

NORTHERN

# INSIGHT

September 2024

Issue 105

A woman with long brown hair, wearing a light-colored sweater, and a man with a beard, wearing a dark blue blazer, are sitting on a wooden bridge railing. They are both smiling and looking towards the camera. In the background, a large, ornate cathedral with multiple towers is visible, situated on a hillside. The scene is set during the day with clear blue skies.

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# CREDITS

## Managing Director

Michael Grahamslaw

## Design

Lu O'Rourke

## Accounts Manager

Lisa Grahamslaw

## Lead Photography

Crest Photography

## Editorial Contributors

Jack Grahamslaw, Holly Grahamslaw,  
Graham Courtney, Barry Speker,  
Stuart Forster, Alex Nelson,  
David Fairlamb

## Social Media

Geeta Ral  
(JAM Prints & Marketing Limited)

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## Media Enquiries

Michael Grahamslaw  
[michael@northern-insight.co.uk](mailto:michael@northern-insight.co.uk)

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# Foreword

## FOREWORD

Welcome to the September issue of Northern Insight.

Our 105th issue is another cracker and bursting with content, vibrant features and critical analysis.

The Newcastle arm of National Technology and Managed Service Provider CMYK are our cover stars and share their plans and recent achievements.

In our popular Big Interview slot we talk to James Carss, the founder of Castle Peak Group who are doing executive search recruitment the right way.

Rockets Community Foundation are our Charity of the Month utilising sport as a vessel to engage people within vulnerable communities.

In an outstanding Education section we highlight the talent and sportsmanship of students from Kenton School and Studio West.

On our travels we enjoy a long weekend in Berlin and take a trip to Heathergate holiday park.

We hope you enjoy this issue.

*Thanks to all our wonderful clients, readers and suppliers for the fantastic support. Till next month...*

Michael Gramshaw, Publisher  
michael@northern-insight.co.uk



### Edition Sponsors





## Sunderland power systems specialist moves to bigger facilities with Swinburne Maddison

Swinburne Maddison LLP (Swinburne Maddison), Durham City's leading law firm, has acted in the preparation of a 15-year lease agreement for a Sunderland-based power systems specialist in its move to larger premises.

Armah Switchgear Ltd (Armah) has taken 41,000 sq ft of space at the £80m, Hillthorn Business Park in Washington, a Sunderland City Council development, as part of a move to grow the business and expand the team.

Armah is one of the most well-known switchgear specialists in the UK and has worked on some major projects including The Shard, in London; Goodison Park, home of Everton Football Club; floodlighting on the Tyne Bridge and the Pilgrim's Quarter in Newcastle city centre.

Its directors believe that the larger facilities will enable 'exponential' growth of the company. Swinburne Maddison's commercial property partner, Gillian Moir, completed the necessary legal work, liaising with all parties.

## Firms urged to apply for funding before it's too late

Sunderland businesses are being urged to apply for funding to support the launch of new products, processes and services before time runs out.

The North East BIC is calling for small and medium sized businesses across the city to submit applications for its Innovation Grant fund. The grant covers up to 40% of the cost of eligible projects ranging from £5,000 to £40,000.

Eligible projects include the introduction of technology, processes or automation which is new to the business or new-to-market but directly supporting the creation of jobs.

The grants are funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and are being distributed by the BIC on behalf of Sunderland City Council.



Debbie Simpson, Business Adviser at the BIC, said: "We've already had a flurry of businesses enquire about the grants, so we cannot stress how important it is for those interested to get in touch before it's too late."



## CustomerSure continues growth trajectory with strategic hirings

Bernardo Delgado and Liam Pearson join the leading North East Customer Experience Management (CXM) company, strengthening the team for future growth.

Newcastle-based independent software firm, CustomerSure, is thrilled to announce the addition of two new members to its experienced and talented team, further strengthening its position in the Customer Experience Management (CXM) sector. Bernardo Delgado and Liam Pearson join the firm from Nutshell Apps, bringing with them a wealth of experience and expertise.

Bernardo Delgado steps into the role of Marketing Manager. With a distinguished career in B2B software marketing, he expressed his enthusiasm about joining CustomerSure, stating, "I'm incredibly impressed with CustomerSure's software and I'm eager to enhance our brand awareness. With a deep understanding of the industries' needs, strong relationships and high retention rates of our own clients, and the most cost-effective CXM software in the market, we can position CustomerSure as the leading choice of CXM platform in the UK and Europe."

Liam Pearson joins as a Business Development Executive, bringing extensive experience from his commercial background. His insights and skills will be pivotal as CustomerSure continues its upward trajectory. "I'm thrilled to join the team here at CustomerSure alongside my existing colleague Bernardo. Joining an already strong team, I can't wait to assist in driving the company forward and make CustomerSure the number one CXM software solution in the UK."

"The funding can be used for a whole host of projects that drive business growth, create jobs or help launch new products or services, so the impact it can have on Sunderland small or medium sized businesses is huge. However, we only have a limited amount of funding to allocate, so once it's gone, it's gone."

Companies in receipt of grant funding can also tap into support from Debbie and fellow business adviser, John Forth.

The support includes signposting to industry experts to help grow their business, other sources of funding and specialist advice.

John said: "It's not just a case of us throwing money at the company and saying, 'there you go', it's much more involved than that."

"Working with Debbie and I, the eligible businesses will also receive advice and support as well as signposting to other organisations who can help."

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## Coupland Leather becomes finalist for prestigious Allica Bank Great British Entrepreneur Awards

**Founded in January 2020, North East-based entrepreneur and luxury leathersmith Stuart Coupland, of Coupland Leather, is celebrating being shortlisted in The Great British Entrepreneur Awards.**

The achievement comes as the company hit six-figure turnover in 2023 having achieved 56 per cent growth year-on-year and now exporting its products to 24 countries – with more to come.

The Allica Bank Great British Entrepreneur Awards receive over 5,000 entries every year with the finalists this year having a combined turnover of £2.9 billion and together employing approximately 20,000 people.

On the announcement of the shortlist, Lex Deak, CEO of Basket which is sponsoring the Maker & Creator Entrepreneur of the Year category said: "This has been such a strong category this year and the Great British businesses listed on this year's shortlist should be extremely proud of their hard work, and the contribution they are making. I look forward to meeting many of you at the final in November."

Stuart Coupland, owner of Coupland Leather said: "The brand has received some amazing attention and we're lucky to have some fantastic, highly supportive customers. Since taking Coupland Leather full time in 2020, I've been able to review and adapt my business to cope with the increasing demand for my products. In 2020, I handcrafted just over 440 items, where last year in 2023, that increased to just shy of 2,000.

"By investing in new equipment and refining our processes I've been able to offer our high-quality standards to companies on a wholesale basis and avoid a lot of cost increases on our products for domestic clients, whereas other companies have had to increase theirs."

## Restoration of two NE piers takes major step forward

**The iconic North and South piers (located in Tynemouth and South Shields) sustained severe damage during Storm Babet in October 2023 and have remained closed to the public in the interest of safety.**

The restoration of both has been a focus for the Port of Tyne as their owner and custodian, with the project taking a major step forward. Representatives from the Port warn that continued vandalism and unauthorised access could cause delays.

Initial phase one works are well underway on both piers and planning permission has now been granted for phase two works, to carry out the extensive repairs needed totalling £4.5 million. The initial storm damage last October was substantial to both piers. Waves of up to 9 metres and winds of up to 70 knots saw large sections of stone walls, handrails, block paving and coping stones washed into the sea. Steps and pavements were badly damaged as well as both lighthouses, with the South Pier lighthouse losing its roof entirely.



Whilst the works are progressing as planned, the Port of Tyne stressed the importance of cooperation from the public following a spate of vandalism and unauthorised access. As well as perpetrators putting their own safety at risk, this has also put the safety of contractors at risk and caused delays to the project. As a result, the Port is investigating 24/7 security at both sites, increasing the cost of the restoration.

Until the restoration works are complete, for the safety of the public and contractors working on the sites, the piers will remain closed.



## Forest Hall Club bowled over by SOS Group support

**A community sports club in North Tyneside has been bowled over by support for its annual Open Pairs Championship.**

Sponsored by office technology company, SOS Group, this was the third Open Pairs competition hosted by Forest Hall Bowling Club, with the first held to celebrate the club's centenary in 2022. Based within North Tyneside Council's Springfield Park in Forest Hall, the competition, attracted 48 players from across Tyneside and Northumberland to play in a series of friendly, competitive matches in glorious sunshine.

Paul Moorhead is Forest Hall Bowling Club's Sponsorship Coordinator.

He says: "We're all thrilled by how well the event went and by the standard of bowls played.

"Everyone at Forest Hall Bowling is passionate about attracting new players and there's no doubt that competitions like this bring interest to the sport.

"We were especially pleased to have an event sponsor this year and SOS Group helped the whole day run smoothly by supplying equipment and refreshments."

Paul, who bowled as a child but only really picked up the sport after giving up football eight years ago, adds: "We're always looking to promote the game to new members. I know it's often looked on as an older person's sport but when you watch the internationals, you'll see the younger players and the skill on show.

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## Cover Story

# Tech excellence in every Byte

National Technology and Managed Services Provider  
CMYK | BUSINESS TECHNOLOGY are transforming  
tech challenges into triumphs

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*Craig Pratt and Sarah Wharrier*



**The Newcastle arm of national business technology supplier and managed IT services provider CMYK, led by regional directors Craig Pratt and Sarah Wharrier (featured on this month's front cover), recently shared their plans and recent achievements with Northern Insight.**

CMYK has rapidly established an outstanding reputation across the region for its technical prowess, support offerings and client-focused approach. The team has found particular success in supporting the region's booming tech sector, swiftly becoming the preferred choice for managed IT, workplace tech and consultancy services. Now in its fourth year of expansion in the North East, CMYK has secured major contracts with some of the region's fastest-growing firms and sector leaders, including Unipres, Opencast, Serios Group, Ubisoft and Tyneside Surgical Services to name a few.

Craig commented; "Since the launch of CMYK Newcastle back in December 2020, we've featured in Northern Insight, and it's brilliant to grace the cover again this month and continue to share our journey. We've had another fantastic year, with major internal process changes and a brand-new look and website launch – reflecting our position as a leading tech provider."

CMYK offers six core technology services: Managed IT Services, consultancy, hardware procurement, licensing and associated support, Managed Print and Integrated Scanning Services, Cloud Telecoms and Mobile; Business Connectivity, Cloud Services and Visitor & Access Management Solutions.

Over the past year, the company has focused on enhancing operational efficiencies to benefit its clients. They have obtained two additional ISO Accreditations: ISO 45001 (Health & Safety Management) and ISO 22301 (Business Continuity Management), bringing their total to five ISO accreditations. They have also made significant investments in a new CRM system and a cutting-edge IT service management platform.

CMYK's network spans the entire UK, with branches in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen, Warrington, London, and Newcastle. The company prioritises forming local partnerships and continues

to nurture relationships with leading sector groups, such as the North East Engineering and Manufacturing Network, the North East Automotive Alliance, and the Entrepreneurs Forum. These partnerships connect CMYK to industry networks and showcase their expertise and service offerings.

In April 2024, CMYK won the 'SME of the Year' category at the North East Automotive Alliance Awards, a significant achievement for the company.

Sarah remarked; "It's been a busy year for us as we've continued to grow and have invested in improving operational efficiencies to benefit our customers. Our customer-centric approach is at the heart of everything we do at CMYK, so winning an award at the NEAA Awards was a real highlight of the year so far. This award demonstrates the fantastic job our team is doing to support our clients throughout the region and beyond."

With a substantial increase in turnover during the last financial year and several new client onboards in the pipeline, CMYK is set to expand its team further. The company plans to recruit for marketing, sales and technical roles in the near future.

Craig added; "September always marks a crucial point in our careers, prompting us to reflect on our journey. I'm delighted with our progress to date; our growth has been remarkable again this year. What we've achieved in such a short time speaks volumes about the brilliant team at CMYK. It's been incredibly hard work and continues to be, but it's equally rewarding. Watching the team grow and adapt to meet future planned projects is fantastic – everyone has been vital in getting us to where we are now and where we aim to be."

**For more details on how CMYK can assist your business, please get in touch with Craig or Sarah.**

**[c.pratt@cmyk-digital.co.uk](mailto:c.pratt@cmyk-digital.co.uk)**

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## St. James' STACK proves it's top of the league

The new St. James' STACK presented by Sela has struck its first goal, after welcoming tens of thousands of visitors over its first weekend.

**The eagerly awaited fanzone, created as a partnership between Newcastle United and STACK, opened its doors early August with queues of eager fans lining up to be the first to take a look.**

And from that moment until Sunday a staggering 38,000 people walked through the doors, with more than 26,000 pints pulled in four days.

The container hub – which has created 165 full and part time jobs – is also home to a range of top street food traders who have reported record sales since the venue launched.

Rob West of Davey's Mexicano said the

response had been “absolutely incredible.”

“We opened at noon on the first day and we were planning for a bit of a soft launch,” said Rob.

“But we were busy from the word go and it has not stopped all week, it's been absolutely fantastic.

“We thought it might quieten down a little bit midweek but that absolutely hasn't been the case. We've been overwhelmed with the response.”

His words were echoed by Garry Overs of Texas Smoker, from whom opening at St. James' STACK presented by Sela is a welcome return to the city.

“We were in the original STACK and then we've been busy at festivals up and down the country,” he said.

“But when the opportunity came up to be in the fanzone we knew it was great way for us to be back in Newcastle again and it has been absolutely amazing.

“It's a great venue for everyone and we have hardly stopped for breath from the minute it opened.”

Neill Winch, CEO of STACK, is delighted with the way everyone has embraced the new venue.

“We knew before we opened the level of interest and excitement there was for STACK to make a return to the city and how special

this project was for NUFC fans,” he said.

“But it was still incredible to see people turn out in their thousands to enjoy the fanzone in its first weekend.

“The feedback from both visitors and traders has been overwhelmingly positive, which has left everyone feeling immensely proud. It's been an honour to create a venue that truly resonates with the club and the community, and we can't wait to welcome fans throughout the season ahead.

Newcastle United's Chief Operating Officer, Brad Miller, said: “The response to the first week of St. James' STACK, presented by Sela, has been overwhelmingly positive.”

“The fanzone has proven popular not only with match-goers over the Sela Weekender, but throughout the week with the diverse events and entertainment on offer. We want this to be the best fanzone in the country in terms of quality and the varied offering for people of all ages.

“Huge congratulations to all the team behind STACK, in what has been a great opening week which has only been possible due to the collaboration and hard work of all stakeholders involved. Football fans and the people of Newcastle have had a great time visiting the venue and there is so much more to come.”

[stjamesstack.co.uk](http://stjamesstack.co.uk)



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# The 'not-so-top-secret' Secret to Business Growth

There is nothing that sucks cash like growth in a company.

**I know this as I'm taking both Just Williams and The Just Williams Sales Academy on a journey - and its expensive, time consuming and tough. The phrase "Cash is King" we hear frequently and unless you're raising investment of some kind, your cash for growth comes from Sales.**

Growth comes from new business but more importantly looking after your existing customers. Take a moment to stop and think about how much of your company's income is raised from long-term or repeat customers? And, importantly, what would happen to your bottom line if one day, they all found a new supplier and walked away? Do you have a genuine relationship with them? Do you even have a true retention strategy to make sure you're looking after them throughout their own journey with you? Because let's not forget, if you aren't looking after your existing customers well, there is always someone else who will!

New business is often seen as the 'way to grow' for many companies we work with, but ultimately, we know it costs significantly more to prospect, convert and onboard new customers rather than potentially increasing an existing spend by improving relationships. So why do we continually push new business over improving existing?

We presume our customers know all the services and solutions we offer yet rarely do they. The reason they came to us is not always the reason they stay or even relevant anymore. When was the last time you had a deep and meaningful conversation with them?!

Here are a few questions to consider this month:

1. Would your existing customers describe the capabilities of your business in the same way that you would?
2. What's your Customer Lifetime Value, and what do you want it to be?
3. How would you rate your organisation on Customer Service delivery?
4. How would your customers rate you on this?
5. Are your existing marketing activities and sales engagements portraying your organisations in the way you wish?

Growth comes from existing customers as much as it does from new business.

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Andrew Silver

## How to create sustainable growth

“Be the change you want to see in the world”

- Mahatma Gandhi

**For over 30 years, I have been involved in people and business growth, working for both large companies, PE backed SMEs and smaller startups in the UK, as well organisations based in Europe and the US.**

Now, I run 360 Growth Partners, where we work closely with SMEs in the North East to help them achieve their growth goals. Over this time I've identified several key factors that lead to accelerated business growth and long-term success which you'll find below. I hope these insights inspire you to reflect and encourage you to contemplate your own growth journey.

### **Growth requires new learning**

If we solely rely on our own experiences and journey, we are likely to fall short. Make an honest assessment about what you do and don't know and start to build a team (internally and externally) that can help you fulfil your potential. In my experience, the

best entrepreneurs and visionaries have made that assessment and developed the right talent to help realise their vision.

### **Create a clear, visible and well-funded growth plan**

'A vision without a plan is just a dream.' Take the time to collaboratively create your plan with the team that are going to make it happen. McKinsey state that one of the top traits of high performing teams is 'aligned direction' where the team know the why, what, and how, and the role they play as individuals.

### **Develop a robust performance management culture**

Successful teams have a shared vision, understand their collective and individual roles and responsibilities. They have worked out their style of play (core values and behaviours) and have clear measures for success. Celebrate the small wins on the way and put in a performance management structure that holds everyone to account, starting with the leaders!

### **Know where you make your money and where you lose it**

Growth in turnover and profit is a good start but understanding what or who is creating it provides the stimulus for accelerated growth in the future. Create the right financial and KPI reporting to help you analyse what is and isn't working. It has never ceased to amaze me how many businesses are working in the dark when it comes to understanding the 'dials' to turn to make more money.

### **Leaders should be leading not doing**

Leaders need time to lead and reflect – it is where change happens. Get outside the comfort of your own business and network with other business leaders who have other experiences. Create the structure and environment for delegated decision making, as the saying goes know when to 'get off the pitch and let the team play.'

### **Build the capability of your team**

Having worked for Virgin twice in my career Richard Branson's focus on 'people' has stayed with me. Reflect on how your people are growing, as individuals and as teams. Where the next leaders are coming from. Are they ready? Grasp the nettle early where it isn't working but always do it fairly and with respect for the individual. The capability of your team needs to match the ambitions of your company.

### **Be bold and build your resilience**

Sometimes you must go with your gut. The only certainty is uncertainty and perfection doesn't exist in the world of work. Identify how you can be the best version of yourself and try to be that person every day. That will mean understanding yourself - when to rest, when to work, who to talk to for support, and looking after your own mental and physical health. Without this you can't do the rest.

***If you would like to discuss your own entrepreneurial journey and the challenges you are facing then please get in touch and let's start the conversation.***

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# THE MAGIC OF NORTH NORTHUMBERLAND



Sanderson Young are delighted to showcase a selection of homes from the finest towns and villages in North Northumberland. The least populated county in England enjoys stunning scenery, rolling hills, a heritage coastline with stunning beaches and many historical sights.

North Northumberland has some of the most stunning and tranquil beaches in the country with sweeping bays & hidden coves, along with historic castles, such as the infamous Bamburgh Castle, an array of golf courses and seafood restaurants. This magnificent coastline offers a fantastic lifestyle and a great choice of properties.

If you're looking for a more rural location, Northumberland offers a wealth of open spaces, much of it fertile farmland,

together with both modern and ancient woodlands, sparkling streams, quiet lanes and thriving hedgerows. With National Park landscapes, including the Cheviot & Simonside hills, Northumberland offers many celebrated views.

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

**Gillian Greaves**

**01665 600 170**

***[gillian.greaves@sandersonyoung.co.uk](mailto:gillian.greaves@sandersonyoung.co.uk)***







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## *Riverbank House*

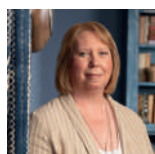
*River Bank Road, Alnmouth*

Riverbank House offers a unique opportunity for those seeking a special main or second home, on arguably one of the most premium sites in this historic village. The impressive, stone built, period property has superb accommodation with many original features, and fantastic open views. The terraced gardens running down to the estuary are fabulous, and there is a lovely summerhouse and a boathouse. No upward chain. Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax: E.



4 3 2 D

**Price Guide:**  
£950,000



**Gillian Greaves**

**01665 600 170**

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## *Glororum Farmhouse* *Glororum, Bamburgh*

Rare opportunity to acquire a stunning, stone built, period farmhouse with a lovely private garden of circa 0.9 acres and fabulous open views to surrounding fields and countryside. Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax Band: F.

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 6  3  3  F

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### **Price Guide:**

Offers over £895,000

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**Gillian Greaves**

**01665 600 170**

[gillian.greaves@sandersonyoung.co.uk](mailto:gillian.greaves@sandersonyoung.co.uk)







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## *Swansfield View* *Alnwick*

Swansfield View is a stylish and contemporary, architect designed house located on a beautiful garden site of approx. 0.4 acres with fabulous, south facing open views over surrounding farmland and Alnwick Golf Course. This impressive, highly insulated, timber framed detached family home has versatile accommodation and incorporates large fully double glazed, full height windows providing excellent natural light. Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax Band: G.



4 3 3 C

**Price Guide:**  
£1 Million



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







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## *Bridge End*

*Bridge Street, Warkworth*

Bridge End is a fabulous, detached, family home, undoubtedly the principal residential dwelling within this popular Northumbrian coastal village. The magnificent Grade II listed property, built circa 1690, has been modernised to create a very special home with 8000 sq ft of accommodation including an annexe and retaining many period features. Bridge End enjoys an extremely private walled garden of 0.6 acres. Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax Band: G.



10 4 4

**Price Guide:**  
Offers over £1.5 Million



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





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## *East Thornton Farm* *North Side, Morpeth*

This equestrian lover's dream home sits within circa 30 acres of grounds and paddocks with an outstanding traditional stone farmhouse, lovingly upgraded by the owners. The impressive equestrian complex has extensive facilities including outdoor/barn stabling, a horse walker and solarium, outdoor/indoor arenas, a canter track and multiple feed/store rooms. There is also a triple garage with a 1 bed apartment above. Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax Band: G.



5 3 3 E

**Price Guide:**  
£2.95 Million



**Mandy Denning**  
**0191 223 3500**  
[mandy.denning@sandersonyoung.co.uk](mailto:mandy.denning@sandersonyoung.co.uk)





# THE BIG INTERVIEW

## Castle Peak Group – doing executive search the right way

Driven by Diversity and Inclusion.

When it comes to Executive Search Recruitment, the name of Castle Peak Group will be new to most of you.

**However, when you spot that the founder is James Carss, there will be a collective nod in agreement that this will be a recruitment firm that knows what it's doing and will be doing things the right way.**

Why? For the simple reason that James is one of the most well-known and respected people in the recruitment business...especially Executive Search. That's not just here in the North East, it's across the entire UK. His incredible level of experience means you will be getting the sort of service you'd expect from a London-based agency rather than one here in the region.

You'll also be able to find out precisely how James works because you'll be dealing with him. When you make your first contact with Castle Peak Group to discuss what you're looking for in terms of a candidate or whether you're looking for a particular position, you'll be dealt with by James.

Once James and his team have done their research, the process will then begin as to what happens next in terms of providing either a small, vetted group of candidates or some relevant positions that you would be suitable for. At this point you will once again be dealt with by James.

Behind everything that James does he has one driving passion.

Diversity and Inclusion.

"At Castle Peak Group we're an Executive Search consultancy working with like-minded organisations that share our belief in the importance of diversity and inclusion in the workplace," said James. "In today's world, we know that diversity, through the lens of ability, race, neurodiversity, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and beyond, helps strengthen organisations. But there is still much work to be done, and that's something we're actively working to change.

I've lost count of the number of times I've spoken to a board of directors about recruitment and then I spot that the workforce is nothing like the people I've just left in the boardroom. They

also look nothing like the customers they're dealing with. The boardroom should reflect the company's workforce and customer base otherwise it can make life difficult when it comes to both parties understanding each other. If there are similarities, then it can make life a lot easier and frequently more comfortable for everyone. It can certainly make your business more efficient and profitable if all parties can relate to each other."

These are not token or box-ticking gestures but values that James feels are close to his heart. He's part of a mixed race family with mixed race bilingual children and also grew up with a hidden disability. Both of these factors have contributed to his desire and passion for Castle Peak Group to be different and, along with providing first class Executive Search services, also be a champion for underrepresented groups at Board level.

There's a world of difference between saying you are a diverse workplace, and actually being one.

"We offer clients a unique evaluation framework, designed to go deep and strengthen their organisation from the inside out. We know from experience that when a workplace practises inclusive leadership and inclusive recruitment, they'll naturally build inclusive high-performing workplaces where people are content, valued, and feel like they belong...recognising the need to address the glaring issue of inequality in the workplace."

As we said at the start, Castle Peak Group does recruitment the right way. They can certainly help transform your business.

**For more information, you can contact James Carss by calling 07802 531040 or emailing [info@castlepeak-group.com](mailto:info@castlepeak-group.com)**

**You'll also find out more details by logging on to [www.castlepeak-group.com](http://www.castlepeak-group.com)**





“

*...The  
boardroom  
should reflect  
the company's  
workforce and  
customer base...*

*James Carss*





## Revolutionary New Software as a Service Company, KLIK SaaS

The historic Globe Theatre, Stockton-on-Tees, recently hosted a VIP launch of KLIK UK (SaaS) Ltd – the game changing tech company founded by industry expert and entrepreneur, Kelly M. Whitfield.

The iconic stage was set for an intimate Q&A with the founder herself, alongside exclusive previews of KLIK's ability to power an unlimited number of Platform as a Service (PaaS) businesses and communities with social value and skills at heart.

Sponsored by Boodles, the red-carpet attracted industry leaders, innovators and investors, who celebrated the unveiling of KLIK's hybrid platform technology.











## Johnston Carmichael boosts North East presence

**UK accountancy and business advisory firm Johnston Carmichael has firmly established its North East presence, moving into a larger Newcastle office and welcoming a stream of new talent.**

The firm has experienced a positive reception since launching in the city towards the end of last year, leading to a regional recruitment campaign to bolster its team.

Over recent months the Newcastle team has expanded to a total of 12,

with a recruitment drive still underway to attract more specialists and grow the team further before the end of the year. The most recent new team members include, Omotola Alex-Taiwo, Audit Manager; Stuart Gardiner, Business Advisory Manager; and Geoff Logan, Audit Assistant Manager.

The firm has also expanded into a new 840 sq. ft office at Maybrook House, Grainger Street, in the centre of the city. The new office is over 50 percent larger than Johnston Carmichael's previous space in Newcastle, opening up room for further growth.

Paul Shields, Partner and Newcastle office lead, has been instrumental in Johnston Carmichael's North East growth and has ambitious plans for further expanding the business' offering in the region. He said: "We have had an incredible reception since launching in the region last October, which has helped us to invest in creating more roles and bring more services locally for our clients. Our Newcastle office is focused on advising and supporting the region's most prominent sectors and ambitious businesses, including real specialist skills in engineering and manufacturing, food and drink, property and tech.

"We are continuing our drive for growth and are open to conversations with people who are looking to join a progressive, independent accountancy firm. We currently have openings in Audit, Corporation Tax, Private Client Tax, and VAT. We will also be welcoming graduates into our Audit team from January 2025, marking a significant milestone for the office. We look forward to collaborating with the next generation of accounting and advisory professionals and continuing to deliver exceptional service for our clients."

## Robson Laidler welcomes five new apprentices

**A new generation of aspiring accountants have been given a step up the career ladder by award winning accountancy firm Robson Laidler as it launches its own training academy.**

Based in Jesmond and Chester le Street, the accountancy and advisory firm which has been listed in the Sunday Times Best Places to Work Awards 2024 has launched a comprehensive apprenticeship programme to recruit and develop the brightest new talent in its industry.

It guarantees apprentices a fully funded structured learning programme, personal development and study time, behavioural mapping, support from a dedicated mentor and a recognised accountancy qualification at the end of the programme through the Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT) and the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW).

The launch comes after years of successful apprenticeships and graduate training opportunities at the firm, which has welcomed five of its latest new trainees as accounts assistants; Joseph Pinkney, Adam Gill and Robyn Arkley who will be based in Chester le Street and James Irving and Ben Hoggeth who will be based in the firm's Jesmond office.

Associate director Georgina Rutter who has worked at the firm for seven years and started her career as an apprentice herself, is now a mentor to the new apprentices. She said: "The RL training academy is a sign of the Firm's continued investment in talent development. The programme offers a clear development path with varied skills-based training and experience across all departments in our firm, so the apprentices can naturally find where their strengths and preferences lie.

New accounts assistant Adam Gill said: "I am so pleased to be joining such a well-respected and forward-thinking firm.



"I didn't think an apprenticeship was the route I wanted to go down and originally had my sights set on university. I attended the RL apprentice open evening last autumn and it completely transformed my thinking."

All staff at Robson Laidler also receive regular 1-2-1s with their line managers and soft skills training delivered through lunch and learn sessions, podcasts and recorded presentations. In addition, the team also benefits from a range of health and wellbeing initiatives, including flexible working options, birthdays off, a benefits scheme with access to discounts at a range of supermarkets, stores, cinemas and popular restaurants, a confidential Employee Assistance Programme and long service awards.

Robson Laidler works closely with Kaplan UK in Newcastle to provide AAT apprenticeships for 16 and 18-year-olds, as well as graduate ACA apprenticeships.



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# RMT Accountants putting growth plans into action as it celebrates its 70th anniversary



**In a year full of business milestones, one of the North East's best-regarded professional services firms has reached a landmark birthday.**

**RMT Accountants & Business Advisors is celebrating the 70th anniversary of its foundation in Newcastle, since when it has remained a constant and successful part of the region's professional services community.**

And after last year becoming part of Sumer, the UK's fastest-growing accountancy group, through a co-investment agreement, RMT is now firmly focused on continuing to expand its client base and range of services.

RMT traces its roots back to 1954, when Robert Miller and Stanley Tate opened an accountancy practice on Newcastle's iconic Quayside.

Mike Pott, managing director at RMT Accountants & Business Advisors, says: "The North East has changed out of all recognition over the last 70 years and we're immensely proud that RMT has remained an integral part of its professional services community ever since.

"Our move to Gosforth Park 20 years ago was

a key milestone in RMT's history, laying the foundations for everything we've become today - and we now have a strategic plan in place to move our business on to the next level."

RMT provides the full range of financial and business advisory services through its specialist teams, and works with companies of all sizes within and outside the North East, as well as internationally.

Its medical and healthcare division is the largest, dedicated specialist team in the UK outside London and acts for well over 1,000 medical professionals, while RMT was also one of the first independent accountancy firms to set up its own IT/technology business, RMT Technology.

Mike Pott continues: "We believe that no other regional practice offers the breadth of services that we have available while also providing the level of personal involvement and collaboration that so often makes the difference to meeting clients' commercial and personal goals.

"Maintaining this position requires us to be constantly adapting, upgrading and adding to the services we provide, and the last 12 months has seen some major developments in this area."

Becoming part of Sumer, which now has eleven regional accountancy Hubs with more than 40 offices and over 1,300 colleagues, has made growth by acquisition a key part of its RMT's commercial strategy

- and it has already completed two such transactions, with others potentially in the offing.

The acquisition at the end of last year of Newcastle and Hexham-based McCowie & Co has enabled RMT to grow its presence in the rural and agricultural sector, while more recently, RMT has joined forces with Durham-headquartered Ribchesters Chartered Accountants, which now operates as RMT Ribchesters.

Mike Pott continues: "Becoming part of a nationwide organisation like Sumer, with a clear strategy for growth, is providing us with opportunities to bring in additional expertise to enhance the services we offer to our clients.

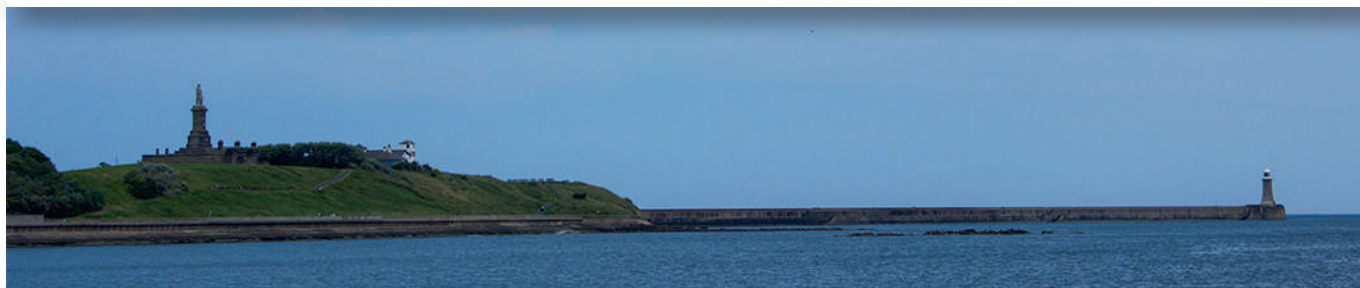
"Bringing the McCowie & Co and RMT Ribchesters teams on board demonstrates how this can be achieved for the benefit of all parties.

"With the Big Four firms becoming ever more remote and smaller practices experiencing the pressure of an ever-increasing regulatory burden, the opportunities for firms like RMT have never been greater.

"Our team and our client base continue to grow significantly and we see no limit to future expansion, with the progress we've made over the last year being just the start of our ambitions."

[www.r-m-t.co.uk](http://www.r-m-t.co.uk)





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Andrew Marsh



# Elite Teams

Is your leadership lack-lustre, with vague direction, vague focus and poor or just okay results? If so, you missed a golden opportunity to learn how to change that by not being a Vistage member.

**North East Vistage members were treated to keynote speaker this month that focused on the building, leading and development of Elite Teams.**

Over two days, Andrew Marsh's cohorts enjoyed the company of Pete Wilkinson, founder and CEO of Reclaro and esteemed Vistage presenter. Andrew is the chair of three North East groups that cover all bases of leadership from CEO's, business owners and influential decision makers.

Using his theory of aligning teams for remarkable results, Pete asked the attendees are you prepared to do what it takes to build lead and continuously develop an Elite Team?

He said: "It's not easy to build an elite team and most businesses don't employ with that well planned selection process that allows for that. Elite teams have crystal clear focus, routines and processes and are constantly tested and evaluated. By using a simplified strategy and leading from the top, little changes can lead to big results."

The fast-paced event saw the attendees who range from many industries including technology, healthcare, charity, financial services, marketing, retail, industrial, mechanical and digital, not only learning important steps but also working out how they would apply them to their own workplace.

Starting with building the elite team, Pete looked at recruitment processes, company reputation in the marketplace, communication, team charters and what elite would actually look like in each of the attendee's own businesses. It was an interactive start enjoyed by all with some strong key takeaways including:

- People make the difference
- Small smart choices + consistency + time = radical change
- Share the vision, the successes and be mindful that there should be no space for D\*\*kheads.

Andrew said: "This part of the presentation was really lively with everyone introspectively looking at what they do with marketing, recruitment, and building that great team. We all recognised the improvements needed to be made which lined us up perfectly for the next part, Leading An Elite Team."

Clearly defined objectives, shared vision, companywide collaboration, agreed outcomes, routines and processes where all discussed with Pete drawing attention to the Standard Operating Procedures in The British Army.



He drew us into the three major practices that enable Elite people to ensure that basics are done well on a daily and weekly basis.

Focus. Routine. Discipline.

Performance management structures were examined, with the conclusion that clear direction, objectives and expected outcomes along with discipline = success.

The pursuit of excellence was the next topic, and how the commitment to ongoing development makes the difference. Using a quote from Ray Dalio, Pete geared everyone up to look at their training offering, investment in their teams and what actions they need to take in their own businesses.

"Constantly train, test, evaluate and sort people."

Andrew concluded: "Pete motivated everyone to improve something in their own business. At Vistage, this is our main driver, to help our member's companies perform better, hit new heights and create stronger bottom lines.

"If you think you would have benefited from this session and want to hear what I have planned for my cohorts in the coming months, then do get in touch to discuss attendance and membership."

**You can contact Andrew on  
[Andrew.Marsh@Vistagechair.co.uk](mailto:Andrew.Marsh@Vistagechair.co.uk)**





L-R: Claire Thew and Clare Blunt

## Venture Zero set to connect more organisations

A company formed by two experts in different fields is set to help more organisations create socially and environmentally connected workplaces thanks to the support from a philanthropic support structure.

**The Experience Bank™ was founded by Peter Neal to help small organisations with purpose, by introducing them to a plethora of experienced NEDs and board advisors, enabling them to grow and thrive.**

Owners of Venture Zero, Clare Blunt and Claire Thew were introduced to Peter via the NatWest Accelerator, and he immediately saw how he could help them.

Between Clare and Claire's experience, Venture Zero is unique in the space they are

working in, bringing an holistic approach viewed through the lens of sustainable wellbeing. Working with organisations such as Newcastle Building Society, Sage, Ward Hadaway, Quorum Business Park, Newcastle University, Tyneside Cinema and Axa Health, the team help navigation through uncertainty, disruption and change, because of challenges with mental health, hybrid working, the climate crisis and much more.

And now poised to help more, an advisory board of four experts has been formed, thanks to introductions via The Experience Bank™.

Miriam Harte brings a host of experience in the charity and third sector; Susan Bell has a plethora of knowledge about IT and coaching; David Horn is a successful business owner bringing lived in focus and Kieran James comes from a background in finance.

Claire Thew said: "Peter introduced us to a great choice of board advisors who were interested in supporting us having seen our pitch deck. We are delighted to be working with the four we chose, as all had something different that we thought useful for us at the current time – we are also confident that others we spoke with will be right to reconnect later in the future."

The newly formed team meet once a quarter face to face, with the board advisors bringing invaluable experience and knowledge sharing.

Clare Blunt said: "Working with The Experience Bank™ was a great experience, informal and relaxed, as Peter talked through the process and what was expected. He gave us pointers for our pitch deck to attract the

best offers of support and encouraged us to touch base with all responders.

"He held our hand and was informative on some extra considerations of candidates without influencing us. Peter has checked in regularly since, and we can't recommend the process to other organisations wanting to grow and needing philanthropic help to get to the next stage. Because of the support our mental health first aid training and carbon health training is available to even more people, having an even bigger impact on our region's business community."

Venture Zero launched a business forum earlier this year - the Sustainable Wellbeing Forum. The aim has been to create a North East network of businesses that are purpose driven doing great stuff and want to share; or those who want to do better in community and society, wellbeing and the environment. The forum is an Informal network setting with speakers, activities and a networking breakfast, sharing ideas of good practice of what can be done in the different areas.

Peter, who has helped scores of purpose-led businesses achieve more, said: "Venture Zero represents something that is becoming a pressure for many businesses, to have a positive impact on people, our planet and their own profitability by developing socially and environmentally connected workplaces. It has been a honour to support them and I will be watching their progress with interest!"

[www.venturezero.co.uk](http://www.venturezero.co.uk)  
[www.theexperiencebank.co.uk](http://www.theexperiencebank.co.uk)



# Meet the team...

## Jason Ryan

*Senior Investment Assistant,  
Raymond James Monument*

In a career spanning over 33 years, it is fair to say that the world of financial planning and investments has evolved significantly. Jason, a highly experienced investment assistant, is rolling back the clock to help provide a truly personalised service.

**Having dedicated over three decades of his life to the financial services industry, Jason continues his unwavering commitment to help support his Raymond James, Monument colleagues deliver tailored investment solutions to clients across the North East and beyond.**

Jason's career began in 1989 at the Co-Operative Bank where he quickly developed his numerical aptitude and interest in investments. Two years later, he joined then Wise Speke Financial Services and spent the next 32 years providing dedicated administrative support and quickly became known as an expert in trading systems. Having built up his vast experience, Jason's passion for offering a more personalised service led him to accept a role as a Senior Investment Assistant at Raymond James, Monument in 2023.

Over the years, Jason has witnessed a seismic shift in the financial services landscape where the world of traditional stockbroking evolved into a comprehensive wealth management service, offering holistic financial planning advice and tailored investment solutions to a wide range of clients. In recent years, he has noticed the significant consolidation of the sector which has led to the centralisation of personnel and investment services and feels that the personal touch is becoming lost. Given this, and despite the inertia, Jason sought the opportunity to join the team at Raymond James, Monument – a firm committed to ensuring client's interests are at the heart of everything they do.



Jason Ryan

Although Jason has spent three decades working in financial services, he has never lost sight of the most important aspect of his role – the client. Throughout his career, he has seen significant technological advancements, several 'boom and busts', geopolitical events and regulatory changes. Despite these, Jason has helped support his colleagues navigate clients through these times. His understanding of investment markets, comprehensive administrative expertise and operational efficiency is something that is extremely valued by the team at Raymond James, Monument as they continue their ambition to be the Wealth Manager of choice in and around the region. Beyond the world of work, Jason is well known in the region to be a passionate football fan and an avid sportsman. Despite his roots being from the North East, he is a self-confessed Tottenham Hotspur supporter which naturally provides regular office debates! He also continues to enjoy playing

11-a-side football and the odd round of golf from time to time.

Jason lives with his wife, Joanne and their son, Jack. Together, they love exploring local attractions, especially those managed by the National Trust, and walking the region's beautiful beaches.

*For more information about Raymond James, Monument, and how its expert team could help map your financial future, email [RJUK-Monument@RaymondJames.com](mailto:RJUK-Monument@RaymondJames.com), call 0191 303 4260, or contact us via our website. Any opinion or forecast reflects the judgment as at the date of issue and is subject to change without notice. This commentary is intended for information purposes only and no action should be taken, or refrained from being taken, as a consequence without consulting a suitably qualified and regulated person. With investing, your capital is at risk.*

**[www.Monument.RaymondJames.uk.com](http://www.Monument.RaymondJames.uk.com)**





## Fairley Gunn Group expands Radiography Division presence with acquisition of x-ray technology specialists

**Fairley Gunn Group, a North East-based engineering services group, has continued its ambitious growth strategy with the acquisition of X-ray technology specialist Axi-Tek Ltd and its wholly owned subsidiary Metrix NDT Ltd.**

The acquisition strengthens Fairley Gunn Group's position in the UK and Ireland Non-Destructive Testing (NDT) market and expands its geographic footprint.

Midlands-based X-ray technology specialist, Axi-Tek was founded in 2012 and the business acquired Metrix NDT in 2020. Metrix, which is a supplier and designer of x-ray inspection components, systems and services, provides manufacturers, universities, research organisations and technology innovators with standard and bespoke digital radiography inspection systems.

Nicholas Fox, the former Managing Director and technical lead of Metrix, will continue to work with the business, alongside Fairley Gunn Group to ensure continuity with existing clients and to help develop new opportunities for the Group.

This transaction marks the fourth acquisition by Fairley Gunn Group since it was founded by Peter Fairley and Jonathan James-Gunn in 2021. The Group, which employs more than 40 people and turns over in excess of £5.5m, was formed after it acquired Jarrow-based NDT Electronic Services, which is a supplier of industrial radiography equipment and systems.

The Group subsequently acquired Northumberland-based Gilligan Engineering Services, which supplies and services industrial gamma radiography equipment, systems and sources for the NDT industry, and Select Controls Systems, located in Gateshead, which designs and manufactures control panel and automation systems for a range of sectors.

Fairley Gunn Group aims to continue its organic and acquisitive growth through a fundraising programme, which will be led by leading Newcastle-based RG Corporate Finance (RGCF).



## TaperedPlus secures £5.5m investment to propel business growth

**TaperedPlus, a specialist in flat roof design and insulation, has secured a £5.5 million investment from BGF to support its ambitious growth plans.**

The deal, which also provides an exit for original investor Comhar Capital, enables the Tees Valley-headquartered business to bring a greater technology-led focus to its operations, while enhancing customer experience and strengthening relationships with supply chain partners.

