing health and safety consultancy and training. Team members come from a main contracting and subcontracting background and have worked, as consultants, with some of the North East's main companies.

The graduate recruitment scheme follows a positive first quarter with increased growth and a strong forward order book. In the last two years, the company, led by managing director, Angela Carney and directors, Martin Crammond and David Wadds, has seen turnover surge by 64 per cent following a 22 per cent increase in retained clients.

As senior vice president of Northern Counties Builders Federation (NCBF), a board member of both Constructing Excellence North East (CENE) and the regional branch of the National Association

of Women in Construction, Angela Carney is known throughout the industry as a passionate advocate of helping to raise the profile and image of the construction sector so that it attracts more young people and women into the sector.

Most recently, Angela and Northern Counties Builders Federation has helped to relaunch the North East Schools Wonder Challenge in which schools within the NELEP areas of Tyne & Wear, Northumberland and Durham to challenge year 9 and 10 students to form mini construction companies.

The NCBF is also working closely with colleges across the region to connect employers with trade students who are looking to take their first steps into the world of work.

Angela said: "Having spent 20 years laying solid foundations to Carney Consultancy, my aim is to allow the next generation of directors to build the business for their next generation. For me, it is about leaving a legacy to ensure continued investment in the training and development of future generations.

"I'm proud that we invest heavily in the development of our team. Our senior health and safety consultant, Sarah James, is an example of this. Before she came to us, Sarah was struggling to get her previous employer to invest in her training. After four years with us she achieved NEBOSH Certificate and Diploma, NVQ Level 6, Chartered

membership status with IOSH, as well as doubling her joining salary. Sarah has now been given a fantastic career opportunity which could take her all over the globe. We could never offer her that currently, so she can now take this new role with confidence in her technical and competence as a health and safety professional, due to our investment in her.

"Over the next five years, we have a recruitment plan to increase the number of women in our technical roles. Currently, we have five male and six female consultants. Our consultants have all been trained from scratch and that's always been our strategy, to ensure we develop people to reach the potential they often can't see, but we can.

"If we don't proactively start changing our image as an industry we will struggle to recruit more people. The training and attracting of new people must start with employers training more people from scratch. This means investing time and money.

"There are some fabulous companies out there already doing this and while we all, at times, need to recruit established, experienced people, we need all companies to participate in attracting and training more new people and having a detailed training programme for trainees and apprentices, so they are involved in their own career path."

www.carneyconsultancy.co.uk



Stuart Smellie with his wife, Gillian

Restoration book to show the way by example

A retired hospital consultant who has spent many years lovingly restoring a number of properties, including a listed farm house in Durham where he now lives, has released a book to show the cost-effective solutions he has found during undertaking his restorations.

The book *Old Buildings: Conversion and Restoration* is available on Stuart's website *My Old Buildings*. Printed in hardback for durability, the book is one man's bible about restoring and converting old buildings, highlighting a range of real-life solutions and options that have an enormous impact on building costs without compromising on quality.

Stuart, who trained as a doctor in Oxford and Glasgow before settling in County Durham,

said: "Whilst doing my own conversions it became ever growingly more important for the work to be done in a cost-effective way but whilst still preserving heritage and optimising appearance.

"As a family we worked hard at finding innovative solutions across seven main projects, both large and small. It is now time to share the valuable tales of how things do not always go to plan!"

As well as covering most situations a would-be builder will encounter, Stuart shares his experience of renewables and secondary heat sources, which are not only inexpensive but relatively simple to instal when how is shared.

The illustrations throughout the book show plans as well as before and after shots, really bringing to life the results and how they are lasting. Although the book presumes that the reader has some basic building knowledge, it is also deal for amateur builders and first time converters, as well as those interested in preservation of heritage buildings in the UK and further afield.

Stuart continued: "Our human story highlights not only what works, but also what didn't. I have shared our blood, sweat and tears and the results with the reader in the hope that not only does it inspire them, but that it saves time and money in saving other old buildings. Unlike technical guides and manuals, I have put in the book things that help those who may be working full time and not have a bottomless bank account to spend on their dream conversion."



Stuart's idea for the book came about during lockdown and he is particularly excited to bring it to market as living costs are spiralling. Covering seven renovations, the projects include a mill, a farm house, a barn, an old garage, an extension to an existing building and a small byre which was converted into an individual dwelling.

Priced at £22.99 the book will adorn many coffee tables in converted and restored properties in the future, as the handbook that helped it all happen!

Buy your copy at myoldbuildings.com



Neil Turner

Houses - how to start a renovation

*By Neil Turner, Director,
Howarth Litchfield*

It can be daunting for an owner of an older house or listed property to know how to approach updating a house. Some people say, 'live in a house for a while' whilst others will say, 'just get on and adapt it!' In both cases, however, preparation and anticipation are key.

People have always adapted dwellings to meet changing needs. In recent years the cost of moving has meant more people are looking to alter houses rather than moving up or down the property ladder. Over the years, I have seen many horrible and inappropriate extensions and alterations to houses.

I have worked on many houses, large and small, and I would advise on some key tips to having a successful project.

Firstly, understand what you have already in terms of the style and architecture of your house. Houses from different centuries or even decade by decade will have features and forms that could (or should) be worth retaining or re using. It's so easy to simply remove or damage an element of the house without appreciating its value. If the house is listed look carefully at what makes the house listed and what cannot be altered or where opportunities lie.

If you are buying or already own your home, having a building survey to understand the physical build up of the house and the condition is important. A RICS surveyor can do a variety of homebuyer or condition surveys, which will inform you on every aspect from the electrics to damp and structural issues.

Get an architect in for a consultation to review your house and discuss your initial thoughts and ideas. Don't be afraid to sketch some rough drawings, as they can be really helpful. Many people feel inhibited when they invite a professional in – don't be. Get out your felt tips and doodle away! It's great to see a client drawing and helps me massively to understand their thoughts.

One of the challenges for an architect is visiting a house for the first time and being asked for initial ideas. It's always great fun to experience a building, so whilst I look at the physical form and its materials, my visit is about experiencing the building. I will ask myself a number of key emotional questions such as where does the light come in? What is the orientation? Is there noise from a



Smelt House before



Smelt House after

road? Is there a great view already – or could there be a view that is not currently taken advantage of?

A house should have a soul and give an emotional response, as well as solving practical issues of living, storing our possessions and keeping us dry. So, I try to understand how a person lives in a house and which spaces are at the heart of the house.

Once you have found your architect, give them an idea of your budgets and ambition. After that you are ready to embark on an exciting journey.

With the right early advice, you can plan and create your house plans and gain cost advice on how much it is all likely to cost. It might not be as straight forward as you imagined as you navigate planning, costing and builders – but have faith and determination. Most people don't regret it and even do it all again. Then it's time for you to sit back and enjoy the final result.

Neil Turner, Director, Howarth Litchfield can be contacted on 0191 3849470 or email n.turner@hlpuk.com www.howarthlitchfield.com



Treetops before



Treetops after



Modo Bloc to redevelop derelict retail site in Newcastle

North East developer Modo Bloc has secured planning permission to redevelop a disused, former retail site in Coxlodge, Newcastle.

Newcastle-based Modo Bloc aims to build six homes on the site of an old Co-op building on John Street, Coxlodge. Work is due to start shortly on the £3.2m development.

Six modern townhouses will be designed to a premium specification, built using the latest materials to minimise their environmental impact. They will all feature their own garden terraces.

George Jenkins, MD of Modo Bloc, explained: "This is a small but exciting opportunity to build some modern, much needed homes in this suburb of Newcastle.

"The site is currently an eyesore to the community, and this investment will breath fresh life into this abandoned site.

"Our consultation with local residents showed a real desire to demolish the dilapidated building and redevelop the site with smart, contemporary homes."

Mr Jenkins added that local suppliers would be used and where possible local people would be recruited on site. The scheme will be delivered by Modo Bloc Construction to ensure quality of build and better manage costs.

Elsewhere, Modo Bloc is currently well underway building seven design-led, four-storey townhouses at the Ropes, an exclusive development overlooking the Ouseburn Valley and River Tyne, Newcastle. This £4.2m development is due to be completed and marketed this May.

The ambitious developer has several big residential projects in the planning pipeline, including other sites in the Ouseburn and a large residential project on the outskirts of Durham.

Modo Bloc has a strong social responsibility agenda, collaborating closely with communities where its developments



George Jenkins, MD, Modo Bloc

are located. The company is also supporting several local charities through its development work including the homelessness charity, Oasis Community Housing - supporting and housing a homeless person for every new house or two flats it sells this year.

More details, visit: www.modobloc.co.uk



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Local Councillors welcome return of youth work to Kenton

The return of youth work and youth 'hubs' in Kenton has been welcomed by the three local councillors for the area. Across the Kenton ward and the city in general youth centres and clubs are re-appearing as part of a partnership programme between Newcastle council and Tyneside youth organisations.

The Haven family hub, based in North Kenton, is running two youth clubs for the under 11s and teenagers whilst the youth charity Project4Change is running a programme of "detached youth work" where qualified and experienced youth workers meet up with young people on the street and in public spaces. This "excellent initiative" across the neighbourhoods is part of the Extra Mile programme funded by the Millions Fund.

The Caring For Kenton initiative is well under way say the councillors. This project, led by Project4Change, involves 16 young people aged 10 to 19 who are spending time in North Kenton Park exploring and learning about the 'hidden nature' in shared spaces. To date the group have made bird feeders and carried out litter picks.

Kenton Park Sports Centre continues to be an effective and valued provider under the City Council's Holiday Activity Fund programme with a full range of children's



and teenager's activity sessions. These popular sessions are delivered over the summer vacation, but also during the Winter and Easter breaks.

Councillor's Stephen Lambert, Ged bell and Paula Maines said: "After a decade of decline due to UK government austerity measures and public expenditure cuts it's encouraging to see the re-appearance of positive and worthwhile activities for young people across Kenton, Kenton Bar and Montagu."

"Youth work comes in many forms and is an important diversionary activity. It also plays a key role for those youngsters susceptible to anti-social behaviour to stay out of trouble," the councillors added.

Detached youth work activity and youth clubs are welcome additions to other successful youth organisations in our district such as TKO Boxing, the West Gosforth, Montagu Scouts and Guides and Rainbows.

The continued adventures of...



Ziggy and Cally!

Hi everyone,

Well my 14th Birthday was a huge success I saw all of my friends – ate lots of tripe cake – need to watch the old figure at my age!! Anyway the rain is back and beginning to wish I didn't have that new trim! Having a holiday at the coast with Teddy, Maisie and Kinnie.

Jemma from Alnwick writes as follows:

Q: My property has Artex ceilings which looks very dated. I've heard that having them plaster skimmed is messy and expensive and can also look odd because the edges of the coving disappear. Is there an alternative?

A: Artex is a brand of textured paint used to make decorative patterns on plasterboard, or to cover up cracks in old ceilings (although this is rarely successful). Other brands are Wondertex, Suretex and Newtex, but they all tend to get referred to as 'Artex'. The big problem with these textured finishes is that they may contain asbestos. The Artex brand itself was still being manufactured with chrysotile ("white asbestos") as recently as 1984. So textured finishes should not be drilled or dry-sanded, as the asbestos fibres could be released into the air and inhaled. The amount of chrysotile included in the mix was small, and there is still something of a debate over exactly how dangerous chrysotile might be. Some experts even claim

it is chemically identical to talcum powder, and that it has been unfairly tarnished by the "asbestos" label.

However, my view is that any asbestos product should be treated with caution, and the HSE insists that the chrysotile used in textured coatings has the potential to be a human carcinogen. Since the coating binds the asbestos into a solid material, and as long as the material is not damaged, there is little or no danger of the fibres being released into the air, and thence finding their way into occupants' lungs. There is no statutory requirement for such coatings to be removed, and HSE advice is that as long as the coating is in good condition, it is usually safer to leave it undisturbed and in place, rather than risk releasing fibres into the air by removing it.

My advice would be to leave the Artex and overboard it with plaster board and skim it. This will alleviate any danger and encapsulate any asbestos forever. Some people will advise that the Artex can be unbonded and then skimmed, however in my experience this is not always successful.

Regarding the coving, most ornate designs have one or two steps in the detail so plasterboarding does not interfere with the overall design. Most modern houses have 'Gyproc' coving which can easily be removed and replaced.



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 micahael@northern-insight.co.uk

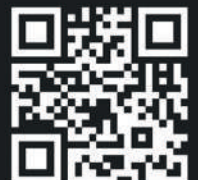
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www.dunwoodieswift.co.uk

Luxury living at landmark £2.25m Symeon Manor

Durham City's most luxurious new home is coming onto the market as the creation of the North East's most exclusive residential development continues.



The £2.25m Symeon Manor at the Mount Oswald estate in Durham City

Symeon Manor is a unique detached six-bedroom, six-bathroom property that sits independently within the landscaped grounds and woodlands at the centre of the historic Mount Oswald estate, just to the south of Durham City.

The £2.25m landmark property comes with a substantial private landscaped garden, a spacious three car garage, an open plan kitchen and dining area, a study and a home cinema space.

The substantial living room features French doors on two sides, allowing light to flood into the room, while there is also a utility room and cloakroom off the generous entrance hallway.

Five of the six bedrooms offer contemporary en suite bathrooms, while the master bedroom has a walk-in dressing room and a large south-facing terrace.



An aerial image of the Symeon Court development at the Mount Oswald estate in Durham City, with Symeon Manor on the right



An artist's impression of the Symeon Manor kitchen

Symeon Manor features underfloor heating throughout the ground floor, as well as a beautifully designed kitchen which includes Silestone worktops, high quality appliances and oak finished doors. The kitchen will be finished to the buyer's specifications.

The property also includes a range of environmental design features including an energy efficient air source heat pump, solar panels, LED bathroom lighting and an electric vehicle charging point.

Symeon Manor is currently being built by Banks Homes and is part of the firm's wider Symeon Court development at the Mount Oswald estate, which also includes four four-bedroom and four five-bedroom homes that are located nearby.

Durham City property firm Urban BASE is acting as sales agent for Symeon Manor and Symeon Court, where the first of the new properties are expected to be ready for occupation later this year.

The Mount Oswald estate was built at the turn of the 19th century and features a Grade Two-listed Manor House that is set to reopen later this year after a substantial refurbishment as The Story, County Durham's exciting new local history centre and cultural venue.

Aisling Ramshaw, head of sales and marketing at Banks Homes, says: "Symeon Manor is a one-of-a-kind property in a magnificent location and represents the absolute pinnacle of luxury living.

"It has been designed to provide an exquisite combination of style, design, and functionality, and includes all the features you need to live, work and play in complete comfort.

"Mount Oswald is a dream location for families, commuters and countryside lovers alike, and as well as offering excellent transport links, it sits just a short walk away from one of the UK's most beautiful and best-loved cities."

For further information on Symeon Manor, please visit www.bankshomes.co.uk/symeon-manor

To register your interest in Symeon Manor and Symeon Court, please contact Jan Dale at Urban BASE on 0845 643 1186 or via info@urban-base.com



An artist's impression of the luxurious lounge at Symeon Manor



Live in the Land of The Prince Bishops

New build homes in one of the region's most historic cities don't come round very often...until now.

When it comes to location, location, location, Durham city is hard to beat.

Its superb road and rail links, its excellent leisure and social facilities and its status as a UNESCO World Heritage site make it one of the most desirable places in the North East for home buyers.

And, while homes close to the city are sought after, those with views of the Cathedral are rarer than gold.

Rarer still are energy efficient new builds – until now, that is and the unveiling of the new Bishops Walk development at Bent House Lane on the edge of Durham, by Miller Homes North East.

Not only is Bishops Walk just a short walk from the historic city centre but it overlooks the Cathedral and its show home – the four bedroom Charleswood – is now open.

In a continuation of its commitment to the county, Miller - which also has developments at Tanfield, Chester-le-Street, Seaham and Consett – has built 235 homes at the site.

Properties offer between two to five bedrooms and the aim is that Bishops' Walk becomes home to a vibrant and multi-generational community.

Landscaping has also been integral to

the design process with plenty of natural planting and the use of a mix of materials, including render and stone, to reflect the surrounding area.

Lauren Angus, sales director at Miller Homes North East, said the development “offers an unrivalled opportunity” in terms of location.

“You have the city – with its fascinating buildings, theatres, cinema, restaurants and superb shops, - on your doorstep and, if you jump on a train, you could be in London in just over two hours or Edinburgh in about 90 minutes.”

Miller Homes has announced a range of options to help homebuyers no matter what stage of the homeownership journey they are at. For first-time buyers and those who are finding it hard to save enough for a deposit, Miller is offering a contribution of up to five per cent of the purchase price towards a customer's deposit on a new build home.

And, for current homeowners looking to make a move, Miller's Part Exchange and Assisted Move schemes are designed to make the process as easy as possible.

Miller will take on the admin and costs associated with selling, managing the independent valuation and marketing of a customer's property, and if required, purchase of their home through its Part Exchange scheme, sparing customers the hassle of finding a buyer and covering the cost of estate agent and advertising fees.

And for homebuyers with a deposit who are concerned about the cost of their monthly mortgage repayments, Miller's partnership with Own New could enable them to reduce the interest rate on their mortgage for a new Miller home for their initial term, while still owning 100% of their property, through a mortgage rate reduction with Own New.

Lauren said the incentives, combined with everything else Bishops Walk has to offer, “will appeal to so many people on so many levels.”

She said: “There has already been considerable interest in this development given its location and the variety of houses sizes and styles, so I'd urge anyone thinking of making a house purchase to come along and find out more.”

www.millerhomes.co.uk



Northbound Tyne Tunnel set for major maintenance

**7th June 2024 to 3rd
March 2025**

The Northbound tunnel is set to be closed for a total of 36 weekends for scheduled maintenance which will ensure the longevity of the tunnels for generations to come.

**Bi-directional
Operation**

On maintenance weekends, drivers will cross the river using the Southbound tunnel which will act as bi-directional - a single lane carrying traffic north and a single lane going south.

**Open Monday to
Friday**

To cause minimum travel disruption to users of the tunnels during the busiest times, both tunnels will remain open, as usual, from Monday to Friday.



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Cleaning for health - Condcliffe Cleaning's approach to hygiene and sanitisation

In today's world, where health and well-being are paramount, maintaining a clean and healthy environment has never been more important. Never has this been more apparent, since the restrictions were lifted from Covid 19.



Recognising the critical link between cleanliness and health, Condcliffe Cleaning Services has developed an exceptional approach to hygiene and sanitisation that goes above and beyond traditional cleaning methods.

With a strong commitment to excellence, they are dedicated to creating spaces that not only sparkle with cleanliness but also contribute to the overall well-being of the occupants.

Barbara Condcliffe, the companies' founder told us: "At the heart of Condcliffe is the understanding that a meticulously clean environment plays a vital role in safeguarding health. Our team of 70 staff believe that a thorough and systematic approach to hygiene is key to preventing the spread of illnesses and creating a safe-haven for everyone."

One of the primary focuses of their approach is on comprehensive sanitisation. They go beyond surface cleaning, delving deep into every nook and cranny to eliminate harmful germs and bacteria. By using industry-approved disinfectants and following rigorous application techniques, Condcliffe

Cleaning ensures that surfaces are not only clean but also thoroughly disinfected. This meticulous attention to detail significantly reduces the risk of cross-contamination, creating a healthier environment for occupants.

In addition to physical cleaning, they prioritise the well-being of both their staff and clients. They maintain a rigorous training programme to ensure that their cleaning professionals are up-to-date on the latest techniques and best practices. By adhering to stringent health and safety guidelines, they not only protect their staff, but they also ensure that every cleaning task is carried out with precision and attention to detail, leaving no room for compromise when it comes to health.

Barbara concluded: "Condcliffe Cleaning is committed to using eco-friendly cleaning products that are safe for both people and the environment. We understand that harsh chemicals can have adverse effects on health, so we opt for greener alternatives whenever possible. By reducing the use of toxic substances, our team minimises the risk of exposure to harmful chemicals,

benefiting both occupants and the planet."

Clients who have experienced Condcliffe Cleaning's services have praised not only the immaculate cleanliness they achieve but also the positive impact on their health. By creating an environment that is free from harmful germs, allergens, and pollutants, Condcliffe Cleaning contributes to a healthier and more vibrant space. Clients have reported fewer instances of illness, improved respiratory health, and an overall sense of well-being after engaging Condcliffe Cleaning's services.

For more information on Condcliffe Cleaning Services. Call 0191 406 6106 or email info@condliffecleaning.co.uk www.condliffecleaning.co.uk.



Miller's Time to Shine making a difference

Miller's Time To Shine isn't just another cleaning company; it's a beacon of hope and opportunity in the community. Founded by Gavin Miller on principles of integrity, morals, and ethics, this venture isn't just about sparkling windows or gleaming gutters - it's about making a tangible difference in people's lives.



of services, Gavin has built himself a mini cleaning empire to be proud of.

Their offerings go beyond the standard window cleaning fare. From PVC frames to cladding, gutter cleaning to waste removal, Miller's Time To Shine tackles the jobs others shy away from. And this is just the beginning - their sights are set on expanding into new areas of cleaning, driven by their passion to make the business a great success.

Using traditional methods paired with a keen eye for detail, Miller's Time To Shine ensures a thorough clean every time. Whether it's removing overgrown moss from gutters or giving commercial buildings a facelift, their dedication shines through in every task they undertake.

But it's not just about the services rendered; it's about the impact they make. By offering employment opportunities, Miller's Time To Shine is helping the North East sparkle in more ways than one. Because when integrity meets opportunity, that's when real change happens!

For more information on Miller's Time To Shine, contact Gavin on 07526 704 385.

Gavin's vision is simple yet profound: to offer a full range of external cleaning services while providing employment opportunities to those who need it most. "I want to make a difference," Gavin affirms, "and I want to show that people who have hit hard times can get themselves out of the mess they're in, and I speak from personal experience."

The journey began in December 2022 when the plans were set in motion. By January 2023, Miller's Time To Shine was born, a modest yet ambitious cleaning company serving the South Shields area. With a commitment to excellence and affordability, Gavin and his team aim to deliver top-notch services to both domestic and commercial clients.

The story begins with Gavin Miller, the company's founder promising to make a difference. The idea behind Miller's Time To Shine is that he can take on unemployed people to assist him in his goal and help set them on the right tracks. "I want to make a difference, and I want to show that people who have hit hard times can get themselves out of the mess they're in," said Gavin.

