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Question: What does Ammar Mirza really do? Answer: Everything he can!

When you ask Ammar Mirza what he does, you'll likely get the same response every time: "Everything I can." And that's not an overstatement.

Ammar's life revolves around giving back, whether it's through volunteering, supporting charities, serving as a non-executive director, or mentoring businesses. His work is driven by a deep sense of purpose, and it's clear that his motivations are pure, despite the scepticism that sometimes surrounds such efforts.

"It's unfortunate," Ammar reflects, "that we live in a society where people can be suspicious of good intentions. They ask, 'Why is this person volunteering? Why do they give away so much of their time? What's their angle?' It's as if people can't believe that you'd do something without expecting something in return."

But for Ammar, it's simple: he believes that life is short and precious, and every day is an opportunity to make a positive impact. For more than 20 years, Ammar has devoted himself to charity work, supporting the community, and mentoring businesses, often expecting nothing in return. He admits that while it's always nice to receive a thank you, his motivation comes from something deeper—a love for his region and the people in it.

In 2014, Ammar was awarded a CBE by Her Majesty the Queen for services to business and the community. But, as Ammar humbly points out, this recognition didn't come because he sought it. "You don't apply for a CBE," he says. "You're nominated confidentially without you knowing by others, people who see the impact you're making and believe you deserve recognition." That recognition which follows a rigorous vetting process and can take years, however, hasn't changed Ammar's approach or motivations. He has however, gone on to submit numerous award submissions for others that are worthy of recognition.

Ammar was the first North East-born Asian to receive a CBE, a title he proudly carries. "I consider myself a Geordie Asian," he says, "and I'm passionate about using my platform to promote inclusion and diversity. It's something I've been an outspoken ambassador for my entire life. It's not about one group over another—it's about everyone working together. Black and white, male and female—we're stronger when we support one another."

Ammar's dedication to inclusion and community-building isn't just about words—it's about action. Over the years, he's held countless directorships, been involved with numerous

charities, social enterprises, and community groups, all with the goal of improving social and economic mobility. He's worked hard to ensure that opportunities are available to those who may have been overlooked. "I've not had all the life chances others have had," he shares, "but I've gone out and created my own opportunities. That's why I'm so committed to helping others do the same."

His journey hasn't been easy. Ammar's working life started at just 10 years old, when he worked in a corner shop to help his mother feed and clothe the family. From those early beginnings, he's worked in a variety of roles, constantly learning and improving himself. After stints in London with the British Council and managing operations in the IT sector, Ammar returned to the North East, dedicating himself to the region's economic and social development.

"Ammar hasn't forgotten where he came from," ... "He's experienced real hardship, including poverty and hunger. But those experiences are what fuel his passion for giving back. He doesn't do it for recognition—he does it because he knows what it's like to struggle, and he wants to help others avoid those same difficulties."

Education, Ammar says, is at the heart of that mission. "It's in my blood," he says. "Education is the key to unlocking opportunities for people. If we can make young people feel valued, special, and give them the tools they need to succeed, we can change lives."

So, while people may wonder what drives Ammar, his answer remains clear: he's doing everything he can to help others. "At the end of the day," Ammar concludes, "I do have an agenda—to encourage, to inspire, and to elevate others. There is nothing more rewarding for me in life than seeing others succeed. If I can create opportunities for people who wouldn't otherwise have them, then I'm doing my part." And for Ammar, that's more than enough.

Ammar Mirza CBE interviewed by Graham Courtney.









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8/9	Business News

10/11 **Cover Story** Agilico - Raising funds for the

Alan Shearer Foundation

12/13 The Big Interview

Claire Parry, Week2Week

26 **Recent Appointments**

40 **Legal News**

58/60 **Community & Charity News**

62/63 Charity of the Month Dragonfly Cancer Trust

101/130 The Built Environment

Technology News 131

148 **Media News**

178 **Education News**

196/198 **Arts News**

204 Leisure News

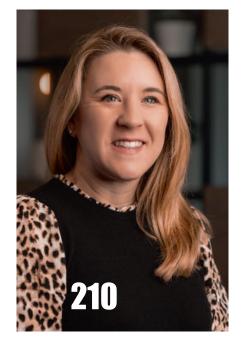
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Barry Speker OBE















Welcome to the October issue of Northern Insight.

With the football season well underway and Strictly back on our screens this chunky edition is the perfect accompaniment to those dark Winter nights ahead.

Our covers stars are workplace technology specialists Agilico who recently raised vital funds in this years Great North Run for the Alan Shearer Foundation.

In our popular Solicitor of the Month slot we talk to Toby Joel who is celebrating 35 years at Jacksons Law Firm.

Look out for our ever growing Built Environment section featuring a plethora of features relating to this crucial sector.

On the Arts front we showcase the wonderful Live Theatre on Newcastle's Quayside which continues to be a leading force in the creation of world class new plays whilst nurturing and developing emerging theatre makers.

A highlight this month was a visit to Chaophyra with my son Jack. Look out for my review of this South East Asian gem.

We hope you enjoy this issue.

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























VILLAGE HOTEL CLUB





















Ex-cops team up with FBI for staff well-being

The pioneering work of two ex-police officers helping individuals and teams to perform at the highest level has been recognised by one of the world's most respected law enforcement agencies.

Zoe Billings from York and Mark Pannone from North Cumbria met while Mark was an Assistant Chief Constable for North Yorkshire Police and Zoe was his Staff Officer. Both have extensive experience operating at tactical, strategic, and executive levels, skills which they used to form their consultancy Adapt and Evolve two years ago after leaving the police.

"We formed Adapt and Evolve out of a shared vision to address performance gaps within organisations by looking at well-being through a unique lens. We provide training that focuses on the biology of stress, psychological safety, resilience, teamwork, leadership, decision making and crisis management," said Mark.

Indeed, their growing reputation and past work history has helped them gain a major piece of work supporting the FBI in the USA. The pair have recently returned from the FBI's Clarksburg Campus in West Virginia, USA. There, they delivered specialised courses to the FBI's Criminal Justice Information Services (CJIS) division. This significant achievement underscores the consultancy's global reach and effectiveness in high-stress environments.

As well as working with the FBI, Adapt and Evolve Consultancy successfully works across many sectors, including UK police services, legal firms, charities, the NHS, finance, engineering and educational establishments. Their training has consistently resulted in 100% satisfaction rates and significant lifestyle changes among participants, with 93% reporting positive changes and 96% of respondents maintaining these changes three months later.

History books open for Eagles as main sponsor returns

History repeats itself for the Newcastle Eagles men this season after the club reinforced its longstanding relationship with one of the region's leading education providers.

Newcastle College University Centre is the new main sponsor for the most successful franchise in British basketball history.

And Marc Steutel's men have gone back to the future — reprising a striking front of jersey partnership that proved hugely successful two years ago.



Engineer cleans up with new venture

A FORMER maintenance engineer has turned redundancy into opportunity with the launch of his own outdoor cleaning business.

Trevor Francis, 58, from Washington, launched Annual Cleaning Solutions in April [2024] after he was made redundant by his previous employer.

Formerly a maintenance engineer for a large pharmaceutical company, he had longed to set up his own business for years, however it was being made redundant which finally gave him "the push he needed."

Fast-forward four months and the decision has proven a shrewd one, with its orderbook full for the next two months and projects pencilled in for clients across the North East and as far afield as London.

"I worked in my previous role for ten years but had toyed with the idea of setting up my own business for a good few years," Trevor said.

"I'd read up on it quite a bit and knew it was something I would love to do, but it was being made redundant which proved the kick I needed. I put part of my redundancy package into starting up and haven't looked back."

Specialising in external cleaning and maintenance, Annual Cleaning Solutions provides gutter clearing, pressure jet washing, roof moss removal, soffit cleaning and tarmac restoration for commercial and domestic clients.

Alan Fenton, Deputy Principal of Newcastle College, said: "We are very proud to return to the front of the Newcastle Eagles kit for the upcoming season.

"As an anchor institution in the North East, working in partnership for the benefit of our local community is central to everything we do.

"We have worked closely with the Eagles for more than five years now, providing our students with unique experiences and showcasing the transformative opportunities offered through higher technical education and sport to those across our region.

"I am looking forward to strengthening our partnership with our neighbours as both Newcastle College University Centre and Newcastle Eagles enter an exciting year ahead."

Making Clients Famous.

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8 October 2024 Northern Insight

Head of Malhotra Group PLC appointed to historic role

Mr Meenu Malhotra DL, the Chairman of Malhotra Group PLC, one of the North East's most successful companies, has been granted the title of Honorary Consul of India. In the 75-year history of independent India, it is the first time such an appointment has been made.

The formal announcement was made on Friday 30 August 2024 by His Excellency, Mr Vikram K Doriaswami, the High Commissioner of India to the UK, in front of civic dignitaries, leading entrepreneurs, sports personalities, senior leaders from NHS Hospital Foundations, universities and other notable representatives from across the local community and the Indian Diaspora.

The appointment to this position is intended to boost mutual trading opportunities with one of the fastest growing economies in the world. Mr Malhotra will strive towards developing strong links across a range of industries, covering everything from the pharmaceutical industries to green energy, and promoting cultural, political and tourism initiatives between both countries. Mr Malhotra has informally supported international students for more than two decades and now with his formal position, he will be in a stronger position to continue to assist and guide.

As part his new role, Mr Malhotra will also pave the way for businesses in the North East to work in India. The new dedicated offices for the Consulate of India are now established in the former Parrish's department store on Shields Road, Newcastle-upon-Tyne. The building has been renamed 'India House' and was officially opened by His Excellency, the High Commissioner of India on 30 August 2024.

Mr Malhotra has over the last 45 years supported the Indian community and the Indian Diaspora both in North East England and his native India, where he has continued to pursue business interests.



Newcastle Airport celebrates record-breaking cargo volume in first half of 2024



Newcastle Airport is celebrating a record-breaking first half of 2024 after handling its highest-ever cargo volume for this period.

From January to June this year the Airport handled 3,100 tonnes of cargo, an 87% increase on the same period last year, further establishing the Airport as one of the UK's key strategic air cargo gateways.

Leon McQuaid, Director of Aviation Development at Newcastle Airport, said: "This record-breaking result is a fantastic achievement and a testament to the hard work of the Airport team and the support of our partners and customers.

"Throughout the year, we have seen businesses increasingly utilise our Airport for their global import and export requirements due to our efficient operations, excellent transport links, later drop off times and faster collection times - establishing us as a vital gateway to and from the UK, connecting us to key markets around the world.

"We take immense pride in this result and we look forward to building on this success, helping to drive further growth and investment in the region." High demand goods such as auto parts and pharmaceuticals are frequently transported via Emirates' daily service to and from Dubai.

The airline's Boeing 777-300 is capable of carrying up to 21 tonnes of cargo in addition to a full passenger load.

From Dubai, cargo can be transported to over 130 destinations worldwide, with Shanghai in China, Melbourne in Australia and Johannesburg in South Africa being among the most popular destinations for exports from Newcastle.

Newcastle Airport has a first-class freight village to the south of its runway, which provides a comprehensive range of facilities for freight processing.

The facility centralises logistics and transportation services, meaning imported goods can be quickly processed to get customs clearance after landing at the Airport.

Once complete, businesses can utilise the Airport's excellent transport links and close proximity to the A1 to transport goods around the country and beyond.

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Agilico raises more than £22,000 for Alan Shearer Foundation

Workplace technology specialist Agilico's team participated in the world's biggest half marathon, the Great North Run on behalf of North East icon - Alan Shearer - to raise vital funds for his Foundation.

On September 8, roughly 30 of Agilico's team laced up their trainers for the iconic Great North Run, raising more than £22,000 for Alan Shearer Foundation.

Agilico, with its North East HQ in Team Valley, Gateshead, had runners from right across its various UK sites. The leader in cutting-edge workplace technology, boasts expertise across four key areas, Sustainable Managed Print, Automated Invoice Processing, Hosted VoIP Telephony and Agile Working and has been a big supporter of the Foundation for many years.

The funds were raised by the Agilico team for the Alan Shearer Centre, a specialist respite, residential and social facility dedicated to providing support and resources for people living with complex disabilities and acute sensory impairments. The Alan Shearer Centre offers an array of facilities completely free of charge.

For many of Agilico's people this was their first Great North Run. The iconic 13 mile run from Newcastle to South Shields tested many of them. Warren Colby Agilico North Director echoed this: "Running for me isn't fun, but it's necessary to raise the funds we want to make an impact for this cause which means so much to us all here at Agilico. And it truly inspired our training efforts! I would like to thank everyone for their donations; it is so appreciated!"

Newcastle United legend Alan Shearer expressed his gratitude, stating, "We are





delighted to have the support of the Agilico team. They have been unwavering in their support of the Foundation for a considerable time, and we are incredibly grateful for their efforts. Their fundraising is vital for the Foundation's sustainability, and their commitment to training and participating in the run is equally impressive."

The Great North Run is synonymous with charitable causes, raising an estimated £25 million for charity each year.





Claire Parry's unique approach to client care

Nestled in the heart of Newcastle's ever-evolving hospitality scene, Week2Week Serviced Apartments offers something distinct for travellers and corporate clients alike.

Unlike the faceless accommodation found on major booking platforms, Week2Week prides itself on delivering a personalised, people-centric experience, setting them apart in the competitive serviced apartment market.

One of the core values at Week2Week is the emphasis on human interaction. Rather than relying on automated booking systems, Week2Week encourages clients to engage directly through online chat, email, or their preferred means – good old fashioned phone calls. "We tailor every stay to the individual needs of our guests," says Claire, "whether that's providing a hands-on approach for those unfamiliar with the UK or the city to a more hands-off service for long-term corporate clients."

This personal touch is especially valuable for those relocating to Newcastle, or those caught in unfortunate situations like house fires or floods. Claire's team often assists clients who have never been to the UK before, ensuring a smooth and stress-free transition. This degree of care sets Week2Week apart from the mainstream production line approach found in much of the short-term rental market.

Safety, cleanliness, and legal compliance are of paramount importance at Week2Week. The company undergoes annual audits and holds a coveted Gold Standard from Quality in Tourism, which ensures that each property is thoroughly inspected for compliance. This not only reassures clients but also provides peace of mind to property owners who entrust their valuable assets to Claire's team.

"We work with a lot of overseas investors who need to know their properties are in safe hands," Claire explains. "Integrity and trust are huge parts of our business."

While many serviced apartment companies cater to short stays, Week2Week specialises in mid- to long-term stays, often ranging from 20 to 30 nights or more. In response to the changing landscape of business travel post-COVID, longer stays have become more common, and Claire has adapted her business to reflect this demand.

"We are seeing more corporate clients booking for extended periods," she said. "It's not just about a place to sleep—it's about creating a home for however long the stay may be."

Week2Week manages a handpicked portfolio of properties in Newcastle and surrounding areas like Jesmond, Gosforth, Tynemouth, and Gateshead Quayside. Each property is selected based on its prime location and suitability for guests. The company is very selective about the properties they take on, ensuring that both the interior and exterior meet their high standards.

"If we wouldn't stay there ourselves, we wouldn't include it in our portfolio," Claire says, reflecting the company's commitment to

offering safe, high-quality accommodation, particularly for lone travellers who may be more sensitive to location and security. This is especially important for their female clients who perhaps are unfamiliar with the area and want to be safe in their short-term home.

The ethos of Week2Week extends beyond the guest experience—it's ingrained in the company's internal culture. With a small core team of five and an extended team of suppliers and contractors, Claire has fostered an environment built on shared values. Everyone involved, from cleaners to electricians, adheres to the same high standards that Claire holds herself and her team to.

"We are all about people. Our extended team is aligned with our company values, and that's how we maintain such a high quality of service."

While some businesses focus on aggressive expansion, Claire takes a more thoughtful approach to growth. Week2Week is not just about increasing the number of properties but about diversifying and adapting to client needs. The company also collaborates with other local providers, forming a supportive network within Newcastle's business community.

"We like to work together with other businesses," Claire says. "It's not just about growing our portfolio; it's about supporting our clients with the best options, even if that means collaborating with others." Indeed, Claire is currently acting as a mentor for similar companies across the UK.

Claire's journey in the serviced apartment industry began with her late mother, who founded Week2Week back in 2000. What started as a small portfolio of properties has evolved into a trusted name, known for its personalised service, attention to detail, and commitment to quality. Today, Claire continues to uphold her mother's legacy while adapting to the modern needs of the market.

For Claire, the success of Week2Week comes down to staying true to the values that have shaped the business from day one. "We do what we say on the tin, and we always look after people," she says with a smile, underscoring the human element that makes Week2Week truly unique.

With a deep-rooted passion for the North East and a peoplefirst approach, Claire Parry is not just running a business—she's providing a home away from home for her guests, one that comes with the reassurance of care, quality, and a personal touch.

www.week2week.co.uk • 0191 2813129













Lumo, the smooth operator

You may well be familiar with the name Lumo. If you read Northen Insight Issue 103, then you might recall we reviewed a journey on one of their trains to Londonyes, thats right - they're the train operator with the shiny blue trains.

Lumo is what's known as an open access operator. That means, unlike the contracted train operators such as Northern or LNER, Lumo makes its money solely through ticket sales and doesn't receive financial support from the government. The company operates independently and can offer competition.

If you catch a train from Newcastle to London, you now have a choice: you can use the government-operated LNER or Lumo. Open access operators can offer more options and services - take Lumo's sister company, Hull Trains, as an example. Before they started up in 2000, there was only one train a day each way between Hull and London. Now there are eight return services each weekday - and Lumo has increased choice and capacity on the Newcastle to London route by adding five daily return services to the timetable.

The services have proved successful and train operators on the East Coast Main Line have seen the biggest recovery in passenger numbers after Covid in the UK. Lumo has carried over 2 million customers since it launched in October 2021 and it already has plans to expand. The company has submitted proposals to the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) for a new train service from Rochdale to London. If approved, brand new British-built trains could start running in 2027.



The Lumo trains which service Newcastle also run north to Morpeth and Edinburgh but there are plans to extend services to Glasgow, giving even more options for travellers from the North East. In fact, a significant number of Lumo passengers travelling from the North East to Edinburgh change trains there to travel to Glasgow. A new direct service would make that journey even easier.

Lumo Managing Director Martijn Gilbert, said: "We are very pleased to be looking at options to grow our popular Lumo train service by extending the service from Edinburgh to Glasgow from next year. We have seen the level of growth and opportunity that is possible with new open access connections, including the significant environmental benefits of passengers switching to rail. We will be working closely with stakeholders as we refine this opportunity and our case for this new offering."

What about the fares? Let's be honest - that's what puts some people off train travel. Lumo claims it offers value for money so let's put that to the test. Here's an example: Let's look at weekend fares for a family of 2 adults and 2 children with a Friends and Family railcard. At the time of writing, return tickets from Newcastle to London, leaving on Saturday 26 October and returning the next day ranged from £139.90 to £211. The cheapest option was to travel on Lumo's 0712 Newcastle to London train and the ticket gives an option of returning on a few LNER trains on the Sunday for a total of £139.90. The price breakdown shows that Lumo is cheaper - charging £57.90 for a one-way fixed ticket with the LNER family single on the return journey making up the other £82.









Lumo trains have a single class of accommodation on board - the trains don't have first class and standard class. The company's managing director, Martijn Gilbert, commented: "Our open access model focuses on giving good value fares and really good quality service and gives customers choice."

It seems that this North East based company is not resting on its laurels and, if the plans are approved, we could see more of the shiny blue Lumo trains travelling to new destinations.

www.lumo.co.uk

Louder than Words

It's a phrase I've heard many times – Actions speak louder than words. But as I sat in the stalls at the New Theatre Oxford for the B-Corp Festival, Louder than Words, which showcased the largest collection of B-Corps in the world...it hit me.

There were c2000 people in the audience, from a wide variety of backgrounds, sectors, cultures but all with a common belief. We should and could be doing more...

The overarching belief is that Business is a Force for Good – we should and can do more to protect our planet and our people whilst staying aligned to our purpose and just to be clear for the naysayers out there, this is not at the risk of profit... we include that too. Coming together to take action, discuss, challenge and collaborate. I also partake with many others in drinking red wine and eating lots of food, the odd run, walk and stroll around the sensational city that is Oxford before you even go there.

In a world where so many tick boxes, take the path of least resistance and value convenience over the future of our planet, the sustainability of our eco systems and the responsibility of doing Better, even when no-one is watching- this is refreshing. There is no being here to look good, tick a box or hit a quota, we are committed to change, acknowledge our responsibility and hold a desire to challenge the capitalist economy we live in.

Louder than words provided challenge. How





can we be better, do better, act better... an interesting, thought provoking question I'm sure you will agree. B-Lab UK, who led the conference, stated their ambitious and bold vision that within the next ten years, every business will be acting as a Force For Good. Each morning the collective sessions at the New Theatre formed a collaborative space to listen and learn from some inspirational key notes with Mary Portas leading the way for a more beautiful business, panels asking us to consider equity in every decision making process and Less, Better, Local from Patrick Grant. The afternoon sessions were spread across the spectacular Oxford city scape and hosted a plethora of topics and options to choose from. We attended sessions including;

- Reframing diversity,
- Big relationships = Big impact,
- Embodying purpose,
- Policy making for SMEs in a B-Corp world
- Empowering Change Better Business Act

For those of you still new to the B-Corp concept, it's one to review. Have a look at the Better Business Act (About The Better Business Act - A Campaign for Better Business) the impact you as an individual and business can have locally to your community, economy and overall environment. In the coming weeks I'm proud to have been nominated as a co-chair as we officially launch the B-Local in the North East along with Gemma, Mandy and Suzanne. We will be hosting regular events and ways for North East businesses to collaborate, engage and share, B-Corp or not and hope to see many of you there.

We at Just Williams believe above all that our businesses should be used as a force for good, we have a responsibility for our future generations, for our planet and to leave our world in a better place. If you want to know more – you know where we are...

www.justwilliamsltd.co.uk

Imagine this: you've got an amazing development idea that could change a community, boost property values, create jobs, and open up tons of opportunities. But like any big vision, making it a reality means you'll need the right financial backing.

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We believe growth needs money, and we're here to make the process of financing your project easy and stress-free. Our goal? To cut through the complexity of development finance. Think of us as your outsourced Bank Manager, without the limitations of a single lender. We'll find the right financing solution tailored to your needs.

Here's why we stand out:

You get access to multiple lenders: Why settle for one lender when you can have access to a network? Our relationships with various lenders mean better rates and more flexible terms for you.

We handle the hassle: Dealing with finance applications, negotiations, and paperwork can be overwhelming. We take care of all of that. From start to finish, we've got it covered, so you can stay focused on your project.

You get expert advice: With years of experience, we know the ins and outs of development finance. You'll get informed advice and the best options available, backed by our proven track record.

You get personalised support: We take pride in offering one-on-one support. We're not just brokers - we're your partners, working to make sure your project gets the funding it deserves.

Our clients' success stories speak for themselves. One developer said: "Bespoq Commercial Solutions made the whole process smooth. Lucy took care of everything, and her advice was invaluable. Our project is now in full swing, and we couldn't be happier."

Get in touch with us. Together, we'll secure the financial support you need to turn your vision into reality. After all, your growth deserves expert support and a strong financial foundation.

Growth needs money.

We get it, and we're here to make it happen.



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Friends go that extra yard!

Great friends Craig Allen and Neal Rawlinson go the extra yard (23,056 yards) to run The Great North Run, with half a freezer strapped to their backs, raising awareness & funds for mens' mental health.

Getting a 15kilo refrigerator fitting is not something one expects to do in one's day job, but that's exactly how Craig & Neal spent their build-up week to the Great North Run.

For a few years now Craig had been mulling over how best to celebrate the passing of his best friend, Josh, who took his life a few years earlier, whilst raising essential funds for Andy's Man Club, an incredible men's suicide prevention charity, which seeks to end the stigma surrounding men's mental health via free-to-attend, peer-to-peer support groups.

Craig's day role is as a budding foodpreneur (Gold Standard Nutrition/GSN), championing a new generation of convenient, frozen ready meals for time-poor, health-conscious individuals (high in protein/low in sugar), convinced him that the perfect homage to his best friend would be for him and his good friend and fellow GSN pioneer, Neal, to cut one of their chest

freezers in half and strap it to their backs.

"Essentially," explains Craig, "We wanted to personify stronger together with an open act of sharing the burden, because all too often men are afraid to share their innermost feelings so suffer in silence, often with horrific consequences."

N.B. Every year there are approximately 6000 suicides a year (74% of which involve men).

"We already suspected that Sunday would be far harder than even our training regime suggested," pondered Craig "and we soon were proven right with a number of added complications that included waiting in for an hour before we got going, one of my straps snapping after only 4.5 miles, the unrelentingly awkward shape and weight of our loads and the ever-present hinderance of rain. Thankfully the incredible support of the crowds and fellow runners got us over the line.

Something Josh wrote two years ago before he passed remains so poignant that Craig & Neal were insistent that his words should sit front and central of the freezer's branding, underpinning their central IT'S OK TO TALK message.

"I forgot who I was once, I thought that maybe I am a man not worth knowing, that was finished and should be forgotten about. I simply wasn't relevant any more. But then I remembered that I have a story worth telling and a man with a story worth telling is always a man worth knowing."

Craig & Neal are now well on our way to hitting their £5k target, but every penny matters, so if you have anything spare in your pocket, please donate generously shorturl.at/MuEEX

Mygsn.co.uk







PROPERTY MARKET WEATHER REPORT



Confusion reigns, and we all get wet, or at least some do. Others carry umbrellas. The property market is in one of its more confusing phases and there are some essential things that we need to learn, such as what will happen in one of the most hotly anticipated budgets for decades this autumn. Will it, for instance, affect inheritance and capital gains taxes, and what will that mean to property buyer and seller sentiment? Will the result of the US general election send a shock wave to our economy in November?

We need to find out whether the government's plan to build 1.5 million homes over the next five years is realistic. Has anyone worked out that it will mean over 800 houses being finished across the country every day? We are now three months into this government. That means roughly 50,000 homes should have been built thus far to stay on target. Prime Minister Keir Starmer says he wants to work at speed. He will certainly need to

But there are things we do know which will give us confidence that entering the property market this autumn shouldn't risk a soaking. We know that mortgage rates are slowly decreasing, and that each rate drop brings more buyers into the market. These buyers are also buoyed by reported falling costs and improving job stability. The result is more buyers at a time when increasing numbers of properties are becoming available. This greater equilibrium should stabilise the market, at least until the end of the year.

Fortune hunters favour market turbulence, but the rest of us favour balance. Some buyers will eagerly study the trends, trying to anticipate the moment some personal algorithm or cost/risk ratio analysis alerts them that financial opportunity has reached its zenith. But for most of us, life events like getting a mortgage, securing a job, running out of space, the school holidays and Christmas are the catalysts that occasion a home move and actually drive the market as a whole. So, it's OK to weather the market this autumn. Certainly, there will be one or two showers so take an umbrella, but overall the outlook is sunny.

Janet Hopkinson Operations Director, Sanderson Young 0191 223 3500





Land at Budle Bay Budle, Bamburgh

A rare and unique opportunity to create a bespoke contemporary new home on a prime residential building plot directly overlooking Budle Bay, on Northumberland's highly sought after heritage coastline. Budle Bay is one of the region's hidden gems situated within the Northumberland Coastal Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), only 1.5 miles from Bamburgh, and is known for its stunning scenery and rich wildlife.



Q 0.75 Acre Plot

Price Guide: Offers over £695,000



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



The Hollies Kenton Road, Gosforth

A beautifully presented, substantially extended family home, fully refurbished and remodelled to a high spec by the current owner and now offering one of the finest semi detached houses within Gosforth. This immaculate property has planning permission to convert the loft space (Ref: 2023/1361/01/HOU) and easy access to Gosforth High Street as well as fantastic road links into the City Centre and throughout the region via the A1. No onward chain. Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax Band: F.





Price Guide:Offers over £1 Million



Mary Walker 0191 223 3500 mary.walker@sandersonyoung.co.uk









Leadgate House & The Old Coaching Station Horsley, Northumberland

A unique development opportunity to acquire a mix of residential/commercial buildings in the village of Horsley. Leadgate House & The Old Coaching Station provides a fabulous stone dwelling with adjoining workshop/showroom and large warehouse/showroom to the rear, ideal for the continuation of business trading. Alternatively, the two commercial buildings show potential to be redeveloped into residential dwellings, subject to planning. Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax Band: B.



Price Guide: Offers over £750,000



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



Rothley Lodge Hartburn, Morpeth

Rothley Lodge is a stunning country house within 2.5 acres of grounds and woodland with private fishing rights. This Victorian former Shooting Lodge is currently run as a successful holiday let and has planning permission (REF 23/04483/FUL) to substantially extend the house, creating luxury living/bedroom accommodation of circa 464m2 (excluding garage) with an annexe/wing and triple garage. Two building plots available by separate negotiation. Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax: Small Business Rates.





Price Guide: £945,000

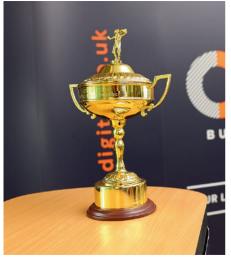


Ashleigh Sundin
0191 223 3500
ashleigh.sundin@sandersonyoung.co.uk













CMYK | Business Technology CYBER CUP® returns to Close House

The region's leading tech provider CMYK | Business Technology welcomed their clients, partners, and guests to their annual summer golf day at Close House and the return of the CYBER CUP®.

Once again this year, Team Spoofing and Team Phishing went head-to-head, players navigated around the Lee Westwood Filly course with Team Spoofing marginally retaining the trophy.

Craig Pratt, regional sales director at CMYK commented; 'Huge thank you to our clients, partners, and guests for attending our annual summer golf day. It's amazing to see our golf day growing year after year and welcoming new faces to the CMYK family. We are extremely grateful for your continued support throughout 2024 – thank you. Special thanks to the team at Close House for always being the perfect host venue. Thanks again to all who attended and well done to all individual prize winners - we look forward to welcoming you all back very soon."











24 October 2024 Northern Insight





























Senior Sales appointment at major earthmoving attachment specialist

The UK's largest manufacturer of earthmoving buckets and quick couplers has bolstered its sales team with a senior appointment to its UK and European sales team.

Miller UK - headquartered in the North East and with manufacturing and support hubs across the globe - has appointed seasoned sales professional Jonathon Cox, to join its team as Sales Manager for UK and Europe.

Possessing over 25 years' experience in both sales and customer service roles across the construction and automotive sectors - most recently as an Aftermarket Manager to SANY UK - Jonathon brings a wealth of transferable skills and sector knowledge to support Miller's ambitious growth plans.

Speaking about his new appointment, Jonathon Cox said: "I am delighted to be joining Miller, one of the world's leading coupler and bucket suppliers. Having worked in the construction industry for many years, Miller has a strong reputation for its innovative designs and superior manufacturing capabilities, and I am proud to be leading the sales team of a company of such high calibre.

"Known for delivering excellent customer service, I am looking forward to working closely with the team and Miller's loyal customer base - as well as onboarding new customers - as we continue to drive the very highest standards that the company is recognised for."



Johnston Carmichael strengthens NE offering with global mobility appointment

Leading UK accountancy and business advisory firm Johnston Carmichael has strengthened its North East offering with the appointment of Tom Harrison as Global Mobility Tax Specialist.

Tom's extensive experience will boost Johnston Carmichael's offering, as a dedicated support to the growing number of regional businesses working across international markets.

With over a decade of experience in the accountancy sector, including time spent at some of the UK's largest firms, Tom developed a specialism in Global Mobility. Drawing on his background in tax compliance and advisory across various sectors, he will bring the full range of Global Mobility services to Newcastle, utilising the firm's existing infrastructure. His appointment sees Johnston Carmichael's North East office continue to diversify its services, with a team of 13 specialists now in place.

Tom, who is from the North East, said: "The opportunity to join Johnston Carmichael and help to grow the Global Mobility offering in the region was incredibly appealing to me. This role offers the perfect chance to use my skills to meet the growing needs of businesses in the North East with global operations, building on the strong foundations laid by Paul Shields and his team since the office was formed last year."

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 unchartered 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 Consultant, Archie Grey; Farm Business Consultant, Olivia Ward;

along with a handful of new members

joining GFW's administrative team.

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The Just Williams Sales Academy is an online and in person training facilitator for Sales and Customer Service professionals looking to develop, learn and grow.

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2024-25 Masterclass Schedule

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Wednesday 29th January How to Network More Effectively Friday 21st February Enhance Your Sales Pipeline Wednesday 26th March How To Generate More Leads Wednesday 30th April Time Management for Busy Sales Professionals Friday 30th May The Art of Exceptional Customer Service

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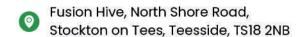




Book online through: teesvalleyexpertise.co.uk

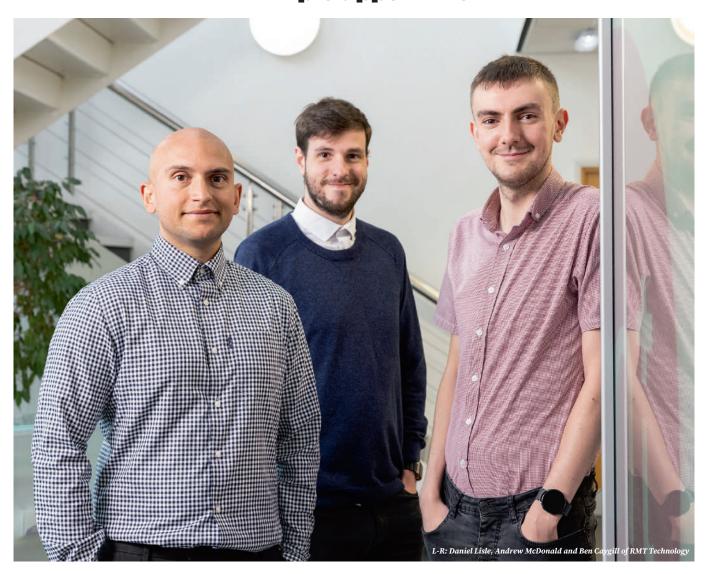
Contact







RMT Technology strengthens technical support team with triple appointment



RMT Technology is gearing up to meet growing client demand with the appointment of a further three talented professionals to its technical support team.

The specialist technology arm of RMT Accountants & Business Advisors has brought in Ben Caygill, Daniel Lisle and Andrew McDonald to enhance the delivery of its cutting-edge services as demand for its range of bespoke, security-first solutions continues to rise.

Each of the new recruits brings a wealth of experience to their roles, adding significant depth to RMT Technology's expert team.

Ben Caygill is taking a leading role in technical project deployment, ensuring that complex IT solutions are delivered seamlessly to clients. Andrew McDonald previously worked with a multinational plc and brings a detailed understanding of large-scale IT operations to his new role, which will be invaluable as he supports RMT Technology's diverse client base.

Daniel Lisle is specialising in the deployment of their security-first solutions and innovations which fortify clients' cybersecurity defences.

These latest appointments follow on from RMT Technology's recent expansion of its senior team, with new commercial director Stephen McNickle and corporate leader Susan Bell now both being instrumental in steering the company's ongoing growth.

RMT Technology works in partnership with a wide range of SMEs to build tailored strategies that prioritise security, infrastructure and data management to meet their specific business and operational needs

Mike Hayes, managing director at RMT Technology, says: "The quality of service and insight that our expert team provides has been central to RMT Technology's rapid expansion in the last few years and we're fully focused on continuing to build the brand and the business.

"Adding Ben, Daniel and Andrew increases our capacity to deliver the services our clients require and will help us achieve our future growth ambitions.

"The business need for remote, secure access to bespoke technology services is growing exponentially. By enhancing our team with unrivalled technological expertise, we're ensuring that RMT Technology remains at the forefront of this critical industry evolution while providing the best possible client service to meet that need."

Alongside RMT Accountants, RMT Technology is part of Sumer, a top 15 UK accountancy practice on a mission to champion SMEs. It has ten regional accountancy Hubs, with more than 40 offices, and over 1,300 colleagues. Sumer is dedicated to providing comprehensive support to SMEs across the country, aligned with the values of RMT Technology.

www.r-m-t.co.uk

28 October 2024 Northern Insight





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Tying in People and Sustainability

Andrew Marsh, Vistage of North East and Northumberland, NED, Entrepreneur, and mentoring facilitator of a number of peer groups for the region's leaders is always looking for new and innovative ways to inspire boards and senior personnel to improve the way they perform.

Keen on all things to do with sustainability in business Andrew has recently written articles on B Corp and a series in Northern Insight on ESG, its importance and its impact. He is also an advocate for DEI and has featured articles around that topic too.

He recently saw a presentation from Venture Zero, a company formed by two experts in different fields, which inspires people, through education and community connections, to contribute to healthier, more sustainable workplaces. This got him thinking about the importance of leaders tying in people and sustainability as imperative to the success of their organisation on a number of levels.

"It is the responsibility of all executive leaders and board members to continuously look for new ways to navigate change and disruption. Organisations of all size and sectors are facing new challenges, in an ever-changing world, including mental health considerations, global warming and climate change and new expectations of workers including hybrid working and four day weeks.

"Staff are looking for more than just good wages. They want to feel valued, be looked after and in the main feel that they are contributing to a purpose. New generations of employees are also demanding that all employers take seriously the impact that their business is having on the environment, along with of course, challenges from the government to minimise that impact.

"Which is why, when I met owners of Venture Zero, Clare Blunt and Claire Thew, I was so impressed with their offering and it got me thinking about what role leaders take in making these changes.

"Venture Zero encourage and enable organisations to positively invest in their people and the planet at the same time. But what would the benefits of this be?

likely to attract the best talent, retain like-minded members of the team, improve engagement with their employees and other employers, and reduce retention problems and absenteeism." "From my own perspective I have seen businesses that invest in both people and the environment thrive. They are more likely to hit targets, are viewed as a good employer and positively impact their bottom line.

Clare Blunt explained: "Organisations that do this are more

"Subjects such as these are looked at regularly by the members of my Vistage cohorts, and we will certainly be exploring linking up health and wellbeing with sustainability in pending meetings. We have previously focused on ESG, DEI and B Corp, even having a speaker in from the organisation to talk to us about what we all need to do."

Venture Zero offer several accredited training courses including Mental Health First Aid, MHFA Awareness, MHFA Refresher, and Carbon Literacy Training. They provide bespoke workshops/webinars, alongside purpose driven team development and volunteer days. Venture Zero also have a bi-monthly Sustainable Wellbeing Business Forum which provides learning as well as networking opportunities. Some of Venture Zero's clients include Newcastle Building Society, Sage, Ward Hadaway, Quorum Business Park, Newcastle University, Tyneside Cinema and Axa Health.

Clare and Claire were invited to present at a recent gathering of the three cohorts of The Experience Bank Groups peer groups for NEDs, Trustee and those operating at board level.

Andrew said: "We had over 40 people in the room and every one of them left with a buzz and an idea of how they wanted to improve what their organisation is doing around team wellbeing and sustainability. It is so much more than ticking a box now, people are truly invested and those companies who don't move with the demands will start to find it hard to build their teams with dedicated staff or retain talent."

Clare and Claire closed out the session by highlighting the 17 Goals to sustainability. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. At its heart are these 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are an urgent call for action by all countries - developed and developing - in a global partnership. They recognize that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth - all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests.

Andrew concluded: "The attendees were encourage by Venture Zero to start by picking even just one of the 17 goals and focusing on achieving that change. If we all did that, can you imagine the impact we would have?"

You can find out more about Venture Zero at www.venturezero.co.uk and you can contact Andrew on Andrew.marsh@vistagechair.co.uk







Venture Ten ventures into new territory with The Experience Bank™

A North East based Recruitment Expert that innovative SMEs now rely on to expand and grow sustainably, has turned to The Experience BankTM to help with their own growth.

Venture Ten is the brainchild of Dan Fenwick and Kimberley Leech, based on their belief that recruitment could be done differently and better. Dan said: "We looked at the market and quickly realised that noone had their needs being met. Companies find recruitment time consuming and the right people hard to find, recruiters spend a lot of time that isn't profitable and recruitees often feel like just a number and a CV that gets thrown around.

"Using my background in cultural change management, we have developed a

professionally project-managed Talent
Partner model that creates the right results
within relationships build on trust and
with longevity. We aren't in it to place one
candidate, but to help organisations find and
keep the right talent at every point of their
growth and own development."

As this approach started to bear fruit, the pair realised their business was going to grow quickly, and that would need help, advice and support on their own journey. As well as partnering with a Canadian company using their methodology in defining culture and candidate behaviours, the pair expanding into facility management following a request from a client, employed an executive assistant Emma and most recently reached out to Peter Neal at The Experience Bank™.

The Experience Bank™ is a philanthropic offering from Experience Bank Group. Through it, Peter offers qualifying start up and small companies, that are primed for growth, access to a carefully curated bank of over 100 leaders from the region who offer up time and experience pro-bono for an agreed period of time. This often leads to long term relationships, helping business in the region flourish and thrive.

Peter said: "What I loved about Venture 10 was the energy and drive of Dan and Kimberley. They do not stand still, and they are not afraid to flex into other offerings, including recently launching a garden maintenance arm. They are, however, focused on their core offering of recruitment, understanding that people and culture is growing in importance and is

their way forward to growth. It was with that in mind that they approached me, as they appreciated they needed a board advisors with significant, strategic experience of HR and recruitment to challenge and support them"

The process through The Experience Bank™ resulted in John McConnell coming onboard, bringing with him over 20 years' experience in getting people culture right. He has a passion for the region and has also spent a chunk of time recently in property.

Stephen Paul has also come onboard using his consultancy back ground to focus Dan on his leadership development.

Dan said: "It is great to have John and Stephen helping us and sharing our vision for the future of Venture 10. They believe like we do that the people ingredient is the most important. It is a breath of fresh air to meet like-minded people and Peter got it just right. Peter's process was very focussed, with a clear brief, quick turnaround and he presented candidates that were a perfect marriage of skills in John and Stephen.

"I would totally recommend The Experience Bank™ to anyone who is focused on the future of their business. The biggest blocker in any organisation is the leader themselves. Just by having confidantes and people to mentally spar with you will become more innovative, more diverse and more practical – all of which can only be positive."

You can find out more about The Experience $Bank^{TM}$ on the experience bank.co.uk/socialenterprise

32 October 2024 Northern Insight



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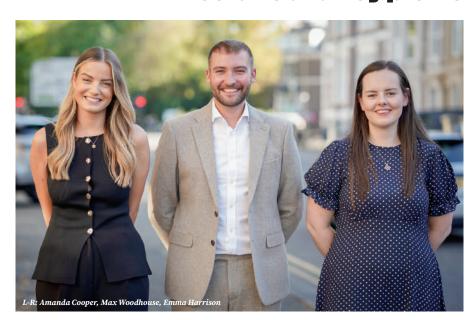
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RISK WARNING: With investing, your capital is at risk

Ryecroft Glenton invests in future talent with new recruits and key promotions



Ryecroft Glenton (RG), one of the North of England's leading business advisory firms, continues to strengthen its team with the addition of eight new recruits and the promotion of three talented professionals.

This ongoing investment in its people reflects the firm's commitment to nurturing talent and delivering exceptional service to clients across its diverse service lines.

The new recruits join RG's Audit and Assurance and Accounts and Business Services service lines, bringing fresh perspectives and a wealth of potential to the firm. Two new Audit Seniors, Vashenka Naidoo and Anton Vassilounis, are welcomed to the Audit team. Vashenka, a Chartered Accountant from South Africa, brings seven years of experience from a 'Big 4' firm, while Anton, a recently qualified Certified Accountant, joins from a local practice in Darlington.

The firm also welcomes four graduate trainees who have begun their training contracts to become Chartered Accountants. Emily Halsall and James Bell join the Accounts and Business Services service line, with Emily holding a History degree and James an Accounting and Finance degree, both from Newcastle University.

Jake Macintosh and Connor Priest strengthen the Audit and Assurance service line, with Jake holding a Master's in Accounting and Finance from Northumbria University, and Connor an Economics and Finance degree from Newcastle University.

In addition, two trainees are starting their journey towards the Accounting Technician

Qualification (AAT). Stephanie Roots joins the Accounts and Business Services service line, bringing experience from a financial services firm, while Alex Shipsey continues his AAT studies within RG's specialist Agriculture team, after transitioning from a smaller practice.

Peter Glenton, Partner at RG, said: "We are thrilled to welcome such a talented and diverse group of individuals to RG. Their ambition and enthusiasm for building their careers with us is clear, and they are excellent examples of the kind of talent RG attracts. By nurturing and developing the next generation of professionals, we are ensuring that RG remains at the forefront of delivering the best possible service and advice."

Alongside these new additions, RG is proud to announce the promotion of three exceptional team members, highlighting the firm's commitment to fostering professional growth and personal development.

Amanda Cooper has been promoted to Director within the firm's Accounts and Business Services service line, where she specialises in serving RG's Agricultural and Landed Estates clients. Amanda's journey with RG began in 2011 during a placement year while studying Maths at Northumbria University.

After joining the firm permanently in 2013 on a training contract, she has steadily progressed, becoming a Manager in 2019, Senior Manager in 2022, and now Director. Her promotion reflects her dedication and significant contributions to the firm.

Max Woodhouse has been promoted to Manager within the Corporate Finance service line, RGCF. Since joining RG as a graduate in 2018, Max has transitioned from audit and accounts to corporate finance, where he plays a key role in advising clients on a range of business transactions. His promotion is a testament to his impressive performance and growing expertise.

Emma Harrison, who has also been promoted to Manager, works in the Accounts and Business Services service line. Emma manages accounts clients, supports the personal tax team, and specialises in accounts and tax for trusts. Since joining RG in 2019, Emma has achieved dual qualification as a Chartered Accountant and Chartered Tax Adviser. Her client-focused approach and deep knowledge have been instrumental in her success, and her promotion recognises her leadership within the firm.

Peter Glenton added: "We are incredibly proud to announce these well-deserved promotions. Amanda, Max, and Emma are outstanding examples of the talented professionals that RG attracts, retains, and develops. Their dedication to providing the highest level of service to our clients is a true reflection of the values we hold at RG. These promotions not only highlight their individual achievements but also underline our ongoing commitment to fostering the growth and development of our team, ensuring our clients continue to receive personal, expert advice."

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34 October 2024 Northern Insight

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66

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Adam Ball, Owner, Sandance Creative

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"

As a group coaching student, I get real value from the collaboration; the room is always bursting with fresh ideas and energy. If your business is feeling a little lethargic these sessions will really get things going for you!"

Alfie Joey, business owner and Growth Hub member





Experienced hire further enhances Employment Tax offering at UNW

In response to continued demand for its specialist tax services, Newcastle-based chartered accountancy and business advisory firm UNW has added to its Employment Taxes Team with the appointment of Parm Bhachoo as Senior Employment Taxes Specialist.

Parm will bring a wealth of experience and a unique perspective to the team gained from a 15-year career working both as an in-house specialist resource and at a senior level within practice.

