

NORTHERN

INSIGHT

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Issue 111



The Future of Construction

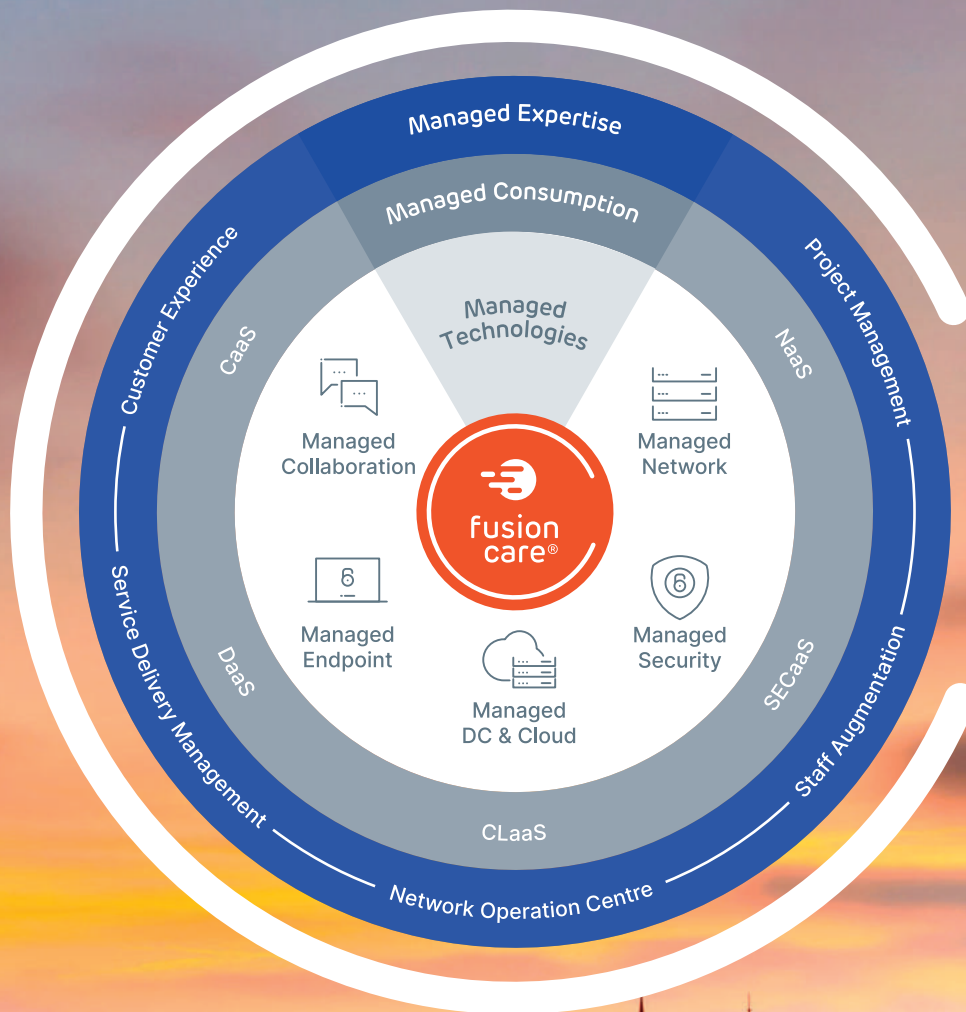
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CONTENTS

8/9	Business News
15/39	The Built Environment
16/17	Cover Story <i>The Future of Construction</i>
40/42	Legal and Financial News
48	Deals News
74	Comment <i>Barry Speker OBE</i>
78/80	Charity and Community News
116	Recent Appointments
128/130	Technology News
140/142	Media News
144/145	Marketing & Media Matters
172	Arts News
182	Leisure News
198	Travel
200/201	Health & Fitness <i>with David Fairlamb</i>
202	Meet the Artist <i>Alan Reed</i>





Foreword

Welcome to the April issue of Northern Insight.

Firstly, huge congratulations to Newcastle United for winning the Carabao Cup, thus ending a 70 year wait for domestic silverware. Having watched my beloved Magpies for the last 47 years this was a day I didn't think would ever arrive. It will live forever in my memory.

Amidst all of the excitement we have produced another mighty issue celebrating the people, businesses and innovations shaping the North.

Our cover star is Daniel Wade from Wade Construction Management Consultants who are committed to leading change in the construction industry.

This heads up an enlarged Built Environment section which we hope you'll enjoy. Elsewhere we showcase the fantastic Cash for Kids Day and also meet Mark Spanton, General Manager of the new Dakota Hotel in Newcastle.

In a welcome return of our Meet the Artist feature we talk to Alan Reed about his enduring 40 year career.

Thank you for being part of our journey and we look forward to continuing to shine a light on the brilliance of the North East in the months ahead.

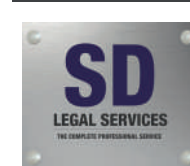
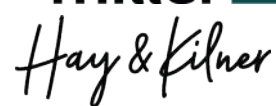
Enjoy the read!

Michael

Michael Gramshaw, Publisher
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Yorkshire firm wants pies to be officially recognised as Britain's National Dish

A North Yorkshire pie maker is aiming to have the humble British Pie officially recognised and added to the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage as a national food of Britain.

Yorkshire Handmade Pies enlisted the help of the former Prime Minister, and current Richmond MP Rishi Sunak, who supported the move by contacting Lisa Nandy, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, who has agreed that pies can be nominated for a UK shortlist to be submitted to UNESCO.

Every year countries can nominate one item to be considered for inclusion in the Representative List of Items of Intangible Cultural Heritage. In the past this has included successful applications such as Neapolitan Pizza in Italy, Belgian Beer, and the French Baguette.

Founder of Yorkshire Handmade Pies, James Sturdy said: "Pies have a long and fascinating history within British Culture. Baked into our culinary DNA, they have fed everyone from the working class to aristocracy over many centuries. British pies reflect not just



the national cuisine, but also regional speciality, with many areas of the UK having created their own unique pies. It's important to preserve our heritage and, as a fundamental part of that, we believe the Great British pie should officially be put forward as one of our national dishes and recognised on the global stage."



Week2Week Supports International Businesses Expanding into Newcastle

As Newcastle continues to attract global business interest, Week2Week Serviced Apartments is proud to support overseas companies looking to establish a presence in the North East.

Offering high-quality, fully furnished serviced apartments, Week2Week provides international business travellers with a true home-from-home experience.

With a handpicked portfolio of quality accredited apartments in prime locations across Newcastle, Gateshead, and the surrounding areas, Week2Week ensures that professionals relocating or working on temporary assignments have a comfortable and convenient base. Each apartment is designed to offer a stress-free stay, featuring fully equipped kitchens, high-speed Wi-Fi and flexible booking options.

What sets Week2Week apart is its personalised service and 24/7 guest support, ensuring business travellers receive assistance whenever they need it. From personal check-ins to giving recommendations for local restaurants, transport, and cultural experiences, the team goes the extra mile to make each stay enjoyable.

Additionally, Week2Week partners with local businesses, to offer guests exclusive discounts off local attractions, restaurants and wellbeing activities enabling guests to make the most of their time in Newcastle.

By prioritising guest comfort, security, and flexibility, Week2Week makes business travel smoother for companies looking to grow in the region.

South Tyneside manufacturer celebrates £4.5m contract wins

South Shields-based Metec UK has secured two lucrative export contracts worth over £4.5 million.