Miller's Time To Shine is a business that is built on integrity, morals, and ethics. Gavin offers a full service of external cleaning, with gutters, windows, driveways and much more cleaned, basically the jobs nobody really wants to do.

Having grown the business to now cover the whole of the North East and an increase



GFW enters new era, announcing a brand refresh and renewed vision for the future



GFW's Richard Garland, Sally Hart and Robyn Peat.

GFW, formerly George F. White, today unveils its renewed vision and plans for the future under the new brand of GFW.

As well-known advisers and agents in the property arena for over 40 years across rural, residential, commercial and development sectors, GFW has grown rapidly in recent years, building on its heritage and strength in these areas as well as diversifying its service offering to include property management and architecture.

With its renewed vision, the business aspires to be one of the best and largest professional services firms in the North East. Not only by continuing to grow its core offering in the property sector, providing clients with exceptional service and innovative solutions, but also expanding its work on large-scale

projects working with private and public sector organisations.

Over the last 12 months the business has welcomed new clients from within the region and across the UK, including projects to deliver strategic property appraisals and advice for local authorities, further education establishments and large multi-national organisations.

To support this growth and its commitment to service excellence for long-standing clients, GFW has made a number of strategic appointments adding 17 new members to the team in the last year, as well as 12 key promotions in the last six months.

Richard Garland, joint Managing Partner at GFW, said: "It's a very exciting time for the business, not only as we continue to develop our service offering to better serve our existing clients, but by opening the door to new opportunities for the business, our clients, and our people.

"This year we said farewell to George White, who left the business following a long and successful career. He founded George F. White back in 1979 and set the foundations

and the values on which the business has been able to grow and evolve over the last four decades.

"With this strong foundation, we now enter a new era with plans to take us through the next phase in our journey, and have a strong vision to continue to diversify and evolve what we are able to offer our clients."

Sally Hart, joint Managing Partner at GFW, added: "The business has grown from strength-to-strength with our clients in recent years and so it felt like the right time to refresh our brand positioning to align with the service and experience we now offer. The new brand represents an opportunity to help broaden the understanding of what we are all about, not just in the North East, but outside of the region too.

"We're thrilled to be able to create more opportunities for our team and to continue to bring more talent into the business over the next 12 months."

GFW is currently recruiting for a number of roles, head to the website to find out more www.georgefwhite.co.uk/careers

GFW.

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Pearson Engineering acquires Armstrong Works building

Pearson Engineering has acquired the historic Armstrong Works from its former owners for an undisclosed amount. The acquisition furthers Pearson Engineering's commitment to its roots in Newcastle upon Tyne where it has successfully built an internationally recognised brand, serving Armed Forces in more than 35 countries.

Pearson Engineering has provided more than 3,000 mine ploughs, as well as other equipment to defeat explosive obstacles and other battlefield hazards to the British Army and its allies from Newcastle for almost 40 years. Founded in 1985 by Dr Alan Reece, a Senior Lecturer and Reader of Agricultural Engineering at Newcastle University, Pearson Engineering now employs more than 300 professionals, graduates and apprentices across two global brands. The move to Armstrong Works on Scotswood Road from a previous base in Walker enabled Pearson Engineering to grow links with co-located contact manufacturer Responsive Engineering which is now its subsidiary. Together, Pearson Engineering and Responsive Engineering are using the strength of Armstrong Works to provide expert manufacturing services to the global defence market, manufacturing armour, bridge structures and turret structures for UK Ministry of Defence programmes.

"Armstrong Works has become a critical national and international asset, increasing the proportion and value of UK content in UK land programmes and providing extensive life-preserving equipment to conflict and contested environments around the world. We are incredibly proud of the work that we produce from Armstrong Works, and its important role in defending our UK armed forces and its allies." – Ian Bell, Group Chief Executive Officer at Pearson Engineering.

Industry conference tackles recruitment and retention challenges in the engineering and manufacturing sector

Employers were urged to be more creative in their approaches to recruitment and retention at an engineering and manufacturing conference in Newcastle recently.

Education providers, SMEs and multinationals came together for EMConf to discuss the challenges businesses are facing in attracting staff, retaining talent and building skilled workforces.

The conference was organised by membership organisation Engineering and Manufacturing Network (EMN) and was held at the Quorum Business Park headquarters of apprenticeships and training provider TDR Training.

The conference was sponsored by operational areas management solution provider SMS Technology and was supported by exhibitors



GLC Projects awarded a place on the Demolition and Associated Services Framework by Northumbrian Water

GLC Projects, a specialist enabling works contractor based in the North East, is thrilled to announce that they have been awarded one of two places on the Demolition and Associated Services Lot as part of the Northumbrian Water Wider Eco Systems framework.

Being a part of the Wider Eco Systems framework which covers all Northumbrian Water's operational areas of the North East, presents an exciting opportunity for GLC Projects to showcase their expertise in the demolition industry. The framework represents a collaborative delivery vehicle which underpins the delivery of the £3.6bn AMP 8 capital investment programme and beyond.

Securing a place on Lot D for North East Demolition and Associated Services will see GLC Projects deliver demolition and decommissioning projects on existing water and wastewater infrastructure across the North East.

The framework agreement, which runs for up to 12 years, is the largest contract award for GLC Projects in the company's history. It forms part of a wider growth plan for the company who has more than doubled its revenue in recent years.

"We are honoured to have been awarded the framework contract for Northumbria Water," said Graeme Cochrane, Managing Director of GLC Projects. "As a local business, we are proud to contribute to the development and progress of our community through our specialised demolition and civil engineering services. We look forward to working closely with Northumbria Water and other framework partners to successfully deliver the programme works."



including NBSL, Newcastle University, Tyne Coast College and New College Durham and NE STEM Hub.

EMConf is the sister event to EMCON, EMN's annual engineering and manufacturing showcase. EMCON attracted more than 900 visitors and 120 exhibitors from North East England and beyond last year. 2024's edition of EMCON will be held Rainton Arena in Houghton-le-Spring on September 12.



Contract Manufacturing to Defend, Power and Explore the World from Armstrong Works.





L-R: Carl Kemp, Rob Lynas, Wayne Farrel and Derek Smith

The truth behind potholes – and the solution

Undertake a Google search for news items referencing “potholes” and I can guarantee there will be items from a plethora of national and local news sources with stories about damage caused to vehicles; road safety issues; and the economic impact of poorly maintained roads.

For as long as I have been working in highways and transportation, which is over 20 years, I have seen the same report rehashed every year detailing the cost to repair the potholes and the economic impact on the UK; but the numbers have been getting bigger and bigger every year!

The latest reports suggest a cost of £16.3 billion to repair potholes in England and Wales; with an impact on the UK economy of £14.4 billion per year; to put this into context, the government recently committed £8.3 billion over the next 10 years to “fix the pothole problem”.

Anybody that drives, rides or cycles on our road network can't help but notice the deterioration in the condition of the road surfaces; however, the potholes are a symptom of a wider problem with the approach to the maintenance of transport infrastructure.

Everybody, well most people, love to see a shiny new development with new roads and infrastructure opened up, usually with a big fanfare and local dignitaries cutting a ribbon and smiling for a press photo; but what happens when the highway gets adopted by the local authority and is added to a network which they are already struggling to inspect and maintain.

It shouldn't be a surprise that the maintenance of highway infrastructure is one of the first things to be reduced in a time where local authority budgets are being squeezed; who is going to notice if the gullies aren't cleaned twice a year, or the road markings aren't refreshed, or if the condition and skid resistance of roads isn't investigated? But in accepting these reductions in standards we must accept that the condition of the infrastructure will deteriorate and the cost for repairing it will continue to increase.

There are many reasons why a pothole may develop; material defects; overloading; failure of underlying materials; the age of the surfacing; but in most cases the ingress of water into the pavement construction is the key factor. The water can wash away loose materials in the foundation and in the winter the effect of the water freezing and thawing causes massive pressures which can tear apart the road. A road is designed and constructed in such a way as to minimise the amount of water that can infiltrate the construction, as soon as this is breached, through damage to the surface; badly reinstated service trenches; badly repaired potholes; there is a route for water damage. Our highway corridors are not just used to transport cars and people on the surface; there are a myriad of services beneath the surface; drains, water, electricity cables, gas pipes, all with the requirement for repairs, and in the case of drainage and water, the ability to introduce water through leakage.

As highway designers we are always looking for innovative ways to improve our solutions, and whilst this is more difficult when improving, widening or repairing existing highways there are opportunities in new schemes to introduce preventative measures which will reduce the risk of damage to the road. On a recent new road scheme we were able to accommodate all of the new services within a widened verge footway and cycleway, minimising the risk of future need to dig in the road; we also designed a drainage scheme which met the requirements of SuDS legislation by providing a swale and limiting the number of drainage pipes in the ground. It is essential that more highway designers start to think more about the longevity of their solutions, and not simply about implementing what has ‘always been’ – it doesn't work anymore. At Lynas Engineers I am incredibly proud of how our team think strategically about a solution, offering multiple outcomes that have long term, positive impact; and consider our rapidly changing environment and communities.

But good design and construction can only go so far; the road materials, particularly the surface layer, is subject to significant environmental and physical stresses, and over time this will lead to deterioration. It is critical that inspection and maintenance is a priority for highway authorities, and that sustainable and durable solutions are implemented; a short term approach of “fixing” potholes is neither of these and a long term programme of wider scale patching and resurfacing; as well as dealing with the underlying cause is required before we can start to reduce the cost of our aging infrastructure on the economy.

lynasengineers.com

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Are you craving more space for your growing business but don't want to relocate? Look no further! Tyne Manufacturing, based in the vibrant heart of the North East but serving clients nationwide, presents the ultimate space-saving solution: bespoke mezzanine floors.



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Mezzanine floors ingeniously insert an intermediate-level floor into tall structures, optimising space for storage, offices, and manufacturing. This versatile solution for efficient vertical expansion is embraced by businesses across diverse environments and offers a myriad of benefits.

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New owners at the helm for long-standing family firm, Anton Estates

Corbridge based Anton Estates has officially announced new ownership after 29 years in business. The independent family-run estate agency Anton Estates, founded by Mike Anton in 1995, faces exciting times with new owners Jonathan and Jessica Landale taking over the reins after almost three decades.

Jonathan and Jessica announce their takeover of the family run business in the Tyne Valley, adding to their already thriving property businesses. With well established companies, Cosmo Grace Property and LT Property Services as well as their own buy to let portfolio, the acquisition of Anton Estates has offered them the opportunity to come back to their roots, working in a more rural environment.

"Living in the Tyne Valley, myself and Jessica were keen to expand our business into the area. When we were approached by Anton Estates it was exactly the opportunity we were looking for" says Jonathan.

"We both began our careers in rural property, myself as a land agent and Jessica in lettings.

To be able to come full circle and now run our own agency within the Tyne Valley felt like the natural progression for us."

The couple, who share a strong background in the property industry, have built their current businesses from the ground up. From sourcing properties and managing refurbishments to lettings and property management, this was the obvious next step in expanding their portfolio.

They will be working alongside the existing team, to provide continuity for their customers, and build on the already established reputation people have come to expect from the agency.

"I am excited to grow the lettings side of the business, which is something I am passionate about and feel can be put second after sales



New owners of Anton Estates, Jonathan and Jessica Landale

by so many agencies' says Jessica, ARLA Regional Executive for the North East of England.

"With a torrent of new regulations for both tenants AND landlords, the rental market can be a minefield for those involved.

"My hope is to work with local landlords and those interested in building their own property portfolios to increase knowledge and understanding of the laws that surround this and create a thriving lettings market across the Tyne Valley. Something which is so desperately needed with the demand for housing rising."

www.antonestates.co.uk



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Contemporary Architecture



Building on a proud heritage to deliver the next generation of protected mobility for our armed forces

Pearson Engineering has almost four decades of experience in delivering equipment that protects the lives of soldiers in combat environments. As the company approaches its 40th anniversary in 2025, Ian Bell has taken the reins as Group CEO, taking Pearson Engineering into a new era of growth, and with it, demonstrable impact for the North East.

Following a successful military career, and senior commercial appointments across the globe, what has brought you to Pearson Engineering?

The opportunity to join Pearson Engineering was a genuinely exciting proposition. The company has a fantastic reputation across the defence sector, having provided equipment that is tried, tested and proven with the British Army and allies in almost forty countries. Pearson Engineering's equipment makes a real difference to the soldier on the battlefield, providing the necessary means to overcome obstacles and to defeat explosive threats. This is really important, life preserving work and I jumped at the opportunity to take the helm as we look to evolve our products. The future will be characterised by smart technologies, automation and AI, taking the human away from what soldiers call 'Dull, Dirty and Dangerous' tasks.

In joining Pearson Engineering, I have also become responsible as Group CEO for our subsidiary, Responsive Engineering, led by my colleague Rachel Mansfield. Working collaboratively with Pearson Engineering, Responsive Engineering provides contract manufacturing into the defence sector. Together, we're looking ahead to a decade of secured work and a sustainable future for Armstrong Works.

What is your vision for the future of Pearson Engineering and Responsive Engineering?

We have an excellent opportunity to further our product range, maximising the potential of the technology we have developed, and that of our parent company, to support post-conflict mine clearance in Ukraine. We will also continue to evolve and develop our core product range which provides 'protected mobility' to our armed forces.

I also see Pearson Engineering becoming a bigger and more influential partner to the UK Government across its various programmes where heavy manufacturing and maintenance, repair and overhaul of equipment is required. We are already contributing to all of the British Army's current armoured vehicle programmes in various ways and we have more to offer.

What does the future of 'protected mobility' look like?

Protected mobility is a term that is used by the military to refer to its ability to move to places of its choosing whilst overcoming the various obstacles that it might encounter on the battlefield. Typically, such intervention has been carried out by heavy duty, mechanical equipment. I expect this will endure for decades to come, but it will be supplemented by enhanced detection technologies that allow

networked sensors to automatically identify obstacles and select the right tool for the job. At Pearson Engineering, we are developing robotic 'mission packs' for uncrewed vehicles that will provide Commanders with wide ranging choices. It is all about protecting the soldier so they can do the job they need to do to defend the nation.

What about skills and technology? How will Pearson Engineering keep pace with advances and continue to support our Armed Forces?

Technology across defence evolves quickly and we must hire the right people with the right skills to ensure that our products are commercially competitive, and that they keep pace with a rapidly evolving threat scenario in conflict environments. This needs to be balanced against the wisdom that is brought by people who have worked in defence for decades. Whilst threats and technology evolve quickly, Armed Forces don't evolve quite so rapidly. We need to balance the innovative and novel with equipment that supports 'Tactics, Techniques and Procedures' that are known and proven.

With a focus on global affairs and central Government in the UK, how does Pearson Engineering deliver benefit to the North East?

It is really important to me that Pearson Engineering is a force for good in the region. The heart of Pearson Engineering can be found in our ambition to help people to overcome very practical challenges to mobility with our products. We want to apply the same to our local communities, though perhaps more figuratively, helping them to overcome adversity.

We already do some great work in supporting prosperity in the North East with a focus on promoting the region, grass roots engineering skills, the veteran community, and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. I can only see our commitment to this growing. We are a major employer with more than 300 staff building on a proud heritage to deliver the next generation of protected mobility for our armed forces. It is important that we continue to invest in our people and that we bring on the next generation too with active internships, apprenticeship and graduate schemes. We currently have 18 apprentices at Armstrong Works and they're working on some of the UK's biggest and most influential programmes – I don't know if they know it yet, but they're genuinely making history from our site.

This all has a knock-on effect for the North East with an improved skills base, greater buying power and an active supply chain that can attract central Government spending.

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“

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ahead to a decade
of secured work...*



SCJ Renewables' multi-million Greencroft Two project wins at Regional Energy Efficiency Awards



North East renewable energy specialist, SCJ Renewables, has been recognised at the North East Energy Efficiency Awards – winning ‘Large Scale Project of the Year’ for its work on the multi-million-pound Greencroft Two bottling facility.

Based in Cramlington, SCJ Renewables was founded by Sean McIntyre, Christopher Lyall, and Jordan Wilson in 2018 – utilising four decades of experience to provide specialist renewable energy solutions in the North East and further afield.

2023 proved to be a record-breaking year for SCJ Renewables, completing over 200 domestic and commercial projects, which helped them achieve an annual turnover of £2.4m.

SCJ Renewables were in attendance at the 10th annual Energy Efficiency Awards in Durham – beating out the likes of E.On Energy Solutions and Hartlepool Borough Council to be named ‘Large Scale Project of the Year’ as well as being highly commended in the ‘PV Installer of the Year’ category.

SCJ Renewables was recognised for its work with The Lanchester Group on the Greencroft Two bottling facility in County Durham, playing a key role in providing and installing circa 5,700 Solar PV panels to the £21m project. Once up and running,

Greencroft Two is expected to create over 2.9 million kilowatt hours of clean, renewable energy every year.

Sean McIntyre, Managing Director of SCJ Renewables said: “The team and I are

delighted to be taking home this award, beating out industry-leading organisations to cap off a truly exceptional year for us.”

“Our success is entirely down to the work of our team, projects like Greencroft Two don’t happen without their skills and determination. I am very proud to see them recognised for their efforts and for the exceptional standard that we’ve put in place on every project we work on.”

scjelectrical.co.uk



L-R: Sean McIntyre, Christopher Lyall and Jordan Wilson



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Mr Infinity – Meet the brains behind ISR Laser

Meet Terence South, founder of ISR Laser, whose journey through the world of engineering is nothing short of fascinating.

After serving in the military, Terence returned to the UK and dove into civil engineering, contributing to projects like the Canary Wharf and the Channel Tunnel. His expertise even took him to Russia and China, where he embarked on a remarkable journey in 1998, staying until 2021.

During his 23-year stint in China, Terence not only mastered the language but also collaborated with Fluor on various global engineering projects. From interpreting in outer Mongolia to overseeing quality control, Terence's work spanned continents.

It was in China where Terence first witnessed the power of lasers, and their potential was further highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic in Europe. Countries like Germany embraced laser technology for its energy efficiency and eco-friendliness, with lasers operating at incredibly low wattages without generating waste.

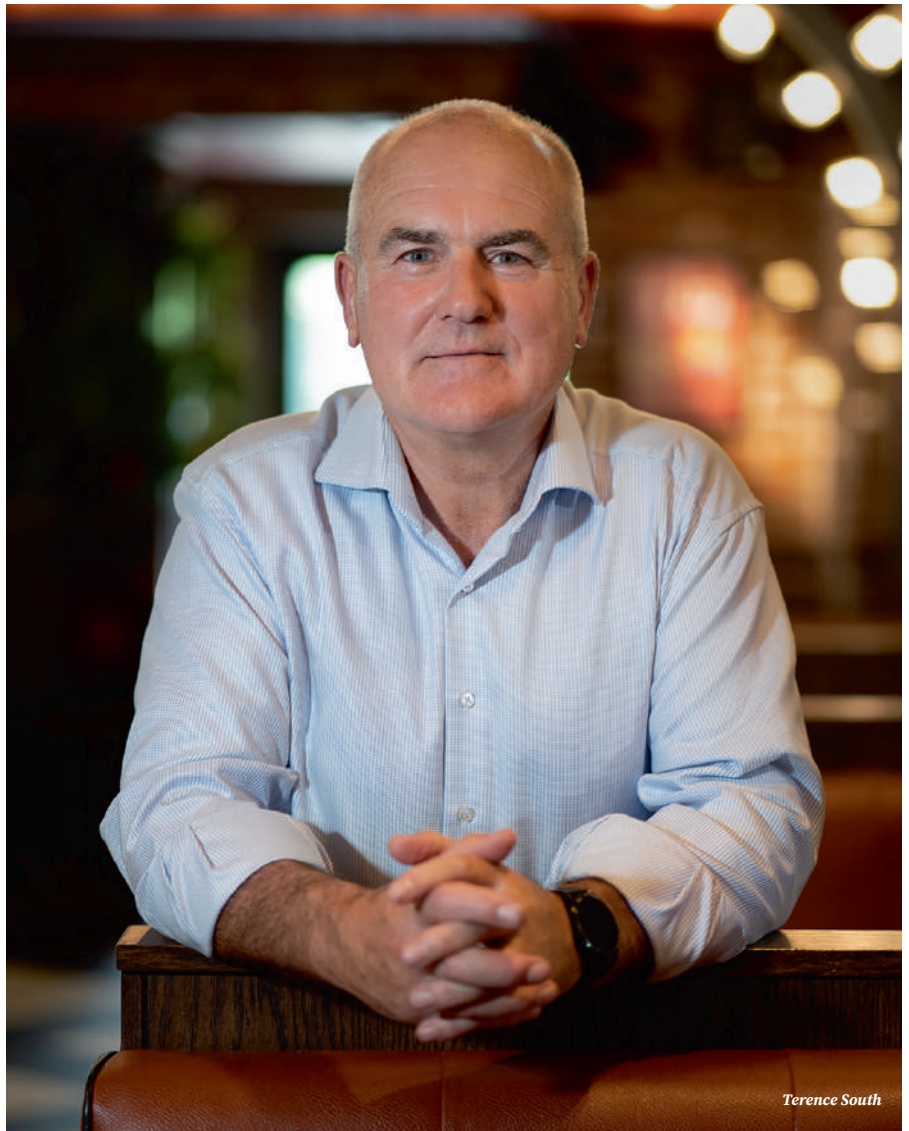
For companies operating 24/7, it's crucial to focus on preparations for shutdowns and supporting employees during factory closures. This includes tasks as simple as cleaning threads on studs, which can significantly reduce disassembly time.

One client, in particular, takes advantage of these periods to organise a weekend car festival for their staff. This event not only allows the company to rejuvenate, but also provides an opportunity to connect with individuals who contribute to business development in unexpected ways. These connections are then pursued to acquire technical knowledge and develop expertise.

Now, ISR Laser has been making waves in the North East of England for the past two years, although their reach extends as far south as Birmingham. Despite a slower uptake in the engineering industry, they're making strides, collaborating with collectors of military equipment and classic items along the way.

Terence's journey is a testament to the power of innovation and determination in the world of engineering – To Infinity & Beyond.

For more information on ISR Laser, call Terence on 07774 622 807.



Terence South



Building materials distributor Encon opens new North East hub

The Encon Group, the UK's leading independent distributor of building materials, has opened a new North East hub as it strengthens its national branch network.

Encon & Nevill Long North East officially opened on the North Shields' Tyne Tunnel Trading Estate.

The state-of-the-art 33,435 sq ft, energy-efficient facility will combine its previous Newcastle and Washington branches into a single, larger hub to provide 'total project solutions' to its customers across the region. This includes building insulation and external facades, interiors, technical insulation, construction products and passive fire protection.