He will support UNW's clients with the full range of employment tax services, including advice on National Minimum Wage issues, off payroll working, and the Construction Industry Scheme. He will also assist with HMRC queries and investigations and specific employer compliance advice.

Led by partner Lee Muter, UNW's award-winning Employment Taxes Team delivers comprehensive advice and support on all aspects of employment tax, from both a compliance and advisory perspective. Operating primarily out of the firm's office base in Newcastle upon Tyne, but with strong networks across the Midlands, Wales and the South, they guide clients through matters including salary sacrifice and employee benefits and expenses, termination pay, employment status, share options as well as overseas and expatriate advice.

In recent years, UNW has invested significantly in its employment tax offering, with the appointments of Paul Tucker and David Paul as Senior Employment Taxes Specialists, and with the creation and then expansion of its groundbreaking Employment Tax Graduate Scheme which has seen Becky Hood and Leah Harrison join the department, with a further graduate due to join the team later in September.

On his decision to join UNW, Parm said: "I am delighted to be joining UNW. It is a firm that is very passionate about delivering an exceptional service to its clients and it's great to be a part of that.

"I am grateful for the opportunity to work alongside Lee Muter and his team who are all very well-respected employment tax specialists. We have a broad range of skills and a wealth of knowledge between us to further build on UNW's reputation for providing a leading service."

Lee Muter, Employment Taxes Partner at UNW, added: "I am delighted to add someone of Parm's obvious quality to our growing team. His considerable experience, gained from his time as both an in-house resource and in practice, will give us a unique viewpoint and enhance our offering.

"As HMRC's employer compliance team are expected to be more active in the future to reduce the perceived tax gap, and as the tax legislation continues to be more complex, there has never been a greater demand for employment tax specialists like Parm to help employers. I am really looking forward to working with Parm and the rest of our team as we continue to look for ways to provide value to our clients."

www.unw.co.uk

Tier One Capitals Fund Management team for Develop North PLC

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

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

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

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

Recent property developments supported by Develop North include:-

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

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

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

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



Ian McElroy, Chief Executive

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



Jess Swindells, Managing Director
Jess joined TOC in 2017 and is a
practising lawyer specialising in Banking
and Corporate Finance.



Brendan O'Grady, Fund Manager
Brendan is a Chartered Accountant and
corporate treasurer and joined TOC in 2017 and
leads the Fund Management team.



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



Committee

Richard is an experienced Corporate Banker
providing lending process and governance

advice to Develop North PLC.

Andrew Cawkwell,
Credit Committee Member

Andrew is a Restructuring Solicitor and Certified
Turnaround professional providing advice to

Develop North PLC.







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Muckle LLP strengthens its corporate finance team with new solicitor

Leading North East law firm Muckle LLP has appointed a new solicitor to its corporate team.

Atif Salim joins the team, which is currently ranked top for corporate law and mergers and acquisitions in the region by Legal 500 and Chambers & Partners.

Atif initially spent six years working as an account manager for Adobe in London, where he worked with clients such as Marks & Spencer, TUI Travel, and Carphone Warehouse on improving their paid search strategy and performance. He then moved back to the North East in 2015 and spent two years working as a global paid search manager at Sage Group PLC.

After deciding to switch careers, Atif completed the Graduate Diploma in Law and the Legal Practice Course at Northumbria University. He subsequently worked as a paralegal at a multinational law firm, before starting his training contract at a regional law firm, where he gained valuable experience.

In his role as a corporate solicitor at Muckle, Atif will work on all types of corporate transactions, including mergers and acquisitions, investments and buyouts as well as company reorganisations and corporate governance.

Atif said: "I'm so pleased I decided to make the big step into law. I've always wanted a career where I'm constantly learning and law opens up so many opportunities to progress and grow. I find getting to know all types of businesses fascinating and I love deep diving into transactional and commercial law.

"Muckle's corporate team seemed like the perfect fit for me to gain diverse expertise with the breadth of work they handle and the clients they serve. There's a couple of deals in the pipeline already that I'm really excited about.

"Muckle also has a very strong social and community focus; I'm looking forward to getting involved in the firm's sports teams and volunteering opportunities.

"I genuinely love my new career and it's everything I wanted it to be."



Exciting new chapter for Muckle LLP

Muckle LLP, an award-winning regional law firm in the North East and Cumbria, has announced plans for a change in leadership.

After leading the firm through 10 years of continued growth, the current Managing Partner, Jason Wainwright, has decided to step down on 31 March 2025. Jason will remain with the firm, continuing to contribute as part of its growing Equity Partner group.

Muckle will then embark on a new leadership phase with current head of Corporate, Anthony Evans, taking over as Managing Partner from 1 April 2025

Jason, who took on the Managing Partner role in 2015, had always planned to lead for no more than a decade. Over his tenure, he has overseen the remarkable success and transformation of the firm. Muckle has recently enjoyed consecutive years of double-digit growth, increased turnover and profit and earned numerous accolades, including North East Business of the Year and Best Place to Work, at the North East Business Awards 2023.

Reflecting on his time as Managing Partner, Jason Wainwright stated: "After nearly a decade of leading this incredible group of people, I am proud of everything we've achieved together. We've built a strong strategy for growth, significantly increased our market share and developed new and growing teams."

As head of Corporate, Anthony Evans has been a central figure in the firm's recent success. His experience, client-focused approach, and deep understanding of the business, together with an impressive 11% annual growth in corporate in the last financial year, make him the ideal candidate to lead Muckle into its next growth phase. He will work closely with Jason over the coming months to ensure a seamless transition.

Renowned regional dealmaker Philip Clare will take over as head of Corporate from 01 April 2025.



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we used to use audio dictation tapes and now we use a digital system where you just talk into a microphone and it records what you say on the screen for the secretaries to pick up. Since I started, Jacksons was the leading law firm regionally for defendant insurance claims, we acted for all the major insurance companies. We separated the commercial and civil parts of the business in the early 2000s. I don't really foresee any major changes with what we do in the future. There are always going to be disputes, and you're always going to end up in court representing somebody on one side of the dispute. I really don't think in the commercial work that we do that there will be much change.

What are you currently working on?

We are now subject to an appeal on a judicial review. The appeal hearing is in November at the Court of Appeal. The case involved poultry farmers and compensation due to them when their birds were culled due to avian influenza in 2021 and 2022. Thanks to our successful representation of seven poultry farmers in a judicial review, the High Court ruled they were entitled to higher compensation, which paved the way for other poultry farmers to come forward for more money. If we are successful in the appeal hearing, there will be a lot of farmers liable for increased compensation.

JACKSONS SOLICITORS

Tell us about the team you work with?

I have probably worked with more than 100 people over my 35 years here! There have been different secretaries, trainee solicitors who might only be with us for six months before moving to a different department and all the different permanent staff who have been and gone. The team now are all, unfortunately younger than me! But in all seriousness the current team is the best group of people I've worked with. The primary roles in the team are commercial litigators and then you also have people with different specialisms who are building on their expertise.

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

Stick at it! I started off on £29 per week and at one time I could have found a job earning more money – but I wouldn't necessarily have had the same career prospects as I have had here. I have gone from the YTS lad to a joint owner of the business as an equity partner. As long as you're doing something you're enjoying and there is progression, you should keep putting the work in and showing enthusiasm – and you will reap the rewards.

Where do you see yourself in 10 years' time?

I see myself retiring! I will be 61 then and I expect I will still be here – I can't imagine moving, but I will definitely be thinking about retiring. I will have been here 45 years!

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

Nick Faldo, Ricky Gervais, Brian Clough and Bob Mortimer

What do you do to unwind?

Play golf at Cleveland GC or walk my lab retriever, Piper on the North York Moors or at the coast.

What's your favourite box set?

Line of Duty

www.jacksons-law.com

UK government strikes back

By Jonathan Moreland, Managing Partner and Head of the Employment team at Swinburne Maddison LLP.

The new UK government has been busy in its first few weeks in office but what may have gone unnoticed is the repeal of a controversial law introduced by the previous regime.

The Minimum Service Levels (MSL) Act 2023 was brought in by the Conservative government to limit the impact of a strike by forcing public sector workers to maintain a minimum level of service.

Effectively, this meant that workers had to complete a minimum number of hours during periods of strike action – bringing the UK more in line with existing minimum service level regimes in countries such as France, Spain and Italy.

The main idea behind the law – also known as the Strikes Act 2023 – was to limit the impact of strikes on the lives and livelihoods of the public, and to find a balance between the ability of unions and their members to strike on the one hand and the need for the public to access key services during strikes. This isn't an easy balance to find and the law drew criticism from some commentators who thought it weighed too heavily on workers' rights. The Trades Union Congress even suggested it would use legal mechanisms to combat the new law, which applied to public sector workers operating in education, fire and rescue services, health and transport. And in January of this year, UNISON joined thousands of other trade union members in Cheltenham at a 'protect the right to strike' rally to protest against MSLs.

Now, though, the picture has changed. The current Labour government has decided to repeal the law through its new Employment Rights Bill on the basis that MSLs restrict the right to strike and undermine good industrial relations. Labour ministers believe that this will strengthen workers' rights and in doing so, reduce the likelihood of strike action to resolve disputes.

Will this happen in practice? Will it reduce the likelihood of days of train strikes, walk-outs by teachers and doctors, and action at border security points? Hindsight and the fullness

of time will tell us more but it's hoped that Labour's New Deal for Working People – which addresses key issues such as insecure work, low pay and exploitative employment contracts – can rebuild relationships between employers and trade unions, avert further strikes and ensure pay settlements are agreed more quickly. Some pay settlements have already been brokered.

There are risks, however. Some commentators say that returning more power to workers could give them more wriggle room to make unreasonable demands on their employer – and if they don't get what they want, they may use industrial action as a bartering tool. Others say it will take more than the repeal of the MSL Act to get Britain's essential public services moving again.

Another consideration is whether or not this will trigger calls to strengthen workers' rights in the private sector. At the moment there's no suggestion that this will happen but if it did, would it improve relations between employers and workers? Would it lead to higher wage demands and higher staff turnover, with workers potentially switching jobs more regularly in a bid to get a better deal? If so, this could lead to a brain-drain of industry talent and dent the profits of companies that feel obliged to bow to workers' wage demands.

The repeal of the MSL Act will no doubt delight trade unions, provide comfort for workers and cause anxiety for some employers, but sensible negotiation and open dialogue should pave the way for decent relations between employers, employees and trade unions. This doesn't always happen, of course, but mediation services and legal advice is readily available for those who need it.

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Group disadvantage and indirect discrimination

Sean Garmory is a Solicitor at specialist employment law firm, Collingwood Legal. Sean considers a recent development impacting the law of indirect discrimination.

Background

Indirect discrimination claims under section 19 of the Equality Act 2010 ("EqA 2010") requires a claimant to establish that a provision, criterion or practice ("PCP") implemented by their employer (that is applied equally to employees) places or would place employees with the claimant's protected characteristic at a particular disadvantage. An employer has a statutory defence to objectively justify the PCP as a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.

This represents the common understanding of an indirect discrimination claim. However, the position on this type of claim has developed because of the introduction of a new section 19A of EqA 2010.

Section 19A

A strict reading of section 19 of EqA 2010 indicates that a claimant must show that the disadvantage they allege would put other employees who share this protected characteristic at the same particular disadvantage. However, this was not a requirement set out in the EU directives which predated this legislation. Indeed, case law from the Court of Justice of the European Union has held that a claimant can establish indirect discrimination even if they do not share the protected characteristic of the disadvantaged group, as long as they can show that they have been disadvantaged in the same way.

This has now been reflected in domestic legislation in the form of Regulation 3 of The Equality Act 2010 (Amendment) Regulations 2023 which inserts a new section 19A to EqA



2010 which enables claimants without a relevant protected characteristic to continue to bring claims of indirect discrimination where they can show that they have been disadvantaged in substantively the same way as the disadvantaged group.

This change in the domestic law reflects the recent decisions of our own courts. Recently, the decision in British Airways plc v Rollett and others has confirmed that, despite the above strict reading, section 19 had to be read in a way which is compatible with EU law. In this case, it was alleged that scheduling changes placed non-British nationals who commuted from other countries and women with caring responsibilities at a disadvantage. The decision of the Employment Appeal Tribunal confirmed that British nationals who shared the same disadvantage as non-British nationals and men with caring responsibilities who shared the same disadvantage as women could both bring indirect discrimination claims. This is now the position reflected in section 19A EqA

What does this mean?

Codification of this interpretation of the law increases the avenues for employees to bring legal complaints about an employer's policies. The example below illustrates the circumstances that could lead to a claim under section 19A EqA 2010:

A male employee on paternity leave putting in a request for flexible working to reduce their hours for childcare but is rejected due to "company policy" that all employees are required to work full time. It has been judicially accepted that women are statistically more likely to have childcare responsibilities than men, but this employee could now bring a claim for indirect sex discrimination, even though the employee is male rather than female as he is "suffering alongside" the disadvantaged group of female employees in terms of the impact of this policy.

As a result, employers will now need to consider the impact of their PCPs not just on employees, or potential employees, who would be placed at a disadvantage due to their protected characteristics but on other employees who could be put to the same disadvantage unrelated to any protected characteristic. Simply, policies which disadvantage groups of employees are now more likely to be subject to challenge.

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Time well spent

By Hugh Welch, senior partner at commercial firm Muckle LLP.

If the 'Great Resignation' has taught us anything, it's that employee benefits are more important than they've ever been.

From agile working and flexible hours to health insurance and profit share, providing attractive employee benefits has become crucial for talent acquisition and retention.

But what if we told you there's one, often overlooked, employee benefit that's known to boost productivity, improve recruitment and retention and could deliver between £1.50 and £3.60 of benefits to an organisation for every £1 spent? That benefit? Employer-supported volunteering (ESV)*.

Hugh Welch, senior partner at commercial firm Muckle LLP, discusses the firm's journey with its volunteering programme.

The UK is a generous country. In fact, the Charities Aid Foundation ranks the UK as the world's third-most giving nation, with Britons donating a record £13.9bn in 2023. They also report that while around 7.1m of us volunteered in the same year, more than half of charitable organisations still say they're struggling with volunteer recruitment.

Hugh believes local businesses are key to pushing these numbers up: "It is one of the strengths of this region that charities are embedded in our communities; they play an immeasurable role in providing support for the most vulnerable, and I believe it's up to local businesses, that admittedly have access to greater resources, to play their part too.

"Offering paid time off for your people to volunteer is a great way of doing this. The modern workplace is evolving and as I see it, every step of this seems to reinforce the value of workplace volunteering. People want purpose at work, both in their roles and the opportunities offered by their employers to make a difference outside of their actual jobs."

It is estimated that between 17m and 23m employees in the UK do not have access to workplace volunteering opportunities. If they did, it could support between 1.5m and 2.8m additional people who would participate in workplace volunteering, providing much-needed resources to the struggling charity sector*.

Muckle offers two days of paid leave annually to volunteer, but Hugh says simply offering is not enough: "It can't just be a tick box exercise; as a business, you have to commit to doing it well. Volunteering is just one pillar of our community work, but it is one that we're putting an increased focus on. 33% of our people take one or both days, and we're determined to increase this over the next 12 months. We also support our people in undertaking external roles such as charity trustees and school governors. There are 28 active appointments across the firm, but we'd love this number to increase.

"In 2022, we partnered with OnHand, an app that offers by-the-hour volunteering as well as more long-term volunteering opportunities such as mentoring. Our team has worked with some fantastic charities over the past year, including the Country Trust, CHUF and Wag & Co. Last year, we introduced purpose champions, a nominated person in each team whose job is to encourage team volunteering as well as promote pro bono work and trustee roles, and so far, it's working really well."



Hugh says businesses can also see benefits to their own organisations: "First and foremost, employee-supported volunteering is all about giving back. By lending our skills, expertise, and people, businesses can make a tangible difference in our local communities. But there are also other benefits. Volunteering is the perfect opportunity for people to learn new skills and work on their personal development, and it's great for attracting new talent - people want to work for socially responsible employers."

Research conducted by Pro Bono Economics showed the productivity boost generated by volunteering contributes an impressive £4.6 billion to the UK economy annually – this is attributed to wellbeing benefits such as better health and improved skills, as employees learn from the experience, leading to fewer sick days and better staff retention.

At the end of 2023, Muckle became the first law firm in the North East and Cumbria to be given B Corp accreditation, awarded to organisations verified as meeting high social and environmental performance standards, transparency, and accountability.

Hugh says that being part of B Corp has invigorated the firm's drive to consistently improve: "We've always put community and purpose at the heart of everything we do. Our Muckle Fund at the Community Foundation has been running for almost 23 years now, and we've once again committed 1% of our annual profits to help local charities. But we're always looking to improve, and B Corp is a great facilitator of that. It allows us to celebrate the areas where we are performing well, but more importantly, pushes us to be innovative and creative in the areas where we have room to improve – like volunteering."

Find out more about Muckle's ESG programme at muckle-llp.com

* Pro Bono Economics

Mincoffs' corporate team expands with solicitor appointment



A leading North East corporate and commercial law firm has announced an appointment in a key department, to assist with increased client demand.

Newcastle-based Mincoffs Solicitors has welcomed solicitor Connie Lu to its corporate team as the latest new starter in a period of prolonged growth for the firm.

Prior to joining Mincoffs, Connie trained across multiple offices at an award-winning law firm in the south of England, before accepting a position in the corporate team at another national firm.

Through these roles, Connie gained experience working with SMEs and larger corporations within the health sector and looks forward to building on these skills in her new position at Mincoffs.

Along with the corporate team being shortlisted for two categories at the Insider Media North East Dealmakers Awards, the latest Experian Market IQ M&A Review confirmed that the corporate team had maintained their 18-month streak ranking as the region's number one deal adviser.

Connie said: "I am very excited to join this vibrant and busy firm. It has a fantastic reputation and an established position in the marketplace.

"The great exposure to a wide range of work and clients here is amazing and I can't wait to work closely with the team in the near future."

Following a raft of new client wins and significant growth at the firm, there are plans to expand the workforce by 10 percent over the next year, with additional appointments planned for the corporate team.

Paul Hughes, senior partner and head of corporate, is confident Connie will be an asset to the department.

"We are delighted to have Connie joining the

firm during what is a really exciting and busy time for our corporate team as we continue to attract new work and clients," he said.

"Despite being in the early stages of her legal career, Connie has worked on some significant transactions in her previous roles and this experience stands her in great stead for the calibre of deals we work on.

"I have no doubt Connie will be a great fit for the team and we look forward to helping her develop her skills as she builds her own caseload at Mincoffs."

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

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

For more information visit www.mincoffs.co.uk

Intellectual Property and Overseas Markets



A recent report from the Chartered Institute of Patent Attorneys (CIPA) suggests that British businesses are falling behind other European countries in the international patent protection of their technology. The CIPA report reveals that UK companies are filing patents in key markets of Europe and China at rates of up to 40% less than their French and German counterparts.

By securing international intellectual property (IP) rights businesses can obtain exclusive rights which enable them to prevent competitors in overseas markets from copying their innovations. Nevertheless, businesses should not put the cart before the horse. Simply having patents overseas does not make a business successful. Filing patent applications overseas is a strategic decision that UK businesses should consider when they want to expand their innovations on a global scale.

Owning intellectual property rights outside the UK can make businesses more attractive to international partners and investors, and can also open up licensing opportunities.

UK businesses can make use of several pathways for obtaining overseas IP rights, these include the filing of International applications via the Patent Corporation Treaty, and filing of European patent applications.

Businesses thinking their approach to intellectual property overseas, whether they have existing portfolios or are considering entering new markets may be able to avail themselves of the UK IPO's IP Advance programme which provides targeted support to innovative, high growth potential SME's.

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Management Buyouts (MBOs): advantages, challenges and the process

In an MBO, the company's existing management purchases the business for a value. While MBOs can benefit both sellers and buyers, they can come with unique challenges.

The MBO Process

An MBO generally involves the sale and purchase of shares rather than assets. External buyers usually evaluate businesses based on market conditions and growth potential. In contrast, the buyer already has deep knowledge of the company and the sector, and their valuation is often based on internal performance metrics.

Frequently, a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) is established to purchase the shares, making the SPV the controlling shareholder. The acquisition can be financed in several ways:

- Debt from banks and other lending institutions.
- Deferred consideration or earn-outs, where the purchase price is paid over time based on the company's future performance or other metrics which may allow the buyer to use money they have earned from the company to pay at a later date.
- Seller loans, where the current owners provide financing to the buyers.
- Equity finance loans, from private equity firms (sometimes used when banks refuse to finance) though they may require their own shares in the company in return.
- Personal money from savings or other investments.

Advantages of MBOs

One of the biggest advantages of an MBO is business continuity. The buyer already understands the company's operations and relationships and so to the outside (and from the inside) the company may look exactly the same post acquisition. Stakeholders typically appreciate the stability offered by MBOs, as business and employee relationships are preserved with little disruption.

MBOs also provide the management team



with greater control to drive enhanced productivity and innovation. Once they take ownership, they have autonomy in shaping long-term strategies so they can use their expertise without needing to consult as they did before. This deeper involvement in decision-making allows for more tailored and responsive business decisions and allows them to benefit financially from the success, growth and financial performance of the company.

Not all businesses are attractive to external buyers and so an MBO may be the only option available for the existing owners and can often be beneficially structured from a tax perspective.

Challenges of MBOs

Financing remains one of the largest challenges in MBOs. Most management teams lack the capital to purchase the business outright, relying instead on external financing options. This can result in the business carrying significant debt post-buyout, which may bring about cash flow problems, limit ability to invest or manage economic downturns. Sellers may also struggle to realise the full value if they offer seller loans or deferred consideration.

The potential for internal conflict is rife

since the management team negotiates the deal whilst still often being employees! As potential buyers, they will obviously want what's best for them and are well placed to conduct their roles in a way that may downplay the company value. Employees, minority shareholders, and other stakeholders might question the fairness of the deal. Transparency throughout the process is essential to avoid potential

Let's not forget it is a hard step to go from employee to owner and it will be a struggle for some, which may ultimately harm the company.

Conclusion

With careful planning, MBOs can offer a smooth transition for owners and a successful path to ownership for management. Before considering an MBO, both sellers and buyers should seek expert legal and financial advice to ensure all stakeholders are protected.

Contact the expert corporate team at Sweeney Miller Law by emailing jess.fenwick@sweeneymiller.co.uk or calling 0345 900 5401.

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Looking ahead to the future

Hay & Kilner's Corporate Partner Mark Adams shares his recent insights for businesses in the run-up to the Autumn Budget.

Partner and head of the Corporate Team at Hay & Kilner, Mark Adams has specialised in corporate mergers and acquisitions (M&A) transactional work for over 20 years.

Here, he shares his insights over the last six months, and a look ahead post-Budget.

From business and company sales and acquisitions, to refinancing and group reorganisations, we are proud to work with a wide range of businesses on all aspects of their corporate transactions and business needs. We like to think our team provides experienced, friendly and pragmatic advice to help each of our clients on their business journey, whatever stage they may be at.

Over the last six months at Hay & Kilner, we've certainly experienced an acceleration of management buyout (MBO) plans in particular, which has had a positive impact on deal activity, and we've also seen, and been involved in, some significant deals for the region.

One of those, and one of our recent highlights, was the 42m-Euro sale of AceOdds, where we acted for the selling shareholders of their i-gaming business to a large Danish sports media group, Better Collective A/S – a transaction that we were grateful to win the Insider Magazine Deal of the Month award for.

From speaking with our clients, we've found that a significant amount of recent activity has been influenced by some uncertainty surrounding potential changes to capital gains tax rates and Business Asset



Disposal Relief (BADR) in the upcoming Autumn Budget. This has led several of our clients to bring forward their plans and, as a result, we've recently completed a number of transactions ahead of schedule, and we're currently working towards completing a number of MBO's prior to the Budget on 30th October.

Future challenges

So, what should we be looking out for? The Prime Minister has already laid the groundwork for some tax increases after warning the Budget will be "painful", but we don't yet know for certain how "painful" or what those changes will look like.

If some of the rumoured predictions become reality, it could mean higher capital gains tax liabilities for those selling their companies, but we'll obviously need to see what happens on 30th October. I'm sure business owners and professional advisors will all be watching out for further information and announcements in the run-up to the Budget, and we of course don't yet know whether any changes will take effect immediately, or after some sort of grace period, in order to enable sellers to take advantage of current tax rates.

As ever, we'd advise our clients to continue to take specialist advice from all of their professional advisors, whether that be tax, accounting, legal or otherwise, in order to try and best mitigate whatever tax changes are announced next month.

For further information on corporate legal matters, please contact Mark Adams at Hay & Kilner LLP on 0191 232 8345 or via mark.adams@hay-kilner.co.uk

New super "sub-team" capitalises on solicitors' knowledge and experience

Jacksons Law Firm is leading the way in the region when it comes to Insolvency cases.

Jacksons Law Firm is capitalising on the unique experience of two of its staff with the creation of a team dedicated to insolvency law.

Associate solicitor Ellie Honeyman is heading up the new insolvency "sub-team" within the firm's Litigation department, with the goal to build a specialist Insolvency Team on Teesside and in the wider region, capitalising upon the knowledge gained working towards and obtaining the Certificate of Proficiency in Insolvency (CPI).

Ellie is based in the firm's Teesside office on Preston Farm Industrial Estate, but as she will be working alongside her Newcastle colleague Alex Howarth, the firm will cover the whole of the North East of England, from North Yorkshire to Northumberland.

"We generally offer assistance from Yorkshire - particularly given our NFU [National Farmers Union] panel status - all the way up to the North of Newcastle, with a growing presence in the Sunderland market," said Ellie, who joined Jacksons in June 2022 and completed the six-month Certificate of Proficiency in Insolvency course with the firm's support.

"This includes both contentious and non-contentious work, with a deal completed working alongside our Corporate Team being awarded Dealmakers Deal of the Year following the application of another North East firm."

During her course, Ellie attended workshops and lectures and visited a local IP firm, building connections and advertising the firm's expertise at the same time as boosting her knowledge.

This has meant the firm is now well-placed to deliver on personal and corporate insolvency cases, as well as the contentious claims arising out of those insolvency procedures.

Alex Howarth, a solicitor, joined Jacksons' Newcastle office in January 2024. He previously undertook a seat in the Insolvency department at another firm in the region during his training contract and qualified into the sector with another Newcastle firm following qualification. He has found Insolvency to be a really interesting area with a variety of different work.

"Everyday is different and you get to work with lots of different types of clients and people and it is very different to the other areas of law that I have experienced," he said.

"We have advised insolvency practitioners, businesses and individuals on issues relating to liquidation and administration of companies, disputes borne from directors' duties, re-use of business names, personal guarantee litigation and claims against the directors of insolvent companies."

For more information, call Ellie Honeyman on 01642 873749 or Alex Howarth on 0191 731 4936.



An expert's guide to wills, trusts and estates disputes

Newcastle-based law firm, Sintons, is home to the region's largest team of lawyers dedicated to resolving wills, trusts and estates disputes. Headed up by partner, Emma Saunders, the team is also one of the most highly rated in the North, receiving a top tier ranking in both Chambers and the Legal 500.

Here, Emma shares an insight into how a wills, trusts and estates dispute can arise, and how she and her colleagues can help people resolve them.

My colleagues and I specialise in helping people resolve disputes which occur at what can be one of the most difficult times in their life - after the death of a family member or loved one.

The reality is that this type of issue can touch anybody's life, and this is reflected in the huge range of people we work with: everyone from business owners through to farming families; and from people wanting to challenge a will through to people defending a claim.

Challenging a will

One of the most common issues we deal with is when someone wants to challenge the validity of a will. This can happen in any family but often where people have re-married or when there are children, half-siblings and step-siblings involved.

Disputes can happen even when a married couple has each made a will. I'll share a theoretical example: a married couple have both been married before and each have children from their previous marriage. They make wills which specify that on the first person's death, their assets go to their spouse. And on the second person's death, the assets are split between all the children.



The problem is that, after the first death, the surviving spouse can change their will and this could result in the children of the first spouse being excluded.

In a situation like this we can help you understand whether there are grounds to make a challenge – for example, if someone has been unduly influenced to change their will.

Disputes about business assets

I deal with many cases where business assets form part of the estate and this can cause additional complications. With assistance from our corporate team we can advise on the particular issues that arise should there be a disagreement between beneficiaries of the will as to how such assets should be shared out

Assets can also include land and this is something we often see in rural areas, where families may own farmland of significant value.

If you're caught up in a dispute like this we can help you understand what's realistic, what the best route for you to take is, and we can manage negotiations between the parties to the dispute. This often means we can reach an agreement without needing to go to court.

Inheritance Act claims

The Inheritance Act lays out the right for 'reasonable provision' from an estate. This can apply to spouses, co-habiting partners,

children, step-children or those financially maintained by the deceased.

If someone passes away without leaving a valid will, or if a partner or dependent is left out of the will – or receives less than expected – it can be possible to make a claim under the Inheritance Act. If your claim is successful, the estate can be redistributed between the relevant parties.

Again, this is something we can help you manage and we will be able to advise you on how likely a claim is to be successful.

Support during a difficult time

These examples show that anyone can find themselves in the difficult situation of being involved in a wills, trusts or estates dispute.

In the immediate aftermath of bereavement, we know that legal issues are often the last things on people's minds, but, when disputes do come to light, we're very conscious of helping people resolve issues in a sympathetic and sensitive way.

Just this year we've added two new lawyers to our team and Sintons is a full service law firm which means we work very closely with our colleagues who are specialists in advising people on wills, trusts and estates. They can help you protect your assets and minimise the chances of a dispute happening in the first place – but if it does, we will be here to help.

Find out more about Emma Saunders and her colleagues at www.sintons.co.uk

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Air Cadets fly high thanks to Northumberland Freemasons

The 242 (Cramlington) Squadron Royal Air Force Air Cadets have received a generous donation of £4,000 from Northumberland Freemasons. This significant grant has been allocated for the purchase of much-needed adventure training and camping equipment, as well as securing the next 12 months of running costs for the squadron's minibus.

Flight Lieutenant Robert Armstrong, Officer Commanding of 242 (Cramlington) Squadron RAFAC, expressed his gratitude: "We are hugely indebted to Northumberland Freemasons for their generous donation. These initiatives have already had an immediate impact in positively enriching the range and scope of opportunities we are able to offer our Cadets. We were delighted to be the beneficiary of such a significant grant."

The funds have been allocated to two critical areas adventure training and minibus running costs. £3,000 has been designated for the purchase of essential gear to support the Duke of Edinburgh Awards programme. This equipment is vital for the continued success and expansion of the programme where cadets complete activities in Volunteering, Physical, Skill, and Expedition sections, with Gold Award participants also undertaking a week-long residential course.

Head of Northumberland Freemasons, Ian Craigs said: "Our young people are our future, and we are happy to support their expedition planning activities. The work the Air Cadets do will help them to develop both physically and mentally and prepare them for the challenges ahead."

Each year, the Provincial Grand Lodge of Northumberland through the Richard Henry Holmes Masonic Benevolent Fund donates around £160,000 to local charities and good causes including food banks to boost worthwhile and deserving projects throughout Northumberland, Newcastle, and North Tyneside.



From Combat Boots to Camera Clicks

Kim Bainbridge, a Dutch national and former soldier in the Dutch Army, has embarked on a new chapter in her life as a wedding and events photographer. With an extraordinary life story, Kim's journey to photography has been as remarkable as the images she captures.

Born and raised in the Netherlands, Kim joined the Dutch Army at the age of 17, seeking adventure and a chance to explore the world. Her military career took a harrowing turn during a deployment to Bosnia, where she was shot in the head during a firefight. The injury left her in a coma for three months, and it took her three years to recover fully.

Settling down in Newcastle with her new husband, Kim began studying photography, starting with online courses and progressing to formal education through Newcastle City Learning. Her dedication and talent quickly shone through, and she eventually earned a masters and bachelor's degree in fine arts, winning several prestigious awards along the way, including a category award in a Food Photographer of the Year competition twice.

Today, Kim is the in-house photographer at the prestigious Lumley Castle in Chester-le-Street, where she continues to hone her skills and capture the beauty of special occasions. Her unique personal background, which blends military discipline with a love for adventure and art, allows her to bring a fresh and captivating perspective to her work.



Northern Cancer Voices shout out for Volunteers

Northern Cancer Voices, a charity based in South Tyneside and operating across the North East and North Cumbria, is actively seeking new volunteers to join their mission. The charity, led by CEO Tori Bradison, is dedicated to improving cancer services and offering support to anyone impacted by a cancer diagnosis in the region.

"Our goal is to amplify the voices of those affected by cancer," says Tori. "While the medical treatment for cancer is excellent, there can be gaps or areas that need improvement. We listen to people's stories, identify what works well, and highlight areas where services can be enhanced. We ensure that the voices of patients and their families are heard and acted upon."

Northern Cancer Voices was formed in November 2023, born out of Tori's personal experience. In 2019, Tori's mother was diagnosed with lung cancer. Following her mother's passing, she decided to leave her corporate job and dedicate her efforts to improving cancer care, leading to the formation of the charity. Northern Cancer Voices works closely with trusts, GPs, and voluntary sectors across the North East and North Cumbria, aiming to foster better collaboration and improve patient experiences.

Volunteers play a crucial role in gathering feedback from patients and carers, helping to identify what works well and where improvements are needed. They also help in spreading the word about the charity's services and supporting the establishment of new cancer support groups in areas that currently lack them.

To learn more or to get involved, visit Northern Cancer Voices on social media, or contact them directly at info@ northerncancervoices.co.uk

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In Conversation With...

John Percival

General Manager, Wallsend Boys Club & Sporting Wallsend

What were your career ambitions growing up?

I really loved sport (and still do) and wanted to be a PE teacher. I only realised reflecting back how important sport was in my life and gave me the opportunity to gain the skills and friendships I have today.

Tell me about your current role?

I am General Manager at Wallsend Boys Club, I have been in post for five and a half years - huge thank you to *The Michael Carrick Foundation* who have funded and supported the post to enable the organisation to grow and develop.

What is your proudest business achievement?

It has to be raising the capital funds (£1.25 million) to finally build *The Peter Olsen Community Hub.* I have to confess I didn't do it all alone- huge thanks to Nathan Rogerson and the Board of Trustees for their support throughout the four year process!!

What is Sporting Wallsend?

Sporting Wallsend builds on the work, ethos and developmental approaches of Wallsend Boys Club (which remains) at the centre of operations...its a community hub for all, inspiring the community to be happier and healthier.

How has the charity sector changed in the last 10 years?

I believe the charity sector has had to modernise, adapt and be more flexible. Ways of generating revenue have changed - no longer reliant on local authority grants/ commissioning, funding becoming more tough but the need is increasing! Working together in collaboration rather than competition is a must. Demonstrating impact and worth to influence decision makers and the power of the sector.

What are you currently working on?

We have just come off the back of an awesome summer programme - providing activities to local children. We averaged 83 children per week who accessed football, surfing, cricket, arts, crafts, drumming workshops and circus skills! Not only that they met new friends and tried new activities for the 1st time, a summer programme we are really proud of!



It doesn't stop there - *The Peter Olsen Community Hub* is celebrating our 1st birthday and we have launched a brand new exciting programme of activity to keep our local community happy, healthy and active. You can check out our new timetables on our socials.

How important are grass roots sports?

Vital! We are celebrating our 120th year, that's 120 years of being a constant regular face for generations and generations, offering a safe space and trusted relationships for children to thrive, explore their passions, meet new friends, gain skills for life! We are deep rooted in communities and provide open access provision, activities for local children and families.

Tell us about the team you work with.

We have a very small and hard working team that keeps the wheels turning here at Kirkley Park. Our facilities are absolutely fantastic and a huge amount of credit goes to the team for ensuring that it is all possible.

Our strapline is 'more than football' beyond the gates of Kirkley Park we deliver after school sessions to local primary school children ensuring that children have access to physical activity

In addition, we are so lucky to have a large

army of volunteers who give up their time each week to ensure girls and boys are able to play football - without them we wouldn't have a club.

The unsung heroes...our board of trustees who behind the scenes set the strategic direction and drive the organisation forward to ensure that we have the best facilities in the North East.

What's the best bit of advice you've been given?

Not sure if its advice, my motto/mantra to life is 'it's nice to be nice'.

Who are your heroes?

Oooooo tough question...Not sure I can pin down a specific hero - however, I am proud of my working class upbringing and background, I believe it has given me the values I like to demonstrate each day.

How can people get involved with Sporting Wallsend?

Come along to one of our activities, tell a pal about our purpose built hub, help spread the word... and follow us on socials.

www.sportingwallsend.co.uk @sportingwallsend



Darlington morris dancers spreading the word with Moor House Wind Farm fund backing

A longstanding Darlington morris dancing group is aiming to get more local people involved with their traditional pastime after receiving a four-figure grant from a renewable energy firm.

The Sadberge-based Locos in Motion Border Morris, which recently celebrated its 25th anniversary, performs regularly at festivals and galas around the region, as well as making weekly appearances outside different pubs across the local area through the summer months.

The fifteen-strong group of musicians and dancers holds practice sessions at Sadberge Village Hall on Tuesday evenings from September to April - and it is now planning to hold an open workshop on Saturday 9 November at Sadberge Village Hall for anyone interested in giving morris dancing a try.

A £2,427 grant from the community fund linked to OnPath Energy's nearby Moor House Wind Farm is set to cover the cost of publicising and putting on the workshop, as well as the group's hall hire costs for the next year.



Killingworth Church's facilities boosted by Banks Community Fund Grant

An historic North Tyneside church's plans to improve the facilities it can offer to the local community have won the backing of North East employer the Banks Group.

St John's Church in Killingworth is undertaking a major building improvement project which will see a new kitchen and bathroom installed in the building, alongside a new entrance and more storage areas being created. The church's listed organ is also to be refurbished.

The Grade II listed building is used by a wide range of church and community groups, but doesn't currently have its own kitchen and bathroom facilities, meaning visitors have to use those in the separate church hall if they're required.

A fundraising campaign has been ongoing for some time, and it has now been boosted by a £1,000 grant from the Banks Community Fund.

The church committee is continuing to look for further project funding, with a view to starting building work in spring next year, and it is hoping that the new facilities will encourage more local people and groups to make use of the building in the future.

St John's Church was originally built in 1869, and serves the communities of Killingworth, Killingworth Village, Westmoor, Palmersville and Holystone.

Charity golf day raises vital funds for Butterwick Hospice

A charity golf day raised over £10,000 for a Hospice which has been supporting people across Teesside and County Durham for 40 years

The event, for Butterwick Hospice, was sponsored by family-owned Croxdale Group Durham, which has been providing motorists in the region with an array of high-quality vehicles and services since 1967. The golf day took place at Ramside Hall, featuring 16 teams playing on the Cathedral Course - and has been hailed a great success by everyone involved.

Events such as these are vital for Butterwick Hospice, as it costs more than £7,000 per day to deliver the Hospice's many services. It provides holistic care for children and adults living with a life-limiting illness. The charity is also a great source of help and support to their families and loved ones.



Speaking of the successful day, Helen, senior fundraiser, said everyone enjoyed their golf – despite the windy weather!

"Afterwards, when we all met in the clubhouse to enjoy a well-earned carvery and dessert, we received lots of positive comments about what a great day it had been," Helen said. "This was my first golf

day, which I loved organising coming from a family of golfers - I just wish I could have captured the atmosphere in a video for the team, with everyone laughing and enjoying themselves."

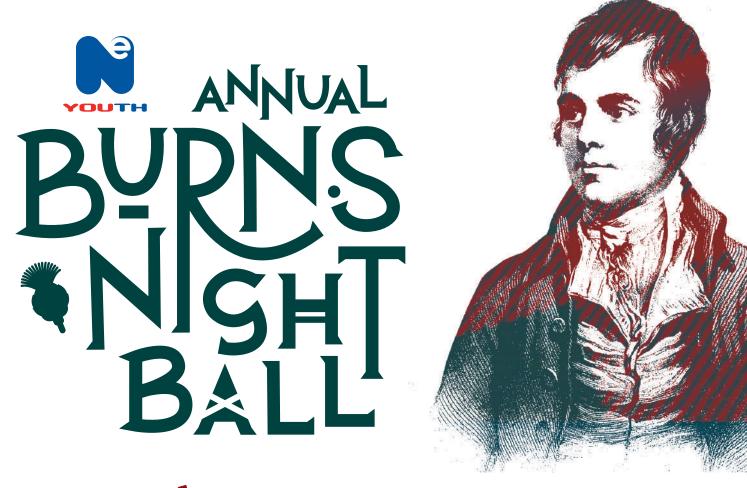
A team put forward by Taylor Wimpey were the victors on the day, followed by runners-up Smith & Friends.



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Charity of the Month

This month Northern Insight talks to...

Jane Deana Dennison

CEO, Dragonfly Cancer Trust

Why was the charity formed?

Dragonfly Cancer Trust was founded to support young cancer patients, from birth to 25 years old, who are facing the most challenging and terminal stages of their illness. We provide cash gifts, bespoke memory-making services, and sibling support to families navigating the unimaginable. The charity was created to ensure that no young person or family facing terminal cancer is left without the resources and emotional support to create lasting memories together.

Which area do you cover?

We are a UK-based charity supporting young cancer patients and their families nationwide. We work closely with hospitals, hospices, and healthcare professionals across the country to reach those who need our support the most.

What type of fundraising events do you have?

Our fundraising activities are diverse, ranging from community events to large-scale campaigns. Some of our key initiatives include the annual Big Give campaign, various charity runs including the Great North Run, our annual Dragonfly Ball which takes place on October 12th at The Biscuit Factory in Newcastle, corporate partnerships, and the support of donors through creative fundraising challenges. Each year, we encourage supporters to host their own events, whether they're fun runs, bake sales, or virtual fundraising efforts.

Who are your trustees and patrons?

Our trustees and patrons include individuals who are deeply committed to supporting young cancer patients and their families. Our board consists of professionals from a variety of sectors who share a passion for the cause. We also have patrons who help raise awareness and amplify our message. Each trustee and patron plays a vital role in guiding the charity's direction and ensuring we continue to make a meaningful impact.

What have been your proudest moments so far?

Our proudest moments have been when we've been able to bring comfort to families during the most difficult of times. Some highlights include launching our sibling box project, expanding our cash gift program, and seeing the overwhelming support during campaigns like the Big Give. One of our recent milestones was the social media success of Ian Lamberts' world record attempt, which helped elevate our charity's profile and increased engagement across platforms.

What are you currently working on?

We're currently focused on expanding the reach of our sibling boxes, improving the awareness of our services, and building stronger corporate partnerships. We are also working to develop new designs for our sibling boxes, ensuring they provide meaningful, comforting support. Our team is engaging with communities and donors to sustain the growth and impact of our services across different regions of the UK.

What does the future hold?

The future holds exciting possibilities for Dragonfly Cancer Trust. We aim to break barriers to service awareness, ensuring every eligible young person and family knows about and can access our support. We are focused on sustainable growth, diversifying our income streams, and enhancing our services. Our efforts to elevate visibility, collaborate with more corporate partners, and engage volunteers will help us continue to meet the evolving needs of young people facing a life-limiting cancer diagnoses.

How do you get involved?

There are many ways to get involved with Dragonfly Cancer Trust. You can participate in our fundraising events, volunteer your time, or become an ambassador or trustee for our cause. We welcome individual supporters, corporate sponsors, and community groups who share our mission of bringing comfort to young cancer patients and their families. Whether it's making a donation, hosting a fundraising event, or simply sharing our message, every action makes a difference.

dragonflycancertrust.org



Stress and anxiety at work. Sound familiar?

Chances are it does, because 1 in 6 of us in the workplace experience mental health challenges every year.

Of course, the problem with stress and anxiety is that other people probably don't spot anything or even suspect that someone is having problems.

It can be very easy to bottle-up stress and anxiety in the workplace and take the problem home where it can affect that person's private life, relationships, sleep patterns and general health and wellbeing. You likely know someone who has been affected by these challenges, and many try to cope in silence. Tragically, some stories end in the loss of life.

There are two things to consider. How to help those people who are struggling with their mental health...and how to stop it occurring in the first place.

A great idea would be to speak to the experts at Talk Works.

Talk Works was founded by Clinical Psychologist and current Clinical Director, Dr Jennifer Cottam in March 2014. It has continued to scale and is now the first BCorp certified mental health consultancy in the UK. They offer rapid access to therapy and advice to individuals and companies with the aim of helping individuals to recover from mental ill health, and for firms to develop wellbeing practices that prevent the development of mental ill health in the first place.

"We are a clinically led organisation that supports individuals and companies with a tailored approach to preventative and intervention services" says Talk Works MD, Helen Wilkinson. "We offer a range of talking therapy services and there is no waiting list for our service, so we can support private individuals or employees quickly, when they need it".

"We work with major organisations including the North East Ambulance Service, Newcastle United, the NHS and leading automotive suppliers that support their staff through our therapy and mental health education services".

Employees are your company's most important asset. A skilled employee is extremely difficult to replace so it's worth ensuring that they are content because they are the heart of your

business. While every job has its pressures, supporting your staff with their mental health is not only the right thing to do for employees, but it can also positively impact the company's bottom line.

"We want people to thrive and fulfil their potential in the workplace, and lead happier lives outside of it" says Dr Jennifer Cottam. "That's why we work in partnership with business leaders, HR and Occupational Health teams to help them build happy, healthy and resilient teams".

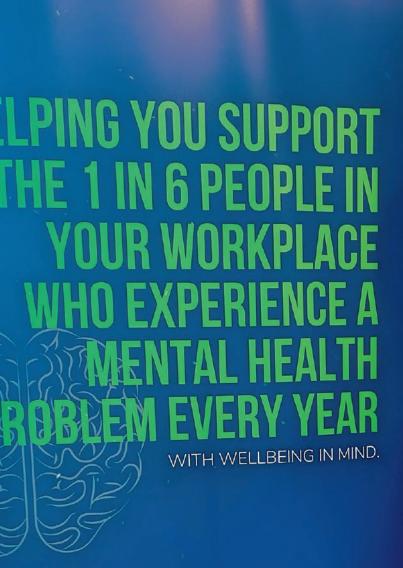
The educational workshops which Talk Works offers companies can be tailored to meet their needs. They also offer online, self-paced mental health awareness courses.

Talk Works MD Helen Wilkinson explains "We have a team of ten core staff at our Gateshead headquarters, and a network of more than 40 associates across the region and nationwide. Our small but mighty team are also B-Corp certified... the only mental health consultancy in the UK to achieve this recognition.

If this resonates with you and you'd like some personal help, or you own or run a business and would like to enhance the support offered in your workforce, then you can contact Talk Works by email talktous@talk-works.org.uk or call 0191 490 9301.

You can also find out more information by visiting www.talk-works.org.uk

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Improving Mental Health today for a better future tomorrow



Improving the mental health of our region

How community mental health support is tackling the mental health crisis in the North East. An interview with Adam Crampsie, Chief Executive at Everyturn Mental Health.

The latest data on suicide rates from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) is showing an alarming trend – with registered deaths from suicide in England and Wales reaching its highest level since 1999.