The largest of the contracts will see the company provide its sacrificial anodes to a major offshore windfarm in the North Sea, which will provide green energy power to more than 3 million British homes.

The other contract will see the company support the development of the UK's offshore grid network by providing sacrificial anodes to another major offshore substation.

Metec UK reported its best year on record in 2024, with both pre-tax profits and turnover reaching record highs.

The rising demand for its sacrificial anodes which provide long-



term protection against corrosion to steel monopile and jacket foundations - has been driven by the global shift to renewable energy.

Metec UK has established itself as a market leader in the supply of sacrificial anodes, which are also used by companies in the oil and gas, LNG, marine and shipping industries.

Making Clients Famous.

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Kinewell Energy signs multi-year global contract renewal with Equinor

North East cleantech scale-up Kinewell Energy has signed a multi-year global contract renewal with Equinor for the continued use of its offshore wind cost optimisation software, KLOC.

The Kinewell Layout Optimisation of Cable (KLOC) software utilises AI-powered technology to rapidly design optimised inter-array cable layouts for offshore wind farms.

KLOC uses advanced mathematical optimisation algorithms to produce economically optimised layouts with greater reliability, typically saving around 20% of cable system capex, while streamlining early-stage development.

Dr Andrew Jenkins, CEO and Founder of Kinewell Energy, said: "We are absolutely thrilled that our global partnership with Equinor has been renewed, and as a result, Equinor will continue to leverage the significant savings in both cost and time that our software delivers."

Equinor is a leading broad energy partner to the UK, supplying natural gas from Norway, developing domestic energy resources, and generating low-carbon electricity.

Headquartered in Norway, the company employs 23,000 people globally, and over 750 in the UK. Equinor's purpose is to turn natural resources into energy for people and progress for society. Equinor supports the UK economy by investing billions in crucial energy infrastructure, working with over 700 suppliers across the country.



Private investment in airport to drive jobs and growth

Proposals for the biggest ever private sector investment in Teesside Airport – creating jobs and boosting economic growth – have been revealed.

Agreements are being progressed with three key airport tenants to each expand their operations, which will create 250 new jobs and unlock £16 million in private sector investment.

To unlock this growth, Tees Valley Combined Authority Cabinet will consider approving £12.5 million in capital funding at its March meeting to fund the construction of new aircraft hangars, attracting new investors and enabling existing firms - Draken, Willis Lease Finance Corporation, and Airbourne Colours - to expand.

The proposed developments will also generate significant sums in business rates alongside income for Teesside Airport through rent and landing fees, supporting the airport's long-term financial sustainability.

Tees Valley Mayor Ben Houchen said: "This multi-million-pound private investment in Teesside Airport would be a game-changer for our region—creating hundreds of jobs, driving economic growth, and unlocking huge opportunities for local businesses."

Newcastle Lifted Project Board launches to fuel female founder funding

The Lifted Project Newcastle Board has launched to increase the flow of capital to female-led businesses in the region.

The new initiative, led by Lifted Ventures, an early stage investment connector co-founded by Jordan Dargue and Helen Oldham, has created regional female founder growth boards in five cities across the UK including Newcastle, Edinburgh, Birmingham, Leeds and Liverpool in a bid to make high-growth entrepreneurship more accessible to women outside of London and the South East.

The Lifted Project is a data and ecosystem-led approach to increase the flow of capital to regional, high-growth female founders. A five-year project aligned with the Investing in Women Code and Treasury, utilises a data-driven approach and provides regional insights, powered by Panintelligence and Data City.

Jordan Dargue, Co-founder of Lifted Ventures said: "We are on a mission to establish the North East as the premier investment capital for women and ensure the region becomes a thriving hub for women's success."

Debra Leeves, Chair of the Lifted Project, Newcastle added;



"This Board represents the very best of the North East business community. Together, we're confident in creating a supportive environment for female-led businesses to thrive, allowing them to scale their businesses and achieve their full potential with the funding and support needed. The Lifted Project Newcastle Board is poised to unlock a wave of innovation and economic growth, driven by the power of female leadership, and we're excited to see what's achieved."

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Why having a Business Development Mindset is Key to Long-Term SME Growth

Sustaining growth in a competitive market is a challenge. One of the key factors that sets thriving SMEs apart, is their business development (BD) mindset.



Justine Joisce

Marketing is, of course, closely linked to BD. Both functions aim to generate business opportunities, attract customers, and drive revenue. Where marketing might focus on building brand awareness and generating leads, business development nurtures these leads into long-term partnerships.

My skilled colleagues at 360 Growth Partners have significantly impacted clients by delivering strategic marketing clarity and implementation. The board is happy, brand awareness rises and leads come in. What then?

Success or failure comes down to the BD mindset in that organisation. And by that I don't just mean the senior leaders or even sales teams if you have them. I mean everyone in that organisation. Do you have a growth plan? Are you making time for BD in your everyday life? Is there any accountability? I suspect the answer is, no. The intention is there but you don't have time, you don't feel comfortable 'selling', you don't feel it's your responsibility....the list of excuses go on. We've heard them all.

So, when the opportunity came along to join 360 Growth Partners as a BD Associate, it felt the natural choice. Together we will help businesses collaborate across all functions to deliver against the overall growth strategy of the business.

Here's why integrating a business development and marketing approach is essential for SME growth.

1. Aligning Marketing and Business Development for Growth

For SMEs, Marketing & BD must work hand in hand. Marketing builds brand visibility and attracts potential customers, while BD converts these prospects into lasting business relationships.

When SMEs align their BD and marketing strategies, they create a seamless customer journey from awareness to conversion and retention.

2. Quality over Quantity

Businesses that integrate BD into their marketing strategy should focus on quality over quantity. It's a dangerous trap that we see many businesses fall into, that quantity of leads is the metric to chase. Wrong. How on earth are you going to put the effort in to develop a meaningful relationship with 100 leads? You simply can't. The efforts feel like failure and the merry dance begins again. Lists upon lists are generated, shared and then ignored. Our advice, pick 3-4, yes you heard me, just 3-4 prospects that align with your ideal customer profile and focus on building an authentic relationship.

3. Build a Strong Brand and Robust Relationships

In today's digital world, SMEs must position themselves as industry leaders to gain trust and credibility. Marketing plays a crucial role in brand-building while business development strengthens this reputation by forming strategic partnerships, engaging in industry events, and fostering customer relationships. A thought leadership strategy can attract potential clients, but efforts are wasted without a BD plan that tracks leads and fosters a culture of accountability and relationship building.

4. Track, Train and Task

SMEs that combine BD with marketing, ensure that leads are nurtured into long-term, loyal customers and move beyond the transactional to a partnership. This requires a commitment to track leads, train individuals to adopt a BD mindset which prioritizes customer engagement, retention, and relationship-building and then task them to be accountable.

So, in short, a business development mindset is crucial for SME growth, but its impact is maximized when integrated with marketing efforts. Businesses that align BD and marketing create a powerful growth engine to deliver against a holistic growth strategy positioning themselves for long-term success and sustained market relevance.

If you would like to know more about 360 Growth Partners and how we can help with integrating a business development and marketing approach to support your growth, then please get in touch and let's start the conversation. 360growthpartners.co.uk



360 Growth Partners - Unlocking your potential together

“

...Andrew and the 360 team have helped guide my business at a pivotal time in its development. They are knowledgeable and approachable, have enabled longer-term planning, acting as a critical friend when I've needed it most. I trust them implicitly and know they have the best interests of myself and the business at heart. When you're a solo founder, it's good to know you have a partner alongside you that understands your world and you can turn to for advice and guidance...