The new unit also provides extensive warehouse and yard facilities, allowing for more products in stock, a larger sales office and a dedicated trade counter and vehicle fleet.

The company's existing teams from Newcastle and Washington have both moved to the new branch, retaining its specialist knowledge and support for customer projects across all market sectors.

Boasting top-of-the-range solutions from market-leading brands, a team of experts for total project support and enhanced service capabilities, Encon & Nevill Long North East believes the move will be key to reinforcing its position in the region as 'The Distributor of Choice'.

George Allison, Encon Regional Director - North, said: "By combining our specialist branches into one site, we can provide a comprehensive product and service offering to customers in the region, with all the solutions and support they need under one roof. The great facilities at Encon & Nevill Long North East, backed by the same expert team from Newcastle and Washington, strengthens our leading position and opens new growth opportunities."



Located at a prime site on the Tyne Tunnel Trading Estate, a well-established commercial hub off the A19, the operational running of the branch will be overseen by Assistant Branch Manager Stephen Begg, supported by Brian Hibbert in the role of Business Unit Manager.

David Gibbs, Commercial Director at UK Land Estates, which owns Tyne Tunnel Trading Estate, added: "Tyne Tunnel Trading Estate is a highly sought-after estate situated at the heart of the North East, with excellent transport links and close to ports and local amenities.

"The new facility will allow Encon to deliver on projects throughout the region, easily and efficiently, while also providing its customers with an easily accessible site. We are delighted to have worked with them on the opening of this new facility and look forward to seeing their operation continue to grow and create opportunities for local people as we look to the future."

www.encon.co.uk

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Property Market update: North East & North Yorkshire



Home prices on the rise: A window of opportunity for buyers and sellers?

youngsRPS Property Experts William Thornton, Head of Residential Agency, and Fiona Roe, Residential Lead for North Yorkshire, offer valuable insights into the current property market trends shaping the UK real estate landscape.

Regional Trends

The property market in the UK continues its upward trajectory, with the latest data from Rightmove showing a notable increase in average asking prices. In the North East, the property market is showing robust growth, with a local increase of 1.3% on a monthly basis and 3.4% year on year. Properties in this region are spending an average of 60 days on the market before being sold. Similarly, in the Yorkshire and Humberside region, there has been a monthly increase of 1.9% and a yearly increase of 3.1%, with an average selling time of 65 days.

Driving Factors

A significant driver behind this surge is the remarkable performance of the largest homes, categorised as the top-of-the-ladder sector. This segment is experiencing its most substantial price growth since 2014, indicating a strong start to the year. However, it's important to note that the market remains price-sensitive, with varying speeds of growth across different sectors.

Market Dynamics

The latest data also reveals a surge in both seller and buyer activity compared to the previous year. New sellers entering the market have increased by 12%, while the number of sales being agreed has seen a notable uptick of 13%. This surge in activity is most prominent in the largest homes segment, where the number of new sellers has risen by 18%, and sales being agreed have increased by 20% compared to the previous year.

Opportunities for Buyers and Sellers

With the property market showing signs of buoyancy and activity levels on the rise, there appears to be a window of

opportunity for both buyers and sellers. Homeowners are increasingly springing into action, with a notable spike observed on Thursday, 28th March, marking the highest number of new sellers entering the market in a single day so far in 2024. This trend is the third largest since August 2020.

Looking Ahead

As we head into the summer months, a busy calendar of sporting events and the potential for a General Election are expected to create additional distractions for home-movers. Therefore, those considering a move may find the current market conditions conducive for action.

With prices on the rise and both buyers and sellers showing increased engagement. Whether you're looking to buy or sell, now could be an opportune time to make your move.

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NE tech and hospitality expert, ServAce, announces staff increase

North East tech business, ServAce, has increased its headcount by 50% as it eyes long-term national growth.

The appointment of seven new employees within the last six months brings its total headcount from 12 to 19.

Based in Tees Valley, the UK market leader for training and event booking management launched in 2006 and since then has supported several national blue-chip companies to manage thousands of online and residential training courses, predominately apprenticeships.

The expansion comes as a result of increased demand in the market and ongoing investment to put in place enhanced systems, including a new 'Apprentice Mobile App' and an online automated payment system to create efficiencies for clients and the business.

The seven new hires include one national account manager, two Senior QA Automation engineers, a junior accounts manager, an account assistant and two business administration apprenticeships.

New national account manager Greg Smith will lead accounts for ServAce's largest clients and head up the businesses safeguarding, a fundamental and increasingly important part of its offering given the increase in managed apprenticeship training. He brings previous experience working with international brands including Just Eat and npower.

Louise White, co-owner of ServAce, said: "Over the last year, we have seen a real demand for our services, which is down to an increase in training requirements in the market, but is also a testament to the relationships we hold with training organisers in some of the UK's biggest businesses who seek out the efficiencies and customer service we provide.



Leighton announces record performance and recruitment drive

Leading North East software development company, Leighton, has announced a year of record performance with plans to create more jobs over the coming 12 months.

Following its success, the business has also made the decision to broaden its executive team and invest in its sales, go to market and customer success initiatives as part of its growth strategy that is set to create over 20 jobs in the next year.

James Bunting, CEO at Leighton said: "It's amazing to be able to talk about the next phase of our strategy.

"To be in such a strong financial position and able to be planning to take on 20 new colleagues this year is phenomenal, especially in the current climate. As a business that started in, and retains its headquarters, in the North East it's absolutely fantastic to continue to play our part in contributing to the regional economy and to be able to provide job opportunities to people not only in this region but also further afield.

"Our success is testament to our amazing team, their hard work and the results their work is delivering for our customers.

"We've been in business for over 32 years and our goal remains to work collaboratively with our customers to help them to make money, save money and solve problems within their business. By offering both end-to-end software development or placing our expert consultants within their businesses to deliver specific projects at pace, we can ensure the right approach to maximise efficiency, deliver value and most importantly ensure the right outcomes and solutions.

Tech company launches new Sunderland hub

A national tech company has launched a new TechHub in Sunderland, opening up opportunities for businesses and residents.

In partnership with Sunderland City Council and Microsoft, Phoenix Software has opened a state-of-the-art space at The Beam at Riverside Sunderland.

The facility will offer a series of tech-related sessions to businesses, the voluntary sector and local schools, which aim to create opportunities for residents of all ages, and support businesses to thrive in today's digital world.

Phoenix Software is an end-to-end IT solution and managed service provider employing over 420 people, with offices in Pocklington, Yorkshire, and MediaCity, Salford.

Becky Wilson, Head of Microsoft Licensing & Strategic Development at Phoenix, said: "We have a long-standing relationship with Sunderland City Council and when this opportunity came up to take space at The Beam it seemed the perfect fit.



"As a business, we're on a very clear growth strategy where we're looking at investing in different regions.

"But we also want to invest in communities and make a difference across the UK as much as we can, and we see this as an ideal place to expand our presence in the North East."

The Sunderland office will be used as a workspace for the company's staff when in the North East, as well as a hub for its outreach work.

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In Conversation With...

David Maginnes

Sales Director at HTG

Describe your career ambitions and background.

Growing up, I was drawn to the world of advertising due to my innate creativity and fascination with design. While my journey led me through studying graphic communications and business management, I ultimately found my niche in IT sales, initially in web and application design before transitioning to infrastructure managed services and cloud.

Tell us about your current role.

I recently joined HTG to spearhead the development and expansion of a sales team with a focus on the UK and Ireland markets. Additionally, I've taken on responsibilities in marketing, aiming to enhance brand awareness and support sales efforts.

What is your proudest business achievement?

Ranking 1st in EMEA sales at Dell stands out as a significant achievement for me. It was a proud moment, especially being selected by Senior Leadership to attend the annual Presidents Club event, which celebrates the performance of high achievers.

How has your industry evolved in the last 10 years?

The last decade has seen an unprecedented surge of technological innovation, reshaping both the corporate landscape and everyday life. From the ubiquitous presence of smartphones to the advent of cloud computing and artificial intelligence, the pace of change has been dizzying. These advancements have not only enhanced efficiency and convenience for consumers but have also revolutionised the way businesses operate.

One of the most significant shifts in the industry has been the escalating focus on cybersecurity. As technology becomes increasingly integrated into every aspect of our lives, the threat of cybercrime has grown exponentially. Despite substantial investments in cybersecurity solutions by organisations worldwide, cybercriminals continue to exploit vulnerabilities, resulting in significant financial and reputational damage. It's estimated that by 2025, the global cost of cybercrime could exceed \$10.5 trillion, surpassing the GDP of many nations.

For businesses, the challenge lies in staying ahead of evolving threats and safeguarding sensitive data from sophisticated cyber-attacks. This necessitates a proactive approach to cybersecurity, encompassing robust defence mechanisms, continuous monitoring, and rapid incident response protocols. As the digital landscape evolves, organisations must prioritise cybersecurity to mitigate risks and ensure the integrity of their operations.

What are you currently working on?

Amidst this evolving threat landscape, HTG has recently developed and launched HTG Overwatch, a comprehensive managed security services solution designed to address the complex cybersecurity needs of modern businesses. Drawing upon our extensive experience in professional services, HTG Overwatch offers a proactive and adaptive approach to cybersecurity, tailored to requirements of our customers.

At its core, HTG Overwatch provides round-the-clock monitoring, threat detection, and incident response capabilities, leveraging advanced analytics and machine learning algorithms to identify and mitigate potential security breaches in real-time. Our team of seasoned cybersecurity experts employs a combination of automated tools and human intelligence to stay ahead of emerging threats and ensure the resilience of our clients' IT infrastructure.

Beyond threat detection and response, HTG Overwatch also encompasses comprehensive vulnerability management, compliance monitoring, and security awareness training programs. By taking a holistic approach to cybersecurity, we empower

organisations to fortify their defences, comply with regulatory requirements, and safeguard sensitive data from internal and external threats.

Moreover, HTG Overwatch is specifically tailored to meet the needs of small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs), providing enterprise-grade security capabilities without the prohibitive costs typically associated with cybersecurity solutions. By democratising access to advanced security technologies and expertise, HTG Overwatch enables SMBs to enhance their cyber resilience and focus on driving business growth without compromising on security.

HTG Overwatch represents a paradigm shift in cybersecurity, offering affordable yet comprehensive protection, dependable and demonstrable recovery granting peace of mind for businesses in an increasingly digital world.

Describe your team dynamics?

At HTG, we foster a culture of passion and curiosity, which drives innovation and high performance across the organisation. I'm privileged to work alongside dedicated colleagues who continually inspire and guide me.

What is the best business advice you have received?

The wisdom of "If you're the smartest person in the room, find another room" resonates deeply with me. Embracing humility and continuous learning has been instrumental in my professional growth.

What has been your biggest challenge?

Adapting to the remote work environment during the pandemic posed significant challenges, particularly for someone accustomed to face-to-face interactions in sales. However, I remain optimistic about returning to pre-pandemic working practices.

What does the future hold?

At HTG, our focus is on aggressive scaling over the next few years, with managed services playing a pivotal role in our growth strategy.

How do you maintain a work/life balance?

Outside of work, I prioritise spending time with my family, exploring the outdoors with our dogs, engaging in sports activities, and visiting my extended family back home in Northern Ireland.

Favourite book and boxset?

David Baldacci's suspense novels and TV series like *House of Cards*, *Jack Reacher* and *Jack Ryan* are among my top choices for leisure.

www.htg.co.uk





“
...our focus is
on aggressive
scaling over the
next few years...”



Chris Anderson

Backing up your data - the last line of defence

By Chris Anderson,
Lead Solutions Architect, Waterstons

We all know that putting space between your data and cyber criminals is vital but there has never been more discussion around the security (or lack thereof) of data so are organisations doing everything they can to protect it?

That's where immutable backup storage comes in to support your business.

What does immutable mean?

The definition of immutable is 'unable to be changed'; immutable backups therefore cannot be altered - they are safe from unauthorised change or deletion. Ultimately, your data is as safe as it can be from human error or malicious intent from unauthorised users.

Why is it crucial to backup infrastructure?

The standard approach to backing up data observes the 3-2-1 backup rule:

- 3 copies of production data are maintained across...
- 2 different types of media with...
- 1 copy offsite.

This has recently been developed to 3-2-1-1-0 (snappy, we know), incorporating 1 immutable copy of data and 0 errors throughout the backup environment.

With the continued increase in ransomware attacks, and cyber criminals actively targeting backup data, the integrity of this backup data is critical for recovery.

How can I achieve backup immutability?

Introducing immutable cloud storage satisfies this requirement and provides a 'last line of defence' mechanism in the event of malicious cyber activity.

We recently announced a partnership with Wasabi to do just that - offering offsite and immutable data backup (two birds, one stone) using Wasabi, with Veeam Backup and Replication.

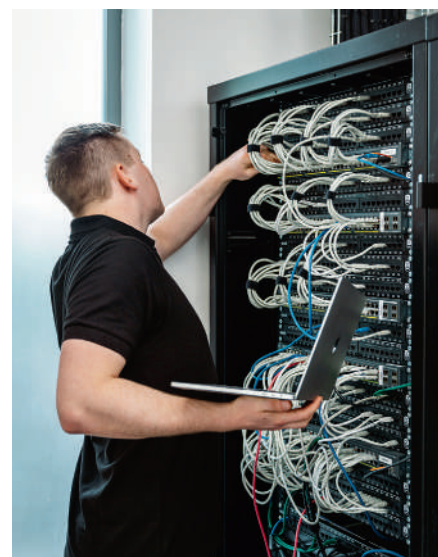
The low cost with cloud storage also enables a suitable repository for long-term GFS (grandfather-father-son) data retention.

As Wasabi does not charge for data ingress or egress, it provides a predictable, cost-effective cloud storage platform.

What else can be leveraged?

As Veeam VASP, our go-to backup product is Veeam Backup and Replication, which also supports the Linux Hardened Repository. Veeam's technology leverages the XFS file system to facilitate backup immutability, but - as we've said before - tape is not dead yet!

To find out more about data and storage backups, get in touch with chris.anderson@waterstons.com



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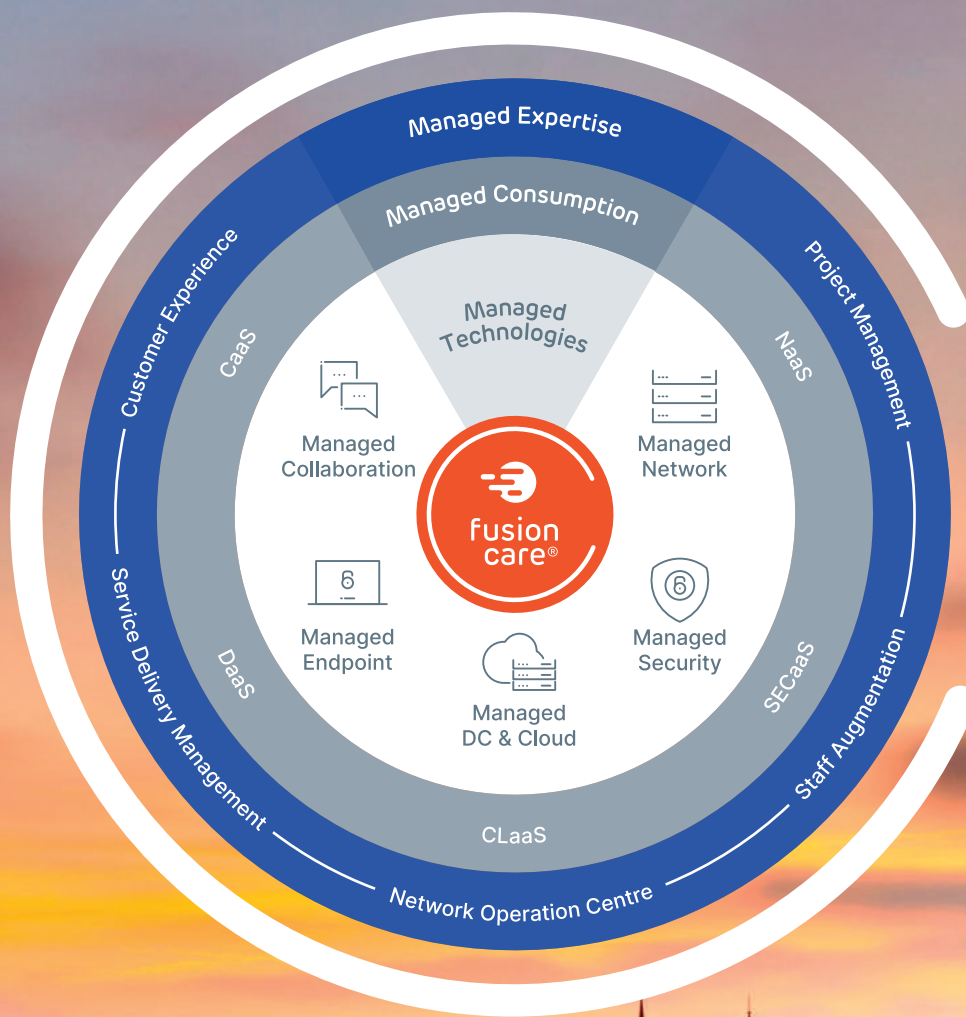


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Take a look into outer space

The North East Space Conference is returning in early June, highlighting the important role the region is playing in the future of this fast growing and exciting industry.

Held in Durham, the event is being sponsored by Lockheed Martin where among the speakers are two of their team who will be highlighting how important it is to follow your dream...

Preeya Lakhani is a living, breathing example of someone who knows that not letting life's challenges getting in the way your dreams can make them come true...

When Preeya Lakhani was just four-years-old she was fascinated by a DVD which was given out free with a UK Sunday newspaper.

The disc offered the user the opportunity to explore the planets, and Preeya and her dad loaded it into their old computer.

Neither of them realised what an important moment this would be, but as Preeya watched the universe unfold before her, it unleashed a passion for space that has never gone away.

"Even at that age, I remember just being fascinated by it," said Preeya.

It started a life long love affair with space – and created a desire in the-then youngster to be involved.

Trips to Farnborough Air Show with her father continued to grow the fascination of how things worked and, adds Preeya with a smile, so was an obsession with a tv show her mother introduced, Star Trek Voyager and Captain Kathryn Janeway (Kate Mulgrew).

"She was a woman who knew her stuff and was a strong leader and I thought that's what I wanted to be," said Preeya.

While her career path may not have seen her on a spacecraft – yet – she is certainly at the forefront of helping the UK forge space as not only a viable economic prospect but as a career.

At just 28 Preeya is a Programme Lead for Lockheed Martin Space, the result of determination and good honest graft.

Preeya had her future all mapped out in her head, but when her A-Levels didn't work out as planned and she didn't get her place at university, she started to look at different routes to achieve her goal.

It was only in recent years when she was diagnosed with ADHD and autism that Preeya started to understand why her academic path may have faltered slightly but this never lessened her desire to success.

Preeya decided to go to college and study for



Preeya Lakhani

BTECs, believing this way she could gain the points she needed to go to university.

Despite being the only female applicant, she managed to win a place on a mechanical engineering course where she was also offered the opportunity for an apprenticeship.

"I was the only girl among 40 boys," she said.

"The lab coats didn't fit me and I had to stand on a stool to reach the machines but I wasn't going to let that put me off."

Preeya won an apprenticeship with Gillette Razors, at the same time not only getting her BTEC but achieving in an HNC in two year and an HND in a year.

A trip to a careers fair led to a conversation with someone working for the Atomic Weapons Establishment and she joined the company, beginning as an Engineering Technician and working her way up to the technical advisor to the CFO.

"We struck a deal, he would teach me about how to run a company and in return I'd teach him everything I knew about the engineering and production of our continuous at sea deterrent (CASD)," said Preeya.

That year-long secondment was the springboard to eventually getting a job at Lockheed Martin, moving up the ladder before working in project management and taking up her current role as Programme Lead.

"Sometimes your career doesn't take the path you originally planned but that doesn't mean you should ever give up," said Preeya.

"I want to be a leader in space, a programme director and show people that the UK space sector really is an incredible place to be.

Also speaking at the end is Lockheed's JB Young, whose career was launched because of a well-timed visit to Florida..

Before her family trip to Florida when she was just nine-years-old Jessica "JB" Young already had her future plans firmly in her mind.

"I wanted to be a candy woman, a kind of female Willy Wonka," said JB.

It's not an unusual thought for a young girl, but that plan was fast forgotten after the ambitious youngster went on a family vacation.

"We went to Cocoa Beach in Florida and it happened to coincide with the launch of the space shuttle," said JB.

"And I was absolutely enamoured by it. Even then I just thought that I had be part of a launch. That was the moment I fell in love with space."

For many people that thought might be because they were simply caught up in the moment – but not JB.

Because that was the springboard that has driven her ambitions and has led her to her current role – capture manager for Skynet, looking after mission strategy and advanced capability.

With her passion for aerospace never waning, JB left school and when to the University of Colorado to study for a degree in aerospace engineering.

She graduated in 2011 and immediately took up a job with Lockheed Martin – where she has been ever since.

While working on her degree JB was involved in a whole host of projects and initiatives which showcased her skill – and her enthusiasm – for space, honing her skills and expanding her knowledge.

That included being project manager for RocketSat, which gave undergraduate students the opportunity to design their own payload, build it and then launch it.

JB helped organise the schedules, took charge of the budgets and a whole host of other aspects of this student run initiative – which highlighted her organizational skills and ability to deliver.

Her first role at Lockheed was as a mechanical engineer, moving on to becoming a system engineer for small satellites and then eventually moving into strategy and business development.

Her current role sees her involved in a whole range of space related activities including "developing the connections between customers' needs and Lockheed Martin's capabilities in meeting those needs."

Alongside the passion for her work, JB is also driven by wanting to share the importance of space to a wider audience – and also encouraging the next generation into engaging with the career possibilities.



Jessica Young

"Space underpins everything we do in modern society," said JB.

"Most people don't realise that space really is a major part of our lives, that so much that happens is influenced by it – from national security to our ability to sleep."

For JB space is a "fascinating industry" and one which has infinite possibilities for everyone.

"Around 50 per cent of people that work here have engineering degrees, with the remaining 50 per cent from every kind of background," she added.

"There are so many opportunities for people to build a career or take their existing skills and adapt them to working in space."

JB continues to be a champion for the space industry, believing that nobody should hold back if that is one of their ambitions.

"It may be a bit of a clichéd philosophy, but I firmly believe in that saying; shoot for the moon because even if you miss it, you'll still end up in the stars."

