

NORTHERN

INSIGHT

February 2025

Issue 109



Castle Peak Group – Bringing inclusivity to the workplace

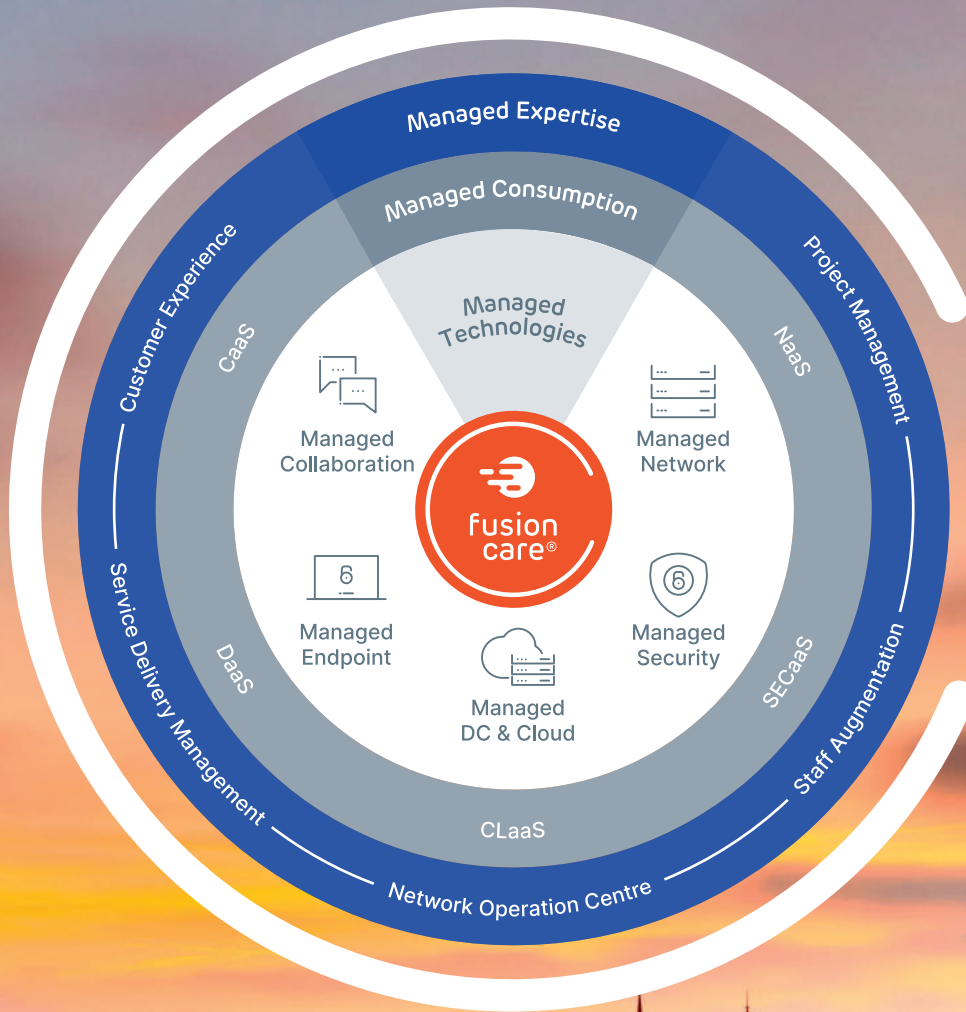
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Boutique Hotel in the Heart of Jesmond



Nestled on the outskirts of Jesmond Dene, a leafy park dotted with quaint bridges and waterfalls sits Jesmond Dene House Boutique Hotel and Fern Dining Room & Bar.

We have space, peace, and room to breathe. We don't take our good fortune for granted. All this makes us even more passionate that our guests are well looked after; above all, feel at home, because it is a home, albeit quite a grand one! We're passionate about detail and Geordie hospitality. Often, it's the little things that make the difference!

Fern is an upmarket neighbourhood restaurant where the cooking is skilful, with a focus on creating fine, flavoursome food, where there's both respect and passion for the ingredients. Dishes inspired by the rhythm of the seasons.



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Foreword

FOREWORD

Welcome to the February issue of Northern Insight.

In a world where business, culture, and innovation are constantly evolving, Northern Insight remains a steadfast beacon of knowledge, opportunity, and community. Since its inception, this publication has been dedicated to showcasing the brightest minds, boldest ideas, and most inspiring stories from across the North East.

As we enter our 10th year we are delighted to start 2025 with another vibrant edition full of the ingredients that have made us such a staple part of the regional corporate landscape.

Our cover stars are Castle Peak Group who are celebrating their first year of doing the right thing in business.

Look out for an abundance of social event coverage including CMYK's festive golf day at Close House, NE Youths Burns Night Dinner and the legendary Lord's Taverners Christmas Lunch.

In our popular Talking Tech platform we talk to Ian Musgrave from regular contributor Forfusion who tells us his story so far.

We also showcase the work of Cassini Films which has rapidly emerged as a prominent player in the North East's creative landscape.

I hope you immerse yourself in the pages ahead and enjoy this issue.

Till next month...




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

Thanks to all our wonderful clients, readers and suppliers.



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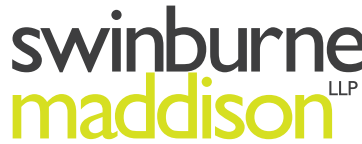


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Unlocking your potential together



RAYMOND JAMES

Monument





Chris's life of empowering others through mental toughness and mindset growth

Chris Kirkland, from Ryton, has taken his extensive experience in school improvement and leadership to a new frontier—supporting businesses and elite athletes in achieving exceptional performance and well-being, a journey deeply influenced by the challenges and lessons he has faced from a young age.

A former teacher and senior leader, Chris has dedicated decades to transforming schools across the North East of England, specialising in behaviour, culture, and leadership development. Today, through

his consultancy unlocking BETTER, he leverages these skills to empower organisations and elite athletes to achieve peak mental performance and long-term success.

One of his recent successes has been with Minster Cleaning Services in Blaydon, where he partnered with Managing Director Simon Bibby to elevate the team's performance through workshops on mental toughness and leadership. This initiative resulted in a 59% increase in business growth, improved staff retention, and a more energised workplace culture. "It's not just about growth," Chris explains. "It's about building the habits and mindset that drive long-term success and well-being."

MD Simon Bibby added: "Chris's insights and proactive approach have undoubtedly influenced our strategies and aspirations at Minster Cleaning Services. He has an unwavering dedication to innovation, excellence, and impactful change."

Driven by a deeply personal understanding of the importance of care and connection and his innate desire to seek out the potential that an individual possesses—he is committed to looking after people, ensuring everyone moves forward together, and that no one is left behind.



Ex-Paratrooper channels military grit to conquer public speaking

Shaun West, a former British paratrooper and close protection expert, from Cleadon, South Tyneside has transformed his career from protecting high-profile clients to coaching businesses on how to navigate challenges and thrive. However, Shaun's greatest personal challenge wasn't on the battlefield or in hostile environments — it was standing in front of an audience.

"As a child, I had an intense fear of public speaking. Even during my military career, I would have chosen standing facing the Taliban over speaking to a room full of people," Shaun admits.

Determined to overcome this fear, Shaun took deliberate steps to conquer it. Joining Toastmasters, a global organisation that helps individuals improve their public speaking and leadership skills, he honed his ability to articulate ideas under pressure.

After submitting numerous applications across Europe, Shaun was invited to speak at TEDx Viikki, Helsinki in October. His talk, covering military lessons for business success, drew on his military experiences to share three key principles for success: taking decisive action, building a strong community, and cultivating a committed mindset.

Now the founder of Mission Paratus, a business coaching and consultancy firm inspired by the Parachute Regiment's motto, Utrinque Paratus ("Ready for Anything"), Shaun is passionate about helping businesses adapt, grow, and thrive. Drawing from his military career and years of experience in high-stakes environments, Shaun helps companies develop the resilience, discipline, and leadership needed to succeed in a rapidly changing world.

Mission Paratus specialises in offering tailored programmes that equip business leaders with practical tools for overcoming challenges, improving decision-making under pressure, and fostering cohesive, high-performing teams. Shaun also works directly with individuals, coaching them to build confidence, embrace calculated risks, and achieve their full potential.

Entrepreneurs' Forum reveals eighth scale-up cohort

The Entrepreneurs' Forum has announced the six entrepreneurs that make up its eighth Scale-up Leaders' Academy cohort.

Toby Bailey of RED Engineering, Hamish Adamson of Harlyn Solutions, James Clinghan of Trusted Business Partners, Douglas Dinwiddie of Maitland, Lee Robinson of JohnJasper Associates and Lyle McCalmont of .MCD are the entrepreneurs participating in this year's programme.

Launched in 2017, the Academy has supported 70 North East entrepreneurs across the North East to focus on achieving sustainable high growth by creating a blueprint for future business success.

The Academy's impact has been recognised on a national scale with the ScaleUp Institute naming it a 'One to Watch' programme.

Elaine Stroud, Chief Executive of the Entrepreneurs' Forum, said: "We're



delighted to welcome six exceptional entrepreneurs to the eighth Scale-up Leaders' Academy cohort.

"Our programme is designed to strengthen leadership capabilities, providing our cohort with the skills and understanding they need to sustain and manage their business growth effectively.

"By working closely with an expert coach and engaging with their peers and senior leadership teams, our cohort will develop a deeper understanding of the core principles that drive sustainable growth. The Academy offers a supportive environment where they can refine their strategies, build resilience and create a solid foundation for long-term success."

Delivered over six months, the Scale-up Leaders' Academy helps participants to build a blueprint for growth and is divided into four sections: people, strategy, execution and cash.

Making Clients Famous.

Bradleyomahoney.co.uk

Entrepreneurial duo aiming for STELLAR 2025

Two of the North East of England's most active entrepreneurs and early stage investors have joined forces to create STELLAR BUSINESS EVENTS, a unique new networking and events business that brings ambitious business owners and leaders together in an inspiring, friendly and supportive environment.

The new, Sunderland-based business incorporates Paul Lancaster's highly-regarded 'UK Startup Week' festival (previously called Newcastle Startup Week) and monthly PLATFORM events. Joining the business is well-known local entrepreneur and angel investor Neil Stephenson with the ambition to add commercial acumen and scale up experience to the proposition.

The pair are good friends and have been working together informally for a number of years, regularly referring clients and business opportunities to each other.

Speaking of the new venture Paul Lancaster said "Since 2016, I've grown an events business which is strongly rooted in the North East of England but has huge reach nationally and it's our intention to scale out our offering into new markets and new geographies. Over the past 12

months we've run 21 x PLATFORM events in Newcastle and Sunderland that have attracted over 700 business owners and leaders and we intend to expand this to Teesside in Q1 of 2025 and then up to Scotland shortly after, giving us a truly Northern UK footprint."

"In addition, our 5-day, multi-venue UK Startup Week festival is due to take place in Sunderland between 2-6 June 2025 with a series of energising events that will inspire and educate people how to start and grow their business in the North East and wider North of England. Our last Startup Week festival in Newcastle attracted just over 800 delegates from across the UK and we expect a similar number in Sunderland in June."

Paul and Neil are keen to talk to any business owners, leaders and investors who would like to use their PLATFORM or UK Startup Week events as a way to raise their profile and reach potential customers or clients. They are also interested in having conversations with anyone who would like their help and advice on how to run successful roundtable discussions, launch events or other business gatherings in 2025.

More at ukstartupweek.com/stellar

Middleton Grange Celebrates Successful Festive Season

Middleton Grange Shopping Centre has reported a significant increase in shopper numbers for the festive season.

Total footfall for the month at the popular Hartlepool shopping destination rose to 601,226 for December 2024, a superb 8.7% year-on-year increase.

The lead-up to Christmas and the centre's festive offerings including the opening of Santa's Grotto and Hartlepool Giving Tree were key factors in the surge in visitor numbers.

The centre's busiest day was Monday 23rd December, which saw a peak of 25,031 visitors and performance outpaced regional trends in North & Yorkshire and the UK average.

Nik McDonald, centre manager at Middleton Grange, said: "We are delighted to see such strong footfall numbers in December, reflecting the vibrancy and popularity of Middleton Grange Shopping Centre. Our festive initiatives, coupled with a diverse retail



offering, have truly resonated with our visitors.

"We have already enjoyed a strong start to 2025 and look forward to continuing this momentum throughout the year."

Tees Valley Mayor and Hartlepool Development Corporation Chairman Ben Houchen said: "The success of Middleton Grange is essential to our plan to ensuring Hartlepool town centre is a vibrant and attractive place for people to visit, shop and relax.

"It's great to see we are already making progress in growing visitor numbers and that the centre enjoyed such a fantastic festive season on which we will build in 2025."

The annual footfall for Middleton Grange in 2024 was 5,247,548 visitors, demonstrating resilience amid challenging economic conditions.



'Gamechanger' for Tyneside drone company as it secures 'UK first' approval

A North East drone company is the first in the UK permitted to carry out 'gamechanging' flights - without a pilot in sight.

heliguy, based in North Shields, is one of Britain's leading UK drone specialists and suppliers, with staff also providing technical support and training.

Now heliguy has been granted authorisation by the UK Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) to operate drone-in-a-box flights beyond visual line of sight (BVLOS).

Typically, pilots must be able to see a drone at all times. However, the watchdog's decision means heliguy's skilled pilots can operate a drone anywhere in the UK from a state-of-the-art command centre, known as 'The Roc' (Remote Operations Control Centre) inside the firm's Tyne Tunnel Trading Estate HQ.

While many companies already use drone technology, this takes that potential a step further by unlocking remote operations, which heliguy can conduct on behalf of a client.

For Michael Smith, heliguy's Head of Operations, the approval is a major milestone - and could help industries unlock the power of drone technology to help boost their business.

"Drones are routinely used for everything from oil and gas pipeline inspections, to keeping prisons and construction sites safe. In the past that has meant having the pilot on-site, but this decision changes everything," said Michael.

"For instance, it could transform the security industry, with one drone - capable of recording evidence in real-time - capable of carrying out round-the-clock patrols on big sites.

"That could help businesses make substantial multi-year savings. Additionally, for pipeline or wind turbine inspections, the ability to fly BVLOS could dramatically speed up the time it takes to complete the job.

"However, we are increasingly seeing demand from an array of industries - from professional football clubs to universities - keen on utilising drones to see just how transformative they can be for a business."

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Castle Peak Group – Bringing inclusivity to the workplace

First year celebration of doing the right thing for business.

This could be the most important article you ever read for the simple reason that it contains information you may not have previously considered on how to take your business forward.

You see, it's important that companies are diverse and not only reflect their customers or their workforce which, let's face it, is important, but the big issue is that those firms are missing out on having people from different backgrounds, different work experiences, different ways of doing business...all of whom can provide the company with a real advantage over their competitors.

We know that two heads are better than one, but there's not much point in having two heads if they're both thinking the same thing, used to doing things the same way and coming up with the same suggestions and same solutions. Why bother?

However, put a selection of people with different backgrounds around a table and you'll end up with ideas and solutions flying around...one or two might just be the next steps in your businesses future.

Which is precisely what James Carss at Castle Peak Group is encouraging companies to do.

"More and more people are realising that having a diverse board or team of executives is not only the right thing to do, it also makes sense purely from a business point of view," said James. "Diversity is not just a buzzword. You need a combination of people from different backgrounds to bring a wealth of different experiences together.

"The real measure of our success is watching clients transform their leadership teams through inclusive hiring, seeing talented executives step into roles where they can drive genuine social impact, and building a business that proves diversity and performance go hand in hand."

Time for a bit of name dropping. James Carss is one of the most respected guys in the recruitment industry. He's worked extensively in London, Hong Kong and Canada. He knows that firms will often look to somewhere like London because of the kudos...but why? Why pay more and wait longer. James takes pride in working quickly and effectively. If he doesn't get a position filled within 2-3 weeks, he'll be seriously annoyed.

"The vast majority of our successful appointments come from head-hunting. We dig deep into the culture of the firm which is looking for a key recruit. We find

out what sort of structure they already have in place and then ensure we find the right person who will not only be capable of doing the job but who will also have something which can add to the mix of diversity within the senior people."

Time for a bit of name dropping. Although James has broad experience in every area of recruitment, if he had to pick three areas where he specialises it would be health, social housing and education. So, here we go...Castle Peak Group has led major board and executive searches for companies and organisations such as Bernicia Group, Tyne Housing, Eden Housing Association, Thirteen Group, Gentoo Group, Livin Housing, Keelman Homes, and YMCA North Tyneside.

He's provided assistance and given presentations and helped with training for Newcastle Utd Foundation as well as partnering with organisations in the private sector on Executive and Leadership roles with Bellway, Vintage Cash Cow and Reeves.

"One of the big pluses of working with Castle Peak Group is that clients know we are looking for the right sort of person...and...they can keep a close eye on what we're up to. We use PROPHET profiling methodology for inclusive executive assessment within our assignments, and we operate an Ezekia portal which allows clients to see what sort of progress we're making. It also allows the client to make any adjustments to our search and make suggestions."

Castle Peak Group is celebrating its first full year in business...it's been a highly successful 12 months. It means that James is now going to expand his business and work nationally rather than just here in the North East.

Castle Peak Group does recruitment the right way. They can transform your business.

For more information, you can contact James Carss by calling 07802 531040 or emailing info@castlepeak-group.com

You'll also find out more details by logging on to www.castlepeak-group.com



“

*...Diversity
is not just a
buzzword...*

James Carss



FURZEFIELD ROAD, GOSFORTH



GUIDE PRICE: £1.75 MILLION

This truly unique, stone built detached bungalow is extremely rare to the market and occupies an enviable plot in excess of a quarter of an acre. Located within the heart of Gosforth's Conservation Area, the current owner has undertaken significant renovation works in more recent years to an exquisite standard throughout, with the addition of a fantastic extension incorporating a beautiful open plan kitchen/living room to the rear. The versatile accommodation also includes three double bedrooms, three reception rooms and four bathrooms, whilst further planning has been granted for the conversion of the roof which would easily accommodate two further double bedrooms. Externally, electronic gates lead to a private lawned front garden with patio, driveway parking for multiple vehicles and a fantastic rear courtyard.

Tenure: Freehold. **Council Tax Band:** G. **EPC Rating:** D.

Contact rare! From Sanderson Young on 0191 223 3500 ashleigh.sundin@sandersonyoung.co.uk www.sandersonyoung.co.uk



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A VERY PROMISING START TO 2025!



I'm delighted to report that our Boxing Day Bonanza of new instructions, alongside a very healthy registration of new buyers, has resulted in one of the best starts in sales and viewings that we have seen in the last 10 years. 6 new sales in Ponteland alone, and an off market sale in Gosforth at £2.25 Million, provide only a flavour of the deals being done in and around Newcastle. Up the coast, our Alnwick branch had 6 sales in the first week ranging from just under £200,000 up to £895,000.

The new buyers registering include 4 new applicants looking up to £2 Million, all cash buyers, so again a very confident beginning to 2025. The sales team is well rested and raring to go to match your home to buyers waiting and in a position to proceed.

At the time of writing, we're due to complete on a fabulous £3 Million mansion in Gosforth and have a lovely, newly registered, young couple looking to buy a 4 bedroom house

with garden in central Gosforth up to £860,000.

Activity in Jesmond is brisk with a magnificent town house in La Sageesse quickly going under offer in excess of its price guide, as well as the stunning, double fronted terrace on Highbury also agreeing its sale to a lucky buyer.

We have more buyers waiting for traditional houses in the suburbs of Newcastle and last week I appraised three city and country Mansions and Estates worth between £7 Million and over £10 Million, so those who are looking to upgrade to something exciting please contact me.

Happy House Hunting!

Duncan G Young
Chairman
SANDERSON YOUNG
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Eden Cottage, Paradise Row, Holy Island

The perfect romantic hideaway!

Located in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and cut off from the mainland part of every day, Eden Cottage is the perfect love nest! This pretty stone cottage is tucked away in a quiet private terrace in Holy Island village. Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax Band: C.

 2  1  2  E

Price Guide:

Offers Over £395,000

Lizzie Beattie

01665 600 170

lizzie.beattie@sandersonyoung.co.uk

Pass the popcorn!

This luxury home offers fully refurbished accommodation including a fabulous cinema room, perfect for date nights. The bar/garden room is the ideal place to discuss the film over a few drinks afterwards! Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax Band: F.

 6  4  3  C

Price Guide:

Offers in Excess of £895,000

Ashleigh Sundin

0191 223 3500

ashleigh.sundin@sandersonyoung.co.uk



Barry House, Old Crow Hall Lane, Cramlington



A romantic dinner for two?

This stunning kitchen has everything you need to rustle up an extra special meal for your partner. Recently fully renovated, the detached family home also has wraparound gardens and fantastic open views. Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax Band: D.

5 2 3 C

Price Guide:

£625,000

Emma Lane

0191 213 0033

emma.lane@sandersonyoung.co.uk

Treat yourself to a spa day!

This exceptional property has versatile accommodation including a spa with Jacuzzi, sauna and steam room, the perfect place to relax. Beacon House provides a unique home with panoramic sea views. Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax Band: E.

3 3 3 C

Price Guide:

£1,375,000

Mary Walker

0191 223 3500

mary.walker@sandersonyoung.co.uk



Lovely walks along the beach!

Castlegate has beautiful coastal walks on its doorstep, perfect for a romantic stroll. This unique detached home has stunning views and is the jewel in the crown of this award winning development. Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax Band: F.

4 2 3 D

Price Guide:

£1,175,000

Gillian Greaves

01665 600 170

gillian.greaves@sandersonyoung.co.uk





Two new appointments expand Howarth Litchfield's Team

The Durham-based award-winning architect, Howarth Litchfield, has announced the arrival of two new studio members to its growing team.

Elle Jarah joins as an architectural assistant having recently obtained a Master of Architecture with distinction at Newcastle University. Now she is studying for her Part 3 to qualify as an architect.

She is currently working on education projects in London and Lincoln as well as undertaking some ecclesiastical work.

Architect, Christine Mottershead, has over five years of experience gained at other regional firms and specialises in residential, commercial, extra care and heritage projects.

At Howarth Litchfield, she is currently working on the refurbishment of a Grade II manor house and a feasibility study for a theatre.

Both positions have arisen due to an influx of new work and will enable Howarth Litchfield to provide more strength in depth to clients at a time when the multidisciplinary firm is extremely busy on projects up and down the country.



Ryecroft Glenton welcomes audit specialist Chris Potter as new Partner

Ryecroft Glenton (RG), the leading North of England-based business advisory firm, has strengthened its team with the appointment of Chris Potter as its newest partner.

Chris, a highly experienced audit specialist, joins RG's Audit and Assurance service line, bringing extensive expertise gained across a wide range of businesses in the North East and further afield.

His appointment takes RG's total number of partners to 14, further strengthening the firm's breadth of expertise and experience across a wide range of sectors and services.

RG operates from offices in Newcastle, Northumberland, and York, serving a broad range of clients across the UK. Its Audit and Assurance service line offers comprehensive support to businesses, combining technical expertise with a pragmatic, relationship-focused approach.



Lumo drives innovation with new senior appointment

Newcastle-based train operator Lumo has announced the strategic appointment of Rachel Firth as Customer Experience and Innovation Manager, reinforcing its commitment to delivering transformative growth and setting new industry standards in modern rail travel.

Firth has more than two decades of leadership experience spanning the rail, road, and aviation sectors. Her appointment brings unparalleled expertise and a proven track record of driving change and innovation.

Rachel's deep industry knowledge positions her as a pivotal figure in shaping Lumo's future as a leader in sustainable and customer-centric rail travel.

Firth's mandate at Lumo is to redefine customer experience by leveraging cutting-edge technology, actionable insights, and a relentless focus on inclusivity and sustainability. This appointment marks a significant milestone in Lumo's journey to deliver seamless, high-quality services while cementing its reputation as a bold innovator in the transportation sector since launching less than four years ago.



Solicitor appointment strengthens Mincoffs' Employment Team

The employment department at a prominent North East firm has bolstered its offering following an appointment in the team.

Hannah MacLeod is the latest new starter to join Newcastle-based Mincoffs Solicitors, which has welcomed 16 new staff across the last 12 months during a period of ongoing growth.

Hannah joins the employment team as a solicitor, where she will work alongside partner Nick Smith, solicitor Laura Liddle and trainee solicitor Jenny Luke.

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WHAT'S ON AT RADISSON BLU DURHAM



Discover the art of mixology with our new

COCKTAIL MASTERCLASS

A fun and interactive cocktail class where you'll learn to craft delicious drinks from scratch. We'll cover essential techniques, explore different spirits, and guide you in creating signature cocktails.

Includes Prosecco on arrival, enjoy olives and nibbles while you learn to make three of your own cocktails from our seasonal menu.

2 hours, £40 per person, check our website for dates available throughout February and March, launching on February 14th.

Start your weekend right at our

LIVE MUSIC FRIDAY'S

Join us in Jozef's Bar for drinks and live music with acoustic guitarist Dave Lynas on selected Friday nights.

Dates for your diary are January 24th, February 21st and March 21st from 6pm - 8pm.

Our sharing plates are 3 for £30 - perfect for after work food and drinks, winding down for the weekend.

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RESTAURANT



Experience the culinary delights of our

AFTERNOON TEA

The perfect blend of sophistication and serenity. Our afternoon tea, served in a stunning riverside setting, is the perfect treat.

Enjoy a savoury selection of sandwiches and nibbles, decadent sweet treats, scones with jam and cream, plus unlimited tea or coffee.

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DURHAM



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www.radissonbludurham.com



“

...It is in everyones interest for the individual to be successful from the outset...



Sales and Marketing in 2025

The new year provides an opportunity for reflection, a pause perhaps, a reset or an adjustment in strategy. It's a time for many organisations pre year end to plan ahead, review performance, contemplate market conditions and seek opportunities.

Just Williams works with organisations across a broad range of sectors, focusing on the engineering, manufacturing and built environment sectors – supporting sales growth, internally and externally along with brand profile through content creation. Starting life as a sales consultancy ten years ago this year, we now stand as The SME Agency – covering Sales, Marketing and Events.

Working with organisations to create and implement a cohesive and results driven sales and marketing plan aligned to the overall business strategy. An area we find more and more organisations struggling to achieve. With internal teams creating content on an ad hoc basis for socials, websites being ten years old, high gloss brochures with out of date information and costing a small forest its life as well as little to no online presence and an ageing customer base. We have a way to go should we desire a sustainable sales future.

Our economy is made up of small businesses, we are the life blood of the Tees Valley and North East region and at around 88% of NE companies, we are a large representation of businesses and employees. There are many challenges that face small businesses but the cost to grow by hiring your first sales and marketing person is up there and is high risk and high cost. As is the time to train them and embed them in the culture of your business.

So often we as small business owners try to do everything ourselves or expect our team to go from one discipline to another (I speak from experience and know first hand the expectations!) so when we get to the point of hiring or outsourcing, its crucial if its for one of the above noted roles – the overall objectives are aligned. I would recommend ensuring you have a full overview/plan/strategy or whatever word you want to call it before any hire is made. Invest in the process of engaging with a specialist to plan pre appointment – it will make all the difference.

To create a strategy, write processes, set metrics, align expectations and create the foundations required to

succeed. Sales and marketing professionals are more likely to hit the ground running and embed into an organisations culture and mentality if they have a clear set of guidelines to adhere to. With many smaller owner managed businesses hiring professionals at entry level due to a variety of reasons – cost being the dominant one – the expectation isnt always aligned with the reality.

It is in everyones interest for the individual to be successful from the outset – so give them a fighting chance. Spend your limited resources creating a plan and laying out some foundations and as we call them, rules of the game. It will save you money in the long term.

Back to combining two disciplines - start with an assessment of your current provision, review your competitors and find an organisation you admire in terms of brand positioning, sustainable growth and overall market positioning. Your sales and marketing team will support the development of these into a fully fledged combined tangible strategy but it helps us massively if you have a few starting points to go from...

Because integrating sales and marketing is an essential element for any organisation, regardless of size. The two have become much more aligned over the years and have become perhaps not besties but certainly less curt than they once were (but not always...!). At Just Williams, we have integrated the two into one team ensuring we act cohesively and collaboratively and the two speak, connect and drive results. An integration and true understanding of the alignment, processes and outbound engagement are more than critical – yet fewer businesses than ideal integrate these two crucial functions. And it shows – when the narrative is not aligned to the outbound appearance and the customers experience - a misalignment and a level of mistrust can become quickly evident.

As a certified B-Corporation, it's in our DNA to integrate ESG into our Sales and Marketing strategies, training and well, every aspect of all that we do. People is one of the five pillars of BCorp and one we constantly evolve to ensure that as a small business, we support our people as much as possible, investing in our sales and marketing teams with continuous professional development through out 5% personal and professional development fund. This continuous investment, training and development in our people is one of the reasons businesses ultimately choose to outsource to us rather than go through the challenging and often painful process of recruiting and training and then retaining.

Sales and marketing are two separate disciplines with multiple skill sets - outsourcing at the outset to create an initial plan may prove in the longer term a more financially sound alternative.

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

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



Looking Internally: The key to managing challenges in 2025

As we step into 2025, there's a lot of talk about the challenges businesses are facing—rising costs, economic uncertainty, and squeezed margins. It's easy to get caught up in these external pressures, but here's something we know: the real opportunity lies in looking inward.

When we take time to reflect on what's happening inside our businesses—those small inefficiencies, clunky processes, or gaps in visibility—it often unlocks solutions we didn't even realise were there. And the best part? These are things you can control.

We've seen first-hand how addressing operational niggles can not only help you manage tough times but also create opportunities for growth. So, if you're feeling the weight of what 2025 might bring, let's talk about why looking internally might just be the best move you make this year.

Why Look Internally?

Here's why focusing on your internal operations can make all the difference:

Operational Efficiency Saves Money:

With costs on the rise, small inefficiencies add up fast. Streamlining your processes or automating manual tasks can free up both time and cash. It's not glamorous, but it works.

Better Visibility Means Better Decisions:

Do you know exactly where your business stands right now? Many businesses don't, and that's where the trouble starts. Clear metrics and cash flow forecasting help you make smarter, faster decisions.

Your Team Will Thank You:

When roles are unclear, or everyone is constantly firefighting, it's exhausting—for you and your team. Simple changes, like defining responsibilities or setting up performance measures, can have a big impact.

Opportunities are Easier to Spot:

Sometimes, just stepping back and asking, "Is this working?" can uncover opportunities you didn't see before. Whether it's a smarter



Helen Butler

sales process or cutting a redundant cost, these insights can make a real difference.

You Build Resilience:

The businesses that thrive during tough times are the ones with solid foundations. Looking internally now gives you the tools and systems to weather uncertainty.

How to Get Started

Taking stock of your operations doesn't have to be overwhelming. Here's where we'd recommend starting:

Audit Your Processes:

Take a good, honest look at how things work. Are there bottlenecks? Manual tasks that could be automated? Recurring issues? Processes that just don't make sense anymore? It's not about perfection—it's about progress.

Review Your Costs:

Rising costs are on everyone's mind this year, so now's the time to dig into the details. Are there subscriptions you've outgrown? Overheads you can cut back on? Keep it realistic—this isn't about slashing costs for the sake of it but about spending smarter.

Plan Your Cash Flow:

If you don't already have a cash flow forecast, start now. It doesn't have to be complicated—a simple spreadsheet is fine. This will give you clarity on where you stand and help you plan ahead.

Set Realistic Expectations:

This is a big one. If you make changes, give them time to work. For example, if you're adjusting your sales process and your average cycle is six months, don't expect immediate results in two. It's not sustainable, and it'll just leave you frustrated.

Introduce Metrics:

Whether it's team performance, sales, or operational costs, having clear metrics keeps everyone on track. It's like setting your business's GPS—you need to know where you are to get where you're going.

Why Now is the Right Time

We've worked with businesses who, at first, didn't think their internal operations were a problem but once they started digging they found inefficiencies that were costing them thousands—or gaps that were holding them back from growth.

There's a lot you can't control about 2025, but your operations? That's something you can take charge of.

Find out how we can help you identify improvement opportunities in your operations. We would love to chat to you. Contact me to find out more.
helen@simplifiedoperations.co.uk
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CMYK Christmas Golf Day raises £2205.00 for the Red Sky Foundation

The region's leading workplace technology and managed services specialist CMYK | Business Technology organised their annual Christmas Golf Day in December at the prestigious Close House, with all proceeds going to the Red Sky Foundation.



The atmosphere was festive as participants donned their Christmas jumpers, basking in the winter sunshine before a day of festive themed golf. Following a hearty breakfast, attendees paused to watch an enlightening presentation from the Red Sky Team, highlighting the amazing work they do saving little hearts.

Perfect weather conditions prevailed throughout the event, and with numerous Christmas-themed activities dotted around the course, participants thoroughly enjoyed themselves - whilst generating funds for an excellent cause. After completing their rounds, players gathered to enjoy a warming Christmas dinner, before the day concluded with the customary prize-giving ceremony.

Craig Pratt, director of CMYK said; "We extend our heartfelt appreciation to all clients, partners and guests who joined our yearly Christmas golf event and contributed to raising this remarkable sum for the Red Sky Foundation, an organisation we're incredibly honoured to support. Your ongoing backing throughout 2024 has been invaluable, and it's been another tremendously successful year for CMYK, for which we're deeply thankful. We particularly want to thank our partner and client Close House for their hospitality and well done once again to everyone who won prizes."







“

...It's staggering how much business can be done by just communicating...

Photo: Graeme Rowatt

Nevil Tynemouth

New Results – They're a driven team

Nevil Tynemouth is one of those 'been there, done it' guys, so when he comes up with a suggestion or an idea, it's worth paying very close attention because it could turn out to be the little gem that takes you and your business forward.

New Results with Nevil at the helm has finished the year with record figures. Quite an achievement but that's what New Results is all about...getting you through the tricky times, taking stock of what you do well (and not so well) and making some relevant adjustments to push ahead.

"I guess I'm the classic example of practising what you preach," said Nevil. "I had a lot of commercial success in the early part of my career but, I confess, I started to switch off from pushing forward, stopped looking for new ideas and new clients. Any sort of business or personal development ground to a halt because I thought I knew it all.

"And then I had one of those moments when I decided to do something about it and get back into the frame of mind I'd had when I started my career. I wanted to look ahead to the future and how I could keep learning...I wanted to anticipate what I'd be doing in my 30s, 40s and 50s...and I'm still learning."

And that's the sort of background and experience which Nevil and the guys at New Results can put in front of you.

New Results will this year celebrate 15 years of helping businesses both locally and nationally...but Nevil has no intention of taking things easy. In fact, he's pushing ahead with new developments and new ways to do business.

Which is why he's launched DrivenNet.

"One of the best ways to do business is to fill a room with directors, business owners, senior execs, business partners and experienced sales, industrial, manufacturing or financial folk, and let them talk to each other. It's staggering how much business can be done by just communicating."

But let's be honest about this, some (a lot?) of the business networking events can be a tad dry and boring. Consequently, Nevil has done something about it.

He's launched DrivenNet. Go onto the website www.drivennet.com and you'll get a flavour of what it's all about.

"Networking often needs a common theme to get things moving. I reckon that everyone reading this

has something which connects them. I bet they have a car. They might be a petrolhead or they might see a car as merely a tool to get from A to B, but it's impossible to deny that a car is important to everyone and the way we go through business and our lives in general.

"So, why not use that as the common theme? We hold our DrivenNet networking in places which have a connection to cars such as car dealerships, car repair centres, car customising garages...we've even been to one of the UK's leading motorsport businesses in Cumbria."

In other words, Nevil has devised what has turned out to be a hugely successful twist on the way people network. Put it this way, you now have the perfect way to break into a conversation with a bunch of strangers and avoid that awkward moment when you don't know anyone and can't think of anything to say. Just talk about your car, what sort of car you'd like, why your care is brilliant...or rubbish...and why go-faster stripes are a good idea. Or not.

The best idea is to go onto www.drivennet.com to find out how your networking can get into the fast lane.

Oh...and get ready for the new-look New Results. Nevil, no surprise, has big plans for his team of associate trainers. Don't forget, nothing is 'off the shelf' with New Results. Everything is tailored to you and your business.

New Results can help you with your life balance. They'll point you in the right direction when it comes to business development, leadership and management skills. They'll help you focus on customer excellence and sales. They can also provide you with facilitated away days which can prove to be a great way to do business or keep your team motivated.

Need new results for your business? You need New Results for your business.

www.drivennet.com

THE
BIG
MATTER
REVIEW

They're going, going at Brilliant Auctions...gone!

Buy and sell at the region's latest auction house.



If you turn on your TV and flick through the channels, you can guarantee that you'll find one which involves antiques. It's incredibly popular viewing...but behind the success of these programmes are two important details.

People have something to sell...and people have things they want to buy.

Of course, the fascination of any auction is that nobody really knows how much something will sell for.

"That's always the exciting part, when you have a bidder who really wants a particular item...even better when there are two or more people bidding against each other," said Brilliant Auctions' Director, Michelle Hill. "Without fail, we always have several surprises in every auction, and they invariably involve something which the owner didn't want or no longer needed. I've lost count of the number of times a buyer has commented after selling items, that it's been a double bonus because they've got rid of an unwanted item, and they've got some money for something that was heading for the skip."

Unless you are an expert like Michelle and her business partner Nic, you may be unlikely to know how much value anything really has. What you may consider to be a prized heirloom may only have arrived from the Far East last year.

However, there's also the possibility that the bit of crockery, a watch, coin, camera, toy or piece of jewellery which has been lying in the bottom of a drawer for as long as you can remember, might be worth something.

In other words, before you decide to throw something away, you should get in touch with Brilliant Auctions. You never know.