Though the North East of England no longer has the highest suicide rate in the country, in 2023 it still saw a 15% increase in people choosing to end their lives.

To respond to this ongoing crisis, Everyturn Mental Health, a non-profit organisation based in Newcastle upon Tyne, has increased and varied its mental health crisis services through innovation and partnerships to ensure no one struggles alone.

We spoke to Everyturn's Chief Executive, Adam Crampsie, to explore how Everyturn is developing these services and the role that community organisations have to play in the long-term ambition of improving the mental health of our region.

Tell us a bit about Everyturn and its mission.

We're proud to be a close partner of the NHS, working hand in hand with our health and social care colleagues to support people and communities with their mental health.

Our services are designed around the needs of the people we support, we're proud to offer high-quality, integrated mental health and wellbeing care, including a range of crisis support that puts people and communities at the heart of their care.





Following the most recent ONS suicide rate data, how is Everyturn responding from the North East?

Those statistics were heartbreaking. Demand for crisis mental health support is only increasing; we've seen a 30% rise in referrals to our services since pre-pandemic, and we know that people's life circumstances play a big role in their crisis. This year alone, we've already supported over 4,000 people in crisis, 50% of whom said financial pressures were the cause of their distress.

At Everyturn, we're taking a transformative approach to suicide prevention, by developing comprehensive support that tackles the practical issues that are pushing people into crisis.

You recently opened a space in Ashington, tell us more about the Safe Havens and how they work.

The Safe Haven in Ashington is the first of its kind in the North East, and it's our way of putting mental health support on the high street. Many members of our Safe Haven team have their own lived experience of mental ill-health, so they know what it feels like; they offer immediate support to people who need help with anything from finances, and housing, to relationship issues.

The Safe Haven is open 2 pm-10 pm, 365 days a year, and people can just drop in –

no appointment is needed, though we're delighted that many GPs have been referring their patients to us.

Since its opening, hundreds of people have been supported by our Safe Haven, and its impact has allowed us to work on a second site in Newcastle city centre to open later this year, with a third planned for 2025.

How important is working with other organisations to create a better patient experience for the population?

We saw in the Darzi Report on the state of the NHS that working together is essential to meet the challenges faced by our health and social care system. We collaborate with many partners and organisations in our services across the country, working flexibly and creatively to take pressure off overstretched services like NHS crisis teams, A&E, and local police forces.

Ultimately, we want to make it easier for people to access mental health support in their local communities and give them the power to shape their services based on their needs.

To learn more about Everyturn Mental Health, and the services provided in the North East and across England, visit the website: www.everyturn.org



Tiny Lives Trust announces ambitious new five-year strategy

Tiny Lives Trust, a charity dedicated to supporting premature and sick newborn babies, has announced its new five-year strategy.

The strategy outlines three key impact goals for the coming five years. These goals include a focus on supporting babies and families to flourish during the first 1,001 days and beyond, ensuring that babies and families with experience of neonatal care are understood and supported by those providing services, and championing neonatal care as a key driver of positive health and social outcomes in the North East and North Cumbria.

Kelly Blakeney, Chief Executive Officer at Tiny Lives Trust said, "Recently Tiny Lives celebrated our 10th anniversary as an independent charity and over this time we have helped thousands of families during the most difficult of times.

"We are launching our new five-year strategy that will allow us to give even more sick and premature babies in the North East and North Cumbria the best possible opportunity to thrive. Families are at the heart of everything that we do and our future focus will see us deepening our relationship with the Royal Victoria Infirmary (RVI) hospital, as well as working to support even more families, including those families who are currently underrepresented within our service. The first 1,001 days, from conception to age two, are fundamental to a child's lifelong emotional and physical wellbeing and we want to play a defining role in supporting premature and sick newborn babies and their families during this critical period.

This strategy is the result of months of collaboration and consultation with families, supporters, staff, and board members and reflects what we want to achieve, how we will prioritise our activities and resources, and how we will know if it's working."

With eight out of the 10 local authorities in the UK with the highest rates of child poverty in the North East and Cumbria, the support that Tiny Lives Trust provides to families spending time on the neonatal ward is needed more than ever.

www.tinylives.org.uk

The Three Tumours Team Triumphs at the Great North Run

The 2024 Great North Run was a resounding success for The Three Tumours team, a group of runners brought together by a shared mission: raising awareness and funds for brain tumour research.

Among the runners was Claire Downs, who raised £731. Claire, chairperson of The Three Tumours charity, ran to honour her late husband, Graydon. After losing him last year, Claire has taken up the mantle, passionately working to support families impacted by tumours. Her dedication has inspired many. Johnny Pringle, who raised £500, ran in memory of his dear friend, Graydon. "Graydon fought valiantly against this illness, and now it's our turn to fight hard for a cure," he shared.

Ben Mullen, who raised £545, echoed this sentiment. Running for Graydon, one of his best mates, Ben said, "I may not be a natural runner, but if Graydon could fight for years, then I can manage a poxy 13 miles!"

Brothers Tom and Jake raised a remarkable £2,190. Tom, who was diagnosed with a brain tumour in January 2023, ran following surgery and ongoing chemotherapy. "We want to raise research and awareness funds to help support others going through similar challenges," Tom explained.

In addition to these incredible efforts, many other runners supported The Three Tumours

charity on the day. Their contributions, dedication, and commitment did not go unnoticed. Together, the team raised an impressive £4,216, which will go towards advancing brain tumour research and supporting families.

A heartfelt thank you goes out to everyone who ran and supported The Three Tumours charity at the Great North Run. Your efforts are making a lasting difference!









One night to change lives

A charity has urged the North East business community to 'spend onenight changing lives' ahead of its busiest fundraising period of the year.

Since launching in Teesside back in 2013, CEO Sleepout has raised over £4.5m to combat homelessness and poverty across Britain.

In October, the charity will stage two major sleepouts in Sunderland and Darlington. The events are expected to raise tens of thousands of pounds for local causes dealing with the North East's worsening homelessness crisis.

For CEO Bianca Robinson, it promises to be a busy – and very cold – period, with nine different sleepouts nationally between October and November.

However, she's called on fundraisers to sign up for one of the two North East events to help the growing number of people in the region "on the brink" of homelessness.

"Over 300,000 people in the UK are currently homeless, and the cost-of-living crisis means many more are in grave danger of losing the roof over their heads," said Bianca.

"In the North East, the situation is dire. The charities we assist and work on the frontline



face unprecedented demand, often from people with jobs and young families to support."

Recently, an investigation by CEO Sleepout cast a light on the full-scale of the North East's problem.

Figures obtained by the charity via the Freedom of Information Act revealed that, in Newcastle, homelessness applications are up 36 per cent year-on-year while in Northumberland, requests for temporary accommodation have trebled in just two years.

Additionally, around 3,300 North East adults under the age of 24 are currently eligible for help due to either being homeless or facing the threat of it.

For perspective, that's enough to fill Gateshead's Glasshouse International Centre for Music twice over.

Against that backdrop, CEO Sleepout's current message is stark and simple:

Nobody's safe.

"Teachers, 999 workers, and NHS staff are among the professionals turning to food banks simply to feed their families. That's frightening, as these are skilled people with careers that would have once given them complete security," added Bianca.

"For the people we rely on to even be struggling to eat is a disgrace. Unfortunately, the situation is getting worse rather than better, and it is often up to the third sector to try and fix it."

And with winter edging nearer, Bianca hopes the public will again find it in them to help the region's most vulnerable.

She's urging people to either donate or, even better, grab a sleeping bag and brave a night under the stars. It may be uncomfortable, she admits, but it is unquestionably memorable – and has the power to help improve lives.

"There's a reason people return every year to participate in our sleepouts, and it isn't the conditions!" added Bianca.

"We can't guarantee good weather, but the atmosphere is fantastic, and the stories you will hear will stay with you forever.

"And we can guarantee that the money raised will make a difference, supporting those who need it the most. Both the Sunderland and Darlington sleepouts are incredible events, and the more of us who take part, the more difference we can make."

The Sunderland CEO Sleepout takes place at the Stadium of Light on November 7.

The Darlington CEO Sleepout takes place on November 18 at The Northern Echo Arena, in Mowden Park.

For more information, ceosleepout.co.uk





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Work Culture: The path to success!

A winning company culture ensures your business is on the path to success, your people are key - to attract and retain your top talent make sure your workplace is top notch!

2024's rapidly evolving business landscape insists on cultivating an inclusive culture and a flexible and engaged workforce.

What is work culture? well it's your shared set of values, beliefs and attitudes that guide your business and is reflected in how you work with your clients and how you treat your employees. It also impacts upon the types of candidates you want to attract. Having a strong work culture boosts your productivity, decreases turnover and improves employee engagement Did you know...

- If your culture is perceived as positive by your employees, they are 5% more likely to refer your business to family and friends?
- During the candidate application journey if your culture is perceived as negative 77% of people will not apply.

Creating and maintaining such an environment requires concerted efforts from both leaders and employees. Consider, what is the Sunday night vibe for your team members? How do they feel the night before they come to work in your business? What does it feel like to be at work, every business has its personality, atmosphere and their "way".

If you feel that your culture might need a little development, there are things that can be done. Start your culture health check by considering these factors:

- Values. Lay out your values, ensure these are communicated and embedded to ensure both leaders and all employees embrace and reflect them in their daily actions and decisions
- Inclusivity. An inclusive culture is where all employees feel valued, respected and empowered to bring their unique perspectives and skills. Inclusivity is not just about diversity, it is about creating an environment where everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed and be heard. Research consistently demonstrates diverse



teams are outperforming their less diverse counterparts.

- Flexibility. The role of flexibility in the workplace is an increasingly key factor in employee satisfaction, a successful culture, and retention. Remote work, flexible hours, and the ability to adjust schedules is a huge factor when considering job satisfaction, increased productivity and lower staff turnover rates.
- Talent Development. Investing in employee training and development is crucial for retaining top talent and ensuring that team members remain engaged and committed to your organisation. Continuous learning opportunities not only benefits the employee, but the employer too and contributes to overall success. When employees see that their employer is invested in growth and development, they are more likely to stay with the company long term.
- Psychological safety. In a thriving culture no one ever feels nervous to share ideas, questions, concerns or mistakes. A conscious effort is required from leadership to always

encourage open communication and actively listen to employees with empathy and respect.

Culture is not the sole responsibility of a business owner, it's the collective responsibility of the team. As a leader you should not dictate your culture, as much as you wish to steer it, but safeguard it fiercely, like you would any other key investment.

Watch your culture as it evolves and matures over time and be sure to keep your finger on the pulse to ensure that it is inclusive, open, flexible and developing effectively.

Building a positive workplace culture is a continuous journey that requires the commitment and participation of everyone in the organisation. Together, a conducive work environment that promotes growth, satisfaction, and success can be established, making your business not just a place to work but a place to thrive!

Interested to find out how Talentheads can support you in your drive for a thriving workplace? Then give us a call on 0191 300 8688 or email hello@talentheads.co.uk





Our unique approach offers a truly different and comprehensive evaluation framework to strengthen your organisation from the inside out. Groups that practice inclusive leadership and inclusive recruitment will have by default naturally inclusive workplaces and therefore, diverse and high performing workplaces.

Increasing diversity on both a leadership and board level is vital to ensure effective, highperforming and collaborative teams which in turn foster innovation, improve decision-making, and can better represent their stakeholders. Inclusive Executive teams and Boards are essential to securing inclusive leadership, inclusive recruitment, and diverse, high-performing teams.

To start your journey towards a more inclusive, more just and more effective workplace contact our Managing Director, James Carss, on james.carss@castlepeak-group.com







The Remote Working Dilemma

Bryony Gibson, director of Bryony Gibson Consulting, delves into the rising trend for returning to full-office work and questions whether it's time to follow suit.

The past four years have seen an unprecedented acceleration in remote working. Initially driven by necessity, businesses have transitioned to new operating models, relying more on technology than in-person interactions.

Post-pandemic, with the job market facing an acute talent shortage, companies continued to embrace flexibility to attract and retain top talent, turning it into a key selling point. Fast forward to 2024, and we are witnessing a new shift in the power dynamic: 64% of professional services firms no longer advertise fully remote roles.

Why move back to the office?

In-person working offers undeniable advantages that are difficult to replicate in a fully remote setting. For example, company culture thrives when people physically interact. Office environments also improve communication, foster spontaneous creativity, and, from an employer's perspective, make performance monitoring easier for managers.

A recent study found that a quarter of professional services firms have increased the number of mandatory office days, with 20% considering a return to the pre-pandemic norms of four or five days on-site per week.

With high-profile brands like Meta, Disney, Starbucks, and Amazon leading the change, it is easy to assume this trend will be widely adopted. But is it the right move for every

Mixed reactions from employees

Returning to full-time office work is not without its critics. The majority of people I speak with have embraced the flexibility that remote work gives them and, for some, it has transformed how they manage both their personal and professional lives.

Forcing a return to the office risks alienating a significant portion of the workforce, leading to potential dissatisfaction, increased stress, and even staff turnover.

Flexibility is proven to boost morale and productivity, largely by eliminating time-consuming commutes and allowing individuals to create schedules that work best for them. It also opens the door to a wider talent pool, where companies can hire skilled professionals without being limited by geographical location.

The Dilemma: Flexibility vs. Control

For employers, the challenge lies in finding the right balance. While the case for full-time

personal interaction is strong, especially for new hires integrating into a company's culture, an all-or-nothing approach has the potential to backfire with people who have restructured their lives around remote working.

A one-size-fits-all approach rarely works, particularly when it comes to an inclusive and diverse workforce. Rather than a blanket approach, firms should be looking to strike a balance. To explore a hybrid model that meets both business and employee needs.

Flexible working doesn't have to compromise accountability or productivity. It's about making sure that employees have the autonomy to work in a way that suits them, while also ensuring that the collaborative, creative, and spontaneous benefits of office work remain accessible.

At the end of the day, people are your biggest asset and happy employees are motivated employees. Making sure they are fulfilled is the key to long-term business success.

The path forward

Adaptability is key to thriving in this new landscape. Businesses that take a rigid approach risk alienating employees, while those who embrace flexibility and balance are likely to succeed.

Instead of fixing set office days across the board, companies should remain open. The future lies in fluid strategies that respond to the unique needs of their team and business.

Finding the equilibrium will not only improve productivity but strengthen employee retention and attract top-tier talent in what remains a competitive marketplace.

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

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Understanding the benefits of Chiropractic Care

Chiropractic care is often associated primarily with back pain, but its benefits extend far beyond that. As a chiropractor, my primary aim is to ensure that your body functions optimally by addressing any misalignments in the spine which can affect your nervous system. These misalignments can lead to a range of issues, such as headaches, neck pain, sciatica, and even digestive problems. When the spine is out of alignment, the body can't communicate appropriately with itself, which may cause discomfort and dysfunction.

Through chiropractic adjustments, we help restore proper spine alignment, improving overall body function. Many patients are surprised to find that chiropractic care can also assist with conditions like migraines and joint pain and improve overall body health. The benefits aren't just reactive, though. Regular chiropractic treatments can also be preventative, helping you avoid future issues by maintaining the proper alignment of your spine.

Chiropractic care can also enhance flexibility, improve posture, and boost general well-being. Whether you're dealing with chronic pain or want to maintain a healthy lifestyle, chiropractic care can be a valuable part of your health regimen. At Gosforth



Chiropractic, we believe in a personalised approach tailored to each patient's specific needs. We use gentle, non-invasive techniques to treat a range of conditions and ensure you feel at ease during your treatment. Dr Jacob Palmer graduated from Life University, a leading Chiropractic training college in Georgia, USA, and has been practising Chiropractic care for 6 years. He specialises in paediatric chiropractic, which involves the care of newborns with conditions ranging from colic to constipation, acid reflux and trapped wind, lack of movement and breastfeeding challenges. Chiropractic is also an option for pregnant women right up until birth.

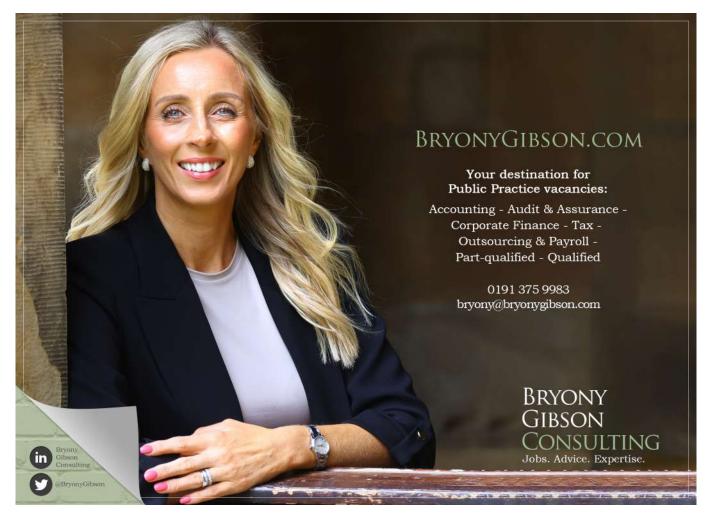
If you've never considered chiropractic care

before or are unsure whether it's right for you, we're happy to offer a consultation to discuss how chiropractic adjustments can help you achieve your health goals. Whether you're recovering from an injury, managing pain, or looking to improve your overall wellness, chiropractic care may offer the relief you've been seeking.

If you are in need of any chiropractic services for your family, then we're on hand to help.

www.gosforthfamilychiropractic.com E:care@gosforthfamilychiropractic.com T: 07888 864860

The Grainger Suite, Dobson House, Regent Centre, Newcastle Upon Tyne, NE33 3PF



What's in a Title?

A year ago, I made a significant and challenging decision: I told my family that my husband of 15 years and I were separating.

Fast forward to now, I find myself navigating life as a divorced woman, having sold our house and stepped into a new chapter. This journey has been one of emotional upheaval, but it has also involved a surprising amount of paperwork. Over the past 12 months, I've filled out countless forms, and one peculiar detail has stood out more than any other. The insistence on choosing a title.

Every time I encounter a form, I'm met with a mandatory field that requires me to define my identity as either Miss, Mrs, or Ms. This requirement strikes me as profoundly limiting and outdated. Why must my identity be linked to my marital status? Why can't I simply be Kathryn?

It's a curious reflection of how society often insists on defining women through their relationships with men. The title I chose feels like a label that reduces my identity to my past—a relic of a bygone era that fails to capture the complexities of who I am today. While I could jokingly select a title like Lady or Baroness, it underscores a more serious issue: why should I even be required to provide a title at all? For the vast majority of forms I fill out, my title serves no meaningful purpose and only complicates an otherwise straightforward process.

In an age where we strive for inclusivity and understanding, it seems counterintuitive that many forms still adhere to this archaic norm. If forms can include options like "prefer not to say," then why can't there be a "no title" drop-down or make the title field optional altogether? Such a change would reflect a more modern understanding of identity—one that celebrates individuality rather than conformity to outdated conventions.

This is not just a personal grievance; it's an issue that resonates with many. In a world increasingly focused on diversity and inclusion, the requirement to specify a title can feel like a relic of the past. When we fill out forms, we often do so to engage with



institutions or services, and our identity should not be defined by a title that feels irrelevant to the purpose of the form.

As I continue my journey, I find myself reflecting on how our identities are multifaceted and how they should not be reduced to a title. The insistence on marital labels can be particularly alienating for those who are single, divorced, or widowed. For individuals navigating complex life changes, such as separation or loss, being forced to choose a title can serve as a painful reminder of a past that may no longer align with their current identity.

If you are part of a business or organisation that collects data online, consider the implications of asking for a title. Do you truly need this information? If so, why? It's time for businesses to re-evaluate their data collection practices and move towards a more inclusive approach. By removing unnecessary requirements and allowing individuals to define themselves on their own terms, we can foster a sense of empowerment and respect.

As I navigate this new chapter of my life, I invite you to join me in advocating for change. Let's challenge the norms that dictate how we identify ourselves and work towards a future where individuals are recognised for who they are, not merely by the titles they are assigned based on their

Follow my journey on LinkedIn and support this cause by signing the petition through the QR code provided. Together, we can advocate for a society that embraces individuality and acknowledges the richness of our diverse identities. Let's redefine how we perceive ourselves and each other, moving away from outdated labels and embracing the complexity of who we truly are.

face2facehr.com





Going for Gold

I think we can all agree it's been a sensational summer of sporting triumphs across Europe with the Euros, Olympics and Paralympics.

But from a human resource perspective there was one clear stand out gold medallist this summer which you may not have noticed.

The innovation and creativity of the Italian giants, AC MILAN made them my standout human resource winners, and this is why...

In short, they are the very first club in Europe to guarantee contract renewals for players who become pregnant in the final year of their deals. Their brilliant and creative approach with their policies and procedures in introducing this groundbreaking maternity policy also includes

help with childcare and expenses for their children and companion.

Can you imagine how this will positively impact on their recruitment and retention efforts?

What I personally love is that it's actual real proactive action which demonstrates their genuine commitment to equality, diversity and inclusivity. This is not just a tick box exercise, this is a real commitment to change their culture and undoubtedly challenge their competitors.

This will also impact on productivity by highlighting professionalism on and off the pitch.

What policy can you improve and introduce to ensure your team is fitter, stronger, happier and at their most loyal for the coming season?

If you want to recruit and retain the very best, then think differently, break away from the norm and maybe, just maybe it is your company everyone is talking about being at the top of the league...

You can email Hayley on hayley@theefficientelephant. co.uk or call her on 07739985959.

Employers face new obligations to combat sexual harassment

Are employers prepared for the upcoming Worker Protection amendment to the Equality Act 2010 that comes into force on 26th October?

This puts a duty on employers to take "reasonable steps" to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace. It also means that compensation awarded at tribunals will be up to 25% higher if this not done.

"Do we not already have a duty to prevent sexual harassment?", you may say. This is true, but the new obligations mean that employers will need to be more proactive in preventing sexual harassment, rather than purely reacting, for example, if a complaint is received.

This heightened duty follows a survey in 2020 which, quite shockingly, showed that 29% of people had experienced some form of sexual harassment in the last 12 months, with some distinct minority groups (16-25 year-olds, LGBT employees, people with severe disabilities) subject to markedly higher levels. This, in combination, with low levels of reporting and ineffective outcomes, showed the existing measures was not successful in addressing the issue.

What does the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) say about it?

- Make sure you have a specific antiharassment policy which is wellcommunicated.
- Engage staff by making them aware of



what harassment is and how to report it.

- Assess risks and take steps to address them.
- Have an effective reporting system.
- Train staff and managers.
- Ensure it is clear what to do if a complaint is made.

This may seem quite onerous but being prepared is the key to compliance with the new duty and ensuring you are protecting your staff.

How can you get prepared?

The first thing to do is review your current policies. Do they include specific anti-

harassment processes? If not, you need to add some.

Next, training. Ensure that all those responsible for managing the reporting processes are aware of their responsibility and understand the new rules.

Finally, be open and clear with your workforce. Ensure everyone know what is expected of them - and what they can do if they experience, or witness, sexual harassment in the workplace.

Also remember that, although women are those most often affected, sexual harassment can be experienced by any gender. The legislation and the steps you take to address it, apply to all.

At the time of writing, the new draft Employment Rights Bill is due to be presented to Parliament in October and this is expected to further strengthen this duty. This may include reintroduction of the original proposal to oblige employers to take "all reasonable steps", instead of "reasonable steps", and an additional specific requirement to protect against sexual harassment from third parties.

If you require any help with rewriting your policies, training your staff or managing your culture, HR Dept are here to help.

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



North Tyneside Business Forum delves deep to explore the inner workings of the Tyne Tunnels



It was a definite case of tunnel vision in a unique fact-finding visit when members of the North Tyneside Business Forum, and representatives from local businesses Cybit and Insulcon Technical, had the rare opportunity to explore the Tyne Tunnels, one of the region's critical infrastructure assets.

The delegation was given a comprehensive guided tour that provided an in-depth look at the operations that keep the tunnel functioning smoothly. The visit included stops at the bustling contact centre, where customer enquiries are efficiently managed, and the control room, equipped with an extensive array of CCTV monitors. The group also gained insight into the advanced safety equipment that ensures the safety of travellers and the smooth flow of traffic.

Michael James, Chair of North Tyneside Business Forum, expressed his admiration for the operations: "When you drive through the tunnel, you don't really appreciate what it takes to run the business. I was very impressed with the safety features in place, and I enjoyed walking down the escape corridor as not many people have been privileged to see that." The visitors also heard about the company's sustainability policy and its pioneering work with the local community.

Chris Evans MD of Insulcon Technical also shared his thoughts: "As an engineering company ourselves, I was delighted to see behind the scenes at the infrastructure that helps keep the region moving."

Insulcon Technical won last year's North Tyneside Business of the year award and entries are now open for this year's awards. Now in its 27th year, the North Tyneside Business Awards are once again organised by the North Tyneside Business Forum, and will take place on Thursday, 14th November at the Village Hotel, Cobalt Park, North Tyneside. The awards are in partnership with North Tyneside Council and will be hosted by BBC Radio Newcastle presenter Anna Foster.

Applications are being accepted online at www.northtynesidebusinessawards.co.uk and the nomination process is also open for the popular Heart of the Community Award and nominations can be made at northtynesidebusinessawards.co.uk/nominate

The closing date for all categories is midnight 6th September 2024.

The North Tyneside Business Forum is run by a management group made up of members from various industry sectors in the Borough and gives support in the form of networking, events and signposting for growth and development. Membership is free and open to any business of any size with a trading address within North Tyneside. The Business Forum is supported by, but not run by North Tyneside Council.

The Forum is FREE to join and is for any business with a trading address in North Tyneside.

E: business.forum@northtyneside.gov.uk www.northtynesidebusinessforum.org.uk T:0191 643 6000



On Empowerment: Trust and they will deliver!

Empowerment is a word I hear leaders use often. It sounds grand and has good intentions, enabling team members to make decisions, take ownership of areas and grow in their role. Great leaders do this easily, it's part of their DNA. But so many more don't. They think that it means something else, often due to never having an effective role model who has empowered them.

Instead I see what a colleague calls 'seagull management'. This is where a leader delegates a task with no expectations setting, coaching, follow up or communication. They leave the person alone until something doesn't go as they wished. Then they 'swoop' in and take over, crushing the poor person who is trying to figure out what went wrong. So how then can we avoid this happening?

What is Empowerment?

Empowerment in the workplace goes beyond delegation. It involves giving individuals the autonomy, freedom, and resources to make decisions and take action. True empowerment means trusting your team to handle tasks without constant oversight, relinquishing control over how things are done, and enabling people to grow by providing them with the necessary tools and support.

This concept hinges on a few key behaviours: trust, relinquishing control, enabling growth, and removing judgment. When leaders truly empower their people, they allow them the space to explore, learn, and even fail.

This means creating an environment where team members feel safe to try new approaches without fear of judgment or blame. Importantly, empowerment is not about abandoning your team to figure things out on their own. Instead, it's about giving them "freedom within a framework"; a set of agreed-upon guidelines that ensure both leader and team member understand the expectations and boundaries. This fosters trust, encourages psychological safety, and allows individuals to take ownership of their work and keep you updated to stop you stepping in.

Why it's useful

Empowerment benefits the team and team members but also enhances a leader's effectiveness.

Firstly, it develops people by building their capabilities. When team members are empowered to come up with solutions, make decisions, and execute plans, they become more proactive and less reliant on constant direction. This growth in capability allows them to take on more significant responsibilities, which is crucial for succession planning and leadership development within the organisation.

Additionally, empowerment frees up leaders to focus on strategic priorities. When team members can operate autonomously, leaders can delegate more effectively and spend their time on higher-level tasks.

Moreover, empowered teams tend to be more creative because they bring diverse perspectives and ideas, leading to innovative solutions that might not emerge under closer supervision.

Finally, empowerment is deeply motivating. It taps into the key drivers of autonomy, mastery, and purpose, making team members more engaged and committed to their work.

What gets in the way?

Several obstacles can hinder empowerment.

• Processes: While processes are important, becoming too rigid can stifle creativity and prevent team members from making decisions that suit the specific challenges they face. This rigidity often strips away the autonomy that empowerment aims to provide.

- Lack of trust and a culture of blame. Being quick to blame when things go wrong, creates an environment of fear and reluctance to take initiative. This undermines the very essence of empowerment, as team members become hesitant to make decisions or take risks.
- Micromanagement: Leaders who are unwilling to relinquish control or who lack confidence in themselves or their teams often fall into the trap of micromanaging. This demotivates the team and reinforces lack of trust, making genuine empowerment impossible.
- Skill gaps. Sometimes leaders mistakenly equate empowerment with abandonment, expecting team members to handle tasks without ensuring they have the necessary skills and resources to do them. This can lead to frustration, anxiety, and poor performance.

How we can go about empowering our people?

Empowering people effectively requires a strategic and thoughtful approach.

- 1. Set clear expectations: Leaders and team members should agree on what needs to be done, the timeline, and any critical components that must be included to satisfy stakeholders. This shared understanding helps both parties feel secure about the process and the expected outcomes.
- 2. Coach don't tell: Coaching can be a powerful tool in empowerment. By coaching team members to think through how they will approach a task, what steps they will take, and how they will measure success, leaders can help them develop a plan that they own. This process allows leaders to maintain oversight without micromanaging, giving them confidence in the team's direction.
- 3. Don't interfere: Now you have to resist the urge to step in once things are underway. Trusting your team to execute their plans, even if it means sitting on your hands, is crucial. Remember, empowerment is about allowing others to shine, not about asserting your way of doing things. Allowing for failure is also essential. When people are trying something new, they may not get it right the first time, and that's okay. Learning from mistakes fosters growth and innovation
- **4. Follow up and feedback:** Empowerment doesn't end when the task is completed; it includes reviewing what went well, discussing what could be done differently next time, and recognizing successes. This ongoing dialogue reinforces the learning process and strengthens the trust between leaders and their teams.

By adopting these practices, leaders can create a more motivated, creative, and capable team, ultimately leading to greater success for themselves and the business.

Annabel is an Executive and Team Coach, Leadership Facilitator and Coach Supervisor. If you would value a discussion on how you can develop your leaders to empower their teams, contact Annabel via LinkedIn, annabel@successfultraining.co.uk, or visit www.successfultraining.co.uk



What are digital credentials and how could they benefit you?

If you've come across the term 'digital credentials' and are wondering what this means, how they work, or whether you're eligible to gain these credentials – you've come to the right place! Here, the awarding organisation NCFE provides the answers to your commonly asked questions on digital credentials and more.

Digital credentials are secure, verifiable, digital assets that validate an individual's academic or professional achievements. Recipients can use these portable and sharable credentials to demonstrate their skills, opening up pathways to further education and employment.

Here at NCFE, they provide an innovative and efficient way of certificating learning for our non-regulated NCFE Endorsed Programmes. Educators and employers can empower individuals to showcase their achievements online, demonstrating their commitment to learning and development.

How do digital credentials work?

When an individual completes a course or achieves a milestone, the issuing organisation creates a digital credential containing metadata such as the programme name, date of achievement, and a description of the skills or knowledge demonstrated.

This credential is then securely stored on a digital platform using encrypted data. Recipients can share their credentials via digital wallets, social media, or professional networks. Employers and educational institutions can easily verify these credentials by accessing the embedded metadata, ensuring authenticity and reducing the potential for fraud.

How widely available are digital credentials?

Digital credentials are becoming increasingly prevalent across the UK, with many educational institutions, employers and professional organisations adopting this innovative form of skills recognition. Training providers and colleges are integrating digital badges and certificates into their programmes, providing students with verifiable proof of achievements that may not be covered by traditional regulated qualifications.

Employers are also embracing digital credentials to certify skills and competencies acquired through continuous professional development (CPD) courses, adding a layer of credibility to their employee training strategy. This growing adoption signifies a shift towards a more modern, efficient, and transparent system of certification, paving

the way for widespread acceptance across various sectors.

What are the benefits of digital credentials?

There are several benefits to offering digital credentials both for learners, and for employers and training providers. For example, the benefits when it comes to offering these credentials upon completion of an NCFE Endorsed Programme include:

- Mark of quality: employers and providers can outwardly demonstrate their commitment to providing high quality learning and development opportunities.
- **Skills recognition:** digital credentials provide a tangible way for learners and employees to evidence their achievements.
- Flexibility: digital credentials can be tailored to recognise various accomplishments within an Endorsed Programme, providing a bespoke acknowledgment of skills.
- **Control:** organisations have full control over the issuing and management of credentials, including setting expiration dates and revoking credentials remotely if necessary.
- **Personalisation:** digital credentials can be customised with an issuing organisation's branding, helping to boost brand recognition and build a positive reputation.
- Inspire pride: recipients can proudly share their digital badges on the web and social media.

To learn more about digital credentials or to request a demo on how they work, you can visit NCFE's dedicated digital credentials webpage www.ncfe.org.uk/accreditation-and-employer-services/digital-credentials



Are people a problem at work? Maybe take a look in the mirror first

Ian Kinnery is a leading North East business coach. During the past 19 years, he has coached hundreds of business leaders and is a previous European Business Coach of the Year winner.

According to a recent Entrepreneurs' Forum poll, 44 per cent of North East business leaders identified people as the biggest problem in the modern workplace.

For the past 19 years, I've coached hundreds of North East CEOs and entrepreneurs, helping to scale-up their businesses which means developing them as leaders.

Often they've told me that they too have people problems. But my answer is always the same.

People are not the problem – how you deal with them is.

As Jim Rohn says, 'Don't wish it were easier, wish you were better'.

Our duty as leaders is to find ways to connect with all of our staff.

Our duty is to understand them, and our duty is to find ways of communicating with them.

A good example of this is how we perhaps interact with younger employees.

One recent survey by a CV website found that almost three-quarters of managers claimed Gen Z staff were more difficult to work with than previous generations.

Respondents felt staff from the group lacked effort, productivity, and motivation.

But as leaders, is it our duty to find a solution to this. And to find it, it often requires a degree of flexibility of thought and deed to connect with more people more easily.

I've recently launched a new YouTube series as part of my 2024 campaign on the 'Changing World of Work', which focuses on the modern workplace.

As we all know the workplace has become far less rigid, and flexibility is crucial in the modern environment.

In fact, a survey commissioned just as the

world eased out of the pandemic found that around half of staff believed workplace flexibility – be it working hours or location – had become equally as important as traditional benefits such as paid leave and pension.

As leaders, our duty is to listen to that and

Besides growing businesses, one of the great things coaching can do is help leaders develop the skills that perhaps have prevented them from doing just that.

Communication, empathy, and flexibility are vital tools that can enable you to work with – not against – those people within your business who you perhaps struggle to gel with.

Leaders may already possess the know-how. But the art of coaching is all about behaviour change, and it teaches people how to apply that knowledge.

Often it is about addressing bad habits; 99 per cent of what we do is habit, from how we type to the leg we first slip into our trousers – but it can also involve how we communicate and work with our staff and colleagues.

So if we want different results, perhaps it is time to do something different.

And maybe don't just instinctively blame the other person.

kinnery.co.uk

The challenges of cash flow

Almost every company, particularly those undergoing rapid growth, experience cash flow problems.

Dr. David Cliff reflects on this common phenomena in organisations.

They say 'cash is king' for a reason. Ultimately, every decision made in an organisation is a financial one. Every action a company takes, even stopping for coffee, has financial implications in terms of profit, accessing opportunity, productivity and profitability. Judgements inevitably must be formed around these things in a series of "soft and hard" decisions made on dynamic basis as organisations move forwards.

In my coaching experience, a key challenge around cash flow is that leaders fail to spend enough time with financial data. Accountancy support is something placed "over there", for the accountant to flag up warnings at meaningful times whilst MDs and others focus on activity, encouraging signs of new partnerships and possibilities and drive the activity of the company forward. The balance sheet is the ultimate barometer of company health, and it is amazing how many people will view that indicator retrospectively than from a dynamic, forward-thinking basis. This is not about micromanagement and knowing the price of everything and the value of nothing. Rather, it is about making informed judgements about the direction of travel the organisation taking fiscally. That duty cannot be delegated, deferred or side stepped in anyway by those in a leadership position.

A key issue with cash flow involves our approach to risk. Entrepreneurs assume risk is an integral part of having a business and to a certain extent it is, however, these things are always "calculated risks", not capricious ones, nor ones that just "go with the territory". We talk about individuals having low or high appetites for risk, but it is the quality of the calculation and the reflection around risk that is a key part of honing their leadership persona. Some of the myths, legends, anecdotes and other pieces of entrepreneurial lore, can often get in the way of people undertaking the deep reflection, careful research and forward planning that is needed to manage the fund flows that go in and out of an organisation.

Scaling companies will often fall into the trap of appointing an FD who then becomes, the arbiter of wisdom in terms of financial matters within the organisation and is somehow subconsciously seen as the person completely responsible for the money. The FD on any board is a functionary,

part of a collective, but it remains every director to understand the financial implications of what they are doing and to maintain a culture of shared accountability.

It goes back to people "owning" the company in its entirety, a mindset that's not about delegation or selective accountability for things people don't want to do. It is about leader's skilling up with a mindset that keeps them responsible constantly for all aspects of the organisation's health. Good boards know this, others frequently just blame people.

Finally, cash flows are about Corporate and Social Responsibility within the organisation. Way too often companies resolve their own cash flow challenges by displacing these into their supply or customer chain in the form of late payments and unrealistic terms and conditions.

Big companies will often specify 90 days payment terms with suppliers (increasingly this is morphing into 180 days), something that can cripple small companies, especially if the payment processing cycle has to start over again if there's just one administration error. Great for big systems handling money with the financial might of larger organisations, but disastrous for the cash flow of small ones. I have heard of dubious practices wherein large organisations offering to speed up payment if a percentage reduction is agreed – effectively a discount to get paid! Understanding contracts thoroughly and long-term financial profiling are essential in such environments.

Early/late payments, define one's fiscal relationship with the companies and customers around us. They colour partnerships that constitutes business relationships and power between organisations. Neglecting the cash flow through the 'whole chain', can create an "us and them" environment where internal mismanagement of our own organisation can stress out other organisations.

At Gedanken, when I work with leaders and company owners, I keep in mind what I started this article with: whilst not being singularly preoccupied with money, we can equally never forget it, as every decision is ultimately, a financial one.

www.gedanken.co.uk





Coach celebrates her own achievements with business expansion

A coach who specialises in supporting people through lifechanging situations is celebrating professional growth of her own as her business expands into new premises in Darlington.

Suzanne Barbour was inspired to launch her eponymous Suzanne Barbour Coaching business five years ago after a challenging period in her life affected both her physical and mental health.

She explains: "A cancer diagnosis and resulting treatment put me into early menopause and at the same time I was going through a divorce. It took every ounce of strength to get through it and the rollercoaster of emotions thrown at me every minute of every day.

"I really struggled to find the right support at the time and recognised a huge gap in services to help people to navigate their way through the practical and emotional challenges of treatment, recovery and beyond. I decided I wanted to be that person for others."

Already a trained coach, Suzanne realised the insight gained through her experience put her in a powerful position to support others.

She developed her business to share tools to help people take control of their emotional pain and redesign their life just the way they want it. She then trained as a menopause mentor, aiming to remove the taboos around menopause and provide comprehensive

support to those experiencing hormonal changes.

After four years of running her business from home, Suzanne was keen to progress into a more professional environment and signed up for membership at the coworking lounge at Business Central in Central Park.

Now, she's on the move again, investing in a dedicated office at the business centre as part of the next phase of growth for her coaching and training work.

Suzanne expects the company's growth to come from a new service developed to support small businesses with the mental wellbeing of their employees, which she believes is unique in the marketplace.

She said: "Stress related illness remains one of the top reasons for absence, both long and short term, which smaller businesses can find difficult to cover, often putting more pressure on the rest of the team.

"Off-the-shelf employee assistance programmes can be expensive and out of the reach of small businesses, so we came up with a pay-as-you-go solution to fit their budget. Employees can dial in for confidential support from counsellors when they need it.

"As far as we know, there's nothing else quite

like it out there. We've been trialling it and the feedback has been superb so I'm very excited about expanding this area of our work."

Suzanne is keen to target male dominated industries with the service, opening up conversations that men have traditionally struggled to have to reach more people in need of mental health support.

And the decision to remain at Business Central for the next chapter of the business's development was an easy one to make, Suzanne said.

"There was no question of moving anywhere else, Business Central is perfect for what we need," she added. "It's fantastic to have the option to change the space we rent, according to what's going on in the business.

"As we grow, we need more space for training so our new office gives us room for four or five people and there's a conference room right opposite if we need something bigger.

"And once the business grows again, there is total flexibility to move to a bigger office just down the corridor."

Business Central and neighbouring sister site Innovation Central are owned by Darlington Borough Council and are managed by the North East BIC. They provide a connected business community at the heart of the town's Central Park development, offering a choice of coworking, office and lab space along with meeting rooms, events and shared services designed to help today's entrepreneurs to innovate and thrive.

To find out more visit darlingtonworkspace.co.uk

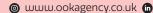
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OK

Life's too short for ordinary agencies



New management team for Newcastle's NE1 street rangers

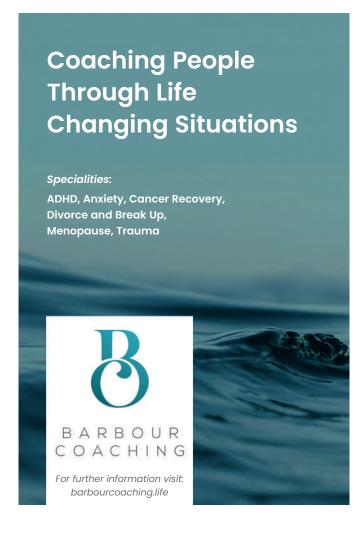


NE1 has appointed the York-based Eboracum support services company to manage its well-known and well-respected NE1 Street Ranger team. The appointment signals a new era for the service as it continues to perform its crucial role in the city's public safety network while expanding to support more businesses across the city centre.

The NE1 Street Rangers are the eyes and ears on the streets of Newcastle, gathering vital intel and reporting directly to relevant partners, including the police and the council, who, together with NE1 form the recently launched, City Safe partnership. City Safe is designed to improve the safety and security of the city, its businesses, residents and visitors. From incidents and information on the city's most vulnerable residents including rough sleepers, to responding to concerns from businesses and residents, the NE1 Street Rangers play a vital part in the new City Safe, safety and security network.

As part of City Safe, NE1 has also expanded its safety team to include a full-time CCTV operative and a Business Crime Officer.

NE1 Street Rangers continue to perform their traditional role of providing a highly visible presence on the streets of Newcastle city centre, working closely with businesses and providing information, directions and a friendly face for visitors and locals in the city.





Why are we drawn to the people who can create change but not those creating the change?



Why do we bow down to privilege but not kindness?

Whilst we enable people to make kind choices and take kind action, Kind Currency is driven by the need to ensure social justice for the individuals and businesses in society we depend on and create a shift in society to ensure need is a priority over greed.

Our Kindness Fund supports nurses, carers, volunteers, frontline essential workers that are living in deprivation. And there's many! The 60% of individuals who are living in-work poverty, are mainly in roles that society depends on, without them our society would collapse. When we are at our most vulnerable, we need them. Their contribution to society and the economy is far greater than those who can create change.

But we chose to leave them to suffer and bow down to those who we do not need and create our unhealthy wants, to those that can create change but do not.

Celebrating and supporting the individuals at the grassroots of society working night and day creating change is vital to protecting the future.

Individuals who aren't talking about it, they are leading grassroot organisations meeting the real needs in society. It's why our podcast Unfudging the World – The Real Heroes, shares the stories of the people in society that are literally saving lives and changing the world. Their contribution to society and the economy is far greater than those in more privileged situations, those we continue to bow down who are not using their position to make a real difference.

There are so many amazing organisations out there that serve our real needs, but we are still chasing the organisations that fuel greed. You don't see change-making grassroot organisations going for B Corp status they are too busy delivering kindness, making real change, and having a substantial impact on society. They are action and impact lead. They are human, nature and environmentally focused, nothing else matters. They are not driven by policies or statements; they are driven by saving lives and protecting us all. It's why we celebrate organisations that ACT kind. It's about the doing!

Recently I shared two stories, one of Richard Branson, inviting Alan Bates (post office master and absolute social justice warrior) to his island to officiate their wedding. This got much attention. But Richard can do this, it was kind, and it was kind action we like to celebrate, but when we think of Richard's position, he could have done a lot more to support Alan and the post masters, but he hasn't. It was also great PR for his personal brand. The other story was of a gentleman who had worked at the grassroots of society

all his life, making a difference not because he was able to do so but because he lived his life consciously regardless of position or privilege, he chose to protect others. When lady luck fell into his life, he immediately responded by using the money to help others, not a tiny gesture, a significant opportunity for many. This story got far less attention.

Why?

Because we chase those that can create change but not those creating the change. We bow down to privilege rather than kindness.

Imagine if the kind people we fail to celebrate, and fail to support just stopped helping us, making a difference, and creating the change needed?

Those who can create the change won't be there to help you when you are at your most vulnerable.

When we say we are enabling us all to make kind choices and take kind action, it is to help us all, help you. We need to support the organisations that are kind, we need to protect the people who are saving the world daily with their kindness.

Shifting our attention to those creating the change, those protecting you, society, nature, and the environment.

Chase the change makers!

www.kindcurrency.co.uk

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Eothen Care Homes enhances the lives of older people by providing experienced residential & dementia care at our three North East care homes

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"We laugh together, we comfort one another.

It's absolutely amazing." A resident at Eothen Whitley Bay

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NE1 strives to make Newcastle one of the safest and most welcoming cities in the UK

By Tariq Albassam, Director of Operations at NE1 Ltd

Our Street Ranger service provides a prime example of this. The service has undergone a significant transformation over the last 18 months. From its traditional ambassadorial role, the team has shifted focus to tackling business priorities including on-street issues, antisocial behaviour, and retail crime.

It has been quite a journey but we are starting to see positive results from our efforts.

When NE1 was established in 2009 it was clear how important the on-street environment was for businesses and the city's economic success.

Creating the right environment on the ground for Newcastle's growth and prosperity was the cornerstone of NE1's founding principles, and remains a key priority today. A successful city needs to look and feel loved and cared for, with a strong identity and a welcoming sense of place.

NE1's Street Rangers arrived on the scene in 2009 to play their part in setting the tone and creating the right environment. They quickly became an integral part of the fabric of the city centre, providing a highly-visible and reassuring presence on the streets.

Recently however, business feedback highlighted growing concerns about the city centre environment including antisocial behaviour, retail crime, reduced enforcement presence and a worrying lack of perceived consequences for frequent and repeat offenders.

It was clear that something had to change.

Armed with this knowledge and with a mandate from businesses, we went back to the drawing board to review how we could refocus our efforts, and reallocate resources to respond to these changing conditions.

We knew from research that 90% of businesses didn't report many offences to the police. As a result, the police lacked accurate data and couldn't allocate resources accordingly. To address this, NE1 created our Business Crime Reduction Partnership (BCRP) to provide an easy and effective way to report crime and disorder and to encourage the police, the council and businesses to work together. We knew that by collaborating we could make Newcastle even safer and more welcoming.