There's no doubt she's on a lifelong journey and never takes her role for granted.

"It's amazing that I can step outside at night and look at the sky and space and think that's the realm I'm working in," she said.



Steve Morland

Application modernisation: Beyond the cloud lift-and-shift

By Steve Morland, CTO, Leighton

Most businesses are heavily reliant on software applications to operate. In fact, it's estimated that enterprise businesses use on average between 473 and 664 applications for day-to-day operations.

However, many are clinging to outdated on-premises software, hindering agility and limiting growth.

Application modernisation offers a solution, but simply migrating applications to the cloud isn't enough. Businesses need to embrace a cloud-first approach to unlock the full potential of the cloud.

The pitfalls of lift-and-shift

The lift-and-shift approach, where applications are moved from on-premises servers to the cloud without significant modifications, might seem like modernisation but the limitations of the original application will remain as the software won't leverage the cloud's built-in features like automatic scaling, on-demand provisioning and pay-as-you-go pricing, leading to inefficiencies.

Challenges of on-premise applications

On-premise applications typically come at a high cost as they require significant upfront investment in hardware, software licenses, and IT infrastructure as well as ongoing maintenance, updates, and

security measures. They also offer limited scalability with scaling typically a complex and expensive exercise. Add to that a lack of agility with new features or functionalities requiring lengthy development cycles and of course, additional infrastructure investment.

Advantages of a cloud-first approach

The true power lies in a cloud-first approach where applications are designed and developed specifically for the cloud environment, bringing many benefits. Cloud platforms offer robust security features that continuously update, mitigating the risk of breaches. Scalability becomes effortless as resources can be automatically adjusted based on demand, saving costs and ensuring smooth performance during peak times. Integration with other cloud services is easier, fostering a connected ecosystem of tools. What's more, cloud-first development aligns perfectly with DevOps practices, allowing for faster development cycles and quicker time to market.

Common cloud challenges

Transitioning to a cloud-first model isn't without its challenges. Common

obstacles can include complexities when it comes to data migration, skill gaps in cloud technologies, and resistance to change within the business. However comprehensive planning, investing in training for IT staff, and fostering a culture that embraces change are effective ways to resolve these challenges.

Getting started with application modernisation

Before you get started with application modernisation, you require a strategic plan. A good place to start is to first take stock of existing applications to understand their functionalities and dependencies. From there you can explore cloud-native development options, such as containerisation, serverless and microservices architecture, to break down applications into smaller, more manageable components. If you're new to the cloud, consider partnering with cloud service providers who offer expertise in cloud-first development and migration strategies.

The cloud isn't just a storage space for outdated applications. By embracing a cloud-first approach to application modernisation, businesses can unlock several benefits such as enhanced security, improved scalability, faster development cycles and seamless integration. Cloud-first modernisation can also lead to significant cost reductions through optimised resource utilisation and reduced maintenance overhead. Faster innovation cycles fueled by the agility of the cloud allow businesses to experiment more readily and bring new features to market quicker, all contributing to a competitive advantage.

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SEBB Group expands its team to enhance customer service and offerings

SEBB Group is excited to introduce four exceptional individuals who recently joined our team: Ethan Vicars-Harris, Luca Phelps, James McCallum, and Prasanna Wijesinghe. Each of these talented professionals brings a unique set of skills and experiences to our sales and account management team, further strengthening our commitment to providing unparalleled service to our 500+ customers and expanding our range of services.

Ethan and Luca, both apprentices, have embarked on a journey to develop their skills in sales and customer service. They play a crucial role in our strategy to engage more proactively with our customers, ensuring they receive the best tariffs and services tailored to their organisations' needs. Their enthusiasm and dedication are invaluable assets as we strive to deliver a more comprehensive and personalised service.

James, who comes to us with a recommendation from his wife Kim, a valued member of our processing department, has assumed the account manager role. His decision to join SEBB Group speaks volumes about the supportive environment we have cultivated within our team. With his expertise and passion for customer satisfaction, James is well-positioned to nurture our client relationships

and drive business growth.

Prasanna brings a wealth of experience and knowledge in the broadband and VoIP phone system solutions department, which he acquired during his tenure at Sri Lanka Telecom PLC. His expertise further strengthens our capabilities in delivering cutting-edge solutions to meet our clients' evolving needs. Prasanna's insights will be instrumental in enhancing our service offerings and ensuring we remain at the forefront of innovation in telecommunications.

At SEBB Group, we are more than just a telecoms, mobiles, and IT services broker. We are committed to providing tailored solutions optimising efficiency, reducing costs, and driving business success. Our approach is rooted in impartiality, ensuring that our recommendations are always

in the best interests of our clients. By leveraging our multi-buying power and industry relationships, we negotiate the most favourable terms and pricing structures, empowering our clients to make informed decisions. Your unique needs and goals are at the heart of our service.

Central to our service is conducting regular audits, ensuring our clients maximise their investments and leverage the latest technologies.

From small businesses to corporate entities, we craft bespoke tenders that align with our client's current needs and future aspirations. We also extend our services to charities, recognising their invaluable work and supporting their initiatives through tailored plans and additional funding.

Our dedication to social responsibility has been acknowledged with the Daisy Social Responsibility Award, a testament to our commitment to making a positive impact in the communities we serve.

Whether it's SIM plans, handset plans, or comprehensive communication solutions, SEBB Group is dedicated to unlocking the full potential of your business connectivity.

The expansion of our team represents a significant milestone in our journey to deliver excellence in service and innovation. We invite you to partner with SEBB Group and discover how our bespoke solutions can transform your communication strategies and propel your business forward. Contact us today to embark on a journey towards enhanced efficiency, profitability, and customer satisfaction.

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Lewis Cobb (bottom left) and Durata's managing director John McGee (white shirt) line up with the Durata team at Loftus Road.

Picture: Durata

Playing a leading role

Durata are proud to have played a lead role in changing the way major players in the data centre industry network by hosting an event on a well-known football pitch.

Teesside's specialists in data centres and critical power infrastructure were the headline sponsors at the first Kick for a Cause UK Charity Trophy on Wednesday, May 8, 2024.

The sold-out event saw 20 companies and organisations, comprising 16 teams and around 130 players, compete at Queens Park Rangers' Loftus Road stadium for the prize. More than £9,000 was raised for charitable partner Save the Children at the historic

White City, London, ground where Rangers legends such as Ray Wilkins, Les Ferdinand, Rodney Marsh and Stanley Bowles shone.

The winners were a team consisting of Principle Cleaning and SDM Fuels.

Lewis Cobb, Durata's head of modular data centre projects, organised the event along with CBRE's Fraser Anderson.

And Lewis said: "Durata are keen on sponsoring unique events in the industry and John McGee, Durata's managing director, wanted to be part of an event that encourages a change in dynamic of how we socialise in the industry.

"Fraser did a smaller version of this event last year and over the last eight months we have developed this tournament into what it is shaped up to be in May.

"We are delighted with how it went. Hopefully this will become a legacy event that brings the key players together in one place to help everyone build new relationships and grow new ones."

The Durata and CBRE powered event was supported by other sponsors such as Legrand Data Center Solutions, Ekko Sense AI, Zumtobel Lighting, MJ Quinn, Meesons UK, Principle Cleaning and SDM Fuels.

Among the teams who competed were Google UK, NTT Global and Digital Realty UK & Ireland as well numerous others who either played or donated to the cause.

Lewis said: "The event gave those in the industry a different way to get together. This provided a personal touch point for those who love football and have commonalities beyond their professional roles.

"Kick for a Cause broke down barriers between companies and personnel. People got to know each other away from the business world and I firmly believe that is something lacking in our industry, and other industries for that matter."

Kick for a Cause's only goals were to bring the data centre industry together and raise money for this year's charitable partner Save the Children. The event will be returning in 2025.

Anyone still wanting to support the event can find further details on the Linked In page or by donating at www.justgiving.com/page/kick-for-a-cause-1708092268934

For further information about Durata check out duratauk.com

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Talking Tech and Digital

In the latest of this popular series we talk to...

Rachel Weldon

Senior Account Manager (Digital & Marketing), Brave & Heart.

Did you always envisage a career in the world of Technology?

No, a tech career wasn't the original plan. I wanted to study Economics at university with a view to go into Financial or Investment Analyst roles, but my A-levels didn't go as planned. I ended up at my chosen university, but on a totally different course—Business Information Systems. Ironically, I did much better than I probably would have done on an Economics one.

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

Try not to pigeonhole yourself too early in your career. Look to take on various roles and build upon your skills where possible.

At the start of my career, I worked across various roles in a brand job, which helped me identify what I enjoy and build my knowledge and skills. Now that I've moved to the agency world, I can better understand the client and their corporate sphere, and ultimately help them achieve their goals.

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

Currently, I'm heavily involved in a global rollout of a SharePoint intranet site to a 100k-employee logistics company, coordinating the team to ensure all projects are running on time and within budget. Now that the foundations are in place, this year we're looking to enhance the capabilities and bring on board key business processes too so we can bring SharePoint's true potential to the fore.

Tell us about your team.

My team is fantastic – and I don't think I'm being biased! I'm fortunate to have a strong team, willing to learn and expand their own skill set while bringing their all to our clients and our team. Each team member brings individual skill sets that enhance our offerings, from creative direction to content development and key analytic skills.

By fluke, most of my team are women, and it's been great to support them in a male-dominated industry and watch them thrive.

What are your long-term plans for the business?

Looking to the future, I'm focusing on enhancing our SharePoint offerings for our clients and our team's capabilities, ensuring we provide our clients with the best possible solutions for their requirements and do it in a way that's honest and right for them.

Over the last year, I've been studying towards a CIM Certificate in Professional Digital Marketing, and I'm looking forward to putting that into practice for both Brave & Heart and our clients.

What's your favourite piece of technology?

My favourite piece of tech is my Fujifilm Instax Mini 90 polaroid camera.

I take a million photos on my phone and never do anything with them. I bought this camera a year ago to capture everyday moments and actually have printed photos. I'm really enjoying the fact that it's a one-shot photo, which adds to its appeal, and all of them end up in a photo album, too—even the bad ones!

Do you have any heroes or mentors?

I don't have any specific heroes or mentors per se. But I have been fortunate to have had several managers throughout my career – some great, some not so great. I've always tried to look at their traits and take something away from them, either what I'd like to emulate or what I'd like to avoid.

When not working, how do you relax?

I'm a huge foodie! Eating out in restaurants or cooking new recipes at home is a constant that helps me relax. I always tend to be the one people go to for recommendations. I even recently started a food Instagram account, much to the annoyance of the team, who now can't eat until I've taken photos of plates!

What's your fondest career memory?

I've been fortunate to work on some interesting projects and great teams throughout my career. But I think my fondest memory is taking the leap from the brand world to the agency world. It's something I never thought I'd do.

In 2019, the opportunity arose for me to leave my brand role and try something new. I reconnected with our CEO, David, and began supporting some initial project work. Five years on, and I'm still here! It's been great to see Brave & Heart grow and go from strength to strength, and know I've been heavily involved in that too.

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

"No one knows what they're doing when they first start." This is oddly comforting advice whenever I step out of my comfort zone. I always try to remember this when imposter syndrome tries to take over.

www.braveandheart.com

“

*...No one knows
what they're
doing when they
first start...*



NE1 selects new creative partner for its next era

Newcastle Business Improvement District Newcastle NE1 has entered its new term with a fresh creative partner to bring to life everything happening across the city.

Following a competitive pitch, O.agency has been chosen to handle the creative marketing for NE1's flagship events, including Newcastle Restaurant Week, Screen on the Green, Summer in the City and Newcastle's Christmas.

The agency, known for having worked with many of the city's biggest names as clients over the years, from retailers like

Fenwick, Dr. Martens and Eldon Square, to new restaurant and bar openings including The Botanist, Quayside living schemes like The Forge and arts and culture venues like Seven Stories.

Managing Director at O, Kirsty Ostell said: "This is a flagship partnership for us, we have been based in Newcastle for 20 years and love everything about our city, so to be given the opportunity to work with the NE1 team to help share that message is an absolute dream!

"Newcastle has undergone a transformation in recent years, and we are delighted to be NE1's creative partner to help drive future success and play a role in promoting the city locally, nationally and internationally."

Ben Whitfield, Director of Communications at NE1 said: "As we enter a new BID term it's exciting to start working with a new creative team. We were impressed by O's enthusiasm and knowledge of the city and our campaigns, as well as their analytical approach which we think will deliver an impactful return for our business. We can't wait to get started."

O.agency will kick off with a fresh campaign for Summer in the City, a lively programme of free events, public artworks and street installations across the city during the school holidays. Since its inception, NE1's Summer in the City has grown year-on-year and in 2023, NE1 worked with local businesses to host over 180 events across six weeks.



Shooting success as Creo appoints new team member

A North East creative marketing agency has bolstered its content team as it continues to expand.

Creo Comms has appointed multiskilled photographer and videographer Ross Johnston to support its growing client roster.

Ross's work has been used by global production companies, corporates and elite sports clubs.

He has covered sporting events for England's national football teams, Newcastle United and Sunderland AFC. Ross also worked with Fulwell 73 Productions on the Netflix documentary Sunderland Til I Die and has covered large events, such as stadium shows by Ed Sheeran and Elton John.

"I'm delighted to have been give this opportunity at Creo," said Ross. "It's a really exciting time to be joining the team, as it continues to grow.

Creo works with clients in a range of sectors from education to manufacturing, and legal services to real estate. Louise Bradford, managing director at Creo Comms, said: "It's great to have Ross on board. He's someone whose work I've been aware of for some time and his portfolio of work is really impressive.

Drummond Central's creative department is growing

Newcastle-based creative agency, Drummond Central is hiring for several roles across its creative team.

The award-winning agency, whose clients include the likes of Greggs, bet365 and Triumph Motorcycles, is on the hunt for new creatives to join the various departments within its creative team – with roles spanning from junior to senior positions.

Drummond Central is currently recruiting for a Mid-weight to Senior Art Director, multiple Junior Creatives, a Mid-weight to Senior Video Editor and a Junior Motion Graphics Designer.

The new hires will play integral roles in strengthening the creative talent behind the agency's ambitious work.

As well as preparing to turn 20 in June this year, Drummond Central has recently celebrated its first anniversary of being an employee-owned business. In 2023, the agency established an employee ownership trust which owns 100% of the business for the benefit of all staff equally – showing its commitment to its people and clients alike.

Drummond Central's Executive Creative Director, Stephen Drummond, said: "DC is at that stage where we're preparing to grow our creative team again. We've had a busy year already, creating some of our best work to date with clients and partners, old and new. So, we're looking for more ridiculously talented people to help us



continue the momentum. We're ready to train, nurture and give a free chair to all successful applicants."

Drummond Central is the creative agency behind last year's Clio award-winning global bet365 'Never Ordinary' brand platform, the recent Greggs Game Show campaign and has recently partnered with Fentimans as their creative agency.

For more information and to apply for any available roles, please visit www.drummondcentral.co.uk

- Rephrase owner Paul Fraser has spent more than 20 years working in the media for a variety of titles regionally and nationally, including a long stint at The Northern Echo
- Rephrase's range of services can be on a pay-as-you-go basis or as part of a longer-term package
- We will do all we can to advise and produce the best possible solution for your needs
- We aim to maintain long-term relationships to achieve goals



Paul Fraser

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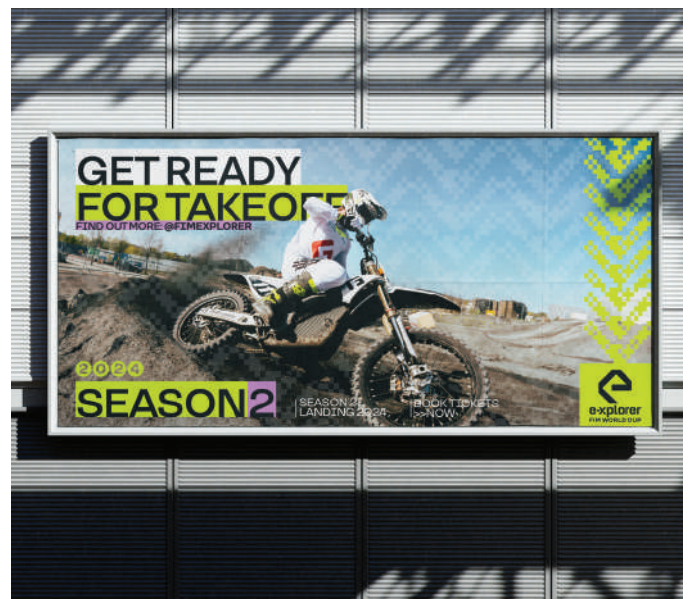
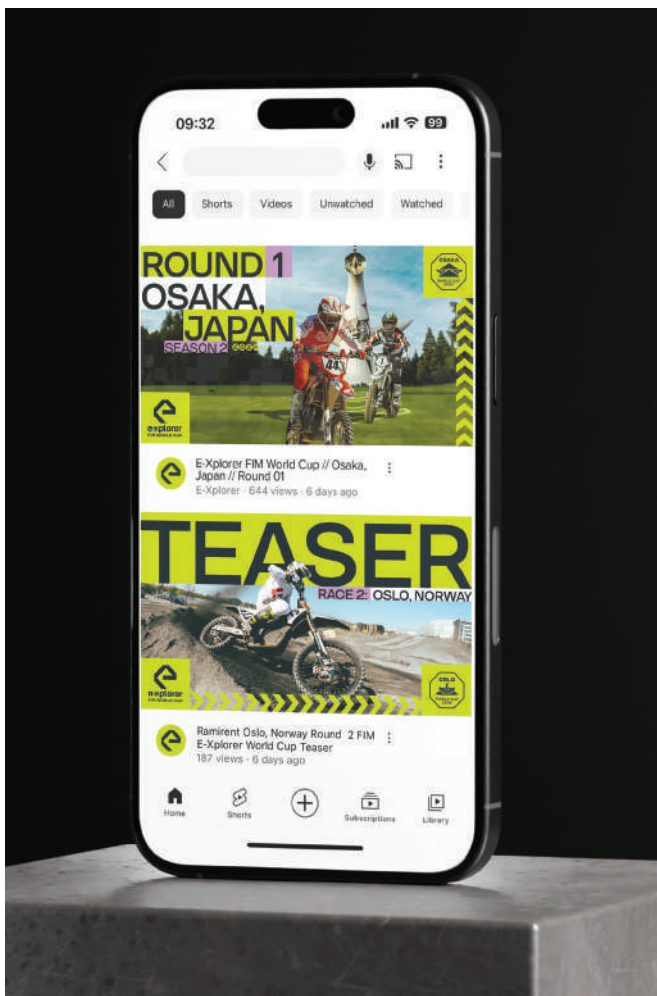
FIM E-Xplorer is a trailblazing all electric motorcycle racing series, featuring men and women racing around the world in total gender parity. Cravens defined their purpose: 'to be the spark that challenges our riders and fans to free ride the world' and built a brand worthy of an international sporting movement.



“ ”

Cravens has been a founding partner of E-Xplorer. They have guided us in building our brand identity from scratch, shaping our key values and strategic messages, which is the heart of our company. Just have a look what they have done for us, you will understand quickly why I will stay loyal to them.

Valentin Guyonnet
Founder & CEO of E-Xplorer



To kick start their epic second season we've brought extra energy to their branding and communications, with a distinctive style that's unmissable all the way from Japan, to Norway, to France, to India and beyond.

Made to move people and move on screens, the identity is capturing the purpose perfectly, inspiring people around the globe to get on board with the tournament and hit the trails themselves.

To see more of our branding work for E-Xplorer, visit our website at cravens.co.uk

...The longest day...

June has the longest day of the year. Highlights PR's Keith Newman asked some of his RADAR members to tell us what their longest day was and why it was so special.



Perhaps the longest day for me was the decades that it took me to get to work. I know about enduring struggle and suffering which is why my work helping my clients is so precious to me. Helping them means that I am using those demanding years to a good purpose. My clients are often living out very long days of going exhaustion, burnout or dealing with life challenges. Helping them with coping strategies, hope and a bit of joy gives my longest years a meaning. When they are holding themselves up despite considerable adversity and taking care of others, they deserve some Lifejoy in their pockets! If you're having a long day in life for good reasons, then celebrate it! If you're having a long one for the wrong reasons, gather up as much support and wisdom as you can. Always remember that you have a silent army of supporters with you!

Dr Rebecca Dinsdale www.drrebecca.org.uk



The longest day I've had at Idos working is 0730 to 2100 - we had to see patients, support staff, manage operations, do educational talks and then round off with a directors meeting!

A marathon but all enjoyable and contributing to our growing business!

Dr Riaan Swanepoel, www.idoshealth.co.uk



The summer season for us is all about getting people outdoors and enjoying the local areas in which we live. This can often mean some very long days for the team, Our 24hr Survivor Challenge is the most popular with everyone from corporate groups through to community and young people's groups. As part of the challenge, you set up your hammock and shelter, building your fire and cook your tea for starters. Often clients go to sleep late and are up very early at first light! A great experience if you have never spent the night in the woods!

We have just been awarded an Adventurous Activities Licence from Health & Safety Executive which expands our activity remit significantly, so our challenges can now involve climbing cliffs, kayaking rivers and paddle boarding at the beach!

Get in touch for a coffee and a chat on
paul@off-the-grid-cic.uk or check out our
website **Paul Kirkpatrick**
www.offthegrid-adventures.co.uk



As with all things that Leading Link do – young people are up front and central in what we do and achieve. Our Young Leaders are an amazing bunch, and they do all sorts of training, activities, community work and celebrating! Our Young Leaders are a hard-working bunch, but they live all over Northumberland, often being picked up early in the morning and dropped off after a long day can see us leaving at 6.30am and not returning home until after 10pm at night after an action packed day!

We often attend residential camps – which means being up for 6am preparing a full English brekkie and then not getting back to bed until the early hours of the next day by the time everyone is settled and into their beds. Long days.... but so beneficial!

Chris Johnson www.leadinglink.co.uk



Our longest days were when Covid hit we had to start by rebooking clients, then when it became apparent this was going to affect us for a long time, cancel booking after booking. We had to contact clients around the world to tell them that their holidays were being curtailed and organise flights back for them before lockdown took effect. Everyone booked with a packaged and protected holiday had a full refund.