"Getting a valuation is free and couldn't be easier," adds Michelle. "Customers can arrange to visit our offices in Sunderland and we'll have a chat with them...or we can visit them in their home. They can also take a photo and send it to us via WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger or email, or pop along to one of our monthly valuation sessions held in Durham City Centre. We'll then give them an estimate of the potential value and suggest some dates for future auctions."

The important thing to remember is that once Michelle and her team have given you a valuation, it's up to you whether you

go ahead. If you do want to sell your item, it'll be photographed and put into a catalogue which is available online. Once it's sold, you'll receive your payment in around three weeks.

Buying is also a simple process. Auctions are live streamed online and can attract bidders from all over the world.

"Auctions are great fun, but we recognise they can also be stressful for buyers and sellers alike. We try to ease the tension by making everything as stress-free as possible. There really is a buyer out there for everything...we're proud of our success rate in selling items...and...believe me...we've had some very strange articles in our auctions. A 4ft 5in fibreglass statue of Albert Einstein is probably the most unexpected to date! The biggest single collection we've been invited to value was over 3000 egg cups. It is fascinating to see what people collect."

Brilliant Auctions can also help with house clearances. If you need to empty a house quickly, the best idea is to contact Michelle and she'll put the wheels in motion. The team will arrive quickly to identify any items suitable for auction, provide estimates for them and then ask how you would like to proceed.

The best idea is to go onto the excellent Brilliant Auctions website...www.brilliantauctions.co.uk where you'll easily find exactly how to buy or sell items. You'll also find dates for upcoming auctions as well as where any potential valuation sessions are taking place.

You won't know what you've got until Michelle and the team at Brilliant Auctions have cast their expert eyes over it. You have nothing to lose.

But you could have a lot to gain.

For further details, check out the website, www.brilliantauctions.co.uk or call 07404 838970 or email enquiries@brilliantauctions.co.uk





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*...It is
fascinating to
see what
people collect...*



RMT Accountants adds 25 new jobs In 70th Anniversary Year

One of the North East's best-regarded professional services firms has marked its 70th anniversary by creating 25 new jobs since the start of the year.

RMT Accountants & Business Advisors has taken its total workforce to more than 150 people - and it is now looking to create further new roles in 2025 as it continues to expand across all its service areas.

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

After outgrowing its original office and its subsequent headquarters in Jesmond, RMT bought its own plot of land on Gosforth Business Park 20 years ago and built the offices in

which it is still based today.

Last year, RMT became part of the UK's fastest-growing accountancy group, Sumer, and has since made growth by acquisition a key part of its commercial strategy.

It completed the acquisition of rural and agricultural specialists McCowie & Co late last year, which is now RMT McCowie, and joined forces in the summer with Durham-headquartered Ribchesters Chartered Accountants, which now operates as RMT Ribchesters.

RMT recently completed the acquisition of the KSA Group, a specialist restructuring practice with offices in Berwick-upon-Tweed, Gateshead, Edinburgh and London which focuses on working with works with the directors and owners of struggling businesses to effect rescues often without the need for a formal insolvency process.

The Ribchesters and KSA Group deals have seen a further 48 people join the RMT team.



Johnston Carmichael appoints North East's leading Private Client Tax Director

Leading UK accountancy and business advisory firm Johnston Carmichael has strengthened its team in Newcastle with the appointment of long-established Private Client Tax Director, Chris Hodgson.

Chris joins the team with over 37 years of experience in private client tax, having built his career at local firm Azets, formerly Tait Walker, which grew to become part of an international network of firms. Over the decades, he has honed his expertise in personal and corporate tax advisory services, capital gains tax, inheritance tax, and trust planning, becoming a trusted advisor to clients across a range of complex tax matters.

At Johnston Carmichael, Chris will provide tailored tax planning solutions, working closely with clients to implement their business growth and succession strategies. He will also collaborate internally with specialist teams, including Wealth Management and Global Mobility, to deliver comprehensive client support.

Chris explained what attracted him to the firm at this stage in his career: "I was drawn to Johnston Carmichael's exceptional client service and extensive knowledge across the firm. The Newcastle office has a dynamic and growing team that reminds me of the close-knit environment I started with in 1987."

Paul Shields, Audit Partner and Head of Johnston Carmichael's Newcastle office, said: "We're delighted to have Chris on board. His exceptional experience and deep understanding of private client tax is second to none. Having worked with Chris in a previous role, I know just how much value he brings to both clients and colleagues. His expertise will play a key role as we continue to grow our Newcastle office and deliver outstanding service to our clients across the region."

National business and recovery specialist opens office in Darlington

Begbies Traynor, the UK's leading independent insolvency firm, is continuing to expand across North Yorkshire and the North East with the opening of a new office in Darlington.

Headed by insolvency director Claire Dowson, the Darlington office complements the group's established Teesside and York offices, and will benefit from the expertise of well-known insolvency practitioners such as Dave Broadbent and Ian Royle who have worked in the region for many years. There are also plans to recruit additional staff in the near future.

Building on the growth of the firm throughout the North East in recent years, businesses and individuals in Darlington will be able to benefit from the full Begbies Traynor Group offering.

Located at Innovation Central on John Williams Boulevard in a fast-growing business area, the new Darlington office is just minutes from the train station and other public transport links and also benefits from onsite car parking.



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We're local, we're national, and we're all connected.





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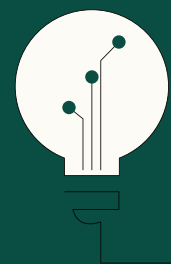
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- Sales strategist **JP Addison** will end with how to close the sale

Tickets: £60

Type RL Business Club into Eventbrite or email:
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...Believe in yourself – it's as simple as that...

Accountant of the month

This month Northern Insight talks to...

Chris Hodgson

Private Client Tax Director, Johnston Carmichael.

Chris has over 37 years' experience in private client tax, having built his career at a local firm, and recently joined the team at Johnston Carmichael as Private Client Tax Director.

Founded in Scotland almost 90 years ago, Johnston Carmichael is one of the UK's leading independent firms of chartered accountants and business advisers. The firm expanded into the North East in 2023, with a new office in Newcastle City Centre, supporting job creation and opportunities for the region's businesses.

What were your career ambitions growing up?

One was to become a professional cricketer, and the other was to be a history lecturer. But in the end, numbers just made sense to me, so accounting turned out to be the perfect career choice.

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

I'm a Private Client Tax Director at Johnston Carmichael Chartered Accountants, where I provide personal and corporate tax advisory services. My role is really varied – I get to dig into complex tax matters while also building strong relationships with my clients. That's the part I enjoy most; understanding their individual needs, helping them navigate challenges, and knowing they trust me to guide them through. It's really rewarding.

What is your proudest business achievement?

I spent 37 years at my previous firm, and I'm really proud of helping to grow the team from 20 people when I joined in 1987, to 200 people by the time I left. Now, I'm proud to be part of Johnston Carmichael and excited to help develop the Newcastle office into a leading hub for businesses across the North East.

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

Technology has completely transformed how we work – it's made things so much more efficient and given us better access to information. Looking ahead, the key will be finding the right balance; using technology to streamline processes while keeping the personal touch that clients really value.

What are you currently working on?

Right now, I'm focused on inheritance tax planning, especially for business owners and farmers, following the recent tax changes announced in October 2024. I'm helping clients make sense of these changes and plan ahead to protect their families and reduce their tax burden.

Tell us about the team you work with.

We've got a fantastic team here in Newcastle. Everyone is committed to providing exceptional advice and going the extra mile for our clients. I know every accountant probably says that, but we really do live by it!

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

Believe in yourself – it's as simple as that.

Where do you see yourself in 10 years time?

Hopefully in semi-retirement, having played a key role in establishing the Newcastle office here in the North East.

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

Now that's an interesting question! Winston Churchill, John Lennon, Agatha Christie, and Jesus.

How do you unwind outside of work?

I love going on a walk with my wife and our dog, to get some fresh air, clear our heads, and enjoy each other's company. It's a great way to de-stress and recharge for the week ahead.

Favourite book and boxset?

I'm a big fan of *'Guards! Guards!'* by Terry Pratchett – it's brilliantly written. As for box sets, you can't beat *The Royle Family*.

www.jcca.co.uk



Chris Moir, associate director and head of personal tax at RMT

Careful planning required around new Inheritance Tax rules

By Chris Moir, associate director and head of personal tax at RMT Accountants & Business Advisors

In her recent Budget, Chancellor Rachel Reeves announced significant changes to the availability of Business Property Relief and Agricultural Property Relief for Inheritance Tax (IHT) purposes which are likely to have a long-term financial impact for those that don't plan properly in response.

In summary, the changes will mean that, after 5 April 2026, when an individual passes away and they have assets that qualify for Business Property Relief or Agricultural Property Relief, the rate of relief will only be 100% on the first £1m of assets that do not pass to a surviving spouse.

Thereafter, for any assets valued at over £1 million, the rate of relief will be reduced to 50%, which means that, on assets that qualify for the 50% Relief (i.e. assets over £1 million), the effective rate of Inheritance Tax will be 20%.

These changes will likely cause great concern for many business owners who have structured their affairs to manage the value that they have created within the business, and they will now need to review and adapt them to ensure they have robust plans in place to mitigate the impact of these forthcoming changes.

Government consultations regarding all of the proposed changes to IHT are still

ongoing, with a separate consultation underway for the general announcements on business property relief / agricultural property relief. Further details are expected to be released by the government in the coming weeks.

Understanding the impact on you

However things turn out, before deciding on what actions you might take, it's essential that you take informed, professional advice, so that you fully understand what your personal IHT position looks like following the changes.

New pension rules will be coming into effect in April 2027, so it would be sensible to wait and see if further details are announced.

Nevertheless, it would make sense to review any family Wills, as you should be doing regularly anyway, and to consider the cash flow of your executor, to ensure they have the resources required to keep running the business.

What does it actually mean?

In terms of paying this Inheritance Tax, if it is required, the ability to do so in instalments will continue to be available.

Due to the nature of shares or assets used in a family business, executors of the estate can elect to pay this tax over a ten-year period.

HMRC has said that no interest will be charged on such payments, but there may be other considerations, such as lending or banking covenants, which make this option impractical.

Insurance could be another effective solution, particularly where there is the ability for the business to fund this tax efficiently, and it does allow time for you to plan effectively.

Insurance can be arranged in respect of assets remaining in the Estate or the tax arising on a failed Potentially Exempt Transfer, which enables an individual to make gifts of unlimited value which will become exempt from Inheritance Tax if the individual survives for a period of seven years.

Owners of family businesses need to be acting now to assess what their current Inheritance Tax position is and how that might change after April 2026.

By ensuring you're fully aware of the impact of these changes, you can then start to prepare a plan and take the appropriate steps to protect your business and ensure it passes intact to the next generation.

For further advice on all aspects of personal tax and to discuss your personal IHT situation, please contact Chris Moir at RMT Accountants & Business Advisors via advice@r-m-t.co.uk or on 0191 256 9500.



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How listening to clients led to stepchange in the North East's most interesting (and interested) accountancy firm

Mark Melville has grown Concept Accountancy from scratch, to a six-figure turnover. And 2025 is the year that Mark is addressing something fundamental to how he believes the very best accountancy should be delivered.

Clients only really ask their accountant for three things. And normally in this order.

First, it's **Recording**. Making sure all that needs to be known financially is perfectly in place, inside the business.

Second, it's **Compliance**. That's making sure whoever needs to know what, outside the business, is informed accurately and on time – every time.

Third, it's **Direction**. That's using what we know to project accurately into the future, so we make brilliant, informed decisions about what to do when for business to optimise.

Thing is, and this is where Mark is driving the client conversation, Mark and his team are super-interested in **Direction**.

“

...We're super-interested in our clients. Learning where the business, and the people, actually want to go. Our Direction First approach to accountancy drives everything. And our new slogan, 'Accountancy With Interest' sums things up well...



“In 2024, Concept Accountancy won its biggest client ever.” Explains Mark.

“And when I asked why we were chosen, the answer really made me think. This particular client, like the best of our clients, had Direction front of mind. They spoke to us about learning from the figures. Making great, timely decisions.

“Sure, this can only be done by getting the Recording and the Compliance parts right. But the thing that really struck me was how this ‘Direction first’ approach was so powerful. Much more interesting, too. And the improvement for the client business are clear. Recording and Compliance, for us, is not the end point. It’s the start point.”

Direction First

From a personal perspective, the ‘Direction first’ approach suits Mark and his team much better, too.

“We’re genuinely interested in our clients. We listen hard. We learn everything we can about them.

“For example, if a client wants to visit me on a Friday – they can’t. Because I’m not in the office. I’m at a client’s office.

“One of the ways we show that we really are interested in learning a client’s businesses is by taking the time to visit them. Chatting at Concept Accountancy HQ is great. But being on-site with the client, every now and then, is better. It’s so interesting to see a business as well as just hear about it.”

Accountancy with Interest

Concept Accountancy starts 2025 with tweaked branding and a new slogan – ‘**Accountancy With Interest**’.

“The new slogan is just right for us,” says Mark.

“We’re super-interested in supporting client Direction. That’s why we’re so interested in putting Direction at the heart of the conversation.”

See www.ConceptAccountancy.co.uk for more.

OCS Acquires Sunderland-headquartered Maxim FM



OCS (“the Group”), a global leader in facilities management, is pleased to announce its acquisition of Maxim FM, one of the fastest-growing independent regional facilities management companies in North East England. This acquisition represents

OCS’ sixth strategic transaction in the UK

over the last 18 months, strengthening its service offering and expanding its regional presence across key public and private sector markets. The acquisition of Maxim follows on from the acquisition of Scottish facilities management specialists FES FM and FES Support Services, which was announced in December last year.

Founded in 2010, Maxim FM has built a reputation for delivering customer-centric facilities management solutions, supporting its diverse client base with a holistic range of services that include commercial and industrial cleaning, maintenance, consumable supplies, as well as hygiene and janitorial services. With a multi-award-winning offering and a commitment to sustainability, Maxim FM is a trusted partner in its key markets across the UK.

Maxim FM brings an established track record in the education sector, which complements OCS’ market-leading expertise, already bolstered by the recent acquisitions of Exclusive Services Group and Accuro. The acquisition will also see OCS welcoming over 1,100 Maxim FM colleagues into its operations, further strengthening its public sector cleaning service capabilities across the UK.

With Maxim FM’s head office in Sunderland, and satellite offices in Glasgow, Bradford, and Swindon, and a strong customer base in the North

of England and Scotland, this deal will add regional density to OCS’ cleaning division, enabling the business to capitalise on growth opportunities and deliver enhanced services to an expanded customer base.

RGCF acquisition of RFS Works Ltd by JST Ports & Logistics Group

JST Ports & Logistics Group (“JST”) announces the acquisition of the rail-handling and logistics company, RFS Works Ltd (“RFS”), from Aggregate Industries UK and GRS Group.

RFS is a leading provider of material handling services, earthworks and heavy mobile equipment solutions particularly focused on primary construction materials in the rail sector.

JST, via its primary operating entity JST Services (Scotland) Ltd, is a UK-wide independent port handling specialist in the bulks and general cargo sectors.

RFS became part of Aggregate Industries UK (“AIUK”) in 2007 as part of the wider Foster Yeoman acquisition. In 2017 it changed its name to RFS Works Limited as part of a new joint venture company between AIUK and GRS Roadstone.

Aggregate Industries and GRS will continue to work closely with RFS.



The combination of the RFS and JST businesses will create the leading, independent, UK ports and rail logistics specialist with over 200 employees, a material handling fleet in excess of 100 large machines, and combined revenues of over £40 million.

JST is owned by alternative investment company Shard Credit Partners and current CEO, Richard Jennings. JST was advised on the acquisition by Newcastle-based RG Corporate Finance (RGCF), with a team led by partner Carl Swansbury, supported by CF director Alex Simpson and CF manager

Sam Shield. JST received legal advice from Gateley, with financial due diligence being performed by Azets. AIUK and GRS Roadstone received legal advice from Addleshaw Goddard.

Carl said: “Having advised on the original MBI of JST back in 2020, it’s great to see the business grow further with the acquisition of RFS Works Limited. It was a pleasure to advise Richard and JST on the acquisition, and we look forward to working with the enlarged group and seeing the business go from strength to strength over the years to come.”



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Meet the Team... UNW's Employment Tax Graduates

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.



L-R: Leah, Louisa and Becky

Following growing demand from clients, UNW has invested significantly in its specialist Employment Tax offering in recent years with the appointments of Paul Tucker, David Paul, and Parm Bhachoo as Senior Employment Taxes Specialists, and with the creation and subsequent expansion of its one-of-a-kind Employment Tax Graduate Programme which has seen Becky Hood, Leah Harrison, and Louisa Edwardson join the department.

Becky, Leah, and Louisa recently took the time to reflect on their separate journeys to UNW, their experiences of balancing work and study, and how they've found life at the firm so far.

Could you tell us a little bit about your backgrounds and what led you to UNW?

Becky: I've always been interested in maths and stats, and with a family background in banking and accountancy, I decided to study Accounting and Finance at Newcastle University. I had previously done a bit of work experience with my sister, and that piqued my interest in what she was doing – which, at the time, was a bit of payroll, a bit of audit, a bit of everything, really! In my final year at Newcastle, I completed a module in Tax, and it ended up being the highest mark of my degree. I really enjoyed it and found the lectures very interesting, and it was very much in my mind as I started looking for jobs.

That's when I came across UNW. Unlike other firms, UNW offered me an in-person interview, and as soon as I met Lee, I knew this was the place I wanted to start my career. The interview didn't feel daunting at all, and he asked about my personal interests and hobbies. As the questions weren't all work-related, I could imagine how I would be treated and feel at the firm – valued and appreciated and not just a cog in a wheel.

Louisa: I'm originally from Sheffield and have always loved maths. I came up to study Mathematics at Newcastle University during Covid, which was rather intense! After my undergraduate degree, I began a Master's degree in Computer Game Engineering but decided that it wasn't really for me. I then tried a bit of teaching but again, it didn't feel right. So I went back to university, this time Northumbria University, and completed a Master's in Mathematics, which I really loved.

Once it ended, I began to look for a graduate role and applied for a range of things. But like Becky's experience, most of the application processes were exclusively online. Because of that, it was difficult to get a feel for the companies or a real understanding of the roles. So, when I came to the interview for UNW, not only was it refreshing that it was in-person, but I also really liked that the task I was asked to do was actually relevant to what I was applying for. I would also say that meeting the team at the interview made me really keen to work at UNW. Everyone was so welcoming, and it was reassuring to know that both Becky and Leah had been through the same process as me.

Leah: I stayed at home for university and completed a degree in English at Teesside with the intention of being a teacher at the end of it. After a placement in a school, I decided that it really wasn't for me! Reflecting on things, I thought, "What's the opposite of being an English teacher?" and decided, "Let's try maths!".

I did some research, looked at some firms, and found the Employment Taxes Graduate Programme advertised on UNW's website. As I hadn't taken maths beyond school, I wanted to find somewhere that would support me all the way through studying and hopefully give me the ability to train with other people of a similar age, and that's exactly what UNW offered. To be fair, I did also like maths at school! But for this role, you need a bit of everything – you liaise with clients, problem-solve, and you do write a lot, so my background in English is pretty useful now!

Employment Taxes is a niche field. What was it specifically that appealed to you about it?

Becky: What drew me to Employment Tax was the combination of working with accounts while also delving into more exploratory and research-focused tasks, rather than just focusing on numbers. And as I'm quite a chatty person, I wanted the work to be more client-based. Most people's idea of accountants is of them sitting in offices and not being client-facing, but that is not the case with Employment Taxes. At UNW, everyone is encouraged to build strong relationships with clients, and if you are happy to specialise in something, you gain expert technical knowledge while developing those relationships simultaneously.

Leah: Researching the role ahead of applying, it quickly became apparent to me that Employment Tax advice seemed like a service really in demand. It was encouraging to know that if I was to go on to specialise in it, my expertise would be needed. And although it is a niche area of tax, you don't feel like you miss out on broader issues because we still cover everything in the training and exams.

Louisa: I'll be honest, before coming to the interview, I didn't really know what Employment Tax was! But during the interview, we were

given a fictional clothing company, and we had to work out if there were any taxable benefits given to the employees – this was so helpful for me to understand what the job would entail and made me excited to work in such a niche field. Since then, I have come to understand the importance of Employment Tax! As Leah said, it's a service in demand and honestly, no two days are the same.

What is it like training, studying, and working at the same time?

Becky: It's difficult, I won't lie, haha! But if you can get your head down and get the work-life balance right, you'll be fine! It's a very supportive culture here. When I'm training or revising for an exam, I like to come into the office at the weekend or stay later during the week. A lot of people in other departments have exams at the same time and are doing the same thing, so you feel like you are all in it together. Even though you might be doing different exams, everyone checks in with each other and supports each other through it.

We also get days off to revise, and Lee is very happy for us to book a room in the office to study rather than staying at home. That's very helpful for people, especially around our age, who might not necessarily have a completely private space of our own to revise in.

Louisa: When I joined the firm, I was nervous about having a full-time job and revising at the same time. However, from the first day here, you have people around you who have gone or are going through the same thing as you and you have access to more senior members of the team like Lee, Paul, David, and Parm.

The learning opportunities that it brings you are amazing – but you can also speak with clients from day one, and that's not something I thought I would be doing. I think it was only my fourth week when Lee and I went to deliver some training for a client in Warrington. It was nerve-racking because I didn't imagine myself doing it, but it was also exhilarating. It builds your confidence having people around you who know their stuff and can back you up.

Leah: Coming in without any experience and not knowing what was expected of me was a little unnerving but, having it all planned out for you at the beginning and being able to visualise your path as a result is rather helpful! I know that I'll be 24 when I finish, which is still pretty young, to be fair!

Could you take us through a typical day in Employment Taxes at UNW?

Becky: My day starts with a cursory look through my emails. I will usually find client queries either directly from the client or delegated from Lee, David, Parm, or Paul. If they are small, quick queries, I'll have a look at them myself and do some research, usually by checking the HMRC manuals. Sometimes I get a trickier question, and I might have to speak to someone in the team with more experience – not everything can be looked up in the manuals, unfortunately!

Quite a lot of the time, you have to call HMRC and wait on the hotline. They don't necessarily always know the answers straight away, so you've got to ring around and contact a few people. Those queries involve a lot of problem solving, knowing who to call and how to get the answers, while chasing regularly and battling deadlines. It can take up to a year to receive an answer, so quite a lot of time is spent going between the client and HMRC just to make sure things are getting processed accurately and as quickly as possible. It keeps you on your toes!

Leah: Day to day, I do a lot of work on disclosures with HMRC. We might have a call with the client, they'll tell us their problem, and then I look at all the information and work through it. With my background in English, we've worked out my niche – I'm better at the training elements of the role and explaining complexities to other people, so I'm constantly looking for webinars to show the rest of the team new things as well as compiling and drafting all the information necessary for presenting to clients.

But we are always working together. It's rare that Lee, Paul, David, or Parm will give one of us the same query – they make sure they mix it up. That's really good because if I get something I've never seen before, Becky or Louisa may have already been through it or have seen something on it and I can ask them for an opinion. We can put our brains together to find a solution.

Louisa: I've learnt quickly that Employment Taxes is a very reactive space to be in, but it makes for a highly collaborative team. In my first team meeting, I had no idea about what everyone was talking about (all the abbreviations, for example!), but very quickly, you get up to speed because you are talking about the topics all the time. And because we are sat next to each other in the office, you never really have to wait for something to be explained to you or to get assistance with something.

We are always afforded the time to go off and find an answer to a query and encouraged to explain it back – this helps your confidence enormously when a senior member of the team asks for your opinion on something we are working on together.

Do you have any particular highlights from your time so far?

Becky: I'd have to say that it was when I was asked to present a Construction Industry Scheme training session at Alnwick Castle. It was in a great, big hall, and there were more people in attendance than we had thought. I was definitely out of my comfort zone at first, but it was a great experience, and everyone seemed really engaged. Once the session had finished, people from the audience started to approach me with questions, and I thought, "I must seem like I know what I'm talking about!"

Louisa: For me, it's definitely the client training workshops. It's great that you get to meet clients face to face, and it makes you feel like you are doing something important and making a difference. When I started doing the workshops, Lee encouraged me to get involved as much or as little as I felt comfortable with. But I got stuck in, and that really helped me grow. Afterwards, I was so glad that I had done it. At UNW, I feel like you are pushed out of your comfort zone but in a really comfortable way, if that makes sense!

Leah: It has to be the training sessions for me as well. We've just recently gone back for a second time in quick succession to deliver some training for a client, and someone in the audience asked me a question when it was my turn to present. I replied, and then we

started to interact. I thought, "This didn't happen last time, so I must be getting better!". The seminars are also a big part of what we do. I think I'd only been here five months or so before I was on stage acting in a Scooby Doo-themed Employment Tax seminar! We are thrown into things but in the right way.

And finally, what's the culture like at UNW?

Leah: I think it's the perfect transition from university to a full-time career. I had feared what it would be like to head straight into a 9-to-5 – that I would be sat on my own in silence – but because of the way we work together and how much is going on here, like the socials, sports teams, et cetera, it's nothing like that. I moved away from home for work and didn't know a soul, so this place is perfect – just what I needed!

Louisa: Everyone knows it's a big adjustment going from university to job life, but at UNW, there are so many things going on socially for you to get involved in that you settle quickly. My second day at the firm was the annual Away Day – I didn't know anyone, but it was so much fun and the perfect start to help me get my bearings. When I talk to my friends or family, they say it sounds like a great place to work not only due to the social aspect but because there's a real desire for the firm to get your feedback on your experiences and adjust.

Becky: I feel like I'm more social now than I ever was at university! Like Leah and Louisa said, there's just so much to get involved in – recently, I've taken part in netball, badminton, a 'Paint and Sip' session, and personal training classes. When I talk to my family about it, they always say, "I want to work where you work!". Coming in as a graduate, you might not realise just how good it is here until you hear others say, "We don't get that, why do you?". It really makes you appreciate the culture. UNW genuinely prioritises its people, and that focus isn't just talk – it's something you feel every day.

unw.co.uk



UNW's award-winning Employment Taxes Team



“
...We expect continued earnings growth, albeit at a slower pace...”

L-R: Gary Fawcett, Alison Hadley, Jason Ryan, James Carrick, Rob Brotherton and Michael Rankin

2025 Outlook

The team at Raymond James, Monument share their views on the year ahead for world investment markets.

Equity markets

The usual Santa rally didn't materialise as 2024 drew to a close, but this shouldn't detract from what has still been a positive year for equities, particularly in the US! The outlook for global stock markets in 2025 is cautiously optimistic, with opportunities and volatility likely in equal measure. We expect continued earnings growth, albeit at a slower pace compared to previous years, due to higher-for-longer interest rates.

The US stock market, in particular, is likely to maintain its upward trajectory, driven by strong consumer spending, robust corporate earnings and President Trump's tax and spending policies. AI is likely to continue to be a major trend, which will benefit the US market. Geopolitical uncertainties will likely influence market movements as the year progresses, which will add to the volatility we expect this year.

The UK market remains one of the 'cheapest' in the world and given its mix of cyclical and defensive sectors, could perform quite well during 2025. Whilst economic growth has ground to a halt over the last six months, many economists believe we will see a return to economic expansion during the next 12 months, aided by increased government spending. However, it is still early days to assess the fallout from the increase in National Insurance contributions on businesses and what impact this will have, which is why the focus should be on companies with strong business franchises and pricing power.

Europe's economy continues to face structural challenges and political uncertainties, particularly in the Eurozone's two largest economies – Germany and France. This will likely weigh on sentiment towards European equities but should be offset somewhat by a more supportive monetary policy with further interest rate cuts expected.

Asian stock markets are expected to experience varied performance. China's market may continue to face headwinds due to regulatory crackdowns and slower economic growth. In contrast, markets in India and Southeast Asia are anticipated to perform well, driven by strong economic fundamentals and generally lower debt as a percentage of GDP. The strong US dollar, however, continues to be a challenge for some Asian and emerging market countries.

Sectors

We feel some areas of the market are better placed than others and some key sectors in our opinion are:

- 1. Technology:** Continued innovation and digital transformation should drive growth, particularly in the US and Asia.
- 2. Healthcare:** Ageing populations and advancements in biotechnology should support sector growth globally.
- 3. Energy:** The transition to renewable energy sources will create opportunities, but traditional energy sectors may face volatility.

4. Financials: Stabilising interest rates will benefit banks and financial institutions, particularly in the US and Europe, with American financials also hopefully enjoying a more positive environment due to President Trump's planned deregulation policies.

5. Consumer discretionary: Strong consumer spending will drive growth, especially in the US and emerging markets.

6. Infrastructure: Government spending here and across the Atlantic over the next few years should be supportive for companies across the infrastructure landscape.

Inflation

Inflation is expected to moderate in 2025 but remain above pre-pandemic levels. The general feeling is that headline inflation could average around 2.7% by the end of the year, with core inflation slightly lower. The Chancellor's Budget and President Trump's policies are potentially inflationary and coupled with persistent supply chain disruptions and geopolitical tensions could pose risks, possibly causing inflationary pressures to re-emerge. As long as inflation remains below 3%, we believe central banks will be fairly comfortable with that.

Interest rates

Despite slightly stubborn inflation, interest rates around the world generally peaked in 2024 and started to come down towards the year end. The Federal Reserve, having cut rates multiple times in late 2024, is likely to adopt a more measured approach this year with the Fed likely to keep rates relatively low to support economic growth. Two 0.25% cuts are now forecast for all of this year. We are also likely to see interest rate cuts by the European Central Bank and Bank of England, although the latter has a slightly harder job trying to balance supporting economic growth against sticky UK inflation.

Bonds

With interest rates stabilising and unlikely to fall as much as originally thought in 2024, bond yields are expected to remain relatively steady. We feel this supports a focus on higher yielding and high-quality corporate bonds over government bonds, although we still advocate having some exposure to UK gilts and US treasury bills in case interest rates are cut more than expected this year and to act as a safety net in case of a deterioration in the world economy.

Overall, we believe 2025 presents a mixed, but generally positive outlook for investors. Wishing all Northern Insight readers all the best for 2025!

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Risk warning: Any opinion or forecast reflects the judgment as at the date of issue and is subject to change without notice. Past performance is not a reliable indicator of future results. This commentary is intended for information purposes only and no action should be taken or refrained from being taken as a consequence without consulting a suitably qualified and regulated person. With investing your capital is at risk.

Preparing for Success in 2025: Key areas for robust financial management

As we enter 2025, businesses are navigating a dynamic environment filled with both uncertainty and opportunity.

In such a climate, robust financial management isn't just a nice-to-have—it's a critical component of sustainable growth. Whether your goal is to weather potential economic volatility or to scale your operations, the strength of your financial processes will play a pivotal role in determining your success.

Below I have set out my six key areas businesses should focus on to ensure their financial management is fit for 2025 and beyond.

1. Financial Reporting: From Numbers to Insightful Storytelling. Accurate and timely reporting is the backbone of financial management. However, it's not just about producing reports; it's about ensuring those reports provide actionable insights.

- **Timeliness and accuracy:** Businesses should aim to close their monthly reporting cycle as quickly and efficiently as possible while ensuring accuracy, avoiding reactive and poor decision-making.

- **Insightful dashboards:** Customised dashboards with key performance indicators (KPIs) relevant to your business will enable your leadership team to make swift, informed decisions.

- **Variance analysis:** Identifying variances to budget and forecasts early allows you to review, understand and address underlying issues before they become significant problems.

2. Cash Flow: The Lifeline of Your Business

Cash flow management has always been critical, but in today's fast-moving environment, it's more important than ever.

- **Dynamic forecasting:** Move beyond static, long-term forecasts and adopt a dynamic 13-week to 12 month rolling cash flow model. This allows you to reflect real-time changes in operations and market conditions.

- **Proactive management:** Implement strong processes for monitoring debtor days, credit control, and payment terms.

- **Building a cash buffer:** Given the unpredictability of external factors, maintaining a cash buffer can help



Dan Cooper

businesses navigate unforeseen challenges without disrupting operations.

3. Team Structure: Building a Finance Function for Growth

Your finance team plays a crucial role in enabling both day-to-day operations and long-term strategy. Ensuring you have the right structure in place is key.

- **Skill set assessment:** Does your current team have the right blend of operational and strategic expertise? If your business is growing or evolving, your finance function needs to scale accordingly.

- **Outsourced support:** For many businesses, outsourcing all or part of the finance function can provide cost-effective access to high-level expertise without the need for a full-time hire.

- **Role clarity:** Clearly defined roles and responsibilities within the finance team can drive efficiency and prevent bottlenecks in decision-making processes.

4. Systems & Processes: Leveraging Technology for Efficiency

Outdated or inefficient financial processes and systems can limit a business's ability to grow and adapt.

- **Systems review:** Conduct a thorough review of your current finance systems. Are they enabling efficiency, or are they a source of frustration?

- **Automation:** Invest in automation to reduce manual tasks and improve accuracy allowing your team focus on value-added activities.

- **Internal controls:** Ensure you have processes in place to safeguard assets, mitigate fraud risk, and ensure compliance with regulations.

5. Marketing & Growth Strategy: Aligning Spend with Financial Goals

A strong financial strategy must be closely

aligned with your marketing and growth plans.

- **Balanced budget allocation:** Ensure your marketing budget is balanced between short-term, high-ROI campaigns and longer-term brand-building initiatives.

- **Performance tracking:** Set clear goals for marketing spend and track performance against them.

- **Cross-functional collaboration:** Finance shouldn't operate in isolation. Encourage collaboration between finance, marketing, and sales to ensure everyone is aligned toward the same growth objectives.

6. Strategic Guidance: Finance as a Strategic Partner

In today's complex business environment, finance should be more than just a support function—it should be a strategic partner.

- **Finance leadership:** Ensure your finance leadership, whether in-house or outsourced, is involved in key strategic discussions. Their insights can help guide decisions on everything from new investments to operational improvements.

- **Data-driven strategy:** Use financial data as the foundation for your strategic planning. Whether you're exploring a new market, launching a product, or optimizing costs, robust financial analysis can significantly reduce risk.

- **Regular reviews:** A strategy isn't static. Regularly revisit your business strategy to ensure it remains relevant and responsive to market changes.

By focusing on robust reporting, dynamic cash flow management, building the right team, investing in efficient systems, aligning marketing spend with financial goals, and embedding finance in strategic decision-making, you can position your business to thrive in a rapidly changing world.

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Back to Grass Roots

Newcastle based Wealth and Fund Management specialists Tier One Capital have continued their support for Sport Newcastle and grassroots sport in the region again sponsoring Sport Newcastle awards night, held at the Newcastle Civic Centre.

The award event celebrates the success of emerging sporting talent, sporting success and achievements in the region, including the rising star awards for young aspiring talent.

Supporting grass roots sports and helping sporting dreams of young people and sports clubs and organisations, Sport Newcastle is the City's oldest and inclusive sports charity.

Tier One Capital's long running corporate sponsorship partnership with Sport Newcastle helps the charity deliver its ongoing quest to support emerging sporting talent and grassroots sport organisations in the region.

This year Tier One sponsored the 'Sporting Success of the Year award' which was awarded to Kieran Reilly from Gateshead, who scooped a silver medal at the Paris Olympics and is also the reigning European BMX Freestyle champion.

The amazing dare devil BMX free styler from Gateshead has his sights on future Olympic and World success and TOC Chief Executive Ian McElroy was on hand on the night to present Kieran him with his award. Matthew Squires, Sport Newcastle Trustee and Head of Fundraising, said, "Our major award winners reflect the region's success achieved across a diverse range of female and male sports.



Kieran Reilly with Ian McElroy

"With the ongoing support of the local business community this augurs well for the future, so a big thank you again to everyone at Tier One Capital for their continued support for our charity."

TOC Chief Executive Ian McElroy said, "As a business deeply rooted in the North East, and with a team of active sports enthusiasts, we are thrilled to continue our long running support of Sport Newcastle.

"The annual awards typify what Sport

Newcastle stands for and really show cases what grassroots sport and the many dedicated people who give up their time to help young sports people achieve their dreams. We were especially proud to present the Sporting Success of the Year award to Kieran who is a thoroughly deserving winner."

www.tieronecapital.co.uk

Teesside firm secures £500k NPIF II funding to boost new contract win



Daniel Wade

2025 has started well for the team at FW Capital, continuing to support North East businesses with funding to support their ambitions.

One firm that is experiencing fast growth is Wade Construction Management Consultants who have received a £500k investment from NPIF II – FW Capital Debt Finance, which is managed by FW Capital as part of the Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund II (NPIF II).

Headquartered in Darlington, the construction management firm recently won a major global partnership agreement with one of the largest pharmaceutical companies in the world. The NPIF II funding is supporting the uptick in activity from this partnership, which will create over 20 jobs and support future growth.

Wade Construction Management Consultants has trebled in size over the last two years. This latest funding is the business' second round of investment from FW Capital. Last year Wade Construction Management Services received finance to support its rapid growth in the pharmaceutical and life science industries. It also supported the launch of the Wade Academy, which provides training and development to enhance the support provided to employees working in the construction sector and meet the industry standards of excellence.

Managing director, Daniel Wade, launched

Wade Construction Management Consultants in 2018 to remove the overspend risk that is associated with traditional methods of procurement. Wade Construction Management Consultants works with clients to deliver projects quickly, producing an accurate costing and scheduling projection, giving them a strategic and competitive advantage when partnering on projects. The firm is a key operator for construction management in the pharmaceutical, life science and process sectors. It works to close the gap between the creation of vital medicines and delivery to the service users by facilitating effective, strategic and professional project and construction management.

Daniel Wade, Managing Director at Wade Construction Management Consultants, explains: "We've seen the business grow rapidly and this latest round of funding gives us further confidence to take on new opportunities and fulfil this new partnership agreement. As a business we've demonstrated our agility to support clients and provide fast solutions. This collaborative way of working has proven to be successful, providing clarity for our clients, reducing risk and helping to speed up project completions. As a result, our business has trebled in size and this latest contract win is a significant boost to our business. We're also continuing our focus on bridging the skills gap in the construction industry with the Wade Academy, helping to create more opportunities to work in collaborative environments and change perceptions.