Rachel McBryde, Founder, McBryde & Co

“

...Andrew and the 360 team have been invaluable over the past 18 months at a crucial time for the growth of my business. Their combination of skills and experience helped instil the confidence that we needed during the process of defining our values and behaviours, business growth strategy and our staff personal development plans.

We are already seeing the benefits of working with such an experienced team and the support we receive on an ongoing basis is invaluable. I wouldn't hesitate in recommending Andrew and the 360 team to anyone looking for help and support within their business...

Rob Brown, Founder & Managing Director, JUMP

“

...Andrew and the 360 team are like partners and colleagues rather than external consultants.

They've listened, challenged, and worked with us to unpack complexities, clarify priorities and help us to develop plans and strategies that are already making a real difference.

They are also a lovely bunch of people to work with, which helps!..

Julia Hankin, Marketing, Communications and IT Director, International Centre for Life

CMYK & Close House announce 'MAJOR' Collaboration

This exciting announcement will unveil a new format for the golfing calendar at Close House.

Bringing together club members to compete for the newly formed 'CMYK Champion Golfer of the Year' this new addition to the existing line up of trophy events will further elevate the significance of Major Tournaments.

Jonathan Lupton, Close House managing director commented; "Close House are delighted to announce a new addition to the Close House member trophy event calendar for 2025, thanks to our continued partnership with CMYK."

"On the weekend of each Major Championship this year, we will host a members trophy competition, which will be generously supported by CMYK. Combined scores from each of the major events will then contribute to member's overall score, with the best overall score across the four events being crowned the coveted 'CMYK Champion Golfer of the Year' at Close House."

Jonathan added; "Since Close House opened in 2011, we have boasted an outstanding list of trophy events for the membership which are supported by our corporate partners and individual members. The addition of this new series of events will further enhance the competitive experience of our membership. I would like to thank Craig Pratt and the team at CMYK for their continued support of the club. CMYK have been associate partners of Close House since 2021 and assist the club with our managed print services across the site. The service and support have always been outstanding, and we look forward to continuing and enhancing the partnership moving forward."

CMYK is proud to support Close House beyond the fairways by managing their technology needs, so when the opportunity arose to introduce this exciting new format to the golfing calendar, it was an



L-R: Jonathan Lupton with Craig Pratt

immediate yes. CMYK's relationship with Close House dates back to the founding of their Newcastle operations, and this collaboration will further deepen that connection, while also benefiting fellow club members.

Craig Pratt, regional director of CMYK remarked; "We are thrilled to announce our exciting collaboration with Close House to help champion their premier events throughout the year. We are immensely honoured to introduce the 'CMYK Champion Golfer of the Year' Trophy to the collection. Close House has played a big part in expanding our presence in the

region and never fails to be the perfect host venue for our many golfing and charitable events we host throughout the year. I'm very much looking forward to seeing the positive impact this sponsorship will have on the club and the members."

This expanded partnership will enhance CMYK's already busy schedule of golfing events, which they organise for their valued clients, partners, and guests, including the prestigious Cyber Cup® and other events that support local charitable causes.

www.cmyk-digital.co.uk



We are currently observing the Holy month of Ramadan and during this month we follow a strict daily fast from dawn till dusk.

The fast is broken with a meal at dusk known as "Iftaar".

As a gesture for "Iftaar" we would like to offer all our customers **15%** off their takeaway bill.

All our dine in customers will receive **20%** off their bill too, from Monday to Thursday.

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The future of construction: Leading change through collaboration

The construction industry is at a critical juncture. Traditional methods continue to deliver traditional results, leading to KMPG reporting up to 69% of projects failing on original budget or schedule.



Despite this, outdated procurement models persist, prioritising passing risk down onto the supply chain over collaboration and project outcomes. The industry has reached a crossroads: either accept mediocrity or drive genuine transformation. We are committed to leading this change, breaking down barriers, and driving project success through true collaboration.

Why the industry must change

Construction remains one of the least digitalised industries, still relying on outdated practices. If you look at photographs from the 1930s, the image of construction, cranes, steelwork, and concrete blocks, remains largely unchanged. The industry's slow evolution has led to stagnation, a widening skills gap, and an outdated perception of construction as a rigid, male-dominated field.

The “modernise or die” warning from Mark Farmer’s 2016 Review remains more relevant than ever. Procurement models continue to operate on a ‘design, bid, tender’ cycle, burdening contractors with excessive risk while limiting room for innovation. This creates a destructive loop: the industry demands efficiency and speed but refuses to invest in the methods required to achieve it.

Breaking free from outdated procurement models

At the root of the problem is procurement. Too often, clients delegate project management to advisors, who then lead them into a traditional tendering process that pits contractors against each other on cost, shifting all risk onto the supply chain. The result is a lack of transparency, minimal collaboration, and an adversarial environment where problem-solving takes a back seat.

Instead of passing risk down the chain, clients must be in a better position to understand risk and, at times, take ownership of it. When risk is fairly distributed and clearly understood from the outset, projects become more predictable and successful. This leads us to a more collaborative approach, encouraging trust and enabling contractors to focus on delivering quality work rather than constantly fighting to manage risk in order to maintain minimal profit margins.

How Wade drives true collaboration

We challenge the status quo by creating environments where collaboration, shared responsibility, and innovation thrive. Our approach is built on three key principles:

1. Influence projects through early stakeholder engagement

Bringing all stakeholders into the conversation from day one ensures alignment on scope, risks, and objectives before work even begins. Our experience in highly regulated sectors like pharmaceuticals and healthcare proves that proactive engagement prevents costly delays and disputes down the line.

2. Challenging traditional procurement

The traditional model forces contractors into a cycle of bidding, squeezing margins, and absorbing risk. We advocate for trust-based partnerships that prioritise long-term value over lowest-cost bidding. By engaging supply partners early and eliminating unnecessary and often duplicated effort, we improve efficiency and ensure project predictability.

3. Embracing modern methods of construction (MMC) and digital innovation

The industry must move beyond outdated techniques. A McKinsey report found that 65% of UK construction firms plan to increase their use of MMC to improve efficiency and sustainability. However, without fundamental changes to procurement and a focus on key project outcomes, these advancements will remain out of reach for many firms.

The consequences of inaction

Poor procurement models not only stifle innovation but also contribute to an adversarial work environment. Contractors are penalised through liquidated damages and withheld payments, creating an “us vs them” mentality rather than fostering collaboration. When risk is unfairly loaded onto contractors, projects suffer. Margins are squeezed, delays become inevitable through change, and trust is eroded.

It’s time to reject outdated procurement models and embrace transparency, collaboration, and innovation. Clients must gain a better understanding of risk management and stop washing their hands of risk and instead engage with suppliers in a meaningful, solutions-driven way. We need procurement processes that reward efficiency, expertise, and problem-solving, not just the lowest bid.

Conclusion

The industry cannot afford to continue down the same path. We must move away from adversarial relationships and towards a truer, more transparent industry focusing on project outcomes through collaboration and mutual trust. That means breaking free from outdated procurement models, investing in digital transformation, and adopting MMC at scale.

At Wade, we are committed to leading transformation in the construction industry. We accelerate delivery and eliminate uncertainty from construction projects. Experience the difference of working with a team dedicated to transforming the construction sector. Get in touch and let's collaborate to achieve outstanding results with efficiency and sustainability at the core.