Since its launch in April 2023, the BCRP has gone from strength to strength with membership topping over 300 businesses, making it one of the largest in the country, and achieving impressive and mounting results.

In the 12 months from August 2023, to August this year the number of reported incidents has doubled to 2813 and reports on known subjects have also doubled to 811.

The BCRP has been strengthened by several key appointments; a dedicated Business Crime Officer joined to work closely with the police, attract new members and provide advice and guidance to businesses. NE1 also part-funded the recruitment of two full-time, city-wide, CCTV operatives. This new, dedicated 'eyes in the sky' monitoring of the city's CCTV cameras has already delivered exceptional results ensuring that appropriate resources are deployed when and where they are needed.

Security in the city entered a new era in May this year with the launch of Newcastle's City Safe initiative, a partnership between Northumbria Police, Newcastle City Council and NEI.

City Safe has created a dedicated, highly responsive and collaborative task force based in the heart of the city to tackle crime and antisocial behaviour on the streets, pooling resources, sharing intel and avoiding overlap in services and delivery.

NE1's Street Rangers play a key role in this new partnership acting as the eyes and ears on the city streets, liaising with businesses to identify issues and reporting to the task force so action can be taken quickly. The team moved into dedicated centrally located premises in August, further cementing the partnership and working practices.

Fast forward to today, and we can already see a positive shift.

In the last two months, City Safe has delivered 94 arrests, 84 dispersals, 50 investigations and 114 Stop and Search incidents, as well as 28 criminal banning orders being issued – efforts that make the city an even safer and more welcoming place for all.

Now, we have the three elements working together, the BCRP providing data, the CCTV operative providing real-time updates, and City Safe providing resources on the ground to deal with issues. We will continue to work closely with businesses, critically reviewing our approach to ensure we continue to deliver.

We won't shy away from future change, and will continue to exploit our unique position to bring the right teams together and push hard for additional resources and presence when needed.

We are proud of the results so far but we aren't complacent and will continue to strive to ensure that Newcastle remains one of the safest and most cared-for cities in the UK.

www.newcastlene1ltd.com







MEET OUR OCAWARDS 2024 FINALISTS

THE MOST INCLUSIVE CELEBRATION IN THE NORTH EAST







MEET OUR OKAWARDS 2024 FINALISTS



THE MOST INCLUSIVE CELEBRATION IN THE NORTH EAST

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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, it's the largest celebration and recognition of the minority and broader community from across a variety of sectors in the North East.



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Pride and Prejudice

I was born on the banks of the Tyne, and if you ask me where I'm from, I'll proudly say I'm a Geordie. But my journey hasn't always felt straightforward, and growing up as an Asian in Newcastle, I quickly realised the lack of equal opportunities.

So, as soon as I could, I ran away to London getting a job at the British Council. Before becoming home sick and returning.

For 10 years after, I immersed myself in the corporate world, leading innovation within the technology sector. I loved the work, the pressure, and the opportunities it brought, but I was also constantly on the move, working away from the North East. During that time, I developed a resilience that came from facing every challenge head-on. But it wasn't just about surviving the corporate grind—it was about building something meaningful. I realised that the experiences I was gaining, both the successes and the hard knocks, were preparing me for something

Eventually, the pull of home grew too strong, and I returned to the North East with a new mission: to give back. For 20+ years now, I've devoted myself to making the North East a better place socially and economically. I've seen the challenges that continue to persist—inequality, discrimination, and a lack of opportunity for many—and I've worked with others tirelessly to address them. Whether it's through exploring international trade, supporting enterprise, or volunteering in my local community, I've committed myself to helping this region realise its full potential.

Volunteering has been at the heart of everything I do. For decades, I've served as a governor and chair of a primary school, sat on the boards of charities like Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums, and Marie Curie, and supported countless businesses. I've chaired the North East LEP Business Growth



Board and the Institute of Directors North East, always striving to support growth and innovation in our region. In 2008, I set up a not-for-profit social enterprise, followed by an enterprise charity in 2013. In 2017, I launched the Cadet Apprenticeship Pathway, becoming a proud advocate for the armed forces. My role as honorary colonel of 101 Regiment is a particular source of pride, as I've helped businesses sign the Armed Forces Covenant and supported veterans in finding meaningful employment.

But despite all this work and commitment to my region, there's an unfortunate truth I continue to face. I've devoted decades of my life to the North East, but I'm still met with suspicion. My motives are questioned, and prejudice, though often subtle, still rears its head. Even though I was born here, and my roots run deep, there are moments when I'm reminded that in the eyes of some, I will always be seen as an alien.

It's tough, no doubt. But every challenge, every bit of adversity, has made me more resilient. The school of hard knocks has taught me perseverance, even if it's left me with a sensitivity to the prejudice that still exists. But I don't see that sensitivity as a weakness—it's what keeps me

compassionate, driven, and focused on the work that needs to be done.

The recent riots and the trolling that followed reminded me of the uphill battles we still face. But they also reminded me why I continue to fight for this region. I love the North East. It's where I'm from, and it's where I choose to invest my time and energy, despite the barriers. I remain committed to breaking down those barriers, not just for myself, but for the generations to come.

In the end, my resilience comes from my belief in the power of community, inclusivity, and growth. Yes, there are setbacks, and yes, prejudice still exists. But I'm here to stay, and I'll continue to stand up for what I believe in. This is my home, and I'm determined to keep building a better future for everyone in it—one filled with pride, purpose, and positivity with less of the prejudice.

Ammar Mirza CBE is Chair & Founder of Asian Business Connexions, Executive Chair of the AmmarM Group, Honorary Colonel of 101 Regiment RA and holds various positions across the public and private sectors with a deep interest in Inclusion, Innovation and Internationalisation.



The hidden energy saving opportunity businesses need to know about

"Harmonics cause additional currents in electrical systems, which result in higher energy losses in the form of heat. This can significantly increase electricity bills. By mitigating harmonics, manufacturers can reduce energy waste, leading to more efficient use of power and lower overall energy costs."

Kevin Brown, Quantum Controls.

Harnessing Energy Savings Through a Harmonics Survey: A Guide for Businesses

In today's competitive market, businesses are constantly looking for ways to reduce energy consumption and improve operational efficiency. One often overlooked opportunity lies in the management of electrical harmonics. A Harmonics Survey can not only ensure compliance with regulatory standards but also reveal significant energy-saving opportunities. This article will break down how conducting a Harmonics Survey can benefit your business, even if you're not an electrical engineer.

What Are Harmonics?

Think of electricity as a clean, smooth sound, like a pure musical note. Harmonics, in electrical terms, are like background noise that distorts this sound. These

distortions occur when electrical devices, particularly those with non-linear loads like Variable Speed Drives (VSDs), introduce irregularities in the electrical signal. This 'noise' can lead to inefficiencies and damage to your electrical systems, much like how unwanted noise can make it hard to hear a conversation.

Why Should You Care About Harmonics?

When harmonics are present in your electrical system, they can cause a range of issues. Over time, these distortions can lead to overheating of equipment, unnecessary tripping of circuit breakers, and even damage to sensitive electronics. This not only risks equipment failure but also increases your energy costs due to inefficiencies.

Imagine running your business with a

machine that's constantly struggling to function correctly due to poor power quality. It consumes more energy, requires frequent maintenance, and has a shorter lifespan. Now, multiply this by every piece of equipment in your facility. The impact on your bottom line can be significant.

Real-World Example: The Quantum Controls Case Study

Consider a recent case where Quantum Controls helped a manufacturing facility suffering from frequent equipment failures. By conducting a Harmonics Survey, a diagnostic tool to help identify and quantify the presence of harmonics in their systems, their electrical performance was monitored over a set period. The culprit was excessive harmonics caused by the VSDs on-site. Quantum Controls having identified the issue recommended the installation of an Active Harmonic Filter. The result? The facility saw an immediate reduction in equipment failures, a significant decrease in energy costs, and improved overall operational efficiency.

Taking the Next Step

Quantum Controls offers a comprehensive Harmonics Survey service, providing you with a clear picture of your power quality and actionable steps to enhance it. By addressing harmonics, your business can achieve better performance, lower costs, and greater peace of mind.

Don't wait for problems to arise – proactively manage your power quality and start saving energy today.

www.quantum-controls.co.uk 01661 835 566



Durham Business Group Members sign the Armed Forces Covenant

Members of Durham
Business Group's "Executive
Group" joined the Royal
Navy and the Ministry of
Defence's North of England
Employer Engagement Team
recently at HMS Calliope for
an official signing ceremony
and celebration of their
commitment to The Armed
Forces Covenant.

As champions of North East businesses, Durham Business Group, a not-for-profit membership and office services business, brought together 16 of its member organisations, all of whom have made a commitment to proudly support the Armed Forces community.

The group were joined by Commander Kev Stockton RN and Commander David King RN for co-signing and presenting the certificates.

The Armed Forces Covenant is a promise from the nation that those who serve or have served in the armed forces, and their families, are treated fairly. The UK Government is committed to supporting the armed forces community by working with a range of partners, including businesses, local authorities, charities, and the public. Alison Gittins, Chief Executive of Durham

Business Group said "Eight years on, The Executive Group returned to HMS Calliope on the Tyne, home to over 100 Royal Naval Reserves and Royal Marine Reserves. It was such a proud day to invite sixteen member businesses to HMS Calliope to sign the Armed Forces Covenant during our Executive Group lunch. The occasion was up there with when I signed on behalf of Durham Business Group at Catterick Garrison in 2019, and for us to go on to achieve the prestigious Gold Award in 2022 was a huge honour for us as a small not for profit business.

The tour of Royal Navy's HMS Trumpeter and to find about life onboard from her Captain and crew was the icing on the cake of a very special day.

We continue to encourage all members of The Executive Group and our wider Durham Business Club to work with The North of England Employer Engagement team. There is no better time to bring communities together, pledge your support, and join over 800 businesses in the North East who have made a promise to ensure that those who serve or have served in the armed forces, along with their families, are treated with fairness and respect".

Gary McLafferty, Director of Engagement for the North of England Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Association said "Defence is extremely proud that the sixteen organisations, all associated with Durham Business Group's Executive Group, have signed the Armed Forces Covenant, on what was a wonderful day with our colleagues from the Royal Navy. The Armed Forces Covenant is simply a voluntary pledge of support focusing on helping members of the Armed Forces community having the same access to public and commercial services and products as any other citizen. By signing their own company Covenant these organisations are promoting the fact that they are proud to be Armed Forces friendly and signifies a significant step in demonstrating their commitment to the men and women who have served our country and their families. I, and Defence are tremendously grateful and thank them for their support."

For more information on the Armed Forces Covenant visit armedforcescovenant.gov.uk or contact NE – Defence Engagement team at ne-engagement@rfca.mod.uk













Champions of North East Business

The purpose of Durham Business Group is to support and champion businesses, and business people, in the North East of England – building relationships, fostering collaboration, and celebrating success.

Established in 1981 as a non-profit organisation to support small businesses, our range of members and clients now embraces everything from one-person start-ups to large corporates, but our focus on promoting North East business – and the values that inspire what we do – remain unchanged.



Celebrating its 10th anniversary in 2024, The Executive Group brings together North East senior directors and decision-makers in a relaxed, non-sales environment.

We hold regular lunch events in stunning and unique venues across the region, with an emphasis on creating trusted long-term relationships. Membership is capped at 50 companies, to allow those connections between peers to deepen and flourish.



Tired of working from home?

We have a modern, comfortable coworking area with hot desks for hire at our Portland House HQ in Durham, DHI. Occupying a bright and dedicated area within our refurbished upstairs office suite, they're perfect if you're looking for a safe, welcoming and flexible place to work, away from the dining table. While you're here working with us, you benefit from free on-site parking, and inclusive access to tea, coffee and wi-fi – at the same time as being part of a vibrant and diverse business community.

New Northumberland employability scheme to empower young people and provide vital skills boost



The pilot will run until March 2025, with three programmes set to take place in October, November and January, and aims to tackle the region's significant workforce skills gap - with North East businesses claiming that 59% of job vacancies are 'hard to fill'.

Recent figures also show that over half (54%) of young people in the UK who are currently not in education, employment or training are economically inactive - an increase from 41% in 2011. For these young people, mental health has been identified as a "substantial barrier" to employability.

Unlike historic employability initiatives which focus on getting all users 'CV ready', CONNECT: Future Ready is a person-centric, needs-based approach harnessing the power of creativity as an initial way of boosting confidence and skills.

CONNECT: Future Ready draws on Mortal Fools' existing CONNECT personal and professional development training to provide holistic support and meet Northumberland-based young people where they are at in their employability journey, acknowledging their unique and complex needs and aspirations whilst developing their employability, interpersonal and life skills.

Kiz Crosbie, Mortal Fools CEO & Artistic Director, commented: "As an organisation specialising in work with young people, we are delighted to be working with the North East Combined Authority to explore new approaches to employability skills development with the young people in our region.



"More traditional approaches to employability often don't meet the contemporary needs of young people, especially those with intersectional needs or facing multiple barriers to successfully joining the workforce.

"This investment, to explore new approaches to this work, feeding into the future economic prosperity of our region, together with supporting the development of individual young people is urgently needed and we are proud to be a part of it."

The project is one of two new employability initiatives led by Mortal Fools, who have led a range of creative interventions in school and youth settings as well as previous young people's employability projects.

Alongside CONNECT: Future Ready, Mortal Fools also leads the CONNECT: Creative Futures pilot project, with support from North East Combined Authority, the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, Asda Foundation and Arts Council England. Creative Futures aims to demystify career pathways for young people into the creative industries and champion creativity as an important employability skill.

Amber Swift from Northumbrian Water, which held a Creative Futures event, commented: "The Mortal Fools Team are like a warm hug to work with. Nothing was a problem.

"The students and schools got so much from their workshop, it was noted as a Top 3 from the event with many saying it was engaging, thought-provoking and that they gained valuable skills for employment and education. Especially more confidence!

"We won't hesitate to contact Mortal Fools again for our next Young Citizens Work Experience Event and we would encourage other companies to reach out to them – they bring something different to work experience weeks and careers events!"

With the Northumberland Train line set to be reintroduced as a passenger route, both initiatives have the potential to open up a world of opportunity for local young people, as well as enabling businesses and investment to tap into a previously untapped hotspot of talent and creativity.

Vicki Clarke, Employment Partnership Coordinator at Northumberland County Council, added: "We recognise the barriers that young people can face into employment – it's a challenging time to be a young person.

"These innovative employability programmes from Mortal Fools will inspire creativity, build confidence, and foster wellbeing to empower individuals to take steps towards employment and their future career goals. We are proud to support them."

The first CONNECT: Future Ready programme launches in early October (signup deadline on 29th September) - find out more and sign up at www.mortalfools.org.uk/connect-future-ready.

To find out more about Mortal Fools' young people's employability work, or to commission Mortal Fools to run an employability enhancing intervention or session for young people, email Rachel.Horton@mortalfools.org.uk

Environmental Sustainability – it's the future

Reduce your carbon impact – good for the environment – good for business.

Are you watching any of the debates about who will be the next President of the USA and were you interested in the recent UK election which saw Labour return to power?

If you followed the two campaigns, you can't fail to have noticed that the environment.... green issues...ranks as one of the major topics for debate.

And whether you like it or not, environmental responsibility is going to affect you and your business.

So why not embrace it?

First and foremost, it's the right thing to do in any case, but it will also be of potentially huge benefit for the simple reason that it reflects on how other people and other businesses will view you.

Put it this way, if you pay no regard to environmental responsibility, you are at risk of many firms, organisations and future employees disregarding your business...they only want to deal with people and companies who show a willingness to protect the environment.

This particularly applies if you want to tender for government contracts or those firms and organisations who work within the public sector.

So, what should you do? How do you go about being environmentally responsible? Where do you start?

The best solution is to speak to Jo Holmes and her team at Genee. They'll lead you by the hand and get you on the right path...and this applies to you whether you are a sole operator or a multinational conglomerate. Genee has also started working with a number of start-ups in Durham.

"We fully understand that a lot of businesses have other business priorities and pressures" says Genee MD Jo Holmes, "but once we explain that making some simple alterations to how they operate their business can be hugely beneficial, not only to the environment but also to their bottom line and how their business is perceived, they quickly become interested and start to appreciate the potential benefits. It's not difficult...it just requires a desire to do what's right."

Genee are the region's delivery partners for Investors in the Environment (iiE) which is a nationally recognised accreditation scheme designed to help organisations reduce their environmental impact and, yes, save money. There are three accreditation levels...bronze, silver and green. They reflect how far along your environmental journey you are and how embedded sustainability is across your organisation. Genee will take you through these various levels to get you accredited and help you identify, measure and reduce your environmental impacts and promote your progress to open doors to new contacts

and new business. It's a win-win for everyone including our environment.

"The first thing we do is get to know the organisation, how its structured and how far along the environmental journey they are on," adds Jo. "we then help them develop policies and systems to look holistically at the organisation and identify measures to reduce energy use, travel expense and waste management...three areas which are probably high on their list of expenditure and therefore ideal to target for savings. It's a lovely framework that organisations of all sizes can work to and when accredited promote internally to staff and externally."

"We have training courses, training videos and many resources and templates that can be used by our members to build processes and procedures and increase staff and stakeholder engagement. We want organisations to build environmental management systems that work for them, so we ensure we are not overly prescriptive. Our overall aim is to reduce environmental impact, which in turn saves money, we help organisations become leaner. It also helps firms retain and get good staff, especially young people because they want to work for firms which look after the environment. They view it as being the right thing to do. A key element of the accreditation is gathering data and producing a carbon footprint, this helps identify and measure the impact of savings made but also report carbon data externally, a growing ask, particularly among the public sector supply chain.

"In other words, we lead organisations by the hand to achieve Investors in the Environment accreditation. They don't start off with a blank sheet of paper."

And Genee is passionate about practicing what they preach. They have iiE accreditation themselves, which was a key element of them becoming a Certified BCorp in July 2024, a huge achievement given their size and capacity. BCorp is a global community of businesses that meet high standards of social and environmental impact.

And of course, when it comes to Investors in the Environment accreditation, they are the go-to people to help your organisation...and they can continue to act as your environmental consultants to help you attain further accreditation such as B-Corp recognition.

Interested?

Log onto www.genee.org.uk for more information. They have some really useful tips and examples of how working for the environment, will work for you.

You can also contact them directly by calling 07815 754931 or email jo@genee.org.uk



Fire safety and training company expands again

Soaring demand for its services has led to further expansion for a fire safety and training company based at the North East BIC (BIC).

ProFire Safety & Training has invested in a new riverside location at the Sunderland business park – its third move in as many years to accommodate its growing team and expanding service offer.

The company, which launched in 2020, has taken over a new two storey unit to serve as its head office and provide a dedicated training facility.

Founder Will Fatherley said the firm's growth has been fuelled by increasing demand for the fire safety consultancy his team provides to the public, private and third sector, as well as training in fire risk compliance, workplace safety, and first aid. The company also provides fire fighter training.

Will said: "New legislation rightly focuses on reducing fire risk in buildings and this has put pressure on those who own and manage buildings to take action. So, we've responded by providing the market with what is needed.

"Our accredited courses take away the worry by providing professionally run, convenient and accessible training to give those responsible all of the knowledge they need to have confidence in what they do."

Demand for ProFire's additional services has translated into a 30 percent increase in turnover and the need for its new permanent training base.

The company now employs 12 members of staff as well as a team of trusted suppliers. Clients include local authorities, charities, schools, care homes, property management companies and builders.

Will added: "There is an opportunity for much further growth in future and we're focused on building the business steadily,

adding to our already brilliant team and strong skillset.

"The beauty of being based at the BIC is that we will be able to move to another unit as soon as we are ready to expand again. The site is so flexible and supportive and there's a space to suit what you need as soon as your requirements change."

ProFire started life at the BIC's coworking space before moving to its own incubator unit on the park. Now, its new home overlooks the River Wear and provides plenty of space for the company to run its operations at the same time as delivering training to visiting clients.

Paul McEldon, Chief Executive at the BIC, said: "We've been by the company's side since it launched, so it's really rewarding to see the team go from strength to strength. We can't wait to see what's next for the ProFire team and we'll be rooting for them and looking for ways to support wherever we can."



For more information about the work spaces and support available at the North East BIC visit ne-bic.co.uk or call 0191 5166200.

For more information on the North East BIC, visit: www.ne-bic.co.uk



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Plans announced for new West Newcastle residential development

Plans for a new residential development to the west of Newcastle are set to be brought forward by a North East developer.

Banks Property has announced plans for a new development at West Brunton, within the boundaries of the Newcastle Great Park, which will see up to 74 high quality new homes being built on a 4.5-hectare site that is located in an area identified as a Neighbourhood Growth Area in Newcastle City Council's Local Plan Policy.

The development would include a range of different house types and a 15 per cent allocation of affordable housing, while it would also deliver a biodiversity net gain of at least ten per cent for the local community through a range of environmental and ecological enhancements.

A new footpath/cyclepath would be built through to Brunton Lane from the new development, which is within easy reach of local amenities, schools and bus routes, while a new sustainable urban drainage system would also be installed.

A benefits package would also be delivered as part of the project which would support tangible improvements to community facilities and the work of local good causes.

Banks Property is expecting to submit a planning application for the scheme to the City Council in the autumn, with a view to it coming before the Council's planning committee next year. If it is approved, construction work could begin on site in 2026.



Engineering and manufacturing community showcased at EMCON 24

The capabilities, diversity and vibrancy of the North East's engineering and manufacturing industry was demonstrated last week, at a major industry expo.

EMCON, which was held on September 12 at Sunderland Live in Houghton-le-Spring, welcomed nearly 900 people through its doors – and featured more than 100 exhibitors from the engineering and manufacturing, education and business support sectors.

Robots, sensor technology, virtual welding software and live machining were all on display, as exhibitors demonstrated their products and services to delegates from OEMs, Tier 1, 2 and 3 manufacturers and the public sector.

EMCON is delivered annually by Engineering and Manufacturing Network (EMN), a long-standing cross-sector network which is dedicated to building and strengthening North East England's engineering and manufacturing community. The event was known as Durham Oktoberfest until 2017 and was held at Glow in Newton Aycliffe until 2022, before moving to the larger venue of Rainton Arena (now Sunderland Live) last year.

EMCON 2024 also featured an Innovation Showcase in partnership with Innovation SuperNetwork, the innovation arm of business support organisation UMi. This enabled regional businesses that have been working with Innovation SuperNetwork to demonstrate their most innovative products and services to a wide range of engineering and manufacturing companies. Thirteen new, early stage or developing companies exhibited as part of the showcase.

Naylors Gavin Black appointed to market major NE industrial property scheme



European and UK industrial asset manager, Sunrise Real Estate, has appointed commercial property consultancy, Naylors Gavin Black, to market its 650,000 sq. ft. warehouse and logistics scheme, Connect at Integra 61, just off the A1 in Durham.

The North East commercial property consultancy has been selected to generate occupier interest in the strategic site which aims to bring significant inward investment into the region.

Naylors will work alongside incumbent agents Avison Young and CBRE to let five units ranging from 43,000 sq. ft, to 298,000 sq. ft. The sizeable 298,000 sq. ft. unit, which features 15 metre eaves, 25 dock doors and two level access doors, is the region's largest speculatively built industrial unit.

The properties are now ready for occupiers to move in.



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Firm transform old Ouseburn 'graffiti wall' building into stunning development

A long-empty building in one of Newcastle's trendiest suburbs has been transformed into a stunning commercial development following an ambitious revamp.

The building, in the Ouseburn, has been derelict for decades and has long been known locally as 'The Graffiti Wall'. Now leases are being signed – with one business ready to move into the vibrant neighbourhood - after a six-figure renovation was completed by MGM Construction.

The North East firm is one of the region's leading property refurbishment specialists, and director Ryan Gardiner said the Mailing Street project was one of their most remarkable renovations to date. "This project has breathed life into the building and transformed it into something really special," he said.

"As a building, it is in a prime location – thousands pass it every weekend en route for food and drinks in the Ouseburn Valley.

"There's been interest from hospitality, retail and even art galleries, and having fitted the units to a white box standard, with the eventual occupants able to put their own unique stamp in their space."

Having spent ten months on the ambitious project, Ryan admitted the work was a "major challenge" not least because of the building's condition. "Everybody involved in this project is over-the-moon with the results. I know it will help cement the Ouseburn's reputation as one of the North East's most special and unique neighbourhoods."



Story Homes sponsors Senior Lionesses' football team in Whitley Bay

Housebuilder Story Homes is excited to be the new sponsor of Whitley Bay Sporting Club's Senior Lionesses, a thriving women's football team in Whitley Bay.

As part of the sponsorship, the housebuilder's North East division has provided funds for the purchase of brand-new football kits for the Senior Lionesses, demonstrating an ongoing commitment to fostering engagement and supporting local sports initiatives.

The team plays its home games adjacent to the Robinson Fields development, where Story Homes is currently developing 300 homes in the local area in North Tyneside. The development includes a range of two to five-bedroom high quality new homes that are designed for modern living and suit the needs of a range of customers.

Kye Bradley, Sales Director for Story Homes North East said: "We're thrilled to support the Whitley Bay Senior Lionesses. At Story Homes, we believe in the power of community, and supporting local sports teams is one way to contribute to the health and wellbeing of those living in the areas in which we build. We wish them the best of luck for the upcoming season."

Growing NE architects firm to make a move

An ambitious architecture and structural engineering business has revealed plans to move, after outgrowing its Sunderland premises.

Building Design Northern (BDN) – which is headquartered in Sunderland, with a second office in Ulverston - will list its stunningly restored Old Simpson Street School base for sale, after revealing plans to relocate to a larger office space.

The firm, which has grown from being a team of 10 in 2019 to having 33 employees, plans to add more people to its number within the next 12 months, and is exploring options to relocate to a larger space to accommodate its growth.

The plans mean the company will sell its current base - Old Simpson Street School – after completing a stunning restoration of



the derelict building that saw it converted into a state-of-the-art office space, alongside eight luxury apartments which are available for short stays.

Richard Marsden, managing director of BDN – which recently restored the Grade II listed former stables building, Sheepfolds Stables, now a destination leisure venue – said: "The growth we have seen at BDN has been rapid, and we've already announced plans to expand our base in Ulverston, with the acquisition of a former police station, to

ensure we have room for a larger team in the Lakes.

"We have found ourselves in the same position in Sunderland, with the building we're in no longer large enough to accommodate our team. We have explored the option of converting other parts of the school to office space to give us more capacity, but the reality is that we have outgrown the school and it's time for us to move on.

"We've started the search for a new base, which will create more capacity for us to expand, and the school being on the market will allow us the chance to find a new custodian of this fantastic building, while unlocking our capacity for continued growth."

To find out more about the Old Simpson Street School building, contact hello@bdnltd. co.uk. The property is on the market with Bradley Hall.

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The Built Environment

In the latest of this popular series of interviews Michael Grahamslaw spoke to...

Mark Dutton

Director, Summers-Inman

Did you always envisage a career working in and around The Built Environment?

When I was studying in the Sixth Form, I wanted to be a graphic designer or computer systems analyst and chose A-Levels to suit that path. Things change rapidly at that time and my university application focused on Surveying, as I thought that looked like an interesting job. I became a Quantity Surveyor and the rest is history. I have no regrets, and it was definitely the right choice.

Tell us about your current role?

I'm an equity partner of the firm, heading up the Newcastle office, and forming part of the senior leadership of our national business. My role includes full responsibility for delivering our services to clients across the North and I am supported by a fantastic, talented team who deliver exceptional quality.

Tell us about your team?

We have a strong team of Quantity Surveyors, Building Surveyors, Project Managers, Health & Safety Consultants and support staff. Our people make the business. We champion diversity and have played a key part in promoting the industry to women. Additionally, we have a strong record of supporting individuals to reach their full potential through training and career support. We achieved Investors in People nearly 25 years ago and really pride ourselves on providing excellent opportunities to people at all stages of their career.

What are you currently working on?

I personally head up our work to deliver a full multidisciplinary service to Severn Trent Water, for whom we have worked continuously with for the past 14 years. Further projects include working with Aldi on the roll out of new stores across the North of England, together with education, healthcare and schools for clients including Newcastle University, Teesside University, Genr8/Kajima, many of the local NHS Trusts and Newcastle City Council. Having been established in Newcastle since 1920 we have a broad and varied workload across the region, and it is great to be able to build on those long-established foundations.

What is your proudest career achievement?

Starting and running my own business for five years before being acquired by Summers-Inman. Taking the plunge and making a success of it was really satisfying. It's been great to continue that journey, eventually going full circle to become an owner of that larger business.

What is your own favourite building?

The 'Cathedral on the Hill' - St James' Park. I've been a Newcastle United season ticket holder for over 30 years. Working in the construction industry in the city, knowing and working with the contractors that built the stands, I've been lucky enough to be able to visit the site behind the scenes as the current iteration of the ground was built.

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

Technology is really fuelling the evolution of the industry. It will become even more common place that we construct two versions of every building – one in the real world, another virtual twin in the digital world. We will continue to improve skills, competencies, training and education. Getting back to basics in designing, pricing, constructing and checking quality will be important.

What does the future hold?

We will continue to build on our strong capabilities, reputation and history to make sure we deliver quality for our clients. A focus on quality is at the heart of what we do, all delivered by our team of competent, capable professionals. And of course, enjoying our time whilst we do this

Who would be your four ideal dinner guests?

Sir Bobby Robson, Ricky Gervais, Steve Jobs and Julia Roberts. I think there would be plenty of engaging, funny conversation with a lot of good inside stories to be told.

How do you like to unwind?

I love going on holiday, and I'm totally relaxed with some sunshine, a good book and a beer.

Favourite Boxset?

I don't think I can split it between *Game of Thrones* and *Band of Brothers*. GoT was the first series of fantasy books to get the full high-quality treatment and the result was truer than most to the subject matter. *Band of Brothers* is a superbly crafted piece of television that is worthy of the big screen.

Favourite Book?

Lord of The Rings. I've read it many, many times and it's a wonderful tale from the father of the genre.

www.summers-inman.co.uk





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.

scale residential development.

Visitors to the launch event, which was held at Durham's Ramside Hall Hotel, were welcomed with a performance by the West Rainton Primary School steel band before going on to view the range of sustainable house designs that have been created for Cathedral Meadows.

The first property reservations were completed by local homebuyers at the launch event, with the Banks Homes team and sales agent Urban BASE now following up on further expressions of interest for specific plots.

Work at Cathedral Meadows is well under way, with its show home set to be ready to welcome visitors before the end of the year and the first occupants scheduled to be moving in in 2025.

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 couldn't have wished for a better reaction to this concept from visitors to our Cathedral Meadows launch event.







"We got so much fantastic feedback on the quality of our designs, the high specification to which our homes are being built and the style that we offer as standard, and to have secured our first reservations at the event is hugely encouraging."

Each Cathedral Meadows property will feature an advanced Hive heating system, an Omega kitchen, Porcelanosa bathrooms, a Ring video doorbell, a full range of kitchen appliances and a fully-turfed garden.

The development will also include a new play area, new landscaped areas and new areas of public open space.

Aisling Ramshaw continues: "Launching Cathedral Meadows, and showing how we're creating a distinctive, desirable place for people to live, is a real landmark moment for Banks Homes.



"We're proud to be building our 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."

Appointments are now available at the Cathedral Meadows marketing suite, which is open from Thursday to Monday between 11am and 5pm, and can be made by calling 0191 378 6200.

For further information on Banks Homes' Cathedral Meadows development, please visit www.bankshomes.co.uk/development/cathedral-meadows-development



Further success on high value Efficiency East Midlands framework

County Durham and
Nottingham-based, Hodgson
Sayers, has been reselected
for a further four years
as lead contractor on the
extensive Efficiency East
Midlands (EEM) framework,
where it has already won
work in excess of £3 million.

Works to be undertaken within the framework are for roofing replacement and repairs and will continue to be led by contracts manager, Linden Blackwood, from the company's base in Nottingham. With its headquarters in Stanley, County Durham, Hodgson Sayers, a building maintenance, security products and roofing specialist, was on the previous framework which ran from 2020 to 2024.

Established in 2010, EEM is a not-for-profit procurement consortium that offers cost and efficiency savings for the public sector across England and Wales. It supports 365 organisations ranging from contracting authorities, education providers, police forces, NHS Trusts and charities.

Hodgson Sayers, which employs around 100 staff, has completed contracts for a number of organisations since it was first placed on the framework in 2020, including Newark and Sherwood District Council, Derby Homes, East Midlands Homes and Nottingham City Homes.

John Sayers, managing director, Hodgson Sayers, said: "Winning new contracts is essential and exciting but renewing an existing contract, or, in this case, retaining our lead position on such an important framework, is testament to a high consistency of quality of workmanship and customer service and to the values of the operational teams, led by contracts manager, Linden Blackwood.

"Once more, we have the opportunity to deliver work to the potential value of several millions of pounds over the lifespan of the framework and, as lead contractor, we do not have to compete against other companies also on the framework to be awarded work. Instead, we can focus on delivering the same quality projects that won us the renewal of our place on the framework.

"I would like to extend my thanks to Efficiency East Midlands and also to the entire team at Hodgson Sayers for ensuring that we provide all of our clients with bestin-class service."

Linden Blackwood, said: "Hodgson Sayers is a customer-centric business and to have, once again, been placed first across all criteria, is the biggest indicator we are performing to the standard we hold ourselves to.

"When I joined the Nottingham office two and a half years ago, Hodgson Sayers was just starting to make itself known in the Midlands. It speaks volumes that we have gone from being a relatively unknown company in the East Midlands, to being a first-choice provider. I am extremely proud to lead the team operating in this region. It has only been possible to attain the level of geographical growth that the business has achieved in such a short time period, with renewed business, because of the dedication our people display day in, day out.

hodgson-sayers.co.uk

Claiming pension credit: It's vital to help 4,300 poor Newcastle pensioners

Pension Credit is a benefit that brings winter fuel payments with it. But Three of 10 of the City's pensioners Don't Claim it.

The UK Government's recent Pension Credit publicity 'Take-Up' campaign is to be welcomed by all those committed to tacking poverty in old age.

About 4,300 Newcastle pensioners could be missing on vital financial support in the form of Pension Credit as the cost-of-living crisis continues.

The tax-free payment, which for single pensioners tops up a weekly income to a guaranteed minimum level of £218, or £332 for couples. The benefit is also a "vital gateway" for claimants to be entitled to other help such as council tax relief, support for dental costs, housing benefit, free TV licences for the over-75s, the £25 weekly winter fuel payment when the weather is freezing, automatic help with electricity bills and crucially the £300 Winter Fuel Allowance.

Those who have caring duties, or a disability, may be entitled to a higher guaranteed income: the severe disability addition is £81.50, while the carers premium is £45.60. As Age UK notes someone qualifying for the first of those will be ensured an income of at least £299.65 a week.

Across the city, 7594 claim Pension Credit with 74.097 successfully claiming it across the North East. Yet three out of 10 pensioners



both in our city and across the region haven't claimed. Nationally a staggering 880.000 eligible pensioners don't claim due to lack of awareness, stigma or a feeling, often wrong, they are not entitled.

Many people of state pension age, many of whom are women, are simply missing out on these top-up payments and could be losing out up to £56 a week.

Couns Stephen Lambert, Ged Bell & Paula Maines said: "It's important more apply for Pension Credit which could make an important difference in helping older people meet their essential needs and avoiding falling into poverty."

Older residents and their families and carers can check if they are eligible by using the online calculator provided by the DWP to fill in their details an find out how much they can claim.

Kenton residents can get practical help with form-filling by visiting The Search Project every Tuesday morning at Kenton library. Or they can call the City council's Welfare Rights public advice line on 277 2627.

Local residents can visit our face-to-face council welfare rights sessions at Kenton Centre every Thursday, 9.30 to 1.00. No appointment required.

The continued adventures of...

Ziggand Colly!

Hi! everyone

Thanks for all your well wishes, I am happy to say that the tablets are working and I am feeling a lot better. A little shaky on the old pins but I can still jump on the setee. Just as well as we are really busy, although I do not get out on site as much these days – Cally has taken over many of my duties.

I have to say, toasting my tail in front of the fire and curling up with a nice treat rather than a cold van does appeal more nowadays.

See ya next month

Q. Several years ago I had my windows replaced with double glazing. After a few years, the south-facing ones became subject to occasional, unsightly internal misting. As there was a ten-year guarantee I claimed for renewal of the windows.

The insurance company claimed that the condensation was normal and therefore refused the claim.

A. One of the great unspoken truths of sealed double-glazed units (SGUs) is that eventually they will all mist up. The time scale should be twenty-ish years in a perfectly made and installed window. But in poorly made ones it can be a lot less. Five months has been reported.

So, in a way, the condensation is 'normal', in that it will happen eventually in all windows. But I would have thought you could expect that a ten-year guarantee would reasonably cover you against misting within that time. It depends on the insurers' small print, I suppose.



Please send me your building queries through facebook - @WDLne, website: wdlnortheast.co.uk or through my Dad's good pal Michael at Northern Insight on micahael@northern-insight.co.uk







youngsRPS strengthens Senior Leadership Team

youngsRPS, has strengthened its senior leadership team with the appointment of four new board members from across the business.

Associate Directors Harry Morshead, Tom Whitehead, Joanne Metcalfe, and Paul Fairlamb join Directors and business owners Graeme Bruce, John Turnbull, and Charles Raine on the firm's board to further develop the overarching business strategy. Michael Blake, a respected previous owner and commercial property lead at youngsRPS, stepped down from the board as a director last year but has remained as a valued consultant through the transition process, and will continue until succession planning has concluded.

Managing Director at youngsRPS, Graeme Bruce, said: "I am thrilled to welcome our Associate Directors onto the youngsRPS board of directors. These individuals have a wealth of experience in their professional fields and have also demonstrated their ability and dedication to further developing the firm. Their appointments will allow us to support the growth of our business's exciting and diverse future, whilst remaining focused on continually improving the excellent results we produce for our clients.

"Our business dates back to 1879, and our heritage plays a significant part in the decisions that we make today. Over the last 140 years, we have evolved from providing rural professional and consultancy advice to becoming a multidisciplined firm and respected rural and commercial surveyors, estate agents, and development consultants. As we look to the future, we want to not only continue that legacy but create a springboard for new ideas, allowing us to keep modernising in an evolving sector. Our new board members represent all areas of the business, giving each sector the voice it deserves."

Newly appointed board member and Associate Director, Harry Morshead, said: "It is a really exciting time at youngsRPS. Over the past 12 months, we have concentrated on recruiting experienced individuals to strengthen the services we provide. We have also invested in our IT infrastructure to ensure a streamlined and productive environment for our team to operate efficiently for our clients. Our people have always been the pinnacle of our success, and we have an excellent team in place. Our initial priorities include further developing their working environment. I am excited to work with our team to create an even stronger and more resilient business for the future."

Joanne Metcalfe is the first female board member at the firm. She joined youngsRPS in 2014 as a newly qualified rural surveyor. She said: "It is an honour to be the first female appointed to the board. I hope to use this opportunity to show that the rural property industry has changed and is no longer solely male-dominated. I will work hard as a leader of the business to ensure that all members of our team are inspired to work towards our common goal and embrace the opportunities available to them."

Paul Fairlamb, Associate Director, said: "It's an honour to be joining the board of directors, and also to represent the commercial arm of the business. Whilst our roots are in agriculture, our commercial team has seen significant growth, particularly since merging with Stanton Mortimer in 2017 and moving to our Grey Street office in 2019. We have brought on board new clients and expanded our overall team and offering. Between us, we have over 100 years of commercial property experience within the Tyne and Wear region, and I look forward to continuing to grow our footprint and identifying new opportunities with the support of my fellow board members and the wider team."

Tom Whitehead, Associate Director, joined youngsRPS in 2020 and has been instrumental in the firm's rural property success in the Yorkshire region. He said: "We have encountered a considerable amount of change over the last four years. Brexit, war, and a global pandemic have created unparalleled challenges for the agriculture sector. As a firm, we have adapted to ensure that we can continue to support our clients as they face business uncertainty. Our team aren't just rural agents and consultants; many are farmers themselves, and they have applied their hands-on farming knowledge to create innovative yet practical solutions for our clients, allowing them to navigate a new landscape and thrive. I look forward to working with the rest of the board to ensure that we continue developing our services and working methods to support our clients as we move into a new era of agriculture."

youngsrps.com



Grenfell Tower - what next?

By Neil Turner, Director, Howarth Litchfield

In September the report by Sir Martin Moore-Bick on the Grenfell Tower inquiry was published and did not hold back on its findings into the deaths of 72 people.

The report was damming on all parties and their collective involvement including the local authority, contractor, architect and manufacturers of the insulation and cladding panels.

I was born in a local warehouse, demolished many years ago, close to the Grenfell Tower. So, reading the final report I feel an extra connection to the area and the sad story in

The report is both shocking and revealing in the reported failure of central government, local governance in fire checking and the method of design and detailing to the cladding of the 1974 tower.

I was asked shortly after the fire to comment

on the disaster and declined, preferring to wait and to read the report and I don't intend in this article to comment on any one party.

There has been a huge amount of work in the industry since the disaster to look at how all buildings are designed, detailed, and constructed. The recent introduction of the Building Safety Act 2022 is the first of many much needed, legislative guidance for the industry.

We all need to look at this disaster and take stock in the industry. Like all architects we have been re assessing the type of materials and insulation that are suitable for use on residential buildings and all developments.

However, the changes are far greater, and we must now have a 'golden thread' of decision recording at every step of a development. We have seen this approach develop but it cannot merely be seen as paying lip service or as a tick box activity, or worse still, getting in the way of creativity.

The message of the report is that all parties working in the construction industry have a moral and legal duty to consider their decisions, check their decisions and record them. It sounds so obvious doesn't it!

We are seeing huge changes in building control, approvals and the need for fire safety which can only help prevent or mitigate future incidents. From this horrible event, the industry has an opportunity to transform the way it builds. I hope the opportunity is not wasted!

But my main concern remains the

considerable number of buildings around the country that have been 'refurbished' or built using combustible material and have people currently living in them.

Grenfell Tower

The Cladding Safety Scheme was set up in 2022 to meet the cost of addressing fire safety associated with cladding on residential buildings over 11m in height and 11-18m in London. But will it go far enough and fast enough to remove the risk from the current building stock? I suspect in 10 years' time we will still be discussing buildings that have inherent issues.

I would really hope that from this awful disaster we could all learn to improve the new buildings coming through on the drawing boards and not ignore all the thousands of buildings that need immediate refurbishment.

Remember that Grenfell was also a refurbishment project, so please let us get it right, across the country, as a matter of respect for those poor people that lost their lives.

Neil Turner, Director, Howarth Litchfield can be contacted on 0191 3849470 or email n.turner@hlpuk.com www.howarthlitchfield.com

Co Durham-based developer submits planning application for key 43-acre M18 site



Potential to deliver around 450 new jobs!

Privately-owned property development company, Premcor Estates (Premcor), which is based at Aycliffe Business Park, has submitted a planning application for its 43-acre, Mode 18 development site at Junction 3 on the M18.

Established in only 2018, Premcor is consistently making its mark in the sector with several other major schemes in various stages of development.

The current planning application relates to the redevelopment of the overall site at Rossington, Doncaster and has the potential to deliver around 450 new jobs.

Planning permission was granted three years ago at the site for the installation of a muchneeded Link Road to divert industrial traffic from the surrounding residential areas and construction of this road forms part of the proposed scheme works.

Proposals include for a mix of employment and an element of operational vehicle storage with supporting infrastructure including a gatehouse. A further planning application will be submitted shortly for land to the western end of the new Link Road for roadside uses, including an electric vehicle charging station and petrol station with shop, as well as providing new restaurant/coffee shop facilities with drive-through lanes.

Premcor director, Rob Lane, commented: "We acquired this site off market and have spent the last four years on site assembly. Our work has also included securing agreements for a new Link Road for commercial traffic to the Bankwood Lane Estate to bypass Rossington and the large volume of residential development that has taken place there. The Link Road will make a big difference to local residents and Doncaster Council who have been supporting and promoting the link road for the last six years.

"We have ambitious plans for the site which will build on our established links with major occupiers. Potential occupiers have already been secured for the petrol filling station and the EV charging facility as well as two restaurants with drive through provision. We will also be welcoming Yard Storage Solutions, which will provide selfstorage and commercial storage facilities, on the remainder of the site."

Mode 18 is so called because of its location on the M18, close to the A1(M) and M1 Motorways as well as its proximity to the iPort Rail terminal which is just a five-minute drive away. Both factors combine to make it a first-class location for any organisation, but particularly industrial, manufacturing or logistics companies.

The two separate planning applications could generate and sustain over 500 new full and part time jobs - the proposed employment development site at the eastern end of the new Link Road will lead to the creation of around 450 jobs, while the commercial/retail uses at the western end of the new Link Road, provide a further 87 new jobs.

Premcor has appointed the Sheffield office of ID Planning to handle the planning application for Mode 18. Architects are C4 Architects and the Sheffield offices of Knight Frank and BNP Paribas have been advising.

www.premcor.com



Steel Benders UK proudly sponsored Open Jar Tribute Festival

Steel Benders UK (SBUK) are proud to have supported a sellout music festival by the sea at Seaton Carew, where more than 8,000 people attended over two days.

The Middlesbrough-based steel bending, profiling and forming specialists sponsored the Open Jar Tribute Festival 2024, which was held just a couple of miles from where the company is in the process of moving to.

The event was over a September weekend when things got underway on the Friday afternoon and concluded in front of a sell-out 5,000 strong crowd on the Saturday.

It featured tribute acts to some of the biggest names in music such as Kings of Leon, Amy Winehouse, The Beautiful South, Coldplay, Oasis and Abba.

"We are thrilled to have been a part of such a fantastic event," said Tania Cooper, managing director of Steel Benders.

"The Open Jar Tribute Festival brought people together to enjoy great music and create lasting memories and I'd like to say a huge well done to co-organiser Joe Franks and the team.

"It was an honour to contribute to the success of this community celebration and we loved being there to enjoy the whole experience." The Open Jar Tribute Festival was held for the second time and SBUK branding could be seen across the site, where there was a food village, stalls and fairground rides as well as the brilliant music and bars.

SBUK is committed to supporting local events and initiatives and the festival was a resounding success, drawing a large crowd of music enthusiasts from across the region.

And Joe Franks, co-organiser, said: "I would like to say a huge thank you to Steel Benders for sponsoring The Open Jar Tribute Festival 2024.

"It was an honour to have such a prestigious company involved with our event and it was a pleasure to deal with Tania and the team from our initial meeting right through to event day.

"I'd just like to say a special thank you to Tania for making this happen and making the partnership for this event such an enjoyable one.

"I'd also like to say a big thank you to Steel Benders' finance manager Ashleigh Glass, who throughout all our communications was nothing but a joy to deal with. We are looking forward to holding the Tribute Festival again next year."