"The backing from FW Capital has once again been great. FW Capital is the only lender that has taken the time to understand us and back our business aspirations. Dave Hawkins and

the team get what we do and are very easy to work with."

Dave Hawkins, Portfolio Executive at FW Capital said: "Daniel and his team have delivered on everything they set out to do from the first round of funding and this latest injection of finance is fuelling further expansion. They've secured a significant new contract with a global pharmaceutical business and needed some working capital support this and help to create new jobs. It's fantastic to be part of their journey and watch the business prosper."

The £660m Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund II (NPIFII) covers the entire North of England and provides loans from £25k to £2m and equity investment up to £5m to help a range of small and medium sized businesses to start up, scale up or stay ahead.

The Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund II is increasing the supply and diversity of early-stage finance for the North's smaller businesses, providing funds to firms that might otherwise not receive investment and help to break down barriers in access to finance. FW Capital provides debt finance options from £100k to £2m to businesses based in the North West of England, with some flexibility to lend across the North.

If you're a business in the North East looking for finance, get in touch to find out more about how we can help. Call 0191 269 6969 or email info@fwcapital.co.uk. You'll also find additional details at www.fwcapital.co.uk



The 2024 Lord's Taverners Christmas Lunch

Held at Newcastle Civic Centre in December, raised an incredible £65,000. These funds will be used both regionally and nationally to empower and positively impact the lives of young people facing challenges related to inequality.

This year's event featured outstanding speakers, including Tessa Sanderson, David Campese, and Ray Parlour, along with the brilliant Pete Graves and Justin Lockwood.

A heartfelt thank you to our event sponsors, Wates Group and Lockton Companies, as well as to all the supporters and contributors who helped make this event such a fantastic success!

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







Hay & Kilner advise The Warren Collection on its acquisition of Kensington House in Jesmond

Hay & Kilner, the full-service law firm, has acted for The Warren Collection on its acquisition of Kensington House, for an undisclosed sum.

Kensington House, located at 5 Osborne Road in Jesmond, offers a mix of one and two-bedroom luxury apartments available for both business and leisure travellers.

All apartments feature a kitchen with fridge freezer, dishwasher, microwave, toaster and kettle, along with a living area and flat-screen TV. Some of the larger two-bedroom units come with a private courtyard.

The Warren Collection, founded in 2021 in Belfast, now operates a portfolio of six properties. The group made its European debut with an opening in Malta in 2023.

Hay & Kilner’s corporate team provided legal advice on the acquisition to The Warren Collection, led by Georgia Whitfield and supported by Nicola Tiffen. Keith Ravenhill at Mincoffs acted for the landlord.

David Warren, Managing Director at The Warren Collection said: “Expanding into Newcastle was a natural step for us. The city offers a dynamic mix of business and leisure opportunities, and Jesmond’s prime location will ensure our clients are centrally located and well-connected to everything Newcastle has to offer. We look forward to welcoming guests, whether they’re in town for a short stay or on a longer-term relocation.”

Thanks to the team at Hay & Kilner for their support on this transaction. Having a North East based firm who knew the market was really beneficial for us on this deal and the service we received was excellent.”

Georgia Whitfield, Associate at Hay & Kilner said: “We are very pleased to support The Warren Collection on acquiring Kensington House and wish them well with their debut property in England. This transaction demonstrates that the hospitality sector remains buoyant in the region and the demand for businesses continues despite the challenges around operating costs.”



Muckle LLP surpasses £700,000 in grants to support local charities

A charitable fund set up by local law firm Muckle LLP over two decades ago has surpassed £700,000 in grants, with donations benefiting several North East charities.

The Muckle Fund, run in association with the Community Foundation, was set up in 2002 as a way for Muckle to give back to people, communities and good causes across the North of England. Since then, it has awarded 737 grants totalling £713,679 to charities, community groups, and not-for-profit organisations across the North East.

Muckle gives 1% of its annual profits to the fund, which supports charities and organisations that help young people, tackle disadvantage, improve social mobility, and champion causes close to the hearts of Muckle and its people.



Sunderland solicitors step up to support running group

Keeping a New Year resolution to get fitter and healthier is now going to be much easier in Sunderland – thanks to a city firm of solicitors.

Richard Reed Solicitors, based at Frederick Street, has agreed to sponsor Sunderland Strollers Running Club, a long standing the organisation based in Sunderland, and the firm will support their beginners group.

And their support means that the group can be offered at a reduced cost to anyone who wants to get in shape and meet new people.

Sunderland Strollers was launched 41 years ago by a group of people who wanted to stay active and be sociable and now boasts more than 300 members.

Club chairman Harry Harrison – which is based at the Beacon of Light – said it has stayed true to its original principles of bringing people together to enjoy running.

“We welcome people at all levels. Although we have lots of members who have gone on to represent the county, for the majority of people it’s just a great way to keep fit and be sociable.”



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Mike Cattermole

Planning for the future: The rise of Lasting Powers of Attorney

Last year saw a surge in applications for Lasting Powers of Attorney (LPAs) across the UK. Mike Cattermole, senior associate solicitor in the wills, trusts and probate team at Jacksons Law Firm, explains the importance of such legal documents, enabling individuals to appoint trusted representatives to make decisions on their behalf.

A Surge in LPA Applications

Official figures reveal that 2023 marked a milestone for LPA registrations, with over one million applications recorded for the first time. Data from the UK Family Court indicates a 37% rise in registrations compared to the previous year. The Office of the Public Guardian reported 1.37 million applications, a substantial leap from one million in 2022.

This increase can be attributed to factors such as an ageing population and improved accessibility through a streamlined online process.

However, the process of establishing an LPA remains time-intensive, often taking up to 20 weeks or more due to backlogs. Applying early is critical to avoiding delays that create difficulties for families needing funds for care fees and other essential expense

Why the Increase?

Several factors contribute to the rise in LPA applications:

- **Growing awareness** - Public understanding of the benefits of LPAs has

increased significantly. Efforts by figures like Martin Lewis, the Money Saving Expert, have highlighted their importance. People now recognise how LPAs ensure their wishes are respected if they lose capacity, giving control over decisions. Family members do not automatically have the right to make medical decisions without an LPA.

- **Ageing population** - As people live longer, they are more likely to face age-related health issues or cognitive decline. LPAs are essential for managing affairs during these stages.

- **Streamlined processes** - The shift to online applications has made applying for LPAs easier and more convenient, encouraging more people to take this step.

The Importance of Planning Ahead

LPAs provide peace of mind by empowering individuals to appoint trusted representatives to manage their finances, property, health, and welfare. There are two main types of LPAs:

- 1. Health and welfare LPA** - Allows your attorney to make decisions about daily care, medical treatment, and living arrangements.

2. Property and financial affairs LPA

- Grants your attorney the authority to handle your finances, including paying bills, accessing bank accounts, and selling property.

Planning ahead ensures your interests are protected and spares your family the stress of navigating legal processes during challenging times.

Difficulties Faced Without an LPA

Failing to establish an LPA can lead to significant challenges for families when unforeseen circumstances arise, including:

- **Lengthy legal processes** - Without an LPA, families may need to apply to the Court of Protection to be appointed as a deputy. This process is time-consuming, costly, and emotionally draining.
- **Financial complications** - Accessing bank accounts and managing finances becomes problematic without an LPA, potentially leading to financial hardship when funds are urgently needed.

Final Thoughts

The rising number of LPA applications reflects growing recognition of the need to prepare for the unexpected. An LPA is more than just a legal document; it safeguards your wishes and reassures your loved ones. Whether considering an LPA for yourself or encouraging a loved one to plan ahead, taking action sooner rather than later is crucial. By establishing an LPA, you can protect your interests, ease your family's burden, and navigate life's challenges with confidence.

For more information, contact Mike on 0191 4068733 or email mcattermole@jacksons-law.com



Paul McGowan

A change is on the horizon

Paul McGowan is Principal Solicitor at specialist employment law firm, Collingwood Legal. Here he looks at the importance of manager training.

Employment Law is ever-evolving and this presents challenges for employers and the managers that work for them.

In 2024, the spotlight is firmly on recent developments like the positive duty on employers to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace. As we step into 2025, especially with changes on the horizon like the Employment Rights Bill, it has never been more important to equip managers with the skills and knowledge they need to navigate increasingly complex workplace dynamics.

The role of Managers

Managers are at the forefront of addressing grievances, managing performance, and fostering workplace culture. Failing to provide effective training for managers risks leaving them without the tools to fulfill their role. Without proper training, they risk making decisions that could expose employers (or sometimes themselves) to legal challenges. For instance, mishandling

a harassment complaint by dismissing it or failing to follow a thorough process could lead to claims of discrimination and victimisation or, in certain circumstances, employees could resign and claim constructive dismissal.

Why training matters Training ensures managers can:

1. Understand Their Legal Obligations:

Managers need to be aware of employment laws, including the Equality Act 2010 and new sexual harassment legislation, and understand their responsibilities.

2. Apply Policies Consistently: Consistency in managing matters such as flexible working requests or disciplinary actions reduces the risk of Tribunal claims.

3. Enhance Communication Skills: Difficult conversations, such as performance issues or grievances, requires confidence and sensitivity, which training can provide.

4. Promote a Positive Culture: Effective training for managers equips them to deal with workplace issues with confidence and foster confidence in their team, aiding productivity and increasing the likelihood of a positive employee experience.

Employers should be actively considering the training needs of the managers in their business and where knowledge gaps may exist. New topics such as the duty to prevent sexual harassment will be new topics for some managers but employers should also consider where managers may need “refresher” training. On top of this, employers should engage in an open dialogue with their managers to understand where training can be most effective.

How we can help - Collingwood Legal Essential Manager Training

Collingwood Legal are hosting 6 easy to access online modules between April and July 2025 covering the essential issues to help managers to navigate this landscape with confidence.

Each module is 90 minutes long and the six topics covered are:

1. *Introduction to employment law for managers* – 10 April 2025
2. *Having difficult conversations* – 1 May 2025
3. *Managing discipline and grievances* – 15 May 2025
4. *Absence management, disability and adjustments* – 5 June 2025
5. *Discrimination, harassment and bullying* – 19 June 2025
6. *Ending the employment relationship* – 3 July 2025

Please call 0191 232 2880 or email sue.graham@collingwoodlegal.com or view the Events section of our website collingwoodlegal.com for further info.

Early-bird discounts available for bookings made before 31 March 2025.

In today's employment law landscape, ensuring managers are well-trained is not just about compliance but creating a workplace where employees feel valued and respected. Proactive training reduces legal risks and helps protect your organisation's reputation.

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

Pre-Nuptial Agreements: A practical love letter?

By Catherine Lowther, Managing Associate, Swinburne Maddison LLP

As Valentine's Day approaches, many loved-up couples will be focusing on planning their wedding day, having celebrated their engagements during the season of love.

Engagements and wedding planning, while romantic and exciting, come with significant costs. Amidst ongoing financial pressures within the current economic climate, many engaged couples are now considering the practicalities and financial implications of marriage, beyond choosing floral arrangements and wedding cakes.

While considering the financial aspects of marriage may not sound particularly romantic, prenuptial agreements ('pre-nups') can play a crucial role. Often thought to be reserved for the rich and famous, pre-nups offer sensible financial planning and protection in various situations, such as if:

- You have pre-acquired wealth.
- You own your own business.
- You anticipate a sizeable inheritance in the future.
- You or your partner has significant debts.
- This is a second marriage.

The purpose of a pre-nup is to agree, at the outset of the marriage, on how finances would be divided in the unlikely event of separation or divorce. It is widely considered to be a sensible step, as such agreements can help alleviate some of the stress associated with resolving finances in the event of a relationship breakdown.



Catherine Lowther

Are they worth the paper they're written on?

It is important to remember that in England and Wales pre-nuptial agreements are not legally binding. However, such an agreement will carry weight in the event of a separation or divorce if:

- Each party has received independent legal advice regarding the terms of the agreement.
- There is transparency between the parties (it is best practice to obtain full disclosure of each party's assets prior to completion of the agreement).
- The document is entered into freely (no

pressure can be placed on one party to enter such an agreement).

- The document is periodically reviewed and amended if required, for example upon the birth of a child.

Is it for me?

There is no "one size fits all" approach to drafting pre-nuptial agreements. Pre-nups should be signed no later than six weeks before the wedding, so it is crucial to seek legal advice at an early stage.

For more information and advice contact Catherine Lowther, Managing Associate, cel@swinburnemaddison.co.uk, 0191 3842441



Business insolvency: reflections and predictions

2024 was a tough year for many businesses and the future is still looking uncertain.



Kelly Jordan

Kelly Jordan, insolvency expert and partner at Muckle LLP, examines the current insolvency market and predicts what the insolvency landscape will be like in the year ahead.

The statistics

Insolvency numbers remain high for another successive year post-COVID-19, with around 22,000 company insolvencies as of November 2024 and an expected annual total of around 24,000, only slightly under the 25,163 company insolvencies in 2023.

Recent challenges

In recent years, the UK economy has presented several challenges for businesses, including high inflation, rises in interest rates and geopolitical instability.

All of these challenges have created a difficult trading environment. Most recently, the measures introduced by the budget in November 2024, including changes to National Insurance, National Minimum Wage and reductions to business rates relief, are no doubt going to put even further strain on businesses, particularly among small and medium-sized enterprises. The restored

appetite of creditors, especially HMRC, to pursue debts more aggressively will also add pressure, potentially leading to an increased number of winding-up petitions.

Given the headwinds facing businesses it is hardly surprising that many predict insolvencies to remain at the current levels (levels not seen since the recession in 2008-2009), with some predicting even further increases.

Sectors that are labour-intensive are likely to be hardest hit, including social care/care homes, retail, hospitality, leisure, and construction. These businesses are most likely to be impacted by changing consumer behaviours, rising operational costs, the aforementioned changes to National Insurance and National Minimum Wage, and a reduction in disposable income.

The third sector is also at risk, with the added pressures of funding being withdrawn/reduced, the bringing of some services back into the public sector, and a squeeze in charitable donations.

Tools for insolvency practitioners

Insolvency professionals working with distressed and insolvent businesses already have a range of tools available.

It will be interesting to see how those tools are utilised, particularly in terms of rescuing and recovering those businesses using Restructuring Plans (RP), Company Voluntary Arrangements (CVAs), and pre-pack administrations.

Although RPs have become a useful tool, their effectiveness amongst SMEs remains uncertain, given the costs and complexities of the process (in fact, RPs are known as one of the most complex insolvency procedures). As the case law around RPs evolves and the market becomes more au fait with the process, perhaps the regime will lend itself to a broader range of companies.

For now, the alternative processes are likely to remain the core options for SMEs. Despite the bad wrap that pre-packs often face, they are often the best outcome in the circumstance, and, as such, they will undoubtedly remain a useful device for all businesses.

The importance of planning ahead

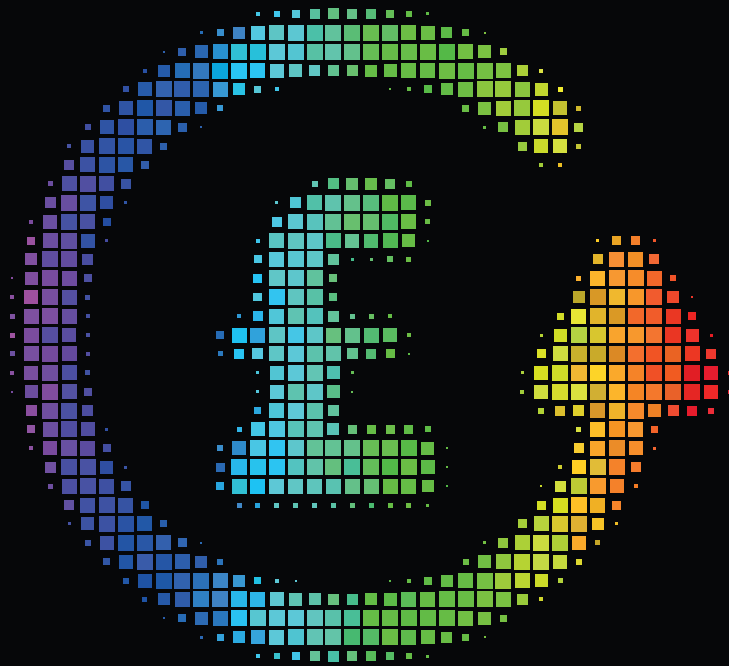
Whether insolvencies rise at the rate predicted by some remains to be seen, but many will inevitably face challenging times ahead.

Good financial governance remains key for businesses. It is important to review finances regularly and seek appropriate professional advice as soon as there are any signs of difficulty.

Early intervention and assistance from qualified insolvency professionals can be critical as it may be the difference between survival through, for example, refinancing or restructuring, and another number in the insolvency statistics.

If you need advice regarding business insolvency, please contact Kelly Jordan using 0191 211 7916 or kelly.jordan@muckle-llp.com.

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Key contract clauses for businesses explained



Commercial solicitor, Alicia MacRae.

Alicia MacRae, a solicitor in Mincoffs Solicitors' commercial team, explores some of the clauses you should look out for and understand in full before you sign a contract on the dotted line.

Engaging lawyers can often be at the bottom of the priority list for businesses, however, when a business faces looming litigation, they realise that lawyers are paramount at the early stages. A commercial lawyer highlights, and mitigates, the risks of a seemingly innocent "standard" contract.

Here are a few key clauses to look out for:

Termination

A contract should have various rights as to termination, including for breach (perhaps on a material or persistent basis) or non-payment of invoices (to avoid working for free). Often over-looked, a termination right for convenience is also key to include where there is a rolling or indefinite term so that a party can end the contract if it no longer serves them (subject to providing requisite notice).

Pros and cons of these rights depend on which side you're on, and lawyers will tinker with termination rights to best suit their client.

Warranties

A warranty is a promise of certain facts or future action, and a breach of warranty entitles the non-defaulting party to claim for damages.

Warranties can be made at the time the contract is entered into; however, a warranty could be stated as repeating intermittently, such as warranting that each time a document is provided it is true and accurate – this is an "evergreen" warranty.

Lawyers usually seek to shift warranties from evergreen to a fixed date (commonly at contract entry), as it is more in the control of the warranting party to warrant a fact at one time, or make necessary disclosures against it, and it reduces the likelihood of breach, which may (depending on the contract) result in damages being payable or termination.

Indemnities

Where damages are narrowed by the legal principles of causation, remoteness, and mitigation, indemnities are not so restricted. An indemnity is a carefully-scoped promise to protect another party against loss from a specific circumstance, and is hotly negotiated as a powerful tool of protection.

Lawyers define the type of harm or loss, the triggers, and the interplay with other remedies. It is advisable to have a cap on indemnities.

Limitation of liability

Several clauses can together operate to limit contractual liability: lawyers consider these in tandem, to fill gaps in protection.

Clauses can exclude specified losses from liability, including indirect losses. Indirect losses may include loss of profits, business opportunities, and anticipated savings. Limiting liability to direct loss reduces the scope for an indemnifying party. The court interpretation of "direct" or "indirect" may differ from the parties' intentions, so it is important to get appropriate legal drafting.

A liability cap will limit the recovery under a contract for loss, and it is crucial to get legal drafting assistance to ensure the right level of protection. Where there are potentially extensive losses, such as for infringement of third-party IP rights arising from the contract deliverable, a party may expect unlimited recovery.

Governing law and jurisdiction

The governing law clause, often tucked away at the end, should be of the desired jurisdiction (usually where a party resides).

The governing law clause is vital for interpretation of the contract, particularly if contracting with parties overseas, and the jurisdiction clause dictates the conduct of disputes (ideally locally, in their own language and subject to their own laws).

If you're considering entering into a contract, it is important to seek early legal advice. Get in touch with Mincoffs' expert commercial services team by contacting solicitor Alicia MacRae on amacrae@mincoffs.co.uk or call the office on 0191 281 6151. www.mincoffs.co.uk

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Child arrangements upon separation

Although the process of separation can be a difficult time for the separating couple, it also causes distress to any children involved.

It is therefore paramount that parents consider future arrangements for any children and establish a co-parenting routine early in the separation process to create a smoother transition for the child.

Parents will need to focus on whom the child shall live with and when the child shall spend time with the other parent. However it is a good idea to agree on all aspects of your child's upbringing.

If parents can agree, this can be recorded within a parenting plan, however this is not a legally binding document. Should parents wish to make an agreement legally binding, a family solicitor will be able to assist in drafting a child arrangements order 'by consent' which can then be filed with the court.

We understand sometimes there are circumstances whereby parents are unable to agree child arrangements in the first instance, which means court proceedings are required. The below will discuss in brief the legal framework behind applying to the court for a child arrangements order.

What is a Child Arrangements Order (CAO)?

A Child Arrangements Order is a legally binding document made by the court which specifies arrangements for whom the child shall live with, when and how often the child shall spend time with the respective parent and any other aspects of the child's upbringing which remain in dispute between the parents. Such an order is governed under the Children Act 1989 and usually remains in force until the child reaches 16.

Who can apply for a Child Arrangements Order?

Parents who are named on the child's birth certificate can apply to the court for a CAO. Grandparents, step-parents or guardians may also apply in certain circumstances so long as they have received the courts



Amy Linton, Family Law Solicitor at Sweeney Miller Law.

permission before making an application.

It is important to note that the person applying to the court must have attended mediation before making an application for a CAO.

What factors will the court consider?

When the court consider granting a CAO, the child's welfare will always be the primary focus.

In each case, the court refers to a 'welfare checklist' to ensure the order being granted is in the child's best interests. The checklist includes the following factors: -

- The child's wishes and feelings.
- The child's physical emotional and educational needs.
- Any history of harm to the child or any potential risk of harm.
- Each parents' capacity to meet the child's needs.

The court recognises that each case is unique, and the above factors will differ case to case.

In conclusion, a child arrangements order is granted to support the child and both

parents by providing a clear and consistent structure for contact whilst also minimising any emotional impact to the child which may be caused by parents separating. It is however preferable to come to an agreement outside of court if possible.

Checklist before applying to the court

1. Speak to your former partner.
2. Seek advice from a family solicitor.
3. Attend mediation.
4. Apply to the court for child arrangements order as a last resort.

Expert Team

Here at Sweeney Miller, we have a family team which is dedicated to supporting all your needs whether it be recording an agreement into a legally binding document, negotiating arrangements on your behalf or preparing and representing you in court. The Sweeney Miller team is on hand to ensure you have the best possible outcome for you and your child.

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Sintons' corporate team reflects on an impressive year

Adrian Dye is the head of Sintons' corporate team, who are praised by clients for providing 'solid commercially-focused pragmatic advice' and 'excellent, customer-friendly service'.

Adrian, can you tell us more about the corporate team at Sintons?

We have four partners in the team: myself, Matt Collen, Emma Pern and Jane Meikle and all of us are very hands-on. Something our clients find is that our senior lawyers are very much involved in client transactions and they have access to experienced people throughout their time with us.

Jane is also our banking and finance specialist which is a really valuable capability for us to have – there aren't many dedicated banking specialists in the region so having Jane's expertise is an incredible advantage for our clients.

We have grown significantly over the last few years and in 2024 we welcomed two further newly qualified solicitors, Saffron Sinclair – who qualified through our solicitor apprenticeship programme and was named as Apprentice of the Year in the 2024 Northern Law Awards – and Charles Bell, who completed our graduate trainee programme.

And of course we also have associate level lawyers, experienced solicitors and the support of the firm's talented business services teams who make sure all our clients receive an outstanding service.

How would you summarise 2024?

It was a very busy year and the team worked extremely hard. The October budget produced a spike in activity but



actually the first six months of 2024 were very strong for us. We've seen growth in the number of transactions but also in their size and complexity – and this kind of detailed, high value work is something we really enjoy working with our clients on.

We've advised clients ranging from large corporates to owner-managed businesses and transactions have spanned all types of sectors. As a firm, we have a long history of specialising in healthcare which remains a strong area for us, but we've also advised tech businesses, engineering and construction firms and professional services organisations, amongst many others.

In addition to numerous acquisitions and

disposals, we've supported a range of clients to transition to employee ownership trusts (EOTs), as well as advising on management buy-outs and restructures.

What are some of the highlight deals you've completed this year?

One of the bigger transactions this year has been the disposal of three northern accountancy offices, which saw the Newcastle, Manchester and Leeds offices of Haines Watts become part of leading wealth management and professional services group, Evelyn Partners. It's a deal which resulted in two incredibly well-known firms coming together and was a significant transaction for the region. The deal was led by Emma Pern who worked closely with



“
...what our clients find is that our senior lawyers are very much involved in client transactions...”

the Haines Watts' shareholders to complete what was a complex transaction.

Earlier in 2024 we acted for the selling shareholders of plumbing and pipeline merchants T. Crossling on the sale of the group to UK Plumbing Supplies. Crossling is a very well-known business, with more than 100 years history in the region and 16 branches nationally.

It was a real privilege to work with the longstanding owners on this significant transaction.

Recently we advised Sunderland engineering firm, Owben, on a management buy-out which has set the business up for its next phase of growth. We've advised the team at Owben for many

years and it's been a pleasure to see them through this latest stage of the company's story.

And, as I mentioned, we've advised a growing number of clients on transitioning their businesses to employee ownership trusts, including leading national construction company, Meldrum Construction.

We've also been able to provide ongoing support via our Sintons Trust Corporation, which can act as a trustee for EOTs.

What is the outlook for 2025?

Despite businesses facing many challenges in the year ahead, the market is very resilient and we are already seeing a good

pipeline of deals for 2025. The upcoming tax changes at the end of March is driving some activity in the first quarter but we predict that the team will continue to be busy for the remainder of 2025 across a range of sectors.

We have increased the size and strength of the team so we can maintain high service levels and continue to provide the partnered support we're known for. Our additional resource and depth of expertise positions us well for the year ahead.

You can find out more about Sintons' corporate team and the work they undertake at www.sintons.co.uk

Protecting Innovations: The role of Intellectual Property in New Products and Markets



Dominic Elsworth

Innovation drives competitive success. Whether launching a new product or entering an unfamiliar market, safeguarding intellectual property (IP) is critical to securing a business's long-term value and ensuring sustainable growth.

What is Intellectual Property?

IP refers to the legal rights that protect creations such as inventions, designs, brand names and logos. These rights help businesses maintain a competitive edge by allowing IP owners to control and benefit from the use of their innovations.

Key considerations for New Products

When developing a new product, it is important to take steps to identify and secure any IP generated. Key aspects to consider include:

- **Is it patentable?** Novel inventions or technical solutions may qualify for patent protection, granting patent owners exclusivity over their use.
- **Does it have a unique design?** Aesthetic elements, such as the product's shape or appearance, can be protected through design registration, preventing

competitors from copying the look and feel of your product.

- **How strong is your branding?** Registering your brand name or logo as a trade mark, ensures your product is easily distinguishable in the marketplace. Conducting comprehensive pre-filing searches to confirm trade marks are free to use helps avoid future legal challenges.

Expanding into New Markets

Entering new markets also requires a fresh look at your IP strategy. IP rights are territorial, meaning a patent or trademark filed in one country won't automatically cover others. Competitor companies in a target market may own patents or trademarks that could prevent a UK business selling its products there, so it is important to conduct thorough IP searches to avoid infringing any existing rights in the target market.

It is therefore crucial to incorporate a robust IP strategy into innovation and expansion plans so that IP is protected and problems with IP owned by others is avoided.

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Five figure sum raised by Hay & Kilner for Great North Air Ambulance Service

Legal firm Hay & Kilner have raised £10,000 to support Great North Air Ambulance Service (GNAAS). Members of the practice voted to support GNAAS as their dedicated charity for 2024, and have been carrying out a range of individual and team-based activities to raise money for, and awareness of, the charity.

Over the course of 2024, colleagues from the firm have undertaken a wide range of wonderful and wacky activities, including a Bake Off, the Great North Run, wine tasting, knit sales, raffles and monthly dress down days. The fundraising highlight was a 20-mile walk in the dark from the firm's offices at The Lumen in Newcastle city centre to Wylam in Northumberland and back!

GNAAS brings pioneering pre-hospital care to the scene, rescuing hundreds of severely injured or ill patients every year. They are not NHS-funded, and their daily operating cost is over £25,000. GNAAS provides a full helicopter emergency medical support service, covering around 8,000 square miles across the North East, North Yorkshire and Cumbria. It recently issued an urgent plea for more funding from the region after revealing that rising costs had put it at risk of running at a deficit, which could potentially mean it might not be able to afford to answer emergency calls. The organisation relies entirely on donations, fundraising and grants to cover its £8.5m annual running costs.

Hay & Kilner is one of the region's leading full-service law firms and provides comprehensive legal advice to businesses and individuals from both within and outside the region.

Over the last few years, over £40,000 has been raised for the firm's dedicated charities, which have included the Children's Heart Unit Fund, Tiny Lives, The People's Kitchen, If U Care Share and the Newcastle West End Foodbank. From charitable support, mentoring schemes to sponsorships and time off for volunteering, giving back to the local community is core to the firm's values and is something the whole team enjoys being involved with.



True Potential celebrates sixth year of mission Christmas support

Newcastle-based financial services and technology company True Potential is marking six years of supporting regional children's charity Mission Christmas, announcing that a total of nearly £60,000 has been raised so far.

True Potential plans to step up fundraising even further this year, working towards a long-term target of raising £100,000 for Mission Christmas. Every penny raised by its 700-strong Newburn Riverside team is matched by the company, making it one of the

charity's biggest fundraisers.

Presenting a cheque for £8,740 to Hits Radio stars Steve and Karen, Samanpreet Kahlon, Head of Charity at True Potential, said: "Every year, Mission Christmas brings festive joy to children across the North East and beyond, and we are proud to continue to support their much-needed work.

"In addition to raising nearly £9,000 last Christmas, our team also donated hundreds of presents to families in need.

"As we enter 2025, we have a renewed focus on supporting our communities, and are thrilled that our fundraising for Mission Christmas has helped to support nearly a quarter of a million disadvantaged children in the last six years."

Young people in Seaham getting creative with Banks Group grant support

Young people in a coastal County Durham community will be getting more chances to express their creativity this year thanks to a four-figure grant from North East employer the Banks Group.

Non-profit youth arts organisation Creative Youth Opportunities (CYO) runs weekly after school arts sessions on Thursdays at Seaham Town Hall which aim to give young people aged between five and 17 the chance to try out a range of new artistic activities.

Around 40 young people have been taking part in the programme, with older volunteers helping to plan and run some of the younger children's sessions and sharing their creative expertise and knowledge.

The £1,998 Banks Group grant will now



cover CYO's staffing costs for the 37 term time sessions that it plans to run, allowing the organisation to plan with certainty the events and activities it will put on through the coming year



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Banks Group grant giving hits £375,000 for latest financial year

North East employer the Banks Group has continued to extend the support it provides to community groups and charities after making grants totalling almost £375,000 in its last financial year.

The family-owned firm runs a range of different funds across the north of England and Scotland which are designed to deliver tangible, long-term benefits to the communities in which it is active.

Around £300,000 of the County Durham-headquartered firm's grant giving in the last year has been focused on recipients in north east England, with more than two-thirds of that figure going to community groups and good causes in its home county.

Over 80 different organisations have received support, ranging from grassroots charities, sports clubs, community groups and parish councils through to major cultural, environmental and charitable organisations such as Beamish Museum, Durham Wildlife Trust, Locomotion, New Writing North and disability inclusion charity Integrating.

The Banks Group's funds are independently managed by Point North (formerly the County Durham Community Foundation), with grant applications assessed by funding panels which include representatives of local communities where appropriate.

The total amount of grants awarded by Banks has now passed the £7.5m mark, while alongside this, Banks Group staff have raised well over £100,000 for a range of dedicated charities that they have chosen to adopt, including The Alzheimer's Society, Bright Red, The Tiny Lives Trust, The Samaritans and Leukaemia & Lymphoma Research.

Banks has run its main fund, the Banks Community Fund, since 1997, but its commitment to supporting local communities dates back to 1976, when the company first began operations, and forms a central part of its longstanding 'Development With Care' approach to its work.



Changing Lives announces partnership with New Starbucks Store

North East based charity Changing Lives who have their headquarters on the Team Valley in Gateshead, are thrilled to announce a new partnership with Starbucks, as the global coffee chain prepares to open its newest store within Sainsbury's on Team Valley.

The collaboration marks a shared commitment to raising funds and awareness to support Changing Lives' vital work, helping people facing homelessness, domestic abuse, addiction, and other complex challenges across the UK.

As part of the partnership, Starbucks staff will engage in local fundraising efforts, host awareness campaigns in-store, and invite customers to contribute to the impactful initiatives led by Changing Lives.

Abby Christie, Senior Fundraising Manager at Changing Lives said: "This partnership with Starbucks is a fantastic opportunity to connect with the local community and drive positive change. We're incredibly grateful for Starbucks' support as we work towards ending homelessness and creating brighter futures."

Adam Scur, Store Manager at the newly opened Starbucks Team Valley store had this to say: "We're thrilled to be bringing the Starbucks experience to Sainsbury's at Team Valley. We're excited to be partnered with Changing Lives, working with our communities is something we wanted to get right from day one."

Special family trip to Edinburgh for Brave Heart Hero Evie

A North East family enjoyed a memorable day in Edinburgh after a challenging two years, thanks to The Charlie and Carter Foundation (CCF) and train operator Lumo.

Five-year-old Evie Green has faced significant health challenges, having been diagnosed with myocarditis at just four months old. By the age of four, her condition worsened, requiring a life-saving heart transplant. After a year in hospital, Evie received her transplant in 2024 at Newcastle's Freeman Hospital. During this difficult time, her family was supported by CCF which provides financial relief to families of critically ill children.

To celebrate Evie's recovery, Lumo, CCF's 2024/25 charity partner, organised a special trip for Evie and her family to Edinburgh. The experience included visits to Edinburgh Zoo, Camera Obscura, and even a ride in Lumo's driver's cab.

Sarah Cookson, Co-Founder of CCF, expressed her gratitude, saying: "Thank you, Lumo, for organising this special trip for Evie and her family. This brave little girl and her family have endured so much and deserve the world and more."

Martijn Gilbert, Managing Director of Lumo, added: "We're absolutely delighted to have given Evie and her family a wonderful day

out in Edinburgh. After spending so long in hospital and missing out on experiences most children enjoy, providing them with a memorable day together was the least we could do."

Evie's mum, Chloe Green, shared her appreciation: "We are very grateful to Lumo for providing a VIP day out in Edinburgh and to CCF for nominating our family for this special trip. Evie was in hospital for 18 months overall, so it is so nice to be able to go on days out thanks to Evie's special donor heart. We had a fantastic trip exploring Edinburgh and we will be forever grateful for this experience."



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www.thecharlieandcarterfoundation.co.uk Registered Charity No: 1166538 laura@ccfemail.co.uk



Yvonne Probert

Tell Us North: Championing quality and supporting the White Ribbon Campaign

Tell Us North, which encompasses Healthwatch Newcastle and Healthwatch Gateshead, continues to make impactful strides in its mission to support and uplift communities.

The organisation has not only achieved the prestigious 'Committed to Quality' status through Healthwatch England's Quality Framework but has also proudly joined the White Ribbon UK campaign to end violence against women and girls. These achievements reflect Tell Us North's unwavering dedication to promoting safety, equality, and excellence in all its initiatives.

The White Ribbon UK campaign is a significant step in tackling violence, harassment, and abuse against women and girls. The White Ribbon, an internationally

recognised symbol, represents the fight to end men's violence against women. White Ribbon UK engages men and boys in preventative efforts, focusing on challenging harmful male stereotypes, fostering empathy, and promoting care to address the root causes of gender-based violence.

Yvonne Probert, CEO of Tell Us North, on behalf of Healthwatch Newcastle, and Healthwatch Gateshead, shared her thoughts on supporting the White Ribbon campaign:

"By becoming a White Ribbon Supporter Organisation, we are reaffirming our commitment to creating a safe and equitable environment for everyone. Supporting the White Ribbon campaign perfectly complements our goals, and the goals of Healthwatch Newcastle and Healthwatch Gateshead, as we work to create meaningful service improvements."

The campaign is led within Tell Us North by White Ribbon Ambassador Dan Milburn and White Ribbon Champion Afsana Begum, who are working to foster a culture of respect and empathy. "Our staff are encouraged to pledge never to use, excuse, or remain silent about violence against women. We are exploring ways to raise awareness within our organisation and in the communities, we serve," said Afsana. "We've also held a successful cake sale to raise funds for the campaign."

Alongside its advocacy for the White Ribbon campaign, Tell Us North recently celebrated achieving 'Committed to Quality' status through Healthwatch England's Quality Framework self-assessment. This recognition underpins the organisation's commitment to continuous improvement and excellence in supporting its

communities. The Quality Framework evaluates key areas such as leadership, sustainability, collaboration, and impact to ensure local Healthwatch organisations effectively advocate for positive change in health and social care systems.

Feyi Awotona, Chair of Tell Us North, shared her enthusiasm for this accomplishment: "This achievement is a testament to the dedication of our teams in Gateshead and Newcastle. We are committed to ensuring our communities receive the very best from Healthwatch, and this certification truly reflects that commitment. The Quality Framework has not only validated our efforts but also provided us with a blueprint for continuous improvement in serving and empowering people who use health and social care services in our areas."

Delana Lawson, Quality Assurance & Regional Manager (North East, Yorkshire & Humber) for Healthwatch England, added: "The Quality Framework provides a shared understanding of the key ingredients of running an effective local Healthwatch service. It's a useful tool for organisations to identify what they're doing well and where they could improve. I'm delighted that Healthwatch Gateshead and Healthwatch Newcastle have completed this process and found it rewarding and beneficial."