Founded in 2014 by Aman Chahal and Robert Vass, TaperedPlus has quickly established itself as a national leader in the provision of tech-enabled architectural design services for complex flat and tapered roof projects - enhancing the performance, safety, and sustainability of buildings.

Based in Stockton-on-Tees, with a technical design studio in Wolverhampton, it operates across multiple sectors, including health, education, and retail. It also provides additional services in technical specifications such as BIM, acoustic, thermal measuring, and surveying.

The investment from BGF, the UK and Ireland's most active growth capital investor, marks a significant milestone for TaperedPlus as it seeks to elevate the independent business to new heights.

As part of the investment, Martin Holt will join TaperedPlus as a non-executive chair. Holt brings extensive experience from the building compliance and technical services sector, and his expertise in developing proprietary tech-enabled services will be crucial in achieving the company's ambitious goals.

Aman Chahal, co-founder and CEO of TaperedPlus, said: "Following a great relationship with Comhar Capital, we were seeking an investment partner to help us expand further while maintaining control of the business. BGF stood out for their culture, values, and relationship-led approach. We are excited to work together to take TaperedPlus to the next level."

Rob Johnson, BGF investor, added: "We're thrilled to back Aman and Rob, who have positioned TaperedPlus as a leader in its field, with innovation and sustainability at the core of their operations. We look forward to supporting the team and aligning our patient capital model with their vision for growth."

Comhar Capital Managing Director, Craig Wilkinson, said: "It has been a pleasure working with Aman and Rob. We're delighted they've found a partner in BGF to continue their impressive growth journey. We wish them all the best for the future."



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**Peter Cromarty**

E: [peter@ccbsg.co.uk](mailto:peter@ccbsg.co.uk)  
M: 07715 409 386

**Graeme Harrison**

E: [graeme@ccbsg.co.uk](mailto:graeme@ccbsg.co.uk)  
M: 07719 560 356



**Matt Lister**

E: [matt@ccbsg.co.uk](mailto:matt@ccbsg.co.uk)  
M: 07572 854 284

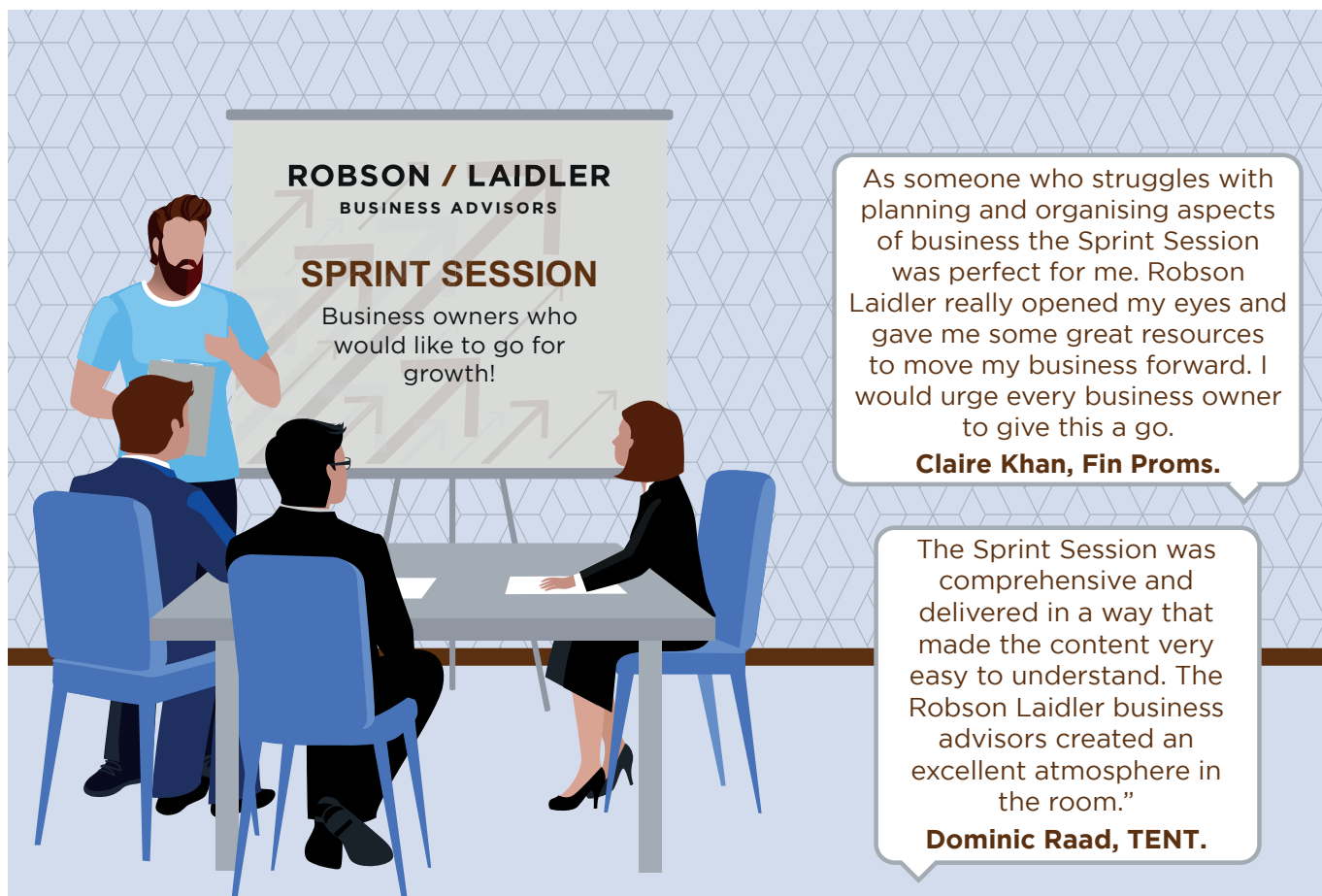


**Steven Foley**

E: [steven@ccbsg.co.uk](mailto:steven@ccbsg.co.uk)  
M: 07561 475 864







As someone who struggles with planning and organising aspects of business the Sprint Session was perfect for me. Robson Laidler really opened my eyes and gave me some great resources to move my business forward. I would urge every business owner to give this a go.

**Claire Khan, Fin Proms.**

The Sprint Session was comprehensive and delivered in a way that made the content very easy to understand. The Robson Laidler business advisors created an excellent atmosphere in the room."

**Dominic Raad, TENT.**

## Accelerate Your Business With Robson Laidler's Sprint Session!

The Sprint Sessions are for business owners who would like to go for growth.

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# Newcastle Building Society bucking the trend



**Newcastle Building Society is bucking the national trend of bank branch closures and putting financial services and advice back on our high streets.**

**More than 6,000 bank branches have closed across the UK since 2015, according to data from the consumer body Which?.**

In the North East, a steady flow of banks have decided to pull the branch shutters down permanently, making it harder for some people to access financial services, savings information, and make the most of their hard-earned money.

While the growth of digital banking options means fewer people might visit a branch to manage their money, there are inevitably times when only a branch will do. Branch closures can leave people feeling isolated and abandoned, and there are often-unseen ways that a well-run local branch helps knit a community together.

Happily, one organisation in the region is taking a different approach to the high street banks by growing the number of its branches, and investing heavily in the provision of face-to-face financial services in our communities.

This summer, Newcastle Building Society opened a new branch in North Shields in partnership with YMCA North Tyneside. After moving into the charity's community building, the Society is now providing branch services alongside a busy café, popular gym, and YMCA North Tyneside's impressive range of community support

services. The new branch builds on the success of similar partnership branches in Knaresborough, Yarm, Wooler, and Hawes – each one a community where banks have left town and where the Society has worked with local councils and partners to restore financial services by sharing space alongside facilities such as libraries, tourist information, and even community policing.

Newcastle Building Society will also open a new branch in Pickering, North Yorkshire this year. Another town where banks have left, Newcastle Building Society's new Pickering branch will offer a full range of services that includes maintaining its offering of savings passbooks for its members, together with a banking terminal which will allow small businesses and personal customers of any bank to deposit and withdraw cash from their accounts.

As a mutual organisation, owned by its members, the Society remains focused on putting the needs of the community first and it's this type of innovation and creative thinking which the Society thinks banks could adopt in order to retain their branches on high streets across the UK.

Andrew Haigh, chief executive officer at Newcastle Building Society, said: "Banks continue to close branches across the UK at

an alarming rate, turning their backs on our high streets. Our approach is very different, with customers at the centre of everything we do, we believe it is our responsibility to find new ways to keep face-to-face financial services in our communities.

"We want to be there for our customers week in, week out, providing access, support and advice where and when it is needed. The role of a branch extends beyond its physical presence, our colleagues frequently play an active role in supporting local charities, assisting with financial education in schools or helping with initiatives promoting employability skills."

One of the ways Newcastle Building Society contributes to positive change in its communities is through colleague volunteering. Society colleagues take part in a range of activities, supporting local charities, community groups, and fundraising initiatives. And through local and strategic partnerships, they help improve financial education across the community, delivering workshops on topics including money management and financial scam awareness.

Many Newcastle Building Society branches have a free-to-use community room, which local groups can book for meetings or social gatherings. It's another way the Society aims to provide value to its community and encourage people to visit the high street and use their local branch, even if they aren't customers. Community rooms can be pre booked in the branch.

Future branch plans include the creation of a new flagship community branch in Newcastle city centre, and a 33rd branch in Tynemouth library to be delivered in partnership with North Tyneside Council.

[www.newcastle.co.uk](http://www.newcastle.co.uk)





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Meghan Phillips

## Growing UNW reveals appointment of Corporate Finance Manager

Newcastle-based chartered accountancy and business advisory firm UNW has further strengthened its Corporate Finance team with the appointment of Meghan Phillips as Corporate Finance Manager.

**Meghan, who is ACCA qualified, joins UNW having recently relocated back to her native North East following a decade in the Midlands where she gained a BSc in Mathematics and an MSc in Investments at the University of Birmingham before beginning her career at Cooper Parry as a Graduate Analyst. Positions as Corporate Finance Executive and a Corporate Finance Senior Analyst followed before she decided to move back to Newcastle earlier this year.**

The appointment comes during a period of sustained activity for UNW Corporate Finance which has seen the team recently ranked as the most active financial advisor

in the Insider North East Dealmakers 'Corporate Finance Guide 2024' and 2nd in the Experian MarketIQ H1 report (North East) which ranks firms in order of the volume of deals completed in the first half of the year.

On her decision to join the firm, Meghan said: "When looking to relocate back to the North East, UNW was continually recommended to me due to the quality of the deals being completed and the expertise and knowledge of the team. Their work with entrepreneurs and business owners in the mid-market also stood out as this is predominantly where my experience lies. But most importantly for me, people

are what make the experience, and as soon as I met the team, I could tell I was surrounded by like-minded, ambitious and talented people who would support me professionally but also make my time at UNW enjoyable."

Chris Wilson, Partner and Head of Corporate Finance at UNW, said: "Meghan is a superb addition to the team, and I am delighted that someone with her experience and skillset has chosen to join us on her move back to Newcastle. Her experience will enable her to hit the ground running on some of our ongoing projects and provide valuable advice to our clients moving forward."

"Despite a challenging period for M&A activity generally, with the headlines showing deal volumes and values down across the board, we are delighted to report that UNW has remained consistently active. Our commitment to nurture and develop our existing team, as well as invest in high quality new hires such as Meghan, ensures that we can deploy full-strength and expert deal teams to work closely with our clients, supporting them every step of the way."

[unw.co.uk](http://unw.co.uk)





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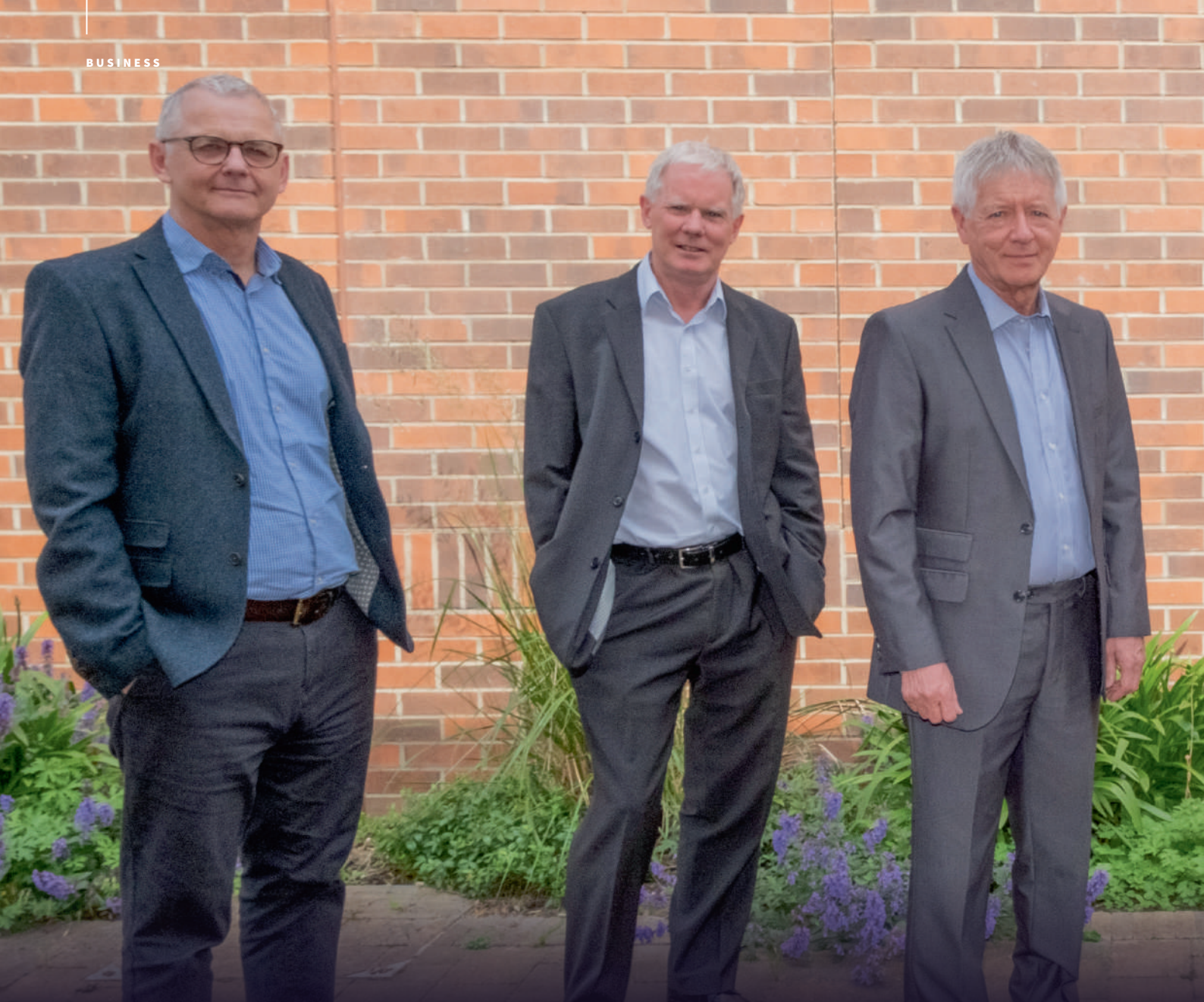
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**SJP Approved 16/07/2024**





## Further growth milestone for Kingsmere Finance Directors

Geoff Maclauchlan founded Kingsmere Finance Directors nearly ten years ago in response to a growing need for businesses navigating the increasingly challenging commercial landscape to access outsourced Finance Director (FD) support. A collaboration of experienced industry FDs, Kingsmere provides high-level strategic financial and operational planning and management guidance, enabling businesses from startups to corporates to increase their financial stability, efficiency, and profitability.

Since founding Kingsmere and in line with the increasing awareness of the need for financial discipline, Geoff has been joined by Finance Manager, Nina Evans, together with fellow established FDs Bob Evans, Harriet King and Steven Jones.

### Maintaining momentum

Prompted by further ongoing demand from businesses for outsourced, part time or 'fractional' FD expertise, the Kingsmere team has again expanded with the recent introduction of four additional FDs - Mike Elliot, Aly Henderson, Rob Jones and Stewart Renfrew, each bringing their own industry experience and expertise.

As well as expanding capacity and scope for clients, the extended team will provide a wider and valuable resource for banks, accountants, lawyers and other professional advisers to access when signposting businesses.

### New starters

Commenting on the expanding team, Geoff said: "The increased demand for financial rigour leading to Kingsmere's continued growth has in part been driven by banks, lenders and investors who understandably want the reassurance of robust internal control of a business' finances through clear and up to date management information. In a constantly evolving commercial world, it has become imperative that businesses have an ongoing and accurate picture of their financial health rather than just a set of accounts six months after year-end."

### Why do businesses need an outsourced FD?

Despite the relentless challenges all businesses face, even successful ones, not every business has the need or resources to employ a





L-R: Steven Jones, Stewart Renfrew, Geoff MacLauchlan, Aly Henderson, Mike Elliot, Bob Evans

full-time, in-house FD. Through a pragmatic consultative approach, Kingsmere fills that gap, working either on specific projects or on an ongoing basis – for as much or as little as the business needs. This flexibility means the FD's input can be dialled up or down as required, for example preparing a business for sale, a funding round or in response to a downturn.

Each business and its owner/s are unique, some fully understand their 'numbers' and simply need reassurance or a 'sounding board' for the CEO/MD. Those more unsure about the financials may need more hands-on practical support, benefitting from an FD's years of industry experience and ability to zero in on where the business is today and where it is going in the future.

Through day-to-day experience of working with businesses, the Kingsmere team has found that a combination of accounting platforms such as Sage or Xero, with a solid lower-level finance or accounting resource and the help of an FD over just a few days a week or month, can lead to considerable time and costs savings.

#### **What if I already have an accountant?**

Most company accountants deal with compliance and tax. An FD complements and supplements an existing accounting resource, deploying their expertise to examine the wider financial health of the business, for example through forecasting or by producing in depth management accounts. The relationship between a part time FD and the business' accountant is therefore mutually supportive and beneficial.

#### **At your side**

Through Kingsmere's collective expertise and experience clients

benefit from an FD hitting the ground running. Following an initial no obligation discussion, support can start immediately, and any issues – such as incomplete management information, VAT problems, cashflow, and funding needs – tackled head-on.

Inflation, interest rates, fixed-rate mortgages ending and skills shortages are some of the many factors leading to economic uncertainty. For those businesses that are finding the climate challenging, Geoff advises: "Ensure that your financial information is completely up to date and accurate. The sooner you identify any issues, the more chance you've got to be able to do something about it. This gives you the opportunity to talk to banks, lenders, turnaround specialists or insolvency practitioners, experts who can provide potential solutions to the problem before it is too late."

#### **Kingsmere's continued evolution**

Commenting on the expanding team, Geoff said: "As my colleagues and I have found when dealing with a wide range of businesses over the years, continued growth inevitably comes from meeting a genuine need for a valued product or service. That is exactly what has happened with Kingsmere – we have developed a tried and tested support model for our clients. The team and I find the variety and positive impact we are making so rewarding with each of the businesses, owners and managers we work with."

***Kingsmere is on the lookout for like-minded FDs seeking a flexible, varied and impactful working life, as well as more junior support roles for activities such as management account production and bookkeeping. For more information visit [www.kfdl.co.uk](http://www.kfdl.co.uk)***





“

*...their belief in  
our vision has  
been key...*

L-R: Christine Stobbs Wilton Engineering and Joanne Whitfield, FW Capital.



# Choosing a funding partner to boost your growth and success

Finding the right funding partner for your business can be a challenging and time-consuming process. It's important to choose someone who shares your vision, understands your market and is willing to support your growth.

**Joanne Whitfield, Fund Director at FW Capital talks about how the right finance provider will support you in more ways than just financially. We also introduce Christine Stobbs from Wilton Engineering who highlights how their relationship with FW Capital has enabled their business to meet unexpected challenges and make the most of opportunities.**

Joanne explains: "Building a relationship with a funding partner who knows your business inside out takes time but this pays off as it ensures you receive support throughout your journey, no matter what the future throws at you.

"Our team work closely with businesses throughout the application process, getting to know the business and ensuring the investment is a right fit, it's not one size fits all. We think it's important to meet every customer and their team. It's not just about us assessing the business, it's also important for the customer to assess us. Are we the kind of people they want to work with for the duration of the investment? Will we support them if things don't go to plan? Will we be able to add value? Our dedicated relationship managers are available every step of the way and take an active interest in each business throughout the investment process.

One business that has benefited from this relationship approach is Teesside-based Wilton Engineering.

Over the past ten years, we have supported Wilton Engineering with £5 million of investment. £3.5 million of this funding was loans to support performance and warranty bonds, helping them win over £50 million of contracts. Further loans totalling £1.5 million safeguarded jobs and supported the acquisition of the neighbouring Haverton Hill site, almost doubling the size of Wilton's original site from 59 acres to 112 acres.

The business has evolved from predominantly working in the offshore and oil and gas sectors to diversifying into renewables and their current focus of defence. Their long term, high value defence contracts have secured their position as one of Teesside's most prominent businesses. It's great to have been alongside them on this journey and they know that we are only ever a phone call away! Our bespoke approach to finance has been key in Wilton Engineering's ability to flex and pivot as market demands have evolved."

Wilton Engineering's Finance Director Christine Stobbs explains: "We are a massive supporter of FW Capital because the team there really take the time to understand

our business. We've enjoyed a long-standing partnership and their belief in our vision has been key.

"FW Capital first supported us when we exited from private equity, sharing our passion to focus back on Teesside. Shortly after this the oil and gas market was significantly impacted by market conditions emulating into an interesting couple of years of repositioning and repurposing the business initially into offshore wind. In tough times cash management and having the right finance partner was going to be an important part of future success. Growth and diversification into new sectors became a reality and FW Capital were there to support us, responding quickly to our requests.

Capacity challenges on the back of our success led to opportunities to expand and new extensive premises were purchased - speed and flexibility was the essence needed to secure the premises as things raced right down to the wire! Today Wilton has increased employee numbers to 256 and continues to develop the local workforce through our apprenticeship program with over 50 apprentices trained and a further 15 joining in the new intake."

Joanne Whitfield continues: "Providing finance is just the start of our journey with businesses as shown with Wilton Engineering. Their vision and ability to adapt to market conditions is the difference. We're keen to support more businesses and our team are currently promoting our new fund - The Teesside Flexible Investment Fund. This follows on from the success of the Tees Valley Catalyst Fund which provided bond finance, facilitating contracts of £107 million across Tees Valley.

"Launched in partnership with the Teesside Pension Fund, the Teesside Flexible Investment Fund provides investment ranging from £100,000 to £3 million and supports 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."

***If you're a business in the North East looking for finance, get in touch to find out more about how we can help. Call 0191 269 6969 or email [info@fwcapital.co.uk](mailto:info@fwcapital.co.uk) You'll also find additional details on website [www.fwcapital.co.uk](http://www.fwcapital.co.uk)***



# Tier One Capital and Central Employment team up to support Durham Cricket



L-R: Steve Hart, Director at Central Employment, cricketers Haydon Mustard and Bas De Leede with Paul Blight, Head of Wealth Management at Tier One Capital

Newcastle upon Tyne-based wealth and fund management experts, Tier One Capital and recruitment and training specialists, Central Employment, have formed a partnership to sponsor Durham Cricket's Metro Bank one-day cup fixture.

**Tier One Capital and Central have again collaborated to sponsor the 50-over one-day game between Durham Cricket and Hampshire CCC, held at South Northumberland cricket ground, in Gosforth.**

Tom Seymour, Durham Cricket Commercial Director, said: "We are delighted that Tier One Capital and Central have again come together to support the day.

"We are reliant on local businesses in the region supporting our fixture list and the one-day at game at South Northumberland is always a great day out and one of the highlights of our fixture calendar."

Paul Blight, Head of Wealth Management at Tier One Capital, said, "We are delighted to team up again with Durham Cricket Club and Central to show our ongoing commitment to sport in the region.

"We are a North East based business and it is very important that we work together with other like-minded businesses to get behind the sporting community within our region and heartland."

Steve Hart, Director at Central, said: "This is a high-profile fixture in the Durham Cricket calendar, and we are also delighted to support South Northumberland Cricket Club, who are a family friendly cricket club.

This annual event helps to unite the local cricket community and successfully brings together businesses with sport."

Tier One Capital Ltd is a wealth management and fund management business providing independent financial planning and fund management services.

They specialise in financial planning and savings advice and investment management and fund management services to senior executives, investors, entrepreneurs, business owners, professional partners and high net-worth individuals.

TOC is also the investment adviser and fund manager for the London Stock Exchange main market listed Develop North PLC who provide finance to the residential and commercial property sector.

Since inception Develop North has loaned over £74million to help fund property schemes in the North East and Scotland helping to create over 3,000 jobs and supporting 36 developments with a gross development value of over £195m.

[www.tieronecapital.co.uk](http://www.tieronecapital.co.uk)





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## Durham law firm gives businesses peace of mind with new employment law and HR retainer scheme

Durham City's leading law firm, Swinburne Maddison LLP (Swinburne Maddison), has expanded its service portfolio with the launch of smartHR, which offers bespoke legal advice and guidance to businesses through a monthly retainer.

SmartHR provides three carefully curated packages for businesses suitable for larger companies with an existing HR team or smaller firms without a designated HR function. Firms can opt for the package that best suits their needs, depending on the level of support required.

The retainer service, which has been under consideration for some time, has been launched in response to the increased demand for

employment law and HR advice which the law firm has recently experienced.

Before finalising the details of smartHR, Swinburne Maddison spoke to various clients already using this kind of service from other providers and listened to their feedback. Clients often spoke with a different adviser each time and, in most cases, they were not lawyers, giving limited employment law advice.

Swinburne Maddison's managing partner and head of dispute resolution and employment law, Jonathan Moreland, acknowledges that this feedback helped to shape smartHR. He said:

"It is important to recognise that one size does not fit all. The needs of a company with an internal HR resource will differ to those without, therefore it was crucial that our packages have inbuilt flexibility. SmartHR offers three levels of support – Premium, Plus and Essentials – to complement existing company structures.

"Phoebe Gogarty, who joined the Swinburne Maddison employment team last year, has been instrumental in the planning and development of smartHR after significant experience of servicing and launching this type of retainer-led support in previous roles.

"As a result, smartHR clients are assigned one of five dedicated employment lawyers who will be their main point of contact throughout their retainer with support and back up from the other members of our employment team. The service can be accessed online, by email or telephone and for more detailed discussions on complex matters, in-person meetings or video conferencing will be used. There is no lengthy contract."

Advice on a wide range of employment matters is available including contracts and handbook policies, grievance and disciplinary procedures, family-friendly rights, redundancies, restructures, employment disputes and much more.

## Hay & Kilner supports growth with strategic hires

North East-based law firm Hay & Kilner has revealed significant growth in the last 12 months, adding a further 20 team members to meet demand.

The firm, headquartered at the Lumen building in the Newcastle Helix hybrid city quarter, offers a wide range of legal services to individuals and businesses, and has seen a surge in demand for its expertise, leading to the expansion of its 126-strong team across its two locations.

The new recruits have joined various departments across the firm, including commercial disputes, rural property, corporate restructuring, criminal defence, family law and private client services, in a range of roles including senior associate solicitor, associate solicitor, assistant solicitor, paralegal and legal secretary.

Managing partner, Jonathan Waters, said: "This past year has proved to be a pivotal year in our growth journey at Hay & Kilner and I'd personally like to thank all our colleagues for their hard work in making this a reality.

"Our new hires bring with them a fantastic range of skills and talent and will only serve to strengthen our existing teams further in providing the high-quality legal services we have become renowned for.

"We are particularly passionate about nurturing and developing all our employees and providing opportunities for them to grow as we do. This is reflected in our impressive retention rates, of which we are incredibly proud.

"It's an exciting time for the business and I'd like to wish each and



every one of our new joiners a warm welcome and the very best of luck in their roles."

Progression, service excellence, innovation and being a great place to work remain key focus areas at Hay & Kilner with the latest appointments supporting the firm's long-term strategy and vision.

New recruits include family law senior associate, Anna Curphey, who commented: "It's wonderful to be joining the Hay & Kilner team at this exciting time. They are a dynamic and progressive company with a long-standing reputation in the North East and strong client portfolio.

"Key areas that attracted me to the firm was its clear ambition, personable approach and focus on its people and I look forward to supporting the team and our clients going forward."



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L-R: Nida Ali and Terri Leigh

## Jacksons recognises high demand for family law services with three key appointments

Jacksons Law firm has recognised the growing demand for family law services with the appointment of three new staff.

**Nida Ali and Terri Leigh have joined the firm as family law solicitors, while Natalya Kosser will be supporting them and the rest of the team in her supportive and administrative role.**

Nida says the department is already busy with instructions for matrimonial matters and matters relating to children.

The current landscape of family law across the UK is incredibly dynamic, with the introduction of no-fault divorces pushing up demand for legal expertise in

matrimonial finances.

Heightened awareness of domestic abuse and enhanced protections for affected individuals has also led to more victims seeking legal help.

Meanwhile, economic uncertainties have made financial settlements in divorces more complicated.

Even Brexit can be said to have had an impact on the demand for family legal services, as it has introduced legal complexities relating to international

family law when it comes to jurisdiction and enforcement of orders.

This has increased the need for specialist advice and representation in cross-border cases.

Family lawyers like Terri and Nida are essential in navigating these complex, often sensitive issues, providing crucial support and representation to individuals and families during challenging times.

Terri and Nida say demand is also currently high for pre and post-nuptial agreements, as people are becoming more savvy about protecting their finances in the event of a separation.

“The introduction of no-fault divorces has increased demand for assistance with matrimonial finances,” Terri says.

“The new law in itself also requires some navigating - and we are ready to assist and allow our clients to access this at the same time as providing the support with their finances as required.”

The pair expect demand for family law services to remain consistently high - and





Terri points to the support they offer cohabiting couples as another area that keeps the department busy.

“Currently, cohabiting couples don’t have the same rights as married couples and until that law gets reformed – which is something we understand the new Government will be looking into - we can get involved with drafting cohabitation agreements.

“It could take quite a while for the law to change, but the country has become aware there is a need for change in that area.”

Cohabitation agreements cover issues like who owns what property, how bills are to be divided and what would happen in the event of a breakdown in the relationship.

“You can even include who’s keeping the dog!” Terri says.

“It’s all about protecting our clients and having their best interests at heart.”

Nida adds it’s often best to assist around protection before a relationship breakdown happens.

“There is a healthy demand for pre-nuptial and post-nuptial agreements,” she says.

“People often narrow it down to divorce and finance arrangements, but it’s such a broad area of law and can also cover child arrangements and protective injunctions.”

Nida adds that, unfortunately, disputes over child custody and arrangements, especially post-pandemic, have become more common and complex, necessitating legal expertise to resolve these issues.

As these issues are often very emotive, Terri and Nida are pleased to have joined a team of caring individuals.

Nida says: “No client is the same and no case is the same – there will be different things to advise on and it’s very personal to those involved.

“We have to be aware of the need for care in what we provide because it is a very emotive subject.

“As a team, we have a very compassionate, empathetic, client-focused, attentive approach - and I’m happy and proud of the team in terms of how we do approach client issues.”

[www.jacksons-law.com](http://www.jacksons-law.com)



*Nida graduated from Northumbria University in 2015 with a Masters in Law degree. Following graduation, she worked exclusively in Family Law, qualifying as a solicitor in March 2022.*

*Nida has gained valuable experience whilst working in various law firms across the North East, as well as a Local Authority where she dealt with children matters. She joined Jacksons in May 2024.*

*Nida specialises in child arrangements, non-molestation proceedings as well as divorce and finance matters. With an empathetic and attentive approach Nida always strives for the best possible outcome for her clients. Her main passion lies predominantly within children matters, and her key interest is assisting families with reaching an agreement in respect of child arrangements, prohibited steps matters or specific issues.*

*Nida, a Newcastle native, enjoys baking, yoga and spending time with friends.*



*Terri graduated from Northumbria University in 2017 with a Masters in Law degree and went on to complete her training at Short, Richardson & Forth solicitors before then joining another firm, where she worked for the past three years practicing predominantly family law.*

*Terri joined the Family Law team at Jacksons in July 2024 and works between our Stockton and Newcastle offices. She specialises in child arrangements, non-molestation proceedings as well as divorce and finance matters. Terri maintains a compassionate approach to family law issues and offers pragmatic advice to help clients navigate their way through difficult times in their relationships ensuring their best interests are protected.*

*In her spare time Terri enjoys long walks with her dog, Simba, holidaying in the sun with her family and friends, attending music festivals and going to the gym.*



# Key steps to securing a lasting legacy



For over 125 years, the award-winning Wills, Trusts and Estates Team at Sintons has worked tirelessly to help its clients to manage and protect their assets for current and future generations.

It is recognised nationally for its specialism and its endorsement by both the Legal 500 and Chambers & Partners High Net Worth Guide provides independent evidence of its capability and the outstanding level of service it offers.

The key message from the team is that planning for the future is crucial at any stage of life. Organising your affairs ensures your wishes are honoured, your loved ones are protected, and your assets are managed effectively.

Here are four key steps to guide you:

## 1. Preparing a Will

A will is crucial for determining how your estate should be distributed. A clear will simplifies estate administration and can reduce the amount of taxes and fees payable on your death.

Without a will, your estate would be distributed according to intestacy laws – potentially to people that you would not want to benefit and missing out family and friends

that you would like to receive something.

If you already have a will, regularly reviewing and updating it will ensure your current situation and wishes are reflected accurately.

## 2. Making Lasting Powers of Attorney

Creating lasting powers of attorney (LPAs) is a vital part of future planning. These documents empower trusted individuals, known as your attorneys, to handle your affairs if you become unable to make decisions yourself.

There are two main types:

**Property and Financial Affairs LPA:** this authorises your attorneys to manage your financial matters, such as paying your bills, handling your investments, and dealing with your property.

**Health and Welfare LPA:** this authorises your attorneys to make decisions about your medical care, daily routine and personal welfare.

LPAs act as a safeguard, ensuring your interests are protected if you lose capacity. It is crucial to set these up while you are still fully capable.

## 3. Estate Planning

A thorough estate plan is essential for managing your financial future. Key components include:

**Maximising Exemptions and Reliefs:** Utilise spousal exemptions and other inheritance tax (IHT) reliefs such as business relief and agricultural relief to minimise IHT.

**Lifetime Gifting:** Gifts can be exempt from IHT if you survive seven years after making

them. Some gifts, like those covered by the annual exemptions (currently £3,000) and those paid out of surplus income, are immediately exempt. Charitable gifts are always free from IHT.

**Pension Contributions:** Pensions are generally exempt from IHT, making them a tax-efficient way to transfer wealth. However, it is important that the documents behind the pensions are completed correctly in order to achieve this.

## 4. Utilising Trusts

Trusts are a powerful tool for managing and protecting your assets. They allow you to set specific terms for the distribution of your assets, which can help preserve wealth across generations and ensure your wishes are met.

**Asset Protection:** Trusts can safeguard your assets from potential future claims or creditors.

**Controlled Distribution:** You can stipulate conditions under which beneficiaries receive their inheritance, which is useful in complex family situations or to prevent misuse.

**Tax Benefits:** Well-structured trusts can reduce estate taxes, ensuring more wealth is passed to your beneficiaries.

Planning for the future is a wise decision at any age. Taking these steps now will provide peace of mind and secure your legacy for the future.

**To find out more about wills, trusts and estates, or to make an appointment with the team, please contact them on 0191 226 7878 or visit [www.sintons.co.uk](http://www.sintons.co.uk)**





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# Huw Edwards and the BBC: lessons for employers

Paul McGowan is Principal Solicitor at specialist employment law firm, Collingwood Legal. Paul considers the recent news story concerning Huw Edwards and the BBC.

**On 31 July 2024, the former BBC presenter Huw Edwards pleaded guilty to three counts of making indecent images of children. Mr. Edwards had already resigned in April 2024.**

On 1 August 2024, the BBC's Director General, Tim Davie confirmed that the BBC knew about the seriousness of the allegations against Mr. Edwards in November 2023 but defended the decision not to sack Mr. Edwards while still employed. In an interview, he explained that the organisation had taken "difficult decisions in a fair and judicious manner" factoring in an ongoing police investigation into Mr. Edwards' conduct, that Mr. Edwards had not been charged at this point and its duty of care to Mr. Edwards.

At the time of preparing this article the full details of this case are not yet known but the BBC is under increasing scrutiny about its decision making particularly as Mr. Edwards continued to receive his publicly funded salary of circa £440,000 per annum throughout this period. So, what are the lessons for employers from this case?

## Police involvement

It is not generally fair for an employer to dismiss an employee who has been arrested or charged with a criminal offence without following their own fair procedure of investigating the alleged misconduct and giving the employee a formal hearing. There is, however, no general rule that an employer cannot carry out its own investigation while a police investigation is ongoing.

It may still be possible for an employer to

be proactive and reach its own conclusions and terminate an employee's employment by way of a fair process before a police investigation has concluded. There may, of course, be practical considerations that an employer has to balance if it takes this step, but, generally, the police investigation should not stop an employer from progressing its own investigation and disciplinary process.

Mr. Davie appears to suggest that the police informed the BBC that "they need to do their work in total confidence" as a reason for its decision not to dismiss Mr. Edwards. As matters stand, it is not clear the practical extent of this limitation on the BBC's ability to proactively investigate matters itself.

## Suspension and pay

There has also been anger reported about Mr. Edwards continuing to receive his salary while he was suspended. However, in circumstances where an employer wishes to suspend an employee then it should always do so in accordance with its contractual obligations. An unpaid suspension would normally be in breach of contract and indicate a presumption of guilt rather than an employer approaching an investigation or disciplinary process with an open mind.

The BBC has been asked questions about clawing back Mr. Edwards pension payments or the increase to his salary in 2023 before

the allegations came to light. Mr. Davie described this possibility as "very difficult" and "nigh on impossible" which will likely be a result of the terms of such payments made to Mr. Edwards. Unless Mr. Edwards has been fundamentally dishonest with the BBC during this time or decides to return the money himself it seems highly unlikely the money will be returned.

## Lessons for employers...

Clearly this is an unpalatable situation and has also been a PR disaster for the BBC.

In this case the BBC appears to have got caught between various difficult decisions from November 2023 and ultimately not made any constructive decision before Mr. Edwards resignation in April 2024.

Deciding to terminate any individual's employment is always a difficult decision. However, in my view, decisive and prompt action from the BBC could well have saved money and avoided much of the recent negative publicity.

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Paul McGowan



# The UK Intellectual Property Office launches new SME Financial Support Scheme - Advance IP



Dominic Elsworth

**Businesses in product development may be familiar with the UK Intellectual Property Offices' IP Audit and IP Access schemes. These schemes have now been rolled into one new scheme, IP Advance, which launched as a pilot on 15 July 2024.**

IP Advance is a tiered funding programme designed to provide support to SMEs at different stages in their innovation journey. IP Advance provides targeted advice and financial support to help businesses better understand their IP, develop an IP strategy, and where appropriate, support to implement that strategy - for example by filing patent applications.

The two levels of support available are:

**1. IP Audit** provides part-funding of £2,250 (inc VAT) towards the cost of an IP audit, conducted by a suitably qualified IP professional, for example Registered Patent Attorneys such as Hargreaves Elsworth. The business contributes £750 (including VAT) towards the overall cost of the audit. The business will receive a bespoke IP Audit report with recommendations, cost projections and a suggested timeline for implementation and a follow-up meeting to discuss the report's recommendations with the IP professional.

**2. IP Access** provides a contribution of up to £2,250 (inc VAT) for IP professional advice

to progress an IP management strategy or implement recommendations from their IP audit. The Business must contribute a minimum of 50% towards the cost of the services carried out by their IP professional under IP Access to qualify for support.

Businesses can apply for one or both levels of funding; receiving IP Audit funding is not a prerequisite to receiving IP Access funding.

IP Advance is open only to SME's (including micro-entities) and will be delivered exclusively through the following regional organisations: Innovate UK Business Growth, Welsh Government, Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, South of Scotland Enterprise, and Invest Northern Ireland.

In the North East applications for IP Advance should be made through: Innovate UK Business Growth via its National Enquiry Gateway at [contact@innovateukedge.ukri.org](mailto:contact@innovateukedge.ukri.org).

A number of our clients found the old IP Audit and IP Access programmes useful to their businesses. Our expectation is that IP Advance will be just as useful and we encourage SME's involved in product development in the North East to apply.

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## Sibling rivalry

The impossible task  
of treating your  
children equally.

**Liam and Noel, Harry and William, Kim and Kourtney, Cain and Abel. Strange bedfellows indeed – but they all share a common issue: sibling rivalry.**

Any parent with more than one child can probably testify to the fact that it starts at a young age, whether it be counting out the Christmas presents to make sure everyone has the same amount or comparing bikes, hockey sticks and tennis rackets to check that they are the 'same'.

As children become adults, the concept of treating them equally becomes a little more complicated than just measuring out their drinks and cutting chocolate bars in half. If not done correctly, it can not only cause distress and estrangement but also protracted and expensive legal issues.

Especially if you've "helped out" one child more financially than another in your lifetime.

So what can you do to avoid this happening?

We're not here to tell you how to parent (or go into the psychology of sibling rivalry), but from a legal standpoint, there are some things you can put in place to address potential issues at the outset.

It's a common misconception that parents are required to treat their children equally in their Will. In fact, unlike some other places, we don't have forced heirship in this country. But let's assume that you are planning on including your children in your Will.

If you feel like you need to level the playing field, perhaps because one child has received more financial assistance during their life than the other, you might want to consider the inclusion of a hotchpot clause in your Will.

Adding the hotchpot clause to the Will would consider the financial help one child received during the testator's lifetime. This would ensure that that child would not benefit twice under the Will to the detriment of the other children.

The added benefit of a hotchpot clause is that once it is drafted into the Will, there is no need to update the Will every time a gift is made.

The only thing the testator will need to do is keep a record of the gifts made.

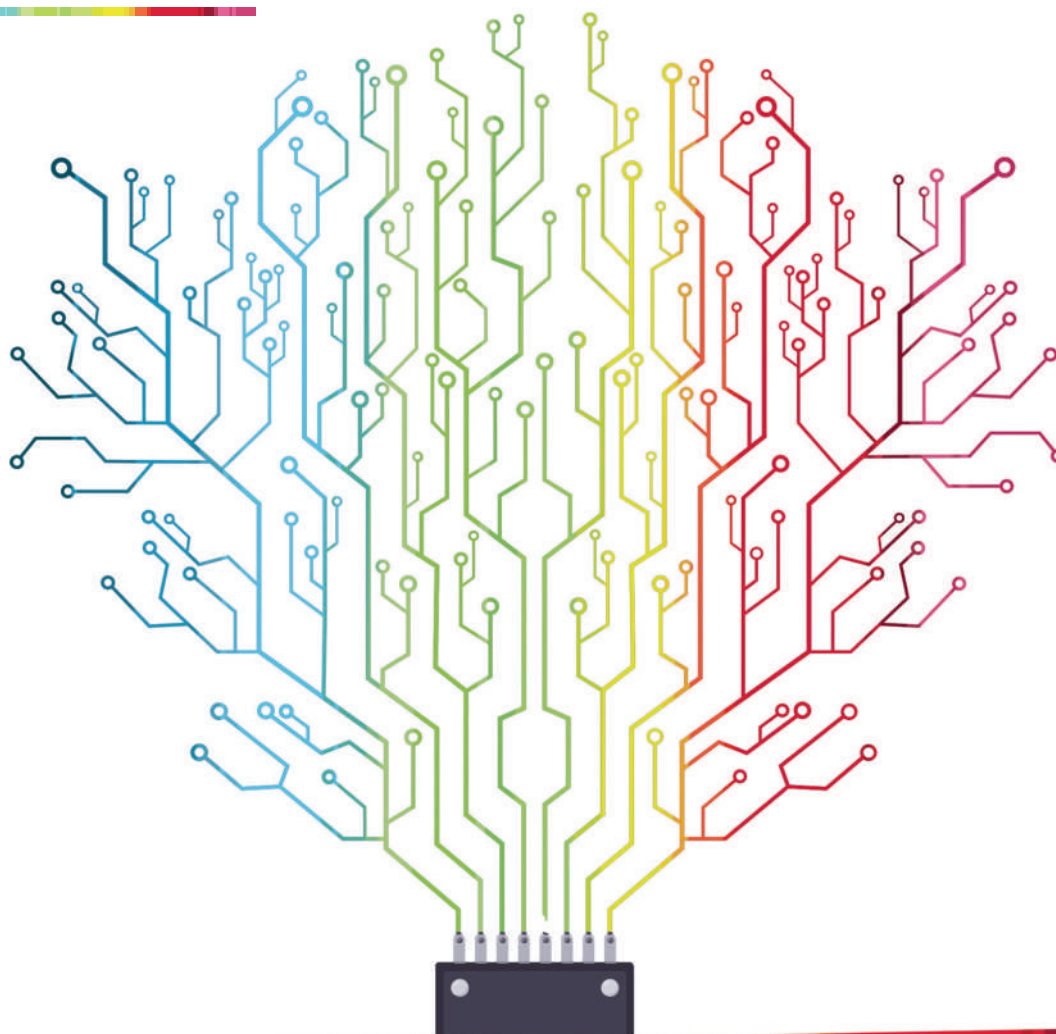
Similarly, in addition to the hotchpot clause, if a parent leaves money to a child in their Will but then, after making their Will, gifts money to that child, then the money could be treated as an advance on the child's inheritance and deducted from what they are to receive after the parent dies.