Steel Benders operate in a wide-range of markets including marine, defence, renewable energy, offshore, petrochemical, manufacturing, architectural and civil engineering.

And the company are moving over from their Middlesbrough home for the last 21 years to the former Caparo and forge plant site on Brenda Road, Hartlepool, creating new roles and a host of new opportunities.

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





Going for Gold

Lynas Engineers, proud Gold Members of the MFC Foundation

As Friends of the MFC Foundation since 2023, we at Lynas Engineers have always been huge advocates of the Foundation's commitment to creating a positive social impact across Teesside through their extensive and varied initiatives. What is so important to us is the Foundation's staunch commitment to providing valuable support to the most disadvantaged people in the most disadvantaged areas in the community. No matter how old, they are there to help.

Every company is different, but as a business we are proud of where we come from, and we take pride in our journey toward social responsibility, community engagement, and sustainable development. We are therefore very fortunate that from day one, we have prioritised fostering meaningful connections across the region and beyond. This has manifested through our hugely successful Preferred Partners programme, which brings together like-minded local organisations from a range of disciplines-across the engineering industry and beyond-through collaborative work within the communities that we serve.

While there are significant business

advantages to this style of working in partnership, one of the key factors is our ability to amplify the pivotal work that our Charity Partners do in the local area, to organisations that value it as much as we do. One of our gifts to the Foundation comes in the form of a complimentary exhibition stand at all of our Preferred Partners events. As regular guests of Lynas Engineers, the MFC Foundation can boost their visibility among leaders of the local industry and showcase their efforts to raise aspirations and change lives for the better across Teesside. This has correlated directly to an increase in Foundation memberships amongst the partners. Not only does this lead to further fundraising for the Foundation, but in turn it also raises the profile of the Foundation within the new members' networks. It is for this reason we are immensely proud of the impact that Preferred Partners has on our charity partner.

"It is fantastic to have the support of Lynas Engineers, they've been amazing allies in helping us connect to other businesses in the engineering industry. These connections have led to other businesses coming on board as Friends of the Foundation. This helps us continue our life changing work in the area, achieving our dream of inspiring confidence and hope across the Tees Valley Community."

Paul Shepherd, MFC Foundation

We are pleased to say that the company's success is not solely measured by its engineering achievements. Lynas Engineers have always been committed to making a difference in the communities in which we operate.

It can be a challenge to foster a charity partnership that is entirely aligned to your company values, while also delivering tangible results to your local area. Yet, this is exactly what we have found with the MFC Foundation- a relationship only strengthened by the number of Boro fans in the office.

It is with this in mind that we have decided to upgrade to Gold Membership with the Foundation, and with it, Lynas Engineers will have an even greater opportunity to support Foundation's many initiatives and to make a lasting impact on the Tees Valley Community.

This reflects our dedication to excellence, not only in the built environment world, but also in social responsibility and community development.

As we look to the future, Lynas Engineers are set to play a pivotal role in backing the positive impact of the MFC Foundation for years to come.

Want to know out more about the Preferred Partners network and its impact on local communities? Visit www.lynasengineers.com to find out.

Bernard Interiors has grand designs

When Jen Bernard established Bernard Interiors in 2008 she had plans to steadily build a company AND build a reputation. She now leads an award-winning interior architecture and design studio specialising in later living, healthcare and luxury residences throughout the UK and abroad, with offices in both Newcastle and London.

The team of 21 include senior management, an in-house procurement team, interior architectural designers, and the interior specialists who deal with artwork, furniture and accessories

But Jen isn't someone who will sit back and reflect on her success...she has grand designs on taking Bernard Interiors forward

"From day one, when I sat in my kitchen in Gosforth, I knew exactly what I wanted to achieve," says Jen. "I couldn't be happier with the way things have gone, but I know that I can do much more which is we're now embarking on a five year plan to take the company to the next level.

"The company will separate into three divisions. There's one division which I currently can't tell you about, but the other two will see us moving our private, high-net-worth clients to a new London office...one of our team has already located down south...and will mainly concentrate on residential design and architectural work in the UK. A second division will focus on our hugely successful commercial clients, particularly those in the later living and care sector. We work with investors, large corporates and real estate firms and currently have a significant commercial order book which stretches to 2030. For many developers, our interior architectural design expertise is seen as being a key asset to powering growth within their chosen market and adding considerable brand value. Our creativity and commercial acumen set us apart, we're strategic in our approach, offering timeless designs, tailored to the vision of our clients with impeccable attention to detail.

Two of Bernard Interiors commercial clients who work in the field of later living are Audley Villages and Hardrian Healthcare. Audley offers high quality housing options for the over 55's with tailored luxury amenities. They allow the end user to rent or own a property and to maintain their dignity and independence. Audley is currently offering eleven projects which Bernard Interiors has worked on. Within the Care sector, North East based Hadrian Healthcare is another leading example of an operator who is changing the perceptions of Care Homes. I'm particularly proud of this relationship as we've built a highly successful, trusted partnership, transforming circa 10 developments over the last 16 years.

"The last couple of years has been tremendous for us. We're looking to move further into the European market...we've already increased the team by 25%...revenue is up by 44%...and we're looking to add a further five to eight people over the next year or so. We're especially keen to promote local talent. It's so important to nurture young people...that's why we're helping a youth community project in Cowgate called Projects 4 Change. I'm involved with Northumbria University and we regularly offer placements to students. We also go to schools and colleges to give talks on interior design to hopefully encourage young people to consider a career in this field."

Bernard Interiors offer a complete turn-key service. From an initial discussion all the way through to fitting-out properties for commercial and private clients, it really does mean that they work on every aspect of a project to ensure seamless execution.

"One of the beauties of how we operate is that we see projects through from start to finish. We frequently work on a project in pre-planning, sometimes for four/five years before the client finally either takes over or moves in. It really can be a case of going from a few sketches on a piece of paper when we first meet a client, all the way through to laying carpets, fitting joinery, hanging pictures and finally handing over the keys. Some clients have their own ideas...most just trust us and leave us to it.

"And yes, it's fair to say that every project is different which means all of our work is bespoke and tailor-made to each individual client or brand. We ensure egos are left at the door here at Bernard Interiors, working collaboratively to ensure a unique end-result."

In other words, Bernard Interiors can work on providing you with solutions. You'll be working with an award-winning agency which has the experience to design precisely what you both want and need.

Interested?

The first thing we'd do it recommend that you check out their excellent website... www.bernardinteriors.co.uk which gives you more details of what they've been up to and what they're currently working on.

You could even call in and discuss some ideas over a coffee at their studio in Newcastle.

Contact them on 01661 821 427 or email enquiries@bernardinteriors.co.uk





Esh Construction builds future talent through education and training initiatives



Esh Construction is one of the North of England's largest privately-owned contractors. Through its Constructing Local strategy, the Bowburn-headquartered company invests heavily in education and training opportunities, from delivering projects in the sector to helping unearth the next generation of construction workers.

Creating a 'Construction Centre of Excellence'

A Construction Centre of Excellence opened to students in September after Esh Construction completed a £1.7 million refurbishment project at Promotion House in Langley Moor.

The contractor has transformed an existing factory unit into a new learning space to create a specialised teaching facility for New College Durham's trade subjects.

The refurbishment has seen the building remodelled to create teaching rooms, breakout areas, changing facilities and a practical area for teaching. A mezzanine level has been created above the teaching space which houses the mechanical plant for the facility.

Grant Watson, Construction Manager for Esh, said: "The Promotion House refurbishment has served to strengthen our relationship with New College Durham. We are proud to play our part in providing new learning environments for the next generation of construction workers and we are confident that the trade-specific

elements the new facility brings will inspire young people to explore a range of key career pathways."

Supporting the transition from military to construction

After a distinguished 26-year military career, Andrew Senior transitioned to civilian life by joining Esh Construction in April – and he has found significant support in his new role as a HSEQ Advisor.

Since attending the Army Foundation College in Harrogate in 1998, Andrew underwent his Phase 2 military training in Catterick and was stationed in Germany for five years before returning to the UK. He completed operational tours in Iraq, Kosovo and Afghanistan, as well as training in Kenya, Ukraine, Jordan and Canada, achieving the rank of Warrant officer (WO2).

In deciding to leave the Army, Andrew was seeking a role back in 'civvy street' and found that his knowledge skills and experience were suited to the health and safety role at Esh. He said: "Health and safety had always interested me, and there were many similarities between the construction

industry and the military that go hand in hand. The same principles are in play, you just apply them differently, but ultimately, our job is to make sure every employee goes home safe each day."

Esh signed up to the Armed Forces Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) in 2021 and became a Gold Covenant holder in July 2023.

Newcastle University student experiences a year in industry

Engineering student, Thomas Davys has successfully completed a year out placement at Esh Construction.

The 21-year-old Newcastle University student spent 12 months with Esh as part of his Civil Engineering BEng (Hons) degree. Opting to take on the year out placement after completing the second year of his degree, Tom has worked across key Esh projects, including the Tyne Bridge restoration, Stockton Waterfront Urban Park, Hebburn Tri-Station and the Hendon Foreshore project at the Port of Sunderland.

During his placement, Tom has gained a deeper insight into his career pathway and expanded his knowledge about the contracting side of the industry. He said: "It's important to understand that when you come out of your degree, what is going to differentiate you is experience – it might be a placement year, or it might just be a summer placement or some volunteering work, but just try to get experience under your belt."

To find out more about Esh Construction, visit www.eshgroup.co.uk



All aboard!

The longest operating marine training college in the world, South Shields Marine School in South Shields, Tyne & Wear, have announced details of their upcoming Careers at Sea Open Day taking place on Saturday, 2nd November 2024 at their multi-million pound training facility in South Shields, Tyne & Wear.

Principal Simon Ashton, who trained at the marine school and returned after a successful career at sea said: "Anyone considering a maritime career or simply curious about life at sea, will have a unique opportunity to explore different roles at sea, meet leading shipping industry professionals, talk to highly experienced lecturers and gain valuable insights into the maritime world."

With current cadets on hand to offer their advice and support and information on student Halls of Residence, the ships careers day is expected to attract students and interest from around the UK, Europe and beyond. The multi-million pound bridge and ships simulators will also be included in the tour, giving a real time experience of working at sea, as well as advice on all careers at sea.

Awarded the Queens Anniversary Prize and founded in 1861, the South Shields Marine

School has also announced above national average results.

Chris Gray, Head of School for Marine Engineering at South Shields Marine School, said: "We aim to provide the best experience possible for students at our world class training school. The national average in Navigation is 72% with South Shields Marine School students achieving 87% and on the Stability & Operations module our students achieved 60% with the national average 48%. The students have worked hard and we're very proud".



The South Shields Marine School next Careers at Sea Open Day is on Saturday 2nd November 2024 10:00am to 2:00pm in South Shields, Tyne & Wear. Register at: forms.office.com/e/Mcv78yTSeD

www.southshieldsmarineschool.com



All good on the Horizon

Sweeping changes to the rental market are driving many experienced landlords away. However, Horizon Sales & Lettings has positioned itself as the go-to business for any North East landlords looking to take a step back.

Formed five years ago by three friends, the Middlesbrough-based company has since been on a one-way path toward growth due to the team's unparalleled knowledge of the North East property sector.

The company's team and turnover has grown year-on-year, while boasting one of the most impressive and diverse property portfolios in the North East, with global investors lining up to break into a region that's rapidly established a stellar reputation for producing bumper yields.

The company's directors say they are focused on offering an "easy offramp" for landlords concerned about their future in the fast-changing sector.

"Rising interest rates, speculation over changes to capital gains tax, and new Government policies are making lots of landlords nervous," admitted co-director Chris Bunn.

"Older landlords may be unwilling to commit to major refurbishments if they have an eye on retirement. Additionally, some landlords may be nervous about raising rents and pushing long-term tenants out – thus saddling themselves with sky-high mortgage repayments.

"But the good news is for anybody considering selling, our team has unrivalled access to a stream of global investors looking to secure residential and commercial North East properties, making us perfectly positioned to help both parties."

And according to co-director Denis Shail, they are not the only winners.

"New investors are determined to inject money into properties, renovating them to an incredibly highstandard," said Denis.

"This benefits both tenants and the wider community, by improving homes which in turn, attracts better-quality renters.

"But delivering high-quality properties also means you attract tenants who want to stay long-term, giving you greater security."

Yet Horizon Sales & Lettings are not merely property investment specialists, with renovation and property management services also offered as part of a comprehensive wrap-around approach that aims to make owning buy-to-let properties as painless as possible.

The Gilkes Street-based company can even arrange refinancing via its friendly in-house team of mortgage experts.

It also has a glowing reputation for speed, priding itself on fast sales and purchases – made all that easier due to both the company's incredible network and constantly monitoring the sector for emerging trends.



"Our investors are varied, but often they are high net-worth clients, and we deal with many successful entrepreneurs and professionals – such as solicitors and accountants - alongside full-time property investors," added fellow director, Martin McManus.

"Many are British, particularly from the south, but we have contacts as far away as Asia and the Middle East.

"We are currently experiencing a lot of interest from the Netherlands following legislative changes that have impacted the Dutch buy-to-let market. As such, we are already bringing investors from Holland across.

"And our investors are not just interested in residential properties. There's been a noticeable demand in recent years for commercial properties, including high-end flats, and that's definitely a fast-growing market that we are already well-positioned in.

"And it doesn't matter if your property is a £20,000 home or a £200,000 commercial property, Horizon Sales & Lettings is the trusted agency to partner with. We are all born and bred in the area, and the company has a superb record for brokering the perfect deal – if you are buying or selling."

For more information on Horizon Sales & Lettings, visit www.horizonsaleslettings.co.uk





David Thompson

Founder/Architect, THAA Architects

I only really entertained the idea of becoming an Architect once I was studying for my A-levels. As someone who was creative and interested in art and the sciences, it suddenly seemed the obvious choice.

Fast forward some 33 years, and I have my own chartered practice, based out of a Newcastle city centre office with a small satellite office in Northumberland. We provide our services nationwide, working on residential and commercial projects across the country. Having set up THAA in 2018, I do everything from managing the team, bringing in new work, and liaising with new and current clients. I also get time to do some of the creative thinking with the team.

I would say my proudest achievement was taking the leap of faith after 16 years of employment as a registered Architect working on many notable projects for renowned international practices to becoming a self-employed sole practitioner.

Looking back, I could have continued as an employed Architect, but being my own boss appealed to me, being the master of my destiny so to speak. I will always remember discussing my desire to go self-employed with a respected local builder, who told me to 'just go for it as what can go wrong' and 'don't say no to anything you are offered' – great advice from an established professional in construction.



After several tumultuous years that have put a lot of strain on many businesses and individuals, we have a healthy order book of commissions, ranging from unconventional residential extensions, and one-off 'grand design' homes, to a brewery conversion for a gallery and artist studios, and a riverside seafood restaurant in Northumberland, as well as just completing a competition entry for an international design museum in Scandinavia.

We have a diverse team at THAA. Apart from myself, everyone comes from outside the North East but has decided to live and work here because of the great quality of life on offer. We have an international mix with staff coming from home and abroad with a range of skills from a junior architect from Newcastle University to several qualified Architects, one from Spain and another from Sri Lanka and several architectural technologists.

In terms of our design work, we always go the extra mile and pride ourselves on thinking outside the box. Clients are by far our biggest critics, but by listening and working closely with our clients, we help them to create a unique crafted and considered solution which meets all their needs.

As a design studio we have embraced all the latest Architectural technology including BIM and Virtual Reality and are now exploring how A.I. can assist us. My practice is forward-looking in its approach to good design, as such we are a strong proponent of sustainable principles such as adopting the Passivhaus process.

Like most businesses creating the right team is an ongoing challenge, currently, we have a great team of designers all working closely together with relevant consultants and clients on the various projects that are currently ongoing. Challenges have come in many shapes and sizes, but I would say that the biggest challenge has been to evolve and adapt as the practice has started to grow.

I have a huge admiration and respect for the late Richard Rogers who was a giant in the Architectural world having designed the Pompidou Centre in Paris and the Llyod's Building in London. I worked for Richard for several years in London on many groundbreaking international projects including the Millennium Dome at Greenwich. As well as being a successful businessman, he was an approachable colleague and would always have time for his staff, however young or old.



He was a consummate professional and the work that his studio produced is a testament to his legacy. I would like to think that during my time working under Richard's tutelage, perhaps some of his talent and people skills has rubbed off on me, guiding me and the work we do at THAA.

Whilst architecture is one of the primary drivers in my life, outside of work I try to find the time to unwind by walking or biking through the beautiful county of Northumberland where I reside or alternatively making music, reading or painting which helps me to recharge as well as influencing my creative thinking for the work we do in the studio.

E: thaa@thaa.co.uk W: www.thaa.co.uk









Ironmongery – A solid investment in any building

Get a handle on this architectural feature with SB Ironmongery Solutions Ltd. When you approach a building there are probably several things you take for granted. But, take a closer look. Check out the door furniture and other special details the architect may have added to make the building look more stylish.

Once you start looking, you'll be surprised by how many pieces of ironmongery are to be found. Look around you now. Whether you're in an office or working from home, you are surrounded by ironmongery. Your building simply wouldn't work without it.

Ironmongery needs to do two things. Be functional...open, close and lock the door...but it should also look good, fit into the surroundings and enhance them.

"That's the tricky bit, that and meeting a budget which, on a large project can run into tens or even hundreds of thousands of pounds" said Director Stephen Waistell from SB Ironmongery in Sunderland. "Our biggest project was for a private client in London and the budget for the doors and windows was over £800k. That's an exception of course, but it shows we can work with anything from high value projects with a major contractor to an individual with a creative vision that no-one else can help with."

"As well as projects requiring multiple pieces of ironmongery, we are able to help architects and the public with bespoke items," adds fellow Director, Scott Brown. "We never say no. I cannot think of one instance where we have been unable to turn a client's vision into reality, from crown shaped handles in Monaco to engraved and infilled handles in Doha".

"Having been in the ironmongery business since the mid 90's, we have an extensive, trusted supply network which allows us an almost unlimited capacity to supply and manufacture with complete confidence".

Stephen and Scott met working for another ironmonger called Scott Beaven Ltd (that's why they call themselves SB Ironmongery in a nod to their past).

"Scott Beaven was a real character, but he was brilliant at what he did and taught us both a lot," adds Stephen. "He instilled in us the principle that things had to be done right and to the highest quality. It's why we've been chosen for prestigious projects like British Embassies in Washington DC and Algiers, the transformation of Kings Cross Station and the £1bn regeneration of Liverpool One (working with some 20 architect practices)".

Scott adds "traditionally a lot of our work has come from the North West and London but we also have a fine body of work here in the North East such as the Stadium of Light, St. James Park, Seaham Hall Hotel, Theatre Royal and 17Nineteen. We're currently working on the transformation of the Redhills Miners Hall in Durham. Sunderland is an exciting place to be right now. We're specified on the HICSA and E-Sports projects and of course there are the film studios that are to be built only a stone's-throw from our offices. We'd love to be involved with those".

Overall they've worked on over 1600 projects together in 12 different countries.



GAI diploma holders, Stephen and Scott have both worked their way up from warehouse, scheduling, contracts, sales and eventually running their own company so they understand all aspects of their business and are very hands on from initial engagement to project completion. Their skills are invaluable to architects and they can also help builders who are looking to value engineer a current specification with no loss of quality.

"We pride ourselves on sourcing the majority of our ironmongery from the UK ensuring the highest quality and all bespoke items are made here," adds Stephen. "We recognise however, that sometimes budgets dictate further savings so we only work with top quality importers to be certain that all products meet our exacting standards."

Whether you need a single item of bespoke ironmongery or thousands of fittings for a multi-storey redevelopment, SB Ironmongery can help. Scott adds "having worked together for nearly a quarter of a century, our clients can be sure that we offer quality, great service and continuity and we're very proud of that."

Log onto their excellent new website... www.sbironmongery.co.uk where you'll find full details of what they can supply. If you don't spot what you're looking for, get in touch with Stephen and Scott and they'll find it for you.

You can also contact them via the website or email, sales@sbironmongery.co.uk or call 0191 549 1806



GFW navigates the emerging trends in the UK commercial property market

As we move through 2024, the UK commercial property market presents a seemingly optimistic yet complex landscape. The latest insights from the RICS commercial property monitor suggest that the market might be poised for a comeback.

In light of the recent report, Lesley-Ann Riddles, Senior Associate and Commercial Surveyor at specialist property consultancy GFW, draws on her industry expertise to share her insights on current market trends, predicting what the future may hold for the UK commercial property market.

Quality over quantity

"One of the most notable trends observed this past quarter is the sustained interest in the industrial sector, particularly in primary and secondary markets. While the volume of enquiries dipped compared to the same period last year, the quality of leads improved, with a higher conversion rate into actual deals. This trend highlights a

shift towards more calculated and strategic investments, with stakeholders prioritising viable, long-term opportunities over speculative ventures.

"In the retail sector, we witnessed an encouraging uptake in the demand for smaller units, particularly in the North East. This aligns with national trends where the retail leasing market is showing signs of growth, driven by a rise in interest for localised, community-centric retail spaces. This resurgence is a positive sign for the broader retail market, suggesting that despite the challenges the sector has faced, there is still potential for growth and improvement."

Election uncertainty stalls growth

"The general election introduced a level of uncertainty within the commercial property market that caused some investors and occupiers to pause their plans, leading to a dip in investment activities. Additionally, the decision to hold interest rates steady from the previous quarter did little to boost confidence, resulting in a market that remains relatively flat.

"Within the typical commercial sectors, industrial is still outperforming both office and retail spaces regionally, with pressures on the retail sector seeming to have eased slightly."

Regional variations and emerging opportunities

"Regionally, the North East has experienced a noticeable slowdown, with fewer enquiries across all sectors, reflective of a broader national trend. However, RICS commercial property monitor indicates that a gap seems to be appearing between rising office demand in London, against a subdued picture for the rest of the country.

"Despite a commercial property slowdown,

this quarter has also revealed emerging opportunities, particularly within the food and beverage industry, where there is a growing demand for commercial units. Alternative asset classes such as student housing, life sciences, and data centres also continue to show strong capital value and rental growth projections, indicating areas of potential expansion outside of traditional sectors."

A positive yet cautious outlook

"Looking ahead, there is a cautious optimism for the remainder of 2024. With a new UK government now in place and inflation beginning to cool, the market could see a gradual improvement.

"Rents for both primary and secondary industrial units are expected to rise over the next 12 months, and there is also a positive outlook for prime office spaces, while secondary offices may continue to lag.

"As the industry awaits further clarity on the new government's approach to planning and business rates, there is a quiet hope that these changes could provide the boost needed to reinvigorate the market. In the meantime, stakeholders will continue to navigate these uncertain waters, seeking out opportunities in the sectors and regions where growth potential remains strong.

"Though uncertainty still lingers in the UK commercial property market, the potential for recovery is becoming increasingly evident. As we move towards 2025, the industry's resilience and adaptability will be crucial in seizing these opportunities and driving the market forward. As market conditions continue to change, GFW are focussed on providing clients with expert support and informed advice, ensuring they make the most of emerging opportunities."

www.georgefwhite.co.uk



Sector optimism soars as NEAA celebrates 10th anniversary

As the North East Automotive Alliance (NEAA) celebrates its 10th anniversary, members geared up for Expo 2024 in confident mood, with a survey revealing many companies are set to significantly increase investment levels in the next two years.

The annual North East Automotive Expo has grown year-on-year since the NEAA was formed in 2014 and is recognised as the most influential event of its type within the UK automotive supply chain sector.

Paul Butler, chief executive of the NEAA, said: "We have achieved so much in the ten years and so many people, members and support organisations have made a phenomenal contribution to make the NEAA and the sector what it is today – the largest representative body within the UK automotive industry.

"While we will celebrate the past ten years

we are, as always, looking to the future and our member survey has filled us with optimism. 64% of those surveyed have planned significant investment over the next two years, a clear signal the supply chain is confident and bullish about growth prospects. Reinforcing this optimism, 50% of members said they were expecting to announce significant automation projects, over the same period.

"These are very positive figures and an indication that the sector will continue to grow at pace and further jobs will be created. However, there is no room for complacency, as 64% said they are struggling to recruit the right calibre

of people and this could seriously hold the sector back. The North East Local Skills Plan (NELSIP) highlighted this is a challenge for many sectors, and it's clear it will be a key priority for the NEAA and will focus heavily in our Strategy 2030."

Other survey findings showed that 72% said they would be implementing a digital strategy within the next two years and were equipped with the right skills to start that journey, whilst 77% have a sustainability strategy in place.

A 10 Year Celebration Drinks Reception, held at Expo 2024, sponsored by SMS Smart Manufacturing Solutions and SMS Tech, took place at the Main Stage at the end of the day.

The Expo is also supported by Headline Sponsor, Sunderland City Council, Partner Sponsors, Invest South Tyneside, TR Fastenings and Hitachi Digital Solutions, Lunch Sponsor, Masfix, Breakfast Sponsor, Jabil, Refreshments Sponsor, SOS Industrial, Registration Sponsor, CMYK | Business Technology, and Expo Guide Sponsor, Horizon Works.

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Cybersecurity funding announced for social care providers in the NE and Yorkshire



The North East Business Resilience Centre (NEBRC) has joined forces with NHS England for a brand new pilot project to tackle cyber threats in the social care sector.

New NHS funding has been announced in partnership with the North East Business Resilience Centre (NEBRC), helping small and medium businesses within the social care sector to prevent cyber threats.

Cyber threats can cause costly disruption to social care providers, with the challenge only growing as threats become increasingly complex and difficult to spot. That's why the 'digital health check', funded by Better Security, Better Care (via the NHS England North East and Yorkshire Regional Digital Transformation Team) includes free cyber services and training, specifically available for social care

in the North East of England and Yorkshire.

Half of businesses (50%) and around a third of charities (32%) report having experienced some form of cyber security breach or attack in the last 12 months1, so this most recent NHS England funding plays a vital role in the fight against cybercrime.

Tom Daly, Project Manager – Better Security, Better Care for NHS England North East & Yorkshire Region commented:

"This exciting partnership approach between NHS England and NEBRC gives us the opportunity to protect critical social care services from disruption due to cyber-attacks. The NEBRC's non for profit mantra and skill in breaking technical language into laypersons terms means they are well positioned to support this crucial work"

The services will be provided by the North East Business Resilience Centre (NEBRC), a police-led, non-profit, that presents a unique blend of corporate businesses, policing and academia to help protect businesses in the North East, Yorkshire and The Humber from online crime and fraud.

As part of the scheme, the NEBRC have taken on a new team member Sam Cattell, Data Analyst to oversee the pipeline. With over 3,000 SMEs from the care sector ready for services2 such as internal and external vulnerability assessments and security awareness training, the NEBRC are looking forward to getting started and delivering as many services as possible.

Free support is available for care homes and funding is allocated on a first come first served basis. If accepted onto the pilot, organisations will need to consent to participate in the confidential research project, which will evaluate the Data Security and Protection Toolkit, for effectiveness.

Email england.dsptney@nhs.net to express your interest or reach out to the NEBRC to discuss the range of potential services they offer at enquiries@nebrcentre.co.uk

Sunderland residents urged to donate unwanted devices to help bridge digital divide

Sunderland City Council is calling on residents to support their local community by donating unwanted digital devices through the 'Donate Devices' project. The project is funded by the UK Government through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Donate Devices aims to ensure that everyone in Sunderland has access to the technology they need, particularly for education, employment and staying connected with loved ones.

The programme is designed to collect unused or unwanted devices such as laptops, tablets and smartphones. These devices will be sanitised, refurbished and distributed to residents who lack access to digital technology, helping to reduce the digital divide in the area.

The campaign aims to reduce e-waste while providing vital support to individuals and families who lack the technology to stay connected in today's increasingly digital world.

The programme accepts a wide range of devices, including: laptops, tablets and smartphones. Devices should be in working order, but even those with minor issues are welcome, as they can often be repaired and distributed to those who need them most.

Sunderland City Council is committed to improving the lives of its residents through a range of smart initiatives designed to enhance



well-being, support digital inclusion and foster a sense of community. It is easy to donate a device by visiting one of the designated drop-off points across the city.

For a full list of donation locations and times, visit: sunderland.gov. uk/donate-devices



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Talking Tech and Digital

This month Northern Insight talks to...

Kelly Whitfield

Founder and CEO, KLIK UK

Did you always envisage a career in the world of Technology?

My early aspiration was to be a police officer.

I was born curious, often dismantling things and putting them back together as a child. Watches, bikes, anything with moving parts.

I'm soothed by process and efficiency, and irked when I see people or businesses struggling unnecessarily.

Technology is the foundation upon which my previous businesses were built, so moving into that arena feels natural to me.

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

I would encourage you to get what I call "Fit to Compete".

Get your CV in order. Use recruitment agencies but don't rely upon them. Seek advice and direction around interviews. Ask for feedback and be brave enough to follow it up.

Stick to my three-P's: be Professional, Polite and Persistent.

If you lack experience, do all that you can to gain it. Campaigns exist to encourage people like you to pursue careers in STEM - so make good use of them.

Tell us about the most exciting project your currently working on?

KLIK is the project I am working on and it's the most exciting thing I've ever done.

It's taken a long time, and a significant sum invested to get KLIK to where it is today.

Tell us about your team.

I have a phenomenal team around me. Our developers are all North-East based and some of the best at what they do.

Now is a crucial time for KLIK, as I look to define the first few years of our people strategy. I'm thinking and digging deep.

Is it possible to work remotely whilst building a positive culture? Could we offer unlimited annual leave yet attain, maintain and retain competitive advantages?

All fascinating questions that I'm playing with right now.



What are your long term plans for the business?

To be the go-to provider of SaaS solutions capable of powering an unlimited number of PaaS enterprises in the UK and beyond.

Technically, KLIK is still a pre-start. We soft launched our vision to a VIP audience in July. The first version of our website www. kliksaas.com went live last month.

Version 1.0 of our software will be 'Dev Complete' at the end of this month - from there it's all systems go.

Despite it being early days, we completed an equity deal during 2023 which valued the concept of KLIK at £6m. We're now looking to build upon that with a significant Series A raise.

What's your favourite piece of technology?

My iPhone - I use it for most things, despite my love/hate relationship with it. Phones distract us from the beauty of life at times – whereas I prefer to be present. I like people and enjoy human interaction. I am from Teesside after all.

Do you have any heroes or mentors?

I admire Simon Sinek, Oliver Yonchev and Daniel Priestley. I've had the pleasure of meeting the latter two, both of whom are super smart and good to get to know.

I read a lot of John Pilger in my early twenties – the concept of Slow News was quite profound back then and has stuck with me since

I mostly admire people who disrupt things, challenge the status quo and help us to think differently.

When not working how do you like to relax?

I enjoy cooking. I have a library of books and love picking a recipe, going out to source ingredients and pulling a feast together. I rarely have the time but when I do, that's my thing. I also like to paint, draw and make things - if the children have homework that involves art, crafts or glue guns, I'm totally IN.

What's your fondest career memory?

Launching my first lifestyle business back in 2006 – Adept. I adored it, and the second business it created that ran alongside. It was hard work, juggling the business and a two-year old, but Adept made all our dreams come true.

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

Itemise and invoice the things that you do for free.

Back in my early days, I did a lot for free because I cared. That can develop into a standard and can be expected of you if not managed carefully.

For that reason, we started listing the work we had done and the true cost within each invoice. We then showed a discount of 100% to the line items that were complimentary.

Not only did that demonstrate our level of commitment to our client, it had a really positive impact upon relations too.

www.kliksaas.com



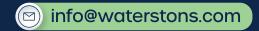
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Digital Twins: what they are and why you need them



What is a digital twin?

A digital twin is a virtual representation of an object or system designed to a copy of a physical object accurately. It spans the lifecycle, is updated in real-time data and uses simulation, machine learning and reasoning to help make decisions.

It is often confused with data platforms or simulations, but its essence lies in its ability to be a detailed and dynamic replica of a place, object or process; to have a bi-directional flow of data, and aid in decision-making.

"There needs to be a 3D model of the thing that you are twinning. There needs to be the ability to run a simulation in that model." Alex Waterston – Associate Director, Innovation and Leadership.

We think of digital twins as doppelgängers of real-world things; perfect for smart analysis, proactive monitoring, and making accurate predictions.

Why would you need a digital twin?

There are many uses of a digital twin, some of which you may not have thought of while others allow for optimisation of your usual business processes.

Some of these include:

Product design

Companies can use the virtual prototype generated by a digital twin during the design phase to test different designs before investing in a solid prototype.

Supply chain management

This technology can solve a range of supply chain challenges, including packaging performance, fleet management, and route efficiency.

Maintenance scheduling

Digital twins can identify variances that indicate the need for preventive repairs or maintenance across a range of assets as part of its data capturing capabilities.

Better collaboration

The data gained can provide insights into product performance, distribution, and end-user experience, as well as be shared by employees across many areas of the business so everyone uses the same data to make better decisions.

Digital twin pros...

Forward thinking

The prediction of future scenarios means engineers make changes to a design without a physical re-build.

• Faster, more efficient development

Allows for faster testing processes

so engineers can make changes and improvements efficiently.

Cost saving

In the long run, digital twins can save businesses money on an array of project costs.

Sustainable construction processes

Digital twins allow precise information on materials and structure, meaning less waste.

Complex technology

It is time consuming to use a digital twin, some smaller organisations may struggle with less resources.

Data security

Digital twins store large amounts of data which naturally leads to increase security risks

High initial cost

This may require investment in new technologies and hardware in order to get the most out of a digital twin.

Integration

Adoption of this technology require new learning and an investment of time and training.

If you're looking for more interesting and exciting ways to excel your business processes, or adopt digital twinning within your organisation, get in touch with our innovation experts at innovation@waterstons.com





Equine in the sunshine!

For the last six years office Gateshead-based technology company, SOS Group, has supported the Riding Disability Association's (RDA) National Championships at Hartpury University & College in Gloucester.

The biggest disabled equestrian event of its kind, this year's Championship was very special and for every one of the competitors it marked the culmination of an enormous amount of hard work and determination.

This year, the RDA celebrated its 55th anniversary at its National Championships, which featured a record number of entries and spectators. On the opening day, the RDA President, HRH The Princess Royal, presented a number of awards on her first public engagement following a recent injury. Over three days, RDA participants took part

in competition classes from dressage and showjumping to carriage driving, showing, endurance, countryside challenge, best turned out, vaulting and arts and crafts.

Throughout the event, SOS Group provided practical, hands-on technical support and equipment for the busy event administration team.



Clare Prysbet, Head of Fundraising at the Riding Disability Association, says: "Running a show of this scale, with hundreds of competitors and volunteers, is a huge logistical operation. We are therefore incredibly grateful for the long-term technical support provided by SOS Group, to help keep the event office running smoothly.

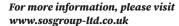
"Andrew and his wife, Karen, have always been incredibly supportive of RDA's lifechanging work, and we were delighted they were once again able to join us throughout the weekend to support and enjoy the RDA National Championships."

Established in 2002, SOS Group is an award-winning company based on the Team Valley and providing digital office equipment services for business from startups to multinationals and internationally significant events.

It has always supported the people and organisations who are making a positive difference to local communities and, 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.

Andrew Skelton, an SOS Group Director, says: "The RDA is a fantastic organisation and you can see the positive difference horse riding is making when you see the many smiles on show throughout the Championships.

"It's an incredibly uplifting event, not only for the competitors, but for their families, friends and coaches, too. We're very proud to support the RDA and our congratulations to all the competitors in this year's Championships."















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Integrating AI: opportunities and challenges

By Lee Gilmore, Principal Solutions Architect and AWS Community Lead at Leighton

The juggernaut that is AI hitting our industry with vast speed over the past two years has created both opportunities and challenges for organisations looking to integrate with it.

It goes without saying that the marketing of AI alone, and the pressures of keeping up with the neighbours from a product feature perspective, has left many executives feeling that they don't want to be left behind. And rightly so. AI used correctly and safely can revolutionise organisations.

In this article, we explore the challenges and opportunities that come with integrating AI into your business.

Bridging the AI readiness and skills gap

One of the first challenges organisations can face is needing more time to be ready to integrate with AI and also keeping up with its speed of advancement. This typically comes in the form of a need for more technical knowledge of this new paradigm, and the need to train teams internally, or hire to fill the skills gap. This is very much an emerging set of skills, and working with an experienced partner who has already hit the hard edges and running multiple AI production workloads can help.

The challenge of non-deterministic outcomes

An example of the complexities of this new paradigm is the non-deterministic nature when it comes to testing models and integrations, and we have all seen companies that have hit the news for unexpected responses or outputs. Traditional software operates within predictable, rule-based frameworks, whereas AI models, particularly those driven by machine learning, can produce varying outcomes depending on the data they're exposed to. The rapid pace of AI advancement means that organisations must commit to continuous investment in research and development to stay at the forefront.

Security, ethics, and bias in AI

Security and ethical concerns are another major consideration for AI integration. AI systems are often tasked with processing vast quantities of personal and sensitive data, raising critical questions about data privacy and regulatory compliance. Moreover, as AI increasingly penetrates sectors like healthcare, criminal justice, and law enforcement, the stakes are higher than ever. The risk of algorithmic bias, where models inadvertently perpetuate prejudices or discriminatory practices due to biased training data, can lead to unfair outcomes and, in certain cases,

legal ramifications. Organisations need to implement strong governance frameworks that ensure AI models are transparent, fair, and auditable.

Navigating job displacement and workforce transition

The cultural impact of integrating with AI is something else organisations need to consider, as job displacement and the knock-on effects on culture are real. The advancements in AI agents mean many repetitive or data-intensive tasks that are carried out by humans currently can now be done using AI. Great examples are customer support chatbots, data entry and cleanup, predictive analytics and content generation. Decision-makers must address how AI adoption might lead to job displacement and how they can re-skill employees to fill more value-added roles. This can have a profound effect on organisational culture, morale, and overall employee engagement, so managing this transition thoughtfully is critical.

Organisational opportunities with AI integration

So, what are the tangible business opportunities of integrating AI? Beyond the high-profile use cases, such as personalised e-commerce recommendations, AIassisted medical imaging, and predictive agricultural analysis, there are immediate, practical applications that organisations can leverage. AI can help streamline internal processes, automate decision-making, and enhance customer engagement through intelligent systems. Many businesses start with integrating AIdriven automation into routine operations as a first step, such as workflow optimisation through utilising off-the-shelf AI products offered by major cloud providers, which reduce technical barriers to entry. Integrating AI is not just about chasing headlines or keeping pace with competitors, it's about reimagining how your business operates and delivers value. With the right approach, AI can unlock new efficiencies, enhance customer experiences, and provide a competitive edge, but it requires thoughtful consideration of technical, ethical, and cultural factors to be successful.

leighton.com



Steven Parker

Founder, Phonetic Digital

What were your career ambitions growing up?

I can't say I had any specific ambitions. I wasn't particularly the academic type, even though I did reasonably well in school. At 16, I had my heart set on joining the British Army, but that wasn't to be. After that, I tried college, which didn't work out, had a stint in a warehouse stocking shelves, and later in car sales. It's safe to say I've had a varied path. But every step taught me something. Eventually, I found my real passion—marketing. Once I got into marketing, everything clicked. That was 20 years ago, and I still have the same energy and enthusiasm for it today!

Tell us about your current role.

My main role is as the Managing Director of Phonetic Digital, which I started in January of this year. As with many small business owners, I wear a lot of hats. One minute I'm delivering for clients. The next, I'm doing business development, finance, recruitment, and sustainability. I'm also the official plant waterer and office hooverer. I do whatever needs doing! I also lecture for NESMA. I teach their Level 3 to 6 digital courses for the Chartered Institute of Marketing.

I'm also proud to serve on the board of the Foundation of Light, Sunderland AFC's official charity. I'm passionate about contributing to the community in my home city in this way.

What is your proudest business achievement?

Setting up my current business, Phonetic Digital, is a huge achievement for me. It's always a daunting task to start something new, but doing it on my own this time has been incredibly empowering. I drew on the experience I gained while setting up, scaling, and exiting my previous business.

How has your industry changed in the last decade?

The digital marketing industry has changed dramatically over the past decade. Ten years ago, TikTok and Snapchat didn't exist and AI tools like ChatGPT were unknown. Only the more advanced businesses were exploring digital ads, like Facebook and Google Shopping.

Fast forward to today, and digital platforms have become an integral part of our lives. People check their phones first thing in the morning and often right before they go to bed. Websites are now interactive, not just static brochures.

The pace of change is staggering, but that's part of what makes this industry so exciting.

What are you currently working on?

We offer three core services: websites, marketing, and training.

We are currently working on some exciting web projects. They are for a well-known regional real estate agent. We are also working with a local college to make their site more dynamic and user-friendly. We have several exciting projects in the pipeline, which we're keen to get started on.

From a marketing perspective, we're managing SEO for a well-respected law firm, helping them strengthen their online presence and visibility. We also handle social media for a large printing firm, ensuring they remain active, engaging, and on-brand across their platforms.

Tell us about the team you work with.

We're a small team, operating with a big-agency mentality. One of the things I love about our setup is the flexibility. We have a core team, but we work with a close circle of trusted associates to expand our capacity when needed. It's a different kind of delivery model, but it works brilliantly for us, and suits our clients too.

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

I've been fortunate to have had many mentors over the years, and received a lot of great advice, so it's hard to pick just one. But two pieces have stuck with me.

"Work hard and be nice to people." It's simple and straightforward, but often overlooked. Everyone is chasing the next deal in business today.

"Stay curious." This industry evolves quickly. If you're not constantly learning, you'll get left behind.

What has been your biggest challenge?

Leaving my old business was definitely one of the biggest challenges I've faced. It was an incredibly difficult decision because it wasn't just a business; it was a part of me.

It was tough, but it was also the correct decision at the correct time. It taught me a lot about resilience and the importance of knowing when it's time to move on and start something new.

Who are your heroes inside and outside of business?

Inside of business, I'd say my hero is Matthew, our technical director. We've been friends and colleagues for over a decade, and I've learned so much from him. His technical expertise is second to none, and I'm grateful to have him on this journey. The plaque on his desk reads 'Fixer of Everything'. I've never seen a more apt sign.

Outside of business, my family are my heroes. I am fortunate to have been married for 19 years now and we have been blessed with two wonderful children. It's not always easy, but it's always worth it.

How do you unwind outside of work?

Outside of work, I love watching my children play rugby. It's great to see them in action and support their passion.

I also play the piano, it's my escape!

Favourite Book and Boxset?

I've recently re-read *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho. It's a fable about following your dreams and the idea that sometimes the greatest treasure is right in front of you, if you're willing to see it.

As for boxsets, I'm a big fan of *Game of Thrones, Vikings*, and *The Last Kingdom*. Who doesn't enjoy a bit of medieval drama?!

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ITEC proves it's a gem while celebrating its Ruby Anniversary

A North East company has clocked up more than 40 years of offering successful apprenticeships...



There are many reasons why ITEC has gone from strength to strength over the past four decades.

The Newton-Aycliffe based company has built its business on bringing apprentices and companies together for their mutual benefit.

For the apprentices it's a way to get a foot on the ladder in their chosen career, get treceive top class training from industry expertsnd be supported through every step of their journey.

For companies ITEC offers an opportunity not only to boost their workforce but to also use its services to help upskill its existing teams.

And that's not all. The company is proud of

the fact that it practices what it preaches, which is why every single member of ITEC's staff have all reached the company's Gold Inclusion Standard.

That standard means they have been successfully trained in a range of useful courses which in turn allows them to give their learners a tailored and supportive experience,

All of the team have been trained in Children and Young People's Mental Health. ADHD and Autism Awareness, Mental Health Awareness and Learning Disabilities Awareness.

These are short courses which ITEC also offers to companies and organisations of all sizes, important for any caring and responsible employer to know about in the current climate.

Carried out online, they are an excellent way for people to improve their understanding of these areas – and many more besides.

ITEC offers around 80 short courses covering a whole host of pertinent topics, many of which contribute to the individual's Continuous Personal Development.

Stacey Banfield, Head of Marketing and Sales at ITEC, said that all of these sessions had been tailored to suit the needs of modern business.

"These short courses cover so many relevant topics, from cybersecurity to first aid to food safety," said Stacey.

"And they are a relatively small investment in terms of time and cost but massively beneficial to everyone who participates in them."

These sessions are just one small part of what ITEC does and the company will be using October's National Learning and Development Month to highlight what it has to offer.

ITEC works across a range of sectors and the company's skill in managing every stage of the process has made it the first choice not only for apprentices wanting to improve their career path, but for businesses.

Companies like AEL Systems, Hewitt Solicitors, United Direct, Bulk Trainer, Anglotech Group and BlueCom Services have all successfully partnered with the training company, resulting in skilled apprentices becoming a vital part of their team.

Along with IT they offer apprenticeships for team leading, network engineer, software developer, property, business administration and multi-channel marketing.

"There is a lot of misconceptions about what constitutes an apprentice and most people seem to think its someone who has just left school and perhaps doesn't want to go to college or university," added Stacey.

"However it's so much than that. We have apprentices of all ages and they are available to older people and also to those already in a job but where someone might want to enhance their skills or move into a role with more responsibility.

"Our apprenticeships give people the opportunity to open doors to new careers or to help them grow in their existing jobs.

"At the same time apprenticeships are a fantastic way for businesses to bring in new blood and help upskill the workforce."

For further information about ITEC and information on current vacancies visit www.itecne.co.uk

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designed with your comfort in mind. Relax in a modern and welcoming space, perfect for enjoying your favourite games.

Competitive Tournaments and Events: Join our exciting tournaments and events, and showcase your skills in thrilling competitions. Are you ready to prove yourself as a gaming champion?

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For more information, visit our website: www.thectrlpad.com or follow us on social media for updates, special offers and gaming tips!

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Marketing must-haves for scaling North East tech businesses

There's no denying that the North East is a hotbed of tech talent, and is ripe for investment. Last year alone, the region saw its tech population increase by over 400 companies - an unsurprising figure given the region's commitment to innovation and development.

Tech businesses face a range of unique challenges when marketing their products and services. They have to find ways to turn complex information into simple and compelling messaging, while also staying true to their values and goals.

Vida Creative has particular expertise in supporting the marketing, branding and web development of scaling tech businesses across a wide range of sectors, with experienced marketer and leader Ellen Hedley and BeamXR CPO Henry Coggin at the helm.

Now, Ellen shares the marketing considerations that growing tech businesses need to be aware of to help them get to the next level.

Simplify your messaging

As a tech company, you're likely deeply invested in your product. After all, you've put in a lot of thinking and hard work to bring it to life. But being so close to your product can make it difficult to simplify your messaging when it's time to market it.

You might not even realise the jargon or overly technical language you use when discussing your product. But using these in your marketing can alienate the very people you want to reach.

When planning campaigns, start by thinking about how your product solves a customer problem or makes life easier. Focus your

messaging around those benefits. Remember, your message may vary depending on the audience, so map out how your product is a solution for each group to ensure more effective, targeted campaigns.