Daniel Wade, Wade Construction Management Consultants
www.wadecmc.com

“

*...At the root of
the problem is
procurement...*

Daniel Wade



Developer announces £35million North East investment drive

A commercial property developer has announced plans to invest over £35million in the North East of England over the next two years.

UK Land Estates has ringfenced tens of millions of pounds to construct over 270,000sq ft of new, Grade A industrial and warehousing space throughout 2025/2026.

The company has also set aside £12million to refurbish and retrofit several units across its business parks spanning Northumberland to Teesside.

All of the new build developments are speculative, with over 200,000sq ft on Team Valley, and 25,000sq ft in Teesside.

Moreover, the business has - or is in the process of - securing outline consent for a further 600,000sq ft of space across its core estates.

Keith Taylor, Managing Director of UK Land Estates, said: "There is still a supply and demand imbalance in the region for high quality, well located industrial space, evidenced by our recent building programme and successful leasing activities.

"Last year, we brought several new units to market, ranging from 9,000 to 72,000sq ft, to fit a range of industry sectors and sizes and the team delivered a superb product, with most letting on or before practical completion.

"We're blessed as a region to have an incredibly skilled workforce and great location, which is why so many businesses want to invest here, however if we are to continue building on this momentum then we must ensure we have the space available those seeking to grow or relocate here, and hopefully these developments can help us ensure that."

Final plank placed in new bridge milestone

Another milestone has been reached as progress continues apace on the city's newest landmark.

This week, the team working on the New Wear Footbridge, at Riverside Sunderland, has laid the last of 91 deck planks, which will form the "floor" of the stunning new river crossing.

The 10-metre wide planks have been installed north to south using a bespoke trolley system, designed specifically for this project, with each plank lifted by crane from the southern riverside park onto the deck trolley, which then transports and positions them with precision before returning for the next one. Once in place, each plank is "stitched" to its neighbour using in-situ concrete to create a seamless deck.

Cllr Kevin Johnston, Portfolio Holder for Business, Housing and Regeneration at Sunderland City Council, said: "The laying of the final plank is a significant milestone



for this incredibly important project, which is a key part of Sunderland's ongoing transformation.

"To get all 91 of these mammoth, steel reinforced pre-cast concrete deck planks put in place so quickly and efficiently in just over one month is testament to the skill and know-how of our partners at VolkerStevin, who are delivering this project that will provide a fantastic new link between a vibrant Keel Square and newly-created Sheepfolds neighbourhood."

North East charities urged to bid for a share of £10K

A leading North East housebuilder is once again handing out £10,000 to charities across the region - and all they have to do is apply.

Miller Homes introduced its regional Community Fund in 2022 to help grassroots projects linked to education, wellbeing, the environment and sport across the North East.

And now the first of two rounds of 2025 funding is underway, with the company urging groups, organisations and good causes to submit their applications.

In the last round of funding, schools and community groups as far afield as County Durham and North Tyneside received grants of either £1k or £2k, enabling them to boost the services and facilities they offer to children and adults alike.

Backworth Miners Welfare received £1k which it has used to fund essential refurbishments to its Welfare Hall and to support its sport and physical activity sessions.

The charity runs four sporting clubs and James Morgan, chair of the cricket club, said: "Our membership has grown enormously over the last four or five years



and we had run out of space and facilities to store all the kit we now have.

"This award has been incredibly useful to us and we're very grateful to Miller Homes North East."

Another beneficiary of £1k was community interest company The Neurothentic Network, which supports neurodivergent children and their families across the North East and used its award to resource additional socialising groups for autistic children.

Children at Castleside Primary School, Consett, received additional outdoor resources thanks to an award of £2k, while the Grange Villa Residents Association, at Pelton, County Durham, benefitted to the tune of £1k, which they allocated to the development of the Grange Village community allotment project.

Miller Homes is currently developing 12 sites across the North East, from Seaham in County Durham to Bedlington.

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The changing fashion of colour

*By Neil Turner, Director,
Howarth Litchfield.*

I read with interest that the Pantone Colour Institute selected Mocha Mousse as its colour of the year, apparently for its 'warming brown hues imbued with richness', reminding us of coffee and chocolate. Last year's colour was Peach Fuzz, a pink-orange!

So, does this mean we should all be painting our walls in browns and buy a new sofa in earthy tones that look like a coffee house? Probably not I would suggest.



Norwegian houses at Trondheim

Well Pantone is influential in providing designers around the world with the ability to define colours, just like the German RAL system or British standard (BS). The choice of paint has never been greater from a huge range of manufacturers ranging from modern emulsion to lime based paints.

Colour is hugely important to all of us and especially so in architecture and design. Whilst some colours appear fashionable, other are stylistically more resilient and stylish.

Certain colours become synonymous with periods of time or an era - and as a conservation architect I have to be extra sensitive to the appropriateness of colour.

The buildings in our region and across the country are affected by the clays and soils found, which were the constituents in early paints. In the medieval periods colour was limited but was focused on stained glass with reds, blues and greens. The Baroque period saw rich coloration and gilding. The Georgian periods of the 18th century favoured more muted colours of sage green, blue grey and pastel tones, restricted by the lead content. The Victorians moved towards darker and richer tones, chestnut brown, dark green and burgundy.

Through the 20th century tastes have been more influenced by themes from the Bauhaus and its use of primary colours and international style of minimal whites.

History can teach us so much about why colours were created or used, often the meanings now lost, but we are accustomed to seeing them.

I was in Norway recently and they have used red, yellow ochre and white on buildings. The red was made from earth pigments, the yellow from copper mines - a little more expensive - and the white made from zinc, which was the most expensive and therefore reserved for only special houses. So, the status of the buildings was clear from the colours creating a hierarchy through colour.



A typical Georgian study

We have further seen the influence of different countries, as people have travelled more over the last fifty years with rich Mediterranean hues, Oriental and Asian influences.

Add in spiritual and social influences; then the choice of colour becomes more eclectic.

It's always fascinating to see what clients ask or request on buildings and also what designers think is suitable. It can make or break a good piece of design if the colour choices are wrong.

If you have a historic house or modern building, then there may be certain colours that work best and it's wise to stay within certain rules.

But on most houses the choice is down to individual taste, moods and preferences. If you are not confident in colour, then seek advice and help.

At the end of the day, we all see things differently. So, whether you are an all-white person or primary colour person it's worth thinking about the building, the use of the space, the furniture to go into that space and maybe, just maybe, the answer could be Mocha Mousse.

Neil Turner, Director, Howarth Litchfield
can be contacted on 0191 384 9470 or
email n.turner@hlpuk.com
www.howarthlitchfield.com

Colour of
the Year
2025

Mocha Mousse
17-1230



SANDERSON
YOUNG

A POSITIVE MARKET!



The first quarter of 2025 has been extremely positive for Sanderson Young, where we have seen very high demand on suburban properties and a strong market across all price points. A lack of stock at this current time means prices are being driven up and we have seen multiple properties achieving an outstanding number of viewings and going to Best & Final offers.

Our Gosforth office, in particular, has been very busy and is achieving excellent figures for homes throughout the region.

We have recently marketed a flat in Heaton at 'Offers Over' £200,000, where we had over 40 viewings and 16 offers, resulting in it achieving well in excess of its asking price.

A beautifully presented, mid terraced home in Gosforth was brought to the market for 'Offers Over' £495,000 and this had 27 viewings, 11 offers, and achieved an exceptional figure above its marketing price.