Of course, parents treat their children differently because they are different and have different needs - so perhaps all this talk of equality between children is overthinking it.

Fairness doesn't always mean equality; you will have the best insight into how it's achieved for your family. Just don't model your parenting style on Adam and Eve (it didn't end well).

***If you're concerned with the division of your estate, contact Muckle LLP's private client team on 0191 211 7863 or email [advice@muckle-llp.com](mailto:advice@muckle-llp.com)***





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Call Tom on **0191 211 7913** or email **[tom.justice@muckle-llp.com](mailto:tom.justice@muckle-llp.com)**

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# Streak of success continues for Mincoffs Solicitors



**Leading corporate and commercial law firm Mincoffs Solicitors has once again been ranked as the region's most active deal adviser.**

**The news comes following the release of the latest Experian Market IQ M&A Review H1, which analyses deal volume across the first half of the year.**

The firm has further reason to celebrate the result this time, with the number one position in the prestigious ranking table being one the firm has maintained for the last 18 months.

The corporate team secured the top spot after completing on 21 qualifying transactions over the period, with a total of 67 transactions across the year to date and a deal value in excess of £489 million.

Senior partner and head of corporate, Paul Hughes, is delighted with the result.

"The corporate team works incredibly hard to deliver successful results for our clients, so it is fantastic to see these efforts reflected in Experian's deal table," he said.

"Being named the region's top deal adviser and maintaining this for a year and a half

is no mean feat and is something we are incredibly proud of.

"This is a testament to the dedication of our entire team and puts us in a great position for the second half of the year."

Along with the Experian ranking, the corporate team were recently shortlisted for Corporate Law Firm of the Year at the Insider Media North East Dealmakers Awards.

The first half of the year also brought about the conclusion of a rebrand for Mincoffs Solicitors, with the firm introducing new branding, a new logo and a new website.

The wider firm continues to attract new clients and win new work, with plans to increase the workforce by more than 10 per cent across the next 12 months to manage increasing demand.

The corporate team recently welcomed solicitor Connie Lu and there is further recruitment planned in the coming months

for this team, as well as in the employment, real estate and dispute resolution departments.

"It's certainly an exciting time to join Mincoffs Solicitors," said Paul, "and we have lots more in the pipeline for the firm.

"The business has gone from strength to strength over the last few years and we have continued to grow the teams and attract clients based across the UK and as far as Thailand.

"We're delighted to be in the position we are in and are committed to continuing this trajectory, so we look forward to what is to come in the future."

Mincoffs Solicitors has been providing high quality legal services across the North East and further afield for more than 75 years.

Business services include corporate, commercial services, real estate, employment, dispute resolution and licensing, while the firm's private client team includes family, residential conveyancing and wills, probate and trusts.

**For more information, visit [www.mincoffs.co.uk](http://www.mincoffs.co.uk) or call the firm on 0191 281 6151.**



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## Sweeney Miller Law appoint legal marketing specialist

Leading North East Law Firm Sweeney Miller Law has appointed Claire Fenwick to the role of Marketing and Digital Media Director, to spearhead its growth in the region and nationally.

**Claire, a member of the Chartered Institute of Marketing (MCIM), brings a wealth of experience to the firm, with a legal marketing career spanning over 23 years. In her new role, she will lead Sweeney Miller Law's overall marketing strategy and build on the company's position in the market to drive strategic growth.**

In addition to its strong client base in the North, Sweeney Miller Law is instructed by individuals and businesses from across the UK including London. The firm's focus on service excellence and growing reputation has helped to attract instructions involving large commercial landlords, including

plcs, extensive property development projects, business sales, acquisitions, mergers and management buyouts, as well as exceptional growth in commercial property, residential conveyancing, private client, litigation and family work.

With a total headcount of 85 staff, Sweeney Miller Law has seen rapid growth since it was established in Sunderland in 2002. In response to increasing client demand, a second office was opened in Newcastle in 2014 which the firm outgrew, and in 2022 relocated to larger premises at Bulman House at Regent Centre, Gosforth.

Earlier this year, the firm relocated its

65 Sunderland head office based staff to Sweeney Miller House, close to the Northern Spire Bridge in the city.

Claire's role will see her leading the strategic marketing for both offices across its key practice areas.

Claire said: "I am looking forward to the challenges my new role will bring and working hard to exceed our goals alongside the fantastically talented team. I was attracted to Sweeney Miller Law due to its rapid growth, clear vision and strong leadership and I am delighted to be based in my home city at our fabulous new Sunderland headquarters at such an exciting time with all of the investment and development plans."

Commenting on Claire's appointment, Sweeney Miller Law's Managing Partner, Surbhi Vedhara said: "We are excited to have someone of Claire's calibre join the firm. She has a very strong reputation in the North East legal marketplace, and we look forward to working with her to further grow both the Sunderland and Newcastle offices of Sweeney Miller Law".

[www.sweeneymiller.co.uk](http://www.sweeneymiller.co.uk)

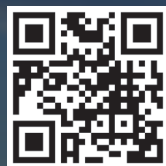


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## Christmas at the Cathedral kicks off early for Sir Bobby Robson's Cancer Foundation

Organisers of the Christmas at the Cathedral show met for a pre-Yuletide planning meeting at St James' Park in tribute to the pioneering fundraising begun by former Newcastle United manager, Sir Bobby Robson.

The Sir Bobby Robson Foundation, part of Newcastle Hospitals Charity, is thrilled to announce its 11th annual entertainment show, Christmas at the Cathedral, will take place on Thursday, 12th December.

This popular fundraising event, held at Newcastle Cathedral, has become a local festive staple, renowned for its star-studded lineup and festive ambiance. For many,

including Lady Elsie, this event marks the beginning of their Christmas celebrations. The show promises another evening of exceptional entertainment, featuring a mix of celebrities and local stars delivering songs, readings, and comedy sketches, all wrapped in a heart-warming Christmas theme.

With the generous support of attendees and sponsors, including this year's main sponsor Layer 7 IT Security from Ashington, the Christmas at the Cathedral show has become a treasured community tradition. State of the art lighting and sound systems will transform Newcastle Cathedral into a captivating theatrical venue, with large TV screens ensuring every moment is enjoyed by all. Ray Laidlaw, former drummer of Lindisfarne, will once again produce the show, continuing the tradition of top-quality entertainment while honouring Sir Bobby Robson's enduring legacy.

Work funded by the Sir Bobby Robson Foundation directly benefits cancer patients in the North East and Cumbria and plays a significant role in the international fight against the disease - funding cutting edge cancer treatment and innovative cancer support services and including the clinical trials of new drugs at the Sir Bobby Robson Cancer Trials Research Centre.

## Durham artist selling painting for Sir Bobby Robson Foundation

Artist Ronnie Pattison is set to offer for sale his most cherished painting of St James' Park, the home of Newcastle United Football Club, in memory of his late mother who passed away from cancer. The goal is to raise as much as possible for The Sir Bobby Robson Foundation, a charity close to Ronnie's heart.

Ronnie, who began painting at the age of 15, attributes much of his inspiration and success to his late mother. Despite initial personal setbacks following her death, Ronnie has now fully regained his passion for painting.

"My mother was the main inspiration behind my art. Unfortunately, after she passed away, I struggled for years, but I promised her I'd never give up. It took me a long time to regain my passion, but I have, especially in the last three years. The first painting I did when I felt well enough again was an aerial view of St James' Park, I did some eight years after her passing



and because of that I've never considered selling it - until now," said Ronnie.

"My mother battled cancer, and if the Foundation was around when she was fighting it may have helped her and others like her. If I can find a Newcastle fan who wants to buy it, then this painting will be my way of giving back. I'm looking for a single buyer or an organisation that understands the value of the artwork and the cause I'm supporting."

Anyone wishing to offer an amount can contact Ronnie on ronpat@mail.com or pop into his studio at 29, South Burns, Chester le Street, next to Tesco.



## Ex-builder trades tools for tunes

Derek Lyall from Berwick, an ex-builder turned musician, has found a new passion in his retirement playing the guitar and composing songs, particularly inspired by his love for dogs.

Derek has released an EP titled 'For the Love of Dogs', which reflects his deep affection for his canine companions. His journey into music began at school, where he learned a few guitar chords, but it wasn't until later in life, after the passing of his beloved dog Ilah, that he fully embraced music as a means of coping with grief.

Ilah played a crucial role in Derek's life, even saving him during a medical emergency by alerting his wife Linda when Derek collapsed and couldn't call for help. Despite her own battle with cancer, Ilah's actions highlighted the profound bond and loyalty she had for Derek. Her memory and the emotions tied to their relationship became a significant inspiration for Derek's music.

With encouragement and guidance from record producer Iain Petrie, Derek refined his guitar skills and recorded his heartfelt compositions. His EP includes songs like 'Alfie', inspired by a touching story of a young boy and his dog, as well as other tracks that celebrate his cherished memories with his dogs, including 'Milli', named after his current dog, and 'Two', which reflects on the two years that have passed since losing Ilah. It also mentions each of the eight dogs that Derek has loved and cared for in his lifetime.

Derek's EP 'For the Love of Dogs' is now available on all major music platforms, including Spotify, Apple Music, and YouTube, allowing listeners to share in Derek's heartfelt tribute to the dogs that have touched his life.

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"Where Friends Become Family"







L-R: Sarah Jones (Wellbeing Hub project manager), Ian Bartlett (Stockton and District Advice and Information Service general manager) and David Murphy (co-owner Wells CRS).

Picture: Rephrase

## No longer an 'ugly duckling'

Thousands of people suffering from welfare problems across Stockton-on-Tees have a new and modern welcoming centre where they can find help.

**The Stockton and District Advice and Information Service (SDAIS), otherwise known as Citizens Advice, have moved into a larger unit in the heart of Wellington Square.**

The switch from a smaller unit in the shopping centre to the new one was completed recently after an overhaul, a project overseen by Middlesbrough's Wells CRS, of a long-vacant unit.

It has been welcomed by staff at SDAIS who have helped more than 5,900 people in the last year alone while dealing with more than 51,000 inquiries.

Ian Bartlett, the charity's general manager for the last 30 years, said: "Staff have told me that this is the best environment we have had and that is important for all those people who come to visit us with problems.

"More and more people are exposed to and affected by the cost-of-living crisis. Many

people are suffering and all those who find themselves in financial hardship, or suffering some form of money problem, will know that can then have an impact on housing and family issues.

"All of those are interlinked and it is important people have an environment where they feel they are safe and where they can come and talk. This move for us has arrived at the right time."

The main problem areas SDAIS help with include welfare benefits, debt, housing, energy and employment.

There was an urgent need for SDAIS to relocate and they had also decided to share their premises with a new Wellbeing Hub, co-developed by Catalyst Stockton and partners, which focuses on adults' wellbeing and mental health support.

Finding a suitable location that met specific requirements—a central location, accessibility, capacity for two charities, 11 interview rooms, and adequate reception and waiting areas - proved challenging.

The former home of the George Hardwick Foundation had stood empty for years. The move there has meant the two-floor unit has had a complete refresh with new heating, energy saving LED lighting, power and data installed as well as creating more interview rooms.

Ian said: "We are grateful to Wells CRS for not only bringing our vision to life but they also offered valuable insights and suggestions that enhanced the final result. Their commitment to quality and understanding of our budgetary constraints were remarkable.

"We secured the lease to the unit in March and work began on transforming this unit from the 'ugly duckling' that nobody wanted to work from into an advice centre that would have a very high footfall and be a source of help and support to thousands of people every year."

The renovated advice centre boasts a bright and open layout, comfortable interview rooms and modern amenities. The transformation has not only improved the functionality of the space but also created a welcoming atmosphere that encourages individuals to access the vital services provided by SDAIS.

"We are proud to have played a role in this meaningful project," said David Murphy, co-owner at Wells CRS. "The new advice centre is a testament to the power of collaboration and the positive impact that well-designed spaces can have on the community.

"This move was completed in an eight-week turnaround and the clients were very clear from the outset what they wanted – a nice, welcoming space for people to walk in.

"It's been a pleasure to work on this project as we know how important the advice centre is to people in this area."

And Matt Boxall, Centre Manager at Wellington Square, said: "The move by SDAIS shows their commitment to Stockton residents and further helps cement our heart of the community ethos.

"They had outgrown their old unit at the top of the mall and this larger and brighter unit showcases their commitment to the shopping centre and our visitors for many more years to come."



## JT Dove aim for £250K fundraising milestone in support of NE Charity CHUF

JT Dove have supported the charity for nearly 10 years and through continued fundraising, the team are set to hit a £250,000 fundraising milestone in 2024. Having raised over £100,000 in 2019 in celebration of their 150th year, the team have continued their mission to provide vital funds for the charity, with football tournaments, in branch competitions and through successful supplier and team race & golf days to name just a few activities.

Chuf, who recently celebrated their 40th year, provides top up support to the NHS to ensure that the care that Heart Heroes and their families receive is amongst the best in the world. Providing vital funding for research, innovation, essential equipment, and much needed resource.

Charlotte Campbell, Director of Fundraising and Operations at Chuf, said: "We are so incredibly grateful for partners like JT Dove. They are real friends of the charity and their fundraising over the years has



made a huge difference to our heart Heroes and their families right across the UK. Their donations quite literally save and improve lives every day and we are so incredibly lucky they choose to support us. The whole team are a pleasure to work with and we can't wait to see what we achieve together in 2024."

## Northumberland Community Bank becomes 12,000th organisation to sign the Armed Forces Covenant

A locally rooted bank which is committed to people not profit has become the 12,000th organisation to sign the Armed Forces Covenant (AFC).



The Armed Forces Covenant is a promise that together all signatories of the Covenant acknowledge and understand that those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces, and their families, should be treated with fairness and respect in the communities, economy, and society they serve with their lives.

The Covenant focuses on helping members of the Armed Forces community have the same access to Government and commercial services and products as any other citizen. This support is provided in a number of areas including healthcare, education and childcare, housing and accommodation, employment and financial services.

Northumberland Community Bank signed the Armed Forces Covenant along with Wing Commander Helen Smyth who co-signed on behalf of the Ministry of Defence (MOD), with the signing facilitated by North Tyneside Council, Employer Recognition Scheme Gold Award holder, and fervent advocate for the armed forces community.

Northumberland Community Bank was launched in 2017, after the fusion of the Credit Union for South East Northumberland and Tynedale Community Bank. The community bank works on a membership-based system and aims to offer a sustainable source of lending for individual and SMEs.

## Darlington patients receive care in comfort thanks to £3,500 OnPath Energy treatment chair grant

St Teresa's Hospice provides palliative and end-of-life care and support to people with life-limiting illnesses across Darlington, South Durham and the surrounding areas, with an aim to provide the best possible care to those who need it.

The Hospice uses specialist reclining chairs at their Woodlands Road premises, which allow for alternating pressure relief meaning patients can have greater comfort.

And after receiving a £3,500 grant from the community fund linked to OnPath Energy's nearby Moor House Wind Farm, the Hospice has been able to add another reclining chair to its Inpatient Unit.

Founded in 1986, St Teresa's Hospice is an independent charity, supporting more than 1,000 people each year through a range of services.



Alongside Inpatient Care, the Hospice provides a Community Hospice Team, a Family Support Team, Specialist Bereavement Care, Complementary Therapies and the Woodlands Wellbeing Hub.

St Teresa's Hospice needs to raise over £3m a year to provide their core services free of charge to those who need them. The majority of those funds come through the kind support it receives from its community through fundraising efforts and grants.



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# Business opportunity blooms between shopping centre and local charity



Gordon Hakin and Lottie Thompson from Sanderson Arcade with staff and service users from Blyth Star Enterprises' Stakeford Nurseries.

**A Northumberland charity has been awarded a contract to supply the floral arrangements to Morpeth's Sanderson Arcade.**

**Blyth Star Enterprises, which operates a horticultural day service at Stakeford Nurseries for adults with complex mental health needs and learning disabilities, was approached by Sanderson Arcade following a recommendation from a member of the shopping centre's security staff.**

Located in the centre of the historic market town, Sanderson Arcade, which boasts 27 retail units, two restaurants and a health club is renowned for its displays of summer and winter floral displays, having won top accolades on multiple occasions at both national and regional level 'In Bloom' competitions.

This is the first year that the contract for the centre's landscaping has been outsourced to an external company and it was important to the management team that the chosen contractor was both local and had the community at its heart.

Lottie Thompson, Centre Manager at Sanderson Arcade, commented: "Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the hanging baskets and planters that shoppers see around Sanderson Arcade had been tended by a dedicated gardening team, but in recent years, the job had fallen to other members of staff who admittedly didn't have the same level of expertise, so we started to consider outsourcing the work.

"Gordon, one of our security guards, recommended that we check out Stakeford Nurseries to see if they could help us. Gordon explained that it was run by a charity, which is something that we really liked the sound of, so we paid the site a visit and were really impressed with the set up. It just seemed like a perfect fit.

"The work that the team at Stakeford Nurseries has carried out has been fantastic. The flowers are absolutely beautiful and we have been getting lots of compliments from shoppers. The staff and service users have been so helpful and have provided us with lots of maintenance tips to help us keep our displays looking their best throughout the summer. We can't thank them enough."

Graham Carr, Horticultural Services Manager at Stakeford Nurseries, added: "We were delighted to be approached by the

team at Sanderson Arcade about supplying the plants for their hanging baskets and planters.

"The idea behind Blyth Star's day services like Stakeford Nurseries, which reflect real working environments, is to provide our service users with a meaningful way to spend their time where they can socialise, learn new skills and access endorsed packages of vocational training.

"Working together with local businesses like Sanderson Arcade is a great way for us to supplement our day services and build on service user's horticultural knowledge and understanding by providing them with projects and experiences which also allow them to engage with the local community – something which can be difficult for them due to the nature of their disabilities."

In total, staff and service users from Blyth Star's Stakeford Nurseries planted up 23 large hanging baskets, six wall planters and a number of freestanding planters to supply to Sanderson Arcade.

**For more information about Blyth Star Enterprises and Stakeford Nurseries, visit [www.blythstar.org.uk](http://www.blythstar.org.uk) or to find out more about Sanderson Arcade, visit [www.sandersonarcade.co.uk](http://www.sandersonarcade.co.uk)**



# Charity of the Month...



*Northern Insight talks to Steven Beaty, Foundation Lead of Rockets Community Foundation in Northumberland.*

## Aiming for the stars with Rockets Community Foundation

Rockets Community Foundation is a Northumberland based charity that utilises sport as a vessel to engage people within vulnerable communities.

### Why was the charity founded?

We recognised there was a huge need for something for kids to do in the community. Rockets Community was created in 2014 in response to a swell of demand for more sport activity in schools, growing it as part of rugby league club, Cramlington Rockets' outreach work, to the point we had over 50 partner schools and won National Club of the Year in 2017 for our community engagement work.

We had to go into hibernation during the pandemic but when the opportunity to have our own venue in Cramlington came up, we became a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) in 2021 to better reflect our intent to engage with a wider community. Cramlington Town Council gave us the building in Eastfield, now called The Launch Pad, having fundraised half a million pounds to refurbish, because we are committed to making it a seven day a week community hub for all.





### Which areas do you cover?

The Launch Pad in East Cramlington has given us a real base for activity and we are starting to really see our projects take off. This summer, for example, we have hosted Best Ever Summer activities, supported by the council, which has meant the Launch Pad has been full of dozens of children every day of the summer holidays, enjoying fun activities while also getting a hot, cooked meal for free.

However, while Cramlington is our home, we see people coming from all over North Tyneside and Northumberland to take part and our plan is, in time, to rebuild our network of partner schools across that area to make positive impact on more and more young people.

### What types of events do you have?

The holiday activity is a prime example of what we do, and our background in rugby means that we're never far away from a rugby camp! But it is not just that. We're a bookable venue and we welcome different community groups to come and use the space. Think everything from knit and natter to Cramlington Steel Band Club. The acoustics in the main function room really lend themselves to that! Really, it's providing a space for the community that is our main aim. If they tell us they want to do something, we'll try and do it.

### What is your mission?

The original rugby club was founded on family values and inclusion and respect are at the heart of that. Sport has long been the vessel for us to help people see a bigger picture, and we strongly believe that giving people a sense of belonging and purpose, that focuses on good mental and physical health, that is challenging but fun, really will give people a launch pad for success. Thus, the name above the door.

### What have been your proudest moments so far?

In 2021 we got the keys to the charity's building, which was a huge moment for the charity and for me personally. Showing the young people around The Launch Pad for the first time and seeing the pride on their faces made all the hard work worth it, and three years later we're just at the start of our ambitions for the space. We want the building to serve as a hub for the communities that surround it and for the people of Cramlington to embrace it as their own. We always welcome guests so if you would like to look around and find out more about what we do here just let us know.

### What are you currently working on?

This summer we've fully funded 840 spaces for children and young people in Northumberland to access activities, a hot meal and peer support in The Launch Pad, and we are about to start work on a project to use the space to support young people not currently in mainstream education with out-of-classroom learning opportunities so they can develop and achieve their full potential. This includes renovating part of our outdoor area into a BBQ and garden designed and developed by the young people taking part in the project.

### How to get involved?

We love meeting ambitious North East businesses and there are lots of ways to get involved with the Rockets Community Foundation. We're keen to build commercial partnerships with organisations who can support our mission and help us to deliver even more projects for the communities we serve. We are particularly keen to speak to businesses who would like contribute to the development of The Launch Pad as it evolves into a space that delivers real impact here in Northumberland.

By partnering with us as your chosen charity, funding a specific project like our new Pupil Development Centre or choosing to volunteer your time and expertise, you'll be empowering local communities to thrive.

**To get in touch email [info@rocketsfoundation.org.uk](mailto:info@rocketsfoundation.org.uk) or visit [www.rocketsfoundation.org.uk](http://www.rocketsfoundation.org.uk)**







# Birtley Community Pool



[www.crowdfunder.co.uk/p/help-us-open-birtley-community-pool-in-september24](http://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/p/help-us-open-birtley-community-pool-in-september24)




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## Buses, trains and automobiles - Help is at hand at The Three Tumours Charity

**At The Three Tumours – We have a team of people that can advise you when things are tough, and you just need a helping hand. One such service you might not be aware of is help with transport costs.**

### Older People

The qualifying age for free bus passes is now being adjusted in accordance with national changes to the state pension age.

To learn when you'll be eligible for a concessionary travel pass and how to apply, visit *Nexus: Concessionary travel for older people*.

### Disabled Adults

If you reside in Tyne and Wear and have a qualifying disability, you can travel on buses for free with a concessionary travel pass.

To check if you're eligible for free travel and to apply, visit *Nexus: Concessionary travel for disabled adults*.

### Metro Gold Card

For just £12 a year, a Metro Gold Card offers unlimited travel on the Metro, Shields Ferry, and Northern Rail between Sunderland and Newcastle, if you live in Tyne and Wear.

A valid concessionary travel pass is required, and the card allows travel during the same hours your pass is valid.

For more details, visit *Nexus: Metro Gold Card*.

### Companion Card

If you require assistance during bus travel, a Companion Card allows your companion to travel for free.

The Companion Card is issued in your name and functions like a concessionary travel pass, with an additional symbol indicating that your companion does not need to pay a fare when traveling with you during applicable hours.

This card is particularly beneficial for unpaid carers.

You may qualify for a Companion Card if you receive any of the following benefits:

- Higher rate care component of Disability Living Allowance
- High rate Attendance Allowance
- Personal Independence Payment (PIP) with a minimum of eight points in the Communicating Verbally and Planning or Following a Journey sections on your decision letter

For more information and to apply, visit *Nexus: Companion Card*.

### Travel Costs for Health Appointments

The NHS may reimburse reasonable travel expenses for health appointments if you meet certain financial and health criteria. In certain cases, the cost of travel for your carer may also be covered.

**For further details, visit NHS: Help with travel costs or contact The Three Tumours Charity.**







## NE Youth host clay pigeon shoot for young people

The 2024 young persons' clay pigeon shoot took place recently with 17 young people from across the region taking part.

**The keen group met at the Northumberland Arms where they all signed in, met each other and listened to the all important safety talks.**

The young people were then split into teams, and given practise turns at the three different stations that were set up. Each young person had a minimum of five shots at each target on each station. The groups rotated around each station until they had completed all three.

After the first round of shooting they feasted on refreshments provided by the Cook and Barker Inn. Each group had a designated leader who was in charge of tracking points in the second round of shooting.

After the three stages, the scores were collated- it turned out three individuals

had the same score so they had a 'shoot off' for the runner up. This was an exciting experience with the whole group supporting the three young people as they competed against each other!

After the shoot the team all went to Cook and Barker where we had food and an awards ceremony. Every individual who took part was presented with a certificate. Trophies were also given to: the highest points total and the most improved shot.

The highest points total was awarded to George, the most improved shot was awarded to Lenni.

Overall a fantastic day, full of laughter, smiles and new experiences for young people!

NE Youth would like to say a huge thank you to everyone that made the event happen: The 12 Bores Club including Glynn Cooper and the excellent team of coaches, The Cook and Barker Inn for great food and refreshments and George Hubb from Hubbway Plant Hire for use of the land.

NE Youth are celebrating their 90th birthday in 2025. Over the last nine decades the charity have helped and supported over 1.2 million young people across the region.

To celebrate the incredible achievements of the last 90 years, they are looking to work in partnership with sponsors/corporate supporters to create a calendar of events and projects across 2025 which will bring about exposure to the charity and the region.

NE Youth want to highlight the difference that has been made to thousands of young people across the North East, and the need to support many more in the coming years.

***If you would like to get involved and supported NE Youth in their 90th year celebrations on an individual, company or corporate level please get in contact CEO Jon Niblo: [jon.niblo@neyouth.org.uk](mailto:jon.niblo@neyouth.org.uk)***

**[www.neyouth.org.uk](http://www.neyouth.org.uk)**







# Inclusive Recruitment

**Inclusive recruitment is not just a statutory obligation - it is strategically imperative when building high performing teams.**

**As organisations strive to remain competitive and innovative, the importance of inclusive recruitment is hard to overstate.**

It is the practice of ensuring that hiring processes are fair, equitable and welcoming to candidates, regardless of their background, ethnicity, gender, age, disability or any other characteristic. Importantly, inclusive recruitment is not only about fostering a positive recruitment and onboarding process, it translates into an environment where everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed.

Inclusive recruitment allows you to reach diverse Talent and supports your business growth by -

## 1. Increasing Innovation and Creativity

Do you want an environment where everyone's opinions are the same and their

life experiences are broadly similar? Is it better for business owners to be surrounded by those that think in a similar way, or is it actually better for teams to be made up of a diverse group of people that bring different experiences and viewpoints?

Yes, you will be challenged, and yes sometimes you will be faced with opinions that are not aligned with your own - but isn't that a bit healthier? Might thinking outside of your own lived experience lead to enhanced innovation and creativity?

## 2. Improving Employee Performance and Engagement

You would like your employees to stay for the long term right? People who feel valued and included are more likely to be committed and engaged in their work. Fair recognition in remuneration, advancement and promotion opportunities, are more likely to bring loyalty to their employer and stay for the long term. If an inclusive culture of aspiration is in place, why would your employees feel they need to look elsewhere?

## 3. Building A Positive Reputation and Brand Awareness

Companies which prioritise inclusive recruitment often enjoy an enhanced reputation and a stronger brand image. In our modern post Covid world, corporate social responsibility and ethical business practices are increasingly important to consumers, being known as an inclusive employer can have a positive effect on job seekers and consumers alike.

Employer values are also increasingly recognised as the reason to, or not to, work for or engage in business with an organisation.

People are inherently more inclined to join a business that are aligned with their own values regarding equality and fairness.

## 4. Reducing Discrimination

By implementing inclusive recruitment practices such as encouraging applications from underrepresented groups by proactive advertising, looking at flexible working patterns and ensuring that interviews are structured and conducted by a diverse panel, unconscious bias and discrimination in the recruitment process is reduced.

A more level playing field is created where candidates are successful due to their talents, skills and qualifications - and that is what we love to see!

## 5. Stronger Legal Compliance

A minor but important point - by ensuring inclusive recruitment practices, as a happy by product an employer ensures that they remain on the right side of UK employment law.

In a snapshot, inclusive recruitment practices are a must for all employers. To build engaged, innovative and high performing teams it is essential!

[talentheads.co.uk](https://talentheads.co.uk)



# A fresh start for September 2024

## SENIOR AUDIT MANAGER

Newcastle • Ref: 2286

Independent accountancy firm seeking an experienced Senior Audit Manager to lead on both Corporate and Not-for-Profit client base. Route to RI and Partnership readily available. Instrumental role to play in the strategic decisions within the audit department.

## INDIRECT TAX MANAGER/SENIOR MANAGER

Newcastle • Ref: 2279

An exciting opportunity for a motivated individual to join this specialist Indirect Tax team within the Big 4. The VAT team work across the wider region to help support and deliver Indirect tax advice for their clients focusing on both mid-market and large corporates, as well as the third sector. Join them and play a key leadership role in the Newcastle team.

## AUDIT SENIOR

West Newcastle • Ref: 2284

Independent accountancy firm with a growing audit team that service both Not-for-Profit and Corporate clients are looking to recruit an experienced Audit Senior to add to their growing team. Great work life balance and family-friendly firm.

## PRIVATE CLIENT TAX SENIOR MANAGER/MANAGER

Newcastle • Ref: 2281

Leading regional accounting firm are seeking a tax specialist in private client tax to join their Newcastle office and support the growth of their compliance and advisory services.

## AUDIT & ACCOUNTS MANAGER

Durham • Ref: 2280

An exciting time to join this business as they undergo a period of change and growth. Qualified ACA/ACCA you will undertake a leadership role supporting the Partner group with the day-to-day delivery of audit and accounting services to local SME clients.

## SENIOR MANAGER - OUTSOURCING

Newcastle • Ref: 2287

A highly ambitious Senior Manager post with a clear route to Director and Partnership for a career hungry qualified accountant (ACA/ACCA) who is able to lead teams, engage with clients, develop new business and provide outsourced Finance Director services to your portfolio of SME and OMB's clients. A fast paced environment perfect for those who are career driven.

## CLIENT MANAGER

South Tyneside • Ref: 2257

A refreshingly modern and sustainability focused accountancy firm looking to appoint a Client Manager to lead a small team of accounting technicians with the delivery of statutory year end accounting for a portfolio of clients. Technology focused, paperless office.

To express an interest in any of the above vacancies, or for a confidential discussion about your career, please contact Bryony Gibson, Bryony Gibson Consulting, on 0191 3759983 or visit [www.bryonygibson.com/vacancies](http://www.bryonygibson.com/vacancies) for more information.

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# The Recruiter

## Bryony Gibson recruitment consultant - It's getting personal

There can be few more people-centric professions than recruitment. At its core, it's about understanding people, what motivates them, what drives them, and how their skills and experience align with the culture and requirements of a business.

**In a world dominated by technology and automation, the human touch makes all the difference. That's why Bryony Gibson makes it personal to find the right person for the right job and, as important, vice versa.**

Building relationships, listening, and understanding are the tools of Bryony's trade. For her, recruitment isn't a numbers game. It's about getting it right the first time. Avoiding the all too common scattergun approach, she specialises in recruitment for the North East's public practice accountancy profession.

If you are looking for an accountant or auditor, a finance manager or tax specialist, then Bryony can help. With more than 20 years of experience recruiting in the North East for public practice, she's got a contacts list which other recruiters would envy.

It's also how she is able to work so closely with independent accountancy firms, all the way up to the Big 4. But what about the person whose name is above the door? We thought we'd learn a little about Bryony and her company, Bryony Gibson Consulting.

**So, Bryony, tell us a little bit about yourself...**

Originally from Bath in the south I spent my childhood years enjoying the beautiful City before heading off to University to study law. After a summer overseas I met my husband and swiftly moved North. Fast forward 25 years and I am now a busy Mum with two (almost) teenage children and Buddy my Labrador. Life is busy with running your own business and playing taxi to two children who swim (a lot). Plenty of 4am starts and 10pm finishes leave little other time but dog walks, shopping, running and pilates are squeezed in. My favourite pastime is holidays and travelling, a (warm) beach is for sure my happy place.

**So, what led you into the world of recruitment?**

After graduating, I joined M&S's management programme. A fantastic education, it didn't take long to realise weekends were far too precious to spend my life in retail. That's when I moved to the North East, and, kind of, fell into recruitment. Thankfully I loved it and, after more than 20 years of specialising in tax and accountancy, I decided to set up my own consultancy and it was the best career decision I ever made.

**What skills do you need to do your job?**

In recruitment, it helps if you have tenacity. Someone once said to me it is not how many times you fall that matters, it's how many times you get back up again. Recruitment is a little like that. You have to be resilient and I believe to be successful you have to genuinely care about what you do. It's more than a job, it's a passion for me to know I have helped someone find their perfect job. The ability to communicate and listen and understanding people's needs is what it's really about, I don't just fill jobs I try to find people the right fit.

Recruitment can be akin to spinning lots of plates at the same time.

**Over the years, how has recruitment changed?**

When I began in 1999 I worked on a black and green screen (who remembers those?) and CV's had to be hand fed page by page into a fax and then a call to check they had been received by your client. The trick was to always number each page. There was no LinkedIn and we relied heavily on our own built database and "hot lists". Hardly an efficient way to work but it taught me to get to know my candidates. One of the dangers with the advance in technology is that people can become reliant upon computer algorithms and AI to find the answers, rather than getting to know the people behind the CV's. Ultimately it is still the same job, the people element will always be needed I believe.

**Why did you choose to set up a business that specialises in one area of recruitment?**

I'd been at the same company for a long time so needed a new challenge and more flexibility. Being part of a PLC gave me a fantastic understanding of global recruitment, but I saw a gap in the market for a sector expert offering a flexible and personal service. One where developing long-term relationships was crucial to the success of the partnership, and so I thought why not just go for it.

**What's been your biggest highlight so far?**

I am not sure I have one single highlight but I do feel very grateful each day for how far I have come on my own. Working independently can be lonely at times and you have to stay positive and motivated, I have to drive myself each day which luckily I don't find difficult. I enjoy the relationship side of what I do and feel lucky to still be working with people I have helped over the years. Receiving the smallest of thank-you's or a personal recommendation are probably up there too as highlights as it means I am achieving what I set out to do.

**Advice time. Anyone reading this who fancies a career change, what would you recommend?**

I am a firm believer that life's too short to do something you don't enjoy so no matter the job, make sure you are passionate about it. Recognise that if you want something enough you can achieve it but that comes at a cost. Of course it is hard, but if it was easy everyone would be doing it.

**So there you go. If you'd like help to find the right tax & accountancy role or a recruit, call Bryony on 0191 375 9983. Alternatively, visit [www.bryonygibson.com](http://www.bryonygibson.com), connect on LinkedIn or follow @bryonygibson.**





“

*...Recruitment  
can be akin to  
spinning lots of  
plates at the  
same time...*

Bryony Gibson



Hi everyone

How is everyone feeling after the summer holiday juggle? Hope we all made it through relatively unscathed!

You might be aware that I took a bit of a break during the holidays, and I'm pleased to report that this article is coming to you from my new office in my lovely new house! The boxes are all away and I'm hoping only one more IKEA trip is required...

I'm now back, refreshed and ready to go, so if you'd like a chat about any of the issues below, or another aspect of HR in your business, please do get in touch.

Kathryn



## *An Apple employee was unfairly dismissed for taking photos of a female colleague*

An employee hired by Apple Retail UK, was found to have been unfairly dismissed after taking and sharing photos of a female colleague without her knowledge. In this case, after the employee had taken photos of a female colleague in the staff canteen and shared them in a group chat, another colleague flagged this as a concern. The employee was then dismissed for sexual harassment.

Despite Apple having policies relating to business conduct, and harassment and bullying, the tribunal found the harassment policy was 'vague and did not contain a clear definition of harassment. The tribunal also ruled that the female colleague was unlikely to have been aware the photo was taken, and his behaviour would therefore not have impacted her. While the judge ruled that this case was a 'stupid form of engagement of a 'teenage-style crush', the claimant's actions did not constitute serious misconduct.

Whilst this type of behaviour may feel like a fairly obvious fair dismissal, this case shows the importance of ensuring any harassment policies clearly define what is classified as harassment, to avoid a risk of a similar finding by a later tribunal.



## *Did you see?*

Last month our articles focused on employee communication. This month, look out for tips all about the various ways to protect your business.



## Post Election special

Last month, we discussed the possibility that the employment law landscape may change if Labour came to power, now it seems to have become a reality, and there are key legislation updates that small businesses will need to watch out for in the coming months as follows:

### Removing the 'one-sided' flexibility of zero hour contracts

This proposal is unlikely to ban the use of zero hours arrangements entirely, but will restrict them, requiring a basic level of security and avoiding the 'exploitative' nature of zero hour contracts.

### Fire and rehire

The controversial practice of businesses 'firing' and then rehiring employees on less favourable terms will come to end with more stringent measure under Labour's plan, including a stronger code of practice than the one issued recently by the previous government.

### Basic day one rights for all workers

Currently only applicable to individuals with more than two years' service, this significant change will give all workers protection against unfair dismissal still subject to probationary periods, and access to parental leave and sick pay.

### Strengthening Statutory Sick Pay (SSP)

Barriers to SSP will be removing, making it available to all workers from day one of their employment, without any earnings threshold or waiting period.



### Flexible working as the default

Employers will be required to accommodate flexible working requests as a default from day one, as far as is reasonable.

### Enhanced protections for new mothers

It will become unlawful for employers to dismiss a woman who has recently returned to work after childbirth for a period of six months, except in specific circumstances outlined by law.

## Legal Update

### *Employee who was part of a pool of one redundancy was unfairly dismissed*

The Employment Appeal Tribunal (EAT) tribunal found that an employee was unfairly dismissed due to the employer's failure to consult on the decision to place them in a pool of one. In this case, three other employees also performed similar roles across the UK, but the claimant was placed at risk of redundancy in a pool of one. Following a consultation process, the claimant was made redundant however, while the tribunal accepted the employer's belief that there was a pool of one and that the role was unique, it found that the business had failed to explain these reasons to the claimant during the employee's consultation process.

It is very tempting to operate pools of one, in an attempt to avoid dragging other employees into a stressful process, but this case highlights the very important need to consult not just on the need for redundancy, but also on the decision to operate a pool of one.





## How can you prepare your business for the upcoming changes in Employment Law?

Next month, the government will be introducing the Employment Rights Bill. This bill is expected to lead to the biggest changes to Employment Law in decades.

### The Employment Rights Bill is expected to:

- Ban exploitative zero-hour contracts, meaning workers will have a right to a contract that reflects the number of hours they regularly work. Workers will also be entitled to reasonable notice of any changes in shifts, with proportionate compensation for any shifts cancelled or curtailed.
- Make parental leave, sick pay and protection from unfair dismissal available from day one for all workers – though they have confirmed that employers can still operate probationary periods to assess new hires.
- Strengthen statutory sick pay (SSP), removing the lower earnings limit to make it available to all workers, as well as removing the three-day waiting period.
- Make flexible working the default from day one for all workers, with employers expected to accommodate this as far as is reasonable.
- Strengthen protections for new mothers, making it unlawful to dismiss a woman who has had a baby for six months after her return to work (this excludes specific circumstances).
- Establish a new single enforcement body, to be known as the Fair Work Agency, which will be tasked with strengthening the enforcement of workplace rights.
- Update trade union legislation, removing restrictions applied by the previous government and simplifying the process of statutory recognition.
- Ending 'Fire and Rehire' and 'Fire and Replace' practices through legislative reform.



Diane Mactavish

### What should you do now to prepare for October?

The emphasis has shifted in employment law. This Labour government will prioritise the rights of workers during their tenure and this bill is the first sign of that. Additional day one rights, extra dismissal protection, more trade union activity and increased enforcement procedures are just some of the expected changes.

The incoming Employment Rights Bill is expected to create an avalanche of additional work and costs for small and medium sized business owners. Regardless of the expected impact on your business, this changing of the guard presents a good chance for you to reset and futureproof your HR policies, procedures, and practices.

The HR Dept can help you get ready for the employment law changes in many ways.

### HR Audit

Firstly, you need to review your HR practices, the HR Dept can support you with a full robust HR Audit. As a starting point you could take our free HR quiz to see where you are currently, details for this can be found here: [hrdept.co.uk/is-your-business-ready](https://hrdept.co.uk/is-your-business-ready).

### Policies and Contracts

You need to review your contract and handbooks to ensure they are up to date and relevant to futureproof your business. We can review and rewrite your contracts and handbooks for you.

### Management Training

We can provide management training, to ensure your management team are up to date with the latest employment law regulations, and how to manage employees in the right way, keeping your business compliant.

### Ongoing Advice

We provide you with ongoing advice and insights to keep your HR practices working effectively. This can be on a retained contract or pay as you go, we can be beside you every step of the way.

***If you don't want to get caught out and want to get ahead of the game, then visit [hrdept.co.uk](https://hrdept.co.uk) or call us today on 0191 2838732 for a free no obligation conversation to see how we can support you and your business.***



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## The elephant in the room...

(is full of support)

### HR Support

- Review of policies and procedures
- Draft of employee letters and document templates
- Research of employee benefits

### Recruiter Support

- Write interview questions
- Conduct telephone screening
- Resourcing and onboarding planning

### Coaching Support

- SME business planning
- 121 start up mentoring
- Career transition guidance



[hayley@theefficientelephant.co.uk](mailto:hayley@theefficientelephant.co.uk)



07739985959



[linkedin.com/in/hayleyramm](https://www.linkedin.com/in/hayleyramm)



# Small changes, big impact: Unlocking operational excellence one step at a time



Helen Butler

Have you ever wondered what really makes some businesses stand out while others struggle to keep up?

**It's not always about big, dramatic changes. More often, it's the small, consistent improvements—the 'small wins'—that add up and push a business towards success. These minor adjustments might seem small at first, but they can have a powerful impact over time, helping you streamline operations and set your business up for long-term growth.**

## Why Small Wins Matter

So, what do I mean by 'small wins'? These are the little changes you make in your business—adjustments that might seem minor on their own but, when done regularly, can make a big difference. In the busyness of running a business, it's easy to think that only major overhauls will get you where you want to go. But from my experience, focusing on these small, manageable wins can actually lead to more sustainable and less disruptive growth.

Businesses that focus on small changes build a culture of continuous improvement. They don't rely on occasional big changes that can shake things up too much. Instead, they regularly refine their processes, support their team's development, and make smart, targeted upgrades in technology. This steady progress helps create a strong, adaptable business that's ready to thrive in the long run.