John Dixon - Destinations By John 0800 1777 857

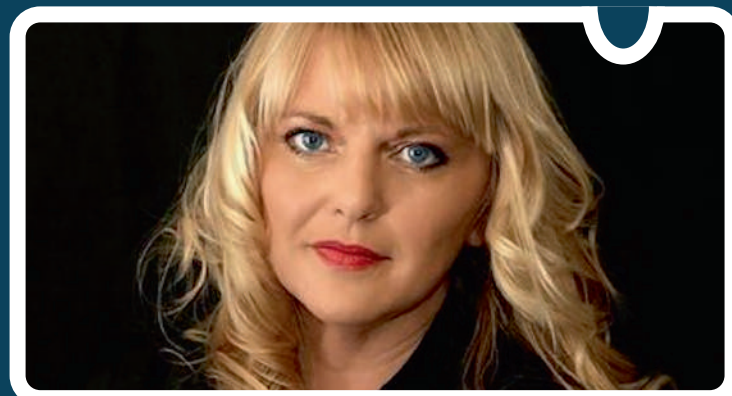
The longest day ever had to be the first day doing Edinburgh Fringe Festival for the first time a few years ago.

After the excitement of having your show accepted for the Fringe wears off, you then get down to the realities of how incredibly expensive it is for a theatre company to stage their shows at this event. To cut down costs we decided to drive up and stay outside Edinburgh at Seton Sands Holiday Park, so avoiding the costs of staying in a central location.

We arrived at the caravan park and then took the bus into Edinburgh, as we weren't sure where, if, how, we would get parked! The bus drive was a good hour and a half, so after the travel up, the long bus journey we arrived at the theatre, went straight into our tech rehearsal, then it was a quick turnaround to our first performance that night. By the time the curtain fell it is safe to say I've never been so tired in my life! Then we had the hour and a half return journey by bus to our caravans. That day went on for about a month.

On our last day, one of the cast found there was a train station five minutes' walk from our caravan site. Getting on the train there the next stop was Waverley...getting there in five mins!

*Alison Stanley - Scriptwriter, Musician and Promoter
stanleycreativesmaggie@gmail.com*



Last month our RADAR members appeared on BBC TV, BBC Radio, Local TV and many magazines and newspapers. To find out more about the benefits of becoming a RADAR member, contact keith@highlightspr.co.uk or call Keith on 07814 397951

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07814 397951

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Future proof your marketing training

The future of marketing training is dynamic and exciting, shaped by emerging technologies, evolving consumer behaviours, and the need for adaptable skill sets.

Veronica Swindale, nesma MD and Paul Sutherland, Commercial Director, share why, after 15 years, nesma remains the go-to training company for marketing, digital marketing, and communications professionals.

Here are their top five observations on how nesma has evolved to ensure its teaching and delivery continues to meet the needs of practitioners today.

1. Marketing training must be flexible

We all have busy lives, and it can sometimes be hard to think about starting a professional training course. The learning packages nesma offers enable you to access them more easily when and where you wish—all of them are facilitated online—all year round and can be completed within as little as six weeks, which helps you to navigate the peaks and troughs of your working year. As you can choose from various awards, qualifications, and masterclasses, you can create a customised learning path to build a unique skill set to align with your experience, interests, and career aspirations and tailor it to your specific needs and interests. For employers, flexible training often incorporates real-world projects and case studies, enabling their teams to apply what they have learned to their jobs immediately. This practical approach enhances retention and ensures the skills learned are relevant and applicable.

2. We need to be creative and share ideas

Developing our learning and critical thinking skills is crucial in a world where AI threatens to dominate. Our courses are led by expert tutors who share their academic and practitioner experiences and facilitate course discussions. This unique setup allows you to learn from them and your peers, who could be anywhere in the world. This global peer interaction significantly enriches your learning experience, especially if you work from home and lack the benefit of regular office interactions. Exercising creativity and sharing ideas is a natural energiser! It will inspire and motivate you to push boundaries and explore new possibilities, promoting innovation and leading to ongoing optimisation of marketing and communication efforts for the employer.

3. Our attention spans are shortening

The new syllabus launched by the Chartered Institute of Marketing this month comes with new content that is more aligned with the current marketing landscape, including topics such as digital marketing, data analytics, and consumer behaviour. It is also delivered in smaller chunks than before, with more frequent exam windows allowing you more opportunity to get started. Plus, there are no more lengthy assignments to work away at. The Chartered Institute of Public Relations qualifications remain assignment-based for the time being. With the rapid pace of technological advancement, this type of quick-fix skills training enables employers to upskill or reskill effectively in response to changing job requirements and market demands. It also helps to remove many of the traditional barriers to access.

4. Employers need more from their employees and happily invest in their learning and development

We value the commitment of employers to their employees' learning and development. That's why around 80% of our learners are sponsored by their employers. They understand that a highly skilled marketing team gives the company a competitive edge. Whether studying at A-level or pursuing a master's level qualification, we believe in recognising and rewarding learning. Our new learning management system allows individual learners to record their work and gain recognition for their achievements. We're not just about securing qualifications but also about driving skills for the workplace and ensuring that your learning journey is both meaningful and impactful. It is well-documented that employers should foster a culture of continuous learning and personal growth that focuses on skills and knowledge relevant to the company's needs. Employers also benefit from enhanced performance and productivity as skilled marketers are better equipped to meet business objectives, drive results, and contribute to the company's overall success.

5. Employers need help with their Learning and Development strategies for their employees

Looking at your team's skill gaps can be challenging but crucial for growth and success. When evaluating your team, there's a risk of bias towards their strengths and overlooking their weaknesses. It's essential to approach this assessment with objectivity and honesty. Therefore, employers are turning to us to help them identify what skills their organisation will need over the next few years and to help map their team's current skillset against those needs. We do this by immersing ourselves in a comprehensive skills assessment, where we analyse your team's current skills and compare them to the future needs of your organisation. It will highlight the skills gaps we can work with you to address. Our solutions may be our in-house programmes, accredited CIM, CIPR and SOSTAC® programmes or something more bespoke, which can be delivered in-house or online depending on your teams' location. Our vast network of associate partners can support any outlying skills requirements.

All these trends are at the forefront of nesma's ongoing development in their training offer, which ensures that our courses equip you with the most up-to-date and relevant skills.

Call Veronica or Paul now for nesma's New Team Skills Review at 07734 222 254 or email hello@nesma.co.uk

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L-R: Sarah Dale and Sarah Walker

Helping to put North East businesswomen on the map!

At SASS media Ltd, owners Sarah and Sarah were delighted to discover that in 2022, the year they set up their business, they were among more than 150,000 new all-women-led companies founded in the UK.

This was more than any year previously, according to Finder's recently published report, which also revealed that almost one in five UK companies (18%) are led by women in 2024 – more than 880,000.

However, the girls were less happy to discover that when the figures are broken down regionally, the North East is lagging behind the national picture, with 16.2% of businesses led by women.

At SASS media Ltd, we want to support more women across the North East to shout loud and proud about their entrepreneurial success.

We're proud to support the Power of Women (POW) campaign on Teesside as well as Female Founder – not to mention our many female clients.

These include Stacey Nottingham, of Bombshell Design, who relishes the rise in female founders.

Stacey, who was born and raised in Thornaby, is something of a trailblazer, as she founded her creative design and digital marketing agency, Bombshell Design, 23 years ago.

"My Mum said I was always out in the backyard drawing," she says. "Drawing was my life."

At university, Stacey discovered a passion for

digital art but on leaving higher education, she found competing for a job in what was then a male-dominated industry extremely difficult.

She had moved down to London where coincidentally, she got talking to an old school friend about how they both wanted to move back up north.

"We decided we would create our own jobs and set up our own business," she says.

"At that time, there were no other design companies run solely by women in Teesside and a very limited number across the North East. In my experience, there wasn't another company that did all we did at the time run by women."

As we have explained before, SASS has the definition of a 'lively spirited quality' which we hope is what we provide to our clients.

For Stacey, the name Bombshell came from the definition – "a shocking and unexpected surprise" – albeit good ones for Stacey's clients when they see her jaw-dropping designs!

Stacey now has a team behind her which includes a head designer, website designer, admin and social media executive and a recently appointed head of web and digital SEO.

Over the years, Bombshell has grown from a graphic design company to incorporate

other services - branding, website design and development, SEO (search engine optimisation), social media marketing and printed literature.

The company's services have widened to meet demand and development over the years and Stacey is set for continued growth.

It's a trajectory SASS media also hopes to follow – and with the support of the likes of Female Founder and POW behind businesses such as SASS and Bombshell, anything's possible.

Sophie McKenna, campaign manager for POW said: "The fact that one in five companies are now led by women demonstrates significant progress towards achieving gender parity in leadership roles.

"Additionally, the surge in new all-women-led companies showcases the incredible potential and entrepreneurial spirit of women."

She added the statistics underscore the importance of promoting an environment that supports and nurtures female ambitions.

"Women in business serve as powerful role models for the future generation, inspiring them to dream big and break barriers," Sophie says.

Max Freer, creator of Female Founder UK, says: "Female Founder UK was created to spotlight amazing females from the North East to inspire inclusion and equality to bridge the enterprise and entrepreneurial gap that exists between the north and south.

"We need to see ourselves reflected in all aspects of business and industry. The phrase you can't be what you can't see is very true."

If you'd like to talk to us about marketing and PR for your organisation, get in touch.

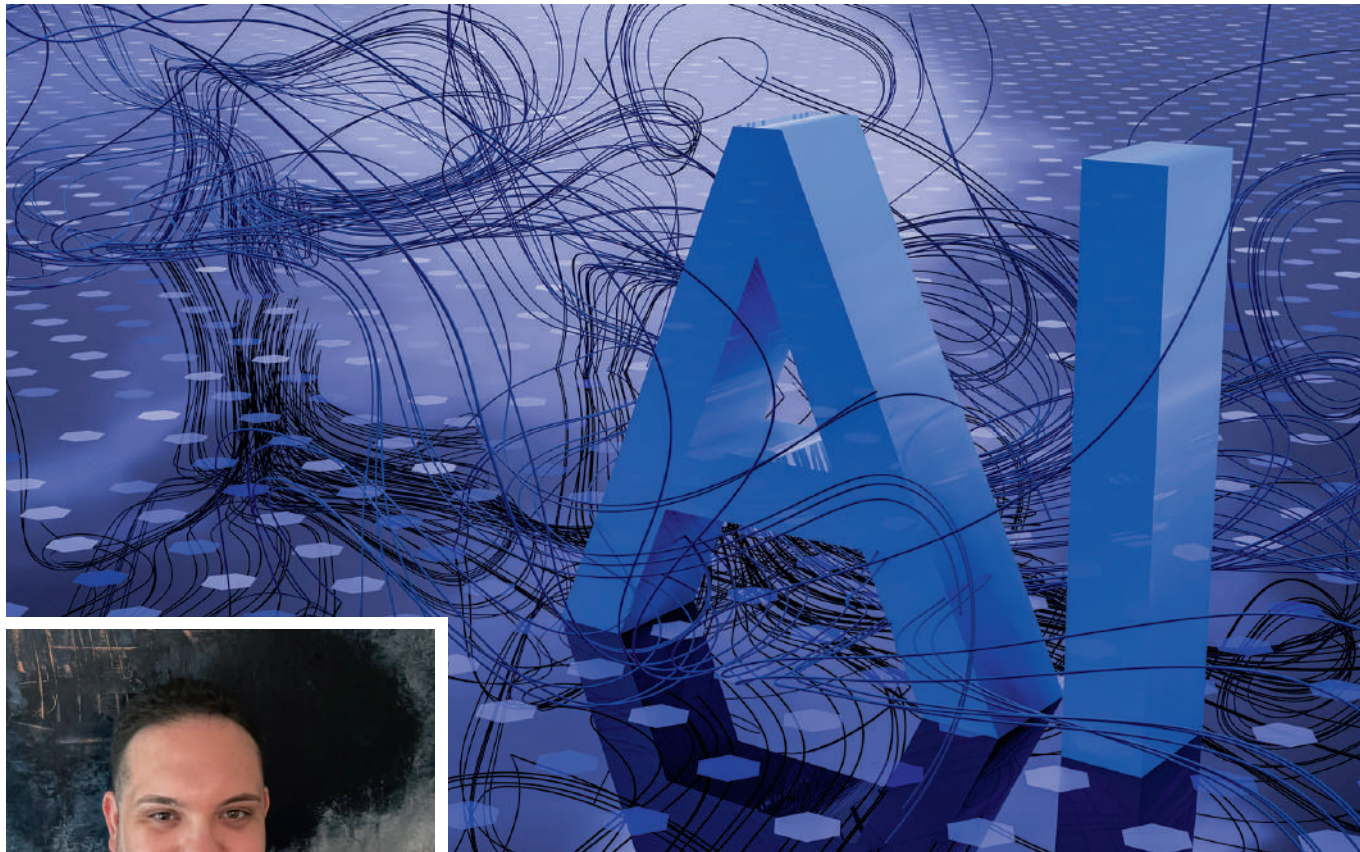
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Samuel Marriott-Dowding

Artificial Intelligence: The Future of Marketing?

In the ever-evolving world of marketing, staying ahead of the curve is not just a choice; it's a necessity.

With the advent of artificial intelligence (AI), marketers have been equipped with a powerful tool that has transformed the way businesses connect with consumers. From enhancing customer experiences to optimising ad campaigns, AI has quickly cemented itself as a cornerstone of modern marketing strategy - but, will every marketer agree and most importantly, adapt?

Many marketers will know that personalisation is key in today's marketing

landscape, and AI plays a pivotal role in enabling hyper-personalised experiences for consumers. By leveraging machine learning algorithms, marketers can analyze individual consumer preferences and behaviors to deliver tailor-made content, recommendations, and offers. Whether it's through personalised email campaigns, targeted advertisements, or customised product recommendations, AI enables marketers to create meaningful interactions that resonate with consumers on an emotional level. This not only enhances customer satisfaction but also fosters brand loyalty and increases conversion rates, a vital component of driving growth.

Personalisation goes a step further when considering the developments that AI technologies have also made regarding customer service. AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants have transformed customer and client support functions, providing round-the-clock assistance, whilst streamlining communication channels. These intelligent bots can handle routine inquiries, provide personalised recommendations, and even process transactions. For many businesses who place a strong emphasis on marketing and public relations, the ability to automate customer support intelligently is invaluable.

As a small business ourselves, Marriott Communications undoubtedly benefits from this AI-managed function, specifically in how we continue to nurture and cultivate important relationships; it has allowed us to remain in contact with our clients whilst also managing complex schedules and delivery dates.

However, as AI continues to reshape how we engage with the marketing function, it

also raises important ethical, privacy, and human-focused concerns. For instance, AI algorithms are only as unbiased as the data they are trained on. Biases inherent in the data or the algorithm's design can inadvertently perpetuate or even amplify existing prejudices. 'Leaning into' inherent biases can be detrimental to a business and its reputation, and is a stark reason why marketers must strike a balance between utilising innovative technology to drive efficiency, whilst also remaining ethically conscious and transparent.

The impact of artificial intelligence on marketing cannot be overstated. From data analytics and personalisation to advertising and content optimisation; AI has contributed to the revolution of the modern-day marketing process, empowering businesses to connect with consumers in more efficient and impactful ways. There are of course the drawbacks, whether they are costs, dependency, the lack of nuanced understanding of human emotion, or even privacy concerns. For the most part, these drawbacks can be negated, but as a marketer myself my biggest concern is not costs or even dependency, but rather, will AI one day make our own jobs obsolete? Hopefully not, but it is a scary thought!

So, is AI the 'Future of Marketing'? Yes and no. Whilst the technology is impressive (and useful across many business functions), understanding and engaging appropriately to and with human emotion is at the very foundation of successful marketing, and until artificial intelligence can learn to do that, I will hedge my bets that our jobs are safe.

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- Write high quality articles for newspapers, magazines and online.



www.sassmedialtd.co.uk



Unlocking Success - A Conversation with George "Mr. 5%" King

Interviewer: Jackie Marston

In the labyrinth of today's business landscape, finding the guiding hand of success can be akin to navigating through treacherous waters. Enter George King, the seasoned helmsman behind Glengyle Commercial Consultants, who has been charting courses for businesses since 2013.

With a career that spans the Royal Navy and executive education, George, affectionately dubbed "Mr. 5%", is a beacon of insight in the often turbulent sea of entrepreneurship.

Jackie: George, you've had an illustrious journey navigating various terrains, from the Royal Navy to the helm of Glengyle Commercial Consultants. How has your background influenced your approach to business mentoring?

George: Indeed, Jackie. My time in the Royal Navy instilled in me a sense of discipline and strategic thinking, qualities essential for steering businesses through stormy waters. My experience on the build and commissioning of HMS Richmond taught me the importance of adaptability and resilience, virtues I bring to every consultation session with my clients.

Jackie: Your company's strapline, "Your Success is My Business," speaks volumes about

your commitment to your clients. Could you tell us more about your role as a business mentor?

George: Absolutely. At Glengyle Commercial Consultants, I undertake a multifaceted role, ranging from business analysis to problem-solving. My aim is to empower individuals and decision-makers to take charge of their destinies, holding them accountable for their actions. Whether it's guiding a fledgling start-up or revitalising a stagnant enterprise, I'm dedicated to fostering sustainable growth and longevity.

Jackie: Your nickname, "Mr. 5%", is quite intriguing. Could you elaborate on its significance?

George: The name stems from the sobering statistic that only 5% of start-up companies survive beyond five years. My mission is to ensure that my clients belong to that elite percentage. Through meticulous mentoring and strategic interventions, I strive to defy the odds and propel businesses towards enduring success.

When this business approached me for some advice it was not obvious what their problem was if any.

The review process swiftly identified that a business which had a reasonable turnover could, with a few tweaks and process re-engineering, see that turnover increase sustainably. What also became apparent was a business that should have been profitable was not even close.

Having recognised the constraints in the way of success, charted the business and personal goals and established a suitable set of objectives it came time to start moving forwards.

There are many and varied techniques for managing change and/or projects but all I need is for a client to learn, "Plan, Do, Check, Act" if they want to succeed with any plan or objectives. And do not worry about accountability, I have that covered.

Six months later, turnover is increasing, costs are coming down and profit is on the increase.

Jackie: Your approach seems to resonate with a philosophy of pragmatism and efficiency. Are there any mottos or sayings that encapsulate your ethos?

George: Two principles that guide my practice are "Management by Exception" and "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." These aphorisms underscore the importance of discernment and pragmatism in decision-making, ensuring that resources are allocated judiciously and efforts are focused on areas ripe for improvement.

In the dynamic realm of business consultancy, George King stands as a stalwart advocate for efficacy and longevity. Armed with a wealth of experience and a no-nonsense approach, he continues to steer his clients towards the shores of success, one consultation at a time.

For more information on George King and Glengyle Commercial Consultants, log onto their website, www.glengyleconsultants.com

Robyn Hamilton: The Art of Media Planning

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 Media Planning and Buying Manager, Robyn Hamilton, sheds light on the intricacies of media planning, the importance of connection in the digital age and unveils the latest developments shaping the ever-changing media landscape.



Robyn Hamilton
Media Planning &
Buying Manager

What made you want to join Bonded?

I wanted to join Bonded because I respect the people that founded the agency; they're not just experts in their field, they're also incredibly motivating and a pleasure to work with.

As an agency, Bonded feels very different to other media agencies - it has a forward-thinking approach and genuine investment in its people that sets it apart in the industry.

What do you wish more people knew about your role as a Media Planning & Buying Manager?

Many overlook the intricate process behind crafting a media plan. At Bonded, our approach is comprehensive, spanning four key stages: Connecting, Planning, Activation, and Learning.

The **'Connecting'** phase involves deep dives into understanding the brand, the target audience, and the market landscape. We analyse cultural nuances and consumer behaviors to inform our strategies.

In the **'Planning'** stage, we bring our strategy to life by selecting the most appropriate channels,

setting clear KPIs, allocating budgets, and leveraging data and technology to optimise performance.

'Activation' is where the magic happens. We collaborate closely with media partners to fine-tune channel approaches, set up tracking and tagging mechanisms, and monitor activities continuously to ensure optimal performance.

Lastly, **'Learning'** and reviewing are integral. We conduct regular evaluations using a robust measurement framework to glean insights that inform future strategies. This process demands meticulous attention to detail and a commitment to ongoing refinement.

Are there any upcoming developments in the media world that you are excited by?

AI is causing a stir in the industry! It's fascinating to witness how media owners are embracing AI, particularly in paid social and programmatic display. Additionally, innovations like augmented reality and anamorphic ads in outdoor media offer exciting possibilities for brands to explore creative avenues.

And finally, what does 'Connection' mean to you?

Connection is all about forging meaningful bonds and nurturing great relationships. In today's automated world, prioritising relationships has become even more crucial. Effective communication, rooted in truly understanding our clients' needs, ensures that we deliver tailored recommendations and execute media strategies with maximum impact.



For more information visit:
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Marketing and Media Matters

In the latest of this popular series of features we spoke to...

Kate Buckingham

Photographer

Did you always envisage a career in the Media Industry?

From an early age I had an interest in photography, I think I got my first film camera when I was eight years old and always loved looking at imagery, newspapers, magazines, documentary photographers work and exhibitions. I remember going to the National Portrait Gallery to see the David Bailey exhibition and was captivated. So I guess it was just photographs to begin with. The media route materialised organically during both my degree and photography training, I guess, as I developed my own skills and found what I enjoyed taking images of the most.

What has been your career path so far?

I have been a professional photographer now for almost 20 years, beginning my career as a trainee staff photographer at the Northumberland Gazette before moving to the Hexham Courant and now working as a freelance photographer under my own name for the last three years as an interiors and architectural photographer.

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

Redundancy I would say has been the biggest challenge I have had to overcome. Covid saw the end of my career as a staff photographer and adapting to life outside of journalism took a lot of effort and time. They say its a vocation rather than a job and I think it is fair to say you do it for the love rather than the salary. Becoming my own boss has had its own challenges, don't get me wrong, however being the captain of your own ship is so rewarding it has been a journey I have mostly enjoyed.

Who has been your inspiration?

For me, the great documentary photographers like Don McCullin or Larry Burrows captured my interest in the first instance. I love Steve McCurry's work, his portraiture and the feeling he is able to portray through his lens is truly magical. Closer to home I guess it has been the press photographers around me who's work I saw every day and made me want to follow in their footsteps.

What is your greatest strength?

My ability to talk to people I would say. Being able to put someone at ease when you are photographing them. They also help you to understand the background to the piece/space so I can tell a story through my images whether its interiors, architecture, property or press.

What is your biggest weakness?

Thinking others are better than me! Its the biggest thing I've had to overcome when working for myself.

What do you enjoy photographing most?