Yvonne Probert summed up the dual achievements: "At Tell Us North, we believe in creating a society where everyone feels safe, respected, and valued. Supporting the White Ribbon campaign and achieving 'Committed to Quality' status are testaments to our commitment to fostering positive cultural and systemic change. Together, we are building stronger, healthier communities and making a difference every day."



“
...The most important skills of a trustee are passion and curiosity...”



James Palmer

Strengthen the Chain: Join Leading Link as a Trustee

Blyth based charity Leading Link is looking to expand its Board of Trustees.

Since 2012, Leading Link has worked with thousands of young people to support and achieve their aspirations. Over the past few years, the charity has established sustainable relationships across the public, private and voluntary sectors, creating a network of enthusiastic and likeminded people who constantly strive to help young people reach their full potential across Northumberland and North Tyneside.

Leading Link has two main strands of work. Through their Young Leaders programme, they tailor opportunities to an annual cohort of young people. Over the years this has included a diverse range of activities; from residentials, to UV dodgeball clubs, from children's crafting classes to paid community work. The opportunities the charity has given young people has been endless.

Leading Link are also proud to have produced and managed Blyth Town Carnival for the last four years, cementing their place in the community and giving their Young Leaders unique volunteering experiences.

Another important aspect of the work of leading Link is the coordination of Northumberland Holiday Provision (NHP) on behalf of Northumberland County Council. NHP offers funded activities for families on free school meals or who are experiencing hardship during the Easter, Christmas and Summer school holidays. It is a massive undertaking but has led to thousands of people having access to days out and activities, making memories that will last a lifetime.

Acting CEO James Palmer said: "As a Trustee, you will be integral in the strategic direction of a skilled and experienced team helping to create a long-lasting positive impact on families and young people in the North East.

'We are keenly aware of the social and cost of living pressures that so many in our community face.

By becoming a Trustee, you can have a significant impact on the resources Leading Link offer. We are particularly interested in hearing from candidates with a background, knowledge or interest in fundraising and finance, further and higher education, equality, diversity and inclusion or those who have lived experience of social hardship"

A Trustee is a volunteer who works with other passionate people to direct how a charity is run. It's an important role, but a rewarding one. There is a lot of support available to help equip you with the knowledge and confidence you will need to make the biggest difference in your new role.

You do not need to have any special qualifications. The most important skills of a trustee are passion and curiosity – a real thirst to be a vital part of Leading Link and always wanting to push to make the biggest difference to our young people.

Being a Trustee is a flexible role, and our current Trustees work full time, fitting their volunteering commitments around work. Our full board meets six times a year, usually from 5.30pm onwards. A full agenda and minutes will be circulated electronically at least a week before a scheduled meeting. Where possible trustees are encouraged to attend meetings in person, but resources for virtual attendance are available. The role is voluntary, and all trustees are unpaid; however, out-of-pocket expenses can be reimbursed.

**For more information contact
james.palmer@leadinglink.co.uk
www.leadinglink.co.uk**

Charity of the Month...



Become a life changer in 2025

By Abby Christie, Senior Fundraising Manager, Changing Lives.

Here, Abby tells us about Changing Lives. So, whether you donate to them, fundraise for them, volunteer with them or support them in another way, you're a life-changer, and they couldn't do it without you.

Why was the charity formed?

Changing Lives has been helping people facing some of the most challenging circumstances for 50 years. We began as a small charity in the North East called Tyneside Cyrenians, later The Cyrenians, helping people who were experiencing homelessness through our hostels and day centres.

With the appointment of Stephen Bell in 2002, we began to look at homelessness as a part of a system, one which can lead to people feeling trapped and unable to access the support they need. We began to expand our services in both provision and geography.

We now operate nationally, helping thousands of people each year to change their lives for the better. In 2013 we re-branded as Changing Lives to mark our growth and our ongoing commitment to providing the support people need to make positive change - for good.

Which area do you cover?

We believe that everyone deserves a safe home, a rewarding job and a life free from addiction or abuse. We also believe that, given the right support, anyone can change their life for the better.

Our core areas of work can be categorised under Housing and Homelessness services, Women and Children's services, Recovery and Wellbeing services and Employment services.

What type of fundraising events do you have?

You can take part in lots of events to fundraise for Changing Lives such as... **Great North Run • Dragon Boat Race Newcastle • Yorkshire Three Peaks Challenge Comedy Night at The Stand Newcastle • Golf Days Newcastle • London Marathon London Bungee Jump • Online Auction • Annual Christmas Campaign** **Organise your Own** such as quiz nights, physical challenges, sleep outs and more!

Find out more about Fundraising events at www.changing-lives.org.uk/fundraising-for-changing-lives/join-a-fundraising-event or contact fundraising@changing-lives.org.uk for advice, your free fundraising pack and fundraising materials.



Who are your trustees and patrons?

Glynis Frew is Chair of the Trustee Board at Changing Lives. Glynis joins Changing Lives with over 40 years' experience in business, 20 of which has been within the property market.

Our other trustees are Dean Fielding, Mike Barton, Steve Guyon OBE, Peter Brown, Lesley Telford, Lisa Boyack and Anthony May.

You can find out more about our Trustees here: www.changing-lives.org.uk/about/people

What have been your proudest moments so far?

Our proudest moment overall is all of the support we have been able to offer people facing challenging circumstances, collectively having been able to reach over 14,000 people each year.

Another of our proudest moments was the refurbishment of then Bentinck Terrace, which has since been renamed Alex's Place in tribute to our late colleague Alex Shirley. The development created self-contained flats as our flagship accommodation project which gives each resident living within our supported accommodation their own front door.

We were extremely proud to receive the Princess Royal Training Award recently in recognition of our Leading With Purpose training programme, for our dedication to supporting the development of our staff.



What are you currently working on?

In 2024 we have mobilised new homelessness services in Doncaster, including outreach and 24-hour accommodation services. This is a unique 10 year contract, with Doncaster Council pledging their commitment to a longer-term solution, allowing us to take our work to the next level supporting those sleeping rough in Doncaster.

We've recently opened Teesdale House, a new supported accommodation in Bishop Auckland specifically for women to be able to address the specific experiences of women experiencing homelessness to help them to heal.

We've also received funding for an extra three years to continue the work of the Adult Sexual Exploitation Partnership.

What does the future hold?

The future for us is continuing to adapt to the needs of our communities to ensure we support people facing any challenging times can benefit from the support we provide.

Last year we updated our 'mission statement' to say that as a fast-paced organisation responding to immediate needs, we are not bound by a mission statement or vision. In doing so we are able to continually learn, adapt and evolve in ways that best serve our life changing work, addressing the challenges and needs within communities across the UK.

How do you get involved?

People can get involved and support us in a variety of ways such as:

- **Fundraising:** Find out more at www.changing-lives.org.uk/fundraising-for-changing-lives
- **Donating:** Find out more at www.changing-lives.org.uk/how-you-can-help/donate
- **Volunteering:** Find out more at www.changing-lives.org.uk/how-you-can-help/volunteer

www.changing-lives.org.uk





The X-energy team who sponsored last year's event.

Golfing for Alice

The Alice House Hospice Golf Day at Hartlepool Golf Club is back this spring for a second year following the success of last year's inaugural event.

The fantastic event – boasting a hole-in-one £10,000 cash-pot among its prizes - takes place on Friday April 4 2025 and promises to be a day of golfing fun while raising vital funds for a worthy cause.

Teams who participated in last year's event, sponsored by nuclear reactor and fuel design company X-energy, are invited back and bookings will be open on Monday January 13.

There is a limited capacity for 20 teams. A fourball costs £300, or £400 for teams wishing to sponsor a hole.

"It is great to be working on this event again with the same brilliant team who made the day such a success last year," said Greg Hildreth, Business & Communications Manager at Alice House.

"We plan to build on that success in 2025 to deliver an even bigger and better golf tournament in aid of local hospice care. We're looking forward to returning to Hartlepool Golf Club, who are long-term supporters of Alice House, and also welcoming back some of last year's teams for a re-match."

The day includes coffee and bacon sandwich on arrival, 18 holes of Texas Scramble shotgun start golf and exciting nearest the pin, longest drive and putting challenges.

There will be prizes for the top three teams as well as a raffle, auction and various sponsorship opportunities.

Exclusive sponsorship packages are also available for the longest Drive and Putting Competition at £500 each, including team entry and hole sponsorship.

Harrison Smith, a financial adviser from Hartlepool, heads up the organising committee having had the original idea to hold the Alice House Golf Day at Hartlepool GC. Rephrase's Paul Fraser and Hartlepool Golf Club's business manager Mark Davies are also supporting the event.

Harrison said: "I'm thrilled to see the Alice House Charity Golf Day returning for another year. It's fantastic to witness an idea that started with a simple conversation become such a successful event.

"I'm incredibly proud of the impact it's making, raising vital funds for Alice House and the essential care they provide. I encourage everyone to grab their clubs and join us for a day of golfing and giving back." Hartlepool GC has a track record for raising funds for Alice House and it tends to be the charity selected for support by the captain.

Mark Davies, the Club Manager, said: "We're delighted such a brilliant day is coming back. Last year's event was a resounding success, and we're proud to once again support this fantastic cause.

"Alice House holds a special place in our community, and we've been committed to supporting their vital work for many years.

"We're looking forward to another great day of golf, team building and fundraising."

***Don't miss out on this fantastic opportunity to enjoy a day of golf while supporting Alice House Hospice. To reserve your team's place, please contact ghildreth@alicehousehospice.co.uk**

Alice House Hospice provides care and support to patients and families affected by life limiting illness, or the death of a loved one in Hartlepool, Tees Valley and East Durham.

It costs over £3.6m to fund these services for one year; the Hospice receives just over 25% of this in Government funding, leaving a shortfall of over £7,000 to be raised every single day.

alicehousehospice.co.uk



Alice House's Greg Hildreth, Rephrase's Paul Fraser, HGC's Mark Davies and Emerald Associates' financial adviser Harrison Smith at Hartlepool Golf Club.

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In Conversation With

Northern Insight talks to...

Jen Tait

Director, Rise Learning Group

What were your career ambitions growing up?

I have always loved public speaking. At school I was on the debate team and I knew I wanted a job that involved speaking to an audience. I always wanted to be a Newsreader for the BBC 6 o'clock news. I felt I was destined for the red sofa!

Tell us about your current role.

I'm Founder of Rise Learning Group, a Training Consultancy that provides learning solutions throughout the colleague journey to reduce attrition, increase productivity and improve engagement. In other words, we design and deliver training which results in loyal, productive and happy teams! I'm passionate about designing and delivering training that sticks, regardless of the stage you are at in your career. Our Four Pillars of Excellence cover the entire colleague journey from new starter offer acceptance through to Leadership Development and everything in between!

What is your proudest business achievement?

Without a doubt it's our client retention rate. Last year we secured repeat engagements with every single one of our clients, a testament to the 'stickiness' of our training! Everything we do is with our clients' needs in mind so to see that recognised with both repeat business and new clients being onboarded, is really special.

How has your industry changed in the last decade?

The changes in L&D have been immense and the answer to this could be an article in itself! Only five years ago the profession was on its knees, as Gen Z began entering the workforce and had expectations for engaging, interactive and on-demand learning, something L&D just wasn't ready for. Since then, there has been a flurry of mobile-friendly, gamified and micro-learning content to satisfy shorter attention spans but that also has its downsides, as that same demographic thrives on feedback and collaboration.

Getting the right balance of personalised, impactful, accessible, inclusive and social learning is no easy task but one which has to be met.

What are you currently working on?

We're excited to be officially launching our Four Pillars of Excellence on 21st February at Chaophraya in Newcastle. We've been using this approach successfully to help our clients reduce attrition, increase engagement and improve productivity. We're bringing together HR, L&D and Operational Leaders to learn about crafting a colleague journey so that they can also realise these benefits. You can sign up by scanning the QR code.

We're also currently developing a series of webinars, in response to industry demands. Clients will then have the option of dropping in to a webinar on a specific topic for instantly actionable insights or to work with us in-house for a solution bespoke to them.

Tell us about the team you work with.

There are three of us in the core team and we work with a trusted network of Associates. Alex and I are in client-facing roles and Paul provides back-office support. We'll be looking to welcome another Trainer later this year, in-line with our forecasted growth.

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

"When you're at work, don't think about home and when you're at home don't think about work." A very good friend told me this when I went back to work when my first daughter was only a few months old. I've since had two more girls so I remind myself of it regularly!

What has been your biggest challenge?

Balancing family life with work ambitions. I'm very driven and that is a core part of who I am. I'm also a mum to three amazing girls and getting the balance right has been tricky at times. I'm lucky to be surrounded by a fantastic support network though and the girls have never complained, probably because I bring them a present home every time I'm away!

Who are your heroes inside and outside of business?

My dad is my role model. He's the salt of the earth and would do anything for his family. He's taught me a lot, not least to work hard, save and always give people 10% leeway!

I met my 'business hero' while working for an insurance company. A contractor there, Christina Pritchard, gave me the inspiration and support to set up Rise Learning Group. She's the reason my business exists today.

How do you unwind outside of work?

I love Hotpod Yoga. I try to go to two sessions a week. I always feel much calmer after a class, and taller!

Favourite Book and Boxset?

I'm currently reading *Key Person of Influence* by Daniel Priestly, which I'm finding really useful. It's jam-packed with actions! I'm also a big fan of *Four Thousand Weeks* by Oliver Burkeman, it's a great reminder to choose how to spend your time.

As for boxsets, I don't actually watch a lot of TV. but I did watch *The Traitors*, I'd love to debate at the round table!

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Jen Tait

The future of work: Who are you becoming as a leader?

2025. That date looms large for me, as we're mid decade, at that turning point in a decade of change that over the last four centuries has heralded major industrial advancements. But it's not just 2025, it's that mid decade which can be so powerful in moving things forward. If we just look back over recent decades.

- 1995 was the year that changed technology. Amazon and Ebay were founded, Playstation moved into the US, and Microsoft created windows 95 (remember that? Sadly I do!)
- 2005 brought You Tube Firefox, 3G cellular networks and the first software for visually impaired users.
- 2015 saw the Apple Watch, Tesla's self driving cars, real time voice translator from Skype, Emergent AI and the digital genome.

We're now moving towards Industry 5.0, as coined by the Leadership Futures report released jointly by Henley Business School, Reading University and the World of Work Institute. This brings us to the era of human-machine collaboration, where we will have to grapple with challenges we haven't faced in two generations when technology changes how we work for ever. Gen Alpha will be in the workplace in the next two years, joining five generations who all have a different relationship with technology. This brings us leaders increasing challenges for how we engage with, and shape the workplace of the now and the future.

The European Commission has stated that this new era is "defined by a re-found and widened purposefulness, going beyond producing goods and services for profit." For some this will be normal, for others a real shift in focus as we must become more conscious of the macro trends impacting society and industry. The world of work and leadership is changing rapidly, and to stay relevant we need to change with it.

PWC's 27th Global CEO survey in 2024 found that "45% of CEOs believe their company will not be viable in 10 years if it stays on its current path". Trust and engagement with societal institutions and organisations is generally low, ESR is crucial for everyone, technology is changing more rapidly than we can adopt it.



Annabel Graham

Therefore our focus becomes clear: we need to lean into people, purpose and technology as leaders if we are to enable ourselves and our organisations to be in the best place to ride the curve of change. So I wonder...

Who is the leader you are becoming? I'll let that sit with you for a little.

Think back. You will have had many transformations in your career, many roles and potentially many versions of being a leader. Some of this will have happened naturally, some of it will have been enforced change through roles or organisations. Some of it may even have been intentional through a period of personal development.

As we develop though, we don't always emerge like butterflies, shedding our previous cocoons of past lives to fly off in our new one. Instead we hang on to behaviours, ways of working, thought processes, beliefs and patterns – many of which are long past their sell by date. These are our tried and tested ways of working and being, some which may even have come from childhood.

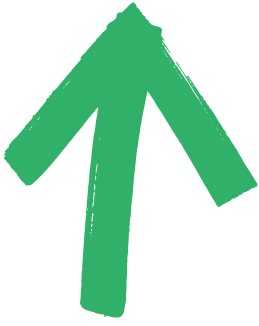
I wonder, are they serving you well? Are they allowing you to thrive, or, are they

increasingly getting in the way, holding you back, not quite fitting with the current and future version of you.

To operate effectively in this new world of work, we'll need to engage on an increasingly human level, and dial up those essential, never soft, skills which we may have neglected over the years as too fluffy, or unimportant. They are the ones that will enable us to connect to our people, engage them with our purpose, and lead them effectively into Industry 5.0.

Where then do you need to lean in, what needs to be dialed up or down, and where might you focus your development to move from a doing leader to a being leader? More on that next month...

Annabel is an Executive and Team Coach, Leadership Facilitator and Coach Supervisor. If you would like to explore what's next for your development Contact Annabel via LinkedIn, annabel@successfultraining.co.uk, or visit www.successfultraining.co.uk



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Keith Newman



Rebecca Thompson

Meet the team

The North Tyneside Business Forum is a supportive network providing information, signposting, connections, and encouragement for members to grow.

The Forum is run on a voluntary basis by a management team made of local businesses. Here we meet some of them.

Keith Newman runs his PR consultancy Highlights PR.

"I'm based in my floating office at Royal Quays Marina. My business gets people into newspapers, magazines, TV, radio and online. Basically, I find a good story and help you to reach thousands of people through the media.

I joined the Forum's management team as I enjoy helping people and I like to share my experience of life and business. It's a very satisfying role and I get to meet lots of interesting business people in the North Tyneside area.

My fun fact is that I once sold an ice cube on eBay and raised £1000 for charity."

Rebecca Thompson works at Plastic and Metal Profiles.

"We are a printing business that uses both modern techniques and traditional craftsmanship to produce signage, point of sale, nameplates, labels, packaging and more on a wide variety of materials. Our customer base varies from education supplies to data tags within the marine safety industry. Due to the expansive nature of our customer base, we were drawn to the business forum to further our networking within our local community. I have been introduced to a wonderful network of business owners who are keen to help each other and develop our local area. The pride for our local area radiates through the business forum, and this is something we wish to continue championing through our business.

My fun fact is that I am a self-confessed book worm! I had fallen out of love with reading, now thanks to a good friend I love nothing more than settling into a good book, especially on a cosy rainy day!

Chris Wilson owns the Square & Compass Bar

Square & Compass Bar is located on Park View in Whitley Bay, offering a relaxed, laid-back atmosphere where guests can enjoy the company of good friends. Our bar is fully stocked with an impressive range of wines, ales, lagers, whiskies, vodkas, gins, and expertly crafted cocktails.

After being nominated for the Heart of the Community award at the North Tyneside Business Awards, I was inspired by the incredible work of the Business Forum. I wanted to get involved and contribute to making a positive difference in our local business community.

My fun fact is that I have a passion for taking on extreme charitable challenges! My most recent adventures include traveling to Ukraine to help with aid and climbing Mount Toubkal, to raise funds for the YMCA in North Shields.

Sangeeta Loomba owns Namaste Taste of India – an authentic deli and café at Newcastle Quays

At Namaste Taste of India, we specialise in authentic street food, traditional thaalis, and classic North Indian Punjabi cuisine.



Chris Wilson

Our goal is to bring the bright and diverse flavours of India to the heart of our community.

The North Tyneside Business Forum provided invaluable support when I needed it most. I wanted to give back by helping others in the same way, encouraging collaboration and growth within the local business community.

My fun fact is that last year, I had the incredible opportunity to meet Bollywood legend Akshay Kumar! His private chef visited us to source authentic Indian supplies while Akshay was aboard the Ambassador cruise ship at the Port of Tyne. After a lovely chat, I was delighted to be invited to the Port of Tyne to meet him in person.

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



Sangeeta Loomba



Ageism: The most overlooked 'ism'?

Ageism is one of the least recognised yet most pervasive forms of prejudice. Unlike other forms of discrimination, it affects everyone eventually, regardless of race, gender, or sexuality. Despite its universality, it is often subtle, systemic, and deeply ingrained in society.

One of the most insidious aspects of ageism is that older individuals often internalise it. Many dismiss themselves as “too old” or adopt societal criticisms, reflecting them back with self-deprecating humour or resignation. This self-inflicted prejudice undermines their confidence and reinforces stereotypes.

Ageism is embedded in institutions and policy. Politicians and civil servants frequently refer to older generations as having “lived their lives,” suggesting diminished value. We have only to recall the attitude of government over Covid and those being discharged to care homes to exemplify that. Moreover, economic decisions, such as the denial of compensation to WASPI women, the reduction of winter fuel allowances, and tax incursions on basic pensions not only devalue people but create breaches of lifelong social contracts.

Moreover, healthcare decisions often reflect ageist biases. Over 75s may face reluctance in receiving treatments due to perceived risks. Younger generations, such as millennials, frequently accuse ‘baby boomers’ of environmental and economic issues. This overlooks the fact that whilst post war life was better than for earlier generations, ‘boomers’ typically had smaller carbon footprints, with lifestyles marked by thrift and sustainability: fewer cars, durable goods, and a culture of repair rather than replacement.

In the workplace, ageism manifests in assumptions about productivity. Contrary to

stereotypes, research suggests older workers often outperform younger counterparts. What they may lack in physical vigour is offset by experience, cognitive ability, focus, and loyalty. Older employees stabilise teams, offer invaluable institutional knowledge, and contribute a sense of continuity. Yet they can be subject to dismissive attitudes, such as labelling them as having “had their day,” erode their contributions and overlook their unique strengths.

Consumer culture often marginalises older individuals. Modern marketing focuses on youth, while quality, long-lasting products that older generations value are in decline. High street shopping is dominated by disposable fashion, leaving little room for enduring styles that once defined middle-class aspirations.

Even practical matters like labelling on medicines or food packaging demonstrate insensitivity. Fonts are often illegible for anyone without perfect vision, and overseas and or noisy call centres outsourced for cost efficiency, can be difficult for those with hearing impairments to navigate. The online world often denies those who value personalisation and human contact over the transaction. Such systemic oversights convey a subtle yet persistent message: society prioritises the young and is transactional rather than relational.

The failures of social care are glaring and should be a source of national shame. Older people, many of whom have contributed

to society their entire lives, face long NHS waits and inadequate support in their most vulnerable years. Although the NHS has predominantly treated older people since its inception, it only introduced comprehensive anti-ageism policies around 12 years ago. This underscores the need for all institutions to adopt anti-ageism strategies that honour the social contract with an ageing population, rather than allowing ageism to persist in plain sight.

This neglect forces many older individuals to exhaust their life savings to fund care, stripping them of assets they worked hard to accumulate. It's a stark violation of the promise of dignity in old age in return for a lifetime of contributions.

Older people are often described as “dinosaurs,” a label they sometimes accept with wry humour. But perhaps society should rethink its view. After all, dinosaurs—like the T-Rex in Jurassic Park—are symbols of power, resilience, and awe. They did well for Spielberg! Instead of overlooking the older generation, we should recognize the value they bring - wisdom, stability, and a perspective forged through decades of experience.

This isn't to suggest neglecting younger generations. Supporting youth is crucial to building a better future. But today's youth will also grow old and face these same challenges unless we address ageism now. Society must move beyond treating age as a burden and instead celebrate it as a stage of life that offers unique contributions.

With one in five now over 60, ultimately, ageism is not just a social justice issue—it's a practical one. A society that marginalises its older population squanders an invaluable resource. Addressing ageism requires systemic change, from policy reform to cultural shifts in all organisations, that and value aging for its social worth rather than its economic challenges.

www.gedanken.co.uk



Brighter Compliance's Managing Director, Austin Gibbons.

A great start to 2025 as Brighter Compliance open their first Scotland office

Following a year of growth and investment, North Tyneside based Brighter Compliance continue with their expansion plans as they open an Edinburgh office.

The compliance consultancy business, which was launched in 2020 by Managing Director, Austin Gibbons, has witnessed impressive growth over the last 12 months with an increase in employees, turnover and several new contract wins.

With extensive experience within the compliance, sustainability and retrofit industries, the company are delighted to have been chosen by Warmworks as their compliance partner with the successful relationship prompting Brighter to open their first office north of the border.

Warmworks, who have offices throughout the UK, were founded in 2015 as a joint venture partnership between Energy Saving Trust, Changeworks and Everwarm. Since then, they have supported more than 35,000 households in Scotland as the Managing Agent of the Scottish Government's national fuel poverty scheme, Warmer Homes Scotland.

Their work is a key part of the drive to reduce carbon emissions and the transition to a net zero society, ensuring that the transition to low-carbon living, with its rapid shift towards new, renewable technologies in people's homes, includes everyone, especially those who need extra help and support to adapt to change.

With a focus on ensuring a rigorous and professional supply chain, Brighter Compliance will now be the preferred consultant for Warmworks installers as they support the businesses to gain essential PAS or MCS certifications.

Commenting on the new Edinburgh expansion, Austin Gibbons said, 'We're delighted to partner with Warmworks on such an essential project, with an emphasis to support and improve their supply chains performance, we will be working closely with the installers to ensure they are compliant and up to date with new

legislation with regards to sustainability and renewables.

The industry recognised PAS and MCS standards, which the installers will need to be accredited to, ensure that products and installation services meet high standards of performance and safety with installers needing to meet rigorous criteria set by the scheme.

The experience and knowledge of our team will be vital in ensuring only the very best installers are approved, we'll be guiding them through the certification process including initial assessments and gap analysis.

We have a very flexible approach and understand that many installers are at different stages of their compliance journey, our approach can be hands-on or more of a mentor and advisory role, with our team being flexible to the needs of the installer.

Not only do we ensure all documentation and procedures are in place, we can also provide training to prepare the installer's team for compliance, we're on-hand throughout the audit process and can provide follow-up support too.

This is a great opportunity for the Brighter Compliance team to further demonstrate our knowledge and understanding of this growing sector, we're looking forward to working with the team throughout 2025 and beyond.'

www.brightercompliance.co.uk



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- 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



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The Future of Automation: How Quantum Controls is helping businesses stay ahead



As industries across the North embrace the transformative power of AI, staying ahead of the curve has never been more crucial.

From manufacturing plants to utilities, automation is redefining efficiency, productivity, and reliability. At the heart of this evolution is Quantum Controls, delivering innovative solutions and expert support that empower businesses to thrive in a rapidly advancing technological landscape.

The shift towards smarter systems

Automation is no longer a luxury—it's a necessity. Emerging trends such as artificial intelligence (AI), predictive analytics, and the Industrial Internet of Things (IIoT) are enabling businesses to optimise operations and make data-driven decisions. Key components of this revolution are Programmable Logic Controllers (PLCs) and Human-Machine Interfaces (HMIs), which form the backbone of modern industrial automation. These systems provide real-time control, streamline processes, and enhance operational visibility.

However, as automation grows more sophisticated, so do the challenges of maintaining and upgrading these critical systems. This is where Quantum Controls steps in.

How Quantum Controls keeps businesses ahead

For over three decades, Quantum Controls has been a trusted partner for Northern and UK-wide businesses, offering cutting-edge solutions and unparalleled support for PLC and HMI systems. Our approach ensures companies not only adopt the latest technologies but also maximise their potential.

● 24/7 Reactive Support

Automation systems never rest, and neither do we. With round-the-clock access to skilled engineers, Quantum Controls provides immediate assistance for any unexpected issues, minimising downtime and protecting productivity.

● Proactive Maintenance

Preventive care is the key to avoiding costly disruptions. Our proactive services include regular system health checks, software updates, and optimisation, ensuring your PLC and HMI systems remain reliable and efficient.

● Seamless Integration

As businesses upgrade to smarter, interconnected systems, seamless integration is critical. Quantum Controls specialises in adapting and integrating new automation technologies with existing infrastructures, enabling businesses to scale without disruption.

Future-proofing Northern Industry

The pace of technological advancement can be daunting, but it also brings unparalleled opportunities. Businesses are

uniquely positioned to lead this new era of automation, and Quantum Controls is proud to support this journey.

Through tailored solutions and expert guidance, we help companies navigate the complexities of automation.

Whether it's implementing predictive maintenance, integrating AI into production lines, or upgrading aging control systems, Quantum Controls is dedicated to empowering Northern industries to stay competitive on a global scale.

Partner with Quantum Controls

As automation continues to evolve, the future belongs to businesses that embrace innovation and adapt boldly.

Quantum Controls offers comprehensive maintenance and support contracts designed to cover critical plant operations at manufacturing sites.

Our cutting-edge solutions utilise advanced AI technology to predict and prevent system failures before they happen, reducing downtime to zero and safeguarding your production.

Our plans also include seamless coverage for PLC, HMI systems, and variable speed drives, ensuring your operations run smoothly. With 24/7 expert support, rapid emergency response, and proactive system monitoring, we protect your critical control systems and maximise productivity.

For more information, visit quantum-controls.co.uk or contact us at 0330 9000 247

New Year, New Goals: Establishing a sustainable business strategy

The welcoming in of a new year is a great time for businesses to reflect on the year that has passed and examine the opportunities and goals they would like to set for the year ahead.

As the business landscape changes, sustainability is becoming an increasingly critical component to consider when establishing your business strategy. Stakeholders, including customers, employees, and investors, are increasingly prioritising environmentally conscious practices.

An important aspect of integrating sustainability into your business strategy is establishing how to align this with your business' overall mission and goals, as well as making this work for your business instead of against it. Misaligned efforts to integrate sustainability which aren't appropriate to your organisation will lead to inefficiencies, reduced impact and frustration.

This is why it is important to establish an environmental management system which works for you, determining what your organisation's environmental impacts are, and assessing where changes can be made to reduce those impacts. Often, these changes can not only reduce your environmental impact, but benefit your bottom line at the same time.

Crucial aspects of establishing an effective environmental management system and sustainability strategy for your business are developing relevant environmental policies; measuring resource use and developing sound data sets; developing meaningful action plans which are relevant to your business; and communicating all of these areas effectively within and outside your organisation.



Accreditation schemes like Investors in the Environment can be pivotal when looking to achieve meaningful sustainability goals which are catered to your organisation. Genee delivers Investors in the Environment across the North of England, providing a structured framework for action, helping organisations establish an environmental management system (EMS) and prioritize impactful initiatives, such as waste reduction and energy efficiency.

Senior Planning Officer and Climate Change Team Leader at Gateshead Council, Lucy Greenfield, said: "working with Genee and the Investors in the Environment programme has been very beneficial to Gateshead Council... The process for iiE is an effective way to ensure the Council is making necessary improvements towards its sustainability targets, providing prompts and recommendations, whilst also celebrating successes along the way."

When sustainability efforts reinforce business objectives, they create a virtuous cycle: operational efficiencies improve, brand reputation strengthens, and stakeholder trust grows. Organisations accredited by Investors in the Environment (iiE) benefit from structured support to

ensure that their environmental goals are not only practical but also aligned with broader business strategies. This alignment helps sustainability initiatives be viewed as value-driving rather than a financial burden.

Jacqui Coulson, Finance Director for Durham County Carers noted that through the iiE programme, "some of the initiatives have not only lessened our environmental footprint, but also contributed significant cost savings".

By aligning sustainability goals with business objectives, organisations can create actionable, measurable, and meaningful strategies to improve their environmental impact and future-proof the organisations. Sustainability is not a one-time initiative but a continuous journey. As businesses set their goals for the year ahead, they must remain flexible and adaptable to changing circumstances. Regularly revisiting and refining goals ensures they stay relevant and impactful.

To discuss how Genee can help your organisation prepare for 2025 and beyond, contact us at jo@genee.org.uk, www.genee.org.uk

From customer number one, to world number one

When Martin Connelly developed a piece of software way back in 2009, he had just one customer. Now, in 2025, UltramapGlobal's AssetMonitor software is the most used specialist subsea cable monitoring software in the world. And it's still headquartered right here in the North East.

UltramapGlobal Co-Founder Martin is pleasantly surprised with the success of his Newcastle headquartered business.

Although when you're in the results business, and results are as good as UltramapGlobal's are, maybe Martin and his team should have seen this coming.

"Our customers are mostly owners of subsea cables. Telecoms, Power, Renewables, Oil and Gas. And Cable Installers." Explains Martin.

"AssetMonitor tracks over 100 million vessel movements at sea every single day. We're watching for threats from dropped anchors and fishing gear more than anything else. The software filters out the huge majority of activity as non-threatening.

And the activity that remains is looked after by our monitoring teams around the world.

Why We're Number One

"As to why we're number one. Well, every single UltramapGlobal client has fewer cable strikes once they use us, than they did before.

And over half of our customers have no cable strikes at all.

I suppose that has something to do with it!"

Saving Customers Millions

A single cable strike can cost a cable owner many millions of dollars to repair.

And, as many cable owners now realise, when protection from UltramapGlobal can cost less than one-one thousandths of a percent of the cost of just one cable strike, investment in protection is a no brainer.

2025 – The Year to Tell Our Story

In late 2024, Sunderland University invited Martin to tell his story to a group of students from a range of schools and colleges around the Northeast.

"It was a good day," says Martin.

"We explained how patience and staying focused has been important. Listening to and learning from customers.

"We wanted to help these younger people. Exploring entering the workforce, to see that anything is possible really. With belief, consistency and hard work.

"Our journey has been great. We feel lucky. So this year, we'll be telling our story to more colleges and universities."

Find out more at [UltramapGlobal.com](https://www.ultramapglobal.com)

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...We're in the results business. And when results are as good as UltramapGlobal's, maybe we should have seen this 'global number one' coming...

ULTRAMAPGLOBAL

Urgent infrastructure investment is needed to allow the region to prosper

By Stephen Patterson, Chief Executive at NE1 Ltd

It was all going so well. The pre-Christmas season was in full swing. Newcastle buzzed with tens of thousands of festive visitors, footfall was up, and tills rang across the city. Everything was on track for a hugely successful period after a challenging year for many businesses, and there was growing optimism for the future as 2025 moved into view.

Then disaster struck with the Gateshead Flyover closure, and then the cessation of the Metro. The ensuing transport chaos changed everything.

Overnight, everyone south of the river was forced to reassess their journeys into Newcastle. Commuters, workers, and visitors were all affected and not for the first time. There was a strong sense of déjà vu, as, for the second year running, transport into Newcastle was brought to a standstill, or at the very least a slow crawl, by what, in effect, were issues outside of the control of businesses at a crucial trading time for them.

In 2023, bus strikes caused serious issues. The flyover was this year's transport nightmare, affecting both road and Metro traffic, with analysis suggesting there were 120,000 fewer journeys on the Metro than the same period the previous year.

The region has been crying out for infrastructure investment for years and has been studiously ignored by Central Government. This latest incident has fuelled a collective stand from the North East that we will no longer tolerate institutional neglect and underfunding. We have been passed over for investment for far too long, and it cannot continue.

Through consistent effort, resourcefulness, positivity and a proactive approach Newcastle is on the cusp of a fantastic period of transformational change. Building projects are reshaping the skyline, and events of national and international significance are planned for the coming months and years. This could mark a sustained period of success for the city. We cannot risk all of this work being jeopardised by the Government's continued failure to adequately fund infrastructure management, maintenance and development, let alone expansion.

We saw this with the Tyne Bridge, one of the most recognisable and iconic structures in the North East. Decades of chronic underinvestment meant the renovation project, when it eventually started, needed to be more extensive, and even then, securing the funding required a gargantuan effort and could still be in doubt. Similarly in Gateshead, the Council has been aware of the issues with the flyover for over 15 years. They have pitched for funding several times but have been turned down by the previous government, meaning proactive management or timely intervention has turned into reactive and urgent remedial action.

Meanwhile, bricks-and-mortar businesses, offices, and venues in both cities are left to pick up the pieces once

again. Post-Covid and in the age of internet shopping, they have enough obstacles to overcome to attract customers. They work hard and creatively to tackle these issues, but no amount of creativity can contend with the absolute failure of infrastructure, which undermines the very basics of a functioning city and region.

To see the Mayor react and address this immediately alongside politicians from Gateshead was exactly the type of representation the region needs. To have one voice, representing an area wider than council boundaries and viewing the bigger picture, is invaluable. The action which was swiftly taken undoubtedly helped as the situation unfolded.

Now, with a new government in power and a regional Mayor who has already identified transport as a key priority, one hopes that the necessary funding will be forthcoming. The reality is, though, it should not have come to this. Sadly, following decades of underinvestment in the city's infrastructure the Gateshead flyover is a case of chickens coming home to roost.

The Mayor has put her shoulder to the wheel, and businesses, residents, and politicians of all hues must step up and support her to ensure the region gets more than its fair share of infrastructure investment to come. We certainly stand ready to assist. We have witnessed first-hand the impact of failing to secure funds, and we simply cannot be at the back of the queue in the future.

The December launch of the Northumberland Line ably demonstrates the immediate benefits which can be delivered by investment in transport projects in the North East, with the new line greeted with enthusiasm and embraced by those in the areas it serves. Increasing connectivity is tremendously positive and opportunity abounds in every direction within the region.

With so much exciting work being championed in the city by energetic, ambitious, and talented people and businesses, we must not fall victim to a lack of ambition from Whitehall.

www.newcastlene1ltd.com



Stephen Patterson

Building Bridges

A bridge connects humans to one another, their impact on our world has been significant and they are a rich part of our North East history.

In 1864 the idea of the Tyne Bridge was first proposed, and the bridge was completed in 1928.

Not quite 65 years, but many moons ago, I was determined to build my own bridge. Not with bricks and mortar of course, but a virtual bridge, a bridge that connected the needs in society to those that can offer hope. Whether that be an individual or a business, the public sector, or academia.

Whatever entity cares about Social Responsibility, I wanted to build the bridge that connects them to those they want to help.

For years I balanced my career and my life as a volunteer charity worker. I spent my days, literally, on two different sides of society. And the chasm between these two sides was growing.

Although I have been delivering charity projects since I was a bairn, it was whilst working as a celebrity wedding planner that exposed me to the concept of a virtual bridge.