Many companies fall into the trap of explaining what their product does instead of the 'so what?' for the customer. Simplifying your message in this way helps you cut through the noise of a crowded industry, attracting both customers and potential investors.

Build a meaningful brand

To stand out in a competitive market, you not only need an innovative product that people actually want to use but also a clear and consistent brand that resonates with your target audience.

Establish brand guidelines early on to ensure consistency in the look, feel, and tone of voice in all your communications and marketing efforts. This helps build brand recognition and encourages customer loyalty.

In such a competitive landscape, humanising your brand is a powerful way to connect with people. In practice this means speaking directly to your audience using simple, relatable language. This will help you foster a community of supporters and advocates who feel personally connected to your brand.

Be data-driven

As a tech company, you're likely already collecting vast amounts of data. Why not use that data to enhance your marketing efforts and target the right demographics?

Just like you leverage data on customer behaviour, product usage, and engagement for product development, you can also use it to sharpen your marketing and communications. Data analytics can help you target specific audience segments with personalised messages that are more likely to convert.

Being data-driven also boosts your credibility with potential investors. Using data to demonstrate the value of your product gives you authority and helps you stand out in a crowded market, which is especially valuable when you're seeking investment to scale.

Embrace content marketing

Creating valuable content is key to building trust and establishing your tech business as an industry leader. Focus on solving your customers' problems with practical blog posts, case studies, and how-to guides.

Diversify your formats e.g. blog posts, videos, and infographics to engage different audience types. Regularly publishing relevant content and repurposing it across platforms maximises your reach and keeps your brand visible.

Leverage partnerships and collaborations

Partnering with complementary businesses or industry influencers can help you access new audiences and boost credibility.
Collaborations, such as co-marketing campaigns or working with industry influencers can expand your reach among new customers a lot quicker and offer mutual benefits. These partnerships can also provide opportunities for longer-term crosspromotion, driving greater visibility for your brand

To learn more about how Vida Creative can support tech businesses to scale, visit www.vidacreative.co.uk



New business wins fuel Drummond Central's growth

Newcastle creative agency Drummond Central is celebrating significant business growth after securing a string of highprofile clients and creating a dozen new roles in the business over the past 12 months.

The employee-owned agency has been appointed by several brands, with new recruits expanding the team to 64.

Tees Valley start-up
celebrates Government

investment

Marketing Engine, based in Darlington, has been awarded a five-figure sum to commercialise its innovative marketing attribution software after impressing judges in Innovate UK's Creative Catalyst competition. The government-backed funding programme aims to support the growth of untapped innovative businesses and to increase investment in creative

Aimee Philipson, COO said: "We couldn't be more thrilled to have the backing of Innovate UK – as well as the support of fantastic organisations like Innovation SuperNetwork who have helped us so much over the last few years. This funding will enable us to really take Marketing Engine to the next level and provide the missing piece in the marketing toolbox for so many businesses."

Newcastle-based digital agency Nebula Labs will lead development work on the Innovate UK project throughout the autumn.

Dylan McKee, Co-founder at Nebula Labs, said: "It's a pleasure to be working with

In February, Drummond Central was appointed as the lead strategic and creative agency for premium soft drinks brand Fentimans, tasked with developing a new creative platform for the brand, which is currently in production. Additionally, international dairy company, FAGE selected the agency to launch their new product range, 'Creamy Dreamy' in the US, with work expected to launch this autumn.

Most recently, Drummond Central has been appointed as the lead strategic and creative agency by the UK's most loved bed retailer, Dreams, following a competitive pitch against other independent agencies. The agency is developing a long-term creative platform for the brand, with the first campaign planned to go live in 2025.

With an influx of new clients, the agency has made twelve hires across its departments within the last 12 months. The agency's creative team has expanded, with the addition of 4 new members, as well as the client services team, who have also welcomed four additions. The planning department has added two new roles and a hire has been made in the HR team. The agency has also introduced the new role of Marketing Executive to its workforce.



the local entrepreneurs behind Marketing Engine to develop some cutting-edge innovations to take their SaaS platform to the next level, incorporating next-generation technologies like AI and proliferating them to effective use in the marketing industry through an accessible toolbox, and we can't wait to get started!"

Kieron Goldsborough, CEO, added: "A 'Founders' Club' of early-adopter agencies and marketing teams from across the UK have been feeding into the development roadmap for Marketing Engine so the market's voice is right at the heart of our decision-making. We're looking for companies of all sizes to join our testing panel so if you're interested, please do get in touch."



Media production company evolving in new location

A growing North East media production company has relocated to Houghton-le-Spring's Evolve Business Centre.

Founded in 2020 by Nathan Clark and Richard Rowell, Canvas HQ emerged from the pair's ambition to leave behind their full-time careers and set up on their own.

The firm prides itself on 'helping businesses stand out in a crowded digital landscape by creating compelling, high-quality content to ensure businesses succeed in the digital age.'

This commitment to producing quality video has seen the firm work with clients from an array of sectors from across the region since its launch four years ago.

After spending two years based in an office in Seaham, however, the pair decided the time was right to move to a larger base and relocated to Evolve, which also placed Richard and Nathan closer to home and clients in Durham and Sunderland.

Richard said: "The move has been great for us – we really wanted a stronger footing in Wearside to connect with clients and expand our network to do more projects here.

"We've only been here a few weeks, but already we feel such a strong sense of community and have been included in everything. Everyone at Evolve has been great and extremely accommodating in our move, they even loaned us furniture while we got settled – they couldn't have been more helpful."

The relocation has also enabled greener commutes to the office, aligning with Canvas HQ's mission of being more environmentally conscious, reducing its carbon footprint by biking and running to work.

"Our future plans are focused more on quality than quantity. We're interested in honing skills, being better for our clients and increasing the value of what we do and growing that way," Richard added.

Rephrase owner Paul Fraser has spent more than 20 years working in the media for a variety of titles regionally and nationally, including a long stint at The Northern Echo

Rephrase's range of services can be on a pay-as-you-go basis or as part of a longer-term package

We will do all we can to advise and produce the best possible solution for your needs

We aim to maintain long-term relationships to achieve goals







Marketing. Video.
Branding. Public Relations.

Bradleyomahoney.co.uk



How using a PR Agency can support your business: Fresh Digital's unique approach

Effective communication and brand visibility are essential for business success. Whether you're a start-up looking to establish a foothold in the market or an established brand aiming to stay relevant, working with a PR agency gives you the expertise and resources needed to be seen in the right places, at the right time, and for the right reasons!

Fresh Digital, a multi-award winning PR agency based in Spennymoor, specialises in helping businesses achieve their marketing and communication goals through innovative strategies and tailored solutions.

PR & Content Director, Lizzie Turner explains:

Building brand awareness and credibility

One of the core objectives of any business is to become known and trusted in its industry. Through expertly crafted press releases, media placements, and compelling storytelling, Fresh Digital ensures that your business is consistently featured in relevant publications, blogs, and media outlets. PR campaigns focus on sharing your unique brand story, enhancing your business's reputation, and building trust with your target audience.

We have a deep understanding of both local and national media landscapes in the UK and knows how to position your business in the press to reach the right audience, improving visibility and credibility in competitive markets.

Crisis management and reputation protection

Every business, regardless of size or industry, can face crises that can potentially damage its reputation. Whether it's a product recall, negative reviews, or unexpected controversies, Fresh Digital can step in with immediate and effective damage control strategies. Our crisis management services help minimise the impact of bad publicity and turn challenges into opportunities for growth.

Fresh Digital's proactive reputation management services ensure that your business maintains a positive public image, even in times of difficulty. We closely monitor your brand's presence online and in the media, quickly addressing any negative press before it escalates. By staying ahead of potential problems, we can safeguard your reputation.

Content creation and storytelling

We pride ourselves on producing high-quality content that resonates with your target audience. From blogs and social media posts to press releases and white papers, Fresh Digital crafts compelling narratives that align with your brand message. By consistently delivering fresh, engaging content, we help you to stay relevant.

Measurable results and ROI

One of the greatest advantages of working with us is our ability to provide measurable results. PR efforts are often seen as intangible, but Fresh Digital ensures that you can see the return on your investment (ROI) by tracking key metrics. We provide detailed reports on media coverage, audience engagement, and website traffic, offering you a clear picture of how the PR strategies we create for you are benefiting your business.

Tailored PR strategies for your business

No two businesses are the same, and we understand that. We work closely with you to develop customised PR strategies that align with your business objectives, target audience, and industry. Whether you're looking to increase brand visibility, manage a crisis, or launch a new product, Fresh Digital creates bespoke campaigns designed to meet your specific needs.

With one off services, a retained option, and also the facility to buy a 'bundle' of services to use throughout the year and paid for monthly, we really breathe fresh air into marketing!

01388 417747 projects@freshdigital.uk • freshdigital.uk

150 October 2024 Northern Insight





Marketing and Media Matters

In the latest of this popular series of features we spoke to...

Lauren Archer Etherington

Brand Marketing & PR consultant, Archer&

Did you always envisage a career in the Media Industry?

I sort of fell into Marketing and PR after graduating, it wasn't necessarily my plan, but then again there wasn't much of a plan, either. When I was at University I was hoping to get into radio presenting and did lots of extra-curricular work in this space, but it never ended up going anywhere long-term. I've had so much fun in my career, though and have worked with and for some brilliant people. I even met my husband!

What has been your career path so far?

After Uni I worked for a couple of professional services firms as an entry-level Marketing Exec, moving into a managerial role after a couple of years with some direct reports. I feel like I found my feet around 10 years ago when I joined a well-respected digital agency, Silverbean, as their in-house Head of Marketing and PR, where I had a few great years.

I then moved into a bigger role at Visualsoft, before going it alone just over six years ago as a Freelance consultant. I've had the privilege of working with a great bunch of clients, largely agencies, but some SaaS scale-ups, too. Agencies are very much my niche, however, and that's something I went "all in" on this year.

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

I face a wide range of challenges that keep me on my toes every day. Wrestling the diverse expectations of multiple clients requires skill, empathy and very good planning and organisation skills. Beyond the day-to-day service delivery is the less glamorous side of running a business – the constant stream of administrative tasks and things like chasing invoices.

Who do you respect most in your industry?

I hugely respect and value the opinion of Sarah Waddington CBE, a powerhouse of our profession, who has done outstanding work and driven real change in this industry.

Which fictional media character can you most relate to?

My husband and I always joke that I'm like Bridget Jones in that I "waltz in and fanny on with the press releases" but I don't think that's a great advert, to be honest. We laugh about it, anyway!

What is your greatest strength?

I'm a fixer and know innately how to get the job done for agencies.

I realised fairly recently that every single marketing role I've had, and every client I've ever worked with, has required me to completely overhaul the approach, sort out the confusion and mess made from haphazard campaigns and build marketing functions that deliver on the brand's mission, objectives, people initiatives and commercial goals. Ultimately, setting them up for success and building agency brands that the people leading them and working for them can be proud of.

What is your biggest weakness?

Trash TV and a good Rioja on an evening!

Professionally? I can be impatient and get frustrated when progress is hampered by delays or procrastination. I'm working on it!

What has been your proudest achievement?

I've been fortunate enough to have been recognised by the industry in the past, receiving a couple of spots on 'Top Women in Digital' and that kind of thing, however, the thing I'm most proud of is that I have run my own business for over 6 years and delivered work I'm proud of.

I know where my expertise lies and thankfully I have the contacts and reputation in my niche that means my ideal clients frequently contact me to work together, and that has happened as a result of hard work and consistency. I'm now my longest employer and that feels fantastic!

What are your future career aspirations?

It's funny because my objectives now are so different from what they were even five years ago. I simply want to do work I'm great at and minimise the stress in my life so I can be there for the moments that matter with my family.

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

A lot of people are scared of AI at the moment and there are so many scaremongering articles out there about AI coming for our jobs. But let's not be afraid, let's be real. My view is that we should use AI to help us with processes and simple tasks, leaving our brilliant human brains to do the work that requires creativity and personality.

How do you like to unwind?

I have a two-year-old tornado of a son so I can't say my life is full of moments to unwind at the moment, but when I get time to myself I like to go on long walks with the dog, listening to my favourite podcasts. I also love to cook and find real joy in making delicious food for my family.

archerand.co.uk





Shouting loud and proud about all the things that are happening across our region!

SASS media Ltd is your go-to PR agency to celebrate success!

Recently, at SASS media Ltd, we had the opportunity to pitch for a new contract and the potential client was interested in all the work we currently do with businesses across the North East and what sectors we are involved with.

At SASS media Ltd, we are proud to say that we work across the public, private and third sectors, where we bring our greatest skill - shouting loud and proud about success - to all three!

Often, when we are busy working in our business, we don't take the time to share our successes with others.

That's where we come in - particularly when it comes to getting out your news about significant growth, new contract wins, job creation or how you're doing your bit for the community you serve.

We're happy to say we've just started working with Croxdale Group Durham on the fantastic growth and development that is going on within this automotive business.

We have been supporting them to promote everything from their sponsorship of a charity golf day at Ramside Hall, which raised more than £10,000 for Butterwick Hospice, to the significant investment they have made in developing the after sales and servicing area of the business.

Watch this space for more news from Croxdale in the coming weeks!

In the North East at the moment, there are a lot of exciting developments happening across construction, around the region's role in the drive towards net zero and advances in healthcare and wellbeing – and we want to be a part of telling these fantastic success stories.

However, we also know that many people across our region are facing a challenging time, whether through financial hardship or health concerns, or while navigating their different abilities or neurodivergence.

That's why we also continue to work in the charity sector, where we offer a 10% discount on our services.

We're proud of the work we do for A Taste of Africa Northeast, celebrating cultural diversity in our community. We've also worked with Autism Parents Together, supporting them with a campaign to attract more trustees and volunteers and Power of Women, promoting its mission to lift and shift the aspirations of women in the Tees Valley – something of particular importance to us.

All these organisations have something in common – they've got a great deal of positive progress to shout about!

So what's going on in your organisation? We believe every organisation has an exciting story to tell.

We'd be honoured if you'd allow us to tell yours!

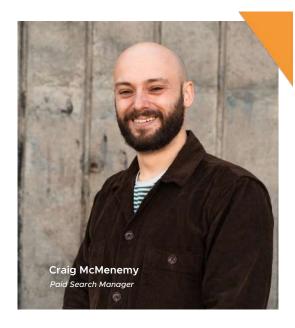
Call us today for a cuppa and a chat on 07896 894538.

154 October 2024 Northern Insight

Craig McMenemy on Paid Search Success

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.

Craig McMenemy, Paid Search Manager at Bonded, discusses the importance of adaptability in paid search, the fascinating developments transforming the field, and how building strong connections is key to driving success.



What made you want to join Bonded?

I've had the pleasure of working with many members of the Bonded team in my previous roles at network agencies. After gaining experience in local independant agencies, the opportunity to reunite with people I trust and admire - this time within an independent environment - felt like the right next step.

Joining Bonded has felt like something of a homecoming for me. I get to work with experts who are not only skilled in their specialisms but also committed to fostering meaningful connections. It's this collective ethos that makes Bonded such a great place to be.

What do you wish more people understood about paid search?

In paid search, adaptability is everything. We need to become experts in our clients' products, target markets, and competitors quickly. I've managed accounts in industries as varied as commercial property, finance, and even lingerie, which highlights how important it is to connect with clients to truly understand their business.

This deeper understanding allows us to build highly effective paid search strategies tailored to each client's specific goals.

"We are people first, marketers second, and leveraging that human touch helps drive success."

Are there any upcoming developments in the media world that you are excited by?

There's a fascinating shift in paid search right now. Google has been pushing more automation through tools like Smart Campaigns and Performance Max, which can be beneficial, especially for established accounts. But there's also been concern about losing transparency and control. What's exciting is the resurgence of usermade scripts and new features from Google—like enhanced targeting options for PMax and better query insights—that are giving control back to marketers.

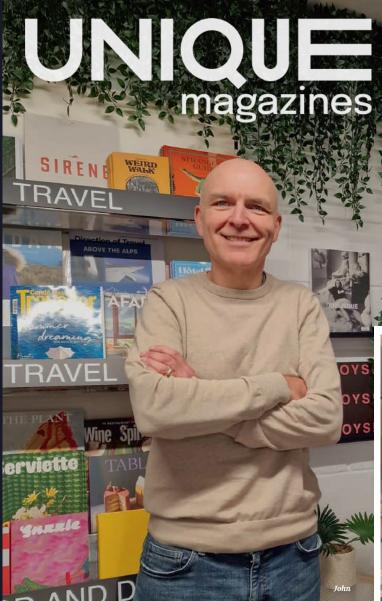
Al is also transforming how we handle data analysis and trend spotting, making these processes more efficient. This means we can focus more on creative strategies and decision-making. It's an exciting time to be in paid search, with new technologies enhancing our ability to deliver more nuanced and effective campaigns.

And finally, what does 'Connection' mean to you?

For me, connection is about truly understanding people on a personal level—whether that's colleagues, clients, or media partners. By getting to know each other, we can tackle challenges more effectively.

Everyone brings their unique perspectives and skills to the table, and it's connection that allows us to tap into that potential. It's about recognising that we are people first, marketers second, and leveraging that human touch helps drive success.







Anyone who knows our Managing Director John and Operations Director Sarah will recognise their strategic approach to everything they do, getting tasks done with clear direction and actioning plans analytically.

This type of approach has supported John, the creator and founder of Unique Magazines, in his 22-year endeavour of our passionate business. This life language, in a series of answered questions we recently conquered as a team, is called a Shaper and they are known for leading the pack, which compliments both John and Sarahs roles here so perfectly.

But what is a life language? A life language is a communication style with its own unique characteristics under one of three intelligent categories which are: Act, Feel or Think first, which then fall into seven different languages to show how each individual moves through the world.





THE SOL

John discovered this by chance. On a solo business trip back to Newcastle, he boarded a plane and took his assigned seat. John does not find sparking up conversation hard and so by the time the plane landed, he had found out all about the work of Clive, his neighbouring passenger on the plane, who is a certified coach of life languages. John shortly discovered how this profound personality assessment can help form a better understanding of your team in business, something which John has admittedly struggled with over the years.

So, in the expected shaper-mover fashion John asked Clive to work with us on our journey of self-discovery. Each staff member completed the personality and communication assessment, which gave everyone a personalised profile. Clive came into our office here in Newcastle to break it down through three fascinating sessions. Our first session was an overview of the languages, the second on distress flares and the third about our interaction as a team, including which members complement each other well and which ones may need to work harder to communicate better.

Chris, our Distribution Manager, identifies as a Shaper. Both he and John share a secondary role as Movers, an action-oriented category. Movers are innovative, direct, and set high standards for their work, leading with vision and passion. Their natural drive for action makes them well-suited for management roles.

In the Action category, we have the Doer. Our Distribution Assistants, Andrew and Andrea, scored this as their primary type, with Sarah placing it second. Doers are reliable, detail-oriented, and focused on practical action. Andrew and Andrea showcase this daily in the warehouse, ensuring accuracy and efficiency when packing and dispatching magazines.

Our top feeler is Ellie, our Brand Content Coordinator, whose two primary life languages fall in the feeling category. She shares her main type, Responder, with Angela, our management accountant. Responders are sensitive, nurturing, and energised by others' emotions, showing deep compassion and creativity. This fits Angela as a caring mother and Ellie as a passionate brand creative perfectly.









Sam, our Customer Experience Specialist, and Ellie both scored Influencer as their secondary type. Influencers thrive on interaction, inspiring others with their vision, warmth, and enthusiasm. They're intuitive, inclusive, and natural at engaging large groups. Ellie uses this skill in office networking and her social life, while Sam shines in her joyful interactions with our customers.

Andrea excels at managing her money, with Producer as her secondary type in the thinking category, alongside Shaper and Contemplator. She's resourceful, responsible, and financially savvy, which explains how she manages to take so many beautiful trips without breaking the bank!

Contemplator ranked low for most of the team, but Andrew and Angela, both scored it as their secondary type. Reflective and thoughtful, they provide insight and depth. Intelligent, inquisitive, and philosophical, it's no wonder Angela is always there to help solve our personal dilemmas.

After reviewing the team report, the results were eye-opening. As a group, we scored Doer-Responder as our overall language, perfectly aligning with our core values of service, quality, and trust.

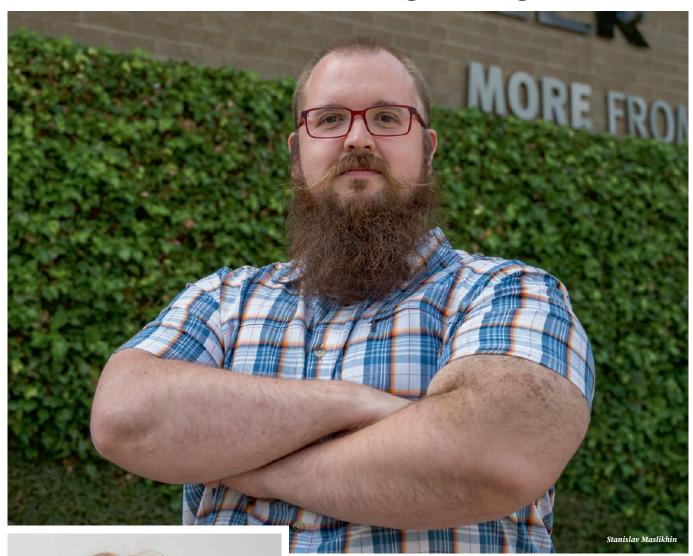
Scoring Doer means we prioritise action, focusing on getting magazines out efficiently, paying attention to detail, and overcoming obstacles with practical decisions. This ensures outstanding service, with quick and accurate dispatch to customers.

Responder, our second language, highlights our emotional depth and care for each customer's problems, reinforcing our compassionate, personal approach to service, which keeps customers coming back.

To get the best from your team, understanding the unique dynamic of each individual is key. Your team drives your business forward and knowing them aligns your goals and vision for the future. Every member deserves to be seen, heard, and understood. Investing in your team is the most powerful thing you can do.

www.uniquemagazines.co.uk

The Power of Lifelong Learning



The CIM qualification results have just been published, and nesma students and tutors achieved an outstanding 98%, making it the ideal time to catch up with new graduate Stanislav Maslikhin, a former Ukrainian marketing director who has completed the L6 CIM Diploma in Professional Digital Marketing.

He works as a digital marketing expert for EGGER, a family company founded in 1961 that employs more than 11,000 people and 22 plants worldwide. Already an extraordinary digital marketer with a keen insight into digital marketing, Veronica Swindale, nesma MD, asked him a few questions about why he decided to embark on his CIM learning journey with nesma.

What inspired you to pursue this qualification?

Self-development is vital for every marketer. If you rely on the education that you received five or 10 years ago, you will always be behind others. That's why I have my rule of completing three to five small courses focused on a particular tool or area of marketing every year and one fundamental 12-month course every two to three years.

I've wanted to obtain a CIM qualification since I received my master's degree in marketing management. Unfortunately, only one program was available in Ukraine, so I temporarily put it on hold.

However, suddenly, my life was turned upside down. As a result of the war in Ukraine, my city was in ruins; I lost my job, and just like that, the hostile army erased all my plans. I had to take my family and move to a safer place.

Veronica Swindale Veronica Swindale

"The CIM qualification with nesma became the first step in building my career in the UK and a way to feel that my life hadn't stopped but was still moving forward".

What role did curiosity play in the process of learning and personal development?

Curiosity is the main driver of changes in marketing, and you need to be curious to be a marketer!

Curiosity encourages you to do foolish and ingenious things, test different concepts, try new tools and channels, or launch new products. For example, 'What if I violate the standards of our corporate style guide and use these assets for Pinterest ads?' or 'What if I change the structure of the marketing department?' or 'What if I use TikTok to target a B2B audience?' All of this aims to gain positive and negative experiences that you can convert into successful case studies in the future.

You learn when you try something new or delve deeply into a specific topic. Even a SWOT analysis can surprise you; you can learn a thousand and one ways to use it. Curiosity boosts our knowledge and helps us stay current, increasing our market value as specialists. At the same time, curiosity goes hand in hand with your readiness to deal with consequences and your ability to justify your ideas. In this case, I can compare marketing to climbing a mountain. At any moment, you can fall, but when you get to the top, you'll want to find another one.

How has this qualification contributed to your personal growth and development?

I'm now 'armed and dangerous' when using digital marketing frameworks to solve ad-hoc tasks.

This qualification has helped me set new goals for my personal development plan in the UK for the next ten years. Achieving Level 7, Chartered Marketer status, and new awards –are all small steps in building my career here.

Additionally, it was the first time I completed assignments in English. People whose first language is not English often have to double or sometimes triple their efforts to achieve good results. It was stressful and challenging, but I proved I could do this and was ready for new challenges.

How do you now envision applying your knowledge and skills?

Step by step. You can't apply everything taught in one week or month. Each company has its own way of working and vision. To feel the effect of your new knowledge, you must change your daily tasks as a digital marketing specialist and implement new ideas and frameworks strategically. This takes time. You must go through dozens of meetings and debates, change your colleagues' mindsets, and take small steps towards bringing your ideas to life.

How do you plan to stay updated on emerging trends and best practices in digital marketing?

I've always found it challenging to balance between five children, work, self-development, and time just for yourself. Books are not an efficient way to stay updated on digital marketing trends. They become out of date before they are even published.

Personally, I use four methods to keep myself updated on digital marketing trends:

- **1. Sharing experiences:** I teach digital marketing to 300 Ukrainian students every year, using fresh data to ensure I nurture a new generation of professional marketers.
- **2. Network:** I like to participate in discussions with marketers from other industries. This helps me consider someone's experience and see a bigger picture than I can at work.
- **3. Knowledge:** I like to stay in touch with the leading training providers in my area, as they usually react more quickly to new trends and changes than others.
- **4. Tools:** The development speed of digital tools is exceptionally high, especially now in the AI era. I always test and set up each digital tool myself, allowing me to notice new features before they appear on social media or other platforms.

For more info email: hello@nesma.co.uk

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...All Hallows Eve...

It's October and tradition has it that the spirits will be out on Halloween. Keith Newman asked some of his RADAR members to tell us some of the horror stories from their job or their celebrations for October 31st.



I am a writer of the occult and have published hundreds of books on the subject. Many scary things happen to an occult writer because all things must be tested, and this can cause all types of mayhem when they turn out to be unsuitable for the public use. But the scariest thing was when my company lost our publisher. As a writer and company, I like to have external publishers to write for as well as Werevamp Media Ltd itself.

We provide manuscripts for other publishers written by myself and published as S Rob. I got out of this by promotion, and putting my efforts into writing as usual but with more time spent promoting which got me another external publisher to provide manuscripts for. My work is written by myself and published as S Rob.

S Rob, Werevamp Media Ltd



At Off The Grid we do love a good Halloween themed party or event, This year we have a group of young leaders away on a Halloween fright night special in the woods which should be fun. Our groups plan, organise and deliver their own events which ensures we are always offering what people really want to do! We also have a number of exciting adult events running through October including a corporate adult group of 26 fundraisers from a National Charity aiming to complete the "Ullswater Way" which is a challenging new route around the lake where participants Walk, Mountain Bike, Paddle-board and Rock Climb their way around! Finishing in the Pooley Bridge Hotel with a great meal and warming drink to discuss the highlights of the day!

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



Lots of things in life can be terrifying ~ with good reason because they are something that needs caution. There are things that require a realistic level of respect for the risks involved. Finally, there are the things that can make us nervous, but we need to proceed with gentle determination. Now here is the tricky part ~ how do we distinguish between those things? That is what I call a quality question ~ a good question that is really hard to answer! Maybe we can look at the evidence before us and assess the risks, plan and do our best.

When we have done our all, then we can hold no regrets and learn from everything. If we look at the things that scare us with a calm mind and encouraging heart, we are much closer to answering that quality question! Keeping calm and thinking wisely are superpowers and most people are much braver than they realise! One of the best things about my working life is being able to help people see their own worth and courage! I often say, "Well done, keep shining and great luck" to my 1-2-1 coaching and counselling clients and that helps them to be less scared. Our lives are too precious to waste on imagined foes, we must do all we can to make sure that we tackle the real ones with dignity, perseverance and a bit of joy!

Dr Rebecca Dinsdale, www.drrebecca.org.uk

160 October 2024 Northern Insight

There is nothing better than a sunny day on the quayside as a trader. But if you add a little bit of wind then it can be scary. You may not know this but the wind, if it is strong enough, is the only weather that will close the market early. And when I first started in January, I was told about permanent stalls being lifted by the wind. Considering there is a huge stone underneath the stall holding it down this was hard to get my head around. But I am happy to say that I have realised there is no bad weather just bad clothing, and I will be at the market come rain or shine. If it's windy you will see me looking calm and collected as my display has been designed for all weathers.

Corinne Lewis Ward, www.powderbutterfly.com





As an independent ABTA travel agency, we have some great ideas and deals for spooky holidays. Tours to Dracula's castle are popular most of the year and very popular is Florida where we have Disney's Mickey's "not so scary" Halloween Event and at Universal Studios a full on Halloween scary events programme. On a personal note, a few years ago I was away with the family seeing a friend starring in panto and was contacted by my staff as the power cables had been cut by a contractor nearby. So without phones and computers we had to implement the emergency protocols. This meant calls coming to mobiles and sorting out temporary offices for several days until the power was reconnected and stable. Stress levels had never been so high

John Dixon, Destinations by John

We're looking for your ghost and supernatural stories not just at Halloween but all year round for Phantom Frequencies on Radio Northumberland. Send an email to requests@radionorthumberland.com

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Psychological safety isn't always comfortable (and why that's **OK**)

"The fear of conflict is almost always a sign of problems"

- Patrick Lencioni

While conflict may seem like it should be something to avoid if you want to nurture a thriving team, understanding what healthy conflict looks like can help to create innovative, creative environments that produce results.

Teams that encourage and support healthy conflict are more likely to have lively and interesting meetings, gain insight and ideas from every team member (not just the boss), and solve problems quickly. Still, it is tough to cultivate this kind of environment if you don't trust each other. Open communication, between colleagues who inherently trust each other, comes when individuals feel psychologically safe and it enables people to not only contribute their best ideas but to disagree when they see something that no

Psychological safety and a positive attitude to learning and growth require leaders and team members to embrace feeling uncomfortable. These teams are driven, never satisfied with past achievements, and have a healthy risk appetite - and risk-taking often means being able to speak up, have opinions, and admit that you don't know the answer. Psychological safety isn't about making everyone feel cozy and it doesn't mean that you're creating a culture where everyone's opinion counts all the time, or where you can continue to fail without consequences. Psychological safety is a fundamental belief that when you speak up you will not be punished and your status on the team will not suffer based upon what you have raised.

One of the most difficult challenges that leaders face in promoting healthy conflict is the desire to protect team members from harm. This can lead to the premature interruption of disagreements which prevents team members from developing coping skills for dealing with healthy conflict alone. The most effective leaders exercise restraint when teams engage in healthy conflict and can role model how to do it successfully, embracing feedback and sharing learning along the way.

ead More Powerfully by Being More Human Ivan Hollingsworth Karolin Helbig How to Heal a Workplace: Tackle Trauma, Minette Norr Foster Psychological Safety and Boost Happiness at Work by Kerry Howard how heal a workplace Your workplace's most powerful resource is Foster Psychological Safety and Boost Happiness at Work interpersonal challenges-and anticipate the WILEY

its people. That's why it's critical to balance the needs of your business with the needs of the employees who make that business happen every day. How to Heal a Workplace shares the insights and hands-on advice that you need to better understand how your culture impacts your team. Drawing on real-world stories from a diverse range of industries, you'll learn how to manage impact of policies and procedures-to create a healthier, happier, and more productive environment.

The Psychological Safety Playbook: Lead More Powerfully by Being More Human by Karolin Helbig and Minette Norman

Every employee, at every level, wants to feel seen, heard, and respected. If we don't feel safe, we can't be our best selves or do our most creative work. This is why leaders must ensure psychological safety for everyone in their team. Whether you're a manager, CEO, or entrepreneur, The Psychological Safety Playbook is the guide you need to lead your team to the highest levels of performance and innovation.

Ivan is the only accredited 'Licensed Psychological Safety Practitioner' in the North East who can carry out the Fearless Organization Scan, which is widely regarded as the gold standard for measuring psychological safety.

For more insights on what company culture truly means, and to find out more about booking a Fearless Organization Scan for your business follow Centric Consultants on LinkedIn or email Ivan directly at ivan@centric-consultants.com

162 October 2024 Northern Insight



Elevate your organisation with Wadds Inc.

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Led by Stephen Waddington and Sarah Waddington CBE, Wadds Inc. brings decades of experience in public relations, management, and communications to your organisation.



Getting back to basics in marketing: why simplicity still wins

With rapidly changing technologies, it can invariably feel overwhelming when it comes to incorporating new tools into your marketing strategy.

While many technological advancements can enhance a marketing campaign, it's important to remember that getting back to basics still has immense power, understanding your audience, delivering a clear message and building strong relationships are still as relevant as ever.

Know your audience

At the heart of any successful marketing strategy is a deep understanding of the target audience. Creating buyer profiles helps you to understand your customers' needs, desires, pain points and behaviours which allow you to target your message in a way that resonates.

Knowing your audience on a personal level fosters stronger connections and allows you to create content that speaks directly to them. When working with clients, I recommend creating no more than three buyer personas for your product or service, even giving them names and faces so you know who you're targeting.

Deliver a clear and concise message

We can't go anywhere now without being bombarded with content across multiple platforms so clarity is crucial. Remember to make your message clear, direct and compelling and focus on your core value proposition – what makes your product or service unique and why should the consumer care? Don't just think about the initial benefits of your product or service, focus on the benefit of the benefit.

Build relationships

Another fundamental principle of marketing and something I'm passionate about, is the importance of building relationships rather than focusing solely on transactions. In the rush to drive conversions and increase sales, brands often forget that long-term customer loyalty is built through trust and engagement.

Rather than being purely sales-driven, marketing should focus on creating value for the customer. Whether through useful content, personalised communication, or exceptional customer service, nurturing relationships creates brand advocates who are far more likely to spread positive word-of-mouth and stay loyal over time.

Be yourself

With the rise of automation and artificial intelligence, there's a temptation to automate every aspect of the customer experience, however, too much reliance on automated systems can make interactions feel impersonal and robotic. Remember, we all love being made to feel special and that's no different when it comes to marketing. Consumers crave authenticity and brands that prioritise real human connections are more likely to thrive.

Getting back to basics means remembering that marketing is ultimately about building trust and connections. Automation should support — not replace — genuine engagement.

As marketing evolves with new technologies and trends, it's essential to remember that the foundational principles remain the same. Knowing your audience, delivering clear messages, building relationships and remaining authentic are strategies that many may feel are outdated but they continue to drive success, even in an ever increasing complex and techie landscape!

By getting back to these basics, marketers can cut through the noise and create meaningful, lasting connections with their customers.

www.riversidemarketingsolutions.co.uk





Cheryl 'spears' success despite personal challenges

A well-known businesswoman is celebrating the success of her startup business and multiple award nominations, despite needing to close for three months to care for one of her twin daughters.

Cheryl Spears founded Spear-heads in September 2023, offering sales, business development and social networking services, seeing an immediate demand for her services. She quickly began to grow her team thanks to a thriving client base, but in the November, one of her twins was admitted to The Freeman Hospital for urgent treatment, which saw her need to close temporarily.

Cheryl and her husband welcomed twin girls in December 2021, Fay and Mia, but unfortunately Mia was born with several serious health issues including a heart condition called 'transposition of arteries' as well as two holes in her heart, which have required multiple surgeries and extended hospital stays.

In November 2023, further health concerns became apparent and Mia was admitted to The Freeman where she underwent intensive treatment and several operations, at which point Cheryl temporarily closed the business to focus on caring for her and supporting her family.

Thankfully, Mia was able to go home in March 2024 despite requiring ongoing treatment, and Cheryl opened up Spear-heads again during this extended stay, working from her daughter's bedside to the delight of her customers who welcomed her return. She has since moved into an office in Stockton, grown her team to five, with two more positions expected to be filled by the end of the year, has been shortlisted in Best Newcomer and Best New Business in the Tees Business awards,

and has secured a contract with Orangebox Training to deliver fully funded LinkedIn training to businesses in the North East.

Cheryl said: "It has been a rollercoaster both personally and professionally, but we're in a really exciting position now and growing rapidly.

"Like many businesses, I've faced challenges with being paid on time in some instances, but my regular customers are so supportive and we've created robust plans to support their growth, which in turn helps Spear-heads to grow, too."

With a proven track record in recruitment, sales and business development, Cheryl is using her experience to help other businesses grow

Cheryl is planning to deliver her own sales conference in 2025, currently dubbed the Teesside Sales Summit, designed to help those in sales and business development roles to bolster their skillset and smash their targets.

Cheryl continued: "Spear-heads uses a mix of tactics including 'drop offs', cold calling, email marketing and more to support our customer base and ensure that they are being seen and heard from by their target audience. I love what I do and I'm really excited to see where we go in the next steps of our journey."

For more information, please see www.spear-heads.co.uk





In Conversation With...

Alan Sawyers & Nathan Cockburn

AS Design

How long have you been running the business?

AS: I started the business initially in 2011 but was always in employment and AS Design was a sideline. I went full time in the business in September 2019.

NC: I started in February 2022 and this is only my second job.

What were your career ambitions growing up?

AS: As a kid I wanted to work with animals, but other than that I'm not sure I had ambitions as such. I do often tell Nathan and Josh [Cockburn, Nathan's brother] that the kind of opportunities available to them at their age didn't exist twenty-odd years ago. Running your own business wasn't an option.

NC: I wanted to be an aerospace engineer or astrophysicist. I still really enjoy learning about the universe and looking at the stars through my telescope on the rare occasion we get a clear night sky.

Tell us about your current roles.

AS: We tend to share pretty much all aspects of the work. We have certain things we're independently good at, and some things we're similarly bad at, or don't enjoy, so we talk regularly about the way the business continues to evolve, which sometimes means you stop doing some of the things you don't like doing – or you find someone who does. As a business, our core is graphic design and web development, but we also offer services like SEO, digital ads management, marketing and social media.

What is your proudest business achievement?

AS: For me, and I know I sound like an embarrassing uncle sometimes, it's been watching Nathan's progression and how he's literally transformed my business. So much so that I haven't referred to it as "my business" for the past couple of years, I call it "our business" because a big part of it wouldn't exist without him.

NC: Yeah, my development for me too. I've learned lots of practical and technical skills but also a lot about running a business. A few months after I started, we agreed a two-year progression plan, which was mainly about my development. That took us up to February this year and we extended the plan to five years.

AS: Now we pretty much know what the core offering of the business is and how we're going to develop that, the extended plan is more about our personal goals and values.

How has your industry changed in the last decade?

NC: I've only been in it for three of them! But even in that time things like AI and other tools have helped us to change how we do things.

AS: Yeah, I don't believe the industry itself has changed as much as you might think but the technology has and continues to do so. If I think back ten years, the things clients



wanted then are the things they still want today, it's the platforms that constantly change, and audiences consume information in different ways.

What are you currently working on?

NC: How long have you got!? We both struggle when anyone asks us that question because we do so much and once a task is done we're straight onto the next one.

AS: About half of our business is made up of long-term retained work, so clients we work with on a daily, weekly or monthly basis, and some tasks literally take minutes. We then have projects that can take months, it's that varied.

Tell us about the team you work with.

NC: The two of us are full time and my younger brother Josh works for us part time. He started while still at school as a summer job and he's stuck at it for over two years. He's just started uni so he joins us by Zoom a couple of times a week and looks after social media and is great with Photoshop. Alan's partner Nic also works for AS Design but based at our production unit about five minutes' drive from the office, where we do a different kind of work for ecommerce clients.

What has been your biggest challenge?

NC: I like to be challenged and I'm pretty determined when it comes to making something work. We work for the singer Toyah and last year Alan asked me if I could re-colour some black and white photographs to match the artistic style of an original 1982 album that we were working on a reissue of.

AS: It probably took Nathan more than 50 hours, so way over and above what we could have realistically charged the record company, but it was a really one of the highlights of the last few years for me, seeing Nathan put so much effort

continued over..



170 October 2024

Northern Insight



WHAT WE DO

WEB DESIGN | HOSTING & MAINTENANCE | SEO & ADS MANAGEMENT BRANDING & LOGO DESIGN | PRINT DESIGN MARKETING SUPPORT & SOCIAL MEDIA



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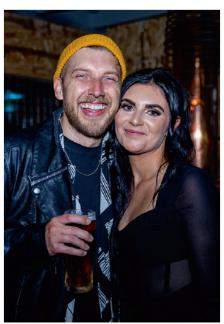




We were thrilled to see so many people join us for this special occasion. The night was full of fun, with DJ Mark Ireland, a rodeo bull, and lots of drinks on hand!

It was all about celebrating our amazing team and the five incredible years we've had, as well as catching up with all of our fantastic clients, friends and family too!

Here's to many more years of success and celebration!







































SQUIDGY — The marketing agency that's making an impact

Andy Robson is the founder and Agency Director of SQUIDGY...one of Newcastle's best-known digital marketing agencies. He's the perfect person for the job for the simple reason that he refers to himself as a 'digital marketing geek.'

SQUIDGY started in his bedroom over a decade ago. Things have changed a lot since then. Andy is now surrounded by a dedicated team of marketing experts who know how to get you, your product and/or your business noticed.

He's a busy chap but we've managed to catch up with him and find what makes Andy Robson and SQUIDGY tick.

Did you always envisage a career in the Digital/Marketing?

No. It's something I found my way into. In my late teens I started building websites and, by the time I reached my early twenties I started down the route to SEO. Because the digital landscape in marketing is always shifting, it's what drew me in and has kept me there.

What has been your career path so far?

I dropped out of Uni just before I qualified as an IT teacher. I switched to being a Financial Advisor just in time for the 2008 credit crunch (great timing) and then became a Business Advisor which was invaluable. After that I headed out into the world of digital marketing.

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

Managing growth. Knowing when to expand the team and how to maintain quality output during that expansion. Also, staying agile in a constantly evolving industry has been challenging but crucial. Balancing long-term strategy with short-term client needs is a fine line to walk.

What is your greatest strength?

I'm naturally a problem solver. I love a puzzle and to me, digital marketing, in particular SEO, is just one giant puzzle. I'm also super detail orientated, so pulling something apart, figuring out how it works, what's missing and putting it back together is what makes me tick. It serves you very well in SEO!

What are your future aspirations?

I want to continue growing SQUIDGY in a sustainable way. We have targets and goals, but at our core I'm focused on working with the right clients and the right people. I want to continue

building a team that's passionate about what they do and able to deliver sustainable, long term results for our clients.

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

It's impossible to ignore AI. I think for us in particular, I think there's going to be more emphasis on understanding the impact we have and how that activity plays a part in the wider marketing journey. We need to educate clients on measuring the success of their activity as a helicopter view and not in the weeds, campaign by campaign or tactic by tactic.

How do you like to unwind?

Films. I try to watch at least one or two a week. I've tried other things but the way my mind works, if I think of something I have to research it, do it, or just note it down. Watching a film disconnects me from that, and more importantly my phone and laptop.

What has been your proudest achievement?

Beyond my two kids, building SQUIDGY from the ground up. Although I never intended to be an agency, I'm very proud that the reason we evolved from a freelancer to Agency is because people wanted to work with me, but there's only so many hours in the day and it just made sense to bring people on board and form an Agency. We've grown a great team, built even stronger relationships with clients and far more importantly made a sustainable and measurable impact on their business. Seeing a business thrive because of the strategies we've implemented is always a proud moment.

Thanks Andy...good luck to you and your team at **SQUIDGY**.

If you'd like help with your digital marketing or just a chat to find out what it's all about, here's an idea. First of all, go onto their website www. squidgy.co where you'll get a good idea of what they're all about.

Another route would be to email hey@squidgy.co or give them a call on 0191 243 2632 BLACKFRIARS COURT

ACKFRIARS COURT



Art with Impact: How Society of Strays is redefining dance theatre

Founded by Andrew
Gardiner in 2019, and further
supported by Director Donna
Lennard, Society of Strays is
redefining the dance theatre
experience with a unique
blend of dark comedy,
dynamic physicality, and
character-driven narratives.

Since inception, Society of Strays have been on a mission to explore the intricate layers of human experience, whilst challenging barriers of accessibility, and creating an inclusive space where mental health and wellbeing are at the forefront.

COVID-19, whilst challenging for many businesses, served as an opportunity for Society of Strays to grow. During the lockdowns, the organisation embraced digital platforms to stay connected and engaged with their audiences. Following popular 'lockdown lives' and guest appearances on Greenwich Dance's podcast, 'Talking Moves,' Society of Strays built up a robust online following. Many viewers of whom found refuge from the challenges and difficulties of the pandemic within the creative world of Society of Strays.

Society of Strays' theatrical productions are not just performances, but immersive experiences that encourage the viewer to delve into the complexities of our very own existence. This interdisciplinary approach enhances their performances, offering audiences a multifaceted experience that transcends conventional boundaries. So it comes as no surprise that the organisation partnered with Nexus for their 2022 'Metro Takeover' campaign - a celebration of Nexus'



40 years of service through dance, song, and visual arts brought together by some of the most prominent and innovative creatives from across the North East.

Developed by Andrew Gardiner, Artistic Director of Society of Strays, the organisation presented public performances of 'Cycle'. Cycle was conceived to explore the cycles we play out in our lives on a macro and micro scale. From the routine and mundane, to the astounding and extraordinary; these chapters define the journeys that we take in life, and whilst grounded in a punchy, darkly comical tone - Cycle offered both dynamic physicality and the opportunity for viewers to pause, think, and reflect.

Society of Strays uses the intersection of various artistic disciplines—which in itself creates a rich tapestry of creative expression—fostering an environment where artists from all backgrounds regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or ability—can come together to create something extraordinary. This dedication to inclusivity is reflected in their work, which consistently embraces a diverse range of voices and perspectives.

Speaking with Andrew Gardiner about their upcoming 'No Plan Bee' project, he says: "Our new project 'No Plan Bee' is going to be made with young people in North Tyneside, Redcar, and Cleveland.

Most of our projects arise from a mental health statistic provocation.

No Plan Bee was born out of young people in the UK where 70% experience climate anxiety and worry about the future of the Planet and where their voices stand in this discussion. So the work will serve as a co-creation with the young participants in which their voices will be embedded into the music, text and choreography of a Bee colony in decline.

It's an outdoor work that will begin touring festivals in 2025. The work has four performers including an operatic/beatboxing queen Bee, her royal aide Herbee, and two dancers."

As Society of Strays continues to evolve, their dedication to exploring the intersection of dance, voice, and theatre - paired with their commitment to inclusivity, diversity, and wellbeing is redefining what dance theatre can, and even should be; especially in the

So whether you're a seasoned lover of the arts or even simply a passer-by lucky enough to see one of their performances, Society of Strays offers a refreshing and thought-provoking experience that promises to challenge and most importantly, inspire.