I have always loved interiors and architecture, so my natural path to follow after press work I felt was down the property and interiors route. I love portraying beautiful spaces and



Photos: Sarah Caldecott

structures. My other love is sport photography - covering Alan Shearer's testimonial match at St James' Park definitely stands out in my memory as one of my favourite experiences as a press photographer.

What are your future career aspirations?

My hope is to just keep building on my early success and establish long-lasting relationships with my clients and continue to take great pictures for as long as I am able.

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

Its really difficult to say - with the ever evolving use of AI and the ease with which anyone can create an image thanks to smart phones etc. it could go many ways. I'd like to hope that it goes full circle and people realise the worth in professionally trained photographers and videographers and are prepared to pay for our expertise. I guess only time will tell!

How do you like to unwind?

Being outdoors, there is nothing better than breathing in fresh air and listening to the sound of life around you. Whether it be going for a walk or watching my son do whatever sport it is at that point.

www.katebuckingham.com



Explore new horizons: Introducing our new magazine room

As humans, there is something undeniable about our desire to explore. Exploration is a part of our everyday lives, evident in even the smallest moments. Whether it's venturing to the world's most beautiful countries and wonders or exploring our true callings and passions, it's all fundamentally the same. When we view the world through the lens of 'exploration,' everything becomes a journey worth pursuing.



Inspiration Behind the innovation: The genesis of our new Space

So, there we were, a typical Monday morning, sitting in the office with cups of tea in hand, casually chatting about our weekends. Suddenly, we veered off into a discussion about the space we have here in Newcastle. We love our office; having built it up from an industrial building with little character, we cherish the environment we have created. Yet, there has been one recurring request from our customers: "Can I come in and browse?" Each time, we've been unable to offer this, but it slowly led us to ask ourselves, "But why not?" Although our friendly warehouse team can fetch exactly what magazine you need and hand it to you through our front office hatch, we yearned for more. We envisioned a personal, unique browsing experience, tailored to our locals in the Northeast, or visitors passing through.

That same night after our casual Monday catch-up, desks had been moved and shelves dismantled— safe to say it all happened very quickly.

Immerse yourself in a new world of reading

Our new customer experience is located in the former meeting room, which was previously filled with an oak table, a few chairs, a wall-sized map of our worldwide delivery service, and a TV for presentations. We saw potential in this room to transform it into an open-plan shopping experience for customers passionate or inquisitive about magazines. We aimed to create a comfortable, leisurely, and welcoming environment where customers can explore without pressure. It also presented an opportunity for our customers to ask questions, as you can meet personally with Sarah, Angela, Megan, Ellie, or John in the office. Since our knowledge of print runs deep, it felt like a waste to not share this with our customers.



Explore the benefits:

What our magazine room has to offer

This small but impactful room is brimming with an impressive 300 different indie publications from diverse backgrounds and missions. For those unfamiliar, indie magazines are published without the financial support of major companies or corporations, choosing not to rely on advertising to drive revenue, which in turn preserves the integrity of their print products. This is why these publications often have a focus, a mission, and a drive to create change—qualities we are passionate about here at Unique Magazines.

The future is indie publications. With their high-quality paper, passionate editors, unique photography, and ability to inspire movement, they represent exactly what we strive for today: positive change and new perspectives. These publications are modern, inspiring, and current, making them the perfect gift, collector's item, or just a casual weekend read.

Looking ahead:

The future of our magazine exploration space

Bring a friend, we'll make the cuppas, and relax in our rattan chairs while flipping through the pages of a magazine that could find its forever home with you. To us, magazines are timeless—they are collectors' items that always have a use. Whether it's displaying them on a coffee table at your family party or cutting them out to create your own art, there is always a place in the world for these beautifully curated pages of knowledge.

Our new unique browsing experience, right on your doorstep, is ready to be explored now. A haven away from the world for a short while, surrounded by nothing but the exploration of print and unlimited possibility.

www.uniquemagazines.co.uk



Durham High School marks 140 Years of empowering girls

A leading single-sex independent school is celebrating 140 years of educating, nurturing and empowering girls in the North East.

As one of the first schools in the region to prioritise girls' education, Durham High School is celebrating its 140th birthday with a programme of events over the summer term, including a whole school picnic, colour run/walk, the burying of a time capsule and a special lunch for returning Old Girls in June.

The anniversary comes as the school enjoyed a visit by the Lord Lieutenant, Mrs Sue Snowdon, who was treated to afternoon tea with some of the star performers of *Evita*, the school's recent production, and was presented with some school memorabilia, which celebrated its 140 years.

Headmistress, Michelle Hill, said Mrs Snowdon was delighted to see how Durham High had continued to evolve to meet the changing needs of its students while staying true to its founding principles.

"It was wonderful to see her so interested in our students," she said. "With 140 years of experience in girls' education, Durham High School understands the unique needs and challenges faced by young women.

"The spirit of sisterhood is ingrained in every aspect of school life and students learn the value of championing each other, creating a strong network of support that lasts a lifetime.

"We're looking forward to celebrating our anniversary with pupils past and present and their families and welcoming more girls to Durham High in the future."

Newcastle lecturer wins teacher of the year award

The Royal Society of Biology's Heads of University Biosciences (HUBS) have named Dr Carys Watts, Senior Lecturer in Enterprise and Director of Engagement at the School of Biomedical, Nutritional and Sport Sciences at Newcastle University, winner of the Higher Education Bioscience Teacher of the Year Award 2024.

The HE Bioscience Teacher of the Year Award, sponsored by Oxford University Press, recognises leading educators at UK universities, highlighting the invaluable role they play in teaching and inspiring the next generation of bioscientists.



Small but mighty' Sunderland school rated 'Good' by Ofsted

A Sunderland primary school which puts pupils at the "heart of all decisions" has been rated 'Good' by Ofsted.

Pupils at St Patrick's Catholic Primary School, which is part of Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust, "embody the school's values, including compassion and tolerance".

Ofsted lead inspector Richard Beadnall said in his report following the inspection of the Ryhope school in March: "In this small but multicultural school, pupils demonstrate high levels of respect for others.

"They understand the school's motto of 'small but mighty'. A pupil reflected the words of others by saying that 'everybody together makes us strong through friendships and harmony'.

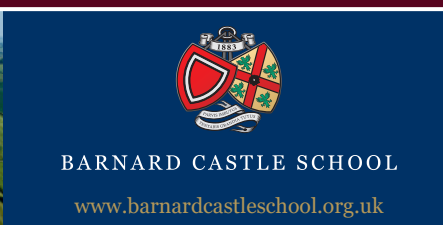
The school leaders' "high expectations for achievement" were evident in the teachers' classroom practice and pupils' understanding of their learning. The curriculum is also tailored to the local area and the inspectors said in their report it was evident how proud the pupils are of Ryhope and its heritage.

Pupils enjoy coming to school – attendance is high – and they find the high-quality curriculum "relevant and exciting".

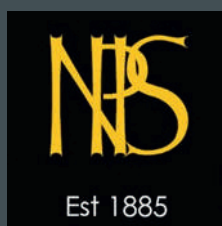
"The school's intentions for high-quality personal development are clear," continued the report.

"Leaders plan rich opportunities that extend beyond the academic curriculum. These include pupils performing at Durham Cathedral and visits to a residential home for the elderly. There are opportunities for pupils to develop their awareness of other faiths and religions, including an educational visit to a Sikh place of worship in Sunderland. The school has close links with the neighbouring church. Provision for pupils' spiritual development is strong.

"Leaders at all levels, including governors and trustees, have a clear understanding of the school. They put pupils at the heart of all decisions. Staff are well supported in terms of workload and wellbeing. Leaders have implemented curriculum open mornings and 'family club' sessions after school. Parents are very involved with the school. One parent summed up the thoughts of others by saying, 'St Patrick's is very much part of the Ryhope community'."



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Studio West's debut production wows local community

Studio West, a secondary school based in West Denton and part of Northern Leaders Trust, put on a dazzling debut school production of *Bugsy Malone* earlier this year. The performance took place at the school between 7th - 9th February.



Images: Martha Crosbie

Organised by drama teacher, Nicole Mavin, music teacher, Jack Hawkins, and stage manager, Jordan Athey, the production involved 51 Studio West students, both onstage and working behind the scenes. The dedicated staff set the production up with the aim of offering students the chance to engage in a whole school production and showcase the performing arts subjects within the school community.

The production was open to any Key Stage 3 (KS3) and Year 10 students that were interested, and parts were decided through auditions, which were advertised around school and on social media. The cast and crew were made up of mostly KS3 students, but some Year 10 students got involved with front of house support and the performance itself.

Rehearsals for *Bugsy Malone* started in October, often after school but some extremely committed and passionate students would work on their scenes at break and lunchtimes. This commitment did not stop once the production was over, with Nicole Mavin stating that: "a notable number of students have been inspired to take GCSE Drama and Music as their option subjects due to their experience in the show. Some are even seeking ways to get involved in productions outside of school as they enjoyed it so much and want to develop their skills further."

The production has had a strong impact on the students' development and school experience. Nicole highlighted that "many of our students have experienced significant growth in their self-confidence. In my role as their drama teacher, I've witnessed remarkable progress in their performance assessments during lessons, with a noticeable eagerness to engage in practical activities. It's evident that students now have a deeper appreciation of the effort required in staging a production, and they've gained insight into the various roles within the performing arts industry."



The production of Buggy Malone created a strong sense of camaraderie among the cast and crew. A diverse mix of students, from different year groups, socialised outside of rehearsals and supported each other during various school social events. The membership numbers in the weekly Drama Club have increased, reflecting the lasting impact and bond formed during the production.

Anyone could watch the show, from parents/carers to friends and family, as long as they purchased a ticket. Studio West received an enormous amount of positive parent feedback on social media, including: "Absolutely knocked it out of the park with this show. My family and I really enjoyed watching it. Everyone involved has put their heart and soul into it and that really shone through in the show. Proud is an understatement" and "Wow, we absolutely loved it! Came on the Wednesday with a few relatives and then the Friday... the confidence in the kids was amazing!"

The day before the production's opening night, the doors to the dress rehearsal were opened to Year 6 students from Studio West's feeder schools, so prospective students could get a glimpse of what student life is like at Studio West. The feeder school pupils "thoroughly enjoyed the production, and staff members were delighted to witness their former students shining on stage."



For many students, Buggy Malone was their first experience of performing arts, and the production has 'significantly enhanced students' communication and teamwork skills.' Their experience has not only refined their abilities in public speaking and performing, but also profusely enhanced their social interaction skills. Nicole highlighted that the camaraderie did not end at the stage curtain, but was extended to backstage where "there was a palpable atmosphere of support and collaboration, which has positively influenced students' behaviour throughout the school."

Students left glowing reviews of their experience, including: "I loved Buggy Malone so much. It gave me a whole new experience and I made so many friends. I am so excited for the next production. Thank you to all of the teachers for making this happen for us." As soon as this production ended, students were quick to enquire about the next.

Studio West are currently devising their performing arts showcase, 'A Night at the Oscars' which will take place on Tuesday, 9th July. Aimee Kirtley, director of music and performing arts expresses her gratitude to the participants: "Staff and crew worked tirelessly to put on an outstanding show. Thank you to all of the parents and carers who supported in the weeks running up to and including the show. We can now reveal that next year's show will be...Grease! We can't wait!" This production has an approximate date of 12th-14th February 2025.

More information about ticket purchases can be found here:
sw.northernleadertrust.org



Barney receives prestigious sporting accreditation



(L-R) Headmaster Tony Jackson and Head of Hockey Alan Fisher

A school renowned for its sporting prowess has been officially designated a centre for talented athletes, one of just a handful in the North East.

Barnard Castle School has joined the Sport England-funded Talented Athlete Scholarship Scheme (TASS), a partnership linking young athletes, specialist learning delivery sites and national governing sport bodies.

The programme is designed to bring the best out of the country's most exciting young talent, aged 16-plus, helping them to balance sport in their lives.

Nationally TASS already supports more than 500 athletes, in 38 sports, deemed to be the cream of the crop. These athletes are all eligible to represent England and have been identified as performing at the top of the Sport England Talent Pathway.

'Barney' joins a national network of 38 TASS delivery sites throughout England which provide vital support services to youngsters.

Teachers and coaches will become TASS practitioners and be provided with a host of opportunities to build knowledge and remain current through a continuous professional development programme. Support packages include strength and conditioning, physiotherapy, lifestyle support, psychology, nutrition, a medical scheme and access to mental health support.

Barnard Castle School's director of sport Rachael Masterman said: "This prestigious accreditation is normally the preserve of universities, so we are delighted to become one of only three registered schools in the region.

"This will allow us to build a workshop programme that will help our students pursue their sporting dreams. It will support pupils with high level abilities in both their sporting and academic learning.

"It will also give them access to the top universities for their chosen sports and identify the best development pathways. We will be looking at our existing scholarship programme to identify the first cohort of TASS athletes who we will then support so they can be the best they can at their sport while ensuring they also receive the education they deserve."

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The Value of Independent Enquiry

By Geoffrey Stanford, Headmaster of Newcastle Royal Grammar School.

Young children often ask the most fascinating questions.

I distinctly remember one of my boys at the age of four asking questions such as, what is the colour of molecules, why there is a gap between an aeroplane and its vapour trail or what is the Japanese word for hospital. At the last of these, when I asked why he wanted to know, he just said, “because I don’t know.”



are more current, relevant, accurate, authoritative and unbiased. At times students can find it intensely frustrating when they haven’t yet identified quite what the interesting point of debate is.

The challenge is figuring out what they should focus on from their initial ideas, or when they cannot get hold of specific source of evidence to support a particular argument, or when they try with varying degrees of success to make contact with an expert in their field to interview them.

Learning by doing, students also develop their project management skills. Typically, when creating their project plan, students underestimate how long things may take, for example, evaluating their sources, proofreading their report, or ensuring that all references and citations are properly documented. Interestingly, the marking of an EPQ is as much about how candidates have managed the process and their reflections of what they have learnt, as it is based on the final delivery of a quality product.

To cap it all, students must stand up to explain and justify their conclusion in front of a live audience whose questions can really test the depth of their understanding of the topic; and yet, even when challenged, students are usually able to support their arguments with evidence and defend their position. It is in these moments that their love of learning really shows through!

www.rgs.newcastle.sch.uk

Such inquisitiveness is very much to be encouraged, particularly in the face of exam specifications dictating what students “need to know to pass”. I have often observed that those who retain their curiosity for why things about them are as they are, tend not only to be more successful in life but also more interesting to be with.

At the time of writing, I have been listening to a number of students presenting their findings and reflecting on the process of researching and writing up their 5000 word Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) report. Each year I act as EPQ supervisor for a set and then as internal assessor for several students from other sets. This opportunity to stay close to what goes on in the classroom is something I thoroughly enjoy and the EPQ itself is a tremendous opportunity for students to find out in depth about something that they choose which genuinely interests them.

Over the years I have supervised projects as varied as the importance of panda conservation, the medical applications of wearable heart rate monitors, methods of cleaning the great pacific garbage patch, the psychology of serial killers and the factors

affecting the take-up of the MMR vaccine. Unlike in most other courses that students take at school, they are given the time (something like 120 hours is recommended) to find out in detail about their topic area, identify a question that is worthy of study and write up their findings.

While the topics students choose may build on an element of their existing A-Level courses or perhaps relate to a subject they may want to pursue at university, it never ceases to amaze me quite how broad and varied the interests of our students are when given free rein.

Completing an EPQ is not easy and every year some candidates will make a start but decide that it is not for them. However, those who have the resilience to complete such a major piece of research are developing skills that will serve them well at university and beyond. Indeed, many universities recognise the benefit of the EPQ, often giving a slightly reduced offer to candidates with a good EPQ grade.

During the EPQ process students learn how to conduct research, with some carrying out primary research themselves to support their desk based secondary research. They have to consider which sources of evidence

Smartphones, Schools and Online Safety

By Mr Will Scott, Principal at Dame Allan's Schools, Newcastle.

I'm sure most workplaces are familiar with the distractions and challenges that too much tech access can have (I would be willing to bet that you are not far from your smartphone as you read this).

However, how far should organisations go in policing tech use? Do you implement online policies that limit employee access to social media sites? Ensure personal phones are stored away from the workplace? It can be a considerable challenge in ensuring that your organisation has a safe and healthy relationship with technology.

The educational landscape has changed dramatically in the last decade or so, with one of the most key changes being the exponential rise of smartphones and access to digital platforms. Pupils have never before had so much opportunity to weave together their digital and 'real' lives.

And so, schools face real technological and educational challenges, with a responsibility to teach pupils about online safety, to ensure that technology is not distracting them from their learning, to make sure they are using technology well in their social lives, and to make sure that their online use within the school is safe.

The recent decision by messaging service WhatsApp to reduce their age restriction from 16 years old to 13 years old has caused considerable controversy, adding to the current discourse around the safety of social media for younger children. From cyberbullying, to dangerous influencers, and increased pressure on teenage body image, it is well-known that social media can have a very negative impact on our young people.

So, how can schools - and families - help the children under our care to use technology and social media safely?

For me, I believe a lot of this comes down to communication, education, and healthy boundaries.



Mr Will Scott

Boundaries: At Dame Allan's, children all have a Chromebook on which to conduct their schoolwork and communicate with teachers when required. Chromebooks are protected via our IT department to ensure no harmful content (or social media channels) can be accessed. Phones are also absolutely not allowed in classrooms in our Senior School and entirely banned in our Junior School. Encouraging your loved ones to have a tech break can be important for sustaining real life connections. Could you look at encouraging offline time during an evening?

Education: Are you aware of the latest social media platforms? Do you know how to personalise security settings on your child's Whatsapp account? As with all things, information is power. Our Senior School staff have completed online safety training, and our dedicated Pastoral team help educate pupils on how to keep themselves safe online. Topics such as body image and the impact of social media are often explored in PSHE lessons, or via our regular pastoral newsletters.

Communication: Open communication is so important as we all make mistakes and, with ever-evolving algorithms and AI, it is easier than ever to stumble upon content that you might not have wanted to see at any age. All of our pupils are encouraged to reach out

should they be struggling with something they have seen on social media, or if they are noticing worrying viewpoints amongst their friends or peers. This open attitude means that pupils know they can come for help, without judgement, should they feel unsafe or unsure about anything they might have accessed or been sent.

Whether or not you work within education or look after children, educating yourself about online safety and healthy habits is something that pays dividends in this constantly changing online landscape. I am by no means an expert, but I endeavour to keep abreast of the digital environment, as both educator and parent.

And for the adults - the next time you reach for your smartphone, why not take a second to consider what you want to achieve with it - phones are addictive after all. Pausing for thought might just lead to a welcome break for your brain, or at least a reduction in mindless scrolling - something that we all could undoubtedly benefit from.

To find out more about Dame Allan's Schools, from Nursery to Sixth Form, please visit dameallans.co.uk

Tygers of Pan Tang play Whitley Bay – 45 years later!



Tygers of Pan Tang, one of the bands who, alongside Def Leppard, Saxon and Iron Maiden, pioneered the new wave of British heavy metal in the 1980s, will perform a hugely nostalgic one-off show at Playhouse Whitley Bay on Saturday 9 November.

The cult band formed in Whitley Bay back in 1978 with their first album 'Wildcat' hitting the Top 20 just two years later.

They followed that early triumph with

successful outings for singles 'Hellbound' and their cover of the Leiber and Stoller classic 'Love Potion No 9'.

The Tygers continue to tour globally and have recently returned from Brazil's Summer Breeze festival that saw them play in front of 10,000 music lovers.

Guitarist and co-founder Robb Weir said "We play shows all around the world so to be able to play such a special one in my home town means everything."

"We last played in Whitley Bay 45 years ago at Mingles, the Esplanade Rock Club, where we had a residency every Wednesday night – its incredible to think about the journey we've been on and to come full circle," he added.

Phil Smith, Theatre Director, said "We're absolutely thrilled to stage what promises to be such a memorable night as the band evoke many memories but are still very relevant today."

"When the chance to host the show came along, we jumped at it as its quite simply one of those 'have to be there' events that don't come around very often," he added.



Craig is on the Right Path to North Shields

Craig Redpath has upped sticks to North Shields to immerse himself in the town's thriving music scene, joining the ranks of established artists like Sam and Liam Fender, Hector Gannet and L Devine. Craig, known for his dynamic performances and captivating lyrics, is already making waves in his new musical home.

Originally from Cramlington, Craig's musical journey took an exciting turn when he discovered the vibrant music community in North Shields. Inspired by the energy and camaraderie of the local scene, he made the bold decision to relocate, eager to be at the heart of the action.

"At 34, I made the leap to North Shields, and I've never looked back," he said. "The music scene here is electric, and it was a major draw for me. I wanted to be part of something special, and North Shields offered exactly that."

His upcoming EP, set to release in the coming months, promises to showcase his diverse musicality. Featuring five tracks, including his acclaimed singles "It's Funny How" and "Fractured," the EP delves into themes of resilience, introspection, and hope. From the anthemic "Orange Sun" to the soulful "Angels," each track offers a glimpse into Craig's musical evolution.

As he continues to make his mark on the music scene, his move to North Shields signals a new chapter filled with promise and potential.

Slalom D empowers community with Socially Conscious Initiatives

Slalom D, a dynamic punk band hailing from Sunderland, is not just about delivering electrifying music; they're also on a mission to make a positive impact in their community. Formed in 2018, Slalom D has been pushing boundaries with their forward-looking punk sound, innovative melodies and raw power while fearlessly addressing contemporary social issues.

Led by the captivating vocals of Fiona Duncan, known affectionately as Fe, the band comprises a talented ensemble including Andrew Scobie (Goober) on keyboards and backing vocals, Tony Lindstedt on bass guitar and backing vocals, Gary Roberts on guitar and backing vocals, and Iain Murray on drums. Together, they create a dynamic sound that has captivated audiences far and wide.

In true punk DIY style, vocalist Fiona Duncan expressed the band's commitment to community welfare. "We've introduced a health and happiness kit available at our merch stall during gigs. It includes essentials like anti-spiking kits, condoms, female sanitary items, face masks, and antibacterial gel. Everything is free and accessible to anyone in need. While donations are appreciated, our primary concern is ensuring everyone has what they need, regardless of financial constraints."



Acknowledging the inspiration behind this initiative, Fe credited American punk bands and other organisations for motivating them to act. "We recognised a real need for this in the North East and were inspired by the efforts of others. We're grateful for the support and guidance from Manchester Punk Festival, Serial Bowl Records, and Sisters of Sedition," she added.