## Finding Your Small Wins

How do you start identifying these small wins? I recommend focusing on three main areas: processes, people, and technology.

**Processes:** Even processes you've had in place for years can benefit from a little tweaking. Sometimes, just changing the order of tasks or simplifying steps can make a big difference. For example, I worked with a business that managed to cut down its production time simply by reorganising the steps in its workflow. It was a small change, but it had a big impact on how efficiently they operated.

**People:** Your team is your biggest asset. Small investments in training, improving communication, or recognising their hard work can lead to big boosts in productivity and morale. I've seen teams become more engaged and effective just by introducing short, focused training sessions or creating a more open, communicative work environment. These small steps can make a huge difference in how your team performs.

**Technology:** In today's world, even minor tech upgrades can have a big impact. Whether it's automating routine tasks, updating software, or introducing new tools, these changes can save time and improve accuracy. The key is not to overwhelm yourself with a complete tech overhaul. Instead, focus on small, manageable improvements that fit your business needs.

To uncover these small opportunities, it's often helpful to get input from your team. They're the ones on the front lines, and they often have the best ideas for making improvements. By encouraging them to

share their thoughts, you not only find new opportunities but also build a stronger, more engaged team.

## Making Small Wins Work for You

Once you've identified these opportunities, it's important to implement them in a way that doesn't disrupt your business. Start with small changes, make sure everyone understands the benefits, and keep an eye on how things are going. This way, you can make adjustments as needed and ensure these changes stick. The last thing you want is to invest in making the changes and for everything to slowly revert back to how it was before!

Don't forget to celebrate these improvements, no matter how minor they seem. Acknowledging these successes, whether in a team meeting or through formal recognition, helps reinforce the value of continuous improvement and keeps everyone motivated.

## Conclusion

Achieving operational excellence doesn't have to be about making huge, dramatic changes. Often, it's the small, consistent improvements that make the biggest difference. By focusing on these—whether it's tweaking a process, investing in your team, or making a smart tech upgrade—you can build a stronger, more efficient business over time.

I encourage you to start today with one small improvement!

[simplifiedoperations.co.uk](https://simplifiedoperations.co.uk)



# Mum who lives with metastatic breast cancer describes how mindfulness and mindfulness meditation help her live well



Laura Ashurst

**A mum-of-two thought to be one of Britain's longest survivors of incurable cancer believes her attention to her mental wellbeing has allowed her to live well alongside the disease.**

**Laura Ashurst, from Stokesley, was first diagnosed with cancer 23 years ago when her son was just six-months-old and her daughter was three.**

Her primary breast cancer spread to her lungs and she's spent the last 16 years living with incurable Stage Four cancer. Despite advancements in treatment, the average life expectancy following a diagnosis of metastatic breast cancer is between three and five years.

However, on business coach Ian Kinnery's 'The changing world of work' YouTube series, Laura revealed how she's not only survived following the terminal diagnosis – but thrived.

"We can be in front of the best oncologists or have access to the best drugs, but what also determines our ability to live well is the mental space we carry around each day," said Laura.

"Practicing self-kindness gives you reserves

to show kindness to others. We all need help and support to develop our ability to show self-kindness.

"When I was diagnosed I was given just two years to live. But I'm still here, and that's testimony to the exquisite sensitivity my disease has to the aromatase inhibitor drug Letrozole alongside the complementary support I gain from embedding mindfulness and meditation into my life."

Having trained in mindfulness and meditation, she's since launched a business called Living with Hope.

"The name of that business encapsulates how I live my life," she added.

"All any of us have is now, and to some degree, we all live with uncertainty.

"To live presently with uncertainty is something I have to practice daily.

"Mindfulness encourages us to notice the small things, things that in the busyness of each day we would ordinarily miss.

"These are often the things that are most important in life."

The 56-year-old discussed her lived experience on Ian Kinnery's podcast, which focussed on tips to manage your wellbeing in the workplace.

Having previously talked openly about his own mental health struggles, Ian – a former European Business Coach of the Year recipient – said Laura "perfectly embodies" the power of mindfulness.

"We all face enormous mental pressures,



especially within the workplace, but Laura has shown that when you manage them – and even make them work in your favour – they can actually have a positive impact on your life," said Ian, a leading coach for almost 20 years.

"She's channelled the power of positivity through meditation and breath work, but there are a host of different steps that you can take to look after yourself – especially in the workplace.

"Unfortunately, jobs are one of the biggest inducers of stress and I know first-hand just how much of a toll your career can take on you.

"Everybody needs to find a way to cope with their stresses, and that's where coaching can bring about enormous benefits, especially for those who ignore the warning signs that they are struggling themselves.

"Often these are the people who, on the surface, seem highly successful such as business leaders. But the reality is we all have struggles and we could all do with taking a leaf out of Laura's book to focus on ourselves – as she's living proof about how well it works."

[kinnery.co.uk](http://kinnery.co.uk)

Photo credit: Dawn McNamara



## Are you playing in the right position?

I've been watching a lot of Olympics and Paralympics this month. I'm not normally a sports nut, but the variety of sports, and the talent and determination on show makes it compelling viewing.

One story that caught my eye was of triathlete Sam Dickinson. No, he didn't take the glory and win gold, but he did play a crucial part in two medal wins. Firstly he helped the mixed relay team win bronze. But he also played a key role in enabling Alex Yee to win gold. He was the pacemaker, leading the bike element, then handing over the lead, before dropping out the race. Truly an example of fulfilling his role in the team.

Whether we are playing in our correct role is a conversation which often shows up when I'm coaching teams. It goes hand in hand with the succession planning and people development conversation, as often senior leaders are stepping down to do roles which is no longer theirs to do. For example: directors making operational decisions despite having capable senior managers, people leaders stepping back into their old technical roles and getting into the detail of issues they've employed other people to solve.

So why does this happen?

• **Unclear Expectations.** As leaders we haven't been clear enough with our people about what we want them to do. We make assumptions that they know, and they often don't. We've not been specific, and have given them very little feedback, so they are guessing.

• **Underperformance is another.** Are the people employed in that role actually delivering what is expected of them? If they aren't, have we told them that? If not, why not? Avoiding the difficult conversation, and stepping in instead rarely works, and only causes a bigger issue later down the line.

• **We're leading where we shouldn't be.** This happens if we've progressed through a business or discipline. We know the

roles our people are doing, as we've done them before. It's easy to step down, pick up the slack, under the guise of 'supporting'. Often though we're taking over instead. It's disempowering, doesn't help our people, and ultimately stifles the organisation.

If any of this sounds familiar; here's what you can do about it.

**1. Know your mandate:** What role is yours to deliver? What should you be doing, and what should you be delegating? If you don't have the right people in place, engage them, develop them or develop yourself to let go and trust others.

**2. Give clarity:** Once you have the right people in position, make sure they are clear on what you expect of them. Give them the support and resources they need to do the job, and let them lead.

**3. Don't overuse a strength:** If you are tempted to step in because you think 'I know how to do this, or can do it faster/better' – stop! Just because you can, doesn't mean you should. Help the other person build skill and expertise and empower them to do the job without you.

**4. Coach don't advise:** If people ask for your advice, then don't give them the benefit of

your wisdom. If you have all the answers, they won't learn and you won't be able to go on holiday! Coach them instead using open questions to get them to come up with their own solutions. The next time they'll know what to do.

**5. Hold people accountable:** This sounds simple but isn't. Accountability means giving people direct feedback on successes and failures; diplomatically and objectively. This does mean we'll have some difficult conversations, and that's the hard bit. We often avoid these conversations, or rescue people by stepping into help. Remember, you're not their parent – so don't save them or scold them. We employ adults, and need to discuss this as adults, without taking on parent mode.

Above all, if you find yourself stepping down a level to pick up a task, then hold up the mirror. Ask yourself – 'am I playing in the right position?' And if you aren't, then make sure the right person is instead!

**Annabel is an Executive and Team Coach, Leadership Facilitator and Coach Supervisor. Contact Annabel via LinkedIn, [annabel@successfultraining.co.uk](mailto:annabel@successfultraining.co.uk), or visit [www.successfultraining.co.uk](http://www.successfultraining.co.uk)**





# You can't move forward if you're not working on what is holding you back

Although I'm not someone who dedicates time to sit down and watch the Olympics, I am currently fascinated by Simone Biles.

**We can learn a lot from how athletes apply themselves to their biggest goals. Simone, for example, made headlines when she withdrew from the Tokyo Olympics due to mental health challenges—a decision not taken lightly given the years of training required for the Olympics. Following this year's Olympics in Paris, she is now the most decorated gymnast in history, adding to her many accolades.**

Athletes understand that a significant part of their success comes down to their mindset. You can see Simone mouthing to herself “you got this” before each event. Tom Daley uses his love for knitting to stay centred, and many athletes listen to music to drown out distractions and maintain focus before events.

Tony Robbins once said, “Success is 80% psychology and 20% strategy.” The simple fact is, if your head is not in a good space, you'll struggle to achieve your desired outcomes. When we are not mentally well, we procrastinate, feel overwhelmed, and a single hurdle can push us further into a negative mental state.

Taking time out (which doesn't always mean taking time off) to work on your mindset and mental health is crucial. In the UK, approximately 60% of C-suite executives work with a performance or mindset coach. This shows how important



Jude Daunt

Image by Alice Slee Photography

companies understand the link between mindset, mental health, and results.

I love this stat. However, when I was struggling with my mental health, it wasn't when I was at a C-suite level. Had I not done the work on my mindset and mental health, there's no way I would have reached that level either; I would still be struggling.

At Activated Mindset, we don't start with the C-suite; we provide affordable, personalized coaching programs for entry-level and middle management. I believe it's at this level where mindset truly matters. This is where people often struggle with confidence, self-doubt, and lack of

self-worth, which can lead to anxiety and a mindset of feeling incapable. If your core team has a winning mindset from the bottom up, imagine the impact on their results and overall happiness at work.

**For 1-1 Coaching visit...**

**Jude Daunt Coaching**  
[www.judedaultcoaching.co.uk](http://www.judedaultcoaching.co.uk)

**If you want a unique coaching programme for your employees visit...**

[www.activatedmindset.co.uk](http://www.activatedmindset.co.uk)

**For details of the next Ladies Collective contact Claire Pickersgill on LinkedIn**



# Silence is golden

In a 'noisy' world, have we lost our understanding of what silence means to us? Dr David Cliff explores its psychosocial benefits and its contribution to how organisations function.

**The sound of silence is not just a Simon & Garfunkel classic, but an actual experience for those who can develop their mindfulness and focus.**

Adopting silence seems to be a dying practice these days. Its decline stems from growing the egocentrism that goes with a postmodern culture focusing on, "I" rather than, "us". It often manifests itself in an increasing inability to listen to people, whilst transmitting one's own thoughts as to how we all should interpret the universe. In a leadership context such egocentrism can result in cults, wooden political ideologies and political reaction, such as far right politics and MAGA, (assuming America ever was great)! It lacks the virtue of humility.

Global capitalism has had a strong influence on this, as it seeks to define our needs to make necessities out of luxuries and ensure that we buy and consume as much as possible. Elites get richer, by these processes, whilst most other people are told about their freedoms, whilst simultaneously spending hours on helplines listening to low quality muzac or on waiting lists, often falsely convinced that they have real choices and influence. An increasing sense of righteous entitlement reinforces this from unregulated social media commentary where one can have a rant with little consequence. The consequent babble of rhetoric we are constantly exposed to feeds into the sensory overload people seem to increasingly complain of.

Paradoxically, people seem to fear silence as a sort of 'auditory void' wherein the quietude our true feelings emerge. I frequently observe amongst my clients' that silence focuses them on re-working or letting go of many things that they normally hold dear. So many of us live lives of distraction wherein it's very hard to stay still, to fall silent, to reflect, to learn and effect real change.

A failure to practice silence means that many simply do not listen, neither to their deepest thoughts, nor the experience of others. They do not review where their drives are taking them and whether their efforts will truly produce the

results desired. They do not hear what customers, stakeholders, community members really have to say. Instead, they often rush into communication with 'mindsets', oh so keen to transmit and promote, yet open only to receive what our confirmation bias allows them to hear. Biases that want to hear, that they are okay and what they do is fine. They then want to bring people along to further confirm the "OK-ness" of their position. But so many people are not OK with what is on offer, the very thing the Tory government recently paid dearly for.

For many people, their first experience of true silence is one of real discomfort as, away from distraction and adopted ideology, emergent, unaddressed emotions often surface and we can start a challenging process of questioning ourselves and perhaps, starting to hear others.

That's what I like about Gedanken clients, they very quickly get the value of silence. They get the value of listening to themselves and that sometimes we need coaching and leadership development, not just for strategy development, goals or specific skills acquisition, but the need to master the craft of humanity. That includes the ability to really listen with human, not market driven interest, to reflect, to consider values and to learn and to embrace uncertainties. By developing ourselves as a resource to navigate these uncertainties, rather than trying to cope by defining everything in ways that create certainty, we start the co-creation of more viable versions of reality for ourselves and others to better coexist in. Myriad books have been penned about the subject of silence, encompassing philosophy, religion, spirituality, neuropsychology, the list goes on. Silence is the true precursor to the understanding of both self and others. Despite this so many overlook the value silence as a place to just 'be' and listen to both our 'inner' selves and to others. We perhaps have two ears and one mouth for a reason!

[www.gedanken.co.uk](http://www.gedanken.co.uk)





“

*...We perhaps  
have two ears  
and one mouth  
for a reason...*



# I love being a woman but my gosh it is financially unkind!

Being the givers of life and living longer aren't the pros they are cracked up to be, not when it comes to being financially independent and stable.

**Closing the gender pay gap isn't enough in the need of gender equality, in relation to all thing's money.**

Women do not need to be paid equally to men. They need to be paid 30% MORE.

As a chronically ill woman and mother, being self-employed enabled me to access my right to earn alongside providing the flexibility to manage my health and family needs.

But this comes with significant problems relating to future proofing and real-time earnings.

But, whilst being employed does provide more protection, I would still be at a disadvantage.

Because the gender pay gap isn't just about closing the pay gap.

Why?...

We have a break in service due to being the child bearer. First there's the pregnancy, which we have no idea how that will go. Then post-birth most women either take a break from working or return following maternity leave (if they get it) on a part-time basis.

Women predominately manage the children, the home and all other additional needs on top of their career, putting us at greater risk of exhaustion affecting our health and the potential need for reducing hours further or taking another break due to ill health.

As our parental demands reduce, we hit the Menopause. Whilst Menopause is not an illness, the biological change in our bodies can have a debilitating impact, leading to a further career break, or reducing hours further and in some instances retiring early.

And women live longer than men, meaning our earnings and pensions needs to protect us for longer.

Then there's the tax on female biology to consider. Whilst our biology and the responsibilities that come with it, equates to us earning less, society financially penalises women for being a woman.

Until 2020, we paid tax on menstrual products.



But we still pay tax on every other biological need.

We pay tax on everything maternity, from clothes to essential items to support. We don't tax children's clothes, but do tax clothes needed to accommodate growing a human inside our bodies.

We pay tax on bras. If the cost of bras wasn't high enough, they are then taxed, including feeding bras. Thankfully, mastectomy bras are not taxed as they are classed as a medical need. Are all bras, especially feeding bras, not a medical need?!

The law says we can't work for six weeks after giving birth, but the government still taxes any income during those six weeks.

And pensions, even some women who are employed don't have a private pension, some need to opt out as they can't afford a pension, all their earnings are needed to pay for essentials items.

For men, their earning path, for the majority, is linear and is quite a weighted line. Society

allows them to earn their maximum potential during their working life, their biology isn't taxed, ensuring a significant pension and savings pot to support them until they pass.

For women, our paths are not linear, we have gaps, and our broken lines are significantly less weighted. We are prevented from earning our maximum potential, our biology is taxed and our pensions and savings, if we are fortunate enough to have them, are inefficient in comparison, but must serve us much longer.

Kind and fair gender equality equates to women being paid 30% more.

It's not about equal pay, it's about equitable living.

*\*I was inspired to write this article following a wonderful chat over a cuppa with Shkun Chadda, a health economics expert, who provided the 30% stat.*

[www.kindcurrency.co.uk](http://www.kindcurrency.co.uk)



# What if someone said: 'You personally could reduce child poverty over the next twenty years by giving up 15 mins of your time this year?'



**You would probably think that they were exaggerating, trying to sell an idea to get you to buy into something.**

**Well actually, based on multiple long term studies both in the UK and internationally, they are correct...if it is done effectively. So why isn't this amazing fact eradicating poverty as we speak? Well it is, but it takes time and more support.**

The evidence is compelling and now being taken seriously by educationalists around the world. It indicates that meaningful awareness of the world of work has a measurable, positive impact on future wage output. That is a very blunt measure of 'success' but indicates higher levels of education, attitudes to working hard and achievement...which some studies also specifically highlight.

It reduces poverty.

The younger we start, the more effective it is.

So why aren't we doing this in every school?

Traditionally 'careers' teaching was an add on, usually confined to secondary school upwards and often co-ordinated by a school librarian or as an 'additional' responsibility

for one teacher. Is it any wonder that it is rarely seen as an important part of the school offer in most schools. What did your school do to improve your awareness of the world of work and the possibilities that your skills and strengths could open up for you?

Spark Tees Valley was set up to create resources and events for schools to create a cultural understanding of the world of work through everyday curriculum work. That is the language and the currency that all schools work with. Teachers rarely teach every objective that is in their long term plans for each year, there simply isn't enough time. So how could they possibly fit in teaching about the world of work as well?

That is where you come in...well virtually.

Spark brings the world of work into the curriculum. As founder Andrew Stogdale explains, "If you have just taught a lesson about electrical circuits how do you make it meaningful? Bringing in an electrician who can talk about what they do and how they got their role adds a purpose and context to what can often feel like a curriculum disconnected from any real meaning". Different children have different interests; different lessons interest different pupils. To immediately connect learning in a lesson to a future career option, something they are interested in, is a powerful learning opportunity.

Spark's content is short and snappy; some

key questions for each volunteer, skills used, route to current role and what they love about their job. Teachers can immediately fit them into any existing lesson plans and feedback is clear: children love them. In fact, the resources also have home access built in so following a viewing in school, the resource can be accessed at home alongside parents to further enhance the engagement. The vast majority of the National Curriculum objectives across all subjects are covered but it is never enough. They need you to talk about what you and your companies does. Fifteen minutes of your time.

At your place of work.

A handful of questions about you and your role.

And you help reduce future poverty.

**To find out more visit:**  
**[www.sparkteesvalley.com](http://www.sparkteesvalley.com)**

**And feature on their map: [earth.google.com/earth/d/1SWSzInFH3MDI053MG\\_DWFqPuIywlspZA?usp=sharing](https://earth.google.com/earth/d/1SWSzInFH3MDI053MG_DWFqPuIywlspZA?usp=sharing)**

**Or email: [andrew@sparkteesvalley.com](mailto:andrew@sparkteesvalley.com) for a chat about how you can be part of the solution.**

**And did we mention that they don't charge you a penny...**



# NE1 CAN and partners are ready for the new term

*By Kerry Mc Cabe, Business Network Manager, NE1 Ltd*

September signals the start of a new academic year, and at NE1, our NE1 CAN programme is gearing up for a busy term ahead as we double the number of events we're delivering, with a minimum of 25 events planned from September to December.

**We are tremendously excited and ready for the upcoming Autumn programme, one of three we will deliver across the academic year. Bringing together cross-sector businesses, education and youth providers from across the region, we provide real-life and meaningful career insight events to help young people make informed decisions about their futures while supporting businesses to tackle recruitment, retention and diversification issues.**

Businesses are operating within a challenging recruitment landscape and our NE1 CAN programme has been tailored to reflect this targeting the individual needs of the businesses we work with.

Since NE1 CAN was launched over seven years ago, we have delivered hundreds of events helping bridge the gap between businesses and young people across the North East. With a strong network of education and youth providers referring young people to our events, we provide relevant links between employers and the workforce of the future. The success of our programme hinges on the way we engage with young people. Creating inclusive environments allows us to break down barriers between businesses and young people, fostering a culture of confidence where attendees are happy to engage with businesses and delivery partners.

Over the next four months, we have a minimum of 25 events booked including sessions with The National Trust, Esh Group and The Environment Agency. Due to the overwhelming demand for spaces at existing events with Newcastle Hospitals Trust, we are working in close partnership with them to host 'The Big One', an event for 500 young people examining the varied careers available across the trust. As a mark of how important recruitment is for the trust, its Chief Executive, Sir James Mackey will be opening the sessions. We are thrilled to have him join us and outline the huge range of employment opportunities within the trust and the NHS.

We work closely with businesses to establish their objectives and align with their recruitment and outreach strategy, what does the individual company or organisation need the event to deliver, and which issues must be addressed? Once this has been established we create the event, knowing what will work for young people.

UNW, the Newcastle-based independent chartered accountancy and business advisory firm, recently sought our support with recruitment for its award-winning apprenticeship programme. The company engaged with NE1 CAN to help spread the message about the available finance apprenticeship opportunities to a wider and more diverse audience.

Once we established the challenges faced by the firm with attracting applications for the programme, we organised an event for 30 interested students from several education providers that UNW had not previously partnered with. The result was that UNW received a number of high-quality applications from young people of all backgrounds. The firm ultimately made an offer to one of those applicants who subsequently accepted and is starting their career at the firm in September 2024.

We had similar success with Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums, TWAM, helping them widen access to their work experience provision. Through our network of 220 youth and education providers, we were able to promote opportunities among people who wouldn't normally have exposure to careers in this sector. We also facilitated long-term working partnerships with SEND providers to improve the work experience offered and create a more inclusive provision.

NE1 CAN's trusted reputation has grown, and due to NE1's strong ties with businesses, more people want to work with the project. Businesses like UNW and TWAM are coming to us after learning about our engagement and outreach work. Peer-to-peer networks have done a great job of sharing our successes and encouraging other companies to partner with us.

They know and trust that we have established contacts with a network of education and youth partners and can deliver events that will provide a platform to meet and engage with young people, the workforce of the future and their potential recruits.

In the year ahead we are working with a large number of partners and have gone to great lengths to talk to them about their individual recruitment and retention needs. Our programme has been shaped to create specific opportunities for meaningful engagement with the workforce of the future and to create longer-term, strategic relationships.

We have a strong programme packed with a record number of events and we can't wait to get started.

***If you want to partner on an event relevant to your business please get in touch***  
***Kerry.mccabe@newcastlene1ltd.com***





Kerry McCabe



# abc AWARDS 2024

THE MOST INCLUSIVE CELEBRATION IN THE NORTH EAST



## The ABC Annual Awards Dinner is back!

Location: Grand Hotel, Gosforth Park  
17th October 2024

We are thrilled to announce the return of our Annual Awards Ceremony, set to take place on the 17th October 2024!

Join us as we continue our journey of celebrating inclusion with the support of our esteemed partners, sponsors, attendees, and phenomenal finalists. Once again, we eagerly anticipate an evening of connecting, supporting, and promoting the Asian and broader communities.

We invite you all to join us in honouring extraordinary individuals and their remarkable achievements. Prepare for a night of celebration that includes a sparkling drinks reception, a delectable three-course meal, and the highly anticipated awards!



ABCConnexions is a not-for-profit social enterprise that aims to connect, support and promote the Asian and wider community. [www.abconnexions.org](http://www.abconnexions.org)







## Over 10 Awards including our new Inclusion By Default Award!

Introducing the all new **Inclusion by Default Award** which is awarded to any individual or organisation who has significantly contributed to making the North East a more inclusive place.

### Purchase a table for 10 or individual tickets

and enjoy a sparkling drinks reception, followed by a delicious three-course meal and, of course, the awards!

The ABC Annual Awards and Dinner held on the **17th of October**, is without doubt, the largest celebration and recognition of the Asian and broader community from across the public, private and third sectors in the North East, attracting significant community, business and political leaders including international celebrities.



### Tables & Tickets

Available to purchase now  
[bit.ly/JoinABCawards](https://bit.ly/JoinABCawards)



# Inclusion 'By Default'

Our impact to date:

- ✓ 4x Round Tables Hosted
- ✓ 4,000+ People completed our survey



## ABC's Inclusion Campaign Soars

ABConnexions' Inclusion By Default Campaign has made significant progress in promoting meaningful inclusion initiatives with it's goal to help make the North East the most inclusive region by 2025.

The campaign has garnered impressive engagement, with over 4,000 people participating in the "What does inclusion mean to you?" survey, providing valuable insights into diverse perspectives on inclusion.

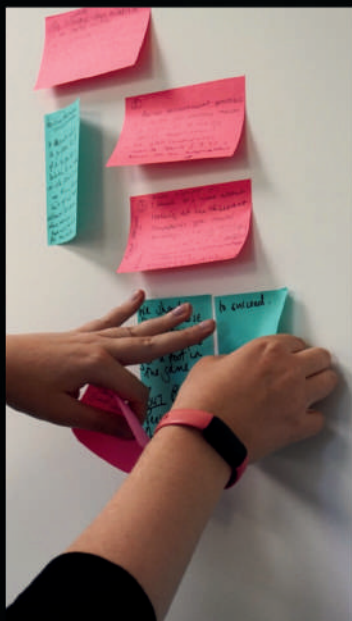
The campaign's impact extends beyond surveys, with ABC facilitating four focused round table discussions on faith, inclusive recruitment, social mobility, and health inequalities.

These sessions, along with the Innovative Inclusion Framework (IIF), are driving conversations and actions that promote a more inclusive environment in business and society.

If you would like to find out more about the campaign or host a Round Table session, please get in touch with the team at ABConnexions using the email:

[inclusion@abconnexions.org](mailto:inclusion@abconnexions.org)





Our new Inclusive  
Innovation Framework  
being utilised at the  
IBD Conference 2024

Using the Inclusive Innovation Framework (IIF) developed in partnership with Yohlar, the campaign will connect, support and promote all communities and initiatives that are working on inclusion, alongside tackling major issues that exist throughout the UK.

In doing so we will raise the profile of existing organisations and initiatives that are already making a difference, sharing good practices and lived experiences, starting by inviting everyone to answer:



***“What does inclusion mean to you and your organisation?”***



It's time to be comfortable with uncomfortable conversations and get involved...

## **InclusionByDefault needs your input!**

We are seeking more data to help inform and develop our Inclusive Innovation Framework.

Simply scan the barcode above and answer 3 simple questions, then ask your team to do the same.

INCLUSION  
IS NOT JUST  
**BLACK  
WHITE**



**#InclusionByDefault**

Want to support our campaign or know more about our IIF framework?



[abconnexions.org/inclusion-by-default](https://abconnexions.org/inclusion-by-default)  
[inclusion@abconnexions.org](mailto:inclusion@abconnexions.org)  
01661 823234



# Power to our People

In recent years, the conversation around inclusion has rightly focused on amplifying marginalised voices. Yet, as we strive to create a more inclusive society, it's crucial that we don't inadvertently marginalise others in the process.

**True inclusion means ensuring that everyone, regardless of background, race, or gender, feels heard, valued, and respected.**

Take, for example, the recent unrest in the UK, where deep-seated frustrations among various communities have come to the fore. Whilst shockingly some of the unrest translated into looting and thuggery with anger targeted towards minority groups, we must also recognise the growing sense of alienation among other segments of the population—particularly young white boys and middle-aged white men who often feel overlooked in today's inclusion narrative.

The Inclusion by Default campaign, which has been a focal point for driving forward a more inclusive society, is about ensuring that inclusivity is embedded into the very fabric of our communities, workplaces, and institutions. **However, for inclusion to be truly meaningful, it must encompass everyone.** This includes those young white boys who increasingly feel left behind in education and employment opportunities, and middle-aged white men who find themselves struggling to adapt in a rapidly changing economy.

**I recall a conversation with a friend, a significant White entrepreneur, who expressed his frustration with how the inclusion narrative seemed to have shifted so far towards addressing the needs of minority groups that people like him were being sidelined.** His perspective was an important reminder: inclusion isn't a zero-sum game. It's not about taking opportunities away from one group to give them to another; it's about expanding the table so that everyone has a seat.

**True inclusion demands a balanced approach—one that acknowledges the challenges faced by all groups and**



Ammar Mirza CBE

**ensures that no one feels left out of the conversation.** This is where the concept of equity comes into play. Equity is about recognising that different people face different barriers and that our approach to inclusion must be tailored to meet these varied needs.

For instance, in certain areas of the UK, young white boys are increasingly feeling disconnected from the opportunities available to them. This is a pressing issue that requires attention, just as much as the systemic inequalities that have historically affected minority communities. Similarly, middle-aged white men, particularly those who have seen industries they relied on decline, often find themselves struggling to find their place in the modern world. Their voices matter too, and their inclusion is critical to the overall health of our society.

**As we look ahead, the Inclusion by Default campaign and the Inclusive Innovation Framework provide the tools to create a society where everyone's voice is**

**valued.** But these tools require action. We must commit to expanding the inclusion conversation to ensure that it genuinely reflects the diversity of experiences across our society.

**Inclusion isn't about choosing which voices to amplify at the expense of others.**

It's about building a society where every voice matters—where young white boys, middle-aged white men, and all other groups have an equal opportunity to contribute and thrive. **The strength of our society lies in our ability to unite and uplift all voices, ensuring that no one is left behind powering us on towards a healthier, happier and wealthier future.**

*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.*



# Quantum Controls – making the next leap...



Kevin Brown

...But they want some help.

**If you have machines using electric motors, you need to know about Quantum Controls.**

**At lot of you reading this probably won't have heard of Quantum Controls. Those of you who are in any sort of industry which uses electric motors, almost certainly will.**

They are the UK's leading supplier of Variable Speed Drives, Motors and Support Services, winning awards for the past 5 years they now service over 300 contracts across the country, but their hearts are in the North East where the company was founded.

MD Kevin Brown bought out the previous owners in 2009 and renamed the company, previously known as Slater Drive Systems, to Quantum Controls.

"I knew that the business had potential to grow so my number one aim was to, in effect, spread our wings," said Kevin. "The company had previously only dealt with two major clients, but I wanted that to change so in 2018 we formed new Service

Partnerships with major Drive Suppliers in the UK and are now the Official Drives Service Partner for Schneider Electric, Danfoss, Vacon and Mitsubishi, and have engineers fully trained on ABB, Control Techniques, Nidec and Siemens Drives."

And it's worked. As well as its headquarters in Prudhoe, the firm now has bases in Edinburgh, Thetford and Exeter, and they've recently opened a manufacturing plant in Birtley. Turnover has gone from £6m to £15m and is predicted to double within the next five years.

A major part of this growth comes from the requirement to reduce energy cost, and with 65% of electricity consumption via an Electric Motor in the Industry, it demonstrated the biggest saving opportunity. They are able to attribute over £100 million pound in energy saving by supporting businesses with the correct utilisation of their Drive across the past two decades.

"We have engineers all over the UK, we offer assets to hundreds of firms, and at the moment we're adding around 10 new contracts a month. Over the next 5 years we're aiming to take that to 1000 new contracts. We're No.1 at what we do and we intend to keep it that way.

Some of our biggest customers are the water utility companies. We work with the

majority of them. The Government has made it a priority to see their investment increase. For example some are predicted to increase their investment from £4m to £40m over the next 5 years which is why we can confidently predict strong future growth for us."

Growth is obviously fantastic at Quantum Controls...it's also great for the regional and national economies.

It also means they need additional staff. The company is busily recruiting and is looking to make various appointments across the company.

"We are particularly looking for engineers, either experienced or having just finished their apprenticeships. It's not just us...the entire engineering industry is struggling to attract enough talent. Here at Quantum Controls we're actively working with local schools and colleges to generate interest and offer apprenticeships and training, but the bottom line is we need more engineers so if anyone is interested in joining Quantum Controls, please get in touch."

**For more information and to take advantage of a free energy saving brochure, go onto [www.quantum-controls.co.uk](http://www.quantum-controls.co.uk) or call 01661 835 566 or email [marketing@quantum-controls.co.uk](mailto:marketing@quantum-controls.co.uk)**





## Building resilient teams: the importance of team development in uncertain times, with People Spark's Scott Smith

### In your experience, why is team development more crucial than ever in today's volatile environment?

We live in a world that's increasingly characterised by what we refer to as 'VUCA' - volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity—and more recently, 'BANI', which stands for brittle, anxious, nonlinear, and incomprehensible. I'm sure that feels very relatable for every reader at the moment!

The importance of team development amid this chaos cannot be overstated. It mitigates the risks of low morale, low job satisfaction, high staff turnover, poor communication and ultimately, low productivity.

### Are traditional management approaches failing?

Traditional management approaches often assume a level of predictability that simply doesn't exist in a VUCA or BANI world. In these environments, leaders need to foster teams that are not just surviving, but thriving amidst continuous disruption. To do this, you need to



Scott Smith





focus on agility, resilience and emotional intelligence - qualities that are cultivated through deliberate and consistent team development, aligned to organisational values and team objectives.

These uncertain environments also have a huge impact on morale and job satisfaction. Job security isn't something organisations can guarantee in stable times, never mind in uncertain ones. Employees crave stability and a sense of purpose so by investing in team development, you can create a supportive and growth-oriented culture which will help employees now, but also if and when they move on - ensuring have a 'toolkit' of skills and techniques to support themselves to embrace new opportunities.

#### **What is People Spark's approach to supporting clients to mitigate the risks posed by volatility and uncertain times?**

We tailor our programs to meet the specific needs of each organisation - there is no one size fits all approach. We really focus in on communication and relationship management; uncertain times can put a lot of pressure on relationships which causes ripple effects across teams, whole organisations and even out to customers and suppliers. Our team development fosters open communication, trust, and collaboration—all of which are crucial for maintaining a cohesive and productive team environment. When team members trust each other and their leaders, they are more likely to support one another and work together towards common goals, even in the face of adversity.

One of our clients recently fed back that the “positive impact of the work that People Spark does cannot be underestimated. They support leaders to build workforces that are happier, more supported, and more heard. The world could do with more Spark!”

#### **What trends are you seeing in team development needs this year?**

We've noticed a significant trend toward leaders wanting to build high psychological safety for their teams amid the backdrop of constant change and unpredictability. We're supporting many organisations - from housing associations, tech organisations to retail and professional services - in taking the time to reflect, build relationships with high trust, be clear about expectations and encourage regular feedback and healthy challenge within their teams.

***If you think your team could benefit from support like this, get in touch with [scott@peoplesparkolutions.co.uk](mailto:scott@peoplesparkolutions.co.uk) for a no-obligation chat.***

***[www.peoplesparkolutions.co.uk](http://www.peoplesparkolutions.co.uk)***





# Lumo takes Pride in supporting local independent businesses



Lumo guest presenters Danni Delonco and Mutha Tucka are joined by Peter Darrant from Pride in Gateshead with just some of the many independent business owners from the bars, cafes and shops based in and near the railway arches on Wellington Street and Hymers Court.



Graham Soult

Tyneside train operator Lumo is showing its support for local independent businesses in Gateshead as part of the town's first Pride event by showcasing some of the town's hidden gems in a video taking social media by storm.

**Popular North East drag queens Danni Delonco and Mutha Tucka present the fun four-minute film featuring a range of shops from the Big Fat Donut Co to bars like Axis, Microbus and well-established pubs like The Central and Station East, as well as activities such as Hot Pod Yoga and even getting a Tattoo by the talented team at Mushu Tattoo.**

Filming took place in early August and was supported by Gateshead Council. Lumo is committed to celebrating and supporting local suppliers and small businesses so commissioned the video to help give the businesses a boost. The video also helps communicate that Gateshead is just a short walk over the Tyne or one stop on the Metro from Newcastle central station, the nearest station for Lumo and other train operator's mainline services.

Martijn Gilbert, Managing Director at Lumo, said: "Lumo is a proud supporter of Pride in Gateshead but we wanted to go further to support the town and celebrate some of the many great local independent businesses both locals and visitors to the area can experience

and enjoy, all within easy reach from our Lumo train services.

"We're keen to play an active role in the communities we serve, and that extends to the whole of the North East which is a key catchment area for customers and colleagues alike. Gateshead's railway quarter has developed into a vibrant mix of independent businesses in recent years, so our sponsorship of Gateshead Pride is a great opportunity to promote some of the other things to see and do nearby. We hope it'll help give business a boost."

Lumo was the main stage sponsor for the end-of-festival Pride on Tyne concert which took place on Sunday 25 August with pop sensation Sonia headlining the free event alongside a special appearance from this year's Mr Gay World finalists.

Gateshead based retail consultant Graham Soult makes a brief cameo appearance in the video which has already achieved more than 10,000 views on social media.

Graham, whose work supports and champions independent businesses UK-wide, said: "As a

passionate advocate for strong partnerships to help transform and strengthen local high streets, I'm full of admiration for this fun and engaging project between Lumo and the local businesses based in the railway arches of the town.

"As someone who travels the UK to help advise on how high streets can adapt and grow to meet changing consumer demands, it's great to see this brilliant work taking place on our doorstep."

Peter Darrant, Chair of Out North East, said: "I am incredibly grateful for the support Lumo has given to Pride in Gateshead, throughout the month and especially for their very kind offer to be main stage sponsor for the Pride on Tyne concert.

"Lumo is an amazing community partner because they approach everything with a real willingness to help in any way they can."

10 local businesses feature in the film which also illustrates the ease of either walking or taking the Metro from Newcastle Central Station to reach the businesses predominantly based on Wellington Street.

Lumo was recently awarded 'Green Innovation Business of the Year' at the recent North East Chamber of Commerce Business Awards, recognising the rail operator's commitment to sustainability and championing local partnerships.

[www.lumo.co.uk](http://www.lumo.co.uk)





# In Conversation With....



## Martin Potts

*Managing Director, Shrewd HR*

### **What were your career ambitions?**

When it was clear I wasn't going to make it as a professional footballer (it was never happening!) I always wanted to have my own company; I didn't know exactly what doing but it was always an ambition to run and grow my own successful business.

### **Tell us about your current role?**

I'm Managing Director of shrewd HR – a full 360 HR outsourcing service for SMEs across the North of England.

### **What is your proudest business achievement?**

Recruiting our first employee.

### **How has your industry changed in the last decade?**

This is what makes what we do so interesting, the world of work has changed so much and continues to. When I first started my career, my first role was within the Personnel Department for the Durham & Darlington Fire and Rescue Service, that role wouldn't exist these days because of AI and technology. Personnel quickly shifted towards Human Resources and now it's much more about People and Culture, emphasising a more people-centric approach to managing employees.

### **What are you currently working on?**

I'm working on updating our website to reflect the additional services we have recently launched.

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

I've been lucky enough to get so much advice through the network I have around me but the thing that sticks with me is to 'enjoy the journey' as business owners we're all so focused on the end goal and rarely sit back and enjoy the little successes and challenges along the way.

### **What has been your biggest challenge?**

Striking the perfect work-life balance is definitely my biggest challenge. At times it is impossible to switch off, even when you're lying on a sunlounger around the pool on holiday, you're still thinking about work. I love what I do though, so I don't see it as an issue, but it is important to find those things to help you switch off (see below).

### **How do you unwind outside of work?**

Exercise is my go-to, I enjoy going to the gym. I've also started to play padel tennis which I've become addicted to, I'm playing 3-4 times a week at the moment and would play every day if I could! I am a Sunderland football season ticket holder (for my sins!) which I've had for many years, so on a Saturday you'll find me cheering on the lads at the Stadium of Light.

### **Favourite Book?**

My favourite book is *Show Dog*, the story behind Nike by Phil Knight.

[shrewd-hr.co.uk](http://shrewd-hr.co.uk)





## Living a healthy and pain-free life

Our team at Gosforth Family Chiropractic is dedicated to helping our patients live healthy and pain-free lives. Whether your pain is acute or chronic, our professional staff will work with you every step of the way to ensure you experience optimal relief. We are a welcoming family chiropractic practice with a friendly staff.

**We pride ourselves on using evidence-based methods to offer you a full diagnosis and comprehensive treatment plan. We employ a multidisciplinary approach to ensure all aspects of your condition are covered.**

We may combine chiropractic with massage and cold laser therapy if appropriate, among various other techniques to ensure the most effective outcomes and quickest recovery times.

**Don't just take our word for it, see what our clients think...**



5 Jul 28, 2024

This was an amazing chiropractic experience! Dr Jacob is a very skilled chiropractor and even did my ankle, knee and is capable of extremity adjustments. He's a very genuine human and family man. You have to go! I feel amazing again.



Jul 06, 2024

Dr Jacob Palmer at Gosforth Family Chiropractic has literally changed my life. I have struggled with daily headaches and

migraines since I was about seven/eight years old due to an injury on a trampoline. I've seen chiropractors throughout my life, but it never really helped so I just stopped going. I just accepted it as part of my life, but it really sucked because I couldn't even play with my children without it triggering a severe headache. I was going through a really rough patch with constant severe headaches until my husband had enough and contacted Dr Jacob Palmer and made an appointment, I went with the feeling that this was just going to be a waste of money because it won't change anything, MAN, was I wrong. Jacob conducted a full assessment and then followed up with an adjustment tailored to my body and needs. WOW already I knew this would be different. Jacob came up with a full plan to work with me to ensure that he would resolve my headache issue. Now as an extremely busy mom of two (one being a baby) and a full-time demanding career, it was tough BUT Jacob proved that the word FAMILY in the business name, wasn't just for show, he accommodated my family and their needs as well. We spoke of my son and his ADHD and how we're struggling with such a long waiting list with CAMHS and without skipping a beat, Jacob said "bring him in" so he would adjust

my son at the same appointment as mine without charging extra. My children came with me to my appointments regularly which helped me so much as we have no family support, and my husband would sometimes be unavailable during my appointments. Jacob has changed my life; I barely have headaches anymore and I am able to physically be there for my children. I will continue going because I see how much this has helped me and my family! I highly recommend Jacob from Gosforth Family Chiropractic. There is SO much more I could say. Thank you, Jacob.



Jun 02, 2024

I should have posted this before Christmas. My son never slept through the night. He could hold his head up on day three of being home. He started crawling early but avoided rolling one way. At nine months, just before he started walking, I took him to see Jacob. Not only was he super friendly and knowledgeable, but he also took all my son's history including birth history and holistic info! After one session, my son was less tense and was rolling both ways. After the second, he started sleeping through the night. I'd tried everything to help him get some sleep and I mean everything. I'm so grateful to Jacob (and his kitten!). Would absolutely recommend for little livewires who can't sleep.

**If you are in need of any chiropractic services for your family, then we're on hand to help. Email: [care@gosforthfamilychiropractic.com](mailto:care@gosforthfamilychiropractic.com) or call 07888 864860.**

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NORTHERN

# INSIGHT

## The Built Environment

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## John N Dunn Group growing Heat Pump Market Presence with major workforce training investment

North East building services firm John N Dunn Group is upskilling its workforce to take advantage of increasing demand for air source heat pumps in the residential property market.

The North Tyneside-based firm has completed a major training programme which has seen 40 members of its team gaining new industry accreditations from the British Plumbing Employers Council (BPEC) that allow them to safely undertake work on these advanced energy systems.

The team is already working on a number of air source heat pumps installation schemes, including new large-scale residential developments in the North East, Yorkshire and Scotland, and it is now actively looking to bring in further contracts.

The project is part of John N Dunn Group's ongoing diversification to take advantage of growing opportunities within the low carbon and renewable energy technologies sector.



## Capital&Centric set to transform Gateshead's Old Town Hall

Social impact developers Capital&Centric have confirmed they plan to give Gateshead's historic Old Town Hall a new lease of life.

Last month it was reported that the Manchester-based developers were planning an expansion to the North East and were in early discussions with Gateshead Council about potential sites.

Now, they've signed an agreement to acquire and sensitively repurpose the stunning Grade II listed building into design-led new homes. The only surviving purpose-built town hall in Tyne and Wear, it was once the council headquarters until the chamber, civic suite and council officers were relocated to the new civic centre in 1987.

The team's architects are now working up a vision to bring the building back into use, with more to be revealed in the coming months as a planning application is worked up.

Capital&Centric has built a loyal following by restoring and repurposing some of the UK's iconic historic buildings, turning them into new homes, work and cultural spaces fit for the 21st Century.