Keep an eye on their upcoming projects at www.societyofstrays.co.uk





Culture Club

Beverley Smith

Owner, Aspire Licensing

Aspire Licensing, based in Wallsend, specialise in various areas of licencing law including alcohol, gaming, entertainment and events. They provide a complete service and have a close relationship with all local responsible authorities.

Here Beverley shares her cultural likes.

Who is your favourite author and why?

I'm currently reading Matt Haig "Reasons to Stay Alive" which is a Sunday Times Best Seller a true reflection of how his mental illness almost destroyed him and that we need to do to turn things around and make the most of every day we have.

What would be your three Desert Island Discs?

Sybil – When I'm Good and Ready **Rod Stewart** – People Get Ready **Chase and Status** – Blind Faith

Who is your favourite film star and why?

Gerard Butler, I mean need I say more? I don't think I've seen a bad film with him in (although I tend not to follow the storyline when he's on screen). Denzel Washington must be up there too.

What are your top three films? Tell me about them.

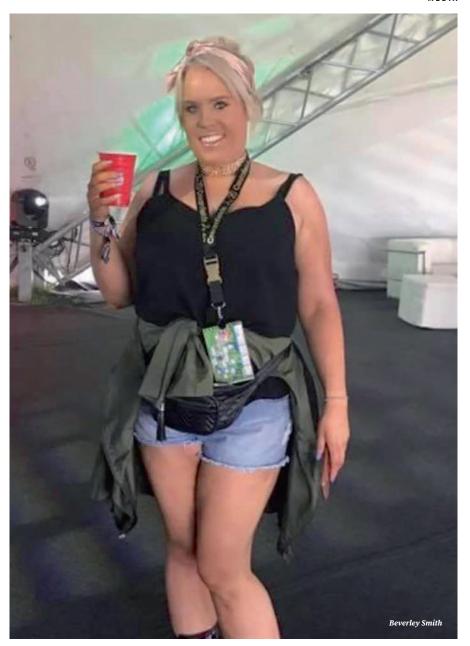
Calamity Jane, this was one of the first films that my grandad made me watch with him. I have great memories of being picked up from school and watching it every week. I still often play the soundtrack to him.

Reservoir Dogs - absolute classic

Harry Potter - I would seriously hate to think of the hours I have spent watching these movies, often full day marathons. The characters and story telling in these are amazing and will be popular for years to come.

Which poem left a lasting impression on you?

Although I'm not massively into poetry, the one I remember from a child is "From a Railway Carriage" by Robert Louis Stevenson.



What box sets have you enjoyed?

Power was one of the best series I have watched for a long time. I loved Orange is the New Black too.

But I would have to say that my all-time favourite that I could watch repeatedly has to be *Entourage* with Jeremy Piven about a young upcoming Hollywood film star and funnily enough his "entourage".

Who is your favourite artist or performer?

I have recently been to see Snow Patrol at Hardwick Live Festival and forgot how brilliant they were, so I am back into them now. I do love The Saw Doctors too, an Irish folk band who I have seen numerous times now. Probably my all-time favourite and this is because of my dad, is Rod Stewart I was brought up listening to his music. We went to see him again last year and he still puts on a great show.

What is your favourite venue?

I much prefer going to smaller intimate venues like the City Hall and Tyne Theatre for gigs. From one extreme to the other I do love a good festival too including *Loosefest* and Hardwick Live.

In terms of going for a drink or a bite to eat probably somewhere like Mayfair in Newcastle which is great for food and families during the day but then nights and weekends they have a great bar atmosphere.

Which musical instrument do you particularly enjoy?

Although I can't play anything myself I have a particular love for chilled vocal house music with sax or bongo percussion, probably down to my best friend Chrissy Mambo who used to play bongos in some of the bars and clubs in town.

From the world of Arts and Culture who would be your ideal dinner party guests?

I would love to me able to chat with the likes of Adele and Amy Winehouse, obviously Rod Stewart would have to be there with Jeff Beck and Ronnie Wood. For sheer comedy value I would have Kevin Hart and Josh Jones.

Contact Aspire Licensing (0191) 500 9562 ext 358 www.aspirelicensing.co.uk



Multi-Academy Trust teams up with football academy to nurture young talent

A new partnership between a Multi-Academy Trust and a football academy kicked off in September.

Fast Feet Football Academy has teamed up with two secondary schools, which are part of Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust, to provide football coaching to talented individuals.

The schools are St Joseph's Catholic Academy in Hebburn and St Bede's Catholic School & Byron Sixth Form College in Peterlee.

Mark Rutter, managing director of Fast Feet Football Academy, said: "The Elite Football Academy at St Joseph's and St Bede's offers specialised training for young athletes, focusing on long-term player development."

One of the key reasons that Robyn Stephenson, 11, from Seaham, picked St Bede's Catholic School & Byron Sixth Form College as her secondary school was the partnership with Fast Feet Football Academy.

Robyn's passion for the beautiful game was sparked by her grandfather, Jeff Clarke, a former professional footballer who played for both Sunderland AFC and Newcastle United and went on to become head academy physiotherapist at Dundee United.

"I want to become either a professional footballer or a physiotherapist working with professional footballers like my Grandad," said Robyn.



Pupils' behaviour at primary school in County Durham is 'outstanding'

Pupils' "outstanding" behaviour was highlighted by Ofsted following an inspection at Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary School in Shotton.

The primary school, which is part of Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust, was rated 'Good' by Ofsted.

The report said: "Pupils' behaviour is outstanding. They work hard and enjoy their learning."

The school's Catholic foundation "permeates throughout school life" with caring relationships between pupils and staff which are "underpinned by kindness and mutual respect".

"The school is ambitious for pupils to

achieve well in their academic studies and personal lives," continued the report.

The fully inclusive school ensures pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) have the same "valuable opportunities" as their friends.

Executive headteacher Lisa Ashton said: "I am very proud of our Ofsted report, which is a celebration of the hard work and commitment of all of our staff, governors, parents and children.

"It recognises many of the wonderful opportunities we have to offer at Our Lady of Lourdes and really captures the exemplary behaviour and attitudes of our wonderful children."

BCCET has 25 primary schools in East Durham, South Tyneside and Sunderland. Apply for reception places at www.bccet. org.uk/our-schools

Sixth form open evenings support students to take next step

Four Sixth Form colleges which are part of Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust are to hold their open evenings for students looking to take the next step in their education beyond GCSEs.

Students who will be making the leap into Sixth Form in September 2025 can benefit from having a look around the different facilities and finding out about the colleges' A-Level success stories.

St Aidan's and St Anthony's Catholic Sixth Form will hold its event on Tuesday 15 October, between 6pm and 8pm. The college, based on Thornhill Terrace Sunderland, welcomes students from St. Aidan's Catholic Academy for Boys and St. Anthony's Catholic Academy for Girls, as well as other schools.

St Bede's Catholic School and Byron Sixth Form College, based on Westway, Peterlee, is holding its sixth form open evening on Tuesday 12 November, between 5.30pm and 7.30pm.

St Joseph's Catholic Academy Sixth Form in Hebburn also opens its doors to future college students on Thursday 14 November between 6pm and 8pm, while St Wilfrid's RC College Sixth Form in South Shields has its open evening on Thursday 21 November between 6pm and 8pm.

More information at: www.bccet.org.uk

Newcastle Preparatory

School





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Our School is a very special place to be.

Argyle House is a leading independent school for children 2-16 Years. We are not just another Independent School. We are an institution built on deep rooted family values. Those values are an integral part for the success and growth of the next generation.

We warmly invite families to join us for one of our open events to find out more.





Scan the code to find out more and to pre-register your attendance.



It's a wrap!

Newcastle High School's wrap-around and school holiday package offers flexible support for busy parents.

NHSG has designed a flexible wraparound and school holiday package to support pupils and busy parents throughout the entirety of the school year.

The package, which includes term-time before and after school clubs, school holiday clubs, chaperoned transport and meal options, can be uniquely tailored to meet the individual needs of families. All options and activities are planned and fully supervised by school staff, ensuring pupils are safe, happy and stimulated.

Amanda Hardie, Head, Newcastle High School for Girls, said: "We know how hard it can be juggling careers and other commitments with family life, so we want to make sure that all pupils and parents are aware of our term time and school holiday support package.

"Because our wrap-around and holiday sessions are delivered by NHSG staff, we can be confident that girls will enjoy their time at the clubs, taking part in a wide range of activities in a safe and stimulating environment."

Younger NHSG pupils can access the before and after school clubs at Junior School from 8am until school starts at 8:40am. The club continues after school, where girls can stay until 6pm if they are not already taking part in other NHSG co-curricular activities. Girls taking part in co-curricular activities that finish before 6pm can be chaperoned to the after school club until parents are ready to collect them.

To access the before and after school clubs, pupils can be dropped off at Junior School from 8am, or they can be brought into Senior School from 8am to make use of our shuttle minibus and our chaperones who will transport them to the club. The after school club also features a light tea option. Alternatively, girls can bring in a prepacked meal when they come into school that day.

Younger girls with older sisters can also be chaperoned by staff to Senior School to meet their sibling at the end of the school day so parents can collect them from the same location.

NHSG's comprehensive holiday club package, Seahorse Club, is overseen by school staff and situated in the school grounds so girls feel safe in familiar surroundings with staff they already know. The club runs from 8am until 5pm every day during school holidays.

Senior School pupils have the flexibility to arrive in school from 8am each day, with the option of a breakfast service between 8am and 8.30am, allowing the girls to fuel up on healthy food ahead of a busy school day. A comprehensive break time service offers the opportunity for girls to purchase a mid-morning snack, and full lunch is served from 12.30pm daily. Across lunchtime, and before and after school, pupils can access a diverse range of cocurricular activities and remain in school until 6pm, where they will be overseen by a member of staff on reception at the Learning Resources Centre.

All of this is in addition to NHSG's ten region-wide chaperoned school bus services that can take the stress out of the school run for busy parents at the beginning and end of the standard school day.

Amanda added: "Taking the pressure off and giving pupils and their parents time to breathe without adding to an already busy day can transform a stressful day into a fun, fulfilling and social one, and also means that girls are ready and focused on learning during their lessons each day."

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How can Sixth Form better prepare students for the 'real world'?

What is something you wish you had been taught in school? Money management? Better career planning? How to keep abreast of current affairs?

At Dame Allan's Sixth Form, part of Dame Allan's Schools in Newcastle, students benefit from lessons on all of the above, and much more. Alongside their academic studies, students undertake regular Enrichment lessons, with topics as varied as applying for university, apprenticeship and interview advice, disability awareness workshops and driver safety.

Students are also encouraged to get real world experience and try as many new things as possible, either through volunteering within the local community, getting involved in co-curricular clubs, mentoring younger pupils, or even by setting up their own business as part of a Business Enterprise module. Access to state-of-theart facilities, including an art space, dance studio, and science labs, also help students to grow academically and within their co-curricular pursuits.

"Dame Allan's is dedicated to developing the 'whole child' and our comprehensive Sixth Form curriculum ensures that our young people are confident, resilient, and curious about the world around them." commented Mrs Karen Fletcher, Director of Sixth Form at Dame Allan's. "It is fantastic to see our



students leading in the school as role models for our younger pupils, as well as getting stuck into sports, debating and dance. We value, guide and nurture every young person in our care and help them make the choices they want for now and for their futures. It is very much about what is right for the individual, and the essential strands of academic and pastoral guidance allow our students to become the best versions of who they want to be."

When it comes to career planning, Dame Allan's Sixth Form students can benefit from one-on-one advice and guidance from the schools' dedicated career team, including university application advice and interview preparation. The Sixth Form also offers bespoke Early Entry advice for pupils looking to pursue entry into Oxford and Cambridge Universities, as well as competitive subjects like medicine and veterinary medicine.

Volunteering and community service too are woven into the ethos of the Sixth Form. Students arrange internal charitable activities, such as the Harvest Festival collection for local food banks, and are encouraged to pursue individual charitable interests, with previous students volunteering at local charities and elderly care facilities.

Dame Allan's enrichment, volunteering, and co-curricular programmes run alongside a robust academic timetable, which includes a range of Sixth Form exclusive subjects, including business and economics, politics, and psychology. In recent A Level exams, more than a fifth of A Levels sat by Dame Allan's students were awarded A* grades.

"We are exceptionally proud of our Sixth Form students, many of whom go on to further education to chase their dream careers." enthused Karen. "Most recently, we have had four students head to Oxford and Cambridge Universities, as well as students admitted to prestigious conservatoires for dance and music, and a wide range of Russell Group Universities. No matter what your passions, we are confident that we can help you achieve them at Dame Allan's - it is such a joy to see students' happiness when they open that results day envelope."

"We're always working to improve the school experience for our students." continued Karen. "We recently refurbished our Sixth Form building, The Queen's Building, to provide an even better learning space, with new classrooms, both silent and group study areas, meeting pods, and an exceptionally popular cafe! It offers students more of a 'university-style' experience, allowing them a vital degree of independence as they tackle the last, important years of their schooling."

Booking is now available for Life in the Sixth Form at Dame Allan's Schools, an Open Event designed for prospective Sixth Form students and their families. Visit from 5.45pm -9.00pm, Thursday 7 November 2024.

www.dameallans.co.uk







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Fostering success through **supporting** wellbeing and developing skills

By Geoffrey Stanford, Headmaster of Newcastle Royal Grammar School.

As parents, we all want our children to succeed in life but, probably more than anything else, we want them to be happy.

In many ways, these two things are closely linked and I have often said that "happy children learn." Indeed, research shows that there is a clear relationship between developing positive friendships at school and academic success. It is perhaps no surprise therefore that one of the four pillars of the Royal Grammar School, Newcastle (RGS) ethos is a sense of belonging. By design, we want every child to feel at home and to thrive.

It has therefore been a pleasure to hear from new parents how well their children have settled in at the RGS during the beginning of the autumn term. One only has to watch the positive interactions between contemporaries every day in school to see this but it is also good to hear the same impression from parents too. While talking



to parents on the touchline of a sports match, one parent recently commented to me on their relief when their child volunteered that they were "finally in the right school for them." Others at the school gate in the morning have commented on how excited their children are going into school each morning.

That said, it is not unusual for young people to face challenges at some point as they grow up and we are in no way complacent. When for whatever reason children are unhappy, it can be traumatic both for the child and the parents. Indeed, it has been said that parents are only as happy as their least happy child. Our pastoral team are always available to provide advice and support in school but we have also recently provided both students and parents with access to The Wellbeing Hub, by an organisation called 'Teen Tips'. This is a resource designed by experts to meet the social, emotional and educational needs of young people. Particularly for parents supporting their first child through adolescence, it can be reassuring to have a reliable source of information to hand. This could be about anything from physical

or emotional health through anxiety or relationships.

As we always emphasise, exam results are the consequence, not the purpose of an RGS education. However, we understand the importance of equipping both students and parents with the right tools to feel confident and prepared as they approach their public exams. That is why RGS is also working with Elevate Education to provide our students and parents in Years 9 to 11 with study skills support. We aim to equip students with techniques and habits to help them absorb and interpret what they learn in the classroom. Meanwhile for parents, we want to arm them with knowledge and skills to support their child's learning.

Working with these trusted educational partners - alongside a programme of supplementary 'RGS Talks' events and parent webinars covering a variety of topics from SEND support to youth wellbeing - supplements our excellent Learning Support Department and our approach to high-quality Learning and Teaching already provided at the RGS.

Even parents who have already had a number of children through the education system may need support from time to time as no two children are the same. Some children seem to go through life with relatively few bumps along the way while others need far more support. That said, I sometimes worry about those who seemingly go through life succeeding at everything, wondering how they will cope with adversity when they do encounter it. So, while we want things to go well, there are important life lessons that can be drawn from when

triangle of support that exists between the child, the parent and the teacher. Everyone wants the best for the child and teachers often gain most satisfaction from seeing the success of those with whom they have had to

things are tough. It is always important to remember the work hardest along the way. www.rgs.newcastle.sch.uk





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1st and 2nd in Yorkshire

Queen Ethelburga's Collegiate (QE) celebrate their A Level league table positions.

Both senior schools at QE are celebrating a wave of excellent A Level, BTEC and GCSE results. Across the two schools, the combined percentage of A*/A grades at A Level are 78%, with the percentage of BTEC Distinction* and Distinction grades in QE Faculty reaching 73%. In addition, the Year 11 students across QE achieved 62% grades 7-9 in their GCSEs.

These results place QE College and QE Faculty as 1st and 2nd in Yorkshire in the Independent Schools Exam Results for A Levels, which was recently published in The Telegraph and The Times. The same league table ranked QE College as the top independent school

from the North of England for A Level and GCSE results, which follows suit with the Sunday Times Parent Power 2024 that confirmed QE College as the top school in the North of England for academic performance for a third year in a row. QE Faculty, which offers

bespoke performance pathways for sport and the arts, ranked 7th for academic performance in the North of England in the Sunday Times Parent Power 2024.

Principal of the Collegiate, Daniel Machin, said: 'We are immensely proud of our Year 11 and Year 13 students – for their results, for the people they have become in their time with us at QE and for the well-rounded, resilient and ambitious adults they will go on to become. We prepare our students for their futures – our two senior schools exist to give a diverse choice of options for our students, to find the



fit they need to succeed within their examination years, inside and just as importantly, outside the classroom. The whole of the Team QE community wishes them well on the next part of their journey.'

This year has seen students aim high with a wide range of first choice university places achieved at Oxford, Imperial College London, the London School of Economics, Durham, King's College London, University College London, and Bath, amongst other excellent UK and worldwide universities.

Scholarships and Bursaries

QE has a longstanding scholarship programme and prides itself on building an experience around each child. At QE, you can create a curriculum to suit your interests and goals, without the limitation of timetables and option blocks. There are over 100 clubs to build up experience and knowledge for career goals as well as for fun and wellbeing.













58.54





Many scholars go onto prestigious universities, accept lucrative US scholarships, attend distinguished arts schools and conservatories, or accept professional sporting contracts.

QE offers partial scholarships to both boys and girls in academics (Year 12 entry only), basketball, cricket, football, netball, music, and drama. Applications for September 2025 are now open for day students and boarders applying for entry into Years 7, 10, or 12. Top up means-tested bursaries are also available.

Student Case Study Georgia, Year 13 QE College • A*A*AA

Georgia's journey at QE began in Year 2 and her commitment has culminated in a place to study Medicine at Oxford University. This prestigious offer is a testament to her individual brilliance and a reflection of the potential that exists within the College community.

Well-rounded, Georgia played 1st team Hockey and Netball and won the 'Best Student of Spanish in the United Kingdom' - a distinguished award run by the Ministry of Education in the Embassy of Spain in the UK. Whilst at QE College, she utilised the Medics Programme and Early Applicant Programme to great success, stating that, "One of the main ways that school helped me was with the mock interviews. We had MMI interviews with teachers and this really prepared me and made me feel more comfortable in my real interviews. I received offers from Cardiff, Leicester and Oxford for Medicine and Manchester for Neuroscience with Spanish."

Student Case Study – Sebastian, Year 13 QE Faculty • AAD (Distinction)

Sebastian joined QE in Year 9. Starting as a shy newcomer, he grew into his role as Head Boy, demonstrating exceptional personal growth. From the outset, his natural talent for rugby was evident, as was his unwavering commitment to his academic pursuits. After captaining QE's Senior Rugby Team, he is poised to either pursue a professional rugby contract or study Management at Loughborough University.

Sebastian truly made the most out of QE Faculty's Performance Sport
Programme (PSP) which offers weekly training both within the PE curriculum
lessons in the day and as a team after school. PSP students
can compete at a high-level and can benefit from an Individual Development
Plan that comprises of coaching from ex-professionals, nutrition,
strength and conditioning, physiotherapy, sports massage, careers
advice, workshops from industry professionals, and the latest tactical,
technical, physical and mental training.



QE is a non-selective set of four schools. To find out more, visit qe.org or email admissions@qe.org

Alternatively, attend their Open Morning on Saturday 16th November.



Newcastle School for Boys - balancing academic rigor and the emotional and social needs of students

By David Tickner, Headmaster, Newcastle School for Boys

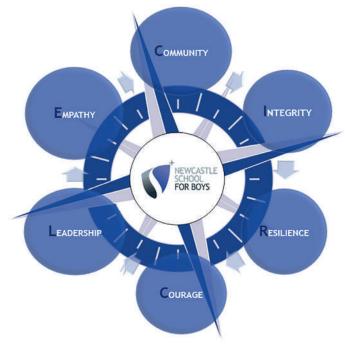
"Beyond the classroom learning environment, pupils are well known as individuals their backgrounds, interests, and aspirations. This makes a tremendous difference particularly, during the adolescent years. To be known and valued as an individual during a time when self-esteem can be fragile is very valuable."

Reflecting on a career in independent schools that started in the early nineties and a headship at Newcastle School for Boys that has now spanned 12 years, it is noticeable how much more multi-faceted and complex education has become. The burden of regulation and compliance has grown exponentially in recent times.

Headship has always been a broad and stimulating role, but schools must now be highly adept not only in teaching and learning, but in the complex and demanding areas of safeguarding, online safety, attendance, mental and physical health to name but a few. And rightly so. These all support and help children. Part of the challenge for schools is to retain sight of the wood for the trees – to avoid drowning in policy and compliance and ensure that they can focus effectively on teaching and looking after their children, staff and wider communities.

However, at its heart, education hasn't changed and each of the independent schools that I have worked in has had at its core an approach to maximising individual pupils' academic progress whilst supporting their wellbeing and social and emotional development.

At Newcastle School for Boys, these are embedded in our school aims, which focus on pupils' wellbeing, individual academic progress, and character development within an environment that both supports and challenges. I am a firm believer that the pursuit of a school's aims should be visible and demonstrable in its daily life – in its classrooms, corridors, and activities – and not simply remain as fine words in a magazine article or published on a website.



How do we achieve this at Newcastle School for Boys?

Firstly, our pupils are known and valued as individuals. This is aided is aided by our size and structure. A model of a single class per year group of up to 20 pupils in our Junior School and a two-class per year group model of up to 40 pupils per year group in the Senior School. The benefits are obvious. In simple terms, up to a third more time for our teachers and support staff to spend with individual pupils compared to a class of 30. This allows for individual feedback and guidance, stretch and challenge as well as additional support where necessary. It also means that beyond the classroom learning environment, pupils are really well known as individuals - their backgrounds, interests and aspirations. This makes a tremendous difference particularly, I always feel, during the adolescent years. To be known and valued as an individual during a time when self-esteem can be fragile is very valuable.

Just as, if not more, important than size and structure is the school's ethos and the commitment of its staff. This is where the focus on individual children and the benefits really makes a difference to the lives and experiences of our pupils.

Like all children and young people, our pupils have experienced increased challenge in ensuring their mental wellbeing since the pandemic. Whilst this has been an unwelcome and perhaps surprising development, our culture and ethos as a school has meant that we have been well placed to respond and work hard to meet all pupils' needs. This is done through an emphasis on building character, including resilience, from a young age as well as being ready to respond and put in place the right support where it might be needed, whether this is through the School's pastoral systems and staff, or more specialist, through onsite professional guidance counselling, or signposting and liaising with other services.

The development of character in our pupils has never felt more important than it does post-Covid. Our pupils are able, from a young age, in the Junior School to articulate our core character virtues of community, integrity, resilience, courage, leadership and empathy. Even more importantly, as they move up through the School, they are able to apply and demonstrate them in their lives – both in school and beyond.

All of this supports and runs alongside the School's core business of teaching and learning, preparing our students for future academic and career paths and their readiness for life beyond school.

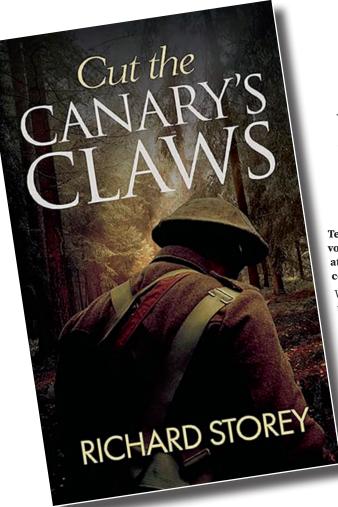


We seek to develop pupils who leave Newcastle School for Boys equipped with the qualifications to pursue their future academic and career ambitions supported by the right character and soft skills to be successful. Even more importantly and ambitiously, we want them to be happy and fulfilled in all aspects of their future lives.

The world has undoubtedly become more challenging including for young people and schools in recent years, but the essential challenge of balancing the focus on academic progress and maximising outcomes whilst supporting individual wellbeing remains constant and something that Newcastle School for Boys has delivered successfully since its formation, nearly 20 years ago now.

newcastleschool.co.uk





Cut the Canary's Claws

By Richard Storey

After a short spell in the trenches in 1915,
Jack Cunningham, a miner from the North East
of England, finds himself recruited as a
tunneller to dig mines under the German lines,
becoming involved in the underground
warfare between the two sides.

Telling the story though a series of flashbacks, he is tormented by a voice inside his head, questioning his memories and his obvious guilt at surviving when others didnt, swinging between varying states of confusion and control over his situation and over what is and isn't real.

Why this is happening now? All Jack knows is that he wants to confront the past and feels driven to resolve the conflict rising up inside him.

As he uncovers more of this hidden life, his three closest friends, Sirindha Singh, an Indian lieutenant, Billy, a 15 year old boy soldier and 18 year old Percy, reappear to him and Jack recalls their part in the build up to the Messines Ridge battle, in which the British detonated twenty underground tunnels in the biggest explosion of the war signalling the start of the battle of Passchendele.

In the final hours before the explosion Jack's memories and the voice become more erratic and violent until they eventually lead him to his own personal revelations, their unavoidable consequences, and at last a final and true resolution.

A superb debut novel from North East born Richard Storey dealing with mental health issues unique to the time of the conflict and also based on historical fact.



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Northern Leaders Trust celebrates outstanding results and unveils new Sixth Form facilities





Northern Leaders Trust, which consists of Kenton School and Studio West, is celebrating an impressive year of academic success, with students receiving outstanding results in both A-Level and GCSE examinations.

With record results at Studio West and some of the best ever performances at Kenton School, this year's GCSE results were a resounding success. Kenton School has had a strong year, with its Sixth Form students achieving remarkable results in their A-Level

This year, over 45% of the grades awarded were between A*-B, a significant accomplishment that underscores the school's continued improvement. The success spans a range of subjects, including Further Maths, Media, Performing Arts and Health & Social Care, demonstrating the wide variety of subjects offered at Kenton School Sixth Form.

Due to the exceptional results, many students going on to higher education have met or exceeded their offers and will be starting at the UK's top universities in Autumn.

Within these results, there are many outstanding individual performances, including:

- Nuha Amer, who achieved AAA* is set to attend Cambridge University to study Medicine.
- Isaac Williams, who earned AAA* A will be heading to Durham University to study Physics.
- Owen Branighan, with A* A* A B, is going to Newcastle University to study Mathematics.

The students' success reflects their hard work and dedication, which has been supported by a strong network of teachers and staff who have been instrumental in their academic journeys.

Assistant Principal and Head of Sixth Form, Andrew Swan, expressed his pride in the students' achievements: "This year's results highlight





the commitment, strengths and talents of our brilliant students, representing the culmination of their seven years at Kenton School. Supporting them has been an absolute pleasure, a sentiment shared by all our teachers, staff and the Sixth Form team. It is fantastic to see so many students continuing their academic journey at their first-choice university and others securing valuable apprenticeships. We are confident that, whatever paths they choose, they will achieve great things. We wish all our Year 13 leavers the very best of luck in their future."

Newly Updated Sixth Form Common Room

The new and existing cohort of Sixth Form students at Kenton School have started the 2024/25 academic year with a newly refurbished common room. The revitalised space is designed to provide students with a bright and comfortable, modern environment where they can study, relax and socialise with their peers.

Designed by Newcastle based award-winning interior design firm, Dakota House of Design, the fresh space includes study booths, sociable sofa areas and dedicated lunch spaces. The walls are decorated with artwork produced by Kenton School students, adding a personal touch.

Delighted with the newly designed space, Sixth Form students have commented on how the 'bright colours and relaxing study areas' have enhanced their learning experiences. A student from Studio West, who now attends Kenton School Sixth Form, explains how accommodating the Sixth Form team have been: "The transition to Kenton Sixth Form from Studio West was easy as there was a lot of support from staff to help me to settle in and the new facilities are great for studying and group work. I have really enjoyed my first year at Kenton and I am excited to get started on my UCAS application and finish Y131"

Rated 'Good' by Ofsted, Kenton School Sixth Form offers a diverse enrichment programme, careers support, excellent pastoral care, outstanding learning facilities and world-class sports facilities.









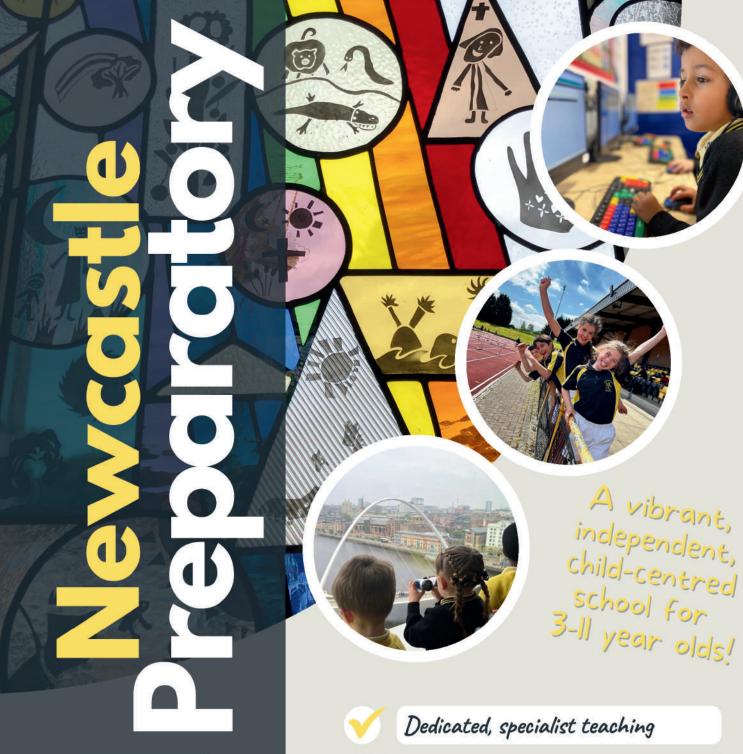
A bright future for Northern Leaders Trust

The success of both Kenton School and Studio West in this year's A-Level and GCSE results is a clear indication of the positive strides being made across Northern Leaders Trust. The Trust's CEO, Lee Kirtley, highlighted the significance of these achievements, noting: "These results reflect the many positive changes that continue to take place throughout the Trust. All students are given the best possible support and advice whilst being encouraged to follow their passion, whatever that might be."

Martyn Gordon, Executive Principal of Northern Leaders Trust, praised the students' efforts, saying: "We are delighted that our students have achieved such excellent outcomes as the culmination of their time with us. They are a fitting reward for the hard work, determination and resilience our students have shown during the last two years, they are also testament to a high quality of education and a relentless drive from our staff to ensure that our students leave Kenton and Studio West with the qualifications and skills needed to go on to their first choice in further education, training or employment. Many of the students are now heading off to university, whilst others are embarking on pathways beyond the traditional university route, such as coveted apprenticeships at leading businesses. We feel this is a great reflection of our holistic Post-16 offer, which we are able to deliver due to such a broad and exciting curriculum, top of the range facilities and committed and dedicated staff. We sincerely send our congratulations and very best wishes to our leavers and we look forward to continuing this positive trend with our new cohort this academic year"

As students from both schools prepare to embark on the next stages of their educational journeys, the Northern Leaders Trust remains committed to providing a supportive and enriching environment where all students can thrive and achieve their full potential. The newly refurbished Sixth Form common room at Kenton School, is just one example of how the Trust is continually investing in the student experience, ensuring that students have the resources and inspiring spaces that they need to succeed.

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Places to go...Norwich







It was my wife who suggested I should have a free day in Norwich, sandwiched between the Wednesday working in London and a family funeral in North Norfolk on the Friday. Rather than doubling back to the North East, I booked two nights in the Premier Inn opposite Norwich railway station and had a free Thursday to explore again the city I lived in briefly from 1983-5.

Norwich is a large city, reached by train from the north-east via Peterborough. At 215,000 in the built-up area, it is the biggest settlement in East Anglia. I was spoiled with options of things to do. I started with the hourly open top bus tour with a recorded commentary.

An adult ticket was £10 which seemed a bit steep until I realised it included the regular bus services within the inner zone. The open top commenced its last rotation around nine stops at 1630 but I could, if I wished, continue riding the conventional bus services until gone midnight which are 100% electric. There was a convenient stop to board the open top service (now ceased for winter) opposite my hotel.

First stop was Tombland, which enabled me to explore the alleys and lanes of Elm Hill, and the warren of wholly pedestrianised streets running up to the City Hall. If you want to see a real emporium of junk/collectables, depending on your point of view, try Whistle Dixie on Elm Hill. There's a ground floor, and, not for the fainthearted, stairs down to a basement full of stuff that you wonder how on Earth they managed to get down there.

I walked out to the huge Roman Catholic Cathedral (since 1976) on the western edge of the city centre, but with another stop on the open topper route. Dedicated to St. John the Baptist, it was constructed between 1882 and 1910 to designs by George Gilbert Scott, Jr. as a parish church, on the site of the Norwich City Gaol. The funds for its construction were provided by Henry Fitzalan-Howard, 15th Duke of Norfolk, as a gesture of thanksgiving for his first marriage to Lady Flora Abney-Hastings.

I had a wander around the colourful market below the City Hall, and found a half-timbered cinema, and lunch at Turtle Bay, a favourite of mine

On the east side of the city, in 1096, Herbert de Losinga, Bishop of Thetford, began construction of Norwich Cathedral. The chief building material for the Cathedral was limestone, imported from Caen in Normandy. To transport the building stone to the site, a canal was cut from the river (from the site of present-day Pulls Ferry, pictured) up to the east wall. Herbert de Losinga then moved his See there, to what became the cathedral church for the Diocese of

Norwich. After a riot in the city in 1274, Norwich has the distinction of being the only complete English city to be excommunicated by the Pope.

I took the last journey on the open-topper to this Anglican Cathedral for 1730 Evensong, at which I learned it was the commemoration of the Beheading of John the Baptist. So strange, there was nothing mentioned about that earlier at the Catholic Cathedral dedicated to him!

It was not until later in the day, when the Shrine had closed, that I remembered I had neglected to visit the home of anchoress Julian of Norwich, on Rouen Road. It was she who, living in the tumultuous fourteenth century, who wrote: "All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well"

Sorry, Julian, I shall have to find another excuse to visit you.

alexnelson@nationalrail.com, www.nationalrail.com





Tyne Theatre receives 0.5m funding for development project

The Tyne Theatre and Opera House have secured £0.5m funding, as part of Creative Central NCL, a project funded by the North East Combined Authority and Newcastle City Council to develop creativity and culture in the city.

The work will be carried out on the footprint of what was known as the Westgate Music Hall from 1869, Grand Saloon from c. 1887 and Winter Gardens Tea Room in the Stoll Cinema years.

Chairman of the Tyne Theatre & Opera House Preservation Trust, Mike Wilmot, has said: "The space that has operated most recently as the theatre's Bistro Bar has had a varied history, having run under numerous names and served the local community in differing ways. We're looking forward to building on this legacy and opening the next exciting chapter for our venue."

These works will return the Grand Saloon to a double height space, removing the ceiling that was added in the 1960s to create a 'black box' performance space.

At the heart of this overarching goal to refurbish and operate a sustainable independent venue, are plans to increase and strengthen ties with the local community. In addition to hosting a variety of entertainment, the 'black box' iteration of the Grand Saloon will be an adaptable space, able to improve access to and engagement with cultural activity by serving as a hub for meetings, rehearsals, workshops and more.

Also included in phase one of the theatre's masterplan is the creation of a new café and bar in the shop and foyer of the former Bistro Bar. Named '1867' (the year the theatre opened), the café bar will be the new home of the box office and will open in November.



A first-of-its-kind collaboration in the heart of Newcastle at Hancock Gallery

Hancock Gallery, based a short walk from Haymarket, is collaborating with renowned artists, Mul and PREFAB77 to produce an exhibition which will be the first of its kind for the two artists launching Thursday the 10th of October.

As part of the exhibition, both artists for the first time will be showing their work in a contemporary gallery space, and fans will also be in with a chance to win a unique collaborative piece of art made especially for this exhibition, with plenty more surprises on the

Mul and PREFAB77's work is recognisable across the city, with Mul's running heart motif a staple along the Quayside, and PREFAB77's vibrant collage mural a stand out on newly revamped Ridley Place. The pair are now expanding their reach and travelling across the UK and even into Europe (Stavanger, Rotterdam) to create more of their iconic street art.

Artist PREFAB77 a.k.a. Peter Manning, said "Mul and I have collaborated on several projects across Newcastle City Centre, and we were seeking a new setting to create something fresh. After meeting the team at Hancock Gallery, it felt like the perfect place for us to do something in a formal gallery setting while still keeping it fun."

As part of the exhibition, Mul and PREFAB77 will also be hosting a drop in 'Meet the Artists' session in the gallery on Saturday the 12th of October where they will be available to chat more about the work.

Chris Morgan, Gallery Manager, said "Working with Mul and PREFAB77 has been a really exciting journey. As a contemporary gallery, our collaboration with these two remarkable street artists has transformed our space into a vibrant canvas of urban expression.

Celebrating a classic childrens story on stage...

Marking the 75th anniversary of the publication of C.S.Lewis' novel and following its celebrated West End run, The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, is set to enchant North East audiences when it visits Newcastle Theatre Royal as part of its 2025 UK tour.

Step through the wardrobe into the enchanted kingdom of Narnia. Join Lucy, Edmund, Susan and Peter as they wave goodbye to wartime Britain and embark on the most magical of adventures in a frozen, faraway land where they meet Mr Tumnus the faun, talking beavers, Aslan (the noble king of Narnia) and the coldest, most evil White Witch.

C.S. Lewis' book was first published in October 1950. Since then, over 85 million copies in 60 languages have been sold, making it one of the top ten best-selling books of all time. The stage adaptation of Lewis' iconic book enjoyed a hugely successful West End run, loved by audiences and critics alike.

Producer Chris Harper said: 'We can't wait for children and adults alike to join us on this spectacular new journey through the wardrobe and are proud to be marking the 75th anniversary of the publication of CS Lewis' novel with this tour.'



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Cast and creative team announced for Northern Stage Christmas Show 2024

Northern Stage, the largest producing theatre in the North East, has announced the cast and creative team for their classic reimagining of Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol, which will open in November 2024 in Newcastle upon Tyne.

Scrooge is returning to the North East this festive season and is meaner and greedier than ever in this classic reimagining of A Christmas Carol (30 Nov - 4 Jan). Adapted by Karen Louise Hebden and directed by Northern Stage artistic director Natalie Ibu, Charles Dickens' classic story of ghosts, greed, and goodwill promises festive magic, music, and merriment, with an international cast promising circus, illusion, spectacular ghosts for children and their grown-ups.

Audiences can spot iconic Newcastle landmarks with the story starting on Victorian Northumberland Street, before telling the classic Christmas story that audiences know and love.

Michael Hodgeson (The Pitmen Painters/ Live Theatre/National Theatre/West End/ Broadway, Get Carter/Northern Stage) will return to Northern Stage in the iconic role of Scrooge. Michael will be joined by an incredible cast of actors and musicians, including Gigi Noel-King, an actress from London who trained at RCSSD and made her professional West End debut in Harry Potter and The Cursed Child, Taku Mutero, an alumnus of Drama Studio London, Taku's credits include The Prophetic Soul (Salisbury Playhouse); Salome (The Bunker Theatre); Lazy Ace (Her Majesty's Theatre) and Malik Ibheis, an actor originally from Düsseldorf, Germany who trained in mime and physical theatre at Die Etage Berlin. After five years of training, he worked as a mime, clown, actor, aerialist, and creature performer. Malik's



credits include *The School for Good and Evil* (Netflix), *Worzel Gummidge* (BBC), and *Inside No. 9* (BBC).

Natalie Ibu, artistic director at Northern Stage has created, "This story is one that so many of us know and love and I can't wait to share it with young people and their grown-ups from across the North East. I especially can't wait to see the response from some of our younger audiences who might be experiencing Dickens' tale of greed and goodwill for the first time. I hope they leave with their hearts full of festive cheer.

"I've been inspired by the most incredible team of collaborators from the North East and beyond to create some real magic on our epic festive stage. You can expect circus, illusion, spectacular ghosts, and a heartwarming tale as Scrooge discovers the true spirit of Christmas."

"We are constantly overwhelmed by the generosity of our Northern Stage audiences in supporting our Pay It Forward campaign and this year has been no different. Over two thousand young people who might otherwise not be able to attend will be joining us for A Christmas Carol, giving access to creativity and sharing some Christmas joy with school groups and young people from all across our region."

Following the release of the Theatre Green

Book in 2020, theatres across the UK are working to become more environmentally friendly. Northern Stage is committed to creating shows sustainably and reducing the carbon footprint across all activities. For A Christmas Carol, costumes and set pieces from previous shows, along with salvaged vintage pieces from second-hand sites and stores, have been painstakingly transformed and repurposed to create the authentic Victorian festive look.

Natalie continued, "Debbie Duru, (set and costume designer), has wholeheartedly embraced this challenge. I've been so impressed with her skill and creativity in transforming and repurposing items from previous Northern Stage productions.

"We've set ourselves a target that 75 percent of the set and costumes will have had a previous life and will go on to have a future life beyond this show and we're proud of that ambition."

Tickets are now on sale for A Christmas Carol at Northern Stage and for a limited time, when you buy a full-price adult ticket to selected performances of A Christmas Carol, you will get a child's ticket for free.

For more information and to book tickets visit northernstage.co.uk/whats-on/a-christmas-carol

Live Theatre, a leading force in Newcastle

Having celebrated its 50th birthday in 2023, Live Theatre on Newcastle's quayside continues to be a leading force in the creation of world class new plays whilst nurturing and developing emerging theatre makers. With a vision for a North East that writes its own story and fights for a more creative future, its programme of productions for Autumn/Winter 2024/5 champions work from the North East showcasing compelling, entertaining stories.



December brings a festive feast of theatre with an offering for both adults and families!

Present, playing from Tuesday 3 to Saturday 21 December is a high octane, festive show with an incredible soundtrack. It's the 23rd of December and Dave is preparing his Christmas tradition – to party like it's 1994, the drinks are flowing, the music is pumping. Tonight's going to be a good night. Until the buzz from his phone stops the noise – bringing him back to the real world.

It's a text that gives him the chance to create a new Christmas tradition and meet his grandson for the first time. Join Dave on this epic festive quest as he battles to buy a Christmas present for his six-year-old grandson.



If you're looking for something for the kids, look no further than **Blitzen On The Tyne**, a wintry tales adventure playing from Saturday 7 to Sunday 22 December. Suitable for ages 5+, although all ages and family members welcome, this visually sumptuous new play about a reindeer who takes on the toon will have you laughing out loud.

Merging the pen of talented writer Danielle Slade with the uncontrollable imaginations of local school children, Blitzen On The Tyne is proper new writing for kids!!!

A fun and frantic tale of finding your inner magic, friendship and celebrating your true self.



Audiences should not miss the World Premiere staging of **Saint Maud**, based on the cult psychological horror film by Rose Glass (voted Mark Kermode's best film of 2020) playing on its main stage from Thursday 10 October to Saturday 2 November 2024.

The 'mesmorising horror masterpiece' (Esquire) is brought to the stage by acclaimed Sunderland writer Jessica Andrews (Saltwater, Milk Teeth) with new music from acclaimed electronic artist Gazelle Twin.

In this atmospheric and intense production, a devout young nurse moves to a seaside town to care for a former dancer now in the last days of her life. Becoming increasingly obsessed with saving her patient's soul, Maud falls into a spiral of self questioning that leads to a truly shocking act of faith.



Looking ahead to 2025, the World Premiere of **Champion** by Ishy Din plays from Thursday 13 February to Saturday 8 March. Set during Muhammad Ali's legendary visit to South Shields in 1977, two brothers' lives are turned upside down in this searing new drama that shows the effects that such a major event has on a mixed race family. This epic offering stirs up questions of identity, community and what each of us are truly fighting for in a play that hits hard!

For more information and to book tickets go to www.live.org.uk

Blagdon Gallery





Blagdon Gallery, Milkhope Centre, Berwick Hill Road, Newcastle upon Tyne NE13 6DA t: 01670 789 944 e: hello@blagdongallery.co.uk





By Mary Ann Rogers

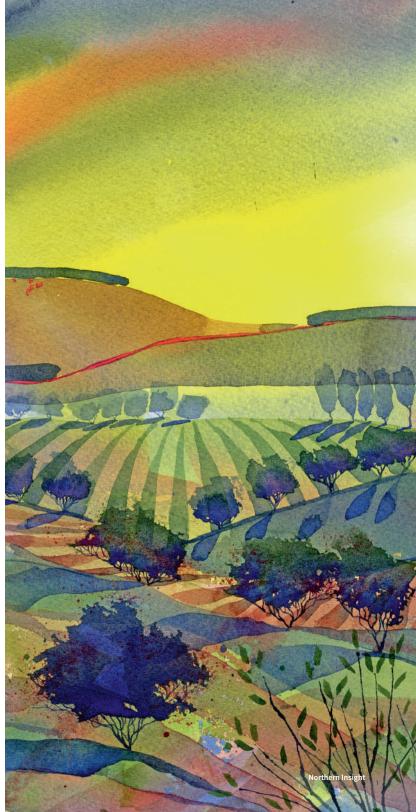
Frosty misty mornings, falling leaves, swallows heading off means autumn has arrived here at Leam Cottage.

This is the time of year when these hills change colour rapidly, and the skies can be slate grey one moment, then a startling shaft of golden light can create astonishing effects on the hills. Painting these autumn scenes requires a bold approach, a lot of paint, plenty of water and nerves of steel!

Our evening swims are much shorter now that the river water is so much colder. We also take our fishing rods with us and try to catch a fresh brown trout for supper. Most of the time we draw a blank, but it's a peaceful time, just watching the water, the wildlife, contemplating life, planning...

This year I achieved my longest ever outdoor swim. After training all summer, my swim buddy and I finally found our weather window at the very beginning of September and had a perfect day for our end-to-end Wast Water swim. Since we very nearly did it two years age, I've had to endure endess teasing from Fifey about being a fraud and a cheat, claiming to have swum it all when in his eyes, we didn't!.