In 2010, Instagram launched and, with it, the rise of the Influencer, positively impacting on the luxury market. Life was good, at least on that side of the river. Simultaneously, on the other riverbank, we were in a recession, cuts to public services were consequential and we started to see the emergence of Food Banks in our society.

The disadvantaged gap grew wider. But a trend emerged. And I became curious. Not wishing to miss out on a marketing bonanza companies started to support people such as my clients with product placement in return for social media advertising.

Once the wedding was over, and been well aware of the growing needs in society from my charity work, I would approach the companies and ask if we could do "something good" with their gifted products. And, on a good number of occasions, they agreed and we would support charities aligned with the couple's wishes.

For instance, one of my clients received £80k worth of product and service. Following the



Michelle Jones

wedding we gifted the products to destitute families through local refuge charities.

A bridge, albeit a small one, was built.

A bridge connecting need with support. Everyone benefitted. The company in question gained a substantial return for their kindness. Their primary goal of marketing at volume was achieved with additional value, it supported their social responsibility targets, the positive brand image increased customer loyalty and staff satisfaction. And, financially, well the books were balanced. A great result indeed!

As the needs in society grew my charity roles were becoming more challenging and I wanted to do more. I needed to do more. It was at this point I started to explore social responsibility and social value from all perspectives.

I needed to build a bigger, stronger, bridge for the many. I was well aware of the needs in society but I was also well aware of those entities in society that could help and, more than that, wanted to help. How could I connect the two, consistently, easily, effectively.

So that is what I did and that is what we have

today (albeit built with code as opposed to steel). Our audit ready, social value software platform, enables individuals and businesses alike to meet the needs in society that they wish to support easily, quickly, and at the press of a button in one streamlined, secure, automated process

Currently, our public services are in crisis from education to the NHS to welfare. We have almost 300k charities and social organisations in the UK, more than half of them are on the brink. These services take the burden of society, they ease the pressure on our public services, they ensure our businesses are sustainable consequently.

If we lose them, what becomes of society? What happens to our businesses? What happens to us? We need them.

Being socially responsible and supporting the social needs in society, is no longer difficult to manage, or time consuming. It's as simple as taking a stroll across the Tyne Bridge.

Imagine life without bridges, whether that's ones built with steel or built with kindness!

www.kindcurrency.co.uk

Rip Tide

Have you ever been caught in a rip current? That invisible pull of water, dragging you further from the safety of the shore? It's a force you don't see coming until you're in it, panicking and flailing, unsure of how to escape.

It's a perfect metaphor for the challenges we've faced over the past year: those invisible, dangerous undercurrents of division, intolerance, and hate.

Last summer, it felt like we were collectively pulled into one of these rip tides. Racism reared its ugly head, loud and brazen. Then, as quickly as it seemed to peak, it disappeared from the headlines. The waves calmed, and some even thought the storm had passed. But here's the thing about rip currents—they don't vanish. They linger beneath the surface, hidden but just as powerful.

I've been reflecting on this undercurrent as I watch the world around me. Divisiveness seems to be growing. Whether it's the toxic narratives taking root in the US or the increasingly vocal and emboldened voices of offence and exclusion, it's as if the rip current is gaining strength, threatening to pull us all further apart.

For the record, I am—and always will be—a staunch advocate for free speech. I believe in everyone's right to have a voice, no matter their background, identity, or circumstance. For most of my life, I've championed causes that some might find surprising: the empowerment of white men and boys, alongside my lifelong commitment to advocating for underrepresented and minority groups and in particular women. Inclusion isn't a zero-sum game—it's about lifting everyone up, not pitting one group against another.

But lately, I'm troubled by the ways these freedoms are being weaponised. Words that could build bridges are now being used to deepen divides. There's an undercurrent of hostility, a sense that it's not just okay to



Ammar Mirza CBE

offend but almost encouraged. Free speech isn't about the freedom to harm; it's about creating understanding, dialogue, and progress.

I draw strength from stories of resilience, like my late mother's incredible example. She worked 18-hour days to support her family and still found time to help others in her community. Her generosity and determination taught me the value of perseverance in the face of adversity. **And there's my youngest daughter, who reminds me daily of the joy in simple things, her laughter cutting through even the most challenging of days. These moments remind me why I do what I do: because the fight for inclusion, understanding, and unity is always worth it.**

But we can't ignore the rip currents pulling us apart. We need to steer a clear,

collaborative path. That means standing up for one another, challenging hate wherever it surfaces, and refusing to be dragged under by the currents of division.

A rising tide raises all ships. But a rip tide? That will sink us if we're not careful. Let's not just stay afloat—let's come together, build bridges, and navigate these waters with compassion, understanding, and strength. Because the only way to overcome a rip tide is to swim together, not apart.

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.

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Mediation Matters

Kathryn Rodgers of face2faceHR on Resolving Workplace Conflicts with Care and Collaboration.

Resolving workplace conflict effectively with face2faceHR

Workplace conflict is an inevitable part of any organisation. Disagreements over decisions, communication breakdowns, or personality clashes can disrupt productivity, harm employee morale, and strain relationships between team members. How an organisation addresses these conflicts can significantly impact its culture and overall success. At face2faceHR, we offer expert mediation services to help businesses transform workplace disputes into opportunities for growth. Our skilled mediators provide a structured, efficient, and effective way to resolve conflicts, restoring harmony and building stronger teams.

What is Mediation?

Mediation is a structured, voluntary, and confidential process in which an impartial third party helps employees involved in a dispute reach a resolution. Unlike formal grievance procedures, which often emphasise fault-finding, mediation focuses on collaboration and mutual understanding. This approach is particularly effective for addressing communication issues, personality differences, or minor disputes that could escalate if left unresolved. The mediator's role is to ensure all parties feel heard and respected while guiding them toward a resolution that meets everyone's needs.

During mediation, employees actively participate in identifying and resolving their issues. The mediator fosters trust, encourages open dialogue, and helps the parties generate practical solutions. When an agreement is reached, the mediator formalises the resolution, ensuring clarity and commitment from all involved.



Kathryn Rodgers

Why choose mediation over grievance procedures?

Grievance procedures are a common way to address workplace issues but often involve assigning blame and can increase tension. Mediation, on the other hand, focuses on repairing relationships and achieving amicable resolutions.

Some key advantages of mediation include:

Speed: Mediation typically resolves conflicts within days or weeks, compared to the months grievance procedures can take.

Cost-effectiveness: By avoiding lengthy investigations or legal disputes, mediation saves both time and money.

Confidentiality: Mediation offers a private space where employees can speak freely without fear of exposure.

Preservation of relationships: Unlike adversarial processes, mediation fosters collaboration, helping employees work together effectively in the future.

By addressing issues early through mediation, businesses can often prevent disputes from escalating into formal grievances or legal claims, creating a more harmonious workplace.

The benefits of mediation for your business

Mediation provides a quicker, more constructive resolution to workplace conflicts, allowing businesses to restore

normalcy swiftly. Employees who resolve disputes collaboratively through mediation are more likely to remain committed to maintaining positive relationships and boosting team morale and productivity.

Additionally, mediation promotes a culture of open communication, helping businesses prevent small issues from growing into significant challenges. This proactive approach not only saves resources but also fosters a workplace where employees feel valued and heard, enhancing overall employee satisfaction and retention.

At face2faceHR, we specialise in providing professional mediation services tailored to the unique dynamics of each conflict. Our mediators are trained to create a neutral and fair environment, ensuring both parties feel supported throughout the process.

We understand that every conflict is different, and our approach is always customised to deliver the best possible outcome. By choosing face2faceHR, businesses gain a trusted partner in resolving disputes effectively, fostering better working relationships, and creating a positive workplace culture.

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Kathryn Rodgers, face2faceHR
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Diane MacTavish

Navigating the Economic Climate: How The HR Dept can support businesses facing redundancies

In the current economic climate, businesses are grappling with a myriad of challenges. Rising costs, fluctuating markets, and economic uncertainty have forced many companies to reconsider their workforce needs.

As a result, redundancies are becoming an unfortunate reality for some businesses. However, with the right support, businesses can navigate these turbulent times more effectively.

The HR Dept Newcastle and North Tyneside, along with Newcastle South and Durham, are well-equipped to assist business owners in managing redundancies. Their comprehensive HR services provide crucial support in several key areas:

1. Strategic Planning: Our HR experts can help businesses develop strategic plans to manage redundancies. This includes identifying roles that are essential to the

business and those that may no longer be viable. By conducting thorough workforce assessments, The HR Dept can ensure that any redundancy decisions are made with the long-term health of the business in mind.

2. Legal Compliance: Navigating the legal complexities of redundancies can be daunting. The HR Dept provides expert advice on employment law, ensuring that businesses comply with all legal requirements. This includes proper consultation processes, fair selection criteria, and appropriate redundancy payments.

3. Employee Support: Redundancies can be a stressful experience for employees.

The HR Dept can offer support services such as career counselling, job search assistance, and training programs to help affected employees transition to new opportunities. This not only aids employees but also helps maintain the company's reputation and morale.

4. Communication: Clear and compassionate communication is vital during redundancy processes. The HR Dept can assist in crafting and delivering messages to employees, ensuring transparency and empathy throughout the process.

5. Future Planning: Beyond managing immediate redundancies, The HR Dept can help businesses plan for the future. This includes restructuring, talent management, and developing strategies to prevent future redundancies.

In these challenging times, The HR Dept Newcastle and North Tyneside, along with Newcastle South and Durham, stand ready to support businesses. By leveraging their expertise, businesses can navigate the complexities of redundancies with confidence and care.

If you would like to have a no obligation conversation then please contact Diane MacTavish on 0191 2838732 or email diane.mactavish@hrdept.co.uk

Introducing Ian Kinnery

Just like riding a bike...

My name is Ian Kinnery. I am a business coach, a scale-up coach, and a successful business owner. Throughout 2025 I will write a monthly column about growing a successful business.

Like the most brilliant of diamonds there are millions of facets to any successful business, and to keep it as simple as possible I am going to arrange the articles into the four major buckets of decisions that we need to get right in any successful business. They are: people and talent decisions; strategy and planning decisions; execution and implementation decisions, and cash and finance decisions.

Just like riding a bike, building a successful business can be easy or hard - but without forward momentum, it is almost impossible. At a standstill it doesn't matter how much you turn the handlebars it won't make any difference. That is why growth is so important to a business.

Besides, a healthy business should always be growing quite naturally, if it isn't, there is something wrong. If you are providing value to your clients, they will want to return and refer others. Goodwill, money, and reputation should be accumulating, making growth inevitable. Like any living thing, a business will either be growing or dying.

Now growth is a much used and misunderstood term. The devil is always in the details. As a business leader you can see that growth is good but not all growth is created equal so one of your first decisions needs to be: growth of what? Are you going to prioritise growth of turnover, profit, team members, reputation, valuation or ease? Notice I used the word prioritise. Many of these concepts are linked, but you need to be crystal clear which one of these outcomes is your number one objective.



Ian Kinnery

I suspect 2025 will be a challenging year and so I hope that you get value from the column in the next 12 months. If you have any specific questions or requests for topics, please contact me by e-mail at ian@kinnery.co.uk and I look forward to hearing your success stories - and how you are leaning into the privilege of leading your business. Be brilliant, as I know you are.

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Navigating recruitment uncertainty

Bryony Gibson, director of Bryony Gibson Consulting, discusses the uncertainty of 2025's recruitment landscape and the right time for a career move.

As we head into 2025, the recruitment landscape is looking a little uncertain. Traditionally, December is a quieter month for hiring, with January bringing hope, positive action, and opportunity.

This year, in the wake of the Government's October Budget, we're seeing firms pause a little longer to consider their employment cost implications. In the world of accountants, this weakened economic confidence has left some unsure whether now is the right time to make a career move.

My advice? If you're contemplating a change, it may not be wise to leave it too long.

Recent data from the Recruitment and Employment Confederation (via KPMG) highlighted a concerning trend. Permanent placements and job vacancies are falling at an accelerated rate. The fastest since August 2023. Potentially signalling the start of a hiring slowdown, for anyone looking for a career move, this means fewer opportunities and a much more competitive market is on the horizon.

In times like this, while staying put might feel like a safer option, if you are unhappy at work or have a niggling desire to move on, delaying your decision and waiting too long could mean missing out on the opportunities that are available now and facing an even tighter job market.

In my experience, the recruitment market can shift very quickly so how can you approach a period of uncertainty with confidence?

Stay Informed

Keep a close eye on market trends and industry reports. Understanding where opportunities lie can help you make better and more informed decisions. For example,



Bryony Gibson

at the moment, sectors such as technology and healthcare continue to show resilience, while others appear to be facing more pronounced challenges.

Prepare Your CV

Even if you're not actively applying, having an up-to-date CV and LinkedIn profile ensures you're ready to act when the right opportunity arises. Make sure you highlight transferable skills and keep your training and recent achievements up-to-date to help you stand out against your competition.

Network Strategically

Who you know is often just as important as what you know, especially in uncertain times. Try to make 2025 the year where you attend industry events, connect with peers, and engage with recruiters to ensure you're on top of their minds when new opportunities emerge.

Consider Long-Term Goals

While uncertainty can feel unsettling, it also gives you the chance to reflect on your career path. Are you looking for stability in

your life? Is now the time to pivot into a new specialism? Do you need to expand your knowledge with new training? Whatever it is, aligning your next move with your broader goals will make the decision clearer.

Act Now

Even in a slowdown, companies are still hiring - particularly for key roles that drive business growth. If you see an opportunity that aligns with your skill set, goals, and aspirations, don't hesitate. Waiting for the "perfect" time or being too cautious may mean missing out altogether.

While 2025 may feel unpredictable, it could also be a year of possibility. And the good news is that companies who are recruiting seem to remain willing to pay increasingly higher starting salaries for the right people. By staying proactive, keeping informed, and being prepared, you can navigate the challenges and position yourself for career success.

I think it is true that "the greatest amount of wasted time is the time not getting started". If a move has been on your mind, the best time to act is before the window of opportunity narrows further.

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



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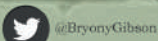
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To express your interest in a vacancy, or for a confidential discussion, contact Bryony Gibson, Bryony Gibson Consulting, on 0191 375 9983 or visit [BryonyGibson.com/Vacancies](https://www.BryonyGibson.com/Vacancies)

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My Weekend



Peter (centre) and his team.

Peter Surridge

Peter is the Managing Director and Founder of Ridgetek Web Solutions based in Gateshead. Here he tells us how he likes to spend his weekend.

Do you ever have to work weekends?

With working in IT, I have to be available to sort problems if and when they occur - and this sometimes includes the weekends. But more often than not the weekends are a great time to catch up when the emails, meetings and calls have stopped.

Are most weekends the same?

Mostly - as a single parent my weekends normally revolve around running my son around his clubs, doing the shopping, housework etc - but I also enjoy getting out to the theatre when I can (next visit is to see Only Fools and Horses at the Theatre Royal in Newcastle), and I love going to the Cinema. Occasionally I get a day to myself to catch up with friends and go for a Scuba Dive. I don't get much sea diving in

these days but like to go to Capernwray in Lancaster that has a fresh water quarry with quite a few 'attractions' underwater to visit.

Do you find it hard to switch off?

Definitely - I think my mind is always on the go, especially if I have a tricky problem to solve. I tend to watch an old sit com when I go to bed to help me switch off - at the moment, I'm watching 'Benidorm'. Sadly, I normally end up taking my laptop on holiday with me 'just in case' although having the Ridgetek team around me now has been a great help.

What do you do at a weekend which you can't fit in through the week?

Clearing out the emails from the week, planning for the next week and getting the shopping in! Lifestyle of a rock star isn't it?

Morning exercise or a recovery lie in?

I really wish I could say morning exercise, but the reality is I get up and get on with the jobs I need to do once I'm awake. More exercise will happen in 2025...maybe!

Big night out or a night in the house?

Definitely a night in the house - I'm getting older and yes, it's boring but it's my happy place. Having said that I don't mind going out for a nice meal, theatre or cinema - but they are occasional treats and not the norm!

Do you watch or play sport at a weekend?

I follow the antics of Newcastle United as an armchair supporter. It's a great season (so far). The only sport I do now is the occasional Scuba Diving.

Where do you like to eat out at a weekend?

We go to the Falcon in Prudhoe sometimes for a meal, or somewhere around the Metro Centre. We probably have a take-away on a weekend more often than eating out.

How important is the weekend to you?

Very - without the weekend I would never be able to keep on top of everything I have to do!

What's the best thing about weekends?

Being able to relax a bit. Parenting by X-box (he is 15) gives me a chance to do something for me for a change!

Of a weekend, you'll usually find me most happy...?

When I get to go for a dive or have a chance to catch up with friends.

www.ridgetek.co.uk



Scott Smith



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SCOTT, YOU GREW UP IN THE NORTH EAST, STUDYING AT NORTHUMBRIA UNIVERSITY AND WORKING IN LARGE ORGANISATIONS BEFORE LAUNCHING PEOPLE SPARK SOLUTIONS IN 2020. TELL US ABOUT YOUR JOURNEY SO FAR.

My career starting in banking. Following the financial crisis, there was a need for rapid and sustainable change. I have been through many transformation programmes, some great in terms of their sustainability and positive impact.

NOW, YOU WORK WITH CLIENTS IN BUSINESSES OF ALL SIZES IN THE NORTH EAST AND ACROSS THE UK – WHAT KIND OF CHANGE ISSUES ARE THEY DEALING WITH?

Change is an inevitable part of organisational growth and evolution whether it's adapting to market shifts, implementing new technologies, or restructuring teams. Change can be both invigorating and challenging as many of you will know – so it's important that you feel empowered to support your team – and that you have the right support.

WHAT IS YOUR APPROACH TO SUPPORTING CLIENTS THROUGH ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE?

We support organisations going through change with coaching & mentoring, team facilitation, leadership and group or team development which can really support organisations to ensure everyone is aligned and focused on the right goal. In addition, we also assess key drivers, strengths and weaknesses using psychometric assessments. These assessments provide valuable insights into personality, communication, conflict, and team dynamics – all of which can be detractors in a transition period. For example, if a senior leader was struggling to generate buy-in for change, we can work with the team to identify the enablers and blockers.

WHY IS COACHING AND MENTORING ESSENTIAL DURING PERIODS OF CHANGE?

It's been proven that organisations that prioritise coaching and mentoring during periods of change experience higher employee engagement and smoother transitions – paving the way for an effective transition – no matter what the circumstances. Prioritising individual wellbeing whilst balancing organisational goals and resilience is the key to this – and that's where coaching or mentoring can really help.

WHY DO 1:1 SESSIONS MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

One-on-one meetings play a pivotal role in maintaining employee morale and productivity during periods of uncertainty. It's essential that leaders make space and time for open communication, honest feedback, and support to give employees a sense of stability and empowerment – and reduce stress – but it's also useful for the leaders as you can reinforce key messages, provide signposting, correct course and offer extra support where needed. Employee well-being is always critical but even more so during times of change. 1:1's provide an outlet for employees to share what is going on for them and allows leaders to act sooner rather than later.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN COACHING AND MENTORING, AND WHICH IS MORE BENEFICIAL FOR CHANGE MANAGEMENT?

Coaching is like having a skilled teammate who helps you set goals, learn new skills, and overcome challenges. Mentoring is like having a wise friend or advisor who shares their experiences and advice with you over time. In times of change at work, both coaching and mentoring are super important. Coaching can help you adapt quickly to new situations and build confidence, while mentoring can offer insights and support

If you think you or your team could benefit from coaching or mentoring support to help you through a period of change, get in touch with scott@peoplesparkolutions.co.uk for a no-obligation chat.

peoplesparkolutions.co.uk

Mandale Business Park, Mullen Stoker House, Durham DH1 1TH

SOS Group support Newcastle Eagles going eco



Gateshead-based office technology company, SOS Group, is helping Newcastle Eagles soar towards their sustainability goals by supplying Epson heat-free business inkjet technology to the Vertu Motors Arena.

The new technology will reduce energy usage and costs for both the basketball club and the Eagles Community Foundation and is already being put to good use.

This season, to reduce its environmental impact and waste, the club moved away from its usual old plastic season tickets to a new digital ticketing app and an innovative recyclable paper solution for physical cards. Furthermore, thanks to SOS Group, those new eco-friendly physical cards can be printed using the new heat-free technology. In addition, ticket vouchers for the region's schools are now being printed in-house using the Epson equipment meaning information can be individually tailored and the club can eliminate any waste from bulk-printed flyers.

Paul Blake, Newcastle Eagles Managing Director, said: "We're really pleased with the

new office technology supplied by Andrew and his team at SOS Group.

"It's helping us to reduce operating costs and become both more flexible and more sustainable with our printing.

"Our schools' vouchers initiative is proving very popular and it is hugely important for us in encouraging more young people to come to games.

"We're now able to be more personal in creating these and, added to this, the ability to create our own recyclable season ticket cards, which we believe is an industry first.

"We're already being much more sustainable with our print requirements."

Epson's heat-free inkjet printers offer significant cost-saving and environmental benefits by consuming dramatically less energy than equivalent laser printers, using

fewer consumables, producing lower CO2 emissions and requiring less intervention from engineers.

Andrew Skelton, a Director at SOS Group, says: "We're proud to be the Eagles Office Technology Partner because they share our commitment to reducing energy consumption and waste through print solutions.

"Working closely with both the club and foundation, we look forward to achieving even more significant environmental and productivity benefits as we go on by using the best office technology available."

Established in 2002, SOS Group facilitates all business and event requirements, including communications and IT, and specialises in providing copy, print, scan solutions for clients from local start-ups to multi-nationals.

Awarded both ISO 9001 and ISO 27001, it has a centralised office on the Team Valley and six regional hubs in London, Scotland, the North West, Midlands, South Yorkshire, South West and North East.

For more information, please visit: www.sosgroup-ltd.co.uk

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Rare chance to squirrel away woodland for investment/conservation

Nature enthusiasts and conservationists have the rare opportunity to purchase Mirk Pot Woodland, a stunning 37 acre sanctuary nestled in the heart of Yorkshire. This diverse woodland offers not only breathtaking beauty but also plays a vital role in supporting the red squirrel population—an iconic yet endangered species in the UK.

Mirk Pot Woodland, Snaizholme is a thriving ecosystem that provides a haven for the much-loved red squirrel. For wildlife enthusiasts, this is a once-in-a-lifetime chance to own land dedicated to conservation and ecological health.

With a long-standing commitment to conservation, the woodland was once part of a nature reserve managed by the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust. The late owners, in collaboration with the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority, even established a public squirrel viewing area that draws wildlife lovers from all over. This makes the woodland not only an ecological treasure but also a part of the region's conservation history.

Barnard Castle based Jonathan Wallis, Chartered Surveyor, is looking after the sale of this unique piece of land.

“Mirk Pot Woodland offers an unparalleled opportunity for those who want to make a real impact on wildlife conservation. The red squirrel is an endangered species, and by acquiring this land, buyers will be helping to preserve a critical habitat for them to thrive. This sale is more than just an investment—it's a chance to leave a conservation legacy for future generations. The woodland has contributed to the spread of the red squirrel into surrounding areas, furthering the conservation impact.”

Guide Price: £500,000. www.Jonathan-wallis.co.uk



North East property entrepreneurs secure £315,000 to launch new business and make first acquisition

Two Northumberland-based entrepreneurs are providing the springboard to launch their new property development business, by utilising a £315,000 funding deal to purchase and transform a new office complex in Cleveland.

Tony Johnson, who operates a trio of businesses in sectors such as automotive across the North East, has just established TJLB Developments with fellow director Lauren Beeforth and is leveraging the funding provided by Reward Funding to complete its first acquisition - New Garth House in Guisborough.

TJLB Developments will also utilise the working capital facility to undertake refurbishments on New Garth House and make it available for businesses to rent, with interest already being received from local companies in the retail and healthcare space. The building, formerly owned by an accountancy firm, spans 4,595 sq. ft. and provides convenient access to local amenities due to its prime location in Guisborough town centre.

New Garth House is expected to be the first in a series of property acquisitions by TJLB, with the new firm turning to Reward to seize the opportunity and act quickly in completing the transaction. Reward specialises in providing high-performance, asset-secured funding to support ambitious entrepreneurs in various sectors across the North East, addressing their challenges in accessing funding.



Leading NE engineering company to expand

Hartlepool's ExMesh Engineering has announced that it is set for significant expansion this year following a £500k investment.

As one of the UK's leading metal fabrication companies, ExMesh Engineering will embark on a recruitment drive later this year, as it introduces an extensive range of new services to meet the growing demands of its customers.

As a division of The Expanded Metal Company, a trusted name in metal solutions since 1889, ExMesh Engineering will build on its over a century of heritage with a fresh focus on innovation and growth.

Renowned for its high-quality expanded metal perimeter fencing, ExMesh Engineering will now offer complete metal fabrication solutions – it can fabricate anything from metal, from intricate custom designs to large-scale production runs.

Ryan Pinder, ExMesh Operations Manager and Head of CI, said: "To support our bold new direction, we have made substantial investments in state-of-the-art machinery, which will enable us to deliver unparalleled precision, flexibility, and capacity in all metal fabrication."



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Neil Turner



Caricature of an Architect

By Neil Turner, Director,
Howarth Litchfield

I have had a long (and I hope successful) career in architecture, enjoying the variety, challenges and opportunities to design buildings across this country and abroad.

So, to begin a new year, I thought I would take a light hearted look at what you might expect an architect to look like and why so many look and dress like their own caricature.

The classic look is the 'all black attire'. This look never goes out of fashion and I have just worked on a collaboration with a London architect who wore this look rather well.

I actually Googled the question, and it came back saying architects like black clothing 'because it's considered a neutral colour that

doesn't draw attention away from their work, allowing the focus to remain on the design and not their clothing'. Hilarious! Who thinks of that, really?

The next element is the black polo neck jumper (they are great you have to admit) making you look like the hitman from the 'Jackal' or 'Man from Uncle'. Even better to wear a different coloured polo neck to create an air of dynamic tension from the de facto black polo neck.

The next version - and going out of fashion - is the bow tie-wearing architect; early in my career there were a number that carried this look. Who can forget RIBA president Owen Luder?

Great architects like Le Corbusier or Lutyens cut memorable figures in the early 20th century with their sartorial elegance in suits and bow ties, setting a real standard. Remember the architect in the film 'Get Carter' - wearing a cravat and delivering a great line 'I have an awful feeling we're not going to get our fees on this job', after Brumby is pushed off the carpark in Gateshead.

There are other versions, in brighter clothes. For example, Richard Rogers always cut a dash in bright collarless shirts, matching his brightly coloured buildings.

Next the glasses - well some variety here: the big thick rimmed glasses of Le Corbusier or

Philip Johnson or the rimless glass look of Steve Jobs - bright colours are allowed too. In fact, I have to admit to having all three!

Do architects wear suits? Well yes - and no - seems to be the answer. At a recent function I noted the large numbers of grey and blue suits! I could hardly tell them apart from the lawyers, who still really like a good dark suit and tie.

Ties are going out of vogue in all professions, not just with architects. Many younger professionals choose not to wear suits, and the casual look is certainly on the increase.

Well, I love a good waistcoat - as many of you know - which combines with a variety of jackets - in contrast to the standard suit, thereby creating a caricature of my very own.

I think the answer is obvious: dress smartly in whatever makes you feel comfortable. I still believe that creating a good and smart impression is important.

If architects are represented by what they wear then I hope that my buildings are bright, sharp and stylish, embodying a degree of flair and not just thrown together.

Neil Turner, Director, Howarth Litchfield can be contacted on 0191 384 9470 or email n.turner@hlpuk.com or www.howarthlitchfield.com

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Constructing Excellence North East Award Winners 2024

The search for the North East's top construction talent ramps up

Constructing Excellence North East is calling for entries to its two annual awards programmes.

The Generation for Change (G4C) Awards and Constructing Excellence North East Awards (CENE) are set to take place in May and June.

G4C is part of Constructing Excellence, supporting young professionals within the industry. Caddick Construction is headline sponsor of the G4C North East Awards which will take place at the Newcastle-Gateshead Hilton Hotel on Friday 2 May.

The Constructing Excellence North East Awards will be held at the Grand Hotel Gosforth Park on Friday 13 June, with CDM Recruitment as headline sponsor.

The deadline for entries is 28 February for the G4C Awards and 7 March for the CENE Awards.

Categories available for CENE are SME of the Year, Integration & Collaborative Working, People & Culture, ESG, Climate Action, Retrofit, Conservation & Regeneration, Delivering Value, Innovation, Residential Project of the Year, Client of the Year, Infrastructure Project of the Year and Building Project of the

Year. Special recognition awards will also be made for outstanding achievement or contribution to the region or to the wider construction industry.

Categories available for G4C are G4C Future Leader, Apprentice of the Year, Trainee of the Year, Student of the Year, New Professional of the Year, Mentor of the Year and Commitment to Employee and Training Development.

Winners for the CENE Awards and the G4C Future Leader will go on to compete in the National Constructing Excellence Awards, held every year in the Autumn.

At the national finals in November 2024, CENE regional winners secured a number of awards, with Teesside University scooping an award and two highly commended accolades for separate projects.

Catriona Lingwood, chief executive of Constructing Excellence North East, said: "I can think of no better way to begin the year than with the announcement that our prestigious awards are open for entries.

"A true celebration of the outstanding achievements of North East built environment professionals, the awards shine a spotlight on those within the industry driving innovation and are best-in-class. From apprentices to SMEs that are long-established, we come together to celebrate our strength and diversity.

"The results from the national finals, in November, highlight how successfully the North East is performing and the opportunity within the industry for real career progression and business success.

"We would like to express our thanks for the support of those who have already signed on to sponsor the awards, including Applebridge Geoenvironmental, Atkins Realis, Bowmer+Kirkland, GSS Architecture, K2 Construction Management, Kier Group, Northern Counties Builders Federation, Northumbrian Water Group, RED Engineering Design, Robertson, Thompsons of Prudhoe and Weightmans LLP.

"A special thank you goes to CDM Recruitment, our headline sponsor of the CENE Awards for the eighth consecutive year and to Caddick Construction, headline sponsor of the G4C Awards. Our sponsors play a vital role in making these awards a success and in recognising the excellence that drives our industry forward."

Companies interested in the benefits of sponsoring the awards or would like guidance on how to enter, please contact our events manager, Leanne Conway: leanne@cene.org.uk

Good news as city carers can earn more

8,119 Newcastle “informal carers” will be able to earn more in a part-time job without losing Carers Allowance with hundreds more being eligible for CA for the first time.

The changes revealed by the UK Government have been welcomed by carer’s support groups across the city. At the moment, carers, mostly women, looking after a vulnerable adult with health issues and a disabled child for 35 hours a week are entitled to the weekly CA of £81.90 and can earn up to £151 (after NI and expenses) in a part-time job.

From April 2025 thousands of carers will be able to work 16-hours a week at the National Minimum Wage - £196 - without losing



Carers Allowance.

The uplift in the earnings limit is the biggest increase since Carers Allowance was brought in in 1976.

Kenton councillors Stephen Lambert, Ged Bell and Paula Maines said: “Informal carers in our city and elsewhere are sometimes seen as the Welfare State’s forgotten army and play a key role in providing emotional,

social and practical support to loved ones with long-term health related conditions and disabilities.”

“Family members, neighbours and friends are providing much informal community care across Newcastle. With the planned changes more carers should be able to claim the benefit whilst earning up to £10k a year, the councillors added.

The continued adventures of...



Hi everyone,

This weather is doing nothing for my old bones – the back legs are creaking more than ever. Everyone is busy at work but the spot near the radiator is where I want to be!

Q: I have a wooden-framed, three-panelled lounge window, 4m x 2.5m, with no opening lights. I want to change it to one which opens onto a patio. The house was built in the early 50’s and the window has a hidden lintel, I assume, with bricks forming the outside of the cavity wall appearing to be placed directly on top of the wooden frame. I have invited three specialist window installers to inspect, and to give me a quote. Company One suggested that PVC-U or aluminium could be used - that a steel angle iron may be required upon further investigation (ie during the alteration) and that an external lintel may also be required. Company Two said PVC-U would not be strong enough, and aluminium

Ziggy *and Cally!*

would be needed. This agent did inspect the outside of the window and said that Building Regulations would not now allow the external bricks to just rest on the frame - they would need some independent support. Company Three insisted that PVC-U would be the best material, and he brought small samples to demonstrate their strength. He did not go outside and did not mention lintels. So, could you please try to clear up my dilemma as to which company is right?

A: In your opening lines, you say you assume that this four-metre wide window opening has ‘a hidden lintel’ supporting the weight of the brickwork above. This is a dangerous assumption. Nowadays there are some clever designs of steel lintel, where the main structural support is up inside the cavity (although they all usually reveal a tell-tale strip of steel between the top of the window frame and the bricks). In the early 1950s such a design did not exist. There was usually a substantial timber lintel above the inner leaf (sometimes steel), but it was common for the first course of outer-leaf bricks to be bedded directly onto the window frame. In other cases a ‘flat’ brick arch would have been designed to carry the load; in time, these too might have settled, meaning that the window frame became load-bearing. Fitters working for replacement window firms are often ignorant of this fact, or perhaps they

just don’t care. All over the UK you can see examples of houses that have been damaged by cheap replacement windows - whether PVC-U, aluminium alloy, or thin-section timber. The original window had been carrying the load of the wall above - whether by accident or design. The new window is not up to the job, and after a few years a characteristic cracking pattern emerges, with a triangle of brickwork detached from the rest of the wall, and perching on top of the sagging window frame. Your first two companies at least acknowledge that a new lintel would be needed, but appear vague about the size or type. I suggest that rather than a “specialist window installer”, what you really need is a Fenestration Surveyor or Structural Engineer to survey the property, specify the best product, and inspect the final installation.



Please send me your building queries through facebook - @WDLne, website: wdlnortheast.co.uk or through Michael at Northern Insight on michael@northern-insight.co.uk



2025 North East Property Market Predictions: Navigating a year of change and opportunity

The North East property market is entering 2025 on a wave of change, shaped by shifting legislation, evolving buyer behaviour, and new opportunities across key sectors. Following the far-reaching implications of last year's budget, property experts from North East business and property specialist GFW share their predictions for how property markets across residential, and commercial will adapt, or better yet, thrive, in a new year that presents new challenges and vast opportunities for growth.

Shifting buyer behaviour and Stamp Duty changes in the Residential Market

Lindsay French, Residential Property Partner

"For those planning to upsize, downsize, or improve their homes, 2025 brings a shifting landscape with changing legislation forcing buyers and sellers to move quickly. Stamp duty reform, which comes into play from April 1st, is expected to increase buying costs for some home movers, leading to a race to complete purchases before the March 31st deadline.

"These changes could reshape buyer behaviour throughout the year. Buyers will likely consider stamp duty thresholds when making offers, potentially driving down offer prices and creating more negotiation opportunities. However, with the North East's average house price just over £190,000, many properties will fall below the £300,000 first-time-buyer threshold, providing relief for local buyers."

Lindsay also predicts that the region will lean further into a buyer's market, building on 2024's shift from the COVID-era seller's market.

"Buyers will benefit from more choice and negotiating power, though sellers may face challenges meeting price expectations."



Lindsay French
Partner



Lesley-Ann Riddles
Partner

Sustainability, flexibility and growth define the Commercial Property Market

Lesley-Ann Riddles, Commercial Property Partner

"In 2025, we predict the North East's commercial property market will reflect national trends of adaptability and sustainability.

"Demand for industrial and logistics spaces will remain robust, driven by the region's growing role in e-commerce and manufacturing," says Lesley-Ann.

"Office spaces emphasising flexibility and energy efficiency will dominate, catering to hybrid working models.

"Retail transactions may stabilise, with mixed-use developments gaining popularity. Investors will prioritise properties with green credentials to meet ESG requirements. Despite economic pressures like interest rates and inflation, the North East's affordability and improved infrastructure will continue to attract domestic and international investors, ensuring steady growth in the commercial sector."



North East resilience amid national market growth

While national predictions, such as Rightmove's forecast of a 4% increase in average asking prices*, hint at market growth, GFW's experts believe the North East will remain steadfast across property sectors. The North East's affordability and unique market dynamics make it well-positioned to weather external pressures in a sector that is brimming with opportunity.

**Information sourced from Rightmove*

For further insights or to discuss your property goals for 2025 visit **gfwllp.co.uk** or give our team a call on **0333 920 2220**

Make *your* next move with us

 0333 920 2220
 gfwllp.co.uk



L-R: Sarah O'Mahoney, director at Bradley O'Mahoney, Sarah Sidey, northern regional director, Randstad, Nik Welsh, chair of Constructing Excellence North East and executive director of communities and customer service at believe Housing.

The War for Talent Intensifies

Recruitment specialist, Randstad and communications and marketing expert, Bradley O'Mahoney, are collaborating in a series of workshops to enable companies in the construction and built environment to transform their employer branding.

A series of four workshops – covering employer branding, staff attraction, retention and skill/ reskill – are planned with Constructing Excellence North East across 2025. The first workshop, Employer Branding and the War for Talent, takes place 12 March at Evolve Centre, Houghton le Spring from 8.30am – 11am.

Nik Welsh, chair of Constructing Excellence North East and executive director of communities and customer services at believe Housing will be a guest speaker.

Catriona Lingwood, chief executive of Constructing Excellence North East, said: "The construction and built environment sector is performing extremely well, with exciting projects coming forward at a rapid

rate. It is well documented the industry requires thousands of new recruits to ensure the North East meets its strategic targets for growth.

"Much positive work to ensure we recruit to the sector is well underway. However, while the issue of training new people is critically important, many companies need to recruit now. That is why this series of seminars is so important, as it addresses the immediate concern many companies face, ensuring they, and not their competitors, capture the best talent currently available on the market.