Having already delivered a slew of regeneration projects across the North of England - including in Manchester, Stockport and Sheffield - the Old Town Hall will mark their first foray into the North East.

## Esh Construction to refurbish two Thirteen Group assisted living schemes in Hartlepool

Work is underway to refurbish two Hartlepool assisted living schemes after Esh Construction was appointed as contractor by housing provider, Thirteen.

Bramley Court and Richard Court will benefit from a range of internal and external improvements as part of a combined £4.3 million investment through Thirteen's Capital Delivery Framework.

Marking the largest award for Esh to date through the framework, Bramley Court - a 46-home sheltered housing development - will undergo full mechanical and electrical refurbishment. This includes major heating upgrades as well as work to improve the lighting and warden call, access controls and CCTV. Extensive internal decoration will be undertaken as well as upgrades to windows and doors.

Similar refurbishment work will be delivered in Richard Court which is a 48-home extra care development located in the town centre area of Hartlepool. Communal areas are benefiting from electrical and mechanical improvements, including the replacement of warden call and fire safety equipment, lighting and CCTV to the main complex. The apartments have benefited from improved ventilation and smoke detection systems. The communal areas will be fully redecorated with colour schemes chosen by the residents.

Esh Construction's Framework Manager, Andrew Harrow, said: "The work at Bramley Court and Richard Court takes our recently awarded contracts to a total of £8.3 million for Thirteen, following the commencement of kitchen, bathroom and re-wire schemes at Albany, Chilton and Blue Hall earlier this year. The amount of work secured in Year 2 of the framework is testament to the hard work of the team to mobilise and action five schemes at the same time.

"We approach these robust refurbishments with a customer first approach and appreciate that at times the works may be intrusive, but we are committed to working with Thirteen to collaboratively improve homes for residents."

Bramley Court and Richard Court are aimed at people aged 55+ who might need support to live independently in their own home.

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# The Built Environment

In the latest of these popular series of interviews Michael Grahamslaw spoke to...

## James Dickinson

Director/Project Manager at Gosforth based JW Dickinson Ltd.

### Did you always envisage a career working in and around the Built Environment?

Yes I did. My father Brian worked in construction and from a young age I was always interested in what he did and loved to go to jobs with him. After leaving school I joined his business, initially as an apprentice joiner and stayed for 12 years gaining tremendous experience along the way.

When I turned 29 I decided I wanted to challenge myself, become a master of my own destiny and start a business on my own. From there my company JW Dickinson was born.

### Tell us about the services you offer.

We are a residential building company who work extensively throughout Gosforth, Jesmond, Whitley Bay, Tynemouth and Ponteland. Whether you're looking for house extensions, loft conversions, home refurbishments or a similar service, we offer complete building solutions from the initial design consultation all the way through to completion.

### Tell us about your team.

We currently have a team of eight all of whom bring a wealth of experience and perform a first class job. We pride ourselves on being friendly, polite and courteous.

### What are you currently working on and how do you source your work?

We have a number of things ongoing at the moment including a large renovation project in West Moor, a sizeable house extension in Jesmond and an exciting development on Forth Banks on the Quayside. In addition we have a number of smaller kitchen and bathroom jobs underway. The variety of the work we undertake means every day is different.

We are fortunate to get a lot of assignments via word of mouth through family and friends and architects we link in with. We are also members of the Federation of Master Builders.

### What is your proudest career achievement?

Very difficult to pinpoint one but the general standard of our work gives me immense satisfaction, we can make a huge difference to people's lives. I am also very proud of those people who have started their career with us as apprentices and then forged successful careers within the building industry.

### What is your favourite building in the North East?

Undoubtedly Cragside near Rothbury which I believe was the first house in the world lit using hydroelectric power. I absolutely love the story of the Armstrong family. It is an absolutely amazing building and I love to visit when possible.

### How would you like to see the business evolve in the next 10 years?

I would like to look at more commercial work and am keen to move into housebuilding. Most importantly I want to retain a high level of service.

### Who are your Heroes and Mentors?

My Dad and my Grandad, both of whom have had a great influence on my life.

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

Ricky Gervais – simply hilarious and a comic genius.

Will Ferrell – *Anchorman* is my favourite comedy film and you can't get through Christmas without watching *Elf*.

John Lennon – a very interesting guy and a music legend.

Nelson Mandela – an inspirational figure. I must make time to read his book *"The Long Walk to Freedom."*

### How do you like to unwind?

To get away with my wife, family and friends. I also love walks with the dog and playing golf. I'm currently playing off a 16 handicap and hoping to improve going forward.

### Favourite Boxset?

*Band of Brothers*. A gripping series which gives us an understanding on how lucky we are and how much we owe to those who served in the War.

### Favourite Book?

*Shantaram* by Gregory David Roberts. A really good read and a proper page turner.

For more information visit the website  
[www.jwdickinsonltd.co.uk](http://www.jwdickinsonltd.co.uk)





“

*...We pride ourselves on great service and a first class end product...*

*James Dickinson*





Neil Turner

## Why are buildings so costly?

*By Neil Turner, Director, Howarth Litchfield*

As I write this article, I am on a train on the way to London to start a new, exciting build project. The capital value of the project is large and considerably higher than a building of similar size, if built in the North East.

**Even in the North East, the cost of construction has risen sharply in the last five years with a large number of factors affecting the build and development cost across all building types and values.**

Planning has become more complex, time consuming and requires more 'specialist' reports than ever. This can add considerable cost (and complexity) to overall development costs.

Material costs have risen sharply since the pandemic and although now more stable, they remain high and will probably stay at the current levels. This is a major issue,

and the building economy could benefit from some deflation in material costs to aid development.

The complexity of projects has increased. Services inside buildings have advanced in recent decades with mechanical and electrical elements now accounting for a quarter to a third of overall building costs. The complexity of building services systems are now comparable to those seen in most new cars which are heavily automated with every aspect of performance requiring specialist attention when there is a problem – from the opening and closing of doors and windows through to the heat recovery and

air source boilers in buildings and homes – all are heavily electrical.

The achievement of carbon zero is now also a factor in the increased costs of design and construction. By considering all the aspects of delivering a new building with a low carbon footprint, the method of build (and inevitably this means materials, services and the costs of construction) has also increased.

Changes in building regulation standards will continue to evolve so that we must also design in cost to accommodate the necessary requirements of being more environmentally responsible.

Ecology and biodiversity credits add time, cost and complexity to the planning of new buildings. My hope is that a new government will look again at this measure and get a better balance between the ecology needs weighed against a desire to accelerate sensible development.

One element that hasn't increased is consultant fees. But I sympathise with clients when they are paying so many different consultants for a wider range of activities. In fact, architects' fees have reduced throughout my career - I note that without complaint, but as an observation. Whilst the role has changed, we still look to offer the quality of service, so when your development costs are higher don't add your architect onto the complaints list!

So how do you keep the costs down? There are a few things you can do to try and mitigate the ever-increasing costs.

- **Keep it simple and avoid complexity, where possible.** The joy of architecture is in interesting shapes and forms, but there is no doubt this only adds to the complexity and thus increases overall cost.
- **Material choices have never been more important** and some of the simplest materials have seen significant cost increases in recent years. Choosing the right materials and then using them has never been more important.
- **The right design team choice is vital, too.** Pick your team carefully and I would advise that you choose qualified and experienced professionals, so that they have a real knowledge of their markets, materials and contractors and can take a design to site.
- **Contractor selection is also vital,** and your professional team should be able to advise on the procurement routes, contractor selection and integration. This is a key appointment.

Building and development is still possible and a huge part of our regional economy. Good design is always achievable, even with an increasingly challenging list of 'must haves'.

**My final tip is perseverance - and you will be rewarded!**

**Neil Turner, Director, Howarth Litchfield can be contacted on 0191 3849470 or email [n.turner@hlpuk.com](mailto:n.turner@hlpuk.com) [www.howarthlitchfield.com](http://www.howarthlitchfield.com)**





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Kevan Carrick

## Land, housing and 1.5 new million homes in five years

The new, Labour Government, is committed to delivering 1.5 million homes.

**Chancellor, Rachel Reeves MP, announced plans to reintroduce mandatory, local housing targets and to reform the National Planning Policy Framework, consulting on a new, growth-focused approach to the planning system, including supporting local authorities with 300 additional planning officers across the country.**

There will also be changes to the system itself and to the way ministers use powers for direct intervention.

The planning service has been the subject of much criticism. The National Planning Forum, together with the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), is currently consulting on the matters required to address such criticism in relation to delay in the planning system.

It is essential, policies ensure the early delivery of housing affordability with planning and economic policies, create a stable and affordable market, avoiding unacceptably high house price inflation in

many areas. The market is also showing the impact of housing shortage with the increase in rental where those, with a lower income, are finding it even harder to secure accommodation.

Change is essential and a national government policy, based on a 20-year strategy, is crucial to achieve a thriving and robust housing delivery programme of adequate numbers of a good qualitative standard, that meets social, environmental and cultural goals. Such a strategy delivered through the regions Combined Authorities would accelerate housing delivery, particularly for the much needed affordable and social housing.

Consideration has been given to industrialising the construction process, by building off site and timber frame. There are challenges with a volatile housing market that make investing in the innovation. A 20 year strategy should resolve these challenges and encourage investors.

Even so, investing in the training and skills for traditional construction, retrofit to improve sustainability and innovation styles of building is equally essential.

The proper and proportionate costs of development must be adopted in arriving at a fair price for the payment of land for development. Such costs for the improvement of infrastructure imposed by the development and the social infrastructure to support that development, such as schools and medical services, require payment from the development gain. Current examples for recovery of such costs from development gain are s106 agreements in planning for contributions including that for affordable and social homes, and/or Community Infrastructure Levy.

Some costs are relatively straight forward, others less so. The latter include planning design, content and density of development, with contributions for affordable and social housing, transport and highways, education and health, community, site services and utilities, remediation and below ground structures, including mines and minerals reservations.

These factors can also, delay or frustrate, delivery of development. To reduce risk, the RICS set up an expert working group, which I have the honour to chair, that has produced a Practice Statement for surveyors negotiating heads of terms for Land Agreements. These comprise, development agreements, option agreements to acquire development land or buildings. The intention is to reduce the considerable risk of delay and additional costs, by seeking to bring clarity to the process of the agreement of price for development land and buildings. Finally, a plea to all to consider the use of mediation as a method to resolve disputes at pace and keep matters moving. Mediation offers a flexible, low-cost approach. Whether in the planning system, between landowner and developer, during construction or in the management of the estate for service charges.

*Kevan Carrick is co-founder of Newcastle-based, JK Property Consultants LLP.*

*He is a member of the RICS Land and Natural Resources Professional Group Panel and is chair of the expert working group preparing the Practice Statement for 'Land agreements for development purposes', soon to be published.*

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## Official Launch For Banks Homes' First Large-Scale Residential Development

The dedicated housebuilding arm of North East employer the Banks Group is set to formally launch its first large-scale development.

**Banks Homes is building 150 high specification new homes at its Cathedral Meadows development on Station Road in West Rainton, which will include 120 detached, three-to-five bedroomed family homes, as well as a further allocation of 30 affordable properties.**

A range of sustainable house designs has been specially created for the development, while it will also include a new play area, new landscaped areas and new areas of public open space.

Cathedral Meadows will have its official launch at a special event on Thursday 5 September at the Ramside Hall Hotel to the east of Durham City, with members of the Banks Homes team on hand to talk to visitors about the range of properties that will be available.

Aisling Ramshaw, head of sales and marketing at Banks Homes, says: "Banks Homes is focused on creating sustainable, contemporary living spaces in desirable locations that enrich our customers' lives and we're so excited to be reaching this landmark moment with our first large-scale development.

"Our new homes will be built to a very high specification, with style coming as standard, and will include a range of high-quality appliances and facilities."

Representatives of some of the interior design firms that will have products within the new homes, including Omega Kitchens and bathroom designer Porcelanosa, will also be at the launch event.





A visualisation of Banks Homes' new Cathedral Meadows development in West Rainton

“

**...We're proud to  
be building Banks  
Homes' first large-  
scale development in  
our home county...**

Work at Cathedral Meadows is now well under way, with each property also set to include advanced Hive heating systems, a full range of kitchen appliances, Ring doorbells and a fully-turfed garden.

The first occupants are scheduled to be moving into the new development by early next year, and Banks is receiving a growing number of enquiries about owning a new home there.

Anyone reserving a new home at the launch event will receive a complimentary year's golf or spa membership at Ramside Hall Hotel.

Aisling Ramshaw continues: "Having our interior design suppliers on hand at the launch event will allow us to demonstrate the quality of their different products and to show visitors how everything will be brought together to create a distinctive, desirable place for them to live.

"We're proud to be building Banks Homes' first large-scale development in our home county and to be maintaining the Banks Group's longstanding 'development with care' ethos and community commitment as part of this work.

"We can't wait to share everything Cathedral Meadows will offer with local homebuyers and look forward to welcoming as many guests as possible to our launch event."

**To reserve a place at the Cathedral Meadows launch event at the Ramside Hall Hotel on Thursday 5 September, please call 0191 378 6200 or visit [www.eventbrite.com/e/exclusive-launch-event-for-cathedral-meadows-by-banks-homes-tickets-946426827117](https://www.eventbrite.com/e/exclusive-launch-event-for-cathedral-meadows-by-banks-homes-tickets-946426827117)**

**For further information on Banks Homes' Cathedral Meadows development, please visit [www.bankshomes.co.uk/development/cathedral-meadows-development](https://www.bankshomes.co.uk/development/cathedral-meadows-development)**



# Understanding the Changing Demographics of Renters in the North of England



As the rental market in the UK evolves, Teresa Sargeant, Lettings Manager with youngsRPS, talks about why landlords must stay abreast of the shifting demographics of tenants.

**In recent years, a notable trend has emerged: an increasing number of older couples are choosing to rent rather than buy, particularly in the North of England. This demographic shift presents unique opportunities and challenges for landlords who are prepared to meet the needs of these potential renters.**

## The Rise of Older Renters

Traditionally, the rental market has been dominated by younger people and transient professionals. However, economic factors, lifestyle choices, and a growing preference for flexibility have led to a surge in older couples entering the rental market. Many of these couples are downsizing from larger family homes or seeking to relocate for a change of pace in their retirement years. The North of England, with its picturesque landscapes, vibrant cities, and comparatively affordable housing, has become a magnet for this demographic.

## Expectations of Older Renters

Older renters often have different expectations and requirements compared to their younger counterparts. They tend to prioritise comfort, security, and convenience. High-end finishes, spacious living areas, and modern amenities are typically high on their list of demands. Moreover, they often look for properties with easy access, minimal maintenance, and proximity to healthcare facilities and recreational activities.

## Benefits of Catering to Older Renters

For landlords, recognising and adapting to these changing demographics can be highly advantageous. Offering properties that meet the needs of older couples can result in longer tenancies and reduced turnover, as this demographic is often looking for stability and long-term rental arrangements. Additionally, older renters may have more disposable income, allowing them to afford higher-end properties.

## Key Features to Consider

- 1. Accessibility:** Properties with features such as step-free access, wide doorways, and walk-in showers can be particularly appealing to older renters.
- 2. Safety:** Enhanced security measures, including well-lit pathways, secure locks, and alarm systems, can provide peace of mind.
- 3. Modern Amenities:** High-quality kitchens, contemporary bathrooms, and energy-efficient appliances are often expected.

**4. Community and Leisure:** Proximity to parks, social clubs, cultural venues, and healthcare services can significantly enhance the attractiveness of a property.

**5. Maintenance and Services:** Offering maintenance services or ensuring that the property is low-maintenance can be a significant selling point.

## The Outcome for Landlords?

Across all of our offices we are witnessing first hand how the rental market in the North of England is rapidly changing, of course we still have the young people and professionals looking for properties but with more older couples opting to rent high-quality properties. By understanding and catering to the unique needs of this growing segment, landlords can not only fill vacancies more efficiently but also foster long-term, stable tenancies. Investing in properties that offer accessibility, safety, modern amenities, and convenience will not only meet the expectations of older renters but also position landlords favourably in a competitive market.

Landlords who adapt to these trends and offer higher-end properties tailored to the needs of older renters stand to benefit greatly from a loyal and financially stable tenant base. As the rental landscape continues to evolve, staying ahead of these changes will be key to sustained success in the property market.

[www.youngsrps.com](http://www.youngsrps.com)



# Call to city firms to pay real living wage

Newcastle has become a 'Real Living Wage City'. An ambitious plan has been unveiled which could result in thousands of workers getting a pay rise.

**More than 100 companies attended an event at St James' Park to find out about the benefits of paying the real living wage. This is an independently calculated rate of pay based on what employees and their families need to have a "decent standard of living" which is higher than the national minimum wage.**

Experts believe that this is an effective way of tackling child poverty which in Newcastle is over 40% with seven in 10 youngsters in poverty coming from working households proving that low pay is not enough to pay for life's essentials. In 2023 Newcastle council, a real Living Wage employer, revealed its intention to make Newcastle a real Living Wage City with accreditation from the Living Wage Foundation.

With partners, it set up a task group to push forward the real Living Wage agenda and have set a three-year plan on how to achieve this. Employers, who don't pay the real Living Wage, have been invited to find out how they can get involved.

According to the Living Wage Foundation, more than 14,000 employers across the UK pay the real Living Wage - of those 174 are in Newcastle.

Together they employ 50,000 staff and pay the RLW to 5,000 of their lowest paid aged over 18. The rate is £12 per hour.

The Council is calling on all employers across the region to recognise and address the issues of low pay within their labourforce

and across their supply chains, and to register as real Living Wage employers if they can.

Accredited RLW employers across the city include WDL Construction, Newcastle University, Newcastle United FC, Newcastle Hospitals, Bellway Homes and many pubs and restaurants.

According to Coun Stephen Lambert, Vice Chair of the Economy, Skills and Jobs committee, it "makes good business sense". Over 80% of accredited RLW employers claimed it had "enhanced their reputation". Over half said it had improved the quality of those applying to work for them.

Research findings show that the extra money people will have in their pockets is spent locally with businesses and shops, creating jobs and "economic resilience". It's estimated 23,000 employees earn below the RLW in Newcastle.



WDL's Brian Dickinson and Coun Stephen Lambert in front of RLW Certificate.

The continued adventures of...



# Ziggy and Cally!

Hi everyone,

**Have not been too good recently – the old legs are not what they were. Daddy took me to that awful place he calls the vet, where despite my most earnest endeavours they still manage to stick horrible things in me. Then when I was not looking a girl shoved her finger in my bottom – not at all very pleasant.**

**Well I am back home now in the comfort of my own settee and taking some nasty stuff to get better.**

Happy days, See ya! Ziggy

**Q.** Several years ago I had my windows replaced with double glazing. After a few years, the south-facing ones became subject to occasional, unsightly internal misting. As there was a ten-year guarantee I claimed for renewal of the windows. The insurance company claimed that the condensation was normal and therefore refused the claim.

**A.** One of the great unspoken truths of sealed double-glazed units (SGUs) is that eventually they will all mist up. The time scale should be twenty-ish years in a perfectly made and installed window. But in poorly made ones it can be a lot less. Five months has been reported.

So, in a way, the condensation is 'normal', in that it will happen eventually in all windows. But I would have thought you could expect that a ten-year guarantee would reasonably cover you against misting within that time. It depends on the insurers' small print.



Please send me your building queries through facebook - @WDLne, website: wdlnortheast.co.uk or through my Dad's good pal Michael at Northern Insight on [michael@northern-insight.co.uk](mailto:michael@northern-insight.co.uk)



## Beautician waxes lyrical about new career – fixing septic tanks



**As a beautician, Hannah Long spent her days making people look glam. However, she has now swapped the salon for septic services.**

**Having grown tired of lash tints and waxing, Hannah is now a trainee service engineer for a UK leading septic specialist, Premier Tech.**

“My old boss thought that I was crazy and just didn’t get the career change,” admitted Hannah, originally from Surrey.

“My boss asked ‘Why sewage?’ – but I was waxing people for a living, being a beautician really wasn’t as glamorous as people think!

And Hannah isn’t alone in seeking a career change. A recent poll by KPMG revealed a staggering 40 per cent of Brits are plotting a career change, in part due to rising living costs. Additionally, a YouGov survey found just 17 per cent of workers loved their current jobs. Having spent eight years as a qualified beauty technician, Hannah admits she needed a “change of scene”.

“I really wanted a new challenge, but also a career with progression,” she said.

“As a beautician there’s a definite career ceiling, and there’s not much chance of growing in the role.

“However, my dad was a plumber and I always liked the idea of having practical skills that I could use in my life. My brother also works for Premier Tech, so I had a good idea of what to expect but I’ve been really impressed with them.

“The company has huge plans to grow whilst developing team members like myself, and even though I’d worked as a beautician, I realised that I had a lot of transferrable skills that helped me hit the ground running.”

Since joining Premier Tech, which has a 1,500+ global workforce, Hannah has also been able to swap the static salon and now travels across Britain maintaining and installing septic systems, learning a new trade on the job.

“Each day is completely different, so you get to meet lots of different people while the work is incredibly varied,” she added.

“When you tell people you are responsible for septic tanks, people think it must be a really dirty job but that isn’t the case at all. You don’t spend your shift inside tanks – you generally only go inside if you need to fix a part – and there’s a lot more to it than that.

“We have reports to write, while I’m also learning about electronics and developing a really rounded skillset.

“And I was even taken to a site before starting the role to get a feel of what the job is like.”

Now Hannah ‘waxes’ lyrical about her new role – where she does treatments of a different kind.

“They’ve made the switch really easy, and even though I’ve gone from manicured nails to nail scrubbers, I absolutely love my new role, and I’d urge anybody thinking of a career change to give it a go,” added Hannah.

[www.premiertech.com](http://www.premiertech.com)

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## Homes for a hybrid lifestyle

When it comes to summing up the 2024 zeitgeist, the phrase that springs to mind is undoubtedly ‘work life balance’ ... and one business is helping make that aim a reality for homeowners.

**IF you thought hybrid referred only to cars then think again. For ever since lockdown introduced us to working from home and the joys – not to mention health benefits – of long, coast and country walks, hybrid has come to encompass far, far more.**

Increasingly, employers and employees alike are navigating flexible work patterns, enabling people to split their working week between their own home and the office.

And, while this can benefit both sides, it has led an increasing number of people to question whether their home is, actually, cut out for hybrid working.

Thankfully, one of the region's leading housebuilders is already ahead of them. Miller Homes North East – which has 10 sites in development across the region – is designing flexible living spaces into every house it builds now.

And, mindful of the need to be within easy commuting distance of urban centres, from Durham and Sunderland to Middlesbrough and Gateshead, it is bearing access and connectivity in mind with each new development.

Its latest, at Blakeney Green, Chapelgarth, Sunderland – set to launch in coming weeks – is a case in point.



Four miles from the centre of Sunderland and just off the A19, Blakeney Green is fringed by a ‘panoramic park;’ a purpose-built green area of walkways and activity zones for new residents to enjoy the space to relax and unwind, and views of the coast to the east.

After all, buyers want hybrid living, too – with facilities, along with open spaces and great walks, all close to hand.

The development offers rapid access to Durham, Sunderland and Newcastle and to all major road, Metro and rail transport networks.

And amenities within half a mile include Doxford International Business Park, supermarkets, pharmacy, Post Office and spa and leisure facilities such as sports centres, pubs and restaurants.

The 165, three to five bedroom, new build homes are 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.

Sales director Lauren Angus is confident demand will be high for homes at Blakeney Green.

“It comes down to location, location, location every time,” she said, “and Blakeney Green’s location simply couldn’t be better.

“Not only is it close to both coast and countryside, but it is within exceedingly easy travelling distance of major cities within the region and beyond.

“You can step off a train at Durham or head home from work in Sunderland and be home, surrounded by nature, within half an hour. But it’s not just about what surrounds your home – the inside space is crucial.

“We pride ourselves on providing spacious homes with areas specifically designed to be home offices and workspaces. And, once you no longer need or want to use them in that way, they make equally gorgeous reading or tv rooms.”

**For more information about Blakeney Green and other Miller Homes properties across the North East visit [www.millerhomes.co.uk](http://www.millerhomes.co.uk)**





## GFW forges ahead with a stream of new hires

**Specialist property consultancy, GFW, has bolstered its team significantly with 12 new hires. Driving forward as a key player in the industry, these appointments align with GFW's continued plans for growth, as one of the largest professional services firms in the North East.**

With a strong foothold across the North of England and six offices working with clients across Residential, Commercial, Development and Rural property sectors, this influx of new talent is set to enhance all areas of GFW's offering. The business has seen uncharted growth in recent months, expanding its headcount by 23% since the beginning of the year.

David Davies joins the Newcastle office as Partner, strengthening GFW's architectural offering. David brings a wealth of experience to the role, with previous projects ranging from hospitals in the North East to deep underground railway stations in the Middle East.

Discussing his move to GFW, David said: "The prospect of working in a multidisciplinary team was a huge draw for me. The focus on developing lasting relationships was very appealing too. I'm excited to be part of the next chapter, undertaking some brilliant project work and building on GFW's ethos of great client care."

Also joining GFW's Newcastle office are Senior Rural Surveyor, Heather Warburton; Senior Associate, Lesley Ann Riddles; Senior Building Surveyor, George Groom; Marketing Manager, Sheela Bell and Property Management Administrator, Fiona Atkin.

Joining GFW's Alnwick, Hexham and Bedale offices are Valuer, Heather Armstrong; Assistant Farm Business Consultant, Archie Grey; Farm Business Consultant, Olivia Ward; along with a handful of new members joining GFW's administrative team.

Sally Hart, joint Managing Partner at GFW, said: "It's an exciting time as we welcome many new team members to the business, bringing different expertise and fresh perspectives, as we move forward as GFW. We are heavily committed to our Rural roots and offering, and the growth that we continue to experience not only enhances our capacity to deliver exceptional service but also reinforces our position as a key player within the region, with a range of sector experience and capabilities all within one team.

"As we continue the next phase of our growth journey, we remain focused on evolving our offering to clients, which is supported by the continued expansion of our team. We are always on the lookout for new talent and have a number of active vacancies across the business."

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L-R: Ben Pickard, managing director, Frances Bell, laboratory manager and Kieron Halley, technical and quality manager.

## Launch of In-house laboratory

Rapidly expanding, Peterlee-based, Asbestos Audit, has made key strategic moves as it launches an in-house asbestos laboratory.

**With over 20 years' experience in asbestos testing and analysis, Frances Bell, has been appointed laboratory manager.**

Her arrival coincides with the company attaining UKAS accreditation to ISO:17025, providing clients with confidence in the company's overall performance capability. This accreditation complements an existing UKAS ISO:17020 accreditation, which has seen it carry out over 20,000 on-site asbestos surveys in the last 12 months.

The new asbestos laboratory has the capability to identify asbestos in suspect materials urgently and provide the analysis results the same day, significantly reducing the waiting times associated with independent laboratories.

Ben Pickard, managing director, Asbestos Audit, said: "Our ambition is to offer the market a one-stop-shop that allows us to move instantly and with great agility to meet the needs of our customers, offering a turnaround that is the quickest in the market. Providing in-house laboratory testing and analysis, alongside on-site surveys, demonstrates how we are bringing our strategy to life. We have an incredibly loyal customer base and, with their continual support, we will achieve our aim of building a dynamic business based on organic, sustainable growth.

"We are delighted that Frances has joined just as we are launching the laboratory. She has immense industry experience including the setting up of laboratories from scratch, the implementation of management systems and the training of staff, which will be particularly important as we plan to quickly add a number of analysts."

Frances, will oversee the growth of the laboratory, recruitment, training and the development of new analytical services. Having held senior roles in major asbestos consultancies, Frances emphasises the highly regulated nature of the asbestos sector and the importance of maintaining high standards of competence and integrity.

Frances, said: "The asbestos sector, quite correctly, is highly regulated and audited and

those operating within it must demonstrate the highest levels of competence and integrity. Standards continue to improve across the industry and it is important to me that Asbestos Audit is committed to pushing the quality of its services to the highest possible level. It is essential that those responsible for maintaining health and safety in the workplace receive a trusted service that allows them to make decisions quickly and effectively. I joined Asbestos Audit having spoken at length with the management team about their plans for the future, including ongoing investment in staff training, health and safety, processes and technology.

"Investment in training and staff development are essential to continued improvement and client satisfaction and the company has prioritised this important area as part of our future growth strategy. Our aim is to actively recruit suitably qualified analysts, surveyors and bulk analysts and to provide training for unqualified personnel wishing to enter the asbestos sector."

Asbestos Audit operates across the UK, providing asbestos surveys, inspections, removal and testing. The company also has a rapidly growing demolition department that includes soft strip out and salvage.

[www.asbestosaudit.co](http://www.asbestosaudit.co)



# Support service celebrates one year with over £1.5m grants committed to Northumberland businesses



**Northumberland business support service celebrates one year of delivery, supporting over 300 micro-small businesses from pre-start to established across the County.**

**The success of the Northumberland Small Business Service has been gratefully received by the hundreds of businesses and individuals who have signed up to receive free support from workshops, 1-2-1 support and Capital Grant funding.**

The Northumberland Small Business Service (NSBS), is delivered by Advance Northumberland on behalf of Northumberland County Council. The project is part funded by the North East Combined Authority and by the UK Government through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and the Rural England Prosperity Fund with the North East Combined Authority as the lead authority.

The service provides support to small and micro businesses and entrepreneurs across Northumberland with a particular focus on supporting rural businesses to unlock the barriers to growth for businesses and start-ups.

The programme's dedicated team and partners have now provided over 800 hours of support to eligible businesses, through workshops and 1-2-1 specialist support covering a range of topics to help businesses including Digital Marketing, Finance, HR and Business Resilience as well as specific support to Farm Enterprises delivered through the

Northumberland National Park Authority.

Alongside delivery of workshops and specialist one to one support, the programme has now committed £1.5m in Capital Grant funding and unlocking a further £2.2m of private sector investment from Rural businesses who are looking to increase productivity and/or diversify their business profile.

Some of the capital grant has been awarded to the high-profile revamp of family favourite, Brocksbushes Farm. Harry Dickinson, Director of Brocksbushes said: "(the grant) will take our business to the next level and give us a home that can accommodate the current demand, with room to grow in the future."

Prudhoe based business, OpenWorks who have also accessed Grant support state that. Neil Armstrong, Engineer Director at OpenWorks continued: "This grant has enabled OpenWorks to seize a time-sensitive development opportunity that will benefit the North East, through the creation of direct jobs and increased volume of work to the local supply chain".

"The team have been extremely supportive, and readily available to answer any queries we have had regarding grants or support for small businesses, It has been a brilliant experience from start to finish."

As well as grants, businesses who have attended workshops said they "gained a lot of understanding" and the workshops are "worthwhile" to help them grow and sustain their businesses.

In the programme's infancy, 100 jobs have already been created and safeguarded within the region with projections to see this number quadruple over the next few years of the programme lifetime.

Councillor Richard Wearmouth, Deputy

Leader and Cabinet Member for Supporting Business and Opportunities at Northumberland County Council said: "The Northumberland Small Business Service is helping to drive growth and resilience of businesses across Northumberland.

"As a County Council, economic growth is one of our key drivers and the support offered through this programme is helping to deliver this ambition."

Interim NSBS Programme Manager, Liz Nelson said: "NSBS is a great opportunity for businesses and individuals thinking about starting their own business. The free support is invaluable for the Northumberland business community, and the team look forward to more milestones over the next few years."

Eligible businesses can access the support through the service until 2026 and are actively encouraged to get in touch with the team to learn more about the support available to them.

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund is a central pillar of the UK government's Levelling Up agenda and provides £2.6 billion of funding for local investment by March 2025.

The Fund aims to improve pride in place and increase life chances across the UK investing in communities and places, supporting local businesses, and people and skills.

**For more information, visit [www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-shared-prosperity-fund-prospectus](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-shared-prosperity-fund-prospectus)**

**If you would like to register or find out more about the Northumberland Small Business Service, please visit [www.northumberlandsmallbusiness.co.uk](http://www.northumberlandsmallbusiness.co.uk) or contact the team at [business@advancenorthumberland.co.uk](mailto:business@advancenorthumberland.co.uk)**



# SCJ Renewables: The role of solar energy in achieving regional and national net zero carbon emissions

*By Sean McIntyre, Managing Director of SCJ Renewables*



As the nation races towards the ambitious target of reducing carbon emissions to net zero by 2050, the spotlight on renewable energy has never been brighter. Above all, solar energy stands out as a vital contributor to reducing our collective carbon footprints.

**For the North East region, encompassing the urban areas of Tyneside and South-East Northumberland as well as extensive rural areas, solar energy offers a unique opportunity to accelerate the transition to a more sustainable future.**

At SCJ Renewables, we believe that embracing solar energy is not just an environmental responsibility, but a strategic move that benefits homes, businesses, and wider communities.

## **Solar PV: A Jewel in the Net Zero Crown**

Achieving net zero carbon emissions is a monumental challenge, requiring effort and collaboration across all sectors. Renewable energy sources are central to this mission, and with decreasing costs and vast scalability - solar energy is poised to play a significant role in this transition.

In simple terms, solar PV systems convert sunlight into clean, renewable electricity. The process is virtually emission-free and

the energy produced can reduce reliance on carbon-intensive sources like fossil fuels.

## **North East England Leading the Charge**

The North East has long been a region with a strong industrial heritage. However, as we look towards a sustainable future there is an increasing need to pivot to more sustainable energy sources. The region has seen an 87% increase in renewable energy generation in the last 10 years, contributing to a 56% decrease in regional CO2 emissions, and enjoys the joint third-lowest rate of emissions per region.

But, we still have work to do to meet Net Zero North East's targets, which reflect a desire to both reduce emissions and enhance energy resilience. As the region receives ample sunlight, Solar PV can play a fundamental role in this strategy. Solar panels are most efficient at cooler temperatures, so our bright and sunny, yet mostly chilly, weather is perfect for generating power that'll help us reach our targets.

By embracing solar power, the region can rapidly reduce its reliance on the national grid - simultaneously decreasing emissions, enhancing energy security and price stability, shielding the region from volatile global energy markets and providing an option where people can take back control over their bills.

## **Benefits for Homes and Businesses**

Solar panels offer homes and businesses a range of compelling benefits including substantially reduced energy bills, a significant return on investment, and increased environmental sustainability.

A typical domestic system saves over a tonne of CO2 annually, so for businesses with larger roof spaces, or land for ground-mounted systems, the carbon savings are even greater. For example, our recent installation at the Lanchester Group's Greencroft Two development in County Durham is already saving 1.2 million kilogrammes of CO2 per year - equivalent to driving over 5.5 million miles in an average car.

The government's "Smart Export Guarantee" also allows property owners to sell excess energy generated by their systems back to the national grid - providing additional income and further incentivising the adoption of solar energy.

By generating renewable energy, businesses also boost their social responsibility profiles which is increasingly important in customer and stakeholder decision-making.

## **Looking Ahead: A Brighter Future**

For the North East, solar energy presents an opportunity to lead by example, demonstrating how we can leverage our resources and ingenuity to benefit everyone. By embracing solar energy, we can contribute to regional and national emissions targets - ensuring a cleaner, greener future for generations to come.

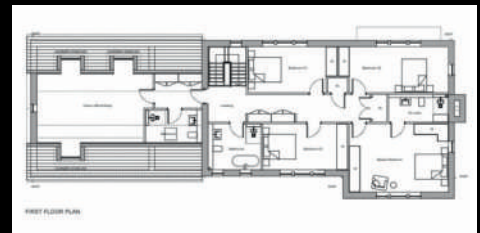
The journey to net zero isn't solely a governmental responsibility - you too can support the transition to a sustainable and resilient energy system.

[www.scjelectrical.co.uk](http://www.scjelectrical.co.uk)



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Stephen Drinkwater

## Stormy skies presents new opportunities

By Stephen Drinkwater

It's not often we can say that adverse weather is a good thing, but following a recent project completed with Seymour CEC, myself and the Lynas team have been able to see the longer term impact of innovative management and collaborative working – especially poignant given our rapidly changing environment.

**Lynas Engineers were commissioned by Yorkshire Water, through Seymour CEC, to provide a stormwater storage design capable of increasing the total stormwater storage capacity of the site to 395m<sup>3</sup> at Easingwold Sewage Treatment Works (STW) in York. This project marked the first of thirteen STW sites we had been requested to provide stormwater storage design proposals for, and it was actually the first of its kind that we had been invited to design for!**

It was fascinating to get into this project – working on an optioneering report to detail the potential stormwater storage expansion options available to Yorkshire Water and concluding that our designs needed to incorporate an additional 55m<sup>3</sup> of stormwater storage to be effective. Our recommendations provided this solution that also ensured the most cost-effective solution for the client too. Whilst we consistently focus on delivering the most impactful, innovative designs, we are conscious of the

need to remain within the parameters of each project too – so this project challenged us the best, most varied ways.

As with most projects, we encountered some challenges during the design phase. We maintained the top water level of the existing tank to ensure the design head at the existing storm tank would not be increased. To ensure the new storm tank could be constructed within surrounding site constraints, Lynas Engineers proposed to install the new tank in the location of the existing storm tank inlet pipe and cut back the pipe either side of the new tank walls to form its inlet and outlet pipes. This proposal also maintained the inlet pipe supplying stormwater to the existing storm tank. The base of the new storm tank featured a slope benching to direct flow into the existing storm tank and a 1m diameter x 1.5m height CWF flushing bell was specified to provide tank cleaning and reduce future maintenance costs.

In May 2024, this project won the Yorkshire



Stormtank Easingwold

Water Cabron 'Project Initiative' Award, through Seymour CEC, after a remarkable total carbon saving of 68,397kgCO<sub>2</sub>e was achieved following design optioneering, design optimisation, hydraulic profiling, manufacture and assembly. I, and the whole team are remarkably proud of our significant involvement in the design of an award-winning new storm tank, and knowing that our unique ways of working – utilising innovative thinking and working with clear, open communication with the client – has given rise to a better understanding of the stormwater tank storage and its benefits is fantastic. Knowing how we can keep responding to the changing climate, and monitoring its impact on our communities is one of the most challenging, yet important elements of our work. We know our world is changing, but now we need to be working together to monopolise new ways of working to ensure we can change alongside it too.

In addition to working with Seymour CEC, our team worked in collaboration with FP McCann, Eliquo Hydrotek and Yorkshire Water – thank you for being great partners to work with.

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## Metropolitan Location for Ridgetek

Ridgetek, a leading website development company based in Gateshead, has celebrated its 10th anniversary with a relocation to a new office in the historic ex Metro Radio Building in Swalwell. This milestone marks a decade of delivering end-to-end website solutions, from domain registration and design implementation to ongoing support, helping businesses establish and maintain a robust online presence.

“Our new office move from Prudhoe to Swalwell is a significant step for Ridgetek, providing us with a dynamic and accessible location closer to the heart of Gateshead and Newcastle,” said Peter Surridge, Founder and Director of Ridgetek. “Metropolitan House is a fantastic space that reflects our aspirations and offers a conducive environment for our team and clients.”

Over the years, Ridgetek has deliberately focused on website development rather than branching into app development, finding ample demand for comprehensive web solutions. “While apps are popular, a dedicated website remains crucial for businesses and organisations to showcase their services and products effectively,” added Peter.

Founded in 2014, Ridgetek has grown from a sole proprietorship to a thriving limited company, serving a diverse range of clients both locally and across other parts of the UK.

Joining Peter at Ridgetek is his long-time friend and business partner, Rutva Patel, who brings legal expertise and client management skills to the team. The pair first met at Prudhoe Castle School First School and have known each other for almost 50 years.



“Working together over the past few years, Peter and I have built a partnership that balances technical proficiency with client-focused, personalised service,” said Rutva. “Our shared history and complementary skills are one of the key parts of Ridgetek’s success. His technical expertise and my business development skills have helped us to gain a well-deserved reputation within the industry.”



## Hartlepool firm get top marks for transforming school’s aging IT network

A Teesside company has been praised by a headteacher for breathing new life into her school’s aging IT system following a radical revamp of the network.

In one of its biggest projects to date, Hartlepool-based MSC IT Solutions was tasked with overhauling The Douay Martyrs Catholic Secondary School’s system.

Over a decade old, the system was so outdated it no longer even complied with the Department of Education’s minimum specifications. Additionally, staff said it was so unreliable that teaching, learning, and productivity were all being impacted.

However, with the experienced MSC IT Solutions headhunted to oversee the six-figure project, the work has “transformed” not only the system, but lessons – and left a smile on the faces of the school’s 1,600 students.

“Even if a school has the best teaching staff, if the IT system isn’t fit for purpose, then schools inevitably encounter problems which have a big knock-on effect on lessons,” said Mark Cronin, Managing Director of MSC IT Solutions.

“Staff and students deserve better, and realising how vital a reliable IT network is in a modern school, the new headteacher was determined to bring it up to speed.

“We’ve established a great reputation, particularly within education, of delivering on projects like this but this was a challenging job, even for us.

“However, we managed to carry out major work – from replacing cables and containment across the vast campus, to installing slick 75’ interactive screens to aid learning – with minimum disruption and downtime before, during and after the school’s summer break”.

“Our safeguarding-lead approach meant lessons continued without interruption, whilst the work has not only improved the school aesthetic, but the system is now fully compliant with fire regulations, so it is safer too.

“What thrills me the most though is the glowing feedback from both staff and students. They now have an IT network they can be proud of, and one which plays a key part in developing their young minds – and that’s something that makes this job so worthwhile.”

Having launched in 2011 from Mark’s spare room, MSC IT Solutions has rapidly grown into one of the most trusted names in the industry and supports over 7,500 people a day across the UK and Europe with their IT needs.

Having worked with dozens of schools and colleges throughout his career, Mark actually got his first IT job at his secondary school soon after he left it as a student.

He now offers IT consultancy, support and managed services, whilst offering expert advice on subjects like cybersecurity, ICT in education and business IT Strategy.



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# Levelling up at The CTRL Pad: A family's gaming paradise



As a parent, finding the perfect family-friendly activity can be a daunting task. However, during a recent visit to Newcastle, my family and I discovered a true gaming oasis – The CTRL Pad. This remarkable establishment has not only captivated our hearts but has also become our new go-to destination for unforgettable gaming experiences.

**The CTRL Pad, nestled within The Gate, is a gaming lover's dream come true. With an entry fee of £6 per hour and an additional hour costing only £4, it offers exceptional value for money. The moment we stepped through the doors, we were greeted by a vast selection of gaming consoles and platforms, ranging from the latest VR headsets to classic retro favourites like the N64 and Dreamcast.**

The boys, aged 8 and 9, were immediately drawn to the VR experience, and the attentive staff guided them through the process, ensuring they had a seamless and thrilling adventure. As they immersed themselves in the virtual world, I took the

opportunity to indulge in a nostalgic journey, revisiting the games of my childhood on the retro consoles.

One of the standout features of The CTRL Pad is its exceptional food and drink offerings. The menu boasts a range of delectable options, from hot dogs and nachos to toasties, all at remarkably affordable prices. We managed to feed our family of four for a mere £8, a feat that would be incredibly difficult to replicate elsewhere. The highlight of our culinary experience was undoubtedly the themed Game Shakes – the Pac-Man and Freddie Fazzbear varieties were both a delightful treat for the taste buds.

The CTRL Pad is not just a gaming

destination; it's a place where families can create lasting memories. The staff's attentiveness and the overall welcoming atmosphere make it a true hidden gem in Newcastle. With a wide range of consoles, games, and competitive pricing, The CTRL Pad has quickly become our family's go-to spot for gaming adventures.

The CTRL Pad is open from 12:00 to 20:00 on weekdays and 10:00 to 20:00 on weekends, ensuring that families can enjoy their gaming escapades at their convenience. Additionally, the venue offers birthday party packages, making it an ideal destination for celebrating special occasions.