Finally, we had a semi detached property on the market in Jesmond at 'Offers Over' £800,000 and this achieved 30 viewings and 15 offers, again selling well in excess of its asking price.

At the top end of the market, we have also seen a very strong start and early signs of confidence returning after the

slight drop at the end of 2024 at these higher price points. The rare! team have sold 12 properties in excess of £1 Million since the beginning of the year, with a lot of their business taking place off the market, so it is imperative that you get in touch with myself, Ashleigh, Duncan or any of the rare! team so that we can discuss your property requirements and give you the full scope of what we have for sale.

The rural market has been a bit trickier so far in 2025, however with Spring arriving and gardens looking their best we expect this to pick up over the coming months.

I hope everyone has had a fantastic start to the year and are looking forward to the lighter and warmer months ahead. Please do not hesitate to get in touch with me on **07769227200** or harry.young@sandersonyoung.co.uk to discuss how I can help you sell your property or find your next home.

Harry Young
Regional Valuer
SANDERSON YOUNG



Honister Avenue *High West Jesmond*

This stunning mid terrace family home is perfectly situated in the popular residential area of High West Jesmond, a minute's walk from the Town Moor and Ilford Road Metro Station. The superb period property offers accommodation over three floors and has retained original features including lovely fireplaces, decorative ceiling coving and picture rails, original internal doors and sash windows. Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax Band: D.



4 2 2 D

Price Guide:
Offers over £495,000



Debbie Brown
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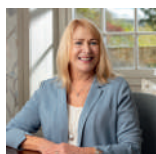
Moor Crescent *Gosforth*

This fabulous, detached family home, constructed in the 1980s, has been refurbished, improved and significantly extended by the current owners including the addition of a sun lounge area overlooking the beautiful gardens. Another tremendous feature is the magnificent external garden room with its own log burning stove, recently built to a very high standard and the ideal place to enjoy the garden all the year round. Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax Band: G.



4 3 3

Price Guide:
£1.25 Million



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





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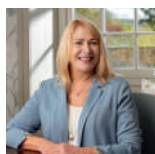
Carlton Terrace *Jesmond*

A magnificent, five storey, mid terraced family home within this very fine terrace of John Dobson designed houses, offering great flexibility in its high quality, luxury accommodation. This beautiful Georgian property also boasts a town garden, south facing courtyard and a separate mews block with secure garaging for 2.5 cars and a versatile space above, ideal as a self contained studio or office. Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax Band: G.



5 2 4 E

Price Guide:
£1.1 Million



Mary Walker
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mary.walker@sandersonyoung.co.uk



BARRY HOUSE, CRAMLINGTON



BEECHFIELD ROAD,
GOSFORTH



MILLFIELD,
DARRAS HALL



OSBORNE ROAD,
JESMOND



WOODSIDE,
MILBOURNE



ACORN LODGE, GUBEON WOOD



SYCAMORE SQUARE, GOSFORTH



DARRAS ROAD, DARRAS HALL

TOON TOON BLACK & WHITE ARMY

Congratulations to **NUFC** for winning the Carabao Cup and bringing home their first domestic trophy in 70 years! What an amazing achievement and so well deserved!

In keeping with the team's colours, we hope you enjoy this selection of properties that we currently have for sale with **black & white** interiors.

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✉ contact@sandersonyoung.co.uk

🌐 www.sandersonyoung.co.uk



In Conversation With...

Bill Calder

Narro, Newcastle.

Narro Associates (Narro) provides innovative, sustainable civil and structural engineering solutions across the North East, Scotland, the UK and internationally.

Founded in Edinburgh in 1986, Narro became employee-owned in 2014 and today, operates from six offices in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Stirling, Inverness, Aberdeen and Newcastle, its first base outside Scotland. Its 100+ team delivers over 700 projects annually.

Here we speak to Bill Calder, senior associate and business development lead in the Newcastle office.

Did you always envisage a career working in and around The Built Environment?

I have always had a keen interest in architecture and design but am also very technically minded and always need to know how things work. Engineering is the career that allows these two things to be brought together. My interest in engineering comes from my interest in architecture and I feel like I am a better engineer the more I understand about the architectural vision of a project.

Tell us about your current role.

My current role is as senior associate and section leader of the Newcastle office of Narro. After joining Narro as a graduate in the Edinburgh office, I worked my way up and then got an amazing opportunity to open Narro's first English office in Newcastle. There has been a big adjustment needed from focusing on project work to being immersed in the world of business development and all that it entails as I build the Narro brand in the region. It may seem a daunting task, but I absolutely love this side of the job and it is easy if you believe in the service and expertise you are providing.

Tell us about your team.

We have an incredible team in Narro Newcastle. Three years ago, it consisted of me alone with assistance from engineers in the other Narro offices. Very quickly it became apparent that there was a real need for more team members to cover the growing workload. Jenn was the first appointment, a senior engineer to assist in the growth and development of the office and we have steadily grown into a very tight and effective team.

We're fortunate in having staff from a variety of specialist backgrounds including conservation of historic buildings, sustainable design and Passivhaus projects as well as structural timber design.

What are you currently working on?

I have been working on a number of historic iron buildings recently including the Orchard House at Craggside and Alnwick Railway station which is the home of Barter Books. These are the types of projects that I particularly enjoy where we are working to conserve part of our built heritage and with materials that are unusual in a modern context. This involves a much more in-depth approach to the project to ensure we are treating the original fabric in a sensitive and appropriate way.

We've also been working on a beautiful project for a five-star hotel - a new spa and swimming pool building - which has really played to our strengths of designing in timber with a focus on sustainability and we feel privileged to have worked on the beautiful Grade I listed Church of Our Lady at Seaton Delaval Hall

and St Mary's Heritage Centre in Gateshead.

Museum projects also play a large role and we are currently working on the redevelopment of the Segedunum Roman Fort Museum and The Museum of Hartlepool. These projects are always great to work on as they combine conservation and sustainability yet also create new challenges like inventive ways to suspend or support items of the collection.

What is your proudest career achievement?

Without a doubt it is the setting up and development of the Newcastle office alongside Jenn. I'm very proud of where we stand three years later with a team of eight absolutely amazing people.

How do you see your industry evolving over the next 10 years?

I would like to start to see more of a value placed on quality of service and design and a move away from competitive tenders driving fees to rock bottom. I would really like to promote a change to this and increase clients' understanding of the value that we and other consultants can add to a project if the fees are appropriate.

What does the future hold?

The future of the Narro brand is to further consolidate its position in the North East in the conservation, cultural and sustainability sectors. We will continue to grow and would like to extend our footprint within the North of England generally, in the future.

How do you like to unwind?

I have three young kids including one-year-old twins so there isn't much opportunity to unwind. I generally spend my weekends keeping them busy either at football, bike rides or at National Trust sites. When I do manage a free afternoon, I will be out on my bike.

www.narroassociates.com



“

*...We're
fortunate in
having staff
from a variety
of specialist
backgrounds...*



Charlie and Hamish, the faithful friends of Narro Newcastle

Bill Calder

Dormor Machine & Engineering makes largest investment in company's history



L-R: Dormor's David Sansom (Production Manager), Ian Vickers (Business Development), Helen Cameron-Clarke (Managing Director) and Glyn Kirwan (Production Manager) stand by the new HNK Horizontal Boring Machine

Middlesbrough-based Dormor Machine & Engineering has made a significant investment in new technology, marking the largest single investment in the company's 46-year history.