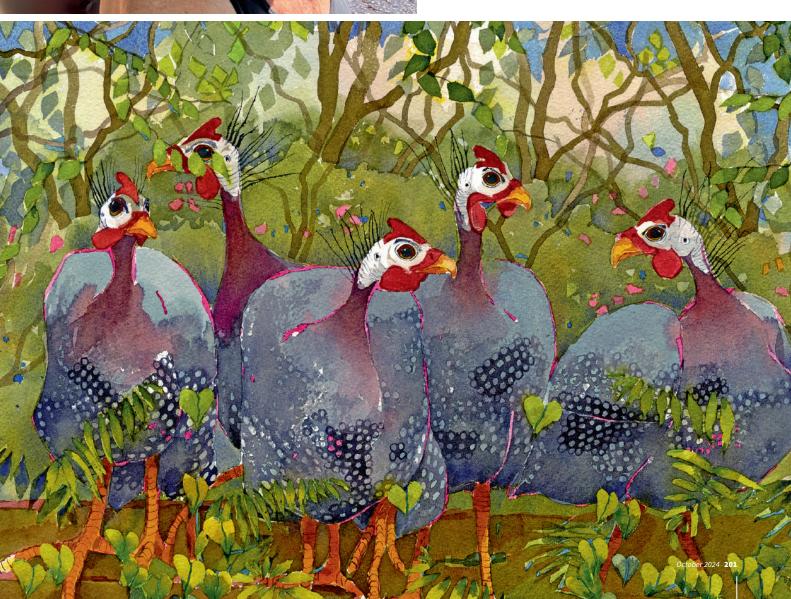
We began our swim a short distance down from the east end of the lake, and those few hundred metres have haunted me, so this time we started right in the river that feeds into the lake, and completed the entire swim on a beautiful sunny day with a stiff chop, and the wind behind us. Both of us were thrilled to have managed the three mile/five kilometre swim, but we have our next swim challenge already in our sights for next year!

With the lamb sales approaching, all the farmers in our area are extremely busy preparing breeding lambs for sale. In order for them to look their best, they often dye the fleece, making the ewe lambs stand out and there are various traditions connected with this practice. Many sheep farmers trim the neck and belly fleece, then the final preparation is to wash the face and legs as close as possible to the sale. This is where I usually spend a day or two at the thick end, scrubbing lambs feet and faces while they are held astride a wooden sheep dressing stool, its rather like a fancy barber's chair for sheep. It's a bit of a change from painting, and there's usually a slap up lunch and a lot of leg pulling and laughter which is probably why I go back every year! Here in the gallery we are enjoying welcoming visitors to the area who are often looking for something to take home with them as a reminder of their stay in this part of Northumberland, the landscape prints are an obvious choice and I just love to think of a little bit of this area hanging on walls in homes all round the UK!

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Kathryn Tickell commemorates Sycamore Gap Tree anniversary with new musical tribute

Northumbrian musician Kathryn Tickell has composed a poignant piece of music to mark the one-year anniversary of the felling of the iconic Sycamore Gap tree. The tree, a symbol of the Northumbrian landscape, was cut down in a shocking act of vandalism last year, leaving a deep void in the hearts of many in the region and beyond.

Kathryn Tickell, a celebrated figure in the Northumbrian music scene, was deeply moved by the event. "It all started nearly a year ago when I woke up to an avalanche of messages. The news of the Sycamore Gap tree being cut down had spread like wildfire, and everyone was in shock," she said. "People started asking me if I was going to write a tune for the tree, and I realised that this was something I could do to honour its memory."

Initially, Kathryn contemplated writing a more uplifting piece, reflecting the regenerative nature of sycamore seedlings that often sprout everywhere. However, as she delved deeper into the creative process, it became clear that a lament was the most fitting tribute. "The lament was the piece that wanted to be written," she shared.

The composition, titled simply



"Sycamore Gap," began as a solo piece for Northumbrian pipes, capturing the haunting and dramatic essence of the landscape. However, during the recording process at a studio in Thropton in Northumberland, the piece evolved. "The engineer suggested adding a pipe organ, and it just worked. Then we added a subtle drum roll, some rustling leaves, and wind noise to evoke the spirit of the place," she explained. The result

is a moving and layered tribute to a beloved natural landmark.

"Sycamore Gap represented the region's rich history, landscape and heritage and everyone was shocked when it was suddenly no longer with us. I hope that this piece of music will stimulate people's memories of the tree and serve as a lasting tribute to a real Northumbrian icon," she added.



Music teacher instrumental in mentoring rising stars in the music industry

Dru Irving, a dedicated and experienced private music teacher based in Greenside, is striking the right chords nurturing the next generation of musical talent.

Dru is currently mentoring Hannah Stanton from Wylam, a talented 16-yearold guitarist and singer. Recognising Hannah's exceptional voice early on, Dru has been guiding her through the process of recording and producing music. They have collaborated with young engineer Adam Forster at Old Church Studios in Thropton, near Rothbury, to record two songs. These tracks have been released on an EP titled Four Stories.

"Hannah has made tremendous progress in her musical journey, and it's been a privilege to support her," said Dru. "Her passion for music is evident in everything she does, and I'm excited to see where her talent will take her."

Hannah herself speaks highly of Dru's mentorship: "My guitar playing, singing, and musical knowledge have improved immensely, thanks to Dru's great teaching and guidance. He's always willing to go above and beyond, advising me on performing in public, helping me with songwriting, and finding equipment. He even invited me to sing two of his songs in the studio, which was an amazing experience. We've also started songwriting together. I don't come from a musical family, so having someone like Dru, with all his knowledge and experience, is invaluable. This support has enabled me to take my first steps and make music such a big part of my life."

"I look at my start in life with no qualifications and wonder where I may have been if someone had shown an interest in me. That is why I put everything into working with my students and I'm getting a great deal of satisfaction out of seeing how well they are doing in the music industry," he added.





Uber Eats are the latest business to renew their partnership with the local theatre, continuing their season sponsorship into the Autumn...just in time for the anticipated return of the spellbinding Wicked.

The untold story of Oz is flying back to Sunderland until Sun 20 Oct, one of the many exciting shows that falls within the Uber Eats sponsorship.

"We here at Uber Eats are delighted to partner with such an iconic local theatre. Showcasing our top Restaurant Partners within these historic walls is an exciting and brilliant opportunity. The dynamic sponsorship gives us fantastic brand exposure to over 375,000 visitors across the North East each year and with huge West End shows exclusive to Sunderland Empire coming up, there's no better time to be involved." *Jenna Walmsley, Territory Account Manager, Uber Eats*.

The sponsorship incorporates great brand awareness with venue takeover including posters, offers backstage for visiting cast to enjoy some of the city's favourite restaurants while they are in the region, advertising on plasma screens and more.

"We're delighted to have such a highly recognised brand, Uber Eats, continue to support our theatre, it's been a hugely mutually beneficial partnership – which is what we're all about here. I'm proud to help them paint Sunderland green and place their brand in the spotlight with our wonderful audiences for the biggest shows in the region." *Paula Mitchell, Sales and Development Manager, Sunderland Empire*.

Keep an eye out on Uber Eats app to win tickets for some amazing upcoming shows.

For any partnership enquiries, please contact your local Uber Eats Territory Account Manager for the North East: jennajw@uber.com

Looking to put your business in the spotlight? Please contact Sales and Development Manager PaulaMitchell@atgentertainment.com







STACK Seaburn celebrates its fourth birthday

STACK Seaburn has plenty to celebrate, as its fourth birthday coincides with one of its busiest ever months.

The Sunderland container village welcomed more than 100,000 visitors in August, who enjoyed everything from a packed live entertainment programme to the venue's top class street food.

Since it launched STACK Seaburn has become one of the city's go-to places for food and drink – and has seen around 6000 live music performances during that time.

A new restaurant - Downey's Seafood and Grill – is currently undergoing a fitout occupying the vacant units

at the front of the scheme, with the hopes of opening in the autumn.

It's the latest good news from STACK, which has opened two further venues this year - STACK Lincoln and St. James' STACK presented by SELA in Newcastle – and has just confirmed that STACK Middlesbrough is scheduled to launch before Christmas.

Neill Winch, CEO of STACK, is delighted with the continued success of STACK Seaburn. "From day one we knew that STACK Seaburn would be a popular site but it has absolutely exceeded our expectations," he said.

"We're very grateful to all of the support we've had from visitors from across Sunderland and beyond, and we look forward to continuing to be a huge asset to the leisure and hospitality scene on Wearside."



Dot Bagels overtakes the competition

A popular Heaton restaurant has steered its way onto the shortlist for a national award, which puts customers in the driving seat.

Dot Bagels, at Chillingham Road, Newcastle, has earned a growing reputation among North East food lovers for its handmade bagels, which come in six varieties with a choice of 18 different fillings.

And their votes have propelled the restaurant – which open a second branch, on Jesmond's Acorn Road, this month (September) - onto the shortlist for the Uber Eats Restaurant of the Year award

The annual awards are run by food delivery service Uber Eats and a judging panel will pick the winning restaurant from a shortlist of 130 venues across the UK and Ireland, voted for by the public.

Not only does the winner receive the Restaurant of the Year title but also a cash prize of £100,000, while runners-up receive a cash prize to help grow their business and a marketing support package.

Dot Bagels gives customers the chance to try everything from the traditional Boujie Lox, with smoked salmon and cream cheese, to bagels inspired by Middle Eastern and American cuisines.

"We are delighted so many of our customers have voted for us," said owner Stuart Young, "so here's hoping we can see off the competition to win the ultimate Restaurant of the Year award."



Luxury hotel and country estate, Matfen Hall, has been recognised as one of the finest boutique hotels in the country by Boutique Hotelier. The prestigious 2024 Boutique Hotelier Awards shortlisted the estate for the coveted 'Boutique Hotel of the Year' category.

This nomination follows the country estate being awarded an AA five-star rating, making it the first and only five-star hotel in Northumberland, with the stunning property seeing an extraordinary reinvention following a multimillion pound renovation project.

The estate is set across 300 acres of beautiful parkland. With six stunning spaces to dine and drink in and 63 bedrooms, ranging from Luxury Suites to Classic Rooms, the hotel exudes sophistication and quality, promising guests an unforgettable experience.

The nomination comes just weeks after the grand reopening of the newly-refurbished golf clubhouse and restaurant — The Keepers — overlooking the hotel's stunning 27-hole Championship golf course.





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Four amazing venues in Durham



With the acquisition of Whitechurch, the brand new opening of Tango, the outstanding refurbishment of The Rabbit Hole and the original and best pan Thai-Asian dining sanctuary, Zen coming up to it's 18th year of service, it really is exciting times for Zen Group and diners in Durham.





W H I T E C H U R C H D U R H A M







Live and Let Thai

By Michael Grahamslaw

Summer 2024 may have been packed away for the Autumn, but the region's foodies can still bask in the sunny flavours of Thailand at Chaophraya in Newcastle.

Set atop Eldon Square's buzzing Grey's Quarter, the restaurant boasts floor-to-ceiling views across Monument and literally offers an elevated Thai dining experience.

Chaophraya – which translates to 'River of Kings' – is the country's major waterway stretching from Bangkok to the Gulf of Thailand, and in keeping with this, its menu captures the length and breadth of a diverse, exotic country.

Inside, the restaurant blends minimalist, contemporary design with many South East Asian touches to create an ambience which is warm and intimate

This makes it the perfect spot for romantic date nights – especially with some highly-prized window tables which offer people watching par excellence.

The view was (somewhat) wasted on myself and son Jack who spent the evening topping up with super-cool Singha lager and bemoaning the failings of the England ODI cricket team.

However, a fantastic time was had, nonetheless.

Under starter's orders, our meal began with two starters that promised to awaken the palate: Tempura Prawns and Thai Tacos.

The Tempura Prawns were a perfect example of simplicity done right. The prawns were generously sized, beautifully crispy, and light, without any of the greasy heaviness that sometimes accompanies tempura dishes.





Served with a sweet chili dipping sauce, they were an ideal balance of crunchy texture and depth of flavour. The prawns themselves were fresh, with a natural sweetness that paired wonderfully with the subtly spicy and tangy sauce – not to mention a supplementary glass of white.

Each bite was crispy and satisfying, making for a well-executed and familiar start to the meal.

The Thai Tacos were a more playful dish. Loaded in crisp, bitesized taco shells, these comprised a harmonious blend of savoury minced meat (we opted for chicken), fresh herbs, and a delicate hint of lime.

The dish was singing with the freshness of the herbs, which lifted the dish, while the chili added a mild kick that didn't overpower the flavours.

The tacos were a fantastic fusion of Thai flavours with a global twist, showcasing Chaophraya's willingness to modernise traditional dishes while staying true to authentic tastes.

The Weeping Tiger Sirloin Steak was the star of the night. The steak, marinated in a rich blend of Thai spices, was cooked to perfection—medium-rare, just as requested. The meat was tender and full of robust, smoky flavours. The marinade meanwhile punctuated the steak, with hints of lemongrass, garlic, and soy coming through with each bite and suffusing the air with delicious aromas.

The Chilli Thai Basil Stir-Fry with Chicken was another highlight. This dish had all the hallmarks of a classic Thai stir-fry: fragrant with garlic, chili, and basil, yet simple in its execution.

Beyond the food, Chaophraya's friendly, attentive service deserves a special mention. Led superbly well by business development manager, Matthew, the team have succeeded in creating a welcoming atmosphere perfect for any occasion from team lunches to special occasion dining.

Chaophraya forms part of the city's burgeoning Southeast Asian restaurant scene and is the perfect place to try a touch of Thai on Tyneside.

For more information, visit chaophraya.co.uk



One of the grandest buildings in Newcastle city centre is having new life breathed into it – welcome to STACK Newcastle



For the past two decades visitors to Newcastle city centre can't have failed to have noticed the imposing building on the corner of Pilgrim Street and Worswick Street which has been surrounded by scaffolding and shrouded in netting.

Once a city auction house, Worswick Chambers stood empty and derelict until now, where it has undergone a Cinderella-like transformation which will see it become an exciting new addition to Newcastle's leisure scene.

STACK Newcastle should open its doors next spring, a stone's throw away from where the original STACK concept was launched.

It was the success of that original venture – bringing together street food, bars, retails outlets and live entertainment – all under one roof that was the springboard for a brand which is now being rolled out nationally.

With STACK Seaburn, St. James's STACK and STACK Lincoln currently running and STACK Middlesbrough due to open later this year and other projects lined up for Leeds, Sheffield, Manchester, Whitley Bay, Wigan, Bishop Auckland, Durham, Carlisle and Northampton, STACK continues to go from strength to strength.

But there's no doubt that the return of a permanent STACK Newcastle will have a special place in the hearts of both those who were fans – and those who are behind the ambitious scheme.

Neill Winch, CEO of STACK, can't wait for the doors to be open and people to see the astonishing transformation to Worswick Chambers.

As a Grade II listed building many of the original features have been kept and lovingly restored, along with a three floor extension to the side built from shipping containers, which will create a stunning leisure hub.

"It is already taking shape and looking absolutely spectacular," said Neill.

"We know how much people loved the original STACK so to be able to create this – not far from the original site – is something very special to us all.

"The landlord has done an incredible job in bringing it to its current level and we will now be starting on the fit-out, which will fully take advantage of the inside-outside feel."

STACK Newcastle will be a cornerstone of the wider scheme to regenerate the Pilgrim Street area and to breathe new life into what has been one of the more rundown areas of the city.

With its street food outlets, bars, games room, cocktail bar and retail units STACK Newcastle will play a huge part in improving the whole area.

With a capacity of up to 3000 people, STACK Newcastle will be the biggest site to date, bringing together both the past and present in complete harmony.





"The landlord has worked very closely with the planners and conservation to retain as many elements as possible, despite the fact that it was in a bad state of repair," said Neill.

"But it has been brought back to something that looks absolutely amazing."

For further details on all STACKs visit www.stackleisure.com



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Meet the GM...

Lisa Crocker

General Manager at Newcastle's Staybridge Suites.

Since opening in 2009 the Hotel has forged an enviable reputation for customer service and regularly attained number one status on TripAdvisor as the best in the City. In this interview she spoke to Michael Grahamslaw about her career and forthcoming plans.

Tell us about your career path so far.

It would be fair to say that I was born with hospitality in my veins as my father was a hotelier and my mother also worked in Hotels. When moving to the North East I even lived in the George at Chollerford for a spell when I was five years old.

I did a degree in Business Management and Hospitality and joined Marriott as a graduate. Here I enjoyed spells at their Gosforth Park and Metrocentre Hotels before being headhunted to join David Lloyd Leisure where I was one of their youngest ever managers. I then took a sales role with the privately owned McKever Hotels who had two serviced apartments in the City. I eventually ended up managing four of their sites including one in Gretna which hosted over 400 weddings a year.

I joined Staybridge in 2010 and have been delighted to have been here ever since. During my time here I also chaired the North East Hoteliers Association for three years which was a great honour.

Tell us about your team.

It would be fair to say we are one big family and it is a joy to come into work everyday as we have such tremendous fun! We have a team of 38 of which 10 have been here since opening. I love to develop people and the longevity of our team is something I am very proud of as it is unusual within the hospitality sector.

What are the unique features of Staybridge Suites?

100% our team who ensure every resident gets a unique experience. We hold evening socials every Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday which allows every guest to enjoy free food and drink and meet other people. This is hugely popular.

We have also just completed a £1.8 million pound modernisation project which has included refurbishment of all of the bedrooms.

As well as being number one in the City on Trip Advisor for the past 12 years we regularly achieve the highest marks in the IHG ratings which is a testimony to the tremendous people who work here.

What are you currently working on?

After the recent refurbishment we have ramped up our marketing to make the local corporate market aware of the work we have done.

In addition we are continually striving to improve the standards and service levels of our team.

How does Staybridge engage with the local community and support local businesses?

We get involved with local litter picks via NE1 and also donated furniture from our refurbishment to homeless charities. In addition, we regularly host charity socials and support the fantastic Newcastle Dog and Cat Shelter.

What recommendations would you give for making the most from a stay at the hotel?

Sample one of the regular socials and spend time with our brilliant team. We also have an enviable location to explore all that the wonderful Quayside and Ouseburn areas have to offer.

What is your biggest challenge?

Maintaining and improving our service standards and retaining our position within the City on TripAdvisor.

What is the best advice you could give to anyone looking to work within the industry?

Be yourself and understand this can be a great career with so many varied roles available. With so much training on offer you have the opportunity to progress very quickly.

Who are your Heroes and Mentors?

My father and also the late hotelier Damon Roberts who was a lovely man and inspiration. He is much missed within our industry and we always toast his memory at our Hotel Association events.

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

Be yourself and try your best at all times.

How do you like to unwind?

Naturally spending time with friends and family. A new passion is running and I've just completed my first Great North Run. I also enjoy horseriding and Olympic weightlifting. All great ways to destress.

newcastle.staybridge.com

Classic Cocktail Champion to be crowned

A mixologist from Blyth aims to be crowned the UK Classic Cocktail Champion this October, after qualifying for a prestigious national competition by Pub & Bar Magazine.

Demi Harper from The Commissioners Quay Inn will represent The Inn Collection Group at the competition's finals in London after coming out on top in an internal qualifying contest in August.

In a pair of keenly contested heats, Demi was part of an impressive line-up of six talented bartenders, all of whom demonstrated excellent technique and creativity to wow the assembled judges.

Challenged to produce High Balls, Long Island Iced Teas, Margaritas, Negroni's Old Fashioneds and Pornstar martini (the same drinks featured in October's contest), an added twist saw local ingredients and spirits used as much as possible.

Demi's use of Newcastle Gin hit the mark, including smoked banana with her Old Fashioned and a spicy salt and pepper crust with her Margarita, which displayed a delicate touch and balance of flavours.

Ensuring that standards were set high, Demi and Jonny were joined by Sarah Bell of The Northallerton Inn, Luke Bramley of Grasmere's The Swan, Josh Foyle of The Harrogate Inn and Tyler Westman of The Temperance Inn in the qualifiers.

Back for a second year, Pub & Bar Magazine's Classic Cocktail Competition will see 15 of the UK's best bartenders assemble to battle it out for each of their drinks to be named the best and an overall champion.



Scored on the balance of flavours, overall taste/enjoyment, presentation, knowledge and skill, prizes for the winner included £1,000 prize money, a Mix with Britvic immersion session and a trip to France for the SIRHA Food show in Lyon.

It is an exciting prospect and one that head of beverage Dave Walker hopes his nominations will go on to become representatives in.

Walker said: "Pub & Bar magazine's Classic Cocktail competition is a really exciting prospect for any bartender with some serious prizes up for grabs, so we felt that hosting an internal qualifying round was the best way to decide who in The Inn Collection Group we nominated for consideration.

"It was a tough decision for us as judges because the standard was incredibly high, which for me was a nice position as it gives me real confidence in the quality of cocktails we are serving in our inns.

"But using the same criteria that will be employed at the Pub & Bar contest, I felt little touches gave Demi and Jonny the edge. We now sit patiently and maybe a little nervously to see if either make it to the finals."

The 2024 Pub & Bar Magazine Classic Cocktail Competition will take place on October 14 at Dirty Martini in St Paul's, London.

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Seaside serenity meets modern living: Discover life at Hartlepool Marina

Review by Jackie Marston

Hartlepool isn't somewhere that was particularly on our Bucket List, but when we were asked to review this apartment, right on the marina, we thought, why not, let's give it a try.

What you realise when you get to the marina in Hartlepool is that there is much more to it than meets the eye. There is an array of bars, restaurants, takeaways and shops for you to walk around, whilst admiring the lovely boats moored down there.

The two-bedroom apartment is owned by Diane, and it is impressive to say the least. It's a very luxurious apartment and newly refurbished, which is also dog friendly, which is always a bonus for us, as we hate leaving our beloved Mia at home.

It's based at Hartlepool Marina, and it comes with a fully equipped kitchen but is also walking distance to the many bars and restaurants it has to offer.

It's in a prime location close to many local amenities including a cinema, retail park, supermarkets, and museums. The beautiful beach and promenade are just a stones' throw away too, perfect for a brisk dog walk.

The first thing you notice is that the property is decorated and furnished to a very high standard with many personal trinkets to make it feel homely. There's a large open plan living room leading to a fully fitted integrated kitchen which includes an eco-

programmed washer/dryer, dishwasher, fridge freezer, oven, and hob.

A 50-inch smart TV in the living room plus two additional smart TV's in each bedroom makes this really great if you're wanting to go along with friends or family and use both rooms.

We noticed that there was a lovely comfortable Tempur mattress in the main bedroom, so a benefit for me and Richard as we can both suffer with bad backs!

There is free Wi-Fi included and there was a hairdryer, dog bowls, shampoo, conditioner, shower gel, plush towels, a Tassimo coffee machine, halogen oven, tea/coffee and sugar, and a lovely outside seating area and allocated parking.

If you're wanting a really chilled weekend, that is close enough to make a party of it, if you fancy, then this apartment is as perfect as they get! The cost is from just £120 per night and can be booked direct, so not costing extra by booking via Airbnb.

For enquiries, contact Diane on 07800 930 202. Mansion House, Fleet Avenue, Hartlepool, TS24 0WN.







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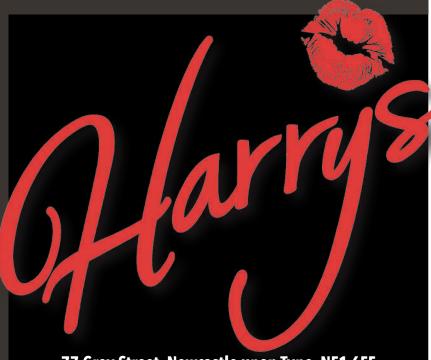
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The North East of England has long been known for its warmth, hospitality, and exceptional service. Central to this is the North East Hotels Association (NEHA), an organisation committed to promoting and celebrating the region's thriving hospitality industry.

The annual NEHA Excellence Awards highlight the outstanding achievements of hoteliers, staff, and venues that contribute to the North East's growing reputation in the UK's tourism sector.

Founded over 30 years ago, NEHA is one of the largest regional hotel associations in England, representing over 50 hotels across Newcastle, Gateshead, Sunderland, Durham, and surrounding areas. NEHA's mission is to raise the profile of the North East's hospitality sector through collaboration and the pursuit of excellence, helping to place the region firmly on the national and international tourism map.

The Importance of the NEHA Excellence Awards

The NEHA Excellence Awards are one of the most highly anticipated events in the region's hospitality calendar. More than just a celebration, these awards recognise the dedication, innovation, and high standards that drive the success of the sector. They highlight the individuals and teams who go above and beyond, delivering the very best experiences for guests visiting the North East.

Winning a NEHA award is a significant achievement, signalling to guests and the wider industry that the establishment operates to the

highest standards. For the North East, these awards boost its status as a top destination for leisure and business travellers. The recognition motivates continuous improvement within the industry and helps attract further investment and tourism to the region.

A Vital Industry for the North East

Hospitality is a cornerstone of the North East's economy. With its rich landscapes, historic landmarks, and vibrant cities, the region is a popular destination for tourists from around the globe. Whether it's the cultural charm of Newcastle or the peaceful beauty of Durham, the North East offers something unique for every visitor.

The NEHA Excellence Awards contribute significantly to maintaining this appeal. By recognising exceptional service, they foster a culture of high standards, which ensures that the North East remains a key destination. This, in turn, supports the local economy, creating jobs and encouraging growth for businesses throughout the region.

In a post-pandemic world, the hospitality sector plays a crucial role in recovery. The NEHA Awards provide much-needed recognition for an industry that has faced unprecedented challenges. The awards celebrate not only excellence but also resilience, shining a light on those who have adapted to the changing landscape while continuing to offer outstanding service.

Innovation and Sustainability

The NEHA Excellence Awards do more than reward past successes—they look to the future. Categories like 'Ethical, Responsible and Sustainable Award' reflect the growing importance of sustainability within the industry. As travellers become more eco-conscious, hotels in the North East are innovating to meet these demands. By recognising sustainable practices, NEHA encourages the industry to embrace environmentally responsible operations, ensuring the region's long-term appeal to visitors.

Innovation is also a key focus of the awards. Whether it's new guest experiences, technological advancements, or creative management approaches, the NEHA celebrates those who push boundaries and redefine what hospitality can offer.

A Celebration of People

Above all, the NEHA Excellence Awards are a celebration of the people who make the North East's hospitality industry thrive. From chefs to front desk staff, every team member plays a vital role in ensuring guests have memorable experiences. Their dedication and passion are at the heart of the region's hospitality success, and these awards are a fitting tribute to their hard work.

As the North East Hotels Association continues to shape the future of hospitality in the region, the Excellence Awards will remain an integral part of its legacy. By recognising and rewarding the best, NEHA ensures that the North East continues to be a leader in the UK's hospitality industry, offering unparalleled experiences for visitors from around the world.

www.nehotels.co.uk



Short listed candidates for NEHA Finalists 2024

Service Excellence

Jack Collin - Village Newcastle Katrina Spiteri - Hotel Indigo Newcastle Lauren Blacker - Sandman Signature Sam Smith - Rockliffe Hall Vanessa Dickinson - Clarion Hotel

Ethical, Responsible & Sustainable Award

Gisborough Hall Hotel
Jamie Naden & the Maintenance/
Grounds Team, Beamish
Ramside Hall Hotel
Dean Bradford & Chris Wells,
Delta by Marriott Newcastle
Village Hotel Sustainability Stars team,
Village Hotel

Inspirational Leader

Ashley Ashton - Rockliffe Hall
Emma Thompson - Hotel Indigo
Newcastle
Fay Pratt - Ramside Hall Hotel,
Golf & Spa
Kirsty Worne - Hotel Indigo Durham
Natalie Cabby - Staybridge Suites
Newcastle
Rob Hawes - Delta by Marriott
Durham Royal County

Sales Excellence

Alice Middleton - Grey Street Hotel Amanda Wilson - George Washington Hotel, Golf & Spa Helen Attley - Hardwick Hall Hotel
Matt Laws - Ramada Encore
Newcastle Gateshead
Robyn Peace - Ramside Hall Hotel Golf
& Spa

Rising Star

Eve Taylor - Lumley Castle Hotel Charlotte Calder - Beamish Hall Amy Saunders - The Clarion Hotel Ryan Muncaster - Maldron Hotel Newcastle Katie Winship - Hotel Indigo Newcastle

Community Award

Hardwick Hall Hotel
Front Desk team - Sandman Signature
Maldron Hotel Newcastle
Susi Lennie - Crowne Plaza Newcastle
Village Hotel Newcastle

Warmest Welcome

Alison Liggett - Rockliffe Hall Bartek Tylek - Hilton Garden Inn Cheryl Milburn - Ramside Hall Golf & Spa Mark Jobes - Holiday inn Jesmond Victoria Mario - Maldron Hotel Newcastle

Culinary Excellence

Ben Watson - Hotel Indigo Newcastle Joseph Gomes -Crowne Plaza Newcastle Roger Harrison -Delta Marriott Newcastle

Support Services

Alan Gowran Delta Hotels Durham Royal County
Jonathan Fellows Hardwick Hall Hotel
Kieran Gunn - Hotel Indigo Newcastle
Paul Cassidy - Beamish Hall Hotel
Stuart Ives - George Washington Hotel
Golf & Spa

Cleanliness

Housekeeping team Doubletree By Hilton Newcastle
Housekeeping Team Holiday Inn Jesmond
Housekeeping Team Holiday Inn Gosforth Park
Housekeeping Team Hotel Indigo Newcastle
Diane Payne & Team Rockliffe Hall

Newcomer

David Urrutia Maldron Hotel Newcastle
Elena Alfimova - Sandman Signature
Ella Kermode - Gisborough Hall Hotel
Jade Haley - INNSide Newcastle
Pedro Vila Verde Delta Hotel Durham Royal County



Rob lands at the Hilton Double Tree

Experienced North East Hotelier Rob Dixon has taken over as General Manager at DoubleTree by Hilton Newcastle International Airport.

What is your vision for the hotel in the next six to 12 months?

To continue the fantastic work that the team at the hotel have undertaken so far in improving the property to enhance guest experience and cement the hotels position as one of the best in the market.

What are the key challenges you anticipate in your role, and how do you plan to address them?

It's always a challenge coming into a busy and well run hotel and to find opportunity to improve either performance or guest experience, but I've been doing this a long time and have a clear plan of what I'm looking to achieve with the property and the team here.

How do you plan to enhance the guest experience?

The hotel has been operating for 13 years now and has always been a popular and high occupancy hotel due to its key location next to the airport. We're currently drawing up a list of priorities that will enhance the arrival experience and guest satisfaction in both accommodation and F&B.

What strategies will you implement to boost revenue and occupancy rates?

The hotel is already incredibly busy, and we have an incredible revenue team at Cairn Group who already do a fantastic job of managing our rate strategy. My key focus is to improve the on-site experience to ensure guest satisfaction means we're the only choice return visitors to the area want to use, this naturally drives higher demand.

How will you ensure effective collaboration between different departments in the hotel?

I've always been incredibly hands on and work with my departmental heads on the ground to ensure I can experience their challenges and frustrations and look to alleviate them. By being present, with clear communication I find it makes teams more engaged in achieving the goals we set for the business.

How will you ensure the continuous development and training of your staff?

Cairn Group have one of the best L&D and HR departments I've ever seen in my time

working in the hospitality industry. They truly focus on development and ensuring we never stand still when it comes to people. I echo that at site level and because we have been given the tools across the portfolio, it makes it so easy as a General Manager to oversee and develop our teams.

What is your approach to maintaining the hotel's brand reputation and ensuring consistent service quality?

I have two sayings when it comes to consistency that have served me well throughout my career: 'excellence is a habit' and 'good enough is not good enough' and leading by example is the only way to build trust within our teams, being present and working on the floor.

How do you plan to stay ahead of competitors in a rapidly changing local hospitality market?

We're lucky to have an amazing brand in Doubletree by Hilton, Hilton is constantly evolving and has a global reputation for excellence which is why so many people choose it, so most of that work is done for me thankfully. I just need to concentrate on the experiences we can deliver here locally.

Away from the hotel how do you like unwind?

I have a big family and as a father of six my only escape is the golf course when given the rare chance of a spare few hours.

www.doubletree-newcastle.co.uk





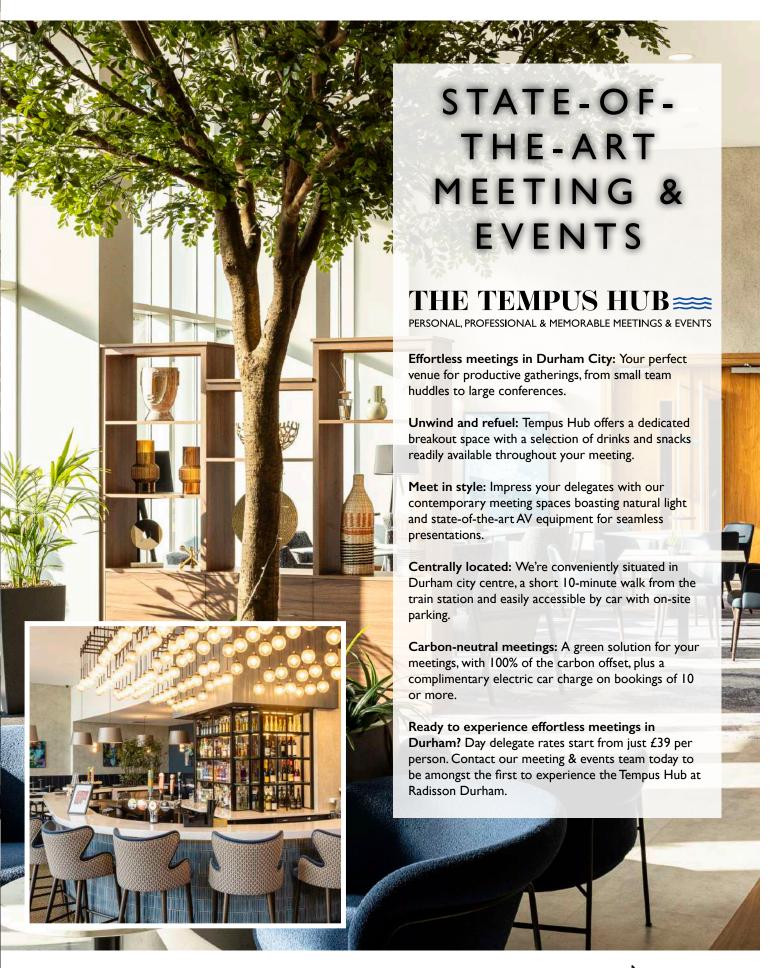
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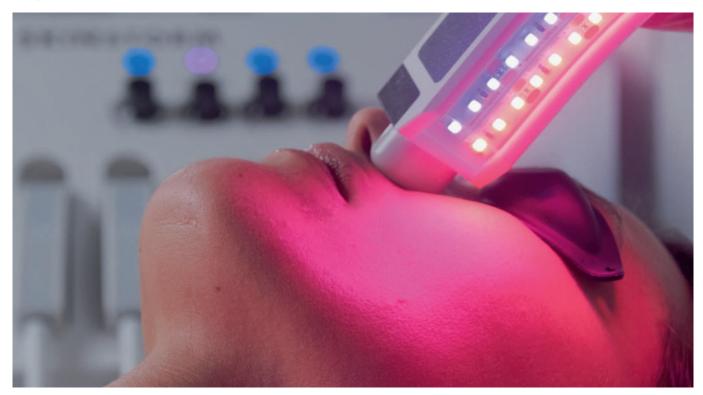
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A Rejuvenating Escape

By Holly Grahamslaw

Looking for an evening of relaxation, I recently visited the award-winning beauty salon & day spa, City Retreat. As the name suggests, City Retreat provides a welcome escape from the hustle and bustle of city life.

With locations on Osborne Road, Grey Street and Gosforth High Street, on this occasion I was delighted to visit the spa's Gosforth site, a serene urban hideaway in an easily accessible location.

City Retreat Gosforth offers a luxurious and inviting atmosphere. With plush velvet seating, elegant gold accents and floral displays, the venue exudes both sophistication and tranquillity. The therapy rooms similarly promote feelings of relaxation, with cosy heated beds, ambient lighting and calming music.

Founded by beauty therapy expert Lesley Caster, City Retreat has grown significantly since its opening in 2004. The spa's Gosforth location specialises in cutting-edge face and body treatments, including Elemis Expert facials and CACI facial solutions, as well as signature Swedish massage, manicures and lash and brow treatments.

Upon arrival, I was greeted by the friendly and attentive therapists, who provided an in-depth and informative consultation

assessing my skin needs and outlining the steps of my treatment. During my visit, I enjoyed the Full Crystal Clear SkinStorm Red Carpet Facial, an indulgent 90 minute treatment aimed at leaving the skin feeling plump, glowing and thoroughly cleansed.

Providing a transformative skincare experience, the new SkinStorm facials use innovative technologies to address a wide range of skin concerns and provide optimum results. The treatments use active ingredients to deeply cleanse, resurface and hydrate the skin, and can be tailored to individual skin needs, such as antiaging, dehydration, acne scarring and pigmentation.

The facial included six unique elements, each designed to address specific skin needs with precision and sophistication. The treatment began with the hydra facial cleanse, a deep cleanse that invigorates and revitalises dull and congested skin. This was followed by the microdermabrasion, designed to smooth texture and refine pores, as well as the oxy-ice facial peel, which worked to thoroughly energise and nourish the skin.

Following on, the treatment included non-evasive microneedling and an oxygen

blast skin booster, both intended to push the product deeper into the skin, stimulate collagen production and enhance the skin's structure and appearance. The treatment was concluded by triple light phytotherapy, which merged different coloured lights to enhance overall skin health. The VIP treatment was nothing like I had ever experienced before, yielding hydration, plumpness and rejuvenation into the skin.

After a follow-up consultation, which detailed my skin needs and some tailored product recommendations, I left City Retreat with my skin glowing and feeling fresh.

All in all, City Retreat was exactly what I needed to feel fully relaxed and refreshed. If you are looking to brighten and energise your skin, the advanced therapies at City Retreat deliver exceptional results and a truly luxurious experience.

Treatments range from £65.00 for a Teenage or Acne Management treatment to £189.00 for the Full Crystal Clear SkinStorm Red Carpet Facial Treatment.

For more information, call 0191 281 9222, or visit the website at www.city-retreat.com





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The benefits of Strength Training

Strength training, often associated with bodybuilders or athletes, is far more than just a way to build muscle. It's an essential for overall health and well-being that can benefit everyone, regardless of age or level of fitness.

Adding strength training into your weekly routine can significantly enhance your quality of life, especially as you age.

Improved Muscle Strength and Endurance

Strength training involving specific muscle groups can not only help in performing daily activities but also improves your overall physical performance, whether you're lifting groceries or taking part in sports.

Increased Metabolic Rate

One of the lesser known benefits of strength training is its impact on metabolism. Muscle tissue is metabolically active, meaning it burns more calories at rest compared to fat tissue. By building muscle, you increase your resting metabolic rate, which can help with weight loss.

Bone Density and Joint Health

Weight bearing exercises, such as strength training, is crucial for maintaining and even improving bone density. This is especially important as you age, as it helps prevent weak and brittle bones. Additionally, strength training strengthens the muscles around your joints, providing better support and reducing the risk of injury.

Improves Mental Health

Strength training has been shown to have positive effects on mental health. Regular strength exercises can reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression, improve your mood and boost self esteem leading to a more positive mindset

Better Balance and Coordination

As we age, balance and coordination tend to decline, increasing the risk of falls and injuries. Strength training, particularly exercises that target the core and lower body, can enhance balance and stability, helping you maintain your independence as you grow older.

Improved Cardiovascular Health

While often overlooked, strength training also benefits heart health. It helps reduce blood pressure, improves cholesterol levels, and enhances overall cardiovascular function. When combined with aerobic exercise, strength training contributes to a strong fitness routine that supports heart health.



Muscle Loss with Age: Why does it Happens and how do you combat It

As we age, our bodies undergo several changes, one of the most significant being the gradual loss of muscle mass and strength, a process known as sarcopenia. This begins as early as the third decade of life, with muscle mass declining at a rate of about 3-5% per decade after the age of 30. By the time you reach 70, you may have lost up to 30% of your muscle mass. This loss is not just a matter of how you look or physical strength, it can have detrimental effects on your mobility, balance, and overall quality of life.

How can you do this? Regular Strength Training

Engaging in strength training exercises at least two to three times per week can help maintain and build muscle mass. Exercises such as squats, lunges, deadlifts, push-ups, and resistance band exercises target major muscle groups and promote muscle growth.

Protein Intake

Eating enough protein is crucial for muscle repair and growth. Older adults should aim for a protein rich diet, including sources like lean meats, fish, dairy, legumes, and plantbased proteins.

Progressive Overload

To continue building muscle, it's important to gradually increase the weight or resistance used in your exercises. This concept, known as progressive overload, ensures that your muscles are constantly challenged and continue to grow.

Mix it up

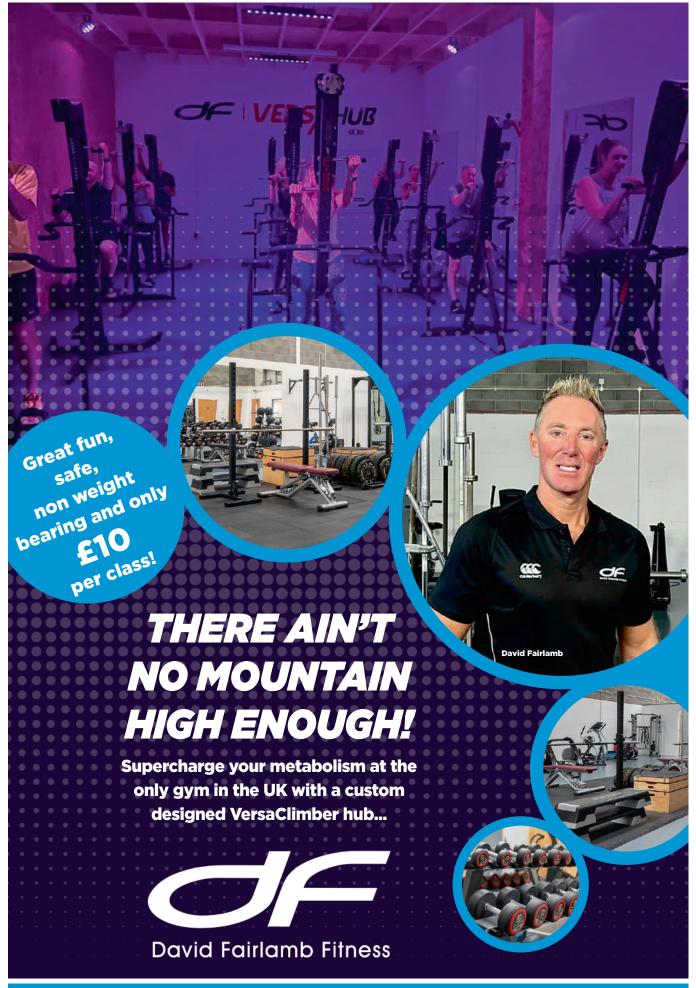
Mixing up your strength training routine with different exercises, equipment, and techniques can help target all muscle groups and prevent plateaus.

Strength training is not just for the young or athletic, it's a powerful tool that can help you stay strong, independent, and improve your quality of life.

David's summing up

Adding strength training into your weekly routine can significantly enhance your quality of life, especially as you age.

www.davidfairlambfitness.co.uk





The Last Word

By Barry Speker OBE

A delightful late summer break at Gardone Riviera on the shore of Lake Garda was greatly enjoyed. Accessible from Newcastle's International Airport direct to Milan Bergamo to avoid departure at an ungodly hour. It is a splendid opportunity to savour resorts around Italy's largest lake, including Bardolino, Salo and Garda.

As the summer holidays shrink to a memory, returning to work for many means staying at home. Working from home (WFH) was a practical expedient introduced at the start of the pandemic to save the country from economic decline. The internet and in particular Zoom and Teams video conferencing enabled every kitchen or bedroom to become a virtual office.

Many enjoyed the flexibility provided and the freedom from commuting. Whether productivity increased is open to question. For many WFH resulted in a sub-optimal working and isolation.

Whilst some can benefit from WFH including those who are immobile from disability or genuine pressing domestic circumstances, it has obvious and serious setbacks. For this reason, Labour's proposal to command employers to consider it is of concern. The government intends to

enshrine WFH as a statutory employment right as part of a number of new rights. Business leaders fear that productivity will suffer and will damage Britain's image as a favourable destination for investment.

Flexibility is to be encouraged but account must be had of the tendency to shirk and waste time. For those starting their career, there is a need to exchange ideas and learn from experienced colleagues; significantly WFH can destroy continuity and teamwork and damage companies where creativity and innovation suffers from lack of group discussions. The government should think long and hard of consequences before pressing on with populism producing major economic damage.

Protestations about modest roots and deprivation may be good material for stand up comics but less convincing for politicians. As a ruse for attracting electoral support, the claims of humble beginnings often seem unconvincing. Prime Minister Harold Wilson drank beer and smoked a pipe in public but preferred cognac and Cuban cigars in private. Having smoothed off rough edges, Margaret Thatcher and John Major made much of the grammar school upbringings, to meet criticism of Tory domination by Eton and Oxford.

There is no challenge to Angela Rayner raising in every interview that she is of working class origin, while Sir Keir Starmer is incapable of not saying "my dad was a toolmaker" to everyone.

Politicians feel the need to indulge in a prolier-than-thou challenge to produce working class credentials. Kemi Badenoch should be discouraged. While acknowledging her middle-class roots, she claims she 'became working-class when I was 16 working at McDonalds'. Her parents were a doctor and a professor, she attended an international school and was an associate director at Coutts Bank.

Kemi should emphasise her valid credentials rather than chase a 'woman of the people' agenda.

Just over a year after the senseless felling of the iconic Sycamore Gap tree, it appears the acer pseudoplantanus is not going quietly. Its destruction caused an outcry. In life the sycamore was a beloved but quietly acknowledged landmark but in death it has become an environmental totem as well as a marketing marvel. The stump of the tree has itself become a tourist attraction , something of a shrine and a symbol of man's inhumanity to tree!

At the nearby Sill visitor centre the memory of the tree is immortalised and



commercialised. A huge mural of the tree adorns the gift shop and there are 'Sycamore Gap tree at sunset' fridge magnets(£4), coasters (£5), mugs (£12) and prints (£19) on sale. A new exhibition is due to open starring a portion of the trunk.

Already famous for starring in the Hollywood block-buster Robin Hood:Prince of Thieves, the felling of the tree has rooted its place in the annals of British folklore.

Sales of the merchandise continue to boom and also on offer is a murder mystery novel Sycamore Gap by LJRoss. Seeds from the tree have been cast in silver by Northumberland jewellery maker Kirsty Taylor who has created necklaces, bracelets, cufflinks and earrings.

There is even hope to recreate the tree itself. 50 seedlings from the tree have sprouted - the first having been presented to King Charles to plant in Windsor Park.

A true case of finding a gap in the market. The words "I will love it if we beat them" uttered by then Newcastle United Manager Kevin Keegan, are long remembered not only by football fans. His passionate statement was in 1996 when Newcastle United almost beat Manchester United to the Premier League title.

Rob Ward's play 'Love it if we beat them', presented at Live Theatre, is a political drama exploring the age-old questions What is power without principle? And What are principles without power? It explores a time of significant change in the North East communities and captures a special moment in recent history. It is not to be missed.

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