In conclusion, if you're seeking a gaming oasis that caters to both the young and the young at heart, look no further than The CTRL Pad. This remarkable establishment has undoubtedly earned its place as a must-visit destination for families in Newcastle and beyond. So, grab your controllers, gather your loved ones, and get ready to level up your gaming experience at The CTRL Pad.

**The CTRL Pad, Unit F6, The Gate, Low Friar Street, Newcastle, NE1 5TG. 0191 250 5264 [www.thectrlpad.com](http://www.thectrlpad.com)**



# Talking Tech

This month Northern Insight talks to...

## Helen Staples, Fiona Laverick and Francesca Kosina

Senior leaders at digital marketing agency, Outrank

### Did you always envisage a career in the world of Technology?

**Helen, Sales Director** - Not at all! I found myself immersed in a career in digital marketing through my passions for connecting with and managing people. The industry excited me as it was very new when I first set out on my career journey.

**Fiona, Search Director** - I actually studied fashion and business at university, then landed a digital marketing role at a luxury fashion company. With digital marketing constantly evolving, I enjoyed the potential to reach vast audiences, engage customers in creative and innovative ways, and drive results.

**Francesca, Operations Director** - Like Helen and Fiona, I stumbled into the world of digital marketing. After university, I qualified as a solicitor, but I found myself increasingly fascinated by the transformative power of technology and the potential it held for reshaping industries.

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

**Francesca** - Do not worry about your A Level results or what degree you studied. As long as you are passionate, enjoy problem solving, and have an inquisitive mind, you can go far.

**Fiona** - Network as much as you can. Build strong professional connections by attending industry events, connect with professionals online, and seek mentorship opportunities.

**Helen** - I think for any industry, thoroughly researching the job you want to secure and gaining work experience in that sector are the best things you can do.

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

**Helen** - As a relative new starter at Outrank, I'm busy crafting new sales strategies to support the company's ongoing growth, whilst developing fresh personal development plans to help the fantastic team reach their full potential.

### Tell us about your team?

**Fiona** - The overall team at Outrank is diverse and dynamic with a wide range of skills, backgrounds, and expertise. Each member brings a unique perspective to the table, enabling us to approach challenges creatively and innovatively from multiple angles. Outrank's culture is based on open communication, mutual respect, and a shared sense of purpose.

**Francesca** - Everyone at Outrank is passionate, talented and highly energetic who love their jobs. The team is collectively bought into our business ambitions, and this shared vision makes work collaborative and enjoyable.

### What are your long term plans for the business?

**Francesca** - Outrank has an aggressive three-year growth strategy which we have carefully developed alongside a structured mergers and acquisitions plan. We recently acquired two agencies and are currently looking to acquire two more.

**Fiona** - Our goal is to be the leading and go-to SEO agency for all UK SMEs. The partnership strategy we have devised by working with Sara Davies and one of the UK's largest banks is helping us to realise our dreams for the business.

### What's your favourite piece of technology?

**Helen** - Not so much a tangible item of technology, but I never fail to be excited by website development and the constant innovation in this area. Getting to see your client's vision come to life, from concept to completion, knowing it will drive their business forward, is incredibly rewarding.

### Do you have any heroes or mentors?

**Helen** - One person who I have had the pleasure to work with was David Brown, retired CEO of Web.com. David managed to make every staff member feel valued and gave back to the company to ensure each member was benefiting from the growth of the business. I recognised the same traits in Outrank's leadership team, which is why I didn't hesitate to accept the role here.

**Francesca** - I am very lucky to count some of the world's most talented digital marketing experts as my friends. I've worked with Michael Briggs, ex-Skyscanner and Canva, twice over the years. His knowledge, advice and leadership style has been hugely influential on my career.

### When not working, how do you like to relax?

**Fiona** - I love to travel and explore new destinations whenever I can. Whether it's a weekend getaway or a longer vacation, travelling brings me joy and helps me unwind from the stresses of life.

**Francesca** - When I'm not busy being mummy to my beautiful boys, I can be found on a yoga mat somewhere. The health benefits for both my mind and my body are huge. Yoga is the only thing that allows my brain to switch off and relax.

### What's your fondest career memory?

**Francesca** - I once had dinner with Sir Richard Branson. He told me to live a life full of adventure, achieve a good work life balance and prioritise my family. Wise words.

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

**Fiona** - It's not what you achieve, it's what you overcome that defines your career.

**Francesca** - It's OK to fail as this helps you to grow as a person.

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L-R: Helen Staples, Fiona Laverick and Francesca Kosina





## AI - navigating the noise

Being a forward-thinking tech company we, unsurprisingly, talk a lot about AI. Whether at events, with clients or on panels, it is a topic that generates questions, opinions and, at times, concern; but we take a different approach.

**Our focus is not to add to the hype, nor be an antagonist towards AI, but instead offer measured discussion about how organisations can drown out the propaganda, look at AI strategically, and adopt it effectively – all while considering the ethics associated with the technology.**

Whilst the #GenAI revolution has made AI products cheaper and therefore more accessible, organisations must ask themselves: “What is our appetite for innovation?” “Are we doing the simple things right?”, and the age old “How good actually is our data?”. Ultimately, we don’t want organisations to use AI as a really expensive way of finding out their data is useless.

Instead, we advocate that any implementation of AI must be aligned to



an organisation’s strategic goals, with the purpose of empowering staff and customers, whilst delivering a better experience. Implementing AI for the sake of it, or the fear of missing out, won’t work - don’t be driven by the technology, start with your strategy and consider how AI might help you deliver on it.

When we discuss potential use cases, most involve taking the vast amount of data organisations already have but using AI to collate it and give a holistic view, such as improving efficiency through AI query bots for contact centres rather than the stereotypical multiple windows, screens and clicks to locate information whilst on a call – ultimately delivering a better experience.

A recent poll suggested 81% of customers wanted a ‘faster’ service; not suggesting something technology focused, but instead efficiency – and faster in today’s world often means better.

Again, how can we use AI in the right way as businesses? Rather than potentially frustrating AI chatbots, which often ultimately lead to a phone call, why not a contact centre armed with AI query bots to

speed up the process of finding accurate information? This is why understanding the problem you are trying to solve rather than jumping to the technology first is vital.

But what about other considerations that need to be made when adopting AI - largely the ethical implications of the solution? If the solution is making recommendations or decisions about people, how can you ensure it is doing so in an ethical way? What checks and balances need to be in place? How are these audited?

What about data security? Do the people in your organisation have the knowledge and understanding to review these sorts of things? What training or investment might be needed so that they can?

Many organisations are keen to adopt AI but to truly get the value, it’s likely they’ll need to mature their approach to data management and governance, so the solution meets expectations. There isn’t a silver bullet to this and, depending on where an organisation is, there might be a large amount of prework required.

If you’re wanting to explore AI, look at collaboration and learn from others further along the journey; try small but scalable proof of concepts and always align it to your strategy. For now at least, AI should only be seen to augment and complement human work, not replace it.

***If you want to learn more about AI, discuss anything in this article, or share your views, I would love to hear them so please get in touch – [andrew.buckels@waterstons.com](mailto:andrew.buckels@waterstons.com)***



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*The Rev'd Canon David Glover with Andrew Skelton (SOS Group)*



*Hexham Abbey*

## Blooming lovely partnership with Hexham Abbey

A regional business partnership begun over 20 years ago is continuing to flower in Hexham.

When office technology company, SOS Group, launched in 2002 one of the company's first clients was Hexham Abbey, who required support to ensure the smooth running of their services and community events.

The Abbey is celebrating its 1,350th anniversary this year and recently held a Northern Saints Flower Festival to mark the occasion.

SOS Group was proud to provide backing by sponsoring the beautiful flower display next to the stained-glass window of St Wilfrid and Andrew Skelton was among the guests treated to an early view of the festival display.

Andrew, an SOS Group Director, says: "We were extremely proud to support this wonderful flower festival and very impressed by the flower displays throughout the Abbey.

"We've worked with Hexham Abbey since SOS Group began back in 2002, so we have a long history together. Not quite as much



*Jan Montgomery (left) and Cath Collins (both from Alnwick and District Flower Club) with Andrew Skelton (SOS Group)*

history as the Abbey has though!

"It says a lot that we have such longstanding client relationships. In fact, we've just extended our partnership with Hexham Abbey until late 2027 and we look forward to continuing to support the work of the team at this magnificent and historic church."

The Northern Saints Flower Festival, a celebration of colour, nature and creativity, featured dozens of beautiful displays created by local flower clubs.

Each display told its own story and drew inspiration from the lives of the northern saints who are celebrated within the Abbey. The event also included interactive workshops and demonstrations.

Established in 2002, SOS Group is an award-winning company based on the Team Valley in Gateshead and providing digital office equipment services for business from startups to multi nationals and internationally significant events.

SOS Group has always supported the people and organisations who are making a positive difference to local communities within the North East. Over the last year, the company has provided hands-on and financial support for more than 30 community projects, charities, sports clubs and talented individuals.

**For more information, please visit [www.sosgroup-ltd.co.uk](http://www.sosgroup-ltd.co.uk)**



# Why we should be 'gathering' rather than 'meeting'

Since the beginning of time, humans have been gathering together to share stories, solve problems, and connect but are our busy diaries diluting what can be achieved when people meaningfully come together?

While it is important to bring people together, endless meetings suck time, resources, and creativity out of teams and can lead to frustration and burnout. Rather than the usual death by PowerPoint where only one person speaks, a meaningful gathering is goal-oriented, and solution-focused. It gives everyone around the table a chance to input and be heard. If we think about the most effective gatherings throughout history, they have been people-led and purpose-driven.

Take the assemblies of Ancient Greece. These gatherings invited citizens from a cross-section of society, regardless of social class, to participate and contribute to conversations that covered everything from military strategies to election processes. Everyone was allowed to voice their opinion without repercussion. In place of rigid agendas, people could collaborate and share information, while forming connections with other members in attendance.

Gatherings like this not only give a platform for problem-solving, creativity, and innovation, but they also foster a culture of trust and connection that is crucial for teams to thrive. Trust is the bedrock of how we interact with others - whether that is at work or in our personal lives. Building trust in a team translates into more energy, less stress, fewer sick days, and less burnout - all crucial elements when it comes to forming a healthy, efficient, and stable team.

Here are five things to build in when you are planning your next gathering:

**1. Purpose** – Why are you coming together? This is rarely the title of the meeting and should be well thought through, clear, and shared with the attendees in advance of the meeting. I would recommend around 2 days in advance as a good rule of thumb.

**2. Attendees** – Who needs to attend to help achieve that purpose? Often too many

people, or the wrong people, are invited to a meeting due to a lack of clarity and purpose.

**3. Environment** – What is the best environment to hold this meeting? If your purpose requires innovative thought, problem-solving or creativity then you need to be in person. If it is to provide support, then it may be a 'walk and talk', a phone call and yes, sometimes even a virtual meeting might be the best option.

**4. Goldilocks Ask** – What are we asking attendees to think about in advance? Too much and the likelihood they won't do it, too little would suggest either the meeting doesn't need to happen, or they shouldn't be attending; we need to ask just the right amount of attendees to drive engagement and accountability.

**5. Evaluation** – Every meaningful gathering should be followed by a process of evaluation. This might be as little as 5 minutes in the car or a more thorough process; essentially, you should be reviewing all of the above, enabling you and your team to learn and grow.



Ivan Hollingsworth

If you're looking to learn more about why we should be gathering over a meeting I would recommend:

***The Art of Gathering – How We Meet and Why It Matters by Priya Parker***

At a time when coming together is more crucial than ever, Priya Parker sets forth a human-centered approach to gathering that can help everyone create meaningful, memorable experiences in their lives, large and small, for work and play.

***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.***

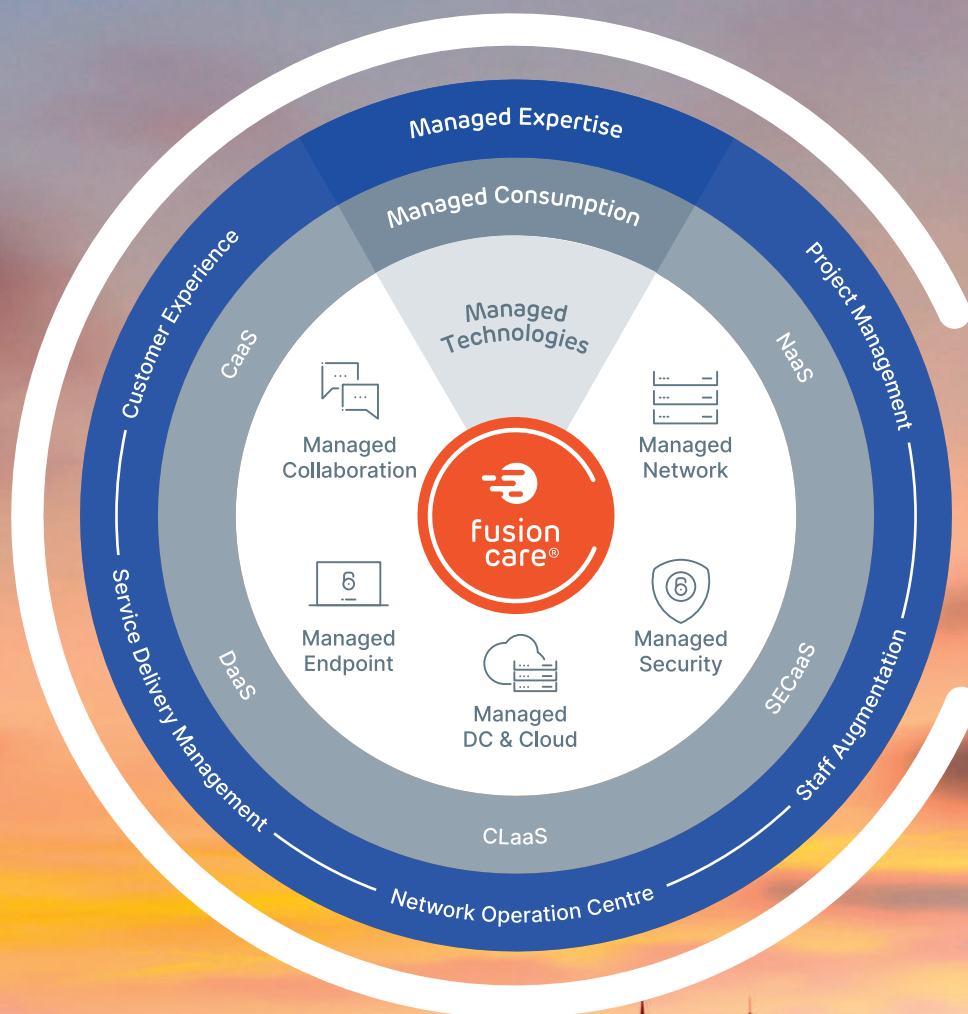
***For more insights on what company culture truly means, and how to implement change across your business follow Centric Consultants on LinkedIn or email Ivan directly at [ivan@centric-consultants.com](mailto:ivan@centric-consultants.com)***





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Kate Jones



# Key considerations for aligning business goals with technology

By Kate Jones, Account Director, Leighton

Businesses are increasingly turning to technology to grow, become more efficient, and drive innovation in today's fast-paced digital world. However, the rush to implement the latest tech solutions can often lead to misaligned projects that fail to address core business needs.

**To ensure that technology investments truly support business objectives, it's crucial to start with a deep understanding of the problem at hand. In this article we'll explore the importance of aligning technology with business goals.**

## The danger of technology-first thinking

Jumping straight into a technology solution without fully understanding the business problem is a common pitfall that can have significant repercussions. When businesses prioritise technology over problem-solving, they risk creating misaligned projects that don't address the root cause of their challenges. This approach often leads to wasted resources - both time and money - on solutions that might be cutting-edge but ultimately ineffective in solving the actual business issue. A technology-first mindset can result in overly complex systems that are difficult to maintain and scale, further complicating the organisation's operations rather than simplifying them.

## The importance of thorough discovery

Before any technology decisions are made, it's essential to undergo a thorough discovery phase. This phase is where the foundation for a successful project is built. By clearly identifying and understanding the business problem, stakeholders, and goals, companies can ensure that the chosen technology will directly address their needs. The discovery phase should include comprehensive analysis, such as stakeholder interviews, process mapping, and market research. This step is critical because it uncovers the underlying issues and aligns the entire project team on what success looks like. Skipping this phase or not giving it the attention it deserves often leads to misunderstandings, scope creep, and ultimately, project failure.

## Stakeholder involvement

Involving all relevant stakeholders early in the process is another crucial factor in aligning technology with business goals. Business leaders, end-users, IT teams, and even customers can offer valuable insights that shape the direction of the project. Their perspectives help to ensure that the technology solution is not only technically sound but also practically applicable and beneficial to the end-users. Stakeholder involvement fosters a sense of ownership and alignment, which is essential for the successful adoption and implementation of the solution.

## Defining clear objectives and success metrics

Setting clear business objectives and success metrics is essential before making any technology decisions. Without a clear understanding of what success looks like, it's impossible

to measure the effectiveness of the solution. Success metrics, such as key performance indicators (KPIs) or objectives and key results (OKRs), provide a tangible way to track progress and adjust as needed. This clarity ensures that the technology solution remains focused on delivering real value to the business.

## Choosing technology that scales with business needs

Once the problem is understood, selecting technology that not only solves the immediate issue but also scales with the business is crucial. The chosen solution should be future-proof, flexible, and adaptable to evolving business conditions. As the business grows and its needs change, the technology should be able to scale accordingly without requiring a complete overhaul. This forward-thinking approach ensures that the investment in technology remains valuable over the long term.

## The role of leadership in ensuring alignment

Leadership plays a pivotal role in ensuring that technology projects align with business goals. Leaders must champion the alignment process, ensuring that teams remain focused on solving the right problems. They are responsible for setting the vision, guiding the discovery process, involving stakeholders, and defining success metrics. Effective leadership ensures that the technology solution is not just a technical success but a business success.

## Adapting to changing business needs

Business environments are dynamic, and technology solutions need to be adaptable to accommodate shifts in strategy or market conditions. Continuous alignment between technology and business goals is necessary to maintain relevance and value. This requires ongoing evaluation and adjustment, ensuring that the technology evolves alongside the business.

Aligning technology with business goals is not just best practice, it's a necessity for successful software development. By understanding the problem first, involving stakeholders, setting clear objectives, and choosing scalable technology, businesses can ensure that their technology investments deliver meaningful, long-term value. Leadership and adaptability are key to maintaining this alignment, ensuring that the technology remains an asset as the business grows and changes.

**Leighton.com**



# In Conversation With...



Jessica Tucker

## Jessica Tucker

Managing Director, Social Allies

### What were your career ambitions growing up?

Growing up, I was drawn to the world of fashion. While I struggled academically with most subjects in school, my love for art and English was always strong. I discovered textiles in school, so I continued with the fashion and creative side. Many years later, I achieved my goal of working in the fashion industry.

### Tell us about your current role.

My current role is Managing Director at Social Allies. I oversee our team's efforts to help brands establish and strengthen their online presence. We specialise in crafting brand identities through a variety of creative avenues, including copywriting, visual design, videography, social media management, and general marketing assets. I'm fortunate to work with a talented and passionate team that supports and drives the growth of Social Allies.

### What is your proudest business achievement?

Every day, I'm incredibly proud of the work we do at Social Allies. Driving the business forward and seeing our team's efforts come to fruition is truly rewarding. However, one of my most significant achievements was the rebrand launch last September.

After a year of meticulous planning and execution, we successfully transformed the internal and external identity of Social Allies into something that authentically represents our values and goals.

### How has your industry changed in the last decade?

The marketing landscape has evolved significantly over the past five years. When we first started Social Allies, we faced the challenge of convincing brands of the importance of social media as a marketing tool. Fortunately, this mindset has shifted, and businesses now recognise the necessity of having a strong online presence.

In recent years, there has been a growing demand for brands to showcase a more personal and authentic side.

This trend has led to a surge in businesses seeking our expertise to develop more humanised online identities.

### What are you currently working on?

At the beginning of the year, we launched the Social Studio, a service offering a wide range of printed materials, including brochures, business cards, signatures, presentations, roller banners, and more. Since its launch, we've been thrilled to see a steady influx of projects through our creative studio. While our love remains with our social media clients, we also enjoy the variety of one-off projects.

### Tell us about the team you work with.

The Social Allies team is the best. The team are dedicated, hardworking, and committed to growing the business. We have the balance of being serious while still having a laugh. Social Allies wouldn't be what it is today without the exceptional contributions of our talented team.

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

One of the most valuable pieces of advice I've received is to focus on my own business rather than comparing myself to others. Additionally, I've learnt the importance of being selective about whom I trust, as people may have ulterior motives. Building a strong team of individuals who are dedicated to your success is crucial.

### What has been your biggest challenge?

Two big challenges were the COVID-19 pandemic and the rising cost of living crisis, which forced us to quickly adapt our business strategies.

### Who are your heroes inside and outside of business?

My mum and aunt have been my greatest inspirations. Aunt Sam is a prominent businesswoman in Teesside, having successfully grown multiple companies. Her guidance and support have been instrumental in helping me launch Social Allies. Her advice has always been to reach for the stars.

My mother, a single parent who faced significant challenges following her divorce, has demonstrated remarkable resilience and strength. She currently works as a cost engineer for a major Teesside company and is widely respected across the community—as well as feared!

### How do you unwind outside of work?

When I'm not working, I enjoy relaxing with my family. I go on a lot of walks and love spending time with my now four-year-old.

### Favourite book and box set?

*Game of Thrones* - I am a HUGE fan!

*One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez - hard but so informative.

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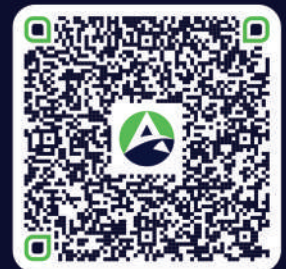
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## NEPO appoints Award-Winning North East Agency to manage its media relationships

The North East-based procurement organisation NEPO has appointed local integrated communications agency Karol Marketing to strengthen its position as one of the leading procurement solution providers in the UK.

The announcement comes as the organisation gears up for the transformative Procurement Act 2023 which comes into force on 28th October 2024 and is designed to improve efficiencies and simplify public sector procurement.

Karol Marketing will be responsible for supporting the development of NEPO's communication strategy as well as delivering engaging campaigns highlighting the impact NEPO has on the business community and regional economy.

Part-funded by the twelve North East local authorities, NEPO selected Karol Marketing based on its strategic approach to stakeholder engagement, extensive expertise in integrated communication campaigns,



regional knowledge, and proven track record of delivering award-winning campaigns.

Following the appointment, Steven Sinclair, Procurement and Commercial Director of NEPO commented: "We are committed to providing the best and most innovative procurement solutions for our stakeholders and expect the same passion and innovation from our partners.

We are delighted that through the tender process, Karol were able to show that they align with our values and demonstrated their commitment to the region and local

communities. It is an exciting time to come together to raise awareness of the work NEPO does every day, supporting our members and suppliers of all shapes and sizes, for the benefit of our communities."

Barbora Gray, Account Director at Karol Marketing added: "We are proud to be working with such a reputable client such as NEPO who is a staple name in the North East business community. It is always rewarding to partner with an organisation that directly contributes to the growth of the regional economy, and we are excited to shine a spotlight on the amazing work NEPO does."

## Festivals Sing Praises for Highlights PR

It's been a vibrant and eventful summer for Highlights PR, a unique public relations firm based on a boat at Royal Quays Marina, North Shields. The man behind the magic, Keith Newman, has had his hands full, working tirelessly to boost the media profiles of businesses, charities, and organisations across the region. But it's not just about press releases and media coverage—this summer, Keith dived headfirst into the heart of the region's major events and festivals.

Highlights PR played a crucial role in bringing Blyth Live Music Festival to life, providing PR support for iconic acts like The Lindisfarne Story Band and Martin Stephenson and the Daintees. The firm also brought its expertise to Gallagher Park Live in Bedlington, where tribute bands set the stage on fire, and North Shields' Coast Festival, headlined by none other than The Selecter and Badly Drawn Boy. The excitement didn't stop there—Morpeth's Party in the Park and the lively Newcastle Mela were also on Keith's packed summer agenda.

"I love music, so working with a host of artists has been incredibly rewarding. Being involved in the behind-the-scenes action and becoming part of the festival fabric is where I'm in my element!" Keith said.

But music festivals weren't the only highlight. Keith also managed the PR for the sold-out Auf Wiedersehen Pet 40th Anniversary celebration at Newcastle City Hall. "As a fan of the TV show, this was an immense privilege. I worked alongside some of my TV heroes, coordinating radio and TV appearances with one of the show's stars before engaging with the media about the event. On the night, I was able to switch off and enjoy the show, which was a major success."

From rocking out at music festivals to celebrating iconic TV shows, it's clear that Keith Newman and Highlights PR have had a summer to remember. Their tireless work has not only amplified the success of these events but also solidified their reputation as a PR powerhouse in the region.



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## Radio Northumberland invites you to tune in to the Paranormal with new show 'Phantom Frequencies'

Alnwick based Community radio station, Radio Northumberland, is excited to announce the launch of its brand-new show, Phantom Frequencies, dedicated to exploring real-life paranormal experiences. The show debuted on Thursday, 15th August and will also rerun on air on Sundays at 10pm.

Phantom Frequencies will be hosted by Keith Newman, a longtime paranormal enthusiast from Ulgham, and Richard Craig, a seasoned paranormal investigator from Mitford with extensive experience in radio engineering. Together, the two volunteers will create a platform where ordinary people can share their extraordinary stories.

Keith Newman expressed his enthusiasm for the show, stating, "I've always had an interest in the paranormal, and teaming up with Richard, who has a wealth of experience, is great."

The premiere episode promises to deliver spine-chilling content, including a mysterious visit from a recently departed father, a haunted house in Yorkshire, and a floating head along with other intriguing stories from the North East. Subsequent episodes will include an interview with a medium and an investigation into a haunted railway station.

Richard Craig shared his excitement about stepping into a presenting role, saying, "I've worked in radio for many years, mostly on the engineering side, but this is allowing my creativity to come out, and it's looking to be a lot of fun."



Listeners with their own paranormal stories are encouraged to contribute by contacting the show at [requests@radionorthumberland.com](mailto:requests@radionorthumberland.com).

Tune in to Phantom Frequencies on [www.radionorthumberland.com](http://www.radionorthumberland.com) for a captivating journey into the unknown.

Email: [requests@radionorthumberland.com](mailto:requests@radionorthumberland.com)  
[www.radionorthumberland.com](http://www.radionorthumberland.com)



## Northern Pride for O with raft of significant new wins

Newcastle-based O.agency has been chosen to bring its creative talent to a raft of key players involved in the infrastructure of the North East, from transport to community life.

Port of Tyne has chosen O to manage its PR and comms as it continues to drive its ambitious plans to decarbonise, digitise and innovate across the business, achieving huge transformation in recent years and with many opportunities ahead.

Award-winning North East train operator Lumo has appointed O as its PR agency, to build its reputation in the region and beyond for

revolutionising eco-friendly travel, providing a fully electric service between Edinburgh and London.

Newcastle NE1 selected O as its new creative partner in the spring, with the first campaigns since the partnership formed now live and generating strong engagement, for Summer in the City, Screen on the Green and Newcastle Restaurant Week.

Seeing many of its clients come together to support Northern Pride, O was also named as Pride in the City's PR partner for 2024, which took place across the weekend of 19-21 July in Newcastle city centre. Supported by NE1 and with a new Lumo Platform stage in the Market Village zone, the event welcomed record numbers of people.

Kirsty Ostell, MD at O.agency, said: "O has been in the region for almost 20 years, working alongside some of our most exciting businesses and most important parts of our local community, from retailers like Fenwick and Charles Clinkard to transport providers and regional universities and colleges to name just a few. We take great pride in playing a part in the impact our clients have on the growth, innovation and vibrancy of our part of the world and are delighted to see this impact grow as we sit at the beginning of a new era for the region thanks to a new mayor.

"Our passion for the North East is loud and proud, so we are thrilled to be working with even more businesses doing great things in our region. From the sustainable economic growth of one of the region's major ports and most sustainable train operator, to the wonderful things happening in our community not least this year's Pride in the City."

O.agency was named NE Marketing Agency of the Year for the last three years at the NE Marketing Awards. It was also recently named best SME for excellence in people practice at the HR&D awards and its founder Kari Owers is one of the finalists in this year's Entrepreneurs' Forum Impact Award category.



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**PR:** *Good news stories, profile building, award entries, thought leadership*



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## Sarah Bell: Connection, Culture & Client Wins

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.

Sarah Bell, Media Planning & Buying Manager at Bonded, shares her journey from being the agency's first employee, to shaping the team culture and delivering innovative media strategies for her clients.



**Sarah Bell**  
Media Planning & Buying Manager

### ***What made you want to join Bonded?***

When the opportunity arose to join Bonded as its first employee, I was thrilled. Having previously worked with the founding directors, I had a deep respect for their vision and saw immense potential in what they were creating.

Joining the agency in its early days presented a unique chance to dive into a variety of media channels, help build a vibrant team culture from scratch, and support our clients as they grew and flourished. Fast forward three years, and I'm delighted to see how far we've come. With a team of 23 (and growing) and offices in both Newcastle and Edinburgh, it's been incredibly rewarding to witness our collective growth.

### ***What do you wish more people understood about the digital and media industry?***

One of the most challenging yet rewarding aspects of my work is navigating the ever-evolving social media landscape. The social funnel is increasingly complex, with algorithms constantly shifting the goalposts for brands.

Because of this, crafting an omnichannel media strategy is more crucial than ever, and it starts with truly understanding your audience.

***"It's not about just reaching people, but connecting with them authentically in real time."***

### ***Are there any upcoming developments in the media world that you are excited by?***

I'm particularly excited about the ongoing developments in video content, specifically the interplay between short-form and long-form video in both organic and paid spaces.

The resurgence of long-form video presents a valuable opportunity for brands to connect with their audiences through more in-depth storytelling. I'm keen to see how brands creatively leverage this format to captivate and retain their audience's interest across various channels.

### ***And finally, what does 'Connection' mean to you?***

Connection, for me is about authenticity and understanding. I feel most connected when I'm surrounded by individuals who are genuine and passionate, allowing everyone to be their true selves.

Whether it's collaborating with my peers or unwinding in nature, connection is about grounding yourself. I find immense peace in nature, especially during long walks or hikes with friends - these moments help me recharge and bring that sense of clarity back into my work.





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Bonded is the digital and media agency that **prioritises connection**. Because Bonded connect better than any other agency, you connect best with those that matter to you. **Ready to elevate your brand?** Let's connect.

"The team at Bonded went over and above. They were accessible, accurate and came to us with solid strategic and tactical recommendations backed up with clear rationale. We felt they were an extension of the team and worked with us to deliver in what was sometimes a pressurised situation."

- *Rugby League World Cup*

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At Unique Magazines, we embrace these individual distinctions. We recognise that everyone's tastes and interests are diverse. With a selection of over 2000 magazine titles, our goal has always been to cater to this variety, ensuring that every customer finds something that resonates deeply with their interests and desires.

To enhance your browsing experience and make it as enjoyable as possible, we are thrilled to introduce our latest feature, now live: 'Uniquely You'.

'Uniquely You' revolutionises the way you discover magazines that cater to your tastes by personalising your browsing experience. Here's how it works: simply select your interests from a broad range of topics, and we will tailor your updates to ensure that you never miss an issue of what you love most.

Our website now includes intuitive options to like or dislike categories as you explore, effectively dividing your 'Uniquely You' account into two distinct sections:

- **Your Favourites:** This section captures all the magazine topics you've indicated you love. We focus on keeping our content aligned with your preferences, ensuring that we consistently offer articles and features that resonate with your personal tastes.
- **Not Interested:** This section allows you to sidestep topics you don't care for, thereby refining your browsing experience to concentrate only on those subjects that truly interest you.

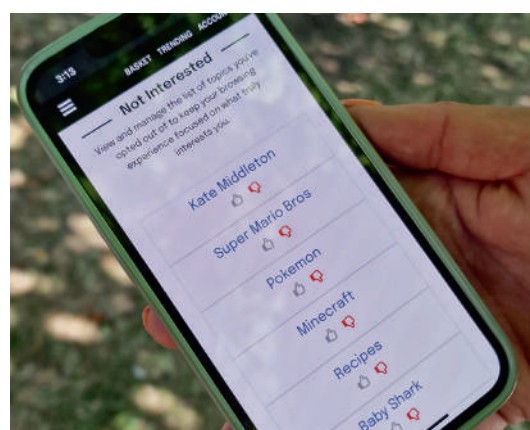
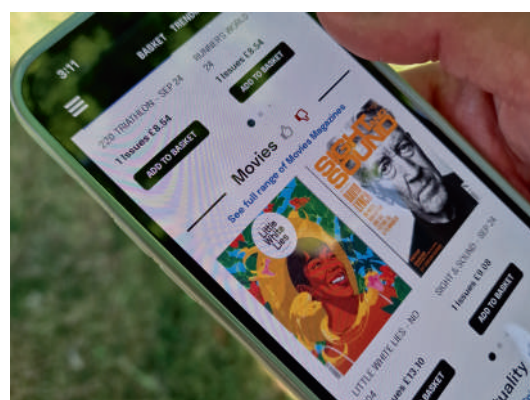
With these new tools, we introduce you to the latest issues and insights in your preferred topics, ensuring you remain informed about the most current and relevant content, curated just for you. Additionally, you will receive timely updates through personalised emails that highlight the latest magazines in your selected topics, opening doors to new possibilities and explorations in the vast world of print.

The personalised email digest ensures you are updated with new magazine releases that match your interests. You have complete control over how often you receive these updates. Choose from daily, weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, or even opt out if you prefer not to receive these emails at all. This flexibility allows you to stay connected with the print world on your own terms, ensuring that every piece of content we deliver is something you truly look forward to.

Our aim with 'Uniquely You' is simple: to simplify and modernise the browsing experience for our customers, ensuring it's tailored to showcase the topics they love most. This approach not only makes your magazine browsing more personal but also more direct and relevant to your specific interests.

We invite you to visit our website today to try out 'Uniquely You' and start customising your magazine browsing experience. Discover how easy and enjoyable it is to stay up to date with the magazines and topics you love the most. With Unique Magazines, your reading experience is always personal, always relevant, and always uniquely you.

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## Harnessing your strengths

Embarking on a CIM qualification is an exciting journey towards advancing your marketing career! But let's face it—juggling personal commitments, work responsibilities, and study time can be challenging.



**“To all those who are also navigating the demanding path of studying while working, I want to remind you that every effort you put in is a step towards your goals. Keep pushing forward, and remember, you're not alone. Lean on your support network, and you can achieve great things together”.**  
*Lynsey Martinez MCIM*

A level 6 CIM qualification is an advanced qualification equivalent to an undergraduate degree, and it's the core operational marketing qualification for marketing professionals. The course provides the knowledge and skills required to take a strategic approach to marketing at a management level. Ideal for Marketing

Managers, this qualification is also suitable for team members in roles such as Account Managers or Business Development Managers.

Veronica Swindale, nesma MD, spoke to Lynsey Martinez MCIM, a recent Level 6 Diploma in Professional Digital Marketing graduate. She started her training with JGA Group, where she completed the Marketing Manager L6 Apprenticeship. This gave her an exemption, so she only needed to complete two modules instead of three, which she did with distinctions.

We asked her to share some tips for balancing commitments whilst studying.

### Why did you decide to take this qualification?

I decided to pursue the Level 6 CIM qualification because I wanted to solidify my expertise in strategic marketing and digital marketing. As a Commercial Channel Manager, staying updated with the latest trends and methodologies is crucial. This qualification was the perfect opportunity to deepen my knowledge and demonstrate my commitment to personal and professional development. I knew the skills and insights gained from this course would be invaluable in navigating the complexities of the marketing landscape and contributing more effectively to my organisation.



### **How has it benefited your role as a Commercial Channel Manager?**

The qualification has been transformative for my role. It gave me a comprehensive understanding of strategic marketing principles and how to apply them in real-world scenarios. I can now approach marketing challenges with a more strategic mindset, which has been instrumental in improving our channel marketing efforts. The course enhanced my ability to analyse market data and make informed decisions that drive growth. It has equipped me with the tools to lead more effective campaigns, align marketing strategies with business objectives, and ultimately deliver better results.

### **What key things did you do to balance your time and juggle your commitments?**

Balancing time and commitments were challenging, but a few strategies made it manageable. I created a detailed study schedule that allocated specific times for studying, work and personal activities. This helped me stay organised and ensured that I consistently made progress without feeling overwhelmed. Secondly, I focused on a unit at a time and gave myself a time limit for research, which allowed me to focus and ensure I didn't go too far down a Google rabbit hole. Lastly, I leveraged technology to streamline my work processes and save time.

### **How did support from your colleagues and employers make a difference?**

Support from colleagues and employers was pivotal in my success. My employer recognised the value of the CIM qualification and was flexible with my work schedule, allowing me to attend classes and study without compromising my job responsibilities. My colleagues were also understanding and supportive, often stepping in to help when needed. This collective support created an environment where I could focus on my studies while still fulfilling my professional duties. Knowing I had a network of people who believed in my goal was incredibly motivating and reduced the stress of balancing multiple commitments.

### **How crucial was the support of your peer group and mentors at nesma?**

Engaging with peers who were on the same journey provided a sense of camaraderie and shared purpose. We exchanged tips, resources, and encouragement, which made the learning process more enjoyable and less isolating. The mentors at nesma were exceptional—they provided guidance, feedback, and insights that enriched my understanding of the course material. Their expertise and willingness to assist were instrumental in helping me achieve distinctions in all my modules.

### **How did you stay motivated?**

Staying motivated was vital to completing the qualification successfully. I set clear, achievable goals and celebrated small milestones. This approach kept me focused and provided a sense of accomplishment that fuelled my motivation. Additionally, I reminded myself of the long-term benefits of the qualification, such as career advancement and personal growth. I was driven by visualising its positive impact on my future, even during challenging times. Lastly, maintaining a healthy work-life balance through regular exercise, proper rest, and time with family and friends helped me stay energised and motivated throughout the journey.

With the right support system, Lynsey has shown us that you can successfully navigate the challenges and reach your goals.

Remember, this is a journey towards your professional growth. Embrace the process, and you'll emerge stronger and more knowledgeable!

**To unlock your or your team's potential, contact Jen Lorimer, Client Relationship Manager, at 07734 222 254 or email [hello@nesma.co.uk](mailto:hello@nesma.co.uk).**

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solution and  
make sure  
it's done  
properly...*

Caroline Marsden



# Marketing and Media Matters

*In the latest of this popular series of features we spoke to...*

## Caroline Marsden

*Director of PR & Marketing Consultancy C&J Media*

### **Did you always envisage a career in PR & Marketing?**

I've always been a creative person. When I was at school I wanted to go into the media industry as a TV news reporter.

After graduating from Newcastle University, I joined Granada Television in Manchester. I worked in production as a runner on a variety of sports, news and entertainment shows.

I then moved into PR when a friend mentioned a PR and Marketing agency was looking for a trainee PR Executive and thought it might suit me.

### **What has been your career path so far?**

After leaving Granada Television I started my first PR role at The Charles Walls Group in Leeds and then made the move in-house to work for Mamas & Papas.

During my mid 20s I took a break to go travelling and worked for Emap Publishing in Sydney on an entertainment magazine. When I returned to the UK, I worked agency and client side, spending over eight years at RBS/NatWest in the bank's corporate and commercial PR and Marketing team. I worked there during the banking crisis and Government rescue which was a challenging time.

When the bank was undergoing major restructuring, I took voluntary redundancy which gave me the push I needed to set up on my own. This has been the best decision I ever made.

Although I'm a specialist in financial and professional services PR having worked for private equity, banking and accountancy firms for the past 20 years I also work with a variety of other sectors including healthcare and EV.

### **What has been the biggest challenge you have faced so far?**

Balancing the birth of my son Ben with my business. C&J Media was in its early days, and I'd just secured a large contract. I was determined to continue and grow the business. It was quite a balancing act. It was also a steep learning curve leaving a large corporate environment to become self employed but I've enjoyed every minute and my business has thrived. Much of my work comes from referrals and I enjoy working with a variety of companies across the UK.

### **Who do you respect most in your industry?**

I admire all agency owners and freelancers out there. It's tough balancing the day to day work with the mechanics of running your own business but it's very rewarding.

### **What is your greatest strength?**

My 'can do' attitude. If something needs doing, I'll find a solution and make sure it's done properly. Likewise, if I think something isn't going to work I'll say so.

### **What is your biggest weakness?**

Saying yes too much which can mean it's hard to switch off.

### **What has been your proudest achievement?**

Setting up my business and 14 years later it's still going strong.

### **What are your future career aspirations?**

I'm happy with how things are right now. I've got a good balance and am lucky to work with some great clients. I'm always open to talk to anyone who needs some help with their PR and Comms strategies, whether it be a one off project or long-term. I love writing and keep saying one day I'll write a book so who knows maybe I'll do it one day.

### **How do you see your industry evolving?**

The media landscape is constantly evolving, changing how we access news. It's important to adapt your PR and marketing strategies accordingly. AI is a big factor – technology will play a big role in the future. Hopefully we won't be all replaced by AI and the benefits of dealing with real people will continue!

### **How do you like to unwind?**

I love to keep fit and spend time with my family. Exercise clears my mind whether I'm running, cycling, doing Pilates or walking my dog. I have a teenage son, so my weekends tend to be spent driving him to various sports activities. He plays cricket and rugby, so summer and winter are both very busy!

[www.candjmedia.com](http://www.candjmedia.com)



## ...Back to School...

*Keith Newman asked some of his RADAR members to tell us what they do to educate themselves in their job*



Autumn is back to school for all of us.

This autumn our staff training programme takes off in a big way! We have just been successful with a funding application to the North East based LGA Foundation who have funded us to train and qualify 25 AQA Level 2 Community Leaders and up-skill a range of existing coaches.

We want to grow our programmes even more going into 2025 with more leaders and more young people on programmes than ever before.

A new online booking system is about to go live and 2025 is shaping up to be an amazing year already so watch this space!

We are always on the lookout for more delivery partners, volunteers or young people interested in helping others!

Get in touch for a chat on 07867795586 or email paul@off-the-grid-cic.uk and check out the website: offthegrid-adventures.co.uk for more details.

**Paul Kirkpatrick, Off the Grid**



As an independent business, I have to research the market and keep up to date with buying trends. All of my products are made in Britain and where possible I use local suppliers.

My customers absolutely love this. However, some of them are used to paying for products on the high street that are bought in bulk by big retailers and many of those products are imported.

Consumers get used to high street prices, therefore when they see high quality goods made in Britain, they think they are expensive. The reason they cost more is because I buy in smaller quantities and British manufacturing adheres to rules and regulations while also paying their employees well.

There is a cost to everything even if you buy cheaper goods that are shipped here. The carbon footprint is higher, and you might be buying goods from a manufacturer that does not have the same standards as British manufacturers.

I always have products that meet everyone's price point, I sell products from £2-£55 giving people the opportunity to support my small business and the suppliers I work with, without compromising their finances. Supporting small British businesses also massively helps the local economy. Small business owners are more likely to spend their money locally. Whereas big retailers continue to spend their money and profits paying shareholders and buying more imported goods.

So, if you shop local and support a small business like mine you are having a positive impact that has a ripple effect. You can find me on Newcastle Quayside every Sunday. Pop along and say hello and find out which of my products are made locally.

**Corinne Lewis Ward, [www.powderbutterfly.com](http://www.powderbutterfly.com)**





I was very proud to be the Headmaster's daughter, so learning was very important in our lives...so was self-discipline and contribution. Therefore, I am always doing a course or learning something. I just can't stop because there is so much to learn and love about it!

Now I've just finished a business course so that I can help my own development and be strategic for my clients who are self-employed too.

The next plan is to do a business strategy course and improve my crochet! I love making things to send to clients in my welcome packs so the creativity can cheer us both!

The entirety of my working life is to help good people learn about themselves, their thinking and their patterns of behaviour. The more we learn then the more powerful we can be! That's almost as exciting as a new school term! Great luck to the students, staff, teachers, leaders and parents!