One of the area's leading precision engineering firms based in Middlesbrough, which provides sub-contract services for a wide range of industries, has acquired an advanced HNK Horizontal Boring Machine to increase capacity and enhance its capabilities.

The new machine has officially begun producing its first components for the nuclear industry.

This investment represents a major step forward for Dormor, allowing them to take on larger and more complex projects while maintaining the high precision and quality standards they are known for.

Helen Cameron-Clarke, Managing Director of Dormor, said: "This is the largest investment in a single machine since the company was formed in 1979.

"The HNK Horizontal Boring Machine is a high precision machine that increases our capabilities to machine large components to a very high standard to serve various sectors and industries."

The benefits of the new machine include multi-operational capabilities, increased efficiency, productivity and high-tech tooling.

The machine features a 90-pocket tool carousel, Renishaw probing for accurate component setting and aids final inspection, plus a contouring head attachment for precision profiling.

Helen said: "We now have the biggest machining envelope we have ever had. This machine has just been commissioned. The initial training has been completed, so only just gone into production after being installed over Christmas."

The HNK Horizontal Boring Machine has already been utilised to produce pump casings and hinges for the nuclear industry. It has also opened doors to new clients and projects that were previously beyond their capabilities.

Dormor's commitment to innovation and investment is rooted in the company's proud Teesside roots. Founded in 1979 on an old British Steel site, the company has continuously embraced new technologies to improve its services at the HQ on Dormor Way.

Helen said: "My late father, Clive Wood MBE, took over the business in 1979 and retro-fitted machines to computer operated machinery from that day onwards.

"He embraced new technology and moved

the business forward. Over the last 25 years we have taken that on and invested even further to where we are today and we want to keep going."

Such progress has fuelled Dormor's growth and success. The company experienced a period of significant expansion due to manufacturing roller assemblies for cable laying ships used in the offshore wind industry. That led to doubling the size of the factory in 2012 and further expansions in 2016.

Dormor has a highly skilled team of 34 employees, many of whom began as apprentices trained through local providers like Middlesbrough College.

In addition to investing in technology and its workforce, Dormor is actively working towards Net Zero and reducing its carbon footprint.

Helen said: "We are a sustainable manufacturer. We have reduced our electrical consumption through investing in new machinery and solar PV, across the whole of the factory roof.

"There is new lighting in the factory as well, so all of that has reduced our electricity consumption by 23.4 per cent. It is important for us to have a positive impact. We will continuously review that on the Net Zero journey we are on."

For further information on Dormor's services check out www.dormormachine.co.uk

The continued adventures of... Ziggy and Cally!



Hi everyone,

Great news! Uncle James and Auntie Sarah are getting a new puppy next month. More details on that later.

My best friend Emily came back to see me this week and as usual, I have been spoiled. Struggling a bit to get around now with these old bones but hopefully will get to my 15th birthday.

Q. I live in a cottage built around 1900 with rendered brick walls (render possibly original) and a slate roof. After the heavy rains recently there was water ingress around the two chimney stacks through to the bedroom ceilings.

A roofing company repaired the stacks and treated the render but during the following winter one chimney stack appeared to be waterproof but the other not. I re-called the roofing company who stated that the chimney stacks were sound externally, but the chimney brickwork etc may be “hygroscopic” which might require expert attention. This chimney stack was linked to an open fireplace downstairs used over the years. Coincidentally we had a multi burner stove installed last year.

The stove company recommended and installed Leca insulation, inserting this down one chimney pot before fitting a cowl. The other chimney passage to the bedroom is vented. The loft space is small but on inspection this chimney stack was quite damp inside the loft after the winter, drying out afterwards. The loft has original airbricks plus three ventilating ridge tiles, fixed at a much later date. Has the fitting of the woodburner contributed to what may be condensation? What are your suggested solutions please?

A. The brickwork forming the flues in old houses will be impregnated with salts given off by decades of coal and wood smoke. These salts make the brickwork hygroscopic, meaning that it can absorb moisture directly from the air. This is not the same thing as condensation. For a common example of

hygroscopicity, think of a salt cellar on the table of a steamy café in winter – sometimes you can see individual grains of salt around the spout forming into little pools of water. Or – if you don’t frequent greasy spoon cafés as I do – have a look at the salt sprinkled on the roads during dry but icy weather – you will see each grain of salt sitting in its own little damp patch.

For this reason, it is important to keep disused old flues, chimney breasts and stacks ventilated, allowing a trickle of air to flow up from the room below and out through the pot. It sounds as though the flue used by your multi-fuel stove has been fitted with a corrugated stainless-steel liner, with Leca insulation granules poured around the outside.

This is standard industry practice, and helps the stove to draw when it is first lit. But it does take away that important drying effect. The chimney breast in the roof space being damp is not in itself damaging, and you say that space is now well ventilated. So the only problem would appear to be the hygroscopic moisture migrating to the adjacent bedroom ceiling, which I’m guessing is probably modern gypsum plasterboard – a material which itself is hygroscopic. You can prevent this migration by cutting a physical gap between the chimney breast and the ceiling, and hiding it with acrylic mastic or a timber moulding.



Please send me your building queries through facebook - @WDLne, website: wdlnortheast.co.uk or through Michael at Northern Insight on micahael@northern-insight.co.uk



Clothier Lacey & Co: your trusted marketing partner for property developments

In today's fast-moving property market, developers need more than just a great product; they need a marketing strategy that ensures their properties stand out. With mortgage approvals up 18% over the past year, the demand for well-positioned properties is rising, and the competition is fiercer than ever.

That's where Clothier Lacey & Co come in.

With over 25+ years of experience and a reputation as a trusted partner for companies nationwide, the Newcastle-based marketing and PR agency has helped developers accelerate property sales through strategic traditional and digital marketing campaigns. With the introduction of its new SEO services, Clothier Lacey is positioning properties for success.

A tailored approach to property marketing

Clothier Lacey specialises in land and new homes marketing, rolling out bespoke campaigns that are crafted to suit each client's individual needs. The agency supports developments from concept to completion, offering an extensive list of services, including PR, branding, design of all marketing materials, email marketing and social media management.

"We know the property market inside and out; from fluctuating mortgage rates to planning reform," says Philippa Clothier, managing director. "Our job is to help developers position their properties strategically and create a brand that resonates with buyers."



L-R: Philippa Clothier and Zoe Leahy

Meeting market challenges head-on

The property market is currently navigating a complex landscape. Mortgage rates remain high, averaging at 4.5%, though there are signs of recovery, as Zoopla reports a 10% year-on-year increase in sales agreements from the first quarter of 2025. This could be attributed to the stamp duty increases, which have created a sense of urgency among buyers.

Simultaneously, the government's overhaul of planning regulations is expected to accelerate the supply of new homes, so developers must adapt in order to stand out amongst competitors.

For property developers, every enquiry counts. So, how can you ensure that your properties get the visibility they need in today's crowded market? The answer lies in Clothier Lacey's new Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) services.

Clothier Lacey's new SEO service

Clothier Lacey has recently introduced SEO services to its digital marketing portfolio, positioning the agency as a one-stop shop for companies looking to increase their online visibility.

Clothier Lacey has appointed Ethan Martin as digital marketing manager. Due to his extensive experience in SEO across a variety of industries, from mining to home furniture, Ethan has driven the development of the SEO services and now leads them. He explains the importance of SEO in today's market:

"SEO ensures your business appears when potential customers search for relevant terms. It's not just about getting more website traffic - it's about getting traffic that will result in sales.