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Culture Club

My culture choices

Kate Watson is the “go to person” for technology and data protection compliance.

Her business, Ask Mrs Watson is a source of trusted support for businesses that need help in those fields.

Her membership platform makes it easy to get support when you need it. It's a flexible format meant for businesses that just need that little bit of help. From sole traders up to global organisations, members get what they need, when they need it. Here we “asked Mrs Watson” about her favourite choices from the world of culture.

Who is your favourite author and why?

John Grisham - He was my Dad's favourite author and became mine as Dad would pass on the books to me when he had finished with them. I love books that I can't put down and I always found that to be the case with each one I read. If I was allowed two, I would also pick Mike Harding, the author of the *Armchair Anarchist's Almanac*, just the best funniest book ever!!

What would be your three Desert Island Discs?

Andrea True Connection - More, More, More - Massive Summer '76 memories!

Vaughan Williams: Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis - The journey it takes me on goes straight to my soul every time.

Slade - How Does It Feel? - Just so many levels, a masterpiece and from one of the most under-rated bands ever.

Who is your favourite film star and why?

Olivia Coleman - she is just so normal yet extraordinary, I don't think I have thought she wasn't amazing in anything I've seen her in.



Kate Watson

What are your top three films? Tell me about them.

Kes - A compelling story that shines a light on social injustice and the battle to rise above - nobody does it better than Ken Loach

A Bugs Life - A very, very funny uplifting story brilliantly crafted where the ants awaken to their collective power against the grasshoppers. I quote lines from it all the time and have watched it more times than I should probably admit! It has a brilliant blooper reel at the end too!

Nine and a half weeks - No comment other than 'ooh err mrs' hahaha A cautionary tale of why fancying the pants off someone and infatuation isn't really love and rarely lasts/ ends well but when you are a young woman with raging hormones it makes you catch your breath like you are a maiden in pride and prejudice!

Which poem left a lasting impression on you?

Death is nothing at all. Like many I've lost loved ones and whenever this poem is recited at a funeral, I think of those who

have 'gone on ahead' it's very comforting to me.

What box sets have you enjoyed?

The Crown, Friends, The Kominsky Method and *Silicon Valley*.

Who is your favourite artist or performer?

Queen/Freddy Mercury.

What is your favourite venue?

City Hall, Newcastle.

Which musical instrument do you particularly enjoy?

Drums.

From the world of Arts and Culture who would be your ideal dinner party guests?

Olivia Coleman, Bill Nighy, Greg Davies, Stephen Fry, Judy Dench, Jonny Depp, Ricky Gervais, David Bowie and Sister Wendy Beckett!

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Holiday Inn Newcastle Gosforth Park Hotel unveils stunning refurbishment of function suite.

Holiday Inn Newcastle Gosforth Park Hotel, a premier destination for meetings and events, is thrilled to announce the completion of the first phase of its extensive refurbishment programme, focusing on the signature Cheviot Suite.

The Cheviot Suite, capable of accommodating up to 500 guests, has undergone a transformative makeover that sets the stage for unforgettable gatherings and celebrations.

The refurbishment, of the Cheviot Suite, which is part of a long-term investment plan from the Ailantus Group encompassed a range of enhancements, including a new ceiling and air handling system, modern lighting fixtures, elegant wall coverings, stylish furniture, cutting-edge technology upgrades, and plush carpets that add a touch of sophistication to the space. These renovations have elevated the ambiance of the Cheviot Suite, ensuring that guests experience unparalleled comfort and luxury when hosting events at the hotel.

"We are excited to reveal the newly refurbished Cheviot Suite, which serves as the crown jewel of our meetings and events spaces," said Peter Auld, Area General Manager. "The redesign of the suite reflects our commitment to providing guests with exceptional venues that cater to a wide range of events, from corporate conferences to weddings and special occasions."

As the first phase of the refurbishment programme reaches completion, Holiday Inn Newcastle Gosforth Park Hotel is already looking ahead to the next phase, which will focus on expanding the Ridley Suite. The upcoming enhancements will feature a brand-new event bar and drinks reception area, creating a sophisticated setting to welcome in guests.



Festival fever comes to Sunderland

Forget Glastonbury, Reading and the Isle of Wight – the festival spirit is alive and well in Sunderland this summer and raising money for a good cause.

Headway Wearside, the charity which supports people with brain injuries, is hosting a corporate fund raising night with a difference on 27 June.

And now tickets are on sale for the Summer Festival event being held at STACK Seaburn, which will include food and drinks, entertainment and a range of festival-themed activities.

The organisers were keen to move away from the usual black tie fund raising style of event and create something really fun and different – but at the same time raising vital cash for Headway Wearside.

"We wanted to use somewhere in the city and create something a little bit unusual but which we are sure everyone will really enjoy," said Kim Hunter, Business and Community Development Manager at Headway Wearside.

The festival is being sponsored by Burnetts Solicitors LLP, EMG Solicitors and JSP Case Management, organisations which all work closely with Headway and their clients.

Paul Brown of Burnetts, who is also chair of Headway Wearside, is hoping that the event will be well supported.

"Headway Wearside does such important work and being able to raise money to fund that work is vital," he said.

Tickets for the event are £600 for a table of ten. For further information or to book contact kim.hunter@headwaywearside.org.uk



Two Newcastle city centre venues acquired by growing hospitality business

A Newcastle bar and nightclub operator has expanded its portfolio of city centre venues, with the acquisition of The Mushroom on Grainger Street and Mimo on Pudding Chare.

Market Shaker Group has added the sites to its existing group of venues: Market Shaker and Pumphrey's which are both on the Cloth Market and Frate, which is located behind Grey Street.

Robert Clarkson, co-founder of Market Shaker Group, said: "We first viewed Mimo more than 10 years ago so it's incredibly exciting to have finally been able to add it to our portfolio."

"Along with The Mushroom, it's been part of Newcastle's nightlife for a long time and we plan to make sure it's a place people enjoy visiting for many more years to come."

The Mushroom is a basement bar/nightclub in Newcastle city centre and Mimo is a two storey building which currently houses a bar on the ground floor and a nightclub on the first floor.

"We've got big ambitions for Mimo which we'll be announcing soon," said Robert.

Newcastle law firm, Sintons, managed the purchase of the lease of both sites on behalf of Market Shaker Group.

Alok Loomba, partner at Sintons and expert in leisure and hospitality, commented: "Sintons' has worked alongside Robert and his team for more than a decade, as they've grown their business from one city centre venue to their current five."

"It's been a real pleasure to be involved in the development of such a variety of sites, which have all gone on to be fixtures in our city's social scene."



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Meet the Face Behind the Business...

John Dixon

Destinations By John

After many years being involved with organising travel arrangements in my career, I decided to do it professionally. Our first shop was in Monkseaton but after eight years we took the opportunity to expand by taking over the old Tui shop in the centre of Whitley Bay.



John Dixon and Fern Dixon

Why use an Independent Travel Agent?

As an Independent Travel Agent, we do not have to promote one brand over another, it is all about meeting the customer's needs. We always recommend the supplier who will be best for our client based on our knowledge and experience. Ultimately the customer makes the decision, but we can offer alternatives or explain why an alternative resort may work better for them.

Recently a couple came in to book their first family cruise and it quickly became apparent that what they thought and expected was not the reality of the situation. Our advice led them to book a land-based holiday which they thoroughly enjoyed. We cruise regularly so know how to explain the features of the different cruise lines and details of the ports.

What sets us apart?

We are a family run business and I work with my daughter who is a fully trained travel agent. We are friendly but efficient and several clients just pop in for a catch-up chat between holidays. Our staff understand the workings of a small business, the relationships we build with clients and our high levels of customer service.

For example, Tracey works for us part time and fits the criteria wonderfully, she understands our approach and fits in as part of the team.

We build the business by repeat clients and

recommendations, word of mouth is very important. Our 5 Star Google Reviews show we are getting it right and this is echoed by having our best year ever.

Staying Updated

We have regular supplier updates both on email and by webinars plus store visits by the operators Area Managers. We are classed as a Managed Business of Barrhead, while remaining totally independent with our own ABTA Number P8323. This in effect means we have their buying power and everything we sell has ATOL protection.

On Line Bookings

Many people found during COVID that having booked a hotel/villa, then flights separately they lost money as they were not protected. Our clients all had full refunds. With the likes of Jet2 Holidays clients can book on line but they will find we are the same price and print off all the paperwork and look after them. Plus, they are supporting local business!

Many people still do not realise that some of the online booking portals are not LIVE, so pricing seems great initially but can rise through the booking process.

With ourselves you can always speak to the same people, build a great relationship, and have someone to turn to if you have any questions or need help.

Complex Travel

We thrive on working with clients looking for a one-off bucket list trip and recently have worked on a rail holiday right across Canada that ended up with a Polar Bear experience in remote Churchill. This year Japan is in high demand, and we have organised several trips where the client travels across country via rail, with the hotels being organised in different cities, plus fully organised and cruises from Tokyo. Honeymoons are another area where we work with clients on far flung destinations with the pairing of Sri Lanka and the Maldives being very popular.

Other Information

Our shop is VERY dog friendly, and we always have dog treats available. Also, we have a Children's Area with real aircraft seats from a Boeing 757 so children can colour in, read, or play with toys giving the adults time to concentrate on their travel plans.

We have great relationships with tour operators and suppliers and in the past, we have held two large travel shows with various suppliers in attendance and we are looking to do this again in the future as well as one off supplier events

**To book your holiday pop into Destinations by John, Belvedere House 254A Whitley Road Whitley Bay, NE26 2TE
0800 1777 8857**

Places to go...Durham

Trains are the usual subject of this column, but I stray into buses where there is a good deal available. Buses often get a bad press, for not turning up or running late, or - worse - running early. But, like trains, most buses operate and close to time, so I decided to put the network to the test with a one day Durham Day Rover on all bus operators in County Durham.



A return journey from, say, Pelton to Chester-le-Street costs £2 each way, but for the same £4 you can buy the Day Rover from first bus out to the last journey home, valid on all operators large and small.

I didn't quite go from first bus to the last, but from 0725 to 2115 in a period of 14 hours I travelled up to the top of Weardale and Teesdale and from the dales down to the sea at Seaham and back home, even including meeting up with a friend and his domino playing mates in Murton between buses. Meal breaks were at Middleton in Teesdale and Seaham, and every bus turned up and all tight connections were met such that I arrived home 30 minutes earlier than I originally expected. As it happened, I only used the buses of Go North East and Weardale, but I could have used Arriva and Stagecoach too. You can make up your own itinerary (whether for a theoretical or an actual journey) using www.traveline.info, and you can plan multiple journeys like Middleton in Teesdale to Seaham, remembering that you cannot travel by train nor outside of County Durham.

There is an even bigger deal available for £6.80 in the form of the (formerly Transport North East) Day Saver which covers Northumberland, Tyne and Wear and County Durham, including the Tyne and Wear Metro and the Shields Ferry. This ticket is a real big hitter as it covers from Middleton in Teesdale to Berwick upon Tweed. I am planning to use this for a trip to Ford and Etal in North Northumberland on 22 June.

For readers in Tees Valley, you can use these tickets to and from the boundary stop where you cross from the Tees Valley area (Mayor: Ben Houchen) to the North East Combined Authority (Mayor: Kim McGuinness). Apart from the region-wide Explorer North East ticket, I can find no comparative ticket for the Tees Valley

Just for the record, here is my itinerary for Friday, 5th April, starting and finishing in Pelton, near Chester-le-Street. Had I travelled on a Wednesday (only) I could have extended my journey with a trip even higher up Teesdale to Langdon Beck on the Hodgson's service 73.

Route	Op	Dep	Destination	Arrival	Miles
78	GNE	0726	Consett	0816	11
764	WMS	0900	Wolsingham	0925	11
101	WMS	0930	Stanhope	0945	6
101a	WMS	1000	Cowhill	1025	10
101a	WMS*	1030	Stanhope	1055	10
101	WMS	1100	Bishop Auckland	1147	16
85	WMS	1155	Barnard Castle	1245	15
95	WMS*	1250	Middleton in T	1318	10
96	WMS	1420	Barnard Castle	1448	10
85	WMS*	1500	Bishop Auckland	1550	15
X21	GNE	1638	Durham	1713	11
65	GNE	1715	Seaham Harbour	1808	14
65	GNE	1846	Murton	1903	4
65	GNE	2003	Durham	2038	10
21	GNE	2040	Chester-le-St	2102	6
8	GNE	2103	Pelton	2108	3



All buses were operated either by Go North East or Weardale Motor Services. A* in the table means the same bus operated the previous journey, therefore a guaranteed connection! I calculate that I travelled around 162 miles with no measurable additional carbon emissions. I felt that I had got the measure of County Durham in one day, and all for £4, at under 2.5p per mile.

alexnelson@nationalrail.com, www.nationalrail.com

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Week2Week Serviced Apartments shortlisted for Global Relocate Award



The Week2Week team from L-R: Amanda Lambert, Janine Russell, Sarah Buck, Claire Parry and Caroline Blackett.

Newcastle based, Week2Week Serviced Apartments, a leading provider of premium serviced accommodation, is thrilled to announce its shortlisting for the prestigious Global Relocate Award in the category of Best Serviced Apartment Provider.

The Global Relocate Awards recognise excellence, achievement, and innovation within the global mobility and serviced apartment sectors. Being shortlisted for this esteemed award underscores Week2Week's commitment to delivering exceptional service and accommodation solutions to its guests.

"We are delighted to be shortlisted for the Global Relocate Award," said Claire Parry, Director at Week2Week Serviced Apartments. "This recognition is a testament to the hard work and dedication of our team in providing outstanding serviced accommodation experiences

for our guests. We take great pride in offering flexible, high-quality solutions that meet the evolving needs of our clients, whether they are travelling for business or leisure."

Week2Week Serviced Apartments has established itself as a trusted partner for corporate clients, relocation professionals, and leisure travellers seeking the comfort and convenience of a home away from home. With a portfolio of handpicked apartments in prime locations in Newcastle and surrounding areas, coupled with a personalised service and attention to detail, Week2Week strives to exceed expectations and ensure a seamless stay for every guest.

The Global Relocate Awards ceremony will take place on 6th June at Two Temple Place in London, where Global Relocate will be celebrating their 20th Anniversary and winners will be announced across the various categories. Week2Week Serviced Apartments is looking forward to the opportunity of celebrating industry excellence and networking with fellow professionals from around the world.

For more information about Week2Week Serviced Apartments and its range of serviced apartments and houses, visit: www.week2week.co.uk or contact +44 (0)191 281 3129.





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PERSONAL SERVICE

We provide a flexible and fuss-free personal check-in service ensuring that they keys are handed to you safely on your arrival. Our friendly team all have expert local knowledge and can help with any queries you have during your stay.

WELL-BEING

Staying in a Week2Week apartment provides you with the perfect space to both work and relax, ensuring you are well rested for the day ahead! Whether you are staying alone or with friends and family, you can enjoy many home from home comforts, including kitchen and washing facilities and a relaxation area. Some properties also have outdoor space too.

HOUSEKEEPING

We are happy to arrange cleaning and supply fresh linen and towels. We cater for team changes too.





L-R: Alfie Dunn, Charlotte Cazalet-Smith, Scott Anderson, Felix Allen, Joe Bowman and Robyn Cuthbert, The Inn Collection Group 2024 Young Chef finalists.

Serving up the best in the region

Up-and-coming culinary talent based across the north of England displayed all their skills in Newcastle's Stephenson Quarter in May, as The Inn Collection Group's Young Chef competition served up an exciting attraction at the 2024 Hospitality Innovation Tourism Supply (HITS) Expo.

Open to chef de partie and commis chefs across the group's 30-site estate, six finalists were selected to test themselves against each other and the clock, in a competitive cook-off at the North East Culinary & Trade Association (NECTA) Hospitality Salon.

With more than 20 entries received, there was strong competition just to make the final, with chefs from Northumberland, County Durham, North Yorkshire and

Lancashire qualifying to contest the showpiece event.

Given just an hour in which to prepare from scratch, expertly cook and prettily present a dish of their creation, the plates of food delivered showcased a delicious array of ingredients that tantalised the tastebuds of the assembled judging panel.

Scott Anderson from The Hog's Head Inn served up a delicious pork fillet, accompanied by black pudding crushed potatoes, a poached egg & an apple cider cream sauce whilst the second chef drawn from the Alnwick pub's kitchen, Alfie Dunn showed superb composure during his cook to present sea bass and sauteed potatoes with a pea puree, green beans and a beurre blanc.

Charlotte Cazalet Smith meanwhile represented Durham city centre pub The Kingslodge Inn, with an impressive, encrusted lamb rump with fondant potatoes, grilled asparagus, and a cranberry & red wine jus, to complete the runners-up.

Awarded the bronze trophy for her seared duck breast served with Hasselback potatoes, pea and broad bean puree and a pomegranate sauce, it was another assured step from The Lindisfarne Inn's Robyn Cuthbert.

Originally joining the pub as a member of the front-of-house team, her progress as a chef has been remarkable since moving into the kitchen and has shown even further levels of development under the tutelage of head chef Amrish Pandoo.

Joe Bowman from Morecambe's Midland Hotel used his site's coastal grounding to earn the Silver trophy, with an onion bhaji crumbed, pan-fried cod served on a coriander potato risotto and coriander oil.

It was a second cod dish though that was judged to be the best of those produced as Felix Allen of The Harrogate Inn emerged as the ultimate champion.

Joining the spa town kitchen back in October 2023, the 20-year-old wowed the panel with pan-seared cod served with lemon butter potatoes, a fennel and dill salad and a beurre Blanc split with parsley oil.

Described as light and perfect for summer, Felix's dish will now feature on an upcoming specials menu across Northumberland, Tyne & Wear, County Durham, North Yorkshire, Lancashire, North Yorkshire and the Lake District.

The NECTA Hospitality Salon is the region's most prominent culinary and catering exhibition and is open to both industry and the public as part of a broader HITS Expo, a celebration of the best in tourism and hospitality from across the North of the Tyne.

Bringing together the best practitioners in food, drink, hospitality and tourism under one roof, the HITS Expo encourages collaboration throughout the industry and beyond as well as highlights the role these vital sectors play in forging the region's identity.

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Award-winning County Durham Distillery samples Indian market with Santander Navigator



Scott Wilson-Laing

WL Distillery Founder Scott Wilson-Laing is in good spirits after securing a coveted place on a recent Trade Mission to India with Santander Navigator. The pioneering visit showcased the opportunities for UK distilleries with a focus on premium spirits looking to build relations and export to the Indian Drinks sector.



Scott joined distilleries from across the UK visiting Mumbai and New Delhi, with several buyer and networking meetings arranged. WL Distillery had the opportunity to showcase their award-winning gin range at The Vault Festival as part of the UK Craft Pavilion, alongside an array of producers from across the UK.

The Vault Festival, held in Mumbai is Asia's premier drinks festival which features and plays host to a selection of global spirits, wines and beer brands, putting brands in front of India's shifting alco-bev market which is seeing a younger and experimentative crowd emerging in one of the largest markets for alcohol in the world.

The trade mission, organised by Santander Navigator, was a fruitful opportunity for WL Distillery to research the market size and audience and pay homage to the intertwined cultural heritage of India and Britain. Santander Navigator is the bank's digital platform that supports UK companies with international growth.

India's economy is on track to be the third largest in the world by 2027 and have a market of 95 million middle-class consumers by 2035. Volume sales of alcoholic beverages in India will see 'rapid growth' to 2027, according to IWSR Drinks Market Analysis.

Scott Wilson-Laing, Founder and Managing

Director, WL Distillery said: "The opportunity to secure a place on the trade mission has been a phenomenal moment for the distillery to present our brand, ethos and gins to a growing and inquisitive market.

The Vault Festival was a fantastic experience and an opportunity to further raise our profile, but we were also thrilled that customers sought out our stand after already hearing about our brand and unique flavours online. It's a great feeling to know we already have global reach and awareness even before we've set foot in the country. We are thrilled that the Santander Navigator team brought us along on the trade mission and are helping us connect with vital partners to support our expansion plans".

Around 7,800 UK SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises) are already exporting to India across sectors as diverse as wind power to cyber security, agriculture, film and gaming.

The trade mission was a pivotal moment for WL Distillery to access a huge market of consumers looking to buy high quality, British goods and has led to a host of promising opportunities.

With a number of flavours now under their belt at WL Distillery the star of the show in India and winner of the Bronze Design Award at the World Gin Awards was the popular

Wilson's Gin Club 'Watermelon and Liqueurice', and seemed to be just the tonic for Indian gin connoisseurs.

Scott was crowned Most Pioneering Gin Distillery MD 2023 in the Managing Director of the Year Awards 2023 hosted by SME News, a finalist in the Great British Entrepreneur Awards for the Maker and Creator category, and finalists for two awards in the Startup Awards North East, Yorkshire and Humberside heat. Alongside, Gin Distillery of the Year' SME Northern Enterprise Awards and 'Best Craft Brewery/Distillery' Food Industry Awards, Business Awards UK.

With the news also just announced that WL Distillery has been named Gin Distillery of the Year in the Corporate Live Wire Innovation & Excellence Awards 2024.

WL Distillery have established themselves as a key player in the UK gin market, both regionally and nationally. Award-winning recognition quickly followed their debut to the market in 2020, with accolades including gold at The Gin Masters, listed in the London Spirits Top 100 spirits, through to making Vogues 'Hot List', GQ's 'Cocktail Club' and being featured at London's world-famous Science Museum.

www.wldistillery.com

In Conversation With...

Ythan Sale

Events Manager, Durham Cricket

Could you describe your current role?

As the Events Manager at Durham Cricket, I oversee a diverse array of functions including cricket hospitality, meetings, parties, christenings, and celebrations of life. Mine is a pivotal function between the clients and the operational running of the business. As part of this I plan, document and execute numerous details of all events at Seat Unique Riverside. I'm always prepared to go above and beyond the role to ensure the success of the events, both internally and externally. Finally, I am deeply involved in the branding, advertising, and marketing of these events, working closely with various agencies. My long tenure has enabled me to contribute significantly to staff well-being and social activities through initiatives like the One Durham Staff Group.

What inspired your career path growing up?

Growing up, my career ambitions were quite fluid—I initially aspired to teach before gravitating towards graphic design. My creative spark has always been integral to my professional identity, which has been invaluable in my roles involving marketing and design. Much of the distinctive look you see in our events business marketing is a direct result of my efforts.

What is your proudest business achievement?