*Dr Rebecca Dinsdale, [www.drrebecca.org.uk](http://www.drrebecca.org.uk)*



As an independent ABTA travel agency, we must ensure that we are kept up to date with the latest news, information and reviews of destinations and holidays all over the world. We sometimes get invited to visit new hotels or events and recently one of the team visited a cruise ship on the Tyne so that she could pass on information to our customers. With these learning experiences we can pass on our knowledge to the customer so that they get the very best holiday possible.

*John Dixon, Destinations by John*

*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](mailto:keith@highlightspr.co.uk) or call Keith on 07814 397951*

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**Contact Keith Newman for more details.**

**Visit him on his floating office**

**[keith@highlightspr.co.uk](mailto:keith@highlightspr.co.uk)**

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## Saltburn Food Festival is a roaring success!

**Biggest event to date for SASS media - who promoted the popular festival.**

**At SASS media Ltd, we are very proud to have supported Saltburn Food Festival with its publicity requirements in 2024.**

We have loved working with Lorna Jackson, telling the story of how she and a friend and family members came to start the food festival, while also building up anticipation for the popular event between March and July through the local media.

Over a period of five months, we sent out several press releases and wrote a feature for Yorkshire Life magazine on Lorna - and we're pleased to say we have achieved great success in getting coverage both before and after the event, which has been hailed a roaring success.

Thousands of food and drink lovers came out in the sunshine to enjoy an electric atmosphere at Saltburn Food Festival on Sunday July 28th.

One of the things we were tasked with doing

at SASS media was promoting the regular park and ride services to try to reduce traffic into Saltburn on the day, and it was pleasing to see many people leaving the car at home and taking advantage of these and the regular train services on our advice via the media.

Festival organiser Lorna Jackson said the turnout of people supporting local food and drinks producers, craft stalls and other small businesses was "fantastic".

"Overall, people seemed to really enjoy the different cuisines and activities," she said.

"It's always nice to see the community come together to celebrate food and local businesses."

Lorna runs the Real Meals deli and bistro in Milton Street and Food First, a community interest company aimed at promoting local food as a way to enjoy cultural experiences and promote a more sustainable, ecological way of life.

She added lots of people had showed up to take part in cookery courses and learn how to create new recipes at the food theatre.

"The atmosphere this year was absolutely buzzing with excitement and positive energy, making it a memorable event for everyone who attended," she said.

"It's absolutely awesome to see the festival growing and becoming even more popular each year.

"Bring on the next!"

We hope to support Lorna with the event in

2025 too, as we were delighted to be able to present the results of our media coverage to her.

Online, there were 476,000 estimated views of our news stories about Saltburn Food Festival over the five-month period.

These views came from a wide range of publications and we were also able to get Lorna on Zetland FM twice and on BBC Tees too.

In print, stories about the festival reached a minimum of 119,600 readers, based on the circulation figures of the publications featuring our stories.

We feel sure the media work we carried out will have had a direct impact on the success of the festival - not to mention the sunny weather bringing everyone out with a smile on their faces!

Summer might be coming to a close now, but we're looking forward to supporting other organisations to promote their events in the near future.

One thing we have learned is that the earlier you start promoting your event, the better, as we were able to build a great deal of momentum and anticipation over the five months we worked on the festival.

So if you're thinking of having an event - or you need media publicity for your organisation, do get in touch with us.

**You can contact Sarah Walker on 07896 894538 or email [sarah.walker@sassmedialtd.co.uk](mailto:sarah.walker@sassmedialtd.co.uk)**





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Nicola Halse

## Why marketing any business should start with its people

As businesses continually look to new and innovative marketing methods to promote their products and services, one strategy which is often overlooked, is internal marketing.

**Put simply, your employees should be your biggest advocates. If your employees are happy and on board with your values and purpose, they will promote the business for you.**

The practice of promoting your company objectives, culture and brand ethos to your employees, internal marketing focuses on a committed, motivated and aligned workforce, which in turn, drives organisational success from within.

One of the primary benefits of internal

marketing is the significant boost in employee engagement. When your employees are well-informed about the company's goals, values and products, they feel more connected to the business's mission. This connection translates into higher job satisfaction and a greater sense of purpose. Engaged employees are more likely to put in extra effort, exhibit higher levels of creativity and stay loyal to the company.

Internal marketing can also facilitate better communication across all levels of the business. Regular updates and transparent communication channels will ensure that your employees are aware of important developments and understand how their roles contribute to the company's success. This openness not only reduces misunderstandings and misinformation but also builds trust between management and staff.

A strong company culture is essential for attracting and retaining top talent. Internal marketing initiatives, such as workshops, team-building activities and recognition programs, help to reinforce the company's values and create a cohesive work environment. When employees share a common understanding of the company's culture, they are more likely to collaborate effectively and support each other, leading to a more harmonious and productive workplace.

Employees who are informed and enthusiastic about their company are natural

brand ambassadors. They are more likely to speak positively about their workplace to friends, family and on social media. This kind of organic advocacy can be a powerful marketing tool, enhancing the company's reputation and making it easier to attract new customers and top-tier talent. Moreover, employees who believe in the company's mission are more credible spokespeople than traditional advertising efforts.

Simple and easy to manage tasks such as having your employees comment, share and like your business's social media content can display their commitment, loyalty and passion for the company.

When employees are engaged and feel valued, they are more likely to contribute innovative ideas. Internal marketing can create an environment where employees feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and suggestions, knowing that their input is appreciated and considered. This culture of innovation can lead to the development of new products, services and processes that give the company a competitive edge.

Internal marketing is a vital component of a thriving business. By focusing on the internal audience, companies can cultivate a motivated, informed, and aligned workforce that drives success from within.

In essence, investing in internal marketing is investing in the heart of the company – its people.

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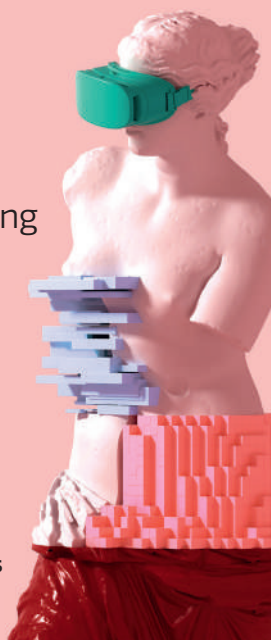


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# Horizon Works looks to the future with new appointment

Catherine has more than seven years of marketing experience across disciplines such as digital content writing, social media and digital analytics.



Horizon Works, which is based at Northumberland Business Park near Cramlington, Northumberland, offers integrated marketing services including strategy, PR, design, digital, website development and SEO, and supports regional, national and global organisations.

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# My Weekend...



## Angela Carrington

Angela is the Managing Director of The Bigger Picture Agency based in Newcastle's Biscuit Factory. Here she tells us how she spends her weekends.

### Do you ever have to work weekends?

Less than I used to. I've worked hard recently to try and make time for my own interests/hobbies and family activities.

### Are most weekends the same?

Never. Every weekend is different...just the way I like it! When I'm not working, I spend a lot of my time as a Trustee and Regional Volunteer Officer for national charity the Maritime Volunteer Service. (MVS) The charity trains people of all ages and abilities in seamanship, engineering and communications. Each unit operates their own vessels and uses their skills for the benefit of the nautical community. I have personally managed the MVS role in three Tall Ships events (Blyth, Sunderland and Hartlepool) working with the Harbour Authority of each and multi-agency teams including Police, Border Control, HM Coastguard and RNLI. A lot of our volunteering work takes place at weekends, so my time must be carefully managed.

### Do you find it hard to switch off?

Very. I work long hours and cram in a lot of volunteer work around that too. If I go on holiday, it takes a good three full days to start to decompress and relax!

### What do you do at a weekend which you can't fit in through the week?

Usually admin (life and work).

### Morning exercise or a recovery lie in?

I love morning exercise. Get it in before your body or mind objects! I rarely lie in.

### Big night out or a night in the house?

Both!

### Do you watch or play sport at a weekend?

Not anymore. I keep active though and carry out safety-boat work at a sailing club in Northumberland.

### Where do you like to eat out at a weekend?

I prefer to order in (Shawarma is my favourite).

### How important is the weekend to you?

Very. It's a chance to reconnect with friends and family and have quality time with loved ones.

### What's the best thing about weekends?

One of the best things for me is spending time with my dogs! I love walking them out in the wilds.

### Of a weekend, you'll usually find me mostly...?

Bobbing around on a boat or walking in a forest.

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## Ideal Space for Partnerships

Two businesses that have been working in collaboration on joint projects have taken the plunge and moved into a new office together.

**Helen Arnold of a leading digital marketing agency and Emma Solomon, an established photographer, have joined forces, setting up a joint office in the beautifully designed Space @ Whitley Bay premises on Park View, famously known as “The Lofts.”**

Space @ Whitley Bay is run by Mark Ions and has been a cornerstone of the local business community since 2018. With four properties now under its belt, it offers a variety of workspace solutions including hot desking, dedicated desks, virtual offices, three stylish meeting rooms, and private offices. The space is renowned

for its stunning design, state-of-the-art technology including instant online booking and access and outdoor areas, all within a stone’s throw from the beautiful Whitley Bay beach and free parking.

Helen Arnold’s digital marketing agency H Social specialises in enhancing the visibility and credibility of businesses across North East England through strategic social media and email marketing. Emma from Emma Solomon Photography has long sought a studio space to expand her creative horizons and cater to both private and commercial clients. This partnership not only fulfils Emma’s dream of having an indoor studio but also complements Helen’s services, providing a seamless experience for their shared clients.

Helen commented, “Our personalities and businesses align perfectly. This collaboration makes everything easier for our clients, offering them comprehensive digital marketing and professional photography services under one roof.”

Emma added, “I’ve always wanted a studio space to enhance my creative offerings. Now, with this joint office, I can provide high-quality, diverse photography services and explore new opportunities.” And indeed, Emma has already taken the opportunity to bring something literally

“out of the box” into the studio.

The new studio features a unique “box” setup, a creative project Emma has envisioned for 18 months. This plywood box, capable of holding multiple adults, is designed for fun and engaging photoshoots, perfect for families, friends, or business teams looking for a memorable experience.

Helen and Emma’s workspace at Space @ Whitley Bay is more than just an office; it is a hub for collaboration, creativity, and community. They are part of a vibrant business community, now housing around 60 professionals. The environment not only promotes productivity but also supports mental well-being and fosters connections among various enterprises.

“We are excited to see the fruits of Helen and Emma’s collaboration,” said Mark “Their partnership embodies the spirit of our flexible workspace – a place where businesses can thrive and support one another.

“True to our ethos, they support Space @ by doing all our photography and social media and it’s a partnership that works well. We are delighted that they have become a big part of our Space @ Whitley Bay family.”

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## Contractor trains up STEM 'Careers Champions'



**Esh Construction has partnered with the North East Combined Authority to enhance STEM provision in schools across the region.**

Working collaboratively through the Combined Authority's North East Ambition Programme, which aims to champion the full potential of the region by connecting communities and giving people the skills to succeed, Esh has provided six bespoke kits to support a wider understanding of STEM-related construction careers.

Through the programme, Esh is currently training up six Careers Champions, who will then host a 'Get into STEM' session in participating schools, with the kits available for schools to book out and use for extra-curricular sessions that will promote STEM careers.

Esh's award winning 'Get into STEM' programme is designed to positively shape career aspirations whilst developing skill sets essential for

science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) careers. Since 2015, Esh has delivered the programme to more than 16,900 primary school students across the North East, Tees Valley and Yorkshire.

Kate Marshall, Social Value Manager for the North East at Esh Construction said: "Our team has been working closely with the Careers Champions to demonstrate programme delivery of the STEM kits, so that they can train up teachers and classroom assistants to use the kits within their own schools. The initiative to enhance STEM understanding to more students across our region will ultimately raise awareness of a range of career options in the construction and built environment sector.

"At a time when our industry is dealing with a skills shortage, engaging with students from a young age will provide opportunities as we move into the 2030s and beyond."



## College students reach final of Bafta Game Designing competition

**Two Newcastle College students reached the final of this year's BAFTA Young Games Designers (YGD) awards. The finals, streamed live at the end of June, showcased their outstanding talent and creativity in game design.**

Finlay Ross and Sophie Hogg, who are returning for their second year of Level 3 Games Development this month, were named finalists in the YGD Game

Concept Award, 15-18 category, for their innovative game concept titled 'The Getaway.'

BAFTA Young Game Designers is a renowned initiative aimed at nurturing young talent aged 10-18 in the field of game development. Winners were judged on the design and suitability of their games for their chosen platforms, encouraging a new generation of game developers and making the industry more accessible to emerging talent. Participants compete for two esteemed awards: the YGD Game Concept Award and the YGD Game Making Award, each category divided into age groups.

"The Getaway" is a momentum-based parkour bank heist getaway game. Players assume the role of a daring bank robber navigating through cities, suburbs, and seas by jumping and swinging between obstacles. The game challenges players to maintain momentum, with each level culminating in a thrilling escape that demands precise timing and skill.



## Outstanding GCSE success for Durham High School girls

**Girls at a Durham independent school are celebrating after receiving their GCSE results with almost a quarter of grades awarded being a Grade 9.**

Durham High School enjoyed another set of outstanding exam results, following on from their recent impressive A Level grades, which saw one in five grades awarded being an A\*.

The GCSE grades revealed that 24 per cent were Grade 9 with 48 per cent Grades 8-9. Stand out performances were in all language GCSEs where 41 per cent achieved a Grade 9.

Among the happy students were Darcy Donkin, of Chester Le Street, who earlier this year was selected as one of only ten winners in a national poetry competition, The Simon Powell Poetry Prize.

She said: "I'm delighted with my results. My best subject was RE, a Grade 9. I'd got a Grade 6 in my mocks in January so to achieve that in my final exam is testament to the hard work and support of my teachers."

Chloe Starbuck, of Durham, who was awarded seven 9s among her GCSEs and plans to study Biology, Chemistry, Maths and Further Maths in the Sixth Form, said she was overjoyed with her results.

Chloe, who is also the Durham representative for the UK Youth Parliament, said: "The highlight over five years at Durham High has been me being able to push myself out of my comfort zone knowing I have that support there.

"I'm so excited to go forward now and study the subjects I really care about and be part of the tight-knit community in the Sixth Form."

Fellow student Kate Burdon, of Chester Le Street, said: "I'm so happy with my GCSE results. I couldn't have asked for anything more. The community at the high school, with small classes and fantastic teachers, has helped me greatly."

Sophie Bannister, of Wynyard, added: "I'm absolutely chuffed with my results. The hard work has definitely paid off. I couldn't have done it without the fantastic support from my teachers."

Michelle Hill, Headmistress at Durham High School, said she was 'elated' with the results and praised the school's staff for teaching and supporting the girls throughout their studies.

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## The business of independent schools

*By Geoffrey Stanford, Headmaster of Newcastle Royal Grammar School.*

I recently had the opportunity to join BBC Presenter Evan Davis to discuss the business of independent schools for Radio 4's programme, *The Bottom Line*. Many independent schools have charitable status but, in introducing the programme, Evan commented that the new government is proposing to treat independent schools more like businesses and less like charities by imposing VAT on the school fees paid by parents.

**Whether charities or not, there is virtually no other country in the world where the provision of education is subject to such taxation - Greece tried something similar and quickly revoked the policy. It is worth noting that the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) paper, on which the policy of imposing VAT was based, specifically commented that where there are cost savings to the government and positive spillover benefits there are good arguments for exempting independent schools from VAT.**

Any child educated outside of the state sector represents a cost saving to government. Indeed, Independent Schools Council figures from 2021 show that this saves the state £4.4bn even before the £14.1bn contribution to GDP and £4.3bn in taxes revenues. Meanwhile, although not all independent schools are charities, those that are often have a long history of providing public benefit in towns and cities all over the country. Half of independent schools in the UK have fewer than three hundred students and many serve very particular markets. These include faith schools, special schools, performing arts schools and so on,

catering for children whose needs are not met in state schools, and families deserve the choice of different schools in order to find the one which best suits their child. Large schools like the Royal Grammar School, Newcastle typically fulfil their charitable obligations through the provision of bursaries and through partnership work in their local community. In our case, as of September, we will have ninety bursary students in the school. In parallel, each year we also run more than fifty projects in over a hundred local schools in areas of most need supporting over 10,000 children, at no cost to government.

As well as being a manifesto commitment, the policy of introducing VAT on school fees was referenced in the King's speech and so, notwithstanding the arguments above, it was no surprise when the policy was announced with an accompanying technical guidance paper. What was surprising was the timing of the announcement and the speed with which the policy is being implemented, without any meaningful consultation with those affected. By announcing the policy during the summer holidays, many schools were not in a position to respond quickly. Meanwhile,

the implementation date of 1 January 2025 means that parents would have to give the standard term's notice to leave before the beginning of September if they need to move their children. It may be, in the short term, that parents move heaven and earth to avoid disrupting their child's education. At the same time, focussing on the needs of the children affected, schools will do their best to support where they can. However, some will have no choice, particularly where schools may be forced to close. Moving your child to a different school is not easy at the best of times and finding places at short notice in the state sector mid-year is also likely to be very challenging.

As the trustee of a Multi Academy Trust that specifically targets areas of disadvantage, I am all in favour of a properly funded state education sector. However, the policy is unlikely to raise the funds that the Labour party expect. The IFS study assumed that the money will be raised irrespective of how many children leave the independent sector, arguing that VAT will be paid on other goods and services that parents spend their money on instead of school fees. In reality these parents will pay for things that do not incur VAT such as tutoring, buying houses near to good state schools and paying off their mortgages.

I recently heard British Labour politician David Blunkett saying in interview that the Labour Party had made a mistake in 1997 by abolishing the Assisted Places scheme, which was paying for 34,000 children to attend schools like the RGS. He said this did not raise the money they expected and that the commitments they made instead cost far more than anticipated and ended up being targeted in affluent suburbs rather than areas of most disadvantage. I fear that history is repeating itself but, by the time this becomes clear, the damage will have been done.

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# No One Left Offline: understanding your employees' digital skills



**The education charity and awarding organisation NCFE has launched a new campaign to raise awareness of the importance of digital skills. David Redden, Commercial Manager, explains why employers must think about their workforce's skills.**

**In 2017, the European Commission estimated that over 1.2 million UK businesses are underperforming due to “insufficient digital awareness and lack of necessary skills”.**

As far back as 2015, the House of Lords stated that digital skills should be taught as the third “core subject” alongside numeracy and literacy.

The Department for Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport's report in June 2019 – No Longer Optional: Employer Demand for Digital Skills – found digital skills are becoming near-universal requirements for employment.

What's key for employers is providing their employees with a basic level of digital skill and creating the platform for them to progress.

## **A lack of digital skills**

Too often, companies invest in expensive

software and systems to improve digital performance and wonder why it hasn't done what they thought.

FutureDotNow carried out research based on 20 digital skills tasks that industry and government agree are essential for work, and the number one missing skill was using digital tools in the workplace.

Embedding digital skills from top down is also essential. There's still some shame attached to admitting you're not digitally confident, however it could easily be the chief executive lacking the skills.

I spent a lot of time talking to employers, training providers, schools and colleges about digital skills; pointing out the need to not only train learners but look within and check your own employees had the skills needed for their job.

It was then that it dawned on me that despite working for an educational charity, we hadn't practiced what I was preaching. What was the state of NCFE's digital skills amongst its staff? Do we have a need to develop them further?

## **Understanding digital skills**

Digital Skills is different to maths where people are quite open in admitting their weaknesses. There's embarrassment in admitting to poor digital skills, particularly in an increasingly digital world.

NCFE set out to provide a route to allow its staff to understand their digital skills levels without the fear of being named and shamed and providing a route to improve those skills.

We set up a page for colleagues that took

them straight into an initial assessment for essential digital skills. From there, they could identify the level they were working at. Following that they had several options:

- plug their skills gap with some online learning.
- do an Essential Digital Skills Qualification through training provider, Learning Curve Group.
- do nothing.

## **The results**

The data showed that 229 members of staff, from the CEO to flexible workers, underwent an initial assessment; 7% came out at Entry Level 3 and 93% at Level 1. For those worried about the time taken up by employees, the average time was 15 minutes.

Of the 229, we saw 173 access resources to develop their essential digital skills. While the numbers don't show how far they went, even if a colleague did one thing to gain more confidence, that will have a significant impact on their ability to perform at work or in life.

The point of this is to show how you can measure your own employees' confidence and abilities in digital skills - while providing an easy path to upskill. That this can be done privately without embarrassing or uncomfortable conversations with line managers enhances participation.

***If you're interested in understanding more about how you can support your staff with digital skills and learning more about our No One Left Offline campaign, visit [www.ncfe.org.uk/no-one-left-offline](http://www.ncfe.org.uk/no-one-left-offline)***





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# Another year of outstanding A Level and GCSE success at Newcastle High School for Girls

As the summer draws to a close, and a new academic year begins, Newcastle High School for Girls reflects on its summer of success.



Scarlett Spearman is heading to Cambridge to read Theology

**With so much riding on the outcomes and some exams taking place as early as April, it can feel like an agonisingly long wait for the A Level and GCSE results to be released in the last two weeks of August. As the much anticipated results days eventually arrived, nerves were soon replaced with elation as pupils from the leading all-girl school ripped open their results envelopes to reveal their top grades. The celebrations could begin at last!**

And there was much to celebrate as NHSG reported another year of phenomenal results which saw around half of all A Level grades at A\* to A and an impressive nine percentage point leap on the previous year with 80% of all grades at A\* - B. The GCSE results were no less impressive with more than one in three grades awarded at grade 9 or 8 (A\*equivalent) and four out of five grades awarded at grades 9 -6. Well over half of NHSG girls in this year's cohort achieved top grades of 9 - 7 at GCSE in Maths.

Taking up the role earlier this year NHSG Head, Amanda Hardie, said: "I am incredibly pleased with this summer's GCSE and A Level results and so delighted for each and every girl as they fulfil their dreams and ambitions and start on the next stage of their education."

Underneath the headline statistics lay exceptional individual achievements from Sixth Form pupils at the school which will see them heading to universities across the UK as well as overseas

Scarlett Spearman from Northumberland secured her place at Cambridge after achieving an impressive A\*A\*A at A Level. She will be reading Theology at the prestigious university and said:

"Cambridge has always been the dream, and I cannot wait to start there. The Theology course is very flexible, and I hope to focus on the philosophy and ethics of religion. Longer term I think I might stay in academia or go into Law where I can draw on the religious and cultural foundation I will have gained whilst at Cambridge."

Among the NHSG pupils who are taking up Medicine at university this year is Katie Preston from Gateshead.

Katie was in the unusual position of being spoiled for choice after receiving an incredible four offers from Medical Schools. She plumped for Glasgow University and, after gaining A\*AA at A Level, was ecstatic to have her place confirmed.

She said: "I have family living in Glasgow and have always loved the city. The spiral curriculum of the course was also a big deciding factor."

There was no less celebration for the girls collecting their GCSE results, who are now embarking on the next stage of their education at NHSG's Sixth Form.

It was no surprise that Inari Bari-Jones from Newcastle was very pleased with her results. She achieved a stunning set of GCSEs with eleven grade 9s and one grade 8. Inari would love to live abroad in the future and potentially work in finance or business. She is embarking on a challenging set of four A Levels at NHSG from September in French, Economics, Maths and Chemistry.

Inari said: "I am really looking forward to Sixth Form, delving further into my chosen subjects and the independence it will bring. A Levels are more intense but I love all my teachers so it will be great to see them every day for my lessons."

Lucy France from Whitley Bay admitted that apprehension and nerves had kicked in over the summer, but having achieved six grade 9s and five grade 8s, she had nothing to fear.

Lucy, who is taking French at A Level alongside Chemistry and Maths, hasn't yet set a future career plan. "I have chosen subjects I love and ones that will leave my options open if I want to follow a Science pathway. Languages also open so many doors."

Head, Amanda Hardie said: "As the long wait for the summer results is now over, August has proved to be a time of wonderful celebration. With results like these you really can't deny the benefits of an all-girl education. We pride ourselves on empowering girls to learn without limits in a productive and dynamic environment.

"Ambitions are always strong amongst the NHSG student community, and I for one can't wait to hear the Year 13 cohort's names mentioned in the years to come as they blaze a trail of success in their chosen field. I am also so excited to see the Year 11 cohort make the transition to our Sixth Form which will offer them the next level of academic challenge and the opportunity to continue to develop so that they can be the best version of themselves."

[newcastlehigh.gdst.net](http://newcastlehigh.gdst.net)



L-R: Holly Thompson, Katie Preston - will be studying Medicine together at Glasgow University





*Inari Bari-Jones achieved a stunning 11 grade 9s at GCSE*





## Northern Leaders Trust goes for gold in sporting events

Northern Leaders Trust recently celebrated a series of sporting events, including their highly anticipated Olympic Week and school sports days, both of which highlighted the talent and sportsmanship of students from Kenton School and Studio West.

### The Olympic Games Week:

Over the course of three days, more than 1,000 students came together from 16 forms across both Kenton School and Studio West to compete in a wide range of events seen in Paris 2024, from traditional sports like football and basketball to more specialised activities such as rock climbing, fencing and trampolining. The spirit of competition was fierce, yet students displayed outstanding sportsmanship and determination throughout.

Staff and students worked hard behind the scenes to make the week run smoothly, including sorting kit, organising events, taking photos, keeping everyone hydrated and cheering students along from the sidelines. The Year 9 Girls Active Leaders received special recognition for helping the PE staff manage the week whilst maths teacher Mrs Collins was commended for motivating her form group.

In Year 7, Robert and Ann-Marie emerged as stars, each claiming gold in the 400m, 800m and 1500m races. Their winning streak continued when they teamed up with Logan and Riyan to win the 4 x 100m relay.





Year 8 also had its share of standout performances, with Amelia dazzling in the trampolining event. Despite narrowly missing out on a medal, her courage and brilliant routines left a lasting impression on her fellow students and teachers. On the running track, Tommy, Harry and Scarlett delivered thrilling performances in the 400m race, with times that rivalled those of the older students.

This event highlighted the wide variety of brilliant sporting facilities that Northern Leaders Trust has, including state of the art fitness suites, full size 3G pitch, tennis courts and a climbing wall.

### Sports Days:

As part of Olympic Week, Kenton and Studio West students all took part in the Olympic Sports Days. The Year 7 basketball competition was a highlight, with 7A taking home the trophy thanks to their excellent teamwork and sportsmanship. In fencing, Macie from form 7A stepped in at the last minute and secured an impressive second place. Meanwhile, Year 9 students got to enjoy a unique twist on two much-loved traditional sports with an exciting game of FootGolf.



### Performing Arts Trip:

Performing Arts students also had the opportunity to visit London, where they participated in Wicked and Mamma Mia! workshops at the famous Pineapple Dance Studios and even attended a performance of Wicked in the West End, where they saw the routines they had learnt come to life.

Executive Principal, Martyn Gordon proudly reflects on the fantastic range of enrichment opportunities, stating: "Lee Kirtley and I have had numerous conversations with external personnel who marvel at the number and range of opportunities our superb teams of staff afford our students. These are the foundations on which this years' success has been built. The number of sporting events, performing arts galas, trips and excursions, experience days, reward and recognition events, academic interventions, personal development opportunities and STEM events that have complemented such a broad and aspirational academic curriculum have ensured all of our students have received a holistic and fulfilling programme, and this is down to the commitment of our staff."

These enrichment activities at Northern Leaders Trust highlighted not only the athletic talents of the students but also the strong sense of community and dedication among students and staff alike. Whether on the track, in the dance studio or behind the scenes, everyone played a role in making these events a resounding success, perfectly reflecting the spirit of community and belonging that Northern Leaders Trust defines as its values.

[northernleaderstrust.org](http://northernleaderstrust.org)





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# Resilient students celebrate Outstanding Exam Results

A Peterlee Sixth Form college affected by RAAC is celebrating its students outstanding exam results, which are a testament to the students' hard work, determination and resilience throughout a challenging academic year.

The proportion of A level students at St Bede's Catholic School & Byron Sixth Form College, which is part of Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust, who received A\*-A was 27.9% and 45.9% received grades A\*-B. This compares favourably with the national picture where 27.8% of A level students in England received the top grades.

Jackson Tilley, 18, from Seaham, achieved 3As in Biology, Chemistry and Maths.

Jackson said, "I'm happy, I've got exactly what I needed". Jackson is going to Newcastle University to study Biomedical Sciences.

Patrick Gilling, 18 from Wingate, was another student with plenty to celebrate, as he achieved an A\* in Maths and two As in History and Physics. The 18-year-old is going to Durham University to study Physics.

As he opened his results Patrick said "I'm delighted, I've finally got the results of all my hard work".

Chloe Musgrave is also off to Durham University to study Archaeology and Ancient Civilisations.

Both Oliver Tudball (AAA), 18, from Wingate, and Hugo Marshall (AAB), 18, from Seaham are going to the University of Sheffield to study Aerospace Engineering, thanks to achieving



L-R: Oliver Tudball, Patrick Gilling, Sophie Jubb

excellent grades in Chemistry, Maths and Physics.

Sophie Jubb, 18, from Seaham had a brilliant results day achieving two A\*s in English and Psychology and an A in History securing a place at University of Oxford to study History and English.

Sophie said, "I worked so hard for these, and I'm so proud of myself and all my friends, it was stressful changing our learning environment but we all worked so hard".

There were also some exceptional performances in BTEC subjects with a number of Distinction \*s.

These included Emily Smith who achieved full marks in BTEC Business, alongside grades A in Psychology and B in Geography in her A Levels. She is going to study Business and Geography at Newcastle University.

Other successful BTEC students included Chloe Rowland who is going to study Early Childhood Studies at Liverpool John Moores University, and Summer Jones who is off to Sunderland University to study Primary Education.

Headteacher Frances Cessford said: Despite the challenging year marked by RAAC (Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete) disruptions and other obstacles, students and staff demonstrated remarkable resilience and determination. Their hard work paid off, resulting in amazing A-level results. Overcoming adversity, the dedication of both students and staff has been truly inspiring, proving that even in difficult times, success is possible through perseverance.

**For more information, please visit [www.bccet.org.uk](http://www.bccet.org.uk)**

	<p><b>St Aidan's &amp; St. Anthony's Catholic Sixth Form, Sunderland</b></p> <p><b>SIXTH FORM OPEN EVENING</b></p> <p><b>TUESDAY 15 OCTOBER 2024</b> 6:00pm - 8:00pm</p> <p><b>FOR SEPTEMBER 2025 ENTRY</b></p>	<p>0191 565 8904</p> <p><a href="http://www.aaasixthform.com">www.aaasixthform.com</a></p> <p><a href="mailto:enquiries@st-anthonys-academy.com">enquiries@st-anthonys-academy.com</a></p> 
	<p><b>St Bede's Catholic School &amp; Byron 6th Form College, Peterlee</b></p> <p><b>SIXTH FORM OPEN EVENING</b></p> <p><b>TUESDAY 12 NOVEMBER 2024</b> 5.30 PM - 7.30 PM</p> <p><b>FOR SEPTEMBER 2025 ENTRY</b></p>	<p>0191 587 6220</p> <p><a href="http://www.st-bedes.org">www.st-bedes.org</a></p> <p><a href="mailto:enquiries@st-bedes.org">enquiries@st-bedes.org</a></p> <p>@StBedesandByron</p> 
	<p><b>St. Joseph's Catholic Academy Sixth Form, Hebburn</b></p> <p><b>SIXTH FORM OPEN EVENING</b></p> <p><b>THURSDAY 14 NOVEMBER 2024</b> 6.00 PM - 8.00 PM</p> <p><b>FOR SEPTEMBER 2025 ENTRY</b></p>	<p>0191 428 2700</p> <p><a href="http://www.stjosephs.uk.net/sixth-form">www.stjosephs.uk.net/sixth-form</a></p> <p><a href="mailto:office@stjosephs.uk.net">office@stjosephs.uk.net</a></p> <p>@stjosephsca</p> 
	<p><b>St. Wilfrid's R.C. College Sixth Form, South Shields</b></p> <p><b>SIXTH FORM OPEN EVENING</b></p> <p><b>THURSDAY 21 NOVEMBER 2024</b> 6.00 PM - 8.00 PM</p> <p><b>FOR SEPTEMBER 2025 ENTRY</b></p>	<p>0191 456 9121</p> <p><a href="http://www.st-wilfrids.org/sixth-form/">www.st-wilfrids.org/sixth-form/</a></p> <p><a href="mailto:admin@st-wilfrids.org">admin@st-wilfrids.org</a></p> <p>@stwilfridsrccollege</p> 





## Ambition, intrigue and jazz-age glamour

The razzle-dazzle of Broadway is coming to Newcastle Theatre Royal as **Chicago the Musical** hits the stage (Mon 28 Oct – Sat 2 Nov 2024). This legendary, Tony Award-winning show brings its signature style with sensational choreography, unforgettable songs, and a captivating story of ambition, intrigue and jazz-age glamour.

Set amidst the decadence of the 1920s, *Chicago* is the story of Roxie Hart, a housewife and nightclub dancer who murders her on-the-side lover after he threatens to walk out on her. Desperate to avoid conviction, she dupes the public, the media and her rival cellmate, Velma Kelly, by hiring *Chicago*'s slickest criminal lawyer to transform her malicious crime into a barrage of sensational headlines, the likes of which might just as easily be ripped from today's tabloids.

Created by the musical theatre talents of John Kander, Fred Ebb and legendary choreographer Bob Fosse, *Chicago*'s sexy, sassy score includes the show-stopping songs "Razzle Dazzle", "Cell Block Tango", and "All That Jazz". Winner of six Tony Awards, two Olivier Awards and a Grammy



## Musicians and fans set to be marooned on Holy Island

For music fans wanting to get away from it all there can be no better venue than Lindisfarne at high tide.

Pilgrimage To The Islands returns this November where attendees are marooned during high tide on Holy Island to enjoy a host of music and art, and the natural surroundings of the island. Then as the tide ebbs a few hours later, they head back to the mainland with fantastic memories and new musical experiences to share.

The festival takes place indoors in the all seater Crossman Hall, where some of the region's most exciting musical talent will be performing as well as artists from further afield including American new wave folk singer Amy Rigby.

Artists for 2024 include King Creosote, Mick Head & The Red Elastic Band, Butler, Blake and Grant, Martin Stephenson & the Daintees, Kathryn Williams and Withered Hand, The Dave Hull-Denholm Band, The Pearlfishers, Ceitidh Mac, Nev Clay, Frankie Archer and Hector Gannet who have appropriately named songs linking them to the area including 'The Whin Sill', and 'The Haven of St Aidan's'.

Organiser Mark Elliott is looking forward to the event. "The last time we did this event, the feedback was amazing. People totally loved getting away from the hustle and bustle of everyday life as the island instils a sense of calm. Music fans emerged themselves into the music and it was an atmosphere like no other. Our Saturday headliners Blake, Butler and Grant represent a huge slice of music royalty from Teenage Fanclub, Suede and Love and Money. Add to this King Creosote (Friday) Martin Stephenson plus Mick Head (Sunday) and we have the ideal ingredients for a memorable event."

Food and drink will be available in the hall and in the island's pubs and cafés.



## Casting announced for Gerry & Sewell

Newcastle United recently kicked off their Premier League campaign on Saturday, but for one Toon Army, they are already celebrating promotion to the biggest stage.

Gerry & Sewell, Olivier award-winning Jamie Eastlake's adaptation based on Jonathan Tulloch's novel *The Season Ticket* and the cult Geordie film *Purely Belter*, is set for a week long run at Newcastle Theatre following sold out performances at Laurels and Live Theatre.

A true tale of Geordie passion, *Gerry & Sewell* is a real North East success story having started life at Laurels theatre – housed in a 120 year social club - in Whitley Bay and after attracting sell out audiences during two runs in 2022, it transferred to Live Theatre the following year playing to packed out audiences for 11 nights. Now it's set to play on its biggest stage to date having scored a six-performance run at Newcastle Theatre Royal (Wed 2 – Sat 5 Oct 2024).

Blyth-born Jamie Eastlake is bringing together a stellar cast brimming with North East talent. Multi award-winning actor Bill Ward – known to millions for his prime time TV roles on *Coronation Street* and *Emmerdale* stars as Mr McCarten opposite BRIT award winner, actress and campaigner Michelle Heaton, who hails from Gateshead and shot to fame as a member of the band 'Liberty X' on *Popstars* in 2001.

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## The Artist's Year

By Mary Ann Rogers

Where on earth has the summer gone? It certainly hasn't been an endless succession of long, hot, lazy sunny days here at Leam Cottage!

**Making the most of things is what we do well here, so regardless of the weather, I book my evening swims at the nearby open water venue, a beautiful tree lined lake with huge views to the west. I may not be the fastest, but I'm usually the last swimmer out of the water and if there was an Olympic medal for plodding on, I'd be up there with the contenders. The other evenings, fifey and I cycle down to the river for a swim.**

July is when we decamp to Harrogate for the only trade show I do. It involves loading up a van with one of everything, plus furniture for the stand, and a caravan hooked on the back to stay in for the 6 days I spend there. It's a huge amount of work, but putting what I do in front of buyers from shops, galleries, department stores and visitor centres from all round the UK and Ireland really is a special opportunity. As usual, the weather was gorgeous. We had a great stand, everything looked exactly as I planned it, down to the last centimetre, and people loved it! We came home with a very healthy order book, and a dose of E Coli. The River Nidd in Knaresborough was just too tempting. Despite the rather murky waters, I swam twice there, head down crawl, and whilst I certainly didn't swallow any water, it appears some of it must have entered my body. I discovered (too late) that the river

water quality for that stretch of river was the lowest it had been, and subsequently I read that many swimmers there had contracted E coli and become quite ill.

It's very quiet here at the moment. A rogue fox has been visiting during the daytime, which is quite unusual, and has taken all of our ducks and chickens over a period of a few weeks. The guinea fowl, always extremely alert and very noisy, have, up until now, escaped becoming fox food, until yesterday. Fifey happened to spot Mr Fox trotting up the field with a dead guinea fowl in his mouth. We only have two rather subdued guinea fowl left, and we are at a bit of a loss to know what to do next. I can't imagine not having a menagerie of fascinating birds, laying fresh eggs and keeping me entertained, but a fox who takes them during the daytime is a real problem.

We are now into the season of landscape painting. The hills become purple with the heather, then the bracken begins to turn golden soon while the skies take on a more interesting character, and I struggle to work fast enough to keep up with the changes.

One of these landscape paintings has

caught my imagination and now adorns sketchbooks, journals, potbags and a new rope handled bag which I think will be great for all my damp swimming things.

In the garden, we are feasting on runner beans every night now, trying to think up new ideas of how to cook courgettes, cooking the potatoes which began so small and earthy and now are large and floury – ideal for rolling in olive oil, thyme and a squeeze of lemon then roasting.

Fifey's amazing hut, made from scavenged window frames mostly, now has a professionally installed woodburner, so we eat our supper in there, watching the sun disappear behind the hills, the cattle grazing and pushing each other around, the rooks heading off to heaven knows where, only to return back to roost about an hour later!

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# The Jewel in Grey Street's Crown

Marianne Locatori on Shaping the Future of Newcastle Theatre Royal





**For its Chief Executive Marianne Locatori, working at Newcastle Theatre Royal is anything but predictable.**

"There's no such thing as a typical day here!" she laughs. With a different touring production visiting almost every week, Marianne's schedule is packed with activities in all aspects of the theatre's operations; there is far more to this organisation than what is on its stage...

As the leader of an independent, not-for-profit charitable trust, she's responsible for steering the overall strategic direction of the Grade 1 listed venue. "I spend a lot of time forging new and managing existing relationships with producers, supporters and stakeholders," she explains. These relationships are crucial, especially in a region where access to the highest-quality cultural experiences hasn't always been available.

Marianne's responsibilities also extend to planning the Theatre's creative programme, a process that requires coordinating production schedules with delicate precision. "I'm currently working two to three years in advance, liaising with producers to schedule shows into our already very busy calendar," she says. This forward planning is her key to maintaining a vibrant, fresh and diverse program that appeals to a wide range of theatregoers here in the North East.

She frequently travels to London to scout potential shows and meet with West End producers. "Seeing productions in London helps me decide what might work for our audience here in Newcastle. It's also a great opportunity to meet with producers and stay informed about their future plans!" she adds.

Theatre, Marianne believes, is more than just entertainment. "Beyond fostering belonging and making a meaningful impact on communities, theatre has the potential to bring joy, challenge beliefs, ask questions of society, and allow stories to be told," she says.

Improving accessibility and ensuring talent development opportunities are made available within the creative sector in the North East is particularly important to her, evidenced in Newcastle Theatre Royal's commitment to maintaining the development of its Creative Engagement programme which involves people of all ages and abilities.

Since reopening after the pandemic, broadening the Theatre's income streams by seeking new revenue from commercial operations, corporate sponsorships and grants has been a priority for Marianne. "Mitigating the risk of increased costs and stretched resources to secure the Theatre's financial resilience means we can continue to invest in projects like our heavily subsidised Creative Engagement activities," she explains.

Her passion for the arts is evident as she talks about the role of regional theatres like Newcastle Theatre Royal as a vessel to drive social and cultural change. "Regional theatres are essential in providing creative and cultural opportunities. Here at Newcastle Theatre Royal, we bring world-class, large-scale theatre to the region, so people can enjoy top-quality performances on their doorstep," she says.

The Theatre's Creative Engagement programme forms a significant part of this vision. Marianne explains with pride; "We engage with everyone, from young people to professional artists, through

*Marianne Locatori, Chief Executive*



performing arts-based projects that help develop talent and support well-being across the community."

This work is crucial in nurturing the next generation of creative talent, particularly following the decline in cultural education in schools over the last decade. "There is a generation of young people who are unaware of the breadth of opportunities in the creative industries," she notes, adding that her aim is for Newcastle Theatre Royal to prioritise talent development and access to creative careers for young people in the North East.

Looking ahead, her ambition for Newcastle Theatre Royal is bold, yet rooted in her own affection for the arts. "Our goal is to create a lifelong love of theatre for everyone in the North East. We have ambitious plans to expand our reach, support artists, and bring exciting collaborations to our stage," she reveals.

Signs of its success are already evident - reflected in the two co-productions announced earlier this year which mark a significant milestone for the theatre. "In February, we announced our first co-production in over a decade: West End hit, *Pride and Prejudice*\* (\*sort of) (Thu 19 – Sat 28 Sep), which was followed only weeks later by the announcement of another - local success story, *Gerry & Sewell* (Wed 2 – Sat 5 Oct)," Marianne shares.

These co-productions not only highlight the theatre's creative ambition but also demonstrate its commitment to nurturing talent. "Auditions for both productions took place at the Theatre, supporting our ongoing aim to be positioned at the forefront of cultural creativity in the sector, both locally and nationally," she says.

The iconic venue standing proudly on Grey Street in the heart of the city is testament to this mission. "We're just curators of this space for a period of time. There were people before us, and people will come after," Marianne reflects. With 25 years of experience in arts venues across the country, it's clear that under her leadership, Newcastle Theatre Royal is poised for continued success.

**Find out more at [www.theatreroyal.co.uk](http://www.theatreroyal.co.uk)**



*Pride and Prejudice\* (\*sort of) plays in September 2024*



# The Fairest of all Panto's!

The Tyne Theatre & Opera House is set to sparkle this festive season with the enchanting production of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*.

Adding to the excitement, we have the sensational duo Ashley Glazebrook and Glen Murphy, better known as Twist and Pulse, joining the cast as the Wicked Queen's Henchmen. Known for their electrifying dance moves and infectious energy, Ashley and Glen captured the nation's hearts as runners-up on Britain's Got Talent and won Britain's Got Talent: The Champions.

As they prepare to bring their unique flair to this beloved panto, we caught up with them to chat about their roles, festive traditions, and what audiences can expect from this magical production.