"Competition to hire top people is intense and many companies need to transform their employer branding and understanding of what candidates are looking for. By doing so, they give themselves the very best opportunity to hire the people they need to take their businesses forward."

The first workshop on Employer Branding, will look at how to position a company as a great place to work. Examining whether employers really know what prospective candidates think of them and what they are looking for in an employer.

Sarah Sidey, northern regional director at Randstad, said: "The workshops will provide an opportunity for reflection, as we encourage employers to be curious through open discussion on how they are currently presenting themselves to the talent within their business and those they are looking to attract.

"Our latest Workmonitor Report showed work-life balance now ranks higher than pay on workers' lists of priorities (95%), more than any other consideration. Nearly a third say career progression is not a priority

because they are happy in their role (31%), but that does not stop them wanting to future-proof their skills through training (72%).

"Workers favour employers whose opinions, values and world views reflect their own, as like-minded partners, they can work with to improve equity in the workplace. Over a third said they wouldn't accept a job if they did not agree with the views of the organisation's leadership. At the same time, there is an overarching feeling that employers don't understand their workforce, with Gen Z expressing this view most strongly (44%)."

Sarah O'Mahoney, director, Bradley O'Mahoney, which works heavily in the built environment and construction with clients such as Construction Alliance North East, Northern Counties Builders Federation, Castle, JK Property Consultants, Asbestos Audit, Hodgson Sayers, Carney Consultancy, John N Dunn, Constructing Excellence North East, Opus Building Services, HLA Services and Silverstone Building Consultancy, said: "There are often simple steps that companies can take to develop employer branding. One of the most obvious is recognising that if hiring staff is the key priority for a business, then this should be reflected in more dynamic engagement on its website. The techniques around this will be just one of the issues we will discuss during our first seminar."

To book a place at the workshop, please contact Leanne Conway at Constructing Excellence North East. Leanne@cene.org.uk

Official opening for Banks Homes' New Cathedral Meadows development in West Rainton



Two new five-bedroom show homes at the North East's newest residential development have welcomed their first visitors after their official opening by housebuilder Banks Homes.

Banks 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.

More than 250 people toured Cathedral Meadows' two five-bedroomed show homes over their opening weekend, which followed on from the development's official opening by Banks Group chairman and chief executive Harry Banks.

Representatives of some of the local community groups that Banks has been working with as the development has taken shape were also invited along to take a look

at what has been created in their village.

The first property reservations at Cathedral Meadows have already been taken by local homebuyers, with the first occupants set to move into their new homes in March.

Banks Homes has also signed up to the award-winning national mortgage scheme Own Now, which is designed to make home ownership more attainable for more people, and is offering the Own New option on selected Cathedral Meadows plots.

Aisling Ramshaw, head of sales and marketing at Banks Homes, says: "Banks Homes will create sustainable, contemporary living spaces in desirable locations, with style offered as standard, and we couldn't be more thrilled with the reaction we had to our fantastic Cathedral Meadows show homes.

"We had so much positive feedback from the couples and families that have come from across the local area and beyond to see what's on offer, with the build quality, high specification and attention to detail in our show homes all going down particularly well."

A bespoke range of seven different house types has been created for Cathedral Meadows, with each property featuring an

advanced Hive heating system, an Omega kitchen, Porcelanosa bathrooms, a Ring video doorbell, a full range of kitchen appliances, bi-fold doors and a turfed garden.

The development will also include a new play area, landscaped areas and areas of public open space.

Chris Burns, treasurer at the West Rainton & Leamside Village Partnership, says: "The presentation of the Cathedral Meadows site is excellent, and the Banks team's approach to working with our community has been exceptional right from the off.

"As we've watched the site evolve over the last year, it's felt like no expense has been spared in creating a really professional design."

Aisling Ramshaw continues: "Being able to demonstrate the outstanding quality of the homes that will soon be available here is a real landmark for us and we're excited to now be working to help all the people that want to make their move to Cathedral Meadows do so as soon as possible.

"Now is the perfect time to secure the home you've been dreaming of, and with the stamp duty increase looming in April, there's a unique opportunity to make significant savings by buying a new home at Cathedral Meadows."

The Cathedral Meadows show homes and marketing suite are now open from Thursday to Monday between 10am and 5pm.

For further information, please call 0191 378 6200 or visit www.bankshomes.co.uk/development/cathedral-meadows-development



Your guide to the Renters' Rights Bill: How Wright Residential supports landlords through change

The Renters' Rights Bill is part of the Labour Party's manifesto, aiming to overhaul renting and property standards by strengthening tenants' rights through tighter regulations. However, if you are a landlord, it may raise concerns and challenges when navigating this new legislation.

One of the most significant changes the Renters' Rights Bill proposes is the abolition of Section 21 no-fault evictions, which previously allowed landlords to evict tenants without providing a reason. While these changes focus on protecting tenants, Wright Residential understand that such reforms may cause concern for landlords.

Wright Residential is a trusted property management company specialising in lettings, with more than 80 years of combined experience across their team. They are well-positioned to guide clients through this ever-changing landscape, minimising risk and preventing potential problems with their expert advice.

Committed to transparency, Wright Residential keeps landlords informed of any issues and reassures them throughout the process. Their robust referencing system alleviates both landlord and tenant concerns, fostering a trusting relationship



between all parties.

In addition, our landlords are so confident in our services that we are assisting them in expanding their portfolios, as we still believe property is a great long-term investment.

The Bill also introduces a new ombudsman scheme to enforce stricter regulations and oversight by local authorities. Wright Residential will help clients mitigate risks, keep properties compliant with legal requirements, and maintain positive relationships between tenants and landlords as new legislation continues to evolve.

As an experienced property management company, Wright Residential is prepared to provide advice and expertise to both new and current landlords navigating these reforms. With their extensive resources, they are dedicated to ensuring that landlords and tenants continue to thrive in this changing landscape.

**Wright Residential Ltd, 176 Chillingham Rd, Newcastle upon Tyne NE6 5BU
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Roamer Robot ships to Miami-Dade County, Florida

Roamer Robotics Ltd., an educational tech startup based in Greenesfield Business Centre, Gateshead, has fulfilled a major order to the USA.

The company has shipped a number of its Roamer Robots - which are an ideal educational resource - to Florida to support teaching staff in Miami-Dade County Schools. The Roamer is extremely durable with different keypad modules for each Key Stages, the robots will be used within the State's floor robots training programme.

Roamer Robotics was established in 2022 and started trading the following year. In September this year they began to work closely with Swift Electronics Ltd which has premises on Saltmeadows Road in Gateshead. The company provided the printed circuit boards, programmed the Roamer to follow commands and assembled them ready for shipment.

Roamer Robotics CEO, Mike Carter said: "It has been a hard-fought battle to gain the order for the training, having to navigate the complex logistical issues around exporting abroad and especially to the United States of America. I'm delighted that through the support of our logistics partner InXpress in Gateshead we've been able to fulfil this exciting order. I strongly believe that once each teacher becomes confident in using the floor robot, they will want more."

Swift Electronics Ltd. Managing Director, Jonathan Sloane added: "It has been an absolute pleasure supporting Mike and the team at Roamer. It's great to see another Gateshead company doing well and we wish them a fantastic 2025"

The startup is currently working with Newcastle University Internship programme through which three students are working on developing the company's website in order to support future sales.

Award success for Leighton



Leading AWS software development company, Leighton, has been announced the winner of the 'Growth Explosion' award at the recent 'Dynamites Awards' in recognition of its impressive performance over the last three years.

The company, which specialises in building software products and optimising processes to accelerate digital transformation for its customers, saw its revenue more than double over the last three years in-line with expanding its team and creating innovative products.

The Dynamites Awards celebrate the North East's IT and technology industry and recognise individuals and organisations that

have demonstrated unparalleled dedication, innovation, and excellence in their respective fields.

The Growth Explosion award, sponsored by LDC, celebrates the growth and success of tech organisations in the North East - creating job opportunities, building companies, and expanding through wider field projects.

Speaking on the win James Bunting, CEO at Leighton said: "We're thrilled to have won our first-ever Dynamites Award for Growth Explosion. The calibre of the shortlist, including some incredible businesses like iamproperty, made this achievement even more meaningful.

"This win is a testament to the resilience, dedication, and talent of the entire Leighton team. Reflecting on the journey over the past few years—particularly the challenges we faced during the pandemic—I'm incredibly proud of how we've focused on what we do best, software engineering, and built on our strong culture to drive growth.

"It's also a moment to celebrate the collaborative North East tech ecosystem, which has been instrumental in our success. From our amazing customers who trust us to deliver to our fantastic partners who enable us to perform at a high level—this award is as much about them as it is about us."

razorblue expands in the North West with new Manchester office at Salford Quays

razorblue, an award-winning IT partner, is delighted to announce the opening of its new office at Anchorage One, Salford Quays. This move marks a significant milestone in the company's expansion across the North West, underlining its commitment to supporting businesses in the region with strategic and innovative IT solutions.

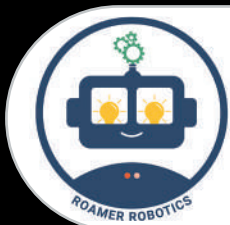
Located on the entire top floor of the Anchorage One building, the new office offers a modern, purpose-built environment designed to accommodate razorblue's growing team and meet the evolving needs of its clients. With a floor plan three times larger than its previous office at Manchester Airport, the space includes state-of-the-art facilities, direct tram access, on-site parking with EV charging stations, secure cycle storage, shower facilities, multiple meeting rooms, collaborative pods, and dedicated areas for IT builds and storage.

Dan Kitchen, CEO of razorblue, said: "We're thrilled to be opening our new Manchester office at Anchorage One, right in the heart of Salford Quays. This space reflects our commitment to expanding in the North West and our confidence in the region's vibrant business landscape. Manchester has been a focal point for innovation



and growth, and we're excited to deepen our roots here. With three times the space of our previous office, we're well-positioned to support our growing team and provide top-tier IT solutions to local businesses."

The Manchester office opening is part of razorblue's ongoing growth strategy, which has already seen the company expand its footprint across the UK. razorblue's ethos centres on being a trusted IT partner, offering businesses strategic, technical, and highly accredited IT services tailored to their needs.



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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.

“What a privilege it is to be part of this incredible business group - quite an exceptional event made more special with the genuine friendships. Simply wonderful!”

Jan Dale, Director, Urban Base



Executive Group members at Ad Gefrin

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.

Space for coworking

Tired of working from home?

We have a modern, comfortable coworking area with hot desks for hire at our Portland House HQ in Durham, DH1. 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.

Contact Alison Gittins, CEO Durham Business Group • alison@durhambusinessgroup.co.uk • www.durhambusinessgroup.co.uk

Talking Technology

This month Northern Insight talks to...

Ian Musgrave

Chief Technology Officer (CTO), Forfusion

Did you always envisage a career in the world of technology?

Subconsciously, I think yes. I joined the RAF straight from sixth form and entered the electronics engineering trade. Over the 15 years I served, I gradually developed skills across a range of systems. Initially, some of the "tech" was fairly old-school: valves and transistors. But eventually, as the RAF modernised, I worked on modern, digital systems. This is what really ignited my interest in technology as we see it today.

What attracted you to your current role?

After leaving the RAF and spending a few years working in several different technology roles across both industry and the public sector, the opportunity to be involved in a start-up was very appealing. Forfusion was born from a collective frustration with large technology integrators not delivering on their commitments to customers. To me, the solutions were often simple ones, but due to the rigid, inflexible service delivery mechanisms under which some of these companies operated, I was not able to make the changes that were obvious to most involved. The opportunity to grow Forfusion into an organisation that was just as capable but agile and able to deliver significantly better outcomes was too good to turn down.

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

Do your research. Various roles and career paths are open to people looking for a career in technology. At Forfusion, we have many different roles across our technical teams; we have engineers specialising in cybersecurity, software-defined infrastructure, collaboration, cloud solutions and software development - to name a few. Each has its own specific set of learning, qualifications, and career paths. Add in the rapidly evolving world of AI, which is disrupting, pretty much everything, then it's key to choose a career path which you find engaging and matches your wider interests.

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

There is a lot going on at the moment, all of which is exciting from a CTO perspective. As a rapidly growing technology company, we're constantly monitoring technology trends and new products to identify those best suited to growing our capability and the value we offer to

customers. We're focusing on AI from both an internal and customer-facing perspective. Our Managed Services department is already benefitting from an internally developed AI tool that uses historical data to make customer interactions much more efficient.

Tell us more about Forfusion.

We're a North East-based IT solutions consultancy and managed services provider. We specialise in delivering secure, innovative Cisco infrastructure solutions to help organisations transform their business. Using our in-house delivery methodology: Assess, Design, Integrate and Operate (ADIO), we focus on a full lifecycle approach to deploying and managing IT. That means we're in it for the long haul. We want our customers to see us as trusted advisors and partners. Seeing our customers gaining real value from the solutions we design and deploy is hugely satisfying.

What are the long-term plans for the business?

Our performance data so far this year indicates we're on track for our best-ever year of trading. We'll be looking to build on that over the coming few years, and I'd like us to be established as the go-to Cisco partner in the North East. We're also starting to build a strong IoT capability, and I'm really looking forward to growing that and working with new and interesting customers.

What's your favourite piece of technology?

It has to be my iPhone and Apple Watch; I don't think I'd survive without them.

How do you like to relax?

Spending time with the family, I enjoy watching them participate in their weekend sporting activities. I also try to play football a couple of times a week to keep fit.

To find out more about Forfusion, visit: www.forfusion.com



Ian Musgrave

5 success factors for a smooth agile transformation

By Tom Preval, Senior Scrum Master and Delivery Community Lead at Leighton

Agility is the hallmark of modern organisations. It reflects their ability to swiftly and effectively adapt to evolving market conditions, shifting customer demands, and unexpected disruptions. It embodies a mindset and approach that prioritise continuous learning, rapid decision-making, and transparency, underpinned by a culture, processes, and systems designed to thrive in an ever-changing environment.

For most businesses, agility is no longer a luxury, but rather a necessity to stay competitive. Yet adopting agile or becoming agile is more than implementing new workflows or tools. It requires a fundamental shift in mindset and culture, something that is often easier to talk about than it is to actually execute.

While the path to agility is unique for every organisation, there are common success factors that can smooth the transformation journey. Here we'll cover five key factors that can help ensure a successful agile transformation.

1. Leadership commitment and vision

Agile transformation starts at the top. Leadership must champion change by articulating a clear vision, demonstrating commitment through actions, and undergoing the same formal training as their teams. When leaders actively participate, lead by example, and foster an environment of trust, they set the tone for the entire organisation. This alignment ensures that teams feel supported, and that agility becomes a strategic priority, not just a tactical change.

2. Empowering teams

One of the core principles of agility is empowering teams to make decisions and take ownership of their work. Businesses must transition from traditional command and control structures to a more decentralised approach. This isn't to say that all decisions and actions become decentralised, but rather we empower teams with the autonomy to make decisions, innovate and adapt. Providing teams with the right training, tools, and frameworks is crucial, but equally important is creating an environment where teams can experiment, fail, and learn without fear of blame.

3. Cultural transformation

An agile transformation will fail without a corresponding shift in organisational culture. Organisations need to foster a culture of collaboration, transparency, and continuous improvement. This often requires breaking down legacy silos and structures while encouraging cross-functional teams to work together toward shared goals. Leaders should model behaviours that reflect agility, such as openness to feedback and a willingness to adapt. Often organisations will focus on embedding agile practices and lose sight of the values. Embedding agile values into everyday practices helps ensure that your transformation becomes sustainable.

4. Customer-centric focus

Agility is ultimately about delivering value to customers, internal and external, faster, and more effectively. Organisations must shift their focus from outputs (how much work teams get done) to outcomes (how much value teams have delivered). This means actively engaging with customers to understand their needs and incorporating their feedback into the development process. Techniques such as design thinking and user story mapping along with the frequent delivery of incremental value help keep the customer at the heart of teams and the wider organisation's decision-making.

5. Measurement and adaptation

What gets measured gets improved. Tracking progress through meaningful metrics is essential to understand whether the transformation is yielding the desired results. However, the key is to focus on metrics that reflect agility, such as cycle time, customer satisfaction, business value and team engagement, rather than traditional performance measures like utilisation. Regular retrospectives at all levels of the organisation, and events such as the inspect and adapt event as seen in the SAFe framework ensure continuous learning and adaptation, helping teams to learn, refine processes and address roadblocks as they arise.

Agile transformations are not a one-size-fits-all endeavour, just look at all the frameworks you can pick from. Nor is it a destination. It's an ongoing journey of learning and adaptation. By focusing on leadership commitment, team empowerment, cultural change, customer-centricity, and continuous improvement, organisations can navigate the complexities of their agile transformation with confidence. The rewards for doing so? Greater responsiveness, improved customer satisfaction, and enhanced employee engagement make the effort worthwhile. Organisations that embrace these success factors will not only thrive in their agile journey but also position themselves to excel amongst the competition.

leighton.com



“

...agility is no longer a luxury, but rather a necessity...

Tom Preval



Digital northern powerhouse takes on more talent

Mediaworks, one of the leading independent digital agencies in the UK has expanded its teams across both their Newcastle and Leeds offices. This wave of growth follows significant new business wins and a long-term strategy to further support the public sector with their Digital Transformation initiatives.

The growth comes at a time when Mediaworks are capitalising on the momentum of high-profile client wins, with prestigious brands such as British Council, Gateshead Council, Odeon, Vet Partners, Travis Perkins, and Lumo selecting Mediaworks as their digital partner.

The new appointments over the past three

months in Social, SEO, Client Services, Sales, Strategic Planning, Digital PR (DPR), Project Management, Innovation, and the Performance Marketing teams reflect Mediaworks' commitment to supporting both the recruitment of regional talent and delivering best-in-class digital expertise to their clients.

"We're thrilled to be recognising the talent we have within the agency as well as bringing in new recruits to help with the next phase of growth in both our Newcastle and Leeds offices" said Brett Jacobson, CEO of Mediaworks. "Our new recruits are not only a response to the increased demand from our growing client roster but also a reflection of our commitment to creating jobs and supporting the economies in the regions we operate in. Each new team member will play an important role as we continue our mission to deliver innovative digital solutions and measurable results."

AI Video editing platform offered £100K investment

The founders of Choppity, an innovative web-based AI video editing platform, Zara Paul and Aaron Morris, made their Dragon's Den debut recently, securing a £100k investment offer from entrepreneur Peter Jones.

During the pitch, the Choppity founders offered 6% of their business in return for an investment and received three offers. Peter Jones beat fellow entrepreneurs Sara Davies and Touker Suleyman, offering to invest £100k for 15% of the business with the option to reduce his share to 12.5% if the company gave the money back in 2025.

Choppity is a web-based automated video editor for social media, sales and education. It simplifies the video editing process for businesses and creators alike. The platform, which was founded in Durham in the North East of England,



is already used in production by leading companies such as ITN, Autotrader, Turtle Bay, and Sonatype. During the pitch, Steven Bartlett likened the platform to "Canva for video."

While Choppity and Peter Jones have since made the mutual decision to not move forward with the investment, something that can commonly happen post-filming, the co-founders are excited for what the future holds after appearing on the show, with the platform soon to introduce new editing services for customers to improve functionality and offer new uses.



Two new hires at Creo Comms

A North East brand communications agency has made two new appointments as it continues to grow.

Sunderland based Creo Comms has appointed Michael McHugh and Ryan Hogan to boost its web design and digital marketing offer, to meet increasing demand. It takes the business's team to 16, and the company is eyeing a move to new premises to support its growth.

Michael's expertise includes web and UI design, graphic design and front-end web development. He has over two decades' experience, working with organisations such as Nissan, Stagecoach and the NHS.

Joining Creo means Michael is reunited with former Farringdon Comprehensive School classmates Louise Bradford – MD of the company - and Ross Johnston – a talented videographer and photographer who joined Creo last year - with the trio having previously been in the same form class from 1997 until 2002.

Michael said: "It's great to be part of the Creo team and to be working with some familiar faces who – by chance - have all ended up working in the same sector, and now all on the same team.

Ryan is an experienced digital marketer with an eye for commerciality and brings particular expertise in e-commerce and SEO, paid social media and customer relationship management (CRM).

"I'm really pleased to be joining Creo," said Ryan. "It's a company that is growing and has a large portfolio of clients.

A full-service agency, Creo works with clients in a range of sectors from manufacturing to real estate, and hospitality to professional services.

Louise Bradford, managing director of Creo Comms, added: "I'm delighted to welcome Michael and Ryan to the team.

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Redu Group and Mira Marketing announce strategic partnership to deliver full-service digital marketing solutions

Two of the North East's leading digital agencies, Redu Group and Mira Marketing, are excited to announce a groundbreaking partnership that promises to reshape the digital marketing landscape for e-commerce businesses.

Redu Group, with over a decade of experience in affiliate marketing, influencer programs, and social publishing, drives over £50 million annually in incremental revenue for major clients such as Iceland, LookFantastic, and Boots. Known for its data-driven approach, Redu Group is a leader in creating innovative affiliate and partnership strategies.

Mira Marketing, with more than 10 years of expertise in paid search, organic and paid social media management, SEO and creative design, has earned a reputation for its omnichannel marketing strategies that deliver measurable results.

By joining forces, the two North East-based agencies are combining their strengths to offer brands a unique, full-service digital marketing solution. This partnership provides clients with access to a cohesive suite of services spanning affiliate, influencer, paid search, social media, and creative strategy—bridging the gap between performance marketing and omnichannel advertising.

"We're thrilled to formalise this partnership," said Angela Goggins, Managing Director of Redu Group. "By working together, we're creating a full-service solution that drives true incremental growth for our clients. Not only is this an exciting development for the digital marketing industry, but it's also a significant win for the North East, as many full-service agencies are typically based in London."

Stuart Bramley, CEO of Mira Marketing, added: "This collaboration allows us to maximise opportunities for our clients and future partners. We're blending our individual expertise to provide a truly seamless and results-driven service that empowers brands to achieve their full potential."

The partnership between Redu Group and Mira Marketing represents a major milestone in the region, spotlighting the North East as a growing hub for digital innovation and excellence.



Three new hires for leading digital marketing agency

Newcastle-based SEO, PPC, and paid social specialists, SQUIDGY, has once again strengthened its team with three experienced new hires.

The firm recently welcomed Amy Robinson as SEO executive, followed by Amy Rowell as paid media executive. The newest hire, Hannah Lymn joins the team as paid media manager, strengthening the delivery of SQUIDGY's comprehensive range of social media services.

Andy Robson, agency director and founder of SQUIDGY, said: "It's always rewarding to see the business you've built grow. I employed my first member of staff back in December 2020. Four years later, we have formed an incredible team of industry experts, now totalling 10, with plans to hire more experts as we head towards our £1 million turnover figure by 2026.

"Hannah, Amy, and Amy add to that expertise and help us continue delivering the high-quality work we pride ourselves on. Thanks to these new hires, we can better respond to the increasing demand for our services, taking on new clients while expanding our existing portfolio.

"As a business, our goal is always strategic growth. For us, that's about working with the right people, for the right reasons. I certainly feel that Hannah, Amy, and Amy share our values and will support our future ambitions."

Hannah Lymn, SQUIDGY's new paid media manager, brings a wealth of experience to the agency. Hannah discovered her passion for marketing at Newcastle University, where she was the communications liaison for the women's rugby team. A recent career highlight was achieved when she launched paid social media services at another Tyneside agency.

Hannah said about her new role: "I'm at the stage of my career where I want to grow in a structured environment, and SQUIDGY is that place for me. Currently, my biggest strength is paid social media, however, I'm keen to improve my PPC skills too. I'm already being given the resources and time I need to learn those skills, which is something I feel really excited about.

"It's great to be at an organisation that truly values personal and professional development - the support I've received from Andy and the team has been amazing."

SQUIDGY hosts regular free networking events in Newcastle during which marketers can connect with peers, share ideas, and create a community. The next event is happening in February 2025.



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Phonetic Digital reflects on a successful first year in business

Since its launch in January 2024, Phonetic Digital has rapidly established itself as a key player in the local digital landscape, securing prestigious accreditation, several high-profile clients and laying the foundation for future growth.

Located in Sunderland's historic Mackie's Corner - a recently revamped Grade II listed building in the city centre - the agency was founded by Steven Parker with a clear mission: to create a sustainable business that benefits not only its clients, but its environment, its finances and its people and community too.

In its first twelve months, that mission has remained firmly at the forefront of everything the agency has done and achieved – from bagging top client wins to securing B Corp™ certification in the realms of diversity, sustainability and ethics, helping to cementing itself as one of Sunderland's most exciting and values-driven employers.

Power partnerships

Its impressive roster of clients – including North East Chambers of Commerce, Gateshead College, Darlington College, Sunderland BID, Sunderland City Council and Oculus HR - continues to grow.

These partnerships have been instrumental in solidifying the agency's reputation for delivering innovative and reliable digital solutions, which stretch from sustainable marketing to cutting edge website development and expert-led digital training.

The vision is and will always be the same: to enhance its clients' digital presence and operational efficiency. Each service is designed to meet the unique challenges of today's digital landscape, while upholding its commitment to clarity, sustainability and community impact. "They say it takes a village to raise a child, and it takes support from great clients to grow a business. We've been incredibly fortunate to have really supportive clients who value our values-driven approach to business and services," says Steven.

"Attaining B Corp™ certification in December 2024 cemented our approach to business sustainability. This has been the difference in winning at least two contracts in competitive pitch processes."



Steven Parker

Stand-out initiatives

Over the past twelve months, Phonetic Digital has undertaken several significant projects - the highlight being its successful bid to design and build a new website for Sunderland BID, following a highly competitive selection process. Its approach was comprehensive and multifaceted, beginning with strategic planning and workshops to gather insights from key stakeholders, ensuring the website would meet the client's needs. This was followed by designing the site structure and wireframes to create an intuitive and user-friendly experience. Steven and his team also collaborated closely with the Sunderland BID marketing team regarding content creation, ensuring the site was both engaging and true to the Sunderland BID brand. Phonetic Digital's commitment to sustainability was reflected in every stage of design and development, resulting in an efficient and environmentally conscious website.

Looking ahead

As Phonetic Digital looks to the future, the company has ambitious plans to grow its team and expand its services. It currently employs four staff members – who collectively offer decades of experience in their field.

Combined, they've completed over 200 projects and each one remains grounded

in the agency's ethos of phonetics—communication that is clear, precise and easily understood. Over the next three years, it aims to treble its headcount, creating more high-quality jobs in Sunderland. Its commitment to being a fair, sustainable and inclusive employer remains as strong as ever. Its recent certification as a B Corp™ Business underscores its dedication to sustainability and support for diverse talent in the workplace, while its Real Living Wage and Cyber Essentials accreditations reflect its strong ethical foundation and commitment to high standards of social and environmental performance, accountability, transparency and cyber security.

With a strong client base, a commitment to sustainability and a clear vision for growth, the future looks bright for this Sunderland-based digital agency. "We've had a great first year in 2024 and we're looking forward confidently to 2025," says Steven. "Our goal for our first year of business was to lay the groundwork and build a solid foundation for our future, which we've succeeded in doing. In year two, we plan on growing bigger and better with some really exciting opportunities in the pipeline."

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O hits 20 year milestone

A look back at its 'Oomph moments'

O agency sprung out of the dot com boom back in 2005, quickly building a reputation as a creative agency that was doing something different for the region's business community.





Since its inception, O has supported clients to deliver more than £50m in economic impact for the region, helped attract five million visitors to the North East and connected over 500 NE businesses to our region's youth talent through schools and community partnerships.

Founder Kari Owers was recently awarded the first ever Impact Award at the region's Entrepreneur Awards, for her approach to sustainable business, community and regional growth.

As the company turns 20 this year, she says: "I have always said there is nothing boring about business, and we are so lucky to get to tell stories that make a difference. I have had the privilege of sitting in boardrooms where multi-million pound deal announcements are crafted, created campaigns that helped to shape our region and supported global brands to launch into the place we call home.

"Our own story hasn't been linear. Just a couple of years into business we were hit by a double whammy – the credit crunch and the rise of social media. We pivoted hard and fast and invested in adopting new ways of storytelling in a multi-media age.

"That pace of change hasn't stopped for 20 years, and now with the rise of Ai, we find ourselves in another major societal shift. Our role is to advise organisations on how to embrace new ways of communicating and telling their brand story. We wouldn't change that for the world, it's an exciting industry."

Looking back over 20 years of change here in the North East the team at O pick out some



of their most memorable campaigns and what they call 'Oomph moments'...

Our first client, One Day...

Our first ever client won at pitch was the charity Young Enterprise NE, who at the time were struggling to recruit enough support from businesses. We created the region's first ever mass youth enterprise campaign called One Day and connected hundreds of NE businesses to our regional youth talent pipeline through giving one day of their time, profits or expertise to helping raise enterprise aspirations in local schools.

2010 - Time to change ending the stigma

Every so often a campaign comes along that stops us in our tracks and Time to Change was one of those. Mental health was still very much a taboo subject 15 years ago, and we launched a region-wide roadshow that made sure we got everyone talking. From our award-winning 'blue crew' that popped up during the January sales, to placing sofas in rural market towns for people to talk about how they were feeling, we learned so much

along the way that has informed how we manage conversations in our workplace and in our own lives every day.

2011 - Pop Card, Metro pops the question

The launch of the region's Pop Card was a very interesting Valentine's Day for the team!

When we heard that the Pop Card was launching to the public for the very first time on 14 February, we knew the whole campaign needed to help the public "Pop the Question" about all things related to using the new travel smartcard around the region.

2015 - Parkdean becomes big business news

O worked on the national media announcement of one the region's biggest business deals, when Parkdean bought Park Resorts, creating Britain's biggest holiday home park operator, with 73 sites across the country. Handling big deal announcements like this for a regionally headquartered business make us very proud to put the North East into the national headlines.

2016 - Dr Martens, global goes local

Dr. Martens is just one of those brands that everyone wants to be part of - so when we got the call that they wanted a UK agency to help them connect to customers in every city they were opening a store, we were buzzing! Starting in Newcastle, we rocked and rolled our way from Belfast to Brighton opening their store network with live bands, street art and lots of local influencers and press. DMs also gave us our first ever global influencer campaign, working with agency partners around the world to launch their DMs Lite range - that rocketed us into the world of creator marketing.

2016 - Elring Klinger, a visit from the future King

We've managed numerous high profile visits over the years but showcasing a Teesside car parts plant with big green plans to the future King was a highlight - then Prince Charles not only met workers on the shop floor, but his eco-passion showed in his keen interest in Elring Klinger's plans to install a wind turbine at the Redcar plant.

2017 - British Masters, world's media descends on NE turf

Bringing the international media, visitors and celebrity sporting talent to the region makes us proud to show off what the North East has to offer, so working with the European Tour on the British Masters at Close House was a great opportunity. Our social media crew broadcast live from the Masters, whilst we worked the press room for the visiting media.

The event achieved over 22m social media impressions - the highest ever for the British Masters - with almost 70,000 spectators attending the tournament.

2019 - Northern Goldsmiths, 100 years of Rolex

Being from Newcastle, lighting up the Millennium bridge is just one of those moments you dream of. We helped Goldsmiths celebrate 100 years of Rolex by doing just that - what a night to remember!

2021 - iamproperty helps us build growth

Not many companies can say they won one of their biggest clients in lockdown. In late 2020 we began working with iamproperty, an ambitious market leader with an amazing story to tell. Started in Newcastle by two ambitious (and very fun) entrepreneurs, iamproperty is now one of the fastest growing companies in this sector in the UK - we are enjoying being part of their very exciting journey.

2022 - First Irish client, Murphy

Although we have worked with clients from Scotland to Cornwall, winning our first Irish client was a big moment for us. Giving us a fresh foothold into Europe, we have built a specialism in the construction sector and have enjoyed travelling the Dublin-Newcastle trade route in recent years as we grow our business in Eire.

2022 - CHUF, the day Ryan Reynolds entered all our lives

CHUF is a charity client very close to our hearts, having worked together for several years to raise vital funds to support heart heroes and their families.

Ivan Hollingsworth, chair of the board of CHUF and dad to Seb, aged 13, was sitting by his son's bedside just four days after Seb had undergone open heart surgery at the Freeman Hospital in Newcastle. At a loss for a way to help while Seb recovered, Ivan typed out a tweet to get a Marvel Studios Superhero to send a message to Heart Hero Seb.

The next day he received a reply. Ryan Reynolds, star of Deadpool, sent a heartfelt personal video to Seb and the message "That scar is street cred for life!" then even more well wishes flooded in from Marvel superstars Brie Larson, Samuel L. Jackson, Chris Hemsworth and Mark Ruffalo.

O's social media and press team sprung into action when overnight Seb became a worldwide sensation, and the story appeared in over 260 media outlets across the world. We then went on to create the 'My scar is my superpower campaign', helping children and adults all over the UK to feel proud of their scar and the amazing superpowers they had.

2024 - NE1 new campaign hits the city streets

By now you'll have gathered we are very proud to be from Newcastle, so winning the NE1 creative agency account was a big moment. Our creative advertising campaigns are now all over the city for big events like Restaurant Week and Newcastle's Christmas, which alongside our annual Fenwick Christmas window reveal project makes us true Geordies!

www.o.agency



Pippa Gilroy on Content That Connects

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.

CONNECTING WITH

Pippa Gilroy, Newcastle-based content creator and Digital Marketing Executive at Bonded, shares her journey into content creation, the misconceptions surrounding the craft, and how AI is reshaping the creative landscape.



Q: Can you start by introducing yourself and your role at Bonded?

Pippa: Hey! I'm Pippa, and I'm a Digital Marketing Executive here at Bonded. I joined the agency in 2024 after graduating from Northumbria University with a Master's in Digital Marketing. My role at Bonded is a mix of paid social and content creation, which is an uncommon combination but actually blends quite well!

Two years ago, I decided to take the plunge and started creating social media content about the North East with the mission of showing people around the world the place I live in: our unique culture, local businesses, and the incredible community around me. Working at Bonded has allowed me to bring these self-taught skills into a professional setting, creating content not only for the Bonded brand but also for our exciting clients.

Q: What are some common misconceptions people have about content creations?

Pippa: I think a lot of people assume that content creation is just about snapping a quick photo or shooting a video, but there's so much more thought that goes into creating high-quality content.

What sets great content apart is the process behind it—starting with researching and understanding

your audience to figure out which trends or content types will resonate most. This is followed by brainstorming ideas, building a social plan, and then heading out to shoot with a clear vision of what to capture.

“What sets great content apart is the process behind it - starting with researching and understanding your audience.”

You're not just thinking about the subject but also about angles, lighting, staging, and styling to bring out the best in each shot. If we're doing interviews or vox pops, for example, we carefully consider who we'll talk to and what questions we'll ask to capture authentic, engaging responses. After all of this, the content goes through editing and refining to ensure the final product is polished, relatable, and impactful. Each piece is crafted with care and intention before it's there, in front of you, on your screen!

Q: Are there any upcoming developments in content creation that you're excited about?

Pippa: I'm sure many people in their respective industries are just as excited about the potential of AI tools as I am in content creation. In my opinion, AI has the potential to be an incredible collaborator.

Some of the ways I already use AI in my work are through ChatGPT, which can be a great tool to help spark inspiration when I hit a creative block, or CapCut's automated captions tool, which can be a real time-saver. I'm excited to see how AI will develop—it is constantly evolving, and I'm eager to see how its capabilities expand.

Q: Finally, who would be your dream client?

Pippa: I'd love to work on Greggs! As both a foodie and a passionate advocate for the North East, I can't think of a better fit. Greggs has such a strong connection to this region, and their social content is way ahead in terms of creativity.

Follow Pippa
@pippagilroy
@gilroypippa

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bondedagency.com.



Marketing and Media Matters

In the latest of this popular series of features we spoke to...

Angela Goggins

Managing Director, Redu.

Did you always envisage a career in the Marketing and Media Industry?

Not at all! I fell into the industry by accident. My background is in business development and sales mainly in publishing and automotive industries. I've loved the journey of learning and growing. The industry is dynamic, fast paced and fun and I'm absolutely where I am meant to be!

What has been your career path so far?

I started in business development for a publishing company in London, where I lived for over ten years. One of my proudest early achievements was building the first e-library across multiple NHS trusts in Scotland to share data. From there, I moved to Vertu Motors and Haymarket Publishing, where I eventually led a UK-wide sales team. Nine years ago, Gary, the CEO of Redu, reached out to me, and I haven't looked back since. Now, as Managing Director, I focus on driving incremental revenue, building our team, and expanding our services into a full-service agency model.

What have been the biggest challenges you have faced so far?

Balancing the demands of running a business while raising my two children has been one of my biggest challenges. Managing a team and continuously learning requires focus, but ensuring I make time for my family has taught me how to work smarter, prioritise effectively, and delegate. It's not always easy, but it's been worth it.

Who do you respect most in your industry?

I have a huge amount of respect for Warrick and Hayley Lambert. I've worked with Warrick for years at Redu, and more recently, I've had the pleasure of teaming up with Hayley. Honestly, I think they've been in the affiliate industry since it was just a twinkle in its creator's eye! Over the last nine years, from being new to digital marketing to becoming the MD of Redu, I've learned so much from both of them. They've not only been invaluable mentors but also great sources of inspiration. I consider myself incredibly fortunate to have had them as guides throughout my journey.

What is your greatest strength?

My greatest strength is building strong relationships—whether it's with my team, clients, or partners. I believe success is built on trust, collaboration, and clear communication. I also like to think I'm a master at adapting to change and making new ideas come to life!

What is your biggest weakness?

My biggest weakness is dealing with imposter syndrome. Despite my achievements, I sometimes question if I'm good enough. Over time, I've learned to focus on my accomplishments and trust in my abilities, using it as motivation to keep growing.

Which fictional media character can you most relate to?