I consider my selection as the 'Durham Cricket Person of the Year' at last year's annual awards dinner to be a standout achievement in my career. This peer-voted honour recognised my contributions towards the organisation's success, offering substantial satisfaction through the esteem of my colleagues. Moreover, my involvement in developing community-based projects and festivals has been immensely rewarding. These initiatives have not only enriched the local area but have also established my reputation as a leading figure among community organisations and governing bodies.



Ythan Sale

How has your industry evolved over the past decade?

The events industry faced significant challenges, especially with the shift to remote work during the pandemic, which impacted face-to-face interactions and large-scale events. However, personal relationships have become increasingly central to business dealings. The industry is now moving away from cold calling towards nurturing connections that often evolve into friendships.

What projects are you currently excited about?

I'm currently leading several exciting projects, including our first-ever fireworks and laser display in collaboration with Chester-le-Street CC, set for November 2nd. Additionally, we're organising the third annual Chester-le-EATS, a food, drink, and music festival anticipated to expand significantly this year with more vendors and activities designed for family enjoyment.

Can you tell us about your team?

I work closely with Jo Morris, our Events Coordinator, whose support is indispensable to our success. We maintain a wonderful working dynamic, filled with laughter and creativity. Alongside Jo, I collaborate closely with our Venue Director, Rob Warren, where

we often brainstorm bold and innovative ideas. Finally I work closely with the entire Operations Team who deliver all our daily business and wider scale events.

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

One of the best pieces of advice I've received is, "It's better to seek forgiveness than ask permission." This has encouraged me to take bold steps and innovative actions in my career.

What has been your biggest challenge?

This year, I faced a tremendous personal and charitable challenge by participating in the Yorkshire 3 Peaks walk. Despite severe weather conditions that threatened to halt our journey, our team persevered and successfully raised £2,152 for St Cuthbert's hospice.

How do you unwind outside work?

Outside of work, I'm an adrenaline junkie who loves socialising, dining out, and traveling the world to ride the most exhilarating roller coasters. My friends and family can attest to my vibrant social life and adventurous spirit.

www.durhamcricket.co.uk



Let's Fly Away

By Michael Grahamslaw

Upon completion of the 100th issue of the magazine this mature publisher was extremely weary so I decided to recharge the batteries with a short break in the Algarve with my wife Lisa.

With a "red eye" flight out of Newcastle we decided to make a welcome return visit to the DoubleTree by Hilton to spend the night before and found that this kickstarted our holiday in great style.

Rocking up at teatime it had already been a fantastic day. My beloved Newcastle United had defeated Tottenham Hotspur in great

style and I had also had a rare win on that afternoon's Grand National. If Carlsberg did Saturdays...

Greeted by the friendliest of welcomes we checked into our uber comfortable King Deluxe room.

This came with all the "bells and whistles" befitting the DoubleTree brand including King Size Sweet Dreams bed, 37 inch LCD flat panel TV, complimentary high speed internet, air conditioning and in room mini bar.

After a quick change we adjourned to the Hotel's own Fratellos Restaurant which is the perfect destination for fine dining with dishes from around the world and offering far more than the traditional pizza/pasta fayre.

Over a lovely glass of Pinot Grigio Blush I kicked off with chicken skewers which were beautiful and tender with the accompanying chilli dipping sauce full of flavour.

Lisa enjoyed crispy cod scampi with tartare sauce, house pickles and burnt lemon which she pronounced delicious.



Carrying on the nautical theme I followed up a classic fish and chips with golden-brown battered haddock fillets resting atop a generous portion of thick-cut, crispy fries. The hallmark of a great hand-battered haddock is the perfect balance between the crispiness of the batter and the tender flakiness of the fish inside. When done right, the batter should be light, airy, and seasoned just right, providing a satisfying crunch with every bite. This certainly did not disappoint.

Lisa opted for pan roasted Sea Bass with Thai style mussels, spiced baby potatoes and chilli and lemongrass sauce. A lovely simple dish, beautifully cooked and lovingly presented.

After a suitable comfort break and in the interest of research we rounded off proceedings by sharing a gorgeous sticky toffee pudding infused with butterscotch sauce. We were on holiday after all!

Mindful of the following day's 3.30am alarm call we returned to our room but noted the comfortable hotel bar which is ideal to extend the evening. Next time...

In addition to first class food and accommodation the DoubleTree by Hilton is also an excellent venue to host your special occasion with the elegant Holly and Kielder suites perfect for the grandest of parties.

In summary an absolute gem. With another break on the horizon in July we have vowed to return.

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My Weekend...

Lewis Brown

*Information and Communications
Officer for Healthwatch Gateshead and
Healthwatch Newcastle.*

With a passion for words and a commitment to community well-being, Lewis brings a unique perspective to the role, combining a love and background in poetry with a dedication to promoting health awareness.

Here he tells us about his weekends.



Lewis Brown

Do you ever have to work weekends?

Sometimes! But usually only as a one-off event, or in a self-directed way.

Are most weekends the same?

I thrive on variety, so I'm often out at different events, seeing friends and family in different places, etc, but I do regularly meet my creative peers in and around town, or go to the library to work on my personal projects.

Do you find it hard to switch off?

I do, so a change of scene or seeing loved ones with can be really helpful. The flipside of being motivated is that you sometimes have to accept you can't do everything you'd like to, or some things will have to wait. We don't always think of it this way, but rest takes discipline too!

What do you do at a weekend which you can't fit in through the week?

Some peace and quiet! I love collaborative work and socialising, but everyone's social battery is limited. I tend to give myself a lot to do even in my free time, so it's important to take some downtime as well.

Morning exercise or a recovery lie in?

I'm very much an evening person, so definitely a recovery lie in. Slow mornings in comfy pyjamas with a cup of tea are really nice.

Big night out or a night in the house?

I love going to the cinema, but I'd have to say a night in! I'm a big fan of tabletop games like Dungeons & Dragons, old-school nerd stuff like that. Nothing better than a night in with friends.

Do you watch or play sport at a weekend?

Not much, but I live close enough to St James Park that I can always hear when Newcastle scores! I have friends and family from all over Europe, so I do find myself rooting for a lot of different sports teams.

Where do you like to eat out at a weekend?

The Magic Hat! It's a lovely café that uses ingredients that would have gone to waste otherwise, which is a great idea and means the menu is always different. It's also just a really nice place to bring a laptop, do a bit of reading, do a bit of writing, etc.

What's the best thing about weekends?

The freedom to set your own pace! Structure is good but sometimes it's nice to not have a plan.

Of a weekend, you'll usually find me most happy..?

Hosting a writing workshop, enjoying some poetry or typing away in the Lit & Phil. The North has such a vibrant arts and culture scene, so there's always something exciting happening!

Healthwatch Newcastle and Healthwatch Gateshead provides community engagement, research, evaluation, and assessment services within the fields of health, wellbeing, and social care. They are committed to improving the health and wellbeing of people using health and social care services in the Newcastle and Gateshead areas.

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Friday 16th August

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TO THE
MANOR BORN

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FAT TONY
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Saturday 17th August

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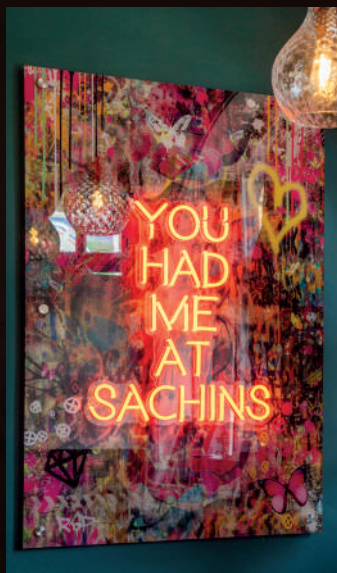
40th Anniversary Celebrations

To commemorate 40 years in business, as well as a recent refurbishment, Sachins Restaurant in Newcastle recently held a private party for family, friends and clients.

Located on historic Forth Banks Sachins has become a local icon serving the finest Punjabi cuisine over the past four decades.

Owner Bob Arora said: "I couldn't be prouder to have reached such a significant landmark and it was great to celebrate with a wonderful evening with so many familiar faces."





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A year on – Silk Route Spirits journey 12 months in



Well, well, well, it's been a whirlwind of a year for Silk Route Spirits, hasn't it? Blink, and you might just miss the transformation from a mere glimmer in Phil Hayden and Mark Douglas's eyes to a shining star in the world of spirits.

Let's hop aboard the spirit wagon and take a gander at their journey from humble beginnings to dizzying heights.

Phil Hayden tells Northern Insight about their journey so far.

"Cast your mind back to May 2022, when the seeds of this spirited adventure were sown. Picture two pals, sipping G&Ts in the heart of Newcastle, our minds wandering all the way to central Anatolia. That's where it all began, folks - the idea for Silk Route Spirits was born over a cheeky tipple.

"Fast forward to July 2022, and we find ourselves knee-deep in the art of distillation. We rolled up our sleeves and dove headfirst into the world of alcohol alchemy. Maths, chemistry, and a sprinkle of magic - that's the recipe for a cracking gin, don't you know?

"By September 2022, it was all about the botanicals. Hours of tinkering, mixing, and distilling led to the birth of a gin with a flavour as distinctive as a Geordie accent. And you better believe we stuck to the good old London Dry Gin process - quality is our middle name.

"Come November 2022, Silk Route Spirits officially strutted onto the scene. Why 'route', you ask? Well, it's all about honouring the twists and turns of the Silk Road and our grand plans for the future. A journey as rich and varied as the spirits they craft.

"April 2023 saw the fruits of our labour - or should I say, the gins of our stills? Two beauties graced our shelves: Signature, and a Navy Strength.

"And by June 2023, we were ready to spread our wings even further. The gin range launched with a bang, and whispers of rum danced in the air, with a launch of Silk Route Spiced and Caramel rums in March 2024 to add to the range.

"So, there you have it, folks - a year in the life of Silk Route Spirits. From a tiny seed of an idea to a flourishing brand, it's been one heck of a ride. And trust me, we're just getting started. Cheers to many more years of good spirits and great company!

**For more information on Silk Route Spirits
www.silkroutespirits.co.uk**

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Dr Ceri Sutherland and Dr Riaan Swanepoel

Idos is Ideal

Idos is a private medical centre in St Peter's Basin, Newcastle, providing GP, Sleep Medicine, Psychiatry and Elderly Care medical services.

They combine these with complementary and psychological therapies to deliver a holistic health model which gets to the heart of the problem, reduces prescribing of medication, and offers more time to listen. It is run by GP Dr Ceri Sutherland and GP Dr Riaan Swanepoel who tells us more.

What sets Idos apart from other healthcare providers in Newcastle?

Our space is very calming and pleasant, and our mission is to create a welcoming alternative medical experience of excellent quality. We offer normal private GP appointments with a difference within the week. We always make sure that people have enough time to feel truly understood so that their concerns and questions are fully answered. We focus on the whole person and our goal is to support wellness at its essence - a well body and well mind.

Our GPs will involve the other practitioners at Idos (if appropriate and with consent) to enable the best health outcomes for each individual client. This allows for a holistic approach using the knowledge of our

experienced team. For example, a client with high cholesterol will be offered a nutritionist appointment along with an exercise intervention without delay, making lifestyle changes achievable.

The GP and the practitioner can work together under the same roof, to support the client with their issue.

How does Idos integrate with the local community while delivering private healthcare services?

We are open from 9am - 5pm other than half day Wednesday. We are also open on Saturday mornings. We have reached out to the Byker Community Trust to establish a program of health literacy with them. Six of our practitioners have delivered talks at the Byker Pantry and we are continuing these short health related talks. This is an extremely positive experience for all where local people hear about health topics including sleep, nutrition, exercise, red flags in health, mental health and behaviour change. Health literacy is a problem for 40% of people and can affect lifestyle choices and engagement with medical care. Improving health literacy is a way to reduce GP appointments and increase healthy behaviours.

Could you describe the range of healthcare services available at Idos?

We offer private GP appointments and have facilities to do blood tests, some heart (ECG) and blood pressure investigations. Our GPs can write prescriptions, compile medical reports, and make referrals to specialists. We also do well person checks, offer travel and work medicals along with travel vaccinations as required.

We are the only provider in the North of England for two services: Sleep medicine which addresses Insomnia and Sleep Apnoea.

Liquid cancer biopsies - we are working with the Cancer Screening Trust and Datar genetics to provide the new frontline 'liquid biopsies' for cancer screening. This is for people who want to know if they have early-stage cancers but have no symptoms - this may be due to a family history of cancer or as part of their Idos comprehensive well person check.

We also offer Health Plans where clients can pay monthly for private GP services so that they have the peace of mind knowing that they can see a GP who they know and trust without a long wait and for a longer appointment. These plans are very affordable starting at £30 per month for individuals.

We provide complementary therapies including nutrition, sport, aromatherapy, acupuncture, shiatsu, yoga, and health coaching.

As "your local Doctors in Newcastle," how does Idos contribute to the overall health and well-being of the community?

Idos provides an alternative option for people who want to prioritise their health and wellbeing. It can reduce burden on NHS GP services by providing this option and by helping the local community to improve their health literacy and how they engage with health service providers.

**To find out more: www.idoshealth.co.uk
hello@idoshealth.co.uk
0191 429 0002**



The Spice of Life

By Holly Grahamslaw

To celebrate my partner Josh's birthday, I recently visited Yuvraaj restaurant for a night of authentic Indian dining. Situated in Ashbrooke, Yuvraaj is just a stone's throw away from Sunderland's city centre, making it ideal for those who want to sample all the city has to offer before or after their visit.

Having recently been named Fine Dining Restaurant of the Year at the Nation's Curry Awards, it is easy to see why Yuvraaj stands out from the crowd for its exquisite cuisine, superb service and luxurious surroundings.

Boasting a combined experience of over 80 years, the family-run business uses only the freshest, locally sourced ingredients. Yuvraaj offers traditional Indian favourites, coupled with unique Bangladeshi dishes and contemporary Western flourishes. The



carefully curated menu includes a plethora of meat and vegetarian dishes, as well as an extensive seafood selection and a variety of Bengali signature specials. Customers can also enjoy an affordable early bird and special menu, with a starter, main course, rice dish and dessert available for only £15.95pp.

As the name suggests, Yuvraaj (meaning Indian Prince) offers both food and decor fit for royalty. With plush, velvet seating, satin drapery and elegant chandelier lighting, the restaurant fuses shades of purple and gold to create an opulent space. The lavish setting was also complemented by the exceptional service, with friendly staff who were attentive to all our needs throughout our visit.

Feeling thirsty, we kicked off proceedings with a lovely bottle of Pinot Grigio and a selection of poppadoms and homemade house pickles, whilst waiting in anticipation for our starters. With much choice available, we shared the Yuvraaj Treat which offered a unique blend of meat, fish and vegetarian favourites. All fused with tasty tikka spices

and vegetables, this proved a real "treat" and demonstrated the attention to detail and flavour on offer at Yuvraaj.

Following on, we sampled the scrumptious Chicken Tikka Bhuna and Lamb Rogan Josh. With a delicious blend of spices and mouth-watering thick sauces, both dishes were exquisite and paired up nicely by a generous helping of pilau rice and garlic naan bread.

Whilst we preferred to stick to our tried and tested favourites, more adventurous diners can also enjoy a range of innovative recipes, including signature gourmet dishes. Exclusive to Yuvraaj, these include Bengali grilled lamb chops, pan-fried Bangladeshi fish and marinated king prawns, which are prepared using the chef's own flair and creativity and tailored to your preferred spice strength.

Despite feeling fit to burst, we still made room to enjoy ice cream, coffees and liqueurs, which proved a fitting end to a thoroughly enjoyable evening spent at Yuvraaj.

All in all, Yuvraaj really is the jewel in the crown of Indian restaurants within the local area. Showcasing sophistication and elegance in abundance, the venue offers both delectable food and excellent service. We can't wait to return.

Yuvraaj Indian Restaurant can be found at 6-7 Douro Terrace, Sunderland, SR2 7DX. For more information, call 0191 510 2002 or visit their website www.yuvraajrestaurant.co.uk



David Fairlamb

Positive summer vibes only!

That summer feeling is starting to gain momentum so let's try to make this summer super positive by keeping an upbeat happy vibe.

Here are a few ideas to turn any negative feelings into a more positive mindset. Here are some suggestions:

Negative...

I need to shed at least a stone for my summer vacation; I'll never manage it, it's too late.

Positive...

Not at all, there are still 10 weeks until the middle of July. By gradually adjusting a few unhealthy eating habits each day, and aiming to lose just over 1lb a week, you can achieve your goal of shedding 14lbs.

Negative...

Despite eating well, I can't seem to lose weight. Why bother trying?

Positive...

While you may believe you're eating healthily, there's a significant difference between eating for health and eating to lose weight. Eliminate refined sugar and processed foods, and focus on consuming lean meats, fish, vegetables, fruits, and

eggs. These changes will lead to noticeable improvements, making your efforts absolutely worthwhile.

Negative...

I don't have time to exercise.

Positive...

With determination and a strong desire, everyone can carve out time for exercise. Strength exercises like squats, lunges, and press-ups, along with core workouts, can all be done at home. Activities like running on the spot or using a mini trampoline also require minimal time investment. No excuses; we can all spare 20 minutes a day for our well-being, even if the exercise is spread throughout the day.

Negative...

One glass of wine a night adds up to around 55,000 calories a year.

Positive...

Simply eliminating that nightly glass of wine while maintaining everything else will result in a weight loss of 3-4lbs by July.

Negative...

I feel fatigued, sluggish, and heavy. Coping with the heat abroad will be a challenge.

Positive...

Initiating regular exercise of any kind will instantly boost your self-esteem. Coupled with improved dietary choices and reduced alcohol intake, you'll transition from feeling lethargic to feeling fitter, stronger, and more energised.

Decreased body fat and a renewed mindset will undoubtedly enhance your ability to cope with the heat if you are going abroad this summer.

Negative...

I'm too embarrassed to attend a fitness class; I need to lose weight first.

Positive...

This mindset undermines the purpose entirely. The aim of attending a fitness class is to transform both your appearance and how you feel. The sooner you begin, the sooner you'll see results. Lives can change dramatically in a matter of weeks, all it takes is belief, forming new habits, and staying committed.

Negative...

I can't seem to stick to a workout routine; I always end up quitting.

Positive...

It's common to face challenges when establishing a new habit, but every setback is an opportunity to learn and grow.

Instead of focusing on past failures, try reframing your mindset. Break down your fitness goals into smaller, manageable steps. Celebrate each small success along the way, whether it's completing a workout or making healthier food choices.

David's summing up...

Remember, progress is not always linear, and setbacks are a natural part of the journey. By adopting a positive attitude and staying committed to your goals, you'll build resilience and perseverance, making it easier to overcome obstacles and negative thought processes in the future.

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Barry Speker OBE

The Last Word

By Barry Speker OBE

A recent policy reversal by Oxford University shows a welcome reaction to the seemingly never-ending march of wokery. For centuries any member of the University could stand for election as chancellor if they could muster 50 nominations.

However, in March it was announced that any candidate seeking to replace the retiring Lord Patten would have to be 'vetted' by a subcommittee before being allowed to go ahead to a vote of degree holders.

The proposed change was said to promote 'equality and diversity' in a role which, since 1715, had been held by a male former politician. Presumably the aim was to disqualify so-called pale, male and stale candidates and have a more 'inclusive' line-up.

Oxford has now ditched the planned change. People of all classes, creeds and ethnicities resent the imposition of tick-box policies upon tried and tested institutions and much prefer a fully democratic vote. Competence and suitability must remain priorities over markers of personal identity to fit in with current fashion.

Meritocracy must be promoted. Crucial are ability and commitment, not age,

gender or race. It is unfair to discriminate against someone on these grounds - or to discriminate in favour of someone for the same reasons.

There is also some hope that Esther McVey, the minister for common sense and tasked with rolling back the tide of wokery in Whitehall, is banning the recruitment of EDI (equality, diversion and inclusion) officers.

There are some 10,000 EDI officers in the public sector but few of these wearers of rainbow lanyards have made much impression on the workplace.

Certainly prejudice exists and the Equality Act 2010 is in place to deal with egregious examples of discrimination on protected characteristics.

But most British people do not require instruction from EDI officers on how to treat respectfully colleagues with different ethnic, religious and sexual identities.



A welcome break in Malaga demonstrated the city to be very much more than an airport to get from the north east to the resorts on the Costa del Sol. A splendid beach, marina and nightlife there are, as well as countless delectable restaurants. Malaga is also a historical cultural centre with castle, Roman amphitheatre and many galleries, most notably the Museo Picasso Málaga, displaying 144 of the artist's paintings, sculptures and innovative structures. Pablo Picasso was born in Malaga which is justly proud of its illustrious son. The gallery alone is enough justification for a visit.

A group fighting for compensation for the 150,000 Northern Rock shareholders whose shares were seized in the lender's 2007 collapse and nationalisation is to relaunch its campaign. The NR Shareholder Action Group accused the Government of grabbing profits of up to £9 billion, after taking control of the mortgage bank following a depositor run.

The Treasury confiscated the Northern Rock shares with no compensation, although the bank's £100 billion mortgage book turned out to be extremely valuable; another report claims it was shown there was an

overall cash surplus £13.3 billion from all bank interventions. This could roll on with increasingly high value claims.

With the experience of billion pound claims against the Post Office and the HIV blood scandal still progressing after decades, claimants will not be discouraged.

The certainty is that mega bills will be paid by the government. The good news? - many lawyers will do extremely well.



The Eurovision Song Contest, derided by many, but theoretically an occasion for countries to celebrate music, joy and camaraderie was again overtaken by deluded hate-filled mobs. Their aim was to terrorise the Israeli contestant 20 year old Eden Golan, to have her disqualified and Israel to be ostracised.

The Irish contestant Bambie Thug led the bullying and intimidation in Malmo, booing and chanting Palestine. Golan was shunned and abused by fellow contestants. The young Israeli had been unable to leave her hotel room because of threats against her of kidnap, rape and murder. She needed protection of more than 100 police officers, a motorcade and helicopter to escort her to the venue.

Thug claimed 'The world has spoken' but not so. The result was that Golan, in fact possessing a quality in rare display here, namely musical talent, came 5th out of 37, a place above Thug. In country after country, the public (as opposed to the juries of national judges), backed Golan and her song 'Hurricane'. The British judges awarded her zero points but the British audience awarded her the full 12 points as did 13 other countries. Even Ireland gave her 10 points. What a contrast between hate-filled intimidatory mobs and Eden Golan who behaved with amazing courage, self-possession and dignity - and talent.

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