"We handle everything from on-page optimisation to local SEO, ensuring that developers reach buyers at the optimal moment in their search journey."

Highlighting Ethan's significant contribution to the company's growth, Philippa says: "The world of digital marketing is evolving rapidly, and we knew we needed to further our in-house expertise.

"Ethan's appointment means we can now offer 360-degree support to our clients, combining traditional marketing with data-driven digital strategies."

With the launch of its SEO service, Clothier Lacey strengthens its position as a leading agency in land and new homes marketing.

Delivering results

Director and head of Clothier Lacey's land and new homes division, Zoe Leahy, explains the agency's new approach: "We've always prided ourselves on delivering results. Adding SEO into the mix allows us to provide even more value. It's about creating a consistent presence, whether that's through press coverage, social media or search rankings - we ensure that potential buyers engage with the right message at the right time."



Clothier Lacey maintains transparency in all its services, providing straightforward pricing with no hidden fees or long-term contracts, so clients have full visibility over their marketing spend.

A trusted marketing partner for property developers

As the property market continues to adjust to new economic and regulatory factors, Clothier Lacey stands out as a trusted partner for developers looking to maximise sales and visibility. Their expertise in land and new homes marketing, combined with their expanded digital capabilities, positions them at the forefront of the industry.

"For developers, the challenge is not just building the right product, it's ensuring the right people see it," says Zoe. "That's where we come in. We help developers cut through the noise and connect with buyers. In a market where every enquiry counts, that's more important than ever.

"Clothier Lacey's strong track record and innovative approach position us as a trusted marketing partner for property developers anywhere who are aiming to enhance their online presence."

www.clothierlacey.co.uk



Banks Homes offering style as standard at new Yarm residential development



An artist's impression of Banks Homes' Cornfields development at Yarm

Housebuilder Banks Homes is proud to introduce its first ever residential development in North Yorkshire – The Cornfields in Yarm.

Set in the stunning surroundings of the charming Georgian market town, The Cornfields will be a vibrant new community of up to 109 high quality homes, with each property built to high design and environmental specifications, and with style included as standard.

The development will include a range of three-to-five-bedroomed homes, with the 11 different property designs available providing options that will suit every type of housebuyer, and will also benefit from excellent road, rail and air transport links.

All Banks Homes also come with sustainability built in, with each property featuring Hive smart heating systems, air source heat pumps and electric vehicle car charging points, while a number of the house types at The Cornfields will also come with underfloor heating.

A formal launch event for The Cornfields is set to take place on Wednesday 7th May at Crathorne Hall Hotel near Yarm, at which properties will be available for buyers to reserve off plan.

Construction work is set to start around the same time, with the first homes at The Cornfields expected to be ready for buyers to move into by spring next year.

Aisling Ramshaw, head of sales and marketing at Banks Homes, says: "Banks Homes was born from a desire to create sustainable homes that positively impact on health and happiness, and our mission is to bring together striking design, future-proof sustainability and desirable locations to create a new blueprint for contemporary living.

"This will be our guiding principle as we work towards bringing our plans to life for The Cornfields, Banks Homes' first residential development in North Yorkshire, which will offer the perfect setting for families and professionals seeking modern homes in a stunning location.

"This fantastic development is just a ten-minute walk from the centre of Yarm, one of the region's most beautiful and sought-after places to live, and will be in easy reach of all the attractions and facilities that anyone could want."

All the properties at The Cornfields will include spacious gardens, three-quarter height windows, bi-fold doors, Porcelanosa bathrooms and Omega kitchens.

Aisling Ramshaw continues: "We believe our design specifications are the very best among our peers, with the role and

function of every room being carefully considered to ensure they provide everything homeowners need for a healthier, happier life.

"The energy efficiency and intelligent technologies we include will also help to reduce owners' energy usage and bills, and mean that a Banks Home is already evolved for tomorrow.

"Whichever style of home you want at The Cornfields you choose, you'll find the same perfect location, discerning style and a home truly evolved for tomorrow.

"We're so excited to be bringing the Banks Homes brand to Yarm and look forward to welcoming everyone to our launch event for The Cornfields next month."

For more information on The Cornfields at Yarm or to reserve a place at the development's launch event on Wednesday 7th May, please email cornfields@bankshomes.co.uk, call 0191 378 6100 or visit www.bankshomes.co.uk/developments/the-cornfields

For further information on Banks Homes' growing range of high quality residential developments across the North East and Yorkshire, please visit www.bankshomes.co.uk



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Expert Lettings Management in the North of England: Trusted by Landlords

At youngsRPS, we understand the rewards and challenges of managing rental properties.

As the rental market in the North of England grows, landlords need a reliable team to secure long-term tenants, maximise rental returns, and ensure compliance with evolving legislation. Our experienced residential lettings team, based in Hexham, offers expert guidance and tailored services to help landlords navigate property letting.

The Growing Rental Market in the North of England

Recent data from Rightmove highlights the strength of the private rental sector in the North, with Northumberland seeing significant growth. The average rent in the region has risen to £922 per month—a 7.7% increase from last year—offering an average yield of 8.3%. Demand for quality rental homes is rising, with one-bedroom properties and larger family homes seeing strong interest.

Northumberland's affordability, job market, and quality of life make it an attractive area for tenants. As demand for rental homes increases, landlords must ensure efficient property management.

A Trusted Lettings Partner in Northumberland

youngsRPS is proud to have a skilled team in Hexham, led by Residential Lettings Manager Teresa Sargeant. Since joining in 2016, Teresa has combined her local expertise with a passion for exceptional service.

With years of experience in the property sector, Teresa leads the lettings department, ensuring personalised service for every client. Supported by a dedicated team, youngsRPS offers comprehensive lettings solutions tailored to meet landlords' and tenants' needs.



youngsRPS Residential Team L-R: Sarah Butterfield (Senior Sales Negotiator), Ciara Duncan (Sales Negotiator), William Thornton (Head of Residential Agency), Teresa Sargeant (Residential Lettings Manager), and Cheryl Scott (Valuer)

Why Choose youngsRPS for Your Lettings Needs?

The private rental sector is constantly evolving. Successful property management requires in-depth knowledge of market trends, tenant expectations, and legal obligations. Our lettings team provides tailored support to ensure peace of mind and long-term success.

Setting the Right Rental Price: Accurate pricing attracts quality tenants and maximises returns. We conduct detailed market analyses to help landlords set competitive rates.

Effective Marketing: A well-presented property is key in today's market. We use professional photography and targeted marketing strategies to reach the right audience.

Finding and Retaining Reliable Tenants: Securing the right tenant is more than filling a vacancy. We perform thorough checks and foster strong relationships to reduce turnover.

Staying Compliant with Legal Changes: With continuous regulatory updates, including

the upcoming Renters' Reform Bill in 2025, staying compliant is vital. Our team ensures landlords understand and implement these changes.

Proactive Property Management:

Maintaining high standards is essential for tenant satisfaction and long-term value. Our trusted contractors address maintenance issues promptly.

A Promising Future for Landlords in Northumberland

With increasing demand, Northumberland remains a prime location for investment. At youngsRPS, we are committed to supporting landlords with expert advice, top-notch services, and proactive management.

Whether you're a seasoned landlord or new to property letting, having an experienced team is essential for success in today's evolving market. Contact our Hexham lettings team to learn how we can help you thrive.

youngsrps.com

GFW's five top tips for selling your home



Lindsay French

Thinking of selling your home? Partner and Head of Residential Sales and Lettings at GFW Lindsay French shares her five top tips for selling in the current market.