Disney's Mulan. Why she's inspiring: "She never gives up on herself and she proves that she can be just as good of a warrior as any man."

What has been your proudest achievement?

Professionally, my proudest achievement has been building the Redu Connect department from the ground up and expanding our agency offerings. Seeing the department thrive and watching my team deliver incredible results for our clients has been hugely rewarding. Personally, I'm proud of how I've managed to balance my career and family life. It's been a challenge and crazy at times, but it's also taught me resilience and the importance of prioritising what truly matters.

What are your future career aspirations?

This year, my focus is on continuing to grow Redu and strengthening our partnerships. My goal is to build a full-service agency model that offers our clients everything they need under one roof. I also want to continue fostering a culture of growth and innovation within my team. For me, success isn't just about hitting business targets—it's about building a legacy of strong, motivated individuals who achieve incredible things together.

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

It's never as bad or as good as it seems, so never get too high or too low, stay balanced. When things go wrong don't panic, just make decisions on the things you can control. Oh and always hire staff that are better than you!

How do you see your industry evolving in the next ten years?

The next decade will certainly bring significant advancements in technology, particularly in AI and automation, which will streamline processes and provide valuable insights. However, I believe the human element—creativity, storytelling, and genuine connection—will remain crucial. Businesses that embrace new technologies while staying true to their brand identity and values will stand out.

How do you like to unwind?

Managing Redu with a teenager, a toddler and crazy dog doesn't give me a lot of time to unwind! I've learnt to adore the chaos but I do make sure I have downtime. I love dog walks and going to the gym alone with my headphones and a podcast. I also love family time and eating out. This year I've made it a priority to have some work and child free time and have planned some city breaks with my partner and I can't wait!

redu.co.uk

Reedus.



“

...always hire staff that are better than you...

...Why we love our business...

It's February – the month of love and Valentine's Day of course. Highlights PR's Keith Newman asked some of his RADAR members to tell us what they love about their business.



How do you feel about Valentines? How do you cope with it? It seems the answer very much depends on whom you ask.

Throughout our lives we might have had an evolving relationship with both the concept and consequences of Valentines ~ much like that of Santa, Bank Holidays and Mothering Sunday.

As we grow, so do the connotations and expectations. Perhaps the wisest answer would be to make some kind of peace with it whatever our circumstances. Then our circumstances do not define us, we define them...at least as much as it is possible to do.

For many, it is a day to be endured with a resigned humiliation and loneliness ~a familiar experience of missing out and the rest of the world being all happiness and hope. For those receiving unwanted attention, it is particularly demanding as everything is turned upside down in the perpetual quest for just a bit of peace. For those enduring grief or betrayal, it is very tough. Please let us remember those souls, when we walk past the cards and the gifts.

Perhaps one of the most helpful things I have ever read suggested that we rename Valentine's Day ~ Friendship Day and to cherish every soul who is our good friend.

Dr Rebecca Williams Dinsdale
www.drrebecca.org.uk

To celebrate Valentine's Day, I wanted to share why I love being the CEO of Tell Us North. A key part of work is delivering Healthwatch Gateshead and Healthwatch Newcastle, where we amplify the voices of the people who are using local health and social care services. Our values as a local Healthwatch are about equity, collaboration, independence, truth and impact, all which naturally fit with me personally as an individual and why I work in the charitable/not for profit sector. So, what I find most rewarding is our aim to understand the public's needs, experiences, and concerns, and to act on their behalf. This often leads to meaningful changes and improvements in local services. Our independence and the impact we make for those whose voices are often overlooked is truly inspiring—what's not to love about making a difference?

Yvonne Probert CEO Tell Us North,
www.healthwatchnewcastle.org.uk



What I love about my business is trading on the historic and iconic Newcastle Quayside Market. I get to meet people from all over the world who need that special souvenir to remember their visit. I find out what students are studying and meet nervous parents dropping their kids off in a new city. I get to speak to local people who have so much knowledge about local history with some great stories to tell. I also meet people from the UK, often when there is a match on at St James' Park, who want a souvenir keepsake to take home with them. The Quayside Market is a social event and it's wonderful to be part of history that has been running since 1736.

Corinne Lewis Ward
www.powderbutterfly.co.uk



We are a small but mighty team, and we absolutely love collaborating with a fantastic network of partners across Northumberland and North of Tyne to bring aspiration and inspiration to children, young people, and their families.

As the lead delivery partner for the Northumberland Holiday Activities Partnership, we are privileged to witness and support the incredible work happening to make these initiatives a success.

Our team meetings are brimming with a 'can-do' attitude, focusing on opportunities rather than limitations. We're fortunate to have the creative space—and the unwavering support of our community—to turn our ideas into action.

We are also thrilled to work alongside our fabulous young leaders, who are the heart and soul of what we do. Their passion, energy, and enthusiasm fuel everything we achieve together.

And now, with our new Blyth office, we're even more inspired to continue this amazing journey. It's a wonderful space that brings fresh energy to our mission and connects us even more deeply to the communities we serve.

Chris Johnson
www.leadinglink.co.uk



Last month our RADAR members appeared on BBC TV, BBC Radio, Local TV and many magazines and newspapers. To find out more about the benefits of becoming a RADAR member, contact keith@highlightspr.co.uk or call Keith on 07814 397951.

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Veronica Swindale



Rachael Simpson

Marketing Reflections and Expectations

Rachael Simpson is a marketing strategist with over 18 years of experience and joined nesma in November 2024 as regional lead for Yorkshire & Humber, supporting businesses with our SkillsPartner programme to ensure the CIM and CIPR-accredited pathways it offers provide the best impact on team performance.

She also serves as vice chair for CIM's Yorkshire Regional Committee and works in the cybersecurity sector as a brand marketing strategist at BlackDice Cyber. She is passionate about lifelong learning and believes marketing is key to business growth.

Her expertise spans brand communications, content strategy, and consultancy. She has a proven record of delivering impactful, data-driven results in a wide range of sectors, from food retail to manufacturing and technology.

Veronica Swindale, nesma MD, asked her about the defining moments of 2024 and what she was excited about for 2025.

Reflecting on 2024:

What were the standout marketing trends of 2024?

One recurring theme for my team and me (from reading many publications, following brand news, attending conferences, etc.) was a renewed focus on brand consistency

and purpose-driven campaigns. Marketers increasingly realise that reliance only on short-term performance tactics, such as lead generation, PPC, and paid social media, is a risk that will erode long-term differentiation and brand equity. So, we've been seeing more conversation in the marketing community about this – from prominent thought leaders like Mark Ritson – with examples of brands investing in campaigns that reinforce their core values and identity. Les Binet and Peter Field's research on the 60/40 rule (60% brand building, 40% activation) got refreshed attention as marketers sought to future-proof their brands in a volatile economy. This is all about building deeper, more lasting connections with your audiences and highlights the importance of balancing short-term performance tactics with long-term brand-building strategies, a tension many of us are still navigating daily!

Which technologies had the biggest impact on marketing strategies last year?

I don't think anyone can answer this question without referencing the huge impact that Artificial intelligence (AI) and automation have had on redefining marketing practices. Generative AI tools such as ChatGPT and MidJourney have now been widely adopted for content creation, enabling faster and more cost-effective campaigns. A recent example is Coca-Cola's Christmas campaign, created entirely with generative AI. This caused a lot of backlashes globally in response to it (and a lot of publicity as a result!)

I also think there have been major advancements in marketing automation software, with the addition of AI for more granular analysis of contact behaviour and campaigns, combined with 'no hands' automation—especially in areas like customer success/support, where the use case and need for automation are significant, especially for scaling companies. This was evidenced in HubSpot's updated CRM tools, which helped support teams manage real-time engagement.

At the same time, Google's AI-driven Performance Max campaigns allowed marketers to optimise ad delivery across platforms.

Looking Ahead to 2025:

How do you think AI and automation will continue to impact marketing strategies?

In 2025, AI's role will expand into areas like predictive analytics and conversational AI. However, as automation grows, brands must ensure ethical AI use, and maintaining authenticity alongside technological advancement will remain a challenge. AI may streamline processes, but genuine storytelling will set successful brands apart. The key to long-term success will be using AI to enhance, not replace, human creativity.

How should marketers strike a balance between innovation and maintaining authenticity?

Balancing innovation with authenticity requires marketers to anchor their strategies in the core values and identity of the brand. While innovation through AI tools, advanced analytics, and dynamic content is essential for keeping pace with market trends, it should never overshadow your brand's consistent voice, purpose, and long-term objectives. For me, consistency builds credibility and loyalty. Marketers must use innovations to enhance their story, not rewrite it. A good way to get that balance is continuously advocating for brand-building activities, as this ensures that innovation supports broader, long-term brand equity rather than being consumed by short-term performance goals.

What new challenges might marketers face in 2025?

Marketing as an industry and marketers as professionals are evolving to meet higher consumer expectations while balancing the potential of technology with the need for authenticity.

Secondly, I don't think this is a 'new' challenge—it is a significant ongoing challenge for marketing. However, with a tightening economy and constrained budgets, I believe marketing will face heightened scrutiny to prove its value.

And here's where I think some of the pinch points will come...

Demonstrating ROI: Marketers will be expected to justify every pound spent, tying campaigns directly to revenue, customer acquisition, and retention. The focus will shift to high-performing, measurable activities, making it harder to justify long-term brand-building efforts.

Short-term vs long-term: As pressure mounts to deliver quick returns, marketers risk overinvesting in performance marketing at the expense of brand equity. This could erode differentiation, making it harder for brands to maintain loyalty and command pricing power.

Aligning marketing with broader business strategy: To secure stakeholders' buy-in, marketing teams must align more closely with business priorities, such as market share growth, profitability, or customer lifetime value.

Ignoring skills gaps: With rapidly evolving tools and platforms, teams that don't prioritise ongoing learning will fall behind in delivering cutting-edge campaigns.

How should marketers prepare for them?

Marketers must prioritise continuous learning and communicate their value to the business by addressing skills gaps and aligning with organisational goals to demonstrate impact. Training like CIM or CIPR qualifications provide teams with strategic frameworks and up-to-date knowledge of emerging trends. In addition, digital upskilling in tools for AI content creation or analytics tools for predictive insights ensures teams can deliver innovative, measurable campaigns.

Most importantly, marketers must demonstrate the tangible and intangible impact of their efforts. Combining financial metrics, such as ROI and customer lifetime value, with qualitative insights, like brand perception, helps present a full picture of marketing's contribution.

Long-term brand investments should be positioned as essential to mitigating risks. This approach underscores how marketing supports resilience and pricing power. Engaging your stakeholders early (stakeholder mapping is a great framework to use) ensures alignment with business goals, secures buy-in, and strengthens marketing's role as a strategic driver of growth. Marketers should position themselves and their functions as vital contributors to business growth, even in challenging times.

If you want to get your marketing into the best shape to tackle 2025, get in touch with Jen at 07734 222 254 or hello@nesma.co.uk

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Beyond the Page

Fostering creative connections in our North East magazine room.

Originally, our vision for the magazine room was not just about creating a space but about curating an experience—a dedicated area to display our carefully selected, favourite independent magazines. We envisioned a place where local customers could leisurely browse.

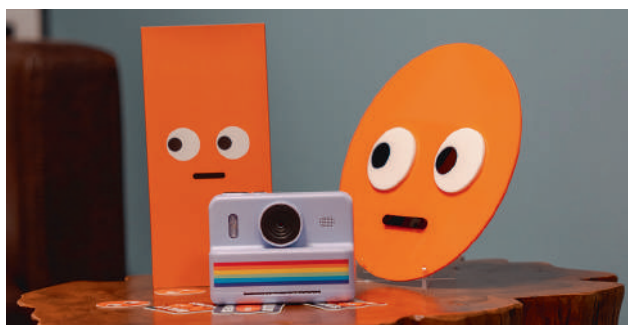
However, as our concept developed, it evolved into something greater: a sanctuary for self-expression and a space for cultivating a dedicated sense of community for print lovers here in the North. We decided to steer away from just solo browsing and move into how we could accommodate for collaboration and exploration, in our unique space.

Our collaboration with Sarah from Kinship started with a seemingly minor project—designing a mug. This however, quickly blossomed into a comprehensive rebranding of our business, creativity handled by her talented mind. The rebrand included a fresh, modern logo that matched more seemingly with what we do here. This experience revealed Sarah's deep understanding of our vision and marked the beginning of what would become a fruitful, long-lasting relationship, truly changing the direction of our brands identity.



Sarah is renowned not merely for her design expertise but also for her dedication to fostering a sense of community among creatives. Traditionally working as a freelance designer, she spent many solitary hours in coffee shops, disconnected from like-minded peers. This changed dramatically one day when an unexpected companion joined her at her usual spot. This encounter sparked a realisation: there was a pressing need for greater support and connectivity among freelance workers. Motivated by this insight, Billy No Mates was born, a vibrant community that brings creatives together in unique, inviting spaces for friendly coworking sessions.

Our magazine room, inspired by Sarah's initiative, then evolved as a vision of a similar gathering place for those passionate about print and creativity. With the perfect space at our disposal, our next challenge was to attract a community that shared our enthusiasm. With Sarah's extensive network and her commitment to building connections, she felt like the ideal partner to help us achieve this goal.



This collaboration came to fruition on January 11th, when Billy No Mates and Unique Magazines came together for a special event. Over three hours, creatives from various backgrounds gathered to chat about future projects, share insights on upcoming reads, and discuss all things related to print and design. We made a conscious decision to keep the day free from formal work, to enhance the opportunity for pure and personal connections. The event attracted both individuals familiar with our brands and new faces, eager to explore the opportunities offered by a thriving North East community. This gathering not only celebrated our shared passion for printed magazines but also the potential for new friendships and collaborations.

In the North East, despite a backdrop of limited opportunities and accessibility challenges, our community's capacity for warmth and hospitality stands unmatched. We are steadfast in our belief that opportunity and a sense of community are not just present but abundant at our doorstep, awaiting further exploration.



The palpable success of our collaboration with Billy No Mates left participants feeling creatively inspired, supported, and valued. Everyone departed with their hands full of new magazines and their minds brimming with innovative ideas and fresh perspectives, in their creative endeavours.

Looking ahead, we are committed to organizing more events that are free of charge, featuring inspirational speakers to make creative opportunities more accessible here in the North East and to encourage our community members to achieve their full potential. Our magazine room offers more than inspiration—it is a place for community building, providing a sense of belonging and connection.

We invite you to keep an eye on our social media channels for announcements about upcoming events and drop-in sessions. These gatherings will take place both in our magazine room and at special locations, supporting causes close to our hearts and magazines that fuel our deepest passions.

www.uniquemagazines.co.uk

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 Our Blog: www.themagazineclub.co.uk



Samuel Marriott-Dowding

Marriott Communications: 4 Years and 4 Lessons Learned

Every new year I gain an enormous sense of accomplishment; not just for having finished a year, or for the adventures of a new year ahead, but every January 11th signifies a new year of trade for Marriott Communications.

Much like every other business or organisation, and especially during the current economic climate, we have had our own share of wins and losses. With every new year, I always try to embrace the ways my agency evolves and grows.

Some of these ways are intentional, and in truth there are even times when evolution happens that I, and we, don't control - this is part of the adventure and excitement of being an entrepreneur.

Over the past four years there have been many lessons learned, some more important than others, but there are four which influence and shape the way I look to the future of Marriott Communications.

Adaptability is Survival

Adaptability is the cornerstone of any business, especially a fast-paced PR Agency. Businesses who can pivot, embrace change, and innovate are better equipped to navigate uncertainties and seize new opportunities. Flexibility is essential because even the most well-thought-out strategies can falter in the face of unexpected challenges. By staying open to change and continually adjusting their approaches, businesses can maintain relevance, outpace competitors, and thrive in evolving environments.

Setbacks pave the path for the best Comebacks

Setbacks, failures, and rejection are inevitable parts of business, but the ability to recover and push forward is what defines true success.

Entrepreneurship requires and the mental strength to navigate tough times. Many who remain motivated and committed, even when times are the toughest, are more likely to overcome obstacles, setting themselves apart from others who may give up too soon.

Relationships Matter

Building strong connections with clients, partners, and even competitors fosters trust,

collaboration, and mutual respect.

These relationships cultivate a network that can unlock opportunities, provide valuable resources, and offer guidance during pivotal moments. By prioritizing meaningful interactions and fostering genuine trust; entrepreneurs can lay the foundation for sustainable growth and resilience, ensuring their business thrives in both challenges and opportunities.

Prioritise Value, Not Revenue

For any business, organisation or entrepreneur, solving meaningful problems and creating genuine value for customers or clients, businesses foster loyalty and trust that extend far beyond a single transaction.

Prioritizing value leads to a stronger reputation, deeper client relationships, and a route to long-term profitability. Chasing quick profits may offer short-term gains, a commitment to delivering real value ensures enduring success and growth.

As I reflect on the past four years of Marriott Communications, I am reminded that the journey of an Agency owner is as much about learning as it is about celebrating achievements. The past four years have been the greatest adventure; we've won, failed, learned, grown, and achieved more than we ever could have imagined. Our next chapter promises even higher heights, stronger partnerships, and a commitment to innovation that pushes the craft of public relations into art as we shape the future of businesses and organisations on a global scale.

marriottcommunications.com



Sarah Dale and Sarah Walker

Have you got exciting plans for 2025?

Award-winning duo can help you promote them!

It's only February, but it's already been a busy start to the year for SASS media Ltd!

The Sarahs, Walker and Dale, who picked up best new creative business and standout achievement at the Best New Tees Business Awards in November, have been pitching for new contracts, as well as enjoying resuming work they enjoy with longstanding clients.

SASS is building a great reputation for supporting businesses, public sector organisations and charities with getting their stories published and helping to build their brand online – and is ready to help support even more with their good news stories and events in 2025.

Sarah W says: “As well as promoting various events and good news stories for the likes of Croxdale Group Durham, Jacksons Law, Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust and A Taste of Africa North East – all longstanding clients – we have been busy writing and editing a number of B2B publications for Benham Publishing.

“However, in addition to all that, we've got a

number of other exciting events we will be involved in promoting this year, including Thomas Judge of First Contact UK Mental Health's charity walk to Spain – with a fridge on his back!

“Thomas is hoping to raise £200,000 for his CIC – soon to become a charity – which supports people with mental ill health in recovery and managing their condition, as well as their carers – so we're pleased to be involved in promoting this fantastic effort.”

The duo are also looking to support other events across the region this year with their PR needs, in addition to resuming work in the NHS – all while maintaining the high quality of work their retained clients are accustomed to.

The pair have a wide range of fantastic testimonials on their website, including the most recent from Croxdale Group Durham, a large motor dealership, servicing and repair centre, authorised for Citroen, DS, MG, Peugeot, Vauxhall, Fiat, Abarth, Alfa Romeo, Jeep and Mitsubishi vehicles.

Anthony Rockingham, managing director, Croxdale Group, said: “I highly recommend SASS media as an indispensable partner and trusted extension of our team.

“Their expertise in public relations and communications is outstanding, making them a reliable and highly skilled resource.

“Working with SASS media is a pleasure, as they consistently deliver professional, high-quality results.

“Whether crafting engaging news articles, supporting our social media content, or developing wider PR strategies, SASS

media ensures success in all aspects of our communications.”

The pair have also helped a range of charities, including Autism Parents Together, who needed some PR support to attract more volunteers and trustees.

Nicola McBean, CEO of Autism Parents Together Tees Valley, said: “The Sarahs' help was amazing, timing a media campaign perfectly with autism acceptance week and providing coverage in The Gazette and supporting me to do successful interviews on BBC Tees and Zetland FM.

“Having never been interviewed before, I felt quite nervous. Sarah Dale was by my side throughout, attending both radio interviews with me to put me at ease.

“Nothing was too much trouble for the two Sarahs – they were always on hand to help.”

Nicola reported the PR campaign resulted in lots of good quality trustees and volunteers coming forward and said she “highly recommends SASS media to friends and colleagues” who would be “looked after in a professional manner”.

So what help does your organisation need to promote itself in 2025?

Whether it's a long-term PR and marketing campaign, or a one-off event you need help with promoting, SASS can help.

For more information, contact us on 07896 894538 or visit www.sassmedialtd.co.uk

You can also email Sarah Walker at sarah.walker@sassmedialtd.co.uk and request a no obligation chat and coffee!



Tim Goodill

Behind the Lens – A focus on film maker Tim Goodill of Cassini Films

Established in 2021 by Tim Goodill, Cassini Films has rapidly emerged as a prominent player in the North East's creative landscape. Combining commercial expertise and artistic innovation with a focus on community impact, Goodill has accomplished remarkable achievements—both individually and collaboratively through the production company. Notably, he secured £2 million in Arts Council funding through a single transformative project.

Cassini Films' debut feature brought high-profile collaborators like Sunderland based band, The Futureheads and Peter Salmon (Endemol) into the fold, setting the stage for future successes. Now an award-winning enterprise with a Royal Television Society accolade, Cassini Films specialises in community-centric productions that range from corporate campaigns to documentary shorts, all with the goal of sparking awareness and fostering regional growth.

First Steps in Television

Tim Goodill's journey began in Yorkshire Television, where he cut his teeth as an assistant camera man on peak time productions like *Heartbeat*. Over time, his focus shifted to post-production, where he contributed to iconic projects such as *Top Ten Sci-Fi Moments* for Sky, featuring interviews with legends like Steven Spielberg and Sigourney Weaver.

Goodill's creative pivot occurred when Northern Film + Media (now NE Screen) supported his first directorial ventures. The *Hard Sell*, a comedic short about a chaotic call centre, marked his early success, gaining traction on the BBC Film Network. His short film *Blood Steel*, a poignant story based on events at the Redcar steelworks, earned him critical acclaim, including a Royal Television Society award. These projects set the foundation for the launch of Cassini Films.

Cassini's Philosophy and Vision

Named after a NASA satellite which was sent into space to discover new information about Saturn, Cassini Films mirrors the spirit of exploration and innovation. Its logo—a celestial-inspired "C"—represents the company's mission to connect storytelling with impactful messaging.

"I enjoy projects with heart," Goodill explains. "Whether it's a campaign, a short drama, or a documentary, the goal is to tell stories that resonate, build relationships, and create a legacy."

The company's ability to balance artistic ambition with community engagement has led to collaborations with councils, schools, and even major musical acts.

Currently, Goodill is working on a behind-the-scenes documentary featuring students and musicians, fostering arts involvement at a grassroots level.

A Pioneer in Inclusive Tourism

Cassini Films is also breaking new ground in the tourism and heritage sector. The company has been selected as one of 12 organisations to participate in the All-Access Pass: Future of Inclusive Tourism programme, in partnership with Destination North East England. This 10-week challenge focuses on leveraging 5G and immersive technologies to address accessibility, access to sites in poor weather conditions, and engaging tourists without access to personal technology.

At the conclusion of the programme, Cassini Films and the other participants will have the opportunity to showcase their innovative solutions to tourism leaders, reinforcing the company's commitment to combining technology and storytelling for social good.

Behind the Scenes

Running a production company isn't for the faint-hearted. "There's an immense amount of work behind even a short video," Goodill admits. "Understanding a client's needs, their message, and their target audience is crucial. It's about creating something that connects on an emotional level."

In addition to its own projects, Cassini Films provides high-end post-production and Visual Effects (VFX) services, demonstrating versatility in an ever-evolving industry.

What's Next for Cassini Films?

Goodill and his team are gearing up for an exciting slate of projects, including the very early planning stages of a large-scale musical collaboration with musician Barry Hyde and ongoing community initiatives. While the workload is heavy, the passion behind Cassini Films ensures that each endeavour is both meaningful and memorable whether it be for a commercial documentary or a cultural short.

Life Beyond the Lens

Outside the studio, Goodill enjoys immersing himself in the region's vibrant music scene, though family life keeps him grounded. With twin girls, a young son, and an older daughter, he balances his creative pursuits with the joys of fatherhood.

As Cassini Films continues to grow, one thing remains clear: Tim Goodill's vision is not just about making films—it's about making a difference.

More information at www.cassinifilm.com





Craig Hawkes

A story to be told

Craig Hawkes is the Founder and MD at Kaleidoscope CFA-Newcastle's Leading Video, Animation and Photography Agency

Craig tell us about Kaleidoscope? Whats the genesis story?

Kaleidoscope offers services and expertise in branded documentary films, animation, videography and photography. We help businesses and brands tell their stories in the most captivating ways possible.

We initially set up in 2013 but under another name- Kaleidoscope was born in 2017, one of our main aims was to gain experience through our work. My background is fine art and film making but I didnt have loads of experience so I needed to do some work for free in order to show people what I was capable of! Thankfully it paid off and we started to work with the NHS... the rest, as they say, is history! So much of our work comes from introductions and recommendations which is a testament to the quality of the projects we produce. We truly enjoy meeting new clients and getting excited about their projects- the whole team gets involved.

What sets Kaleidoscope apart from other video/animation production companies?

Firstly all our staff are salaried - job security and satisfaction is so important to us and often not the norm in the creative industries. We believe in our team and want them to feel part of the Kaleidoscope family. With a strong team comes high productivity and a brilliant creative force.

We always want to gain a deep understanding of the narrative of our clients. In a world flooded with standard content, we specialize in turning their vision into a compelling, standout story with a fresh, artistic touch. We craft every project with care, creativity, and attention to detail. We bring our clients stories to life!

Who do you work with? which sectors

In the beginning we worked a lot with the public sector, over the last few years we've been asked to work on projects within the construction industry- which is vast and the charity sector, which we enjoy doing some pro bono work for, its important to give back when you can. We've also worked with some big brands including Pfizer!

What is your team like?

Our team at Kaleidoscope are brilliant- each member has a specialism but also full creative skill sets which means they can jump onto a project at any point. Unlike a lot of video/film production companies we also



The Kaleidoscope team.

have animators and photographers as part of the team which stands us part and allows us to work on more projects collectively.

What are your plans for 2025?

Thrive and grow! We've got some really exciting projects in the pipeline this year. We want to build our portfolio so when Netflix come knocking we're ready!

Funny story- when I was younger I had dinner with a Channel 4 commissioner- it was a big deal but I didnt know it at the time. They asked to see my portfolio and I didnt have one!!! A massive missed opportunity but also a really good life lesson... be prepared and make sure you have a cracking portfolio to showcase all your work!!

Kaleidoscope CFA are always looking to work on interesting projects.

**Contact Craig: craig@kaleidoscopecfa.com
kaleidoscopecfa.com**

Blyth woman launches debut novel – *A Stitch in Wartime*

A local retired mental health nurse who writes under the pen name Jennifer Verity, has penned four romantic genre novels since retiring ten years ago.

All featuring the North East, specifically Blyth, which is fictionally called Rawdon-by-the-sea in the novels. The first novel chronologically is *A Stitch in Wartime* which is now available to purchase on kindle and paperback via Amazon.

All proceeds from the first 30 sales were donated to The Royal British Legion. The story revolves around true events - the pen pal relationship that developed between her parents during WW2. The sequel *If Only You Knew* is due for release in February 2025.

Here is Jennifer's account of the novel: "Whenever I think of my writing I think of *The Red Shoes* fairytale. The girl loves dancing so much she dances to the point of exhaustion and ultimately her death! Laughing at the exaggerated comparison – suffice to say writing is my lifetime passion. Yet I only started writing novels ten years ago upon retiring as a mental health nurse in Newcastle. The need to earn a living hindered my obsession!

The idea, progressing from informal jottings, was to bring into focus the world of mental health nursing, specifically from my experiences working for over 30 years in an acute psychiatric clinic. Thus my first manuscript was a reply to one of my favourite television programmes - *Call the Midwife*. I couldn't bring to mind any TV series, based on novels, which depicted mental health nursing. I thought, 'you think being a midwife is story worthy? Well, read this!' And so my debut was written within three months of retirement, with the working title *Little Wing*. Heartened by how much I enjoyed the process, I put pen to paper again writing three more novels, working backwards chronologically to the beginning of WW2.

Traditional publishing alluded me, so undefeated, I self-published. *A Stitch in Wartime* was launched in November 2024.



This novel picks up the fictional character Nancy Posset working as a teenage seamstress in Leeds during the war. Nancy responds to a call within the factory to write to a soldier abroad. Gunner Bill Harper in Palestine becomes her pen pal and the pair become romantically involved – on paper. Bill had fled his hometown Rawdon-by-the-sea (based on Blyth, Northumberland) at the age of fourteen to join the army, chasing adventure, only to find deep trauma and battle shock. Although fictional the characters are inspired by my own parents throughout the war, after which they married, but remained shadowed by the effects of war.

The sequel *If Only You Knew*, due for launch 1st February 2025, takes their story to northeast Northumberland in search of jobs, a home and security for their toddler daughter Sorcha. But their troubles follow them, threatening to tear the family apart.

During novel writing I feel I'm walking in the footsteps of my mum and dad, reaching an understanding and sympathy for their struggles, highlighted by the contrasting environments of a cosseted urban life in Leeds, compared to the hardships of a northeast coastal pit village. As Nancy herself describes – learning to decipher the pit speak dialect is like trying to understand a foreign language!

Both books in the series to date contain historical themes - all resonating today - unmet ill health, poor housing, misunderstood sexuality, factory closures and redundancy. Heartache, yet heart-warming hope and faith are explored throughout – but which will win through?"

***A Stitch in Wartime* is now available from Amazon UK and Kindle direct in paperback and e-book format. Connect with Jennifer Verity author on Facebook, where you can follow more of her writing journey.**

Academic Results: A consequence, not the purpose of a good education

By Geoffrey Stanford, Headmaster,
Royal Grammar School, Newcastle.

This year, we are celebrating the 500th anniversary of the Royal Grammar School Newcastle, which makes the school one of the oldest learning institutions in the country.

While RGS received the Royal Charter from Elizabeth I in 1600, the school only moved to its current site in Jesmond in 1906. Over the centuries, RGS has undergone many transformations, and this ability to adapt underpins its enduring success. Today, the RGS is widely recognized for its academic achievements, though this has not always been the case. It may also seem surprising when I emphasize that academic results should be the consequence of a good education, not its purpose.

That is not to say that our results do not matter. In fact, this year, not only did RGS students achieve record results but we have also received a Diamond award from Alps Education (the UK's top analytics platform for tracking students' academic progress) for our 'value added.' By this measure, relative to schools with students of equivalent academic ability, our A-level results were in the top 10 per cent nationally and our GCSE results were in the top 1 per cent nationally, including for those with SEND needs. In other words, not only do we have a highly academic cohort but students at all levels of ability achieve their potential and their results are over and above what students of similar ability elsewhere achieve.



Geoffrey Stanford, Headmaster.

It is only right that I celebrate the success of three particular students: one achieved the top mark in the country for Computer Science A-level; a second managed the same feat for English A-level; and a third was the only person in the country to score 100% in Further Maths A-level with a perfect 300/300. Having such talent brought together in the same place is an extraordinary privilege, creating positive momentum. Indeed, just recently, all those who were interviewed at Oxford received offers, with Cambridge due to announce their places at the end of the month. However, I am equally proud of those who achieve lesser results with just as much, if not more, effort. I value the journey of those who take different routes through university or recognise that the best route for them is straight into the workplace, perhaps through degree apprenticeships.

Just as every child is different, no two paths through life will be the same. Some will follow

tried and tested routes, while others will have careers in jobs that we cannot yet imagine. In each case, the education we provide has to set them up for future success by teaching them a whole range of things beyond just achieving high grades in exams. These include developing a set of values to live by, the ability to work alongside other people, the critical thinking skills to address problems, and the resilience to cope when things are tough. Much of this growth happens in the classroom, but just as much is gained beyond it - on the sports pitch, on stage, during a Duke of Edinburgh expedition, or helping others through service activities.

In many ways, exams are a rite of passage for young people and good academic results undeniably serve as a stepping stone towards future success; but they only take you so far. Few meaningful achievements in life come from an individual working alone in an exam hall. True success depends on the collective effort of people working together toward a shared goal. We therefore aim to ensure that our students can serve in and lead teams, sharing responsibility for and coping with failure when it comes. They will be learning from and bouncing back from disappointments along the way, and, in doing so, they will be putting into practice some of the best lessons that a good education can provide.



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From the Headteachers Study...

James Crowe

New Headteacher of St Joseph's Catholic Academy, Hebburn

James Crowe joined St Joseph's Catholic Academy, Hebburn in September 2024 as the new Headteacher. St Joseph's Catholic Academy is part of Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust, which has 25 primary schools and five secondary schools across South Tyneside, East Durham and Sunderland.

What has been your career path so far?

I studied geography and then completed teacher training at Durham University, with placements at Stokesley and Tudhoe, before joining St Edmund Campion Catholic School for my first job. This school became Cardinal Hume Catholic School in Gateshead. From joining 20 years ago as a geography teacher I worked my way up to the role of associate deputy headteacher.

Why did you join St Joseph's?

I had been an Associate Deputy Headteacher for a few years and I was ready for the next step. This headteacher position came up at exactly the right time. St Joseph's was definitely the one for me. Pre-Covid, I did some training here and got a really good vibe about the school and I have kept an eye on it ever since.

What is your initial view of Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust?

The Trust is smaller than my previous one which was attractive to me. There is a helpful and genuine cohesion within the Trust which is very good.

How have you been welcomed by your new team?

It has been very positive. We have also recruited three new members to bolster the senior leadership team who joined us in January.

What do you enjoy most about your job?

The diversity – each day is very different. In my previous role, to a certain extent, it could be quite repetitive, as I had a very clear rhythm to the year. Here, everything is very different and I have more opportunities for strategy. I do miss teaching though and would like to incorporate that into my role at some point. This is the first year in my career where I haven't had a GCSE or A Level class so it is quite a change.

What improvements have you implemented so far and plan to bring in?

My initial priority is to drive up standards of behaviour along with teaching and learning as we develop the structures to achieve outstanding outcomes for the students. We are looking at developing the site and working with external partners to add more facilities, especially in sport. The school is over-subscribed, so we need to increase our sports provision in particular.

What has been your proudest achievement in your career?

Apart from getting this job, my proudest achievement is helping my last school achieve an Outstanding grading from Ofsted.

What are the key challenges facing the education sector?

Funding, the pressure on local authorities to help pupils with SEND (special educational needs and/or disabilities) means more challenges fall to schools, the lost years due to Covid with a focus on reading and literacy standards, a changing curriculum, and uncertainty over Key Stage 5 pathways.

What has been the best piece of leadership advice you have received?

There is often no need to give an immediate answer. My advice is to think things through and give an answer that has been considered from all angles.

What is your leadership style?

It is centred around empowering others. That is the style of management that I have experienced throughout my career and that is what I want to emulate in my role. No-one needs to be micro-managed; they are professionals and it's key to treat them as such.

How do you unwind?

Spending time with my wife and our two daughters, aged five and one. I like to go walking, travelling, going to see Sunderland AFC and playing golf. I have been really structured and strict with myself to make time to switch off. Sharing the nursery/school run with my wife means I make sure I manage my working time well. I am flexible with my team too as I am mindful of the challenges working parents face. You only get one chance to attend events such as their Nativity or Sports Day, and people remember your flexibility for special times like these.

For more information about BCCET, visit www.bccet.org.uk





James Crowe

Designing the future of Girls' Education

By Amanda Hardie, Headteacher

As a member of the Girls' Day School Trust (GDST), Newcastle High School for Girls (NHSG) benefits from cutting-edge research, such as the *Designing the Future of Girls' Education Insights Report and Framework*.

This report builds on decades of GDST expertise, alongside insights from academics, educators, pupils, and campaigners. It follows the landmark 2022 Girls' Futures Report, which explored girls' experiences growing up today and how education can support their ambitions.

Such reports, combined with NHSG's ongoing consultations with teachers, pupils, and parents, help us refine our girls-only approach, ensuring we foster a culture and curriculum that empower every girl to learn without limits.

At NHSG, we nurture an environment where girls are encouraged to dream big, speak up, and aim high and the GDST report helps us build on this foundation, ensuring every girl develops the confidence to become her best self.

Inspiring Education for Every Girl

The *Designing the Future of Girls' Education* report identifies three key areas: Classroom, Curriculum, and Culture.

Girls in the Classroom

GDST research highlights that girls often feel underrepresented in co-educational classrooms, where attention can disproportionately focus on a small subset of demanding boys. However, simply creating an all-girl environment isn't enough—confidence-building and challenge-embracing are also critical.

At NHSG, our classrooms empower girls to explore, question, and take risks. In this collaborative and supportive atmosphere, girls find and confidently use their voices. For example, the report emphasises girls' preference for project-based learning and collaboration. From Nursery to Sixth Form, our curriculum integrates opportunities for teamwork, whether solving mathematical puzzles in Junior School or analysing key texts collaboratively in Senior School.



The Curriculum and Co-Curriculum

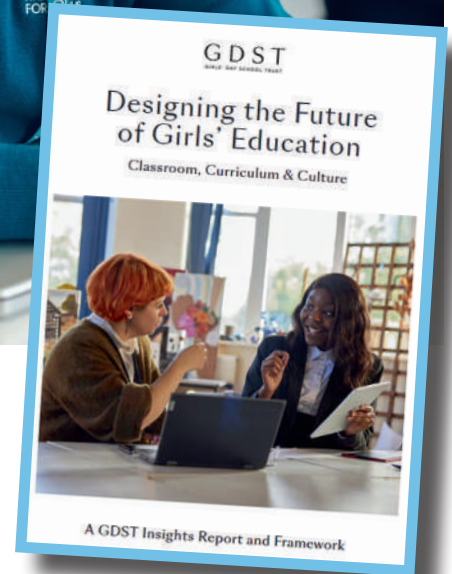
Our mission is to equip girls with tools to succeed in a dynamic world. Whether inspiring STEM engagement, ensuring equal access to sports, or fostering leadership skills, we aim to remove barriers and open doors.