**How does it feel to be joining the cast of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* at Tyne Theatre & Opera House this Christmas?**

It's super exciting, we can't wait to get back into the swing of things. Nothing beats a good panto at Christmas, and we've heard Newcastle is incredible!

**Can you tell us about the characters you'll be playing in the panto?**

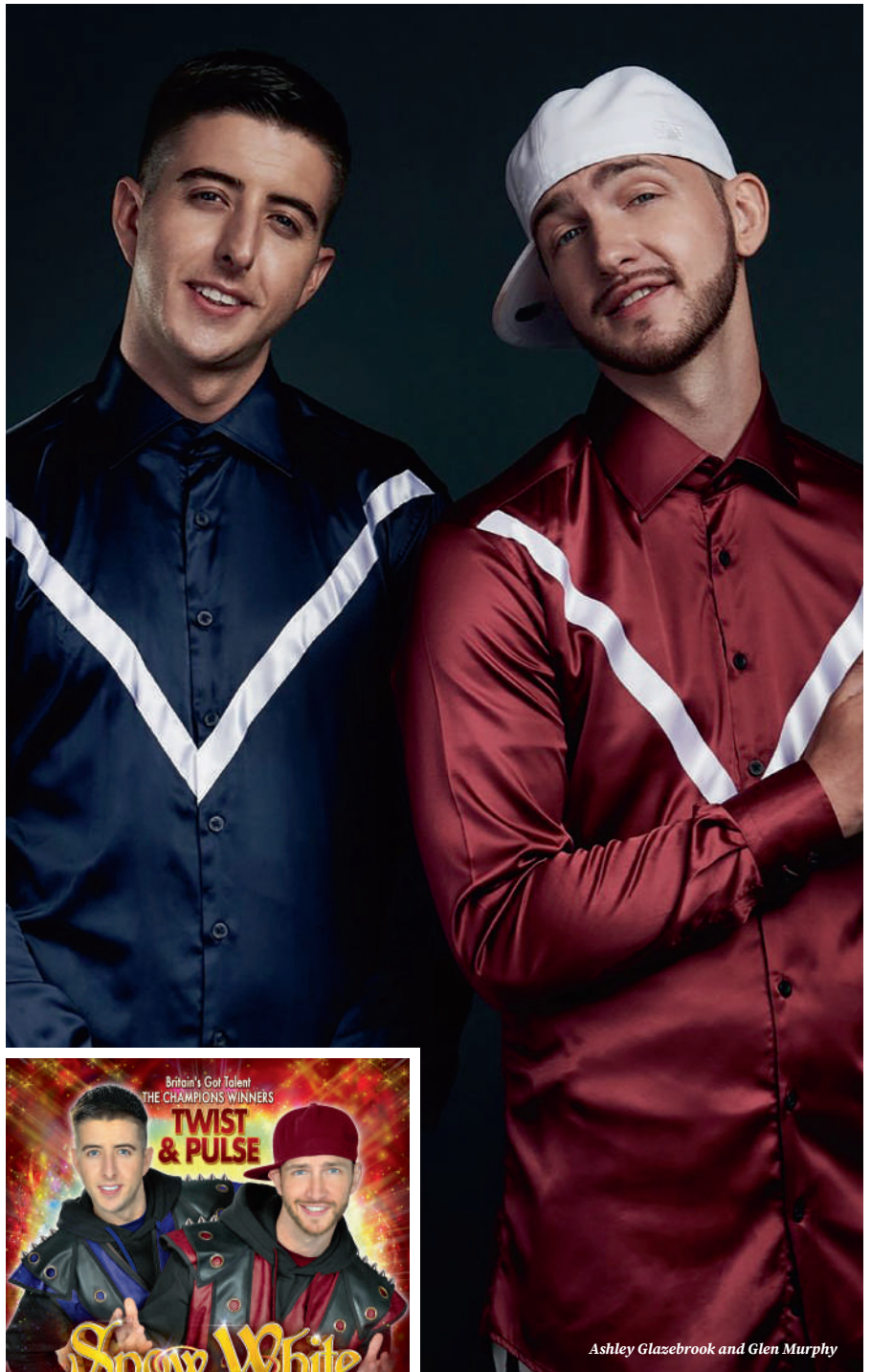
We will be playing henchmen, expect killer dance routines with a dumb and dumber type comedy duo sketches thrown in.

**What's your favourite thing about performing in a panto?**

We love that every show is different. You don't know what each audience will laugh at more, something always goes wrong in the best way possible, so you're just non stop laughing!

**How do you prepare for your roles in the panto?**

We always like to bring brand new routines with as much pop culture references for the audience but also love diving into the comedy scenes, using our physicality to create unique and entertaining comedy moments!



Ashley Glazebrook and Glen Murphy



**What can the audience expect from this year's production of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*?**

This year is gonna be bigger and better than ever. The energy is gonna be through the roof and we will be bringing as much show stopping numbers and belly laughing moments as possible.

**What's the best part about working together as Twist and Pulse?**

Getting to be on stage with your best mate. We can read each other so well that we know when one of us is going to crack in a scene and laugh but also know that we are both going to bring nothing but top-level energy to every show.

**How do you both get into the Christmas spirit? Any traditions?**

Most definitely Christmas music. As soon as it hits December the 1st, the Christmas playlist is created and played throughout the whole month. And let's not forget that we watch all the Christmas films. Home Alone is a firm fave! And a throwback to our Christmas short film Musical 'Christmas Spirit' on YouTube!

**Lastly, what message do you have for your fans coming to see the panto this year?**

Bring as many people as you can because you're going to talk about all the epic moments afterwards. Experience it with someone because it's a great memory to share over the Xmas period!

[www.tynetheatreandoperahouse.uk](http://www.tynetheatreandoperahouse.uk)



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# North East Hoteliers Association announces 2024 Excellence Awards



The North East Hoteliers Association (NEHA), a distinguished organisation with over three decades of service, has announced its highly anticipated annual gala, set to take place at The Fed Brewery in Gateshead on October 3rd, 2024.

**With an expected turnout of more than 400 esteemed guests, the event promises to be a spectacular celebration of excellence within the hospitality industry.**

NEHA, a cornerstone of the region's hospitality sector, is renowned for offering vital support, guidance, and a sense of unity to hoteliers and affiliated businesses.

As one of the largest associations of its kind in England, NEHA represents over 60 of the region's most prominent hotels and serves as the collective voice of the industry.

Its core mission is to advocate for industry-related changes, challenge decisions that impact the sector, and ensure that the concerns of hoteliers are heard. The association is committed to easing the challenges faced by hoteliers through collaborative efforts and works with educational partners to help grow the

future hospitality talent for the region.

The annual Excellence Awards are a key highlight of NEHA's calendar, showcasing the association's dedication to recognising outstanding contributions within the industry.

These prestigious awards are presented during a grand black-tie gala, where guests are treated to a sumptuous three-course dinner, live music, and entertainment by the much-loved Geordie personality, Charlie Richmond.

In partnership with prominent regional sponsors, the gala honours exceptional performance across 11 distinct categories, celebrating those who have excelled in their roles and hotels. The awards aim to recognise individuals and teams who have gone above and beyond in delivering exceptional service.

The evening also supports a noble cause, raising funds for Hospitality Action, the chosen charity of the industry.

Anna Wadcock, General Manager of the Maldron Hotel Newcastle and Co-Chair of NEHA, expressed her deep appreciation for the hospitality sector and highlighted the importance of encouraging careers in hospitality and tourism, given their crucial role in the regional economy.

Reflecting on the event, Anna Wadcock, Co-Chair of NEHA, remarked: "The event grows each year as more hotels join the association and more individuals strive for excellence."

*"We are the voice of our sector. We advocate, influence, and challenge, but we also recognise and appreciate the hard work of those in our industry, which is why this evening is so important in acknowledging those who have truly excelled."*

**For information on the event contact Nola Collinson on 07725 064 312.**



# Places to go...Oakham



I thought that it was very rare that I visited the small county of Rutland, until I was informed that the East Coast main line sliced through Essendine in the eastern corner of Rutland, and I had therefore passed briefly through Rutland very often. But I had never visited the small county town of Oakham, with a population of just 12,000 and home of a magnificent church, home of a famous public school, county museum and an inland reservoir which is the largest reservoir in England – even larger by surface area than Kielder.

I was travelling to Rutland from the London direction, intending to catch the 2002 from St. Pancras via Leicester, for the first class fare of £32.90. But on arrival at STP I found the train was cancelled, with none later the same evening. So I crossed to King's Cross and bought a replacement ticket via Peterborough. Arriving there with LNER a few minutes early, I found a Birmingham train (by CrossCountry), second stop Oakham, on the far platform. This was not an advertised connection, being less than the minimum interchange time. But I hurried over the footbridge and jumped aboard, finally arriving in Oakham half an hour before the supposed arrival via Leicester. Interesting conundrum, therefore, applying for a Delay Repay to East Midlands trains when in fact I arrived 30 minutes earlier than expected.

I stayed at the Anglers Arms, a pub with rooms and too many stairs, comfortable but basic, and no breakfast served. In the morning, I walked back towards the station to find the Hub and Spoke café I had seen the night before. I spent the morning exploring the town. Oakham School had closed for the holidays and was all quiet, but there was a toddlers morning in the church of All Saints which was worth a visit. Oakham Castle is more of a fortified manor house, which is still an occasional court room, and displays horseshoes around the walls presented by visiting royalty and nobility. This horseshoe presenting has only to be done once: King Charles III has already presented a horseshoe when he was Prince of Wales, and need not do so again, in adherence to a tradition which dates back to 1470.

I cannot pretend that Oakham, ancient and picturesque though it is, can charm you indefinitely. So a visit to Rutland Water is strongly recommended. The lake shore runs to 23 miles, and is a man-made reservoir created by Anglian Water, a few miles east of Oakham. I headed towards the town's tiny Bus Station behind B&M in John Street. Minibus R9 shuttles between Oakham and Stamford (in

Lincolnshire) and runs roughly hourly to the village of Whitwell on the north side of Rutland Water. Everybody opened and closed the door of the minibus themselves, and nobody was paying any fares – it seemed to be a free service.

I walked down to the shore, and enjoyed a snack in the Harbour Café overlooking the jetty for the Rutland Belle, a pleasure boat with two decks which offered hourly trips over to Normanton Church, dedicated to St. Matthew. This is the iconic church which could have been subsumed by the waves but was surrounded by a wall so whilst deconsecrated provides a focal point of interest on the south shore. I could have walked, or hired a bike, around the lake, but the boat was least effort and fastest. Cruising back, I rejoined the free R9 back to Oakham, collected my bags from the pub and walked back to Oakham station for the train to Peterborough and home.

[alexnelson@nationalrail.com](mailto:alexnelson@nationalrail.com), [www.nationalrail.com](http://www.nationalrail.com)

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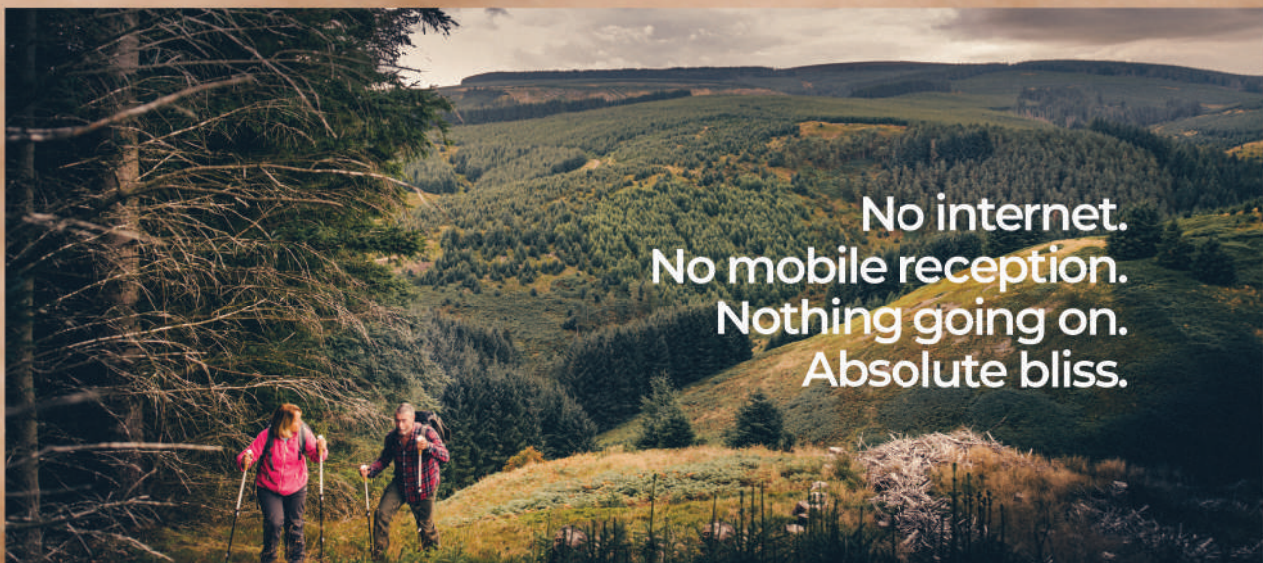




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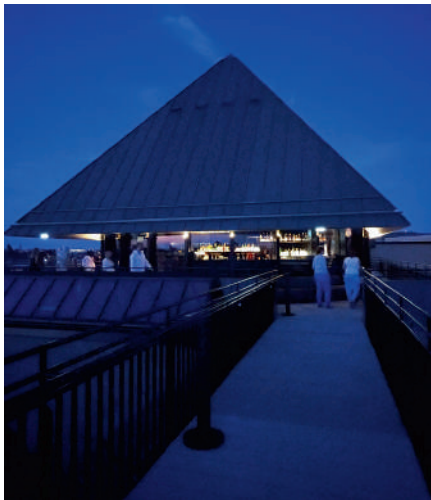
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## A champion long weekend in Berlin

By Stuart Forster

Football prompted my travel to Berlin this summer. And as I discovered during my two-night stay, there are plenty of other reasons to justify a long weekend in Germany's dynamic capital.

**Given the result, perhaps it was a blessing that I didn't get a ticket to the UEFA EURO 2024 final between England and Spain. I headed to Berlin Olympic Stadium for the round of 16 tie in which Switzerland beat Italy. An upbeat atmosphere and entertaining game made it an ideal focal point for an enjoyable city break.**

Arriving the day before the game, I checked into the NH Collection Berlin Mitte Friedrichstrasse Hotel. The four-star property is next to Friedrichstrasse railway station, a 30-minute rail journey from Berlin Brandenburg Airport.

I picked up a mid-afternoon coffee strolling in the direction of the Brandenburg Gate, a 15-minute walk from my hotel. Close to the iconic landmark, a football-themed exhibition drew me into Madame Tussauds Berlin. There I snapped the waxwork likenesses of France striker Kylian Mbappé



and Argentina star Lionel Messi before stepping back out onto Unter den Linden – the grand boulevard that many Berliners regard as their city's answer to the Champs-Élysées in Paris.

Several of the palaces and grand facades along Unter den Linden have been renovated in recent years. The Neue Wache – a squat Neoclassical building near the River Spree – houses Germany's memorial to victims of war and dictatorship. There I paused to appreciate the raw emotion conveyed by artist Käthe Kollwitz's sculpture of a mother cradling her lifeless son's body.

Continuing the short distance to Museum Island, which as its name suggests has a concentration of museums and is also the site of Berlin Cathedral, I resisted the temptation to join locals sunbathing on the grass of the Lustgarten park. Instead, I pushed on five minutes' further to the elegant café of Bode Museum, where I sipped an Apfelschorle – a mix of apple juice and sparkling water – while sitting beneath the institution's grand dome.

Refreshed, I walked on to view photography and art exhibitions at Fotografiska Berlin, which opened last September in premises built to house a department store. Subsequent uses include as the Kunsthaus Tacheles art collective. Graffiti from that period adorns stairwells and can be seen on the way up to Veronika, the museum's fine-dining restaurant. Bar Clara, whose rooftop observation platform presents views over surrounding streets, proved a classy spot for a nightcap.

Before the match, for a local's view of Berlin's evolving food and drink scene, I joined a walking tour focusing on the long-gentrified Prenzlauer Berg district. Tour guide Tiago pointed out tramlines in the street, indicating the area was formerly in



the eastern part of the once divided city. From a street corner snack bar, he ordered a Kettwurst, explaining that the sausage was East Germany's equivalent of a hot dog. At Häppies, we shared fluffy Germknödel-style steamed dumplings with a variety of savoury and sweet fillings and heard how the café is a hit locally. Our last stop was the city's oldest beer garden – the Prater, where drinks have been served since 1837.

On my final day in Berlin, I immersed myself in the history of espionage at the German Spy Museum, where real-life gadgets are displayed along with posters of films about spying. Imagining myself the star of one of them – while undoubtedly lacking a movie stuntman's grace of movement – I twisted along a corridor of crisscrossed laser beams in one of the interactive exhibits.

Feeling like a beer, I strolled to the restaurant Ständige Vertretung's riverside terrace and gazed along the Spree, sipping while reflecting on an enjoyable couple of days.

### Travel information

For information about sightseeing, events and hotels in the German capital, see the website: [visitberlin.de/en](https://visitberlin.de/en).

Fork and Walk Tours ([forkandwalktoursberlin.com](https://forkandwalktoursberlin.com)) operates guided walking tours of Berlin.

### Getting there

British Airways operates flights between Newcastle and Berlin via Heathrow. Jet2 operates direct flights, for the Christmas markets, in November and December.





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## Branches Restaurant, Jesmond are named Finalist in Good Food Awards

The owners of Branches restaurant in Jesmond are excited to announce they have been chosen as a finalist in the prestigious Good Food Awards!

This accolade recognises the best local and independent food businesses across the UK.

Branches is a multi-award-winning restaurant aims to provide its customers a contemporary dining experience set in a beautifully modern décor surroundings. Located on the hugely popular Osborne Road in Jesmond, they pride themselves on the professional service their staff provides each customer. The intimate stylish dining room caters for individuals and parties to provide the ideal setting for any occasion from romantic dinners to business lunches.

Branches Restaurant has also won TripAdvisor's Travellers Choice award for multiple consecutive years along with appearing consistently in their top 10 restaurants in Newcastle Upon Tyne.

Award-winning head chef, Cevat Robert Elat said: "We're absolutely delighted to be shortlisted as a finalist for this very prestigious award and I am personally incredibly proud of the whole team for their continued dedication to the excellent service we provide at Branches. This is a testament to their hard work and devotion to the Branches brand."



### WOR BEER BACKS WOR BOYS...

A much-loved Tyneside brewery is flying the flag for the Magpies with special offers for fans of the beautiful game.

Anarchy Beers Ltd, at Heaton, is making a donation from every pint or can of Wor Beer sold, either online or through pubs, to Wor Flags.

A fan-funded group, Wor Flags creates everything from black and white hand-held waver flags, to larger, pole handled flags and giant text banners featuring messages of support for the team.

And with £30k raised for the group so far, Anarchy is helping ensure Newcastle United FC's fans are able to cheer the team on in style – whether they are playing at home or away.

With the new season now in full swing, the brewery is also releasing a limited edition six pack, designed in the style of NUFC's 1996 away shirt with £3 from every £18 pack going to Wor Flags.

A pale ale, Wor Beer is one of a number of ales produced by the company, which was named Anarchy Brew Co prior to a takeover by a consortium of investors earlier this month (August).

A very easy drinking pale ale, with subtle notes of citra, it has a light body and is already proving a big hit with Toon fans at the newly opened St James' STACK, adjacent to the NUFC stadium. And Stuart Young, co-owner of Anarchy Beers Ltd, said the brewery was "absolutely committed to boosting the fan power at NUFC games, which is why we're supporting Wor Flags."

"When the team is riding high the whole city just comes alive," he said.



### Indulge in Authentic Thai Flavours with Mantra Thai's Lunch & Early Dining Menu

Mantra Thai, the city's go-to destination for authentic Thai cuisine, is delighted to announce the launch of its new Lunch & Early Dining Menu.

Nestled in the heart of Newcastle on Forth Banks, Mantra Thai continues to bring the vibrant and rich flavours of Thailand to the North East, offering an exceptional dining experience that marries tradition with innovation.

Guests are invited to explore a carefully curated menu that showcases the very best of Thai cuisine, featuring two courses for just £23.50 or three courses for £26.50. As an added touch of hospitality, diners can enjoy a complimentary drink on arrival, choosing between the refreshing alcohol-free Thai special, The Mantra Magic, a glass of Prosecco, or a crisp Sauvignon Blanc.

The Lunch & Early Dining Menu includes a diverse selection of starters, mains, and desserts, crafted by Mantra Thai's experienced chefs, who bring over 30 years of culinary expertise directly from Thailand. This menu offers a taste journey through the country's most beloved dishes.

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Sachins is renowned for offering consistently flavourful traditional dishes with a contemporary twist in a relaxed and ambient setting. Head chef, Bob Arora, is committed to using only the finest ingredients and blending spices on-site for a delicate and aromatic piquancy.

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★★★★★ *Google review*

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Rod Davies

## Celebrating 10 vibrant years at Willi's Café

Rod Davies, the proud owner of Willi's Café on Clayton Road in Jesmond, is celebrating a remarkable milestone – 10 years of being part of a unique and vibrant community.

Over the past decade, Rod has seen Clayton Road flourish with a variety of specialist and bespoke shops and businesses, each contributing to the unique charm and appeal of this beloved street.

### A Hub of Unique Businesses

Clayton Road is more than just a street; it's a thriving hub of independent businesses that have found a home here. The support among business owners is unparalleled, fostering a culture of collaboration and mutual respect. From bespoke clothing to high end kitchens and fine wines to interior design every business offers something distinct.

George Musson, co-owner of Musson Brown Architects, has been a staple in the community. He and his wife chose Clayton Road for its vibrant atmosphere and strategic location. "Our practice thrives here because of the excellent community and the synergy among the different businesses," says George. He believes that the bespoke nature of their work aligns perfectly with the street's ethos of quality and individuality.



Northern Insight



A longstanding fixture, Palmer Menswear, has seen generations of customers walk through its doors for specialist wedding and day wear while a few doors down, Ian Fairley clothes caters for the vintage and casual market.

Ian Davies of ID Hair has had his salon on Clayton Road since 1993. He has seen the street change from cafes and antique shops to the current mix of independent traders. "When I first came here, I was the youngest on the street and now I'm the oldest. I've worked hard to make the business work but moving here was a great decision."

John Welsh, owner of The Wine Shop, is relatively new to Clayton Road, having been here for just over two and a half years. However, his shop has quickly become a favourite for wine enthusiasts. "We chose this location for its heart-of-Jesmond feel. It's a bespoke street with a traditional charm," John explains. With a wine selection that has grown from 370 to over 500 wines, The Wine Shop caters to a discerning clientele.

John Ord, an interior designer runs Abercrombie Interior Design. "We've been here 12 years and the number of businesses that compliments ours is growing. Our visibility is high and the street itself is in a great part of Jesmond. We're very happy here."

Jeanette Groom has been on Clayton Road since 2013 with her business Groom & Co. As well as general clothing alterations they specialise in wedding dress and suit adjustments. "This is a destination street and people travel here for the wealth of speciality shops we have," she said.

Award Winning Practice, Roseanna Grace Physiotherapy has been on Clayton Road for five years. "It is a lovely street, and it is lovely to be able to offer the people of the North East specialist pelvic health services so that we can both prevent and resolve any unwanted pelvic floor symptoms. We also love our coffee and cake fix on the Road - if you haven't been, it is worth a visit!" said Roseanna.

Amanda Simmonds runs luxury bespoke Travel Agency Now Lets Travel which is next door to Willi's. "We've been here eight years and we're passionate about travel and Clayton Road is a fantastic place to be, many of our clients book a holiday then pop next door for a coffee or a meal."

Rod Davies reflects on the journey, "We've built something special here. The

community's support has been incredible, and it's been a pleasure to be a part of it." His own journey in the food and beverage industry spans over 35 years, including ventures in Gosforth and the Quayside before finding his perfect spot on Clayton Road.

And a perfect spot it is too using local ingredients and food cooked on the premises.

At the heart of Willi's menu is the quintessential Full English Breakfast, a hearty platter that has become a favourite among the student population and visiting shoppers. Cooked to order to ensure maximum freshness, this classic dish includes sizzling sausages, crispy bacon, golden hash browns, baked beans, juicy tomatoes, mushrooms, and perfectly fried eggs. Uniquely, this all-day breakfast really is served all day, a hard-to-find timely delicacy in Jesmond. The use of locally sourced produce not only supports nearby farmers but also guarantees a flavour that is rich and authentic.

With success like that, Willi's Café has grown its customer base and reputation in the 10 years that Rod has been the face behind the business.

As Willi's Café and the other businesses on Clayton Road continue to thrive, there's a shared sense of optimism for the future. The street is not just a place to shop or eat; it's a community where independent businesses support each other, creating a vibrant and welcoming atmosphere for all who visit.

***For those who haven't yet experienced the unique charm of Clayton Road, now is the perfect time to explore. From bespoke clothing and fine wines to the cosy ambiance of Willi's Café, there's something for everyone to enjoy. Here's to many more years of success and community spirit on Clayton Road!***







GM Sarah Macintosh and Jonas Armstrong join members of the Offshore team in raising a glass to the St Annes' venue.

## A challenge to rise to...

The Inn Collection Group has a contender in the race to be named the best new tourism business in Lancashire after Lytham St Annes' Offshore was named as a finalist in the annual Lancashire Tourism Awards.

**The only county-wide awards for tourism and hospitality businesses, the Lancashire Tourism Awards celebrate excellence across a wide range of visitor economy businesses.**

Opened in March this year by "After the Flood" and "Coma" actor Jonas Armstrong, Offshore is the product of a nearly two-year, multi-million-pound refurbishment of St Anne's Lindum and Carton hotels.

Amalgamating both into a single entity, the result is a vibrant new pub with rooms style venue on the Lancashire coast.

The Inn Collection Group's largest property by number of bedrooms, Offshore boasts 98 in a variety of configurations including double, twin, family and single all equipped with the expected amenities and en-suite bathrooms.

Adapting to the inn style of hospitality synonymous with the group across northern England and Wales, Offshore's ground floor spaces have transformed into a warm, welcoming, family-friendly pub.

Boasting 250 covers inside, a large outdoor

seating terrace compliments this capacity and maximises the venue's shoreline location.

Five months on from reopening, Offshore has served more than 14,000 meals with the traditional pub favourites Fish & Chips, pie of the week and house burgers proving particularly popular.

Between today's announcement and the awards ceremony, to be held in February 2025, the finalists will progress through a number of stages including mystery shopping, announced visits and interviews with the independent Lancashire Tourism Award judges.

Reacting to the shortlisting, Offshore general manager Sarah McIntosh said: "We're so excited to have been named as a finalist for the 2024 awards, it is a real honour to be recognised and to have made a shortlist with so many brilliant candidates, we're in excellent company!"

"Offshore has been growing steadily since reopening in March and from customer feedback, are delighting our guests.

"Our occupancy rates have been climbing steadily as people discover and praise our new look bedrooms, whilst there is a growing number of people joining us for relaxed drinking and dining.

"We can't wait to show the judges around and are looking forward to celebrating the best of the county at the awards in February."

Vikki Harris, Marketing and Partnership Director of Marketing Lancashire said "Today's finalists have been through a rigorous shortlisting process, mapped against nationally set criteria, and earned a place in the county's most prestigious tourism and hospitality awards.

"We wish them luck through the next stages of the competition and look forward to celebrating with them at the awards ceremony early next year.

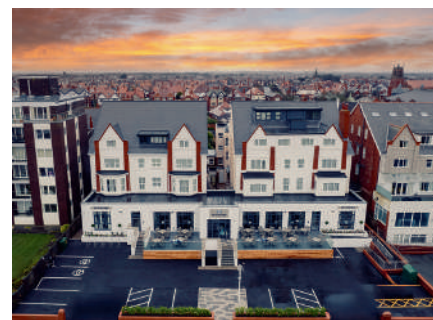
"Some of the finalists will now be visited by mystery shoppers and some by appointment, but all will have the opportunity to meet with our esteemed panel of judges in November.

"Our judges will consider all the evidence, reports and interviews before selecting the winners of the Lancashire Tourism Awards 2024.

"This year's finalists are leaders in their field and we are thrilled to support them through the next stages of the awards process and to support our judges, who have quite a task on their hands.

"Congratulations to all this year's finalists, you've risen to the challenge."

[inncollectiongroup.com/offshore](http://inncollectiongroup.com/offshore)







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## Home from Home

*Review by Jackie Marston*

We've always been a big fan of the town of Allensford, so when we were asked to stay at The Cottage on the Park, we jumped at the chance. It's dog-friendly, so taking our big, blonde Goldie, Mia, was an added benefit.

**The cottage itself is a charming two-bedroom, single-level cottage in a stunning countryside setting is the perfect base for exploring the local area or relaxing with a book by the fire.**

If you fancy a quiet walk or using a picnic table in a beautiful setting, Allensford Country Park is accessible from the cottage's back gate. Within walking distance, you will find our café serving home-cooked food and delicious desserts.

Venture a little further to discover the beautiful Derwent Reservoir, Beamish Museum, and historic towns such as Hexham, Corbridge, or Durham. If you prefer a picturesque drive towards the coast, you can soon find yourself at the stunning sandy beaches of Whitley Bay and Tynemouth. For those looking to spend some time in the hustle and bustle of a city,

Newcastle upon Tyne is just a short drive away, offering an incredible range of shops, restaurants, and entertainment to suit everyone.

Enter the cottage through the rear door to find the main lounge to your right, furnished with a two-seater sofa and two armchairs. You will have everything you need to feel right at home, including a lovely electric fire. There were cake left in the kitchen, dog treats as well as tea and coffee. There's also a four-seater table looking through the hatch to the kitchen, which includes an electric oven and hob, and a fridge freezer. The master bedroom comes complete with a double bed and ample storage. The second bedroom also features a double bed.

A beautiful, enclosed garden offers a patio area with outdoor seating and another area with a table and chairs. Additionally, there is off-road parking for two cars. We were fortunate to have picked a good day, weather-wise, so we happily played cards in the garden as we listened to the excited giggles from the kids on the park.

The cost of this cottage is from just £100 a night, and if two couples go, that's just £25 each. Take into account you have all the necessary cooking facilities, you can go away extremely cheaply, in beautiful surroundings for next to nothing.

This is somewhere we'll definitely be going back to, without a shadow of a doubt!

**Michelle Rayson-Turner is the host behind this gorgeous place, so contact her direct to get the prices shown above. Email her direct at [cottageonthepark24@gmail.com](mailto:cottageonthepark24@gmail.com)**





# Tango in Durham named amongst best burgers in Britain

Tango in Durham City, much loved for its mouth watering burgers has featured on the list of 'best burgers in Britain' by the website 'Love Food'. They feature on the list alongside national brands like Fat Hippo and recognisable names from across the country.

Initially based on Elvet Bridge, where it forged its name as one of the best in the region for its burgers, it moved to a venue on Saddler Street in October last year.

From classic beef to fried chicken, crispy halloumi and vegan patties, Tango has it all. They recently launched the Sunday burger (beef patty, pork stuffing patty, cheesy potato spread, parsnip strings, proper thick gravy topped with Yorkshire pudding. Garlic & herb tossed proper fries to great acclaim.

They've also got a delicious new brunch menu which includes favourites like The Full Tango, Turkish Eggs and of course a Breakfast Burger (smashed sausage patty, thick cut farmhouse bacon, folded omelette, rosti potato & American cheese!)

Al fresco eating is now also available on the beautiful terrace that looks out across the river.

**To celebrate the Best Burger in Britain accolade, Tango are offering a burger, chips & soft drink for £12, Mon- Friday.**

Tango is open 7 days a week- 10am- late  
[www.tangodurham.co.uk](http://www.tangodurham.co.uk)  
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## Diamonds are for Heather

*By Michael Grahamslaw*

One of the more interesting things to land in my inbox this month was the opportunity to review Heathergate holiday park in Northumberland.

**Northumberland, with its rolling hillsides and historic charm, has long been a go-to for holidaymakers seeking a peaceful retreat from the pressures of working life. Yet, even in such a picturesque region, Heathergate manages to stand out as a truly remarkable destination.**

A stone's throw from the market town of Hexham, this hidden gem offers an oasis of tranquillity, perfect for a much-needed recharge. This immediately piqued the interest of my wife Lisa.

On our visit we were accompanied by my lovely in-law's, Joyce and Tommy, so as a merry little four ball, we packed the car and revved it up the A69 in eager anticipation.

Standard caravan park this is not – but a swish, five-star, boutique retreat replete with comfort and luxury. Upon arrival, we were warmly welcomed and promptly checked-in to what would become our base for the weekend: the Luxury Spa Lodge 2 – Sycamore.







To say we were impressed would be an understatement. The lodge exuded class from every corner and was fully befitting of its five-star, award-winning status. The spacious, open-plan design of the lodge struck the perfect balance between comfort and style. Its warm embrace was a fine example of what the Scandinavians call Hygge.

The kitchen, fitted with modern appliances, was a delight. The inclusion of complimentary cheese, crackers, and a bottle of Prosecco quickly won Lisa and Joyce's approval and immediately made us feel right at home. These small details set the tone for our stay, where every aspect seemed meticulously thought out.

The living and dining area was another highlight, with an expansive, wall-mounted TV providing the ideal setup for winding down. We spent both evenings catching the final days of the Paris Olympics from the plush seating area, which was so cosy that it felt like our own private screening room. This, combined with the stunning views of the Tyne Valley visible from the large windows, made staying in a real treat.

The lodge featured two generously sized bedrooms—a double and a twin—both with en suite bathrooms. The attention to detail in the bedrooms, from the luxurious linens to the ample storage space, ensured a restful night's sleep.

Also particularly impressive was the reading room, a peaceful nook that also doubled as an ideal workspace. With its serene atmosphere, it would have made a perfect second office, had work called during our stay. The next Northern Insight nerve centre? Watch this space.



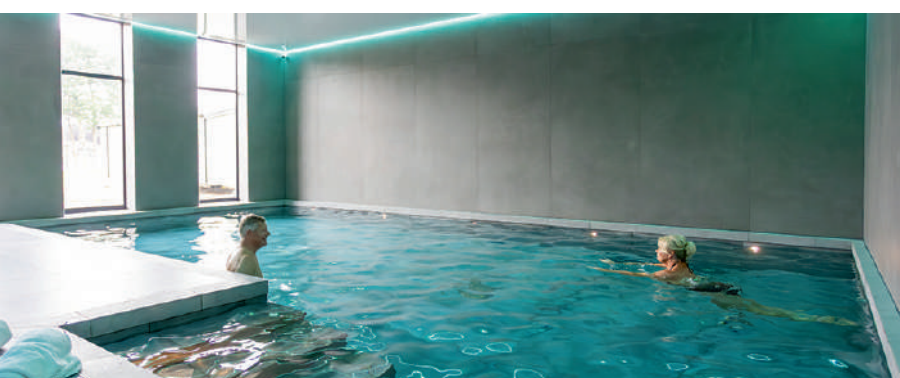
Of course, the luxury didn't stop at the lodge's interior either. Outside, the extensive terrace area was where we spent most of our time, soaking in the breathtaking views of the Tyne Valley and drinking in the last of the summer wine.

Heathergate has recently expanded its offerings with the addition of a private on-site pool, gym, and spa – a lovely touch. These facilities are available to residents by appointment, ensuring a personal and uncrowded experience. Although we were tempted to explore the nearby attractions, including Hexham, Corbridge, Allendale, and the iconic Hadrian's Wall, the allure of these facilities kept us anchored to the lodge.

For those who do feel the itch to get out and about, Heathergate's location is ideal. The surrounding areas offer a wealth of historical and natural attractions, all within easy reach.

As our stay drew to a close, we found ourselves reluctant to peel ourselves away from this haven of relaxation however we did file a mental note to return to one of Heathergate's sister sites in Slaley, West Yorkshire, or North Yorkshire.

Now heading into the Autumn, this classy retreat is perfect for a weekend's getaway to break up the long slog to Christmas. With so much to do in and around the site, Heathergate is a solid choice whatever the weather.



**For more information, visit [inspireleisure.com/heathergate-holiday-homes-northumberland](https://inspireleisure.com/heathergate-holiday-homes-northumberland)**





Samuel Marriott-Dowding

## The Sportsman: North Shields' Hidden Gem

Nestled in the village of Preston in North Shields, sits The Sportsman. Now under new management and led by experienced hospitality entrepreneur, John and his team, The Sportsman is fast becoming a foodie haven.

**With an emphasis placed on local quality produce and with customer service that makes you feel like family - The Sportsman is truly one of North Shields' hidden gems.**

After taking over the venue in December 2023, John and his team got to work revamping the menu, redesigning the

interior, and engaging with the local community with the aim of building a loyal customer base who won't ever hesitate to call The Sportsman their local.

After months of transformation The Sportsman is officially back in all its glory; from Tomahawk Tuesdays, to vegan specials, sharing platters great for all of the family, and Sunday roasts that people travel far and wide for - John and his team have brought passion and care to the North Shields food scene.

The Sportsman owner, John, said: "It has been an exciting time here at The Sportsman. Our venue has gone through a tremendous amount of positive changes in the last few months, and we have been excited to showcase our commitment to quality food and warm customer service to our local community and beyond.

The North East is going through a period of growth and development, and The Sportsman is no different. We have listened closely to what our customers want and expect and have refined our venue to reflect this - paying particular attention to using local, quality produce, producing dishes that are comforting, and hosting events that engage our local community.

We renovated the tranquil rear beer garden with the help of Mark One87, who is a

community-focussed graffiti artist, and we have recently confirmed the refurbishment of the front beer garden with new signs, lighting, and the aim to restore the Tudor frontage in 2025.

At The Sportsman quality, community, and service are at the heart of everything we do, and much like how the kitchen is the heart of every home, we want every one of our customers when they come to The Sportsman to feel like they are a part of our family. Greeted with a friendly smile and served food cooked with love, we want every experience to be memorable and special."

It is always a pleasure for me as a business owner myself to highlight other entrepreneurs and businesses who are not only existing, but are also thriving. John and his team have managed to take an existing concept, and really transform it into something that may look similar, but delivers differently. It is this delivery to such a high standard and an attention to detail which ultimately sets The Sportsman apart from its competitors, and it will no doubt continue to be a place of comfort and joy for Preston locals, and a must-visit foodie stop for customers far and wide.

**Contact The Sportsman on 0191 243 0980 or at [contact@thesportsman.pub](mailto:contact@thesportsman.pub)**





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## Ordinary to Extraordinary

The tagline as you enter my gym is “Where Ordinary People Do Extraordinary Things,” and it couldn’t be more accurate. Over my 30 years as a trainer, I have witnessed incredible achievements, both physically and mentally, through adversity and great successes.

Everyone who joins us has a unique goal at a particular time in their life. Much like the inspiring stories we see at the Olympics, it’s the personal journeys behind the medals and participants that truly define them.

Whether your goal is to walk a mile, lose weight, build self-confidence, or use exercise to improve your mental health, we all have our own aspirations. This is your Olympics, and it’s up to you to maintain focus and dedication to reach your targets.

You might think these athletes are born with such focus and drive, but for many, it comes from sheer determination and the will to be the best. Dedication your life, training every

day, and consistently pushing your body through pain is awe-inspiring, and I have immense respect for them.

If there’s something you want to achieve, let the Olympics inspire you. Set your plan, push yourself out of your comfort zone, and stay focused on your goal. It’s easy to

be deterred by external influences, but stay committed and prove to yourself and others that anything is possible with the right physical and mental mindset.

It’s okay to struggle at times, reset and come back stronger. Even the best, like USA gymnast Simone Biles, face setbacks. She took time out but returned to the Olympics fitter and stronger.

Seeing ordinary people achieve extraordinary things inspires me every day. I’ve been fortunate to help many achieve what they never thought possible. One day, I hope to write a book, as a few words can’t capture the incredible life stories of my clients.

Write your own success story, because you can!

### *David’s summing up*

*If you can change your mind  
you can change your life!*

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## The Last Word

By Barry Speker OBE

Memories of the Paris Olympics 2024 will generally be positive, with the French capital providing a visually impressive setting. After coping with rain on the Seine the extravaganza progressed to a mighty, if over-long finale, unashamedly patriotic and criticised by some as over-religious and therefore not inclusive.



**The Olympic ideal of 'faster, higher, stronger' was generally observed with some notable exceptions. One of course was the women's boxing where gold and silver medals were won respectively by Moroccan Imane Khelif and Taiwanese Lin Yu-ting. Both had been disqualified from the 2023 World Boxing Championships after failing gender eligibility tests which revealed that they possessed the XY chromosomes typical of males. Neither appealed.**

However for Paris, the International Olympic Committee allowed athletes to compete in the category 'which best aligns with their self-determined gender identity'. Whether this will be allowed in Los Angeles in the face of protests by women's rights campaigners as well as Elon Musk and JK Rowling remains to be seen.

Congratulations to Gateshead born Kieran Reilly on his magnificent silver medal in the BMX freestyle event - and if you think this struggles to fit in with the traditional Olympic ideal, how about skateboarding and breakdancing?

The forthcoming Last Night of the Proms may retain its traditional celebration of the music whilst allowing some unashamed British pride. It is to be hoped that attempts to hijack the event as an occasion for self-flagellation about colonial history and slavery will be avoided. Singing 'Land of Hope and Glory' amongst a sea of Union Jacks is part of our culture. There are always indications of the diversity of our nation on display amongst the audience and performers.

The organisers of the BBC event at the Royal Albert Hall have notified ticket holders for the September 18 Last Night concert that 'some flags will not be allowed in the



auditorium, including those from proscribed groups (and) flags related to protest, hatred or advertising'. Any such flags will be confiscated and destroyed.

Organisers are believed to be aiming at preventing Palestinian flags. The Premier League made similar changes about flags in the weeks after the attack on Israel by Hamas on October 7th last year.

As the new Government's honeymoon period expires, Sir Keir has even cancelled his holidays. There is realisation that election promises and assurances are not so easy to fulfil in the cold light of the real world.

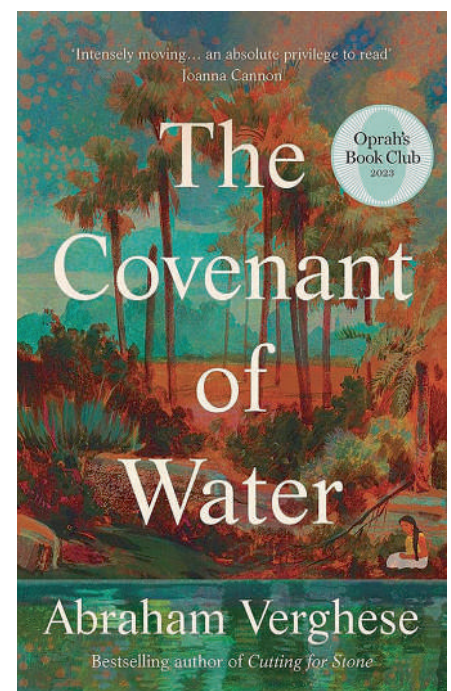
The decision to settle the train drivers' pay claim without any concession on reform of working practices, while scrapping winter fuel payments for all but the poorest of pensioners, sends a clear message; namely that sacrifices will not be equally shared. It is clear that Labour will mollify its Union paymasters at the expense of ordinary taxpayers.

Next up RMT want similar settlement of its claims and there is the independent pay review recommendation that 6 million public sector workers receive rises of between 6% and 7%. All this following the junior doctors' pay settlement with further demands to follow.

Before the election Rachel Reeves stressed her commitment to ensuring that everything would be costed. It is time for the Chancellor to find that money tree! However, with such a large majority and five years until the next election, Labour may calculate that such political 'hits' are manageable.

My recommendation for late summer reading is *The Covenant of Water* by Abraham Verghese which is an epic tale of three generations over 70 years across southern India. It is unputdownable and well worth getting through the 753 pages to the totally unpredictable conclusion.

[barryspeker@hotmail.com](mailto:barryspeker@hotmail.com)







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