The report stresses the need to break down barriers preventing girls from pursuing STEM. At NHSG, STEM is deeply embedded in our ethos. Our girls defy stereotypes, exploring STEM subjects with enthusiasm from an early age. For example, Junior School pupils engineer pavilion designs, work towards Primary Engineers awards, and participate in Lego League.

Our annual STEMpowerment event connects pupils with industry leaders, universities, and innovative technology. This hands-on exposure fosters curiosity and passion for STEM careers. Furthermore, NHSG has partnered with Sage and Northumbria University to deliver a bespoke STEM Diploma, equipping our girls with in-demand tech skills.

Culture

Creating an empowering culture for girls is paramount. There's a perspective suggesting gender equality is best achieved in co-educational settings. I strongly disagree. Research and the GDST report highlight that girls thrive when their education focuses on their unique needs. In mixed settings, girls often adapt their behaviour to fit rather than flourish. Our environment prioritises girls' empowerment, equipping them with the skills to challenge inequality and navigate life with resilience.



Role models play a pivotal role in cultivating this culture. At NHSG, alumnae regularly share their journeys with pupils, discussing both their achievements and the challenges they've overcome. These powerful stories inspire our girls to aim high. Beyond our community, events like the Future First Conference expose pupils to trailblazing women in diverse fields, fostering ambition and showcasing what's possible.

Looking Ahead

The GDST's *Designing the Future of Girls' Education* report is a reminder of why girls-only education is so powerful. It challenges us to keep innovating and collaborating to empower the next generation. By continuing to nurture a supportive, ambitious culture, we can equip girls to shape a more equal future.

Scan the QR code to access the full report.
www.newcastlehigh.gdst.net





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Newcastle's specialist recruitment agency for education relaunches in Leeds with two new senior hires



Matthew Shone



Vikki Lowrey

Newcastle's specialist recruitment consultancy for the education sector, The Education Network, has announced its expansion into Leeds again – the consultancy formerly had an office there which closed during the pandemic.

At the same time, two new senior members of staff have been appointed as part of consultancy's ambitious expansion plans.

Firstly, Vikki Lowrey has been appointed as director of Yorkshire and is responsible for establishing the Yorkshire division. She brings a wealth of experience within the recruitment sector, not only running her own business in the past, but also holding a position within a similar recruitment consultancy in Newcastle.

Vikki is supported by Matthew Shone as branch manager. Matthew has also previously worked for another national education recruitment firm and is a SEND specialist.

Commenting on her new appointment,

Vikki said: "I am excited to be setting up the Yorkshire division for The Education Network. We have decades of experience providing essential support to primary, secondary and SEND schools throughout the UK when there is an urgent or unexpected vacancy to fill.

"We have made a great start since we reopened and are already ahead of target with many new contracts across Leeds as well as several bids and tenders in progress. We are starting up specialist divisions and will expand from these into primary and secondary schools.

"The business enjoys a great team spirit. All new consultants are given support to help build their desks and develop client relationships.

"Our aim is to be the market leading recruitment agency in the education sector and to achieve this, we always go above and beyond expectations to ensure we secure the right candidate for each new role. We have a very bright future ahead of us."

From its five offices in Newcastle, Durham, Middlesbrough, Leeds and Birmingham, the Education Network places thousands of education professionals in supply, interim and permanent posts nationwide in its partner secondary, primary and SEND schools.

The company was established 15 years ago in Newcastle but the team has been together for over twenty years. CEO, Kevin Gill, a specialist recruitment consultant, is delighted to establish an office in Leeds again.

He said: "It was a very difficult decision to close the office during the pandemic, so it is great that we have been able to hit the ground running.

The team has already made many good connections and is getting its message out to schools in the area. The location of our office on Aire Street was a big factor when choosing where to re-establish the business because not only is it centrally situated but it also has a roof terrace where we can hold networking events.

"We take great pride in our work and will continue to grow the business without compromising any of our core principles of acting responsibly, honesty and ethically to make a valuable difference within the sector.

"We look forward to bringing our own particular brand of education recruitment to schools in Leeds and making The Education Network the sector's first choice when staffing issues arise."

www.theeducationnetwork.co.uk



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Nicola Smillie



A new era at Argyle House School – We welcome Mrs Smillie as Interim Head

After over 20 years as Head of Argyle House School, Mr Christopher Johnson retired at the end of 2024 and we welcome Mrs Nicola Smillie as Interim Head.

Nicola is a Hispanic Studies and French graduate who has worked in the independent sector for 30 years. Previously she has held the positions of Headmistress at Saint Martin's School, Solihull and Alderley Edge School for Girls. Both schools are "all-through" schools for pupils aged 2 –18 years. Nicola is also an inspector for the Independent Schools Inspectorate.

Argyle House School is proud to be owned by Forfar Education. The school's aims and ethos align with Forfar's vision to put the needs of each child at the heart of the school to create a friendly, welcoming community which empowers children with the tools to be successful.

At Argyle House School our aim is to provide pupils with an all-round education in a supportive environment where every child feels safe, happy, cared for and valued as an individual. Whether your son or daughter joins our school in our Nursery, part way through Prep School, or in Senior School, you can feel confident they have started on a path which will help them succeed and flourish.

Pupils at Argyle House achieve the highest academic standards but we believe that education is far more than simply the acquisition of examination results. Our dedicated staff are highly qualified and experienced classroom practitioners.

They are extremely committed to inspiring pupils to aim high and achieve their full potential. We encourage independent

learning, a community spirit, and we empower students to embrace responsibility and learn to celebrate diversity in a spirit of understanding and tolerance that helps them become better global citizens.

We firmly believe in educating the whole person and realise that learning takes place outside of the classroom as well as in lessons.

At Argyle House School there is a full programme of extra-curricular activities on offer. Our pupils excel in sport, music and drama, as well as benefitting from the many trips and visits on offer.

Pupils leave Argyle House School as well-educated young people with highly developed interpersonal skills and a broad range of interests. They are confident and well-prepared for the next exciting phase of their lives.

The best way to find out more about Argyle House is to come and visit us, either at one of our open events or by making an individual appointment. Mrs Smillie would be delighted to offer a tour of the school.

Places available for September 2025 please contact Aimee Palin, Marketing and Admissions Coordinator, to visit the school on admissions@argylehouseschool.co.uk or 0191 510 0726.



We Rise Wellness Studio opens in North Shields

We Rise, a brand-new wellness studio, has officially opened its doors at the creative and co-working hub, Harbour House, in North Shields. The studio offers a unique blend of yoga, breathwork, meditation, sound therapy and functional mobility classes designed to build strength, resilience and empower individuals both physically and mentally.

Founded by James and Vera Powles, We Rise is more than just a wellness studio – it is a community. The couple has crafted a space where individuals can flourish, not only on their fitness journeys but in their overall well-being.

“It doesn’t get easier. You get stronger.”

This powerful tagline drives the studio’s mission. James, a science teacher, and Vera, a biomedical sciences graduate, have made it their mission to provide clients with science-backed practices that promote immediate and long-term health, support their nervous systems and lessen restraints on personal growth. “Our tagline reflects the philosophy that growth is about building inner strength to face life’s challenges head-on, whether on the mat or out in the wider World,” says James Powles.

Building a Community of Strength

The studio is located within Harbour House, a new creative and co-working hub in North Shields that is quickly becoming a key part of the local community. The studio’s location perfectly aligns with the vision of Harbour House, which aims to provide innovative and supportive spaces for businesses and individuals in the area.

Join the Movement

We Rise offers a variety of membership options, class passes and an introductory offer. Memberships include complimentary access to We



Photo by Sarah Jean, www.sarahjean.co.uk

Rise Online, where clients can enjoy a wealth of wellness content that complements their studio experience.

For more information about We Rise, to view the class schedule, or to book a session, visit www.werisestudio.com or follow the studio on Instagram at [@werise.studio](https://www.instagram.com/werise.studio)

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☎ 01661 842147



Keep on Rolling!

Blyth Town Council is "Shang-A-Lang" excited to announce that the legendary Bay City Rollers will be the headline act for the highly anticipated Blyth Live Music Festival 2025. The festival, a highlight of Blyth's calendar, will take place on Saturday, 21st June 2025 at Mermaid Car Park, Blyth.

Bay City Roller legend, Stuart "Woody" Wood, has brought together powerful group of talented musicians who embody the same essence of the original band that the world knew and loved. Backed by incredible musical resumes, this group has taken what it means to be a Bay City Roller to heart and their excitement is infectious.

The current Bay City Rollers are Ian Thomson on lead vocals and guitar, John McLaughlin on vocals and keys, Mikey Smith on bass guitar, Jamie McGrory on drums and Woody on guitar.

This free, family-friendly event will have the crowd "Summer Love Sensation" ready, with live music and a jam-packed day of activities that promise to be a hit for all ages. Alongside the iconic sounds of the Bay City Rollers, festival goers can enjoy community and craft stalls showcasing local talent and creativity, a variety of food concessions, street theatre performances and a fun fair.

Mayor of Blyth Town Council Aileen Barrass shared her excitement, saying: "We're thrilled to welcome the Bay City Rollers to Blyth Live 2025. Their music has stood the test of time, and we know their performance will get everyone dancing. This festival is a great way to bring our community together and celebrate everything that makes Blyth special. So, let's roll on to June 21st it's going to be a "Saturday Night" to remember.



Fawlty Towers

Currently playing to sold-out houses at London's Apollo Theatre Shaftesbury Avenue, John Cleese's Fawlty Towers – The Play, has announced a major theatre tour for 2025 and 2026.

Following the hugely successful West End run – which has seen the show extend twice - "the funniest show in town" (Daily Express) will embark on the 10-month tour across the UK and Ireland on 30 September 2025 through to July 2026, visiting Sunderland Empire from Tuesday 3 – Saturday 7 February 2026.

Based on three of the original BBC TV episodes of the "greatest British sitcom of all time" (Radio Times), Fawlty Towers – The Play has been adapted for the stage by original co-creator John Cleese into a two-hour play, complete with a new finale. Casting will be announced in due course.

Theatre goers across the country are in for a treat as this "comedy masterpiece makes a seamless transition to the stage" (The Arts Desk) to deliver "an indisputably funny evening" (Daily Telegraph), as "from the moment Basil walks on stage, the audience start laughing" (Daily Mail) whilst watching "some of the best punchlines ever written" (London Theatre). To quote Broadway World; "if you loved the original TV series, you will adore this show".

John Cleese said: "When we came up with the idea of bringing Fawlty Towers to the stage, I never thought it would get the reception that it has. On 23 December it will be 50 years to the day since we recorded the pilot at BBC Television Centre, and I'm delighted that the audiences we've had in the West End still think it's as funny as ever. The announcement of the tour means many more people will now have the chance to laugh themselves helpless."



Tyne Theatre date for Matt Goss

Phil McIntyre Live are thrilled to announce that "The New King of Las Vegas" and award-winning musician Matt Goss will embark upon a brand-new tour for 2025. Matt Goss: The Hits & More will be a celebration of all Matt has achieved in his music career and beyond. Kicking off in Plymouth, Matt will take in a further 20 dates including a night at Newcastle's very own Tyne Theatre & Opera House on Wednesday 19th March 2025.

This tour will mark an eagerly anticipated return to the live UK music scene for Matt following his smash hit tour in 2023. Matt, who has performed in the States for an astounding 11 years initially headed to the Palms Casino for one year only. The show became an instant success, and he subsequently performed the show at the iconic Caesars Palace for the remainder of his Vegas residency. Whilst in the US, Goss performed in world-renowned venues such as Carnegie Hall and Madison Square Garden and even officially hailed August 8th as Matt Goss Day in Las Vegas.

On announcing the UK tour Matt Goss said: "Trust me, what I've learnt over the years being on countless stages around the world, this will be your best night of the year!"

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Sunderland Empire unveil their nominated Charity for 2025 – aiming to make a lasting impact through Creative Learning

The staff committee at Sunderland Empire have chosen the Sunderland Empire Theatre Trust as their Charity of the Year.

This fantastic charity works closely with the brilliant Creative Learning team to ensure that people across the city can participate in theatre classes, attend shows, and bring schools into the theatre, making the arts more accessible to everyone in the city.

Find more information about this amazing charity by visiting: sunderlandempiretrust.org

Co-chairs of the Sunderland Empire Theatre Trust Sharon Appleby and John Mowbray said: “We are absolutely thrilled that Sunderland Empire has chosen our charity as its Charity of the Year. This incredible partnership is a unique opportunity to bring our shared vision to life- ensuring Sunderland’s communities have access to the very best in creative arts, hosted in one

of the country’s most iconic venues. We look forward to working closely with the talented team at Sunderland Empire to raise vital funds and make a lasting impact together.”

An ambitious fundraising goal has been set for the year, but with the support of staff and audiences, it is certain to be reached by the end of what promises to be an exciting year.

Businesses can also get involved, as donations go directly to support the trust’s ambitious plans to expand theatre access for everyone in the community:

- **Raising £550** will allow a local child to join the Performing Arts Academy for a whole year. Money can be a barrier for some families who really want their child to grow and thrive within the performing arts. With your funding, we aim to support five more young people this year.

- **Raising £1,000** will enable a local school to engage with Sunderland Empire for a whole academic year. This will include workshops and projects, visits to the venue, tickets to see shows, working with professional artists, and 1on1 support for teachers. As fewer schools are able to visit the theatre year on year due to financial challenges, the team are keen to reach out to six schools to benefit from this within the year.

- **Raising £5,000** will allow the team to ensure all the children, adults, and families from weekly workshops are celebrated during their annual Creative Learning Showcase, by making it bigger and better than ever!

You’re invited to join Sunderland Empire Creative Learning groups for a fantastical journey through fairy tales, from musical theatre to pop music and brand-new plays at their showcase on Tuesday 25th February.

For more information and booking details, please check online: www.atgtickets.com/shows/once-upon-a-time-in-sunderland/sunderland-empire

If your business can support in any way, please contact Sales and Development Manager on PaulaMitchell@atgentertainment.com

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From hotel lobby to theatre spotlight: Maldron Newcastle's enchanting panto partnership



Maldron Hotel Newcastle once again stepped into the limelight as the proud hotel sponsor for Tyne Theatre and Opera House's enchanting pantomime, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs.

This exciting partnership united two of the city's finest institutions, delighting theatre-goers and providing a unique opportunity for the hotel to showcase its warm hospitality. The panto, a cherished tradition in Newcastle, brought an extra sprinkle of magic to the festive season, and the Maldron was thrilled to be at the heart of the action.

"We loved having the hotel invaded by the cast; they were such a fun bunch and brought a lot of fun to the hotel," said Anna Wadcock, General Manager of Maldron Hotel Newcastle. "Their energy was contagious, and our guests couldn't help but smile when they caught a glimpse of the performers in costume. It really added a wonderful buzz to the hotel atmosphere."

The sponsorship boosted brand visibility, highlighted the hotel's commitment to supporting local arts and culture, and strengthened the Maldron's reputation as a prime choice for city centre stays. By aligning with such a popular and family-friendly show, the hotel further cemented its status as one of Newcastle's premier

accommodation providers for visitors seeking comfort, convenience, and a little theatrical sparkle during their stay.

For the panto's cast and crew, staying at the Maldron Hotel Newcastle offered numerous advantages. Positioned in the heart of the city, the hotel's central location made travelling to and from the Tyne Theatre and Opera House swift and convenient. The modern amenities, comfortable rooms, and welcoming service helped the performers relax and recharge after long days of rehearsals and memorable performances on stage. The Maldron's onsite dining options also catered to all tastes, ensuring cast members could enjoy hearty meals and healthy snacks throughout their busy schedules.

Now that the pantomime has drawn to a close, the Maldron Hotel Newcastle looked back on the partnership with fondness and pride.

The success of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs at the Tyne Theatre and Opera House was a testament to the dedication of all involved, and the Maldron team was honoured to have played a part by providing top-notch accommodation and support.

This collaboration highlighted the hotel's ongoing commitment to the local cultural scene, while reinforcing the importance of celebrating the performing arts as a vital part of Newcastle's heritage.

www.maldronhotels.com/newcastle





An Artist's Year

By Mary Ann Rogers

2025 started with a ping from the app on my phone alerting me to solar activity and a likelihood of viewing the aurora borealis (Northern Lights). I shot outside in time to see a glowing red sky, and found myself a spot behind the house, where I could hold my iphone steady for some long exposure shots of the sky.

What followed was about 20 minutes of the most amazing display of changing colours filling the northern sky, visible to the naked eye, but captured more vividly by the incredible properties of the camera on my phone. This past year has witnessed several breathtaking displays of the aurora, due to the sun being at the peak of an 11 year cycle and geomagnetic storms being more frequent at this time.

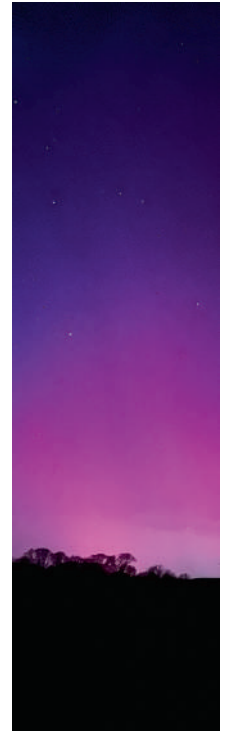
Whatever the reason, the greens, reds and purple colours are wonderful, and we are so lucky to live in part of Northumberland which has very little light pollution.

We have had an incredibly cold spell in January, with over a week of freezing temperatures, each night being colder than the previous one. Daily walks along the river began with seeing the formation of 'ice pancakes', formed by the natural foam freezing in swirling eddies, creating discs of ice. As the week progressed, so did the ice platform which formed from the bank at each side, eventually meeting in the middle to create a sheet of ice right across the river, not thick enough to walk on, but providing hilarious swimming opportunities-with care, as ice is very sharp and can cut bare flesh just like glass.

Regular Insight readers will know that I swim year round outdoors, and when temperatures drop below five degrees Celsius, it is technically ice swimming, an extreme form of outdoor swimming which requires a bit of training and safety precautions, and is extremely good fun!

For the first time in many years, the cold weather has frozen over a small, shallow 'wader scrape' or pond nearby, made to encourage waders and other wildlife. We joined our neighbours for a sunset ice skating party with music, snacks, a fire and drinks which will be a wonderful memory for years to come.

Back to everyday life and after an extremely busy Christmas, work has resumed on several new paintings, and other paintings are being shipped to collectors in the USA, Dorset and Dubin this month. Plans are underway for exhibitions in 2025, and visitors to the gallery are now being treated to a bit more warmth thanks to a new log burner installed in one of the gallery areas!



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Three men, one boat and a malfunctioning shark



As smash hit comedy *The Shark is Broken* sets out on a UK tour, which will be visiting Newcastle Theatre Royal (Tue 18 – Sat 22 Mar), co-writer Ian Shaw reveals why he wanted to write a play about the troubled making of *Jaws*, and what it's like to play his dad, legendary actor Robert Shaw.

with a friend who thought it was a good idea, so I looked at it again. My wife and family all thought it was interesting. So, I decided that I should take the risk."

The Shark is Broken opened at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in 2019 and was met by glowing reviews, leading to both a West End and Broadway run in quick succession. Now the production is embarking on a UK tour, and Ian is getting ready once again to don the moustache and cap that bring out the striking resemblance to his father. "It's a funny thing, being there in the dressing room and looking in the mirror before I go on, doing a bit of the famous Indianapolis speech from the film that my late father helped to write, just to make sure that I feel in character. I'm not somebody who believes in spiritual things very much, but there's definitely a dialogue between me and my dad before I go on stage. It's not like anything I've ever done in my life before."

***The Shark is Broken* plays Newcastle Theatre Royal Tue 18 – Sat 22 Mar 2025. Tickets can be purchased at www.theatroyal.co.uk or from the Theatre Royal Box Office on 0191 232 7010.**

When *Jaws* hit cinemas in the summer of 1975, it was a blockbuster success unlike anything the film industry had seen. Its behind-the-scenes drama has become the stuff of similar legend: mechanical sharks broke down, boats sank, actors argued fiercely, and the script changed day by day.

The Shark is Broken, which embarks on a UK tour after smash runs in the West End and on Broadway, is set in those long, tense gaps between filming. It focuses on the relationships between the film's three lead actors, Roy Scheider, Richard Dreyfuss and Robert Shaw who found themselves stuck on a small boat called the Orca for 16 weeks with little to do except drive each other crazy.

The play's co-writer Ian Shaw stars as his

father Robert. "I'd spent my life trying not to be associated with my dad, as most children of famous people tend to do," says Shaw. "You want to carve your own path, so I was wary of that. But I'm obsessed with films, and I'm obsessed with the story of filmmaking. I just imagined three men stuck on this boat, marooned out in the water. Something about that idea appealed to me. I've reached a point now where I guess the comparison with my dad doesn't matter so much. I'm also at the same age as my dad when he was doing *Jaws*."

Almost as soon as he started thinking about the idea, Ian lost faith. "I thought it might be in poor taste to play my father and to portray him like that, so I put it in a drawer. It wasn't until a while later that I had a pint





Rudy's Pizza Napoletana Newcastle Now Open

Rudy's Pizza Napoletana recently opened its eagerly awaited Newcastle restaurant in the heart of Grey Street.

The new pizzeria showcases Rudy's effortlessly attentive hospitality and minimalist signature style, in a spacious 2,500 square-foot unit with approximately 100 covers for dining.

Since launching in 2015, Rudy's has grown from one restaurant in Manchester to almost 30 pizzerias nationwide. The Newcastle pizzeria marks the restaurant's sixth opening of the year and second in the Northeast area, following the popularity of the Durham restaurant, which opened in December last year.

Born out of passion for pizza, Rudy's follows the authentic Neapolitan tradition of pizza-making, serving classic recipes such as Marinara, Margherita and Calabrese – all originating from Naples, the birthplace of pizza, alongside paying homage to famous pizzerias around the globe with its rotating specials.

Whilst pizzas are a key part of Rudy's, it wouldn't be a traditional Naples experience without a well-stocked bar which is why visitors will also be able to wash down their food with iconic Italian spritzes, crisp Italian and local lagers, and classic stirred cocktails.

Follow Rudy's on Instagram for the latest updates – @wearerudyspizza and head to www.rudyspizza.co.uk/location/newcastle for more information.

Amaze Gourmet Spice wins exclusive award

One of Whitley Bay's newest restaurants has fended off stiff competition from rival eateries across the north of England to win an exclusive award just one year after first welcoming diners through its doors.

Amaze Gourmet Spice in Cauldwell Lane has been named New Fine Dining Restaurant of the Year in the annual North England Prestige Awards.

The award was recently presented in a special ceremony at Hazlewood Castle Hotel and Spa in Tadcaster.

Opened by Mohammed Hussain and his family the restaurant was specially created to allow customers to sample the ultimate dining experience. With inspiration taken from the luxuries of an Indian palace customers can relish dining in a lavish interior which perfectly complement the vast selection of mouth-watering dishes.

The selection of menus includes the A La Carte for a party of 1-4 people, the Journey Heritage for four or more people, the Chef's 7-Course Taster Menu, the Vegan and Vegetarian menu, and the Maharajas and



Maharanis menu – a banquet of two to four courses based on the dining experience in the finest Indian palaces.

The award marks the latest in a long line of celebrations for the multi-award-winning family who have also won accolades with Jashn in Gateshead and Turmeric Gold in Coventry, including the Curry Life award and a special honour in the House of Lords for their service to the food industry.

Mohammed said: "We are delighted Amaze Gourmet Spice is among this year's winners in the annual Prestige Awards.

"The restaurant has enjoyed a fantastic first year with excellent support from diners from Whitley Bay and further afield – making it a true destination venue.



Kamal Indian Restaurant Cooks Up National Award

Kamal Indian Restaurant, located on Stanhope Street in Newcastle, has been recognised as one of the finest dining establishments in the country by being Highly Commended in the North East Asian Restaurant of the Year at the Asian Curry Awards 2024. The award ceremony took place at the iconic Grosvenor House Hotel in London, with over 1,000 attendees celebrating culinary excellence from across the UK.

The owner, Umayr Saleem, accepted the award on behalf of his team, stating, "This

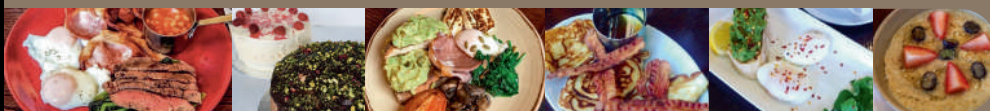
recognition is a testament to the hard work and passion we pour into our food every day. It's a proud moment for us and for Newcastle's vibrant food scene."

Kamal Indian Restaurant has been a staple of Newcastle since 1992, but it reached new heights when Umayr and his family took over in 2011. They undertook a full renovation of the restaurant, modernising its interiors and exteriors while retaining its authentic charm. Today, Kamal offers traditional Indian cuisine made with the finest quality spices and ingredients, promising a taste experience that stays true to the roots of Indian cooking.

Kamal serves a variety of dishes, from flavourful biryanis to richly spiced curries. Each dish is crafted to deliver an authentic experience, steering away from the watered-down versions often catered to Western palates. Patrons are invited to bring their own alcohol, adding a personalised touch to their dining experience.

The Asian Curry Awards recognise excellence across the culinary industry, assessing everything from food quality to overall dining experience. Kamal's commitment to delivering authentic flavours and exceptional service helped secure its win, showcasing Newcastle's prominence on the national culinary map.

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



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Burns Night Ball raises over 18k for NE Youth

On the 24th January the Grand Hotel, Gosforth Park transformed into a wee bit of Scotland all in aid of NE Youth's Annual Burns Night Ball, proudly sponsored by Northern Garden Sheds.



Ceilidh dancing... and the night ended with live music by the brilliant Storm Band.

Dave Clayton, Managing Director at the event sponsor Northern Garden Sheds, said: "This is our second year sponsoring NE Youth's Burns Night Supper and we are delighted with the evening. To raise over £18k is incredible - so many more young people will be supported across their 90th year."

Jon Niblo, Chief Executive of NE Youth, said: "Our Burns Night Ball has always been one of core fundraising events in the calendar- it has something for everyone whether that the reciting of Burn's poetry, the piping in of the haggis, the energetic Ceilidh or fantastic live band and disco! NE Youth hope to raise 90k across 2025 to celebrate their 90th anniversary and support more young people. The needs of young people have certainly changed over the last nine decades but opportunities and services for young people have never been more in demand! I'd like to thank our main sponsors Northern Garden Sheds and all the businesses that donated to the auction. Our focus now shifts to our Gala Dinner at the Fed on the 10th April- ticket available via our website!"

If you can support NE Youths 90th campaign please contact: Jon Niblo, CEO at jon@neyouth.org.uk www.neyouth.org.uk

Over 300 guests braved Storm Eowyn to raise a glass to Robbie Burns and raise as much funds as they could for NE Youth- who are celebrating their 90th anniversary across 2025.

Anna Foster, BBC presenter and NE Youth ambassador compered the evening, keeping everyone on track and ensuring they donated as much as possible across the night!

The evening started with a game of Heads and Tails, the Donna Kimberly School of Highland Dancing then gave a fabulous performance, getting everyone tapping their feet and excited for the Ceilidh later in the evening!

The Addressing of the Haggis is the more serious part of the evening when guests are taken back to 18th century Scotland- rumour

has it that Burns came up with poem on the hoof during a dinner he was invited to! It was also the first poem Burns had published in 1786!

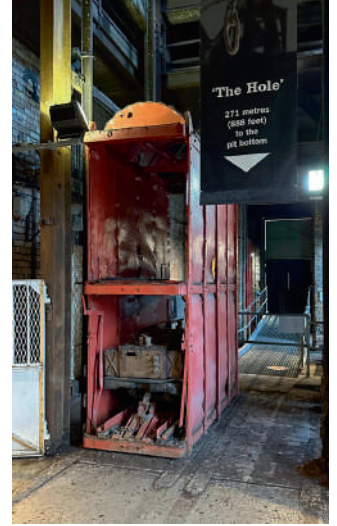
The food was of course a traditional three-course Scottish feast which included Haggis, Neeps and Tatties- what else!

Over £18.5k was raised on the night- the auction featured some amazing prizes generously provided by local businesses- with all moneys raised going towards NE Youth's work with young people. A huge thank you to all the businesses that donated prizes, including our sponsors Northern Garden Sheds, Vertu BMW, the Inn Collection Group, Ramside Estates, N. Blaine Ltd and The Grand Hotel to name but a few.

The Robert Whitehead band were in charge of getting everyone on the dance floor for the



Places to go...Ashington



Week commencing 15th December was an auspicious one for public transport in the North East.

The line from Newcastle to Ashington via Seaton Delaval opened, with further intermediate stations at Newsham, Blyth Bebside and Bedlington due to open later. Further, the first of the new fleet of Stadler trains went into public service on the Tyne and Wear Metro. Unfortunately, the Gateshead flyover was also closed as a result of damage possibly caused by vibration from the Metro trains. Metro service was suspended between Heworth to Monument through the middle of Newcastle.

On the Saturday, I arrived at Gateshead and boarded a "Metro Replacement Bus" driven, fortuitously, by Northumberland County Council's Senior Programme Officer (Rail) who was able to brief me about the new line on the way over the Redheugh Bridge to Central Station. I was there to join the Northern Rail train to Ashington through the south east Northumberland coalfield, which left punctually at 1115 calling at Manors and Seaton Delaval. It was busy, but not as full as southbound trains from Ashington with residents wanting to try the new service. There's a special £3 fare each way. Note that Ashington will be more used as an origin rather than destination. There's not a lot to see and do in the town, and the best pub is the J D Wetherspoon house named after the world-class Guyanese batsman who was brought in to play for Ashington Cricket Club in the 1964 season. A small but powerful player, Kanhai was one of the West Indies' leading run-scorers during the 1960s and 70s.

The grandest building in town is the three storey Ashington Industrial Co-Operative Society Ltd (pictured) with classical architecture, but now populated only on the ground floor with a series of low grade outlets.

Station Road no longer leads to the station, but head east along it, go behind Home Bargains and the brand new Leisure Centre and Library, and you'll find McDonalds. Outside McDs, follow the spine road east with a pedestrian and cycle path towards Woodhorn Colliery which was one of the five pits in what became the world's largest pit village.

There's a level crossing after five minutes allowing access over the railway line to the Queen Elizabeth II Country Park. It's a pleasant stroll round the lake to the Woodhorn Colliery Museum, open Wednesday to Sundays, 10am to 4pm. This was a working colliery from 1894 to 1981 when it closed, to reopen as a museum in 1989. The museum was substantially expanded with The Cutter building opening in 2006.

I was only visitor who turned up for a 1400 tour which meant I could have a good discussion with the guide, and a followed this up with a visit to the Pitmen Painters exhibition and an interesting video. Some of the colliery buildings were closed off for maintenance. However,

the permanent exhibition and a special display about the Miners' Strike of the 1980s and the battle of wills between Arthur Scargill and Margaret Thatcher were absorbing.

When I left Ashington, I stopped off at Seaton Delaval. It was windy, wet and dark by the time I reached the welcoming Hastings pub which seemed much more attractive than a walk into town. The barmaid told me it was about 40 minutes walk to the National Trust's Seaton Delaval Hall, and anyway it was shut as a result of Storm Eowyn. (If you want to go to the Hall, which is nearer Seaton Sluice, plan instead on using Arriva bus X7 which stops close by.) Instead of walking into the village, I enjoyed a pleasant pint of real ale. Going back to the station for the next train to Newcastle, I noticed a very optimistic 10mph sign applicable to cars driving down to the car park. Good luck with that!

alexnelson@nationalrail.com, www.nationalrail.com



For bookings to and from North East England and trains all over Great Britain

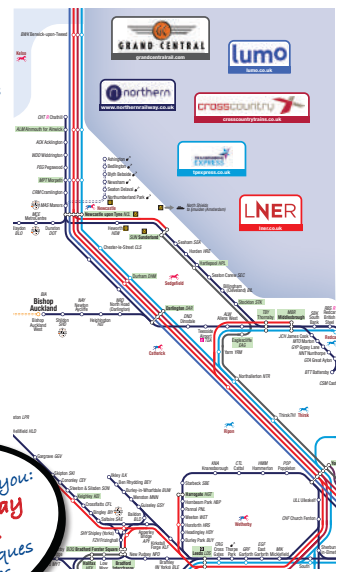
- Advance and walk-up (on the day) tickets
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Our map is available for purchase at railmap.org.uk plus optional free pdf for personal use

Poster map for display is 63.5cm wide x 100cm deep

We can advise on delay repay!





David Fairlamb

Staying focused

Mental toughness plays a crucial role in our daily lives. Making the right decisions is important, but staying committed and disciplined is what truly drives success.

If you've set realistic goals for 2025 here are a few tips to help you maintain focus and resilience:

Remember Your Why - Reflect on why you set these goals in the first place. Block out external influences that could derail your progress.

Self-Talk Matters - Regularly remind yourself to stay strong and focused. Take pride in your efforts and acknowledge the positive steps you are making.

Reframe Challenges Positively - View your goals as opportunities for growth, not as burdens. This mindset shift can make a huge difference.

Track Progress - Weekly regular check-ins will keep you accountable and motivated. For long-term projects, break them down into smaller, manageable milestones to avoid feeling overwhelmed.

Change Negative Associations - If certain times of day bring low energy or negative thoughts, switch up your routine. Take a walk, read something inspirational, or watch a funny show. Small changes can refresh your mindset.

Surround Yourself with Positivity - Spend time with people who uplift and inspire you. A positive environment can significantly boost your mental state.

Find Inspiration - Keep a go to film, book or TV show that reignites your motivation. Inspiration can come from anywhere, use it to your advantage.

Reward Yourself - Celebrate milestones by treating yourself to something small when you hit specific targets. Rewards reinforce good habits.

Learn to challenge yourself - Stepping outside your comfort zone regularly helps build resilience and adaptability. It can also build your self confidence in all areas of your life.

Turn Setbacks into Strength - When challenges arise, use them to fuel your determination. See setbacks as opportunities to prove your resilience and push forward with even more grit.

Empower Yourself - Remind yourself that achieving your goals is your responsibility. No one else can do it for you, embrace the journey with confidence and strength.

David's summing up

Success isn't measured by how easy the journey feels, but by how you handle the difficult days. Push through those moments because giving up is easy, staying strong and reaching your goals is what sets you apart.

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The Last Word

By Barry Speker OBE

As a very longstanding fan of Bob Dylan, I greatly enjoyed the recently released film 'A Complete Unknown' a rhyme from 'Like a Rolling Stone'.

This is based on Dylan's early years and his emergence to prominence in New York in the early 60s. The troubadour had travelled from the Midwest to see his idol Woodie Guthrie to whom he dedicated his first notable song.

The film is directed by James Mangold and took five years to make. The delay because of the pandemic and then the American actors' strike gave the star Timothee Chalamet increased time to perfect his portrayal of the troubled troubadour and to sing and perform live the many songs in the film. Awards will surely follow!

This is no rose-tinted tribute to Dylan but a realistic portrayal of his development and relationships. This included the booing at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival when he insisted on moving from acoustic to electric. That controversy was still bristling when I saw him perform in 1968 at the Odeon in Newcastle.

Ultimately he became the only popular singer songwriter to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature - typically he did not attend the ceremony.

The inauguration of Donald Trump as 47th President of the United States was a glittering occasion and a dramatic demonstration of his determination to proceed immediately and energetically to change his country's direction. He publicly signed numerous executive orders undoing much of the Biden policies. The declaration that the USA will become 'great again' relying upon 'drill, drill, drill' maximising oil and gas production, supporting its traditional automobile industry and withdrawal from the Paris accord on the environment, completing the wall with Mexico and mass deportations of immigrants all show the emphasis on 'America first!'

Although when officially visiting the UK in 2019 Donald Trump described the ties between Britain and America as 'the highest level of special', that special relationship is certainly under threat.

Suggested blanket tariffs on imports from all countries including the UK would be a significant blow to our exporters



Barry Speker OBE

Personal differences fired by public abuse of Trump by foreign Secretary David Lammy and others and by the ill advised canvassing in the US election by Labour activists for the democrats. Eyebrows were raised at the yet unconfirmed nomination of Lord Mandelson as UK Ambassador.

Elon Musk, the world's richest man and Trump's close political ally has been vocal in criticising our PM in relation to failures concerning the grooming gangs scandal. He has recently criticised the Starmer plan to extend to foreign nationals the right to vote. The UK Government's rush to sell off the Chagos Islands to Mauritius on Human Rights grounds has caused dismay in the USA. The Diego Garcia naval base is seen as crucial to US defence against China in the Pacific.

Trump's attitude to Ukraine is affected by his confidence that he can talk to Vladimir and negotiate peace and in the process get the Nobel Peace Prize.

And there is Trump's oft repeated complaint that NATO members do not pay their way and spend insufficient on defence. He may want this up to 4 or even 5% of GDP. Another pressure on Rachel Reeves.

The presence of so many billionaires at Trump's side - Musk, Bezos, Zuckerberg - was another contrast. In America success,

entrepreneurship and wealth attainment are applauded. Our economy is not growing and new taxes are leading to stagnation and lack of business confidence.

A punitive tax environment drives many to consider moving elsewhere. Figures compiled by New World Wealth, show that last year Britain lost a net 10,800 millionaires, an increase of 157% on 2023. This included 78 centi-millionaires and 12 billionaires.

We have lost their tax revenue and their spending in the economy as well as generous charitable donations.

Having received Richard Osman's latest book 'We Solve Murders' as a present, I felt I should persevere through the 438 pages. This is the first of a new series by the 6'6" tall TV question master. I had not read any of his first series The Thursday Murder Club.

The latest book is in folksy style fluctuating between assassins, drug cartels, protection rackets, Dubai, California and sleepy English village life where the pub quiz is not to be missed. It is clearly written with a view to adaptation for TV or film. As he often says in his House of Games - 'How did you get on with this at home?' Perhaps too much murder?

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