1. Pricing Strategy

It's so important in a post covid market to be realistic with your price and have a strategy with your agent to finely balance the best achievable price with the best timescale. Motivation for selling is different for everyone, so the pricing strategy we adopt is different for every home we sell. For example, if your motivation is to achieve a quick sale, you may look at an 'offers over' approach, where you guide your property slightly lower, in the hope that you achieve more interest which drives up the price. If time is less of a pressure,

you may look at a slightly higher guide price, which allows a little wiggle room with your negotiations.

2. Marketing

I always tell my clients that buyers are very visual, so the photography, brochure, property videos, floorplans and land plans that your agent produces on your behalf have a huge bearing on the interest that your property receive, and how you make yourself stand out from the competition.

3. Property presentation

Viewings are one of the most important steps in securing a buyer, so my top tip is to have your property ready to view, as you would want to view a property. Think about finishing touches such as clear surfaces, flowers, well-made beds, nice smells etc. These can make all the difference to a prospective purchaser.

4. Transparency

Nobody wants to think about compliance, but being open and honest from the outset and having your ducks in a row so to speak,

is the best way to protect yourself from a fallen sale. So for example, if you know you have no mobile signal at your property, be transparent about it, as this could affect a buyers decision further down the line.

5. Choose a proactive agent

When choosing an agent, so many people make a decision around cost and fee, when really the decision ought to be centred around service and exposure. When the market is a little stickier, it's easy to tell the difference between a proactive agent and a reactive agent. A proactive agent, may cost a little more at first glance, but by applying the skills to fight for a better sale price, and get the sale over the line, it may well mean you end up thousands of pounds better off.

If you'd like to talk to someone about the process of selling your home, or if you have any other property needs, the Residential Sales and Lettings team at GFW would love to hear from you.

Give GFW a call on 0333 920 2220 or visit gfwllp.co.uk



The New Way of Working: How hybrid and flexible workspaces are changing the game

An insight from Laura Goldston, General Manager at Hoult's Yard Hubs.

Laura Goldston

The world of work has undergone a seismic shift in recent years, with businesses and employees alike reassessing their needs when it comes to office space. Hybrid working, once a necessity born from lockdowns, has evolved into an expectation, shaping the way companies think about their workplaces.

Employees now crave flexibility, and businesses are seeking smarter, more cost-effective workspace solutions that allow them to scale without unnecessary overheads.

At Hoult's Yard Hubs, we've seen this shift firsthand and have adapted our offering to meet the evolving demands of the modern workforce. Our flexible workspaces are designed with agility in mind, offering everything from private offices to meeting rooms and event venues, allowing businesses to work in a way that best suits their team dynamics.

The hybrid working boom

The hybrid working model has become a norm for many organisations. Instead of rigid, five-day office schedules, employees split their time between home and a shared workspace, benefiting from autonomy and collaboration. This shift has changed what businesses look for in an office—long-term leases are being swapped for flexible agreements, and location convenience now trumps city centre prestige.

Our business centres across Newcastle and the North East have seen a growing demand for flexibility, with many companies looking for adaptable spaces that can grow alongside their team. Whether it's a satellite office to support a hybrid workforce, a fully serviced space that removes the hassle of facilities management, or access to high-quality meeting rooms for collaborative sessions, businesses are rethinking the traditional office setup.

This shift isn't just about convenience—it has real implications for work-life balance, particularly for working parents. Studies show that women, who often take on most childcare responsibilities, face more significant barriers to career progression when flexible working isn't an option. By embracing hybrid models and flexible workspace solutions, businesses can help level the playing field, ensuring that talented professionals aren't forced to choose between career growth and family commitments.

More than just a desk

What sets flexible workspaces apart isn't just the ability to rent an office for as little or as long as you need—it's the community, the experience, and the amenities that come with it. Employees working remotely often report feeling isolated, and businesses struggle to maintain company culture when teams are dispersed. That's where spaces like ours come in, offering a dynamic environment where people can connect, collaborate, and thrive.

At Hoult's Yard Hubs, we prioritise community. Our spaces are designed to foster interaction, whether it's through our breakout areas, networking events, or casual 'Brew and Bite' meetups. With super-fast internet, on-site support, and stylish, functional designs, our workspaces create an environment where businesses and individuals can be productive without compromising on the benefits of in-person interaction.

For those who don't require a permanent office, we also offer flexible day passes and fully equipped meeting rooms, giving businesses and individuals access to a professional workspace when they need it most.

The future of workspaces

The office as we knew it isn't coming back—but that's not a bad thing. Instead, we're moving towards a more thoughtful, human-centric approach to workspace design. Businesses are embracing a mix of remote work, in-person collaboration, and flexible solutions tailored to their needs.

At Hoult's Yard Hubs, we're excited to be at the forefront of this change. By offering a range of flexible workspace solutions, we're helping businesses of all sizes navigate the future of work with confidence. Whether you're a growing team in need of a scalable office, an established business looking to optimise costs, or someone who needs a professional space for the day, our workspaces provide the perfect balance of flexibility, functionality, and community.

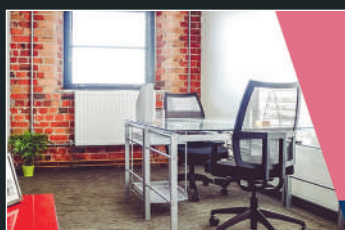
The way we work has changed for good—and flexible workspaces are leading the charge.

Considering a move to flexible workspace?

We've got some great offers to get you started:

- **50% off half your term** - When signing up for 12 months or more on an office space.
- **50% off meeting room bookings** - Perfect for when you need to bring the team together.

Laura is the General Manager at Hoult's Yard Hubs. If you are considering flexible workspace and are interested in how Hoult's Yard Hubs can support you contact Laura via LinkedIn, Laura.Goldston@hyhubs.com, or via our website www.hyhubs.com



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James Carss with his dog, Bella

Castle Peak Group - Driving business forward

Diversity and equality in the workplace makes good business sense.

In last month's edition of Northern Insight we began what is going to be a series of articles about diversity and why it's not only the right thing to do when it comes to business...it also makes sense in terms of your bottom line.

This all comes about following extensive research which has been undertaken by Castle Peak Group to look at the progress... or lack of it...regarding diversity at executive and board level.

Castle Peak Group, led by CEO James Carss, is a North East based Executive Search company which strengthens organisations through diversity and equality.

Why does he concentrate on diversity and equality? Simple...because James Carss is one of the UK's most experienced recruiters. He knows what works when a company is recruiting...he knows how a boardroom and executive team ticks... how it makes that business successful. He knows how to deal with people who operate at a senior level. With over 20 years of experience under his belt, when he's giving out advice, you should listen very carefully.

Something he knows which makes a massive difference to a company is diversity and equality at senior levels. It can see a business flourish, create greater income and provide an opportunity for that business to move forward.

"A diverse board or team of executives from different backgrounds brings a wealth of experiences together. Companies can transform their leadership teams through inclusive hiring, allowing talented executives to drive genuine progress. Diversity and performance go hand in hand because it can lead to better decision making and therefore make organisations and businesses more efficient and effective - something which is vital in difficult times."

In other words, if you have a business and you employ people, or you are someone at a senior level within a company, this research is something you need to read.

Here's an idea which James's research has picked up on...it may work for you. The National Housing Federation has a set of guidelines. One suggestion is for organisations to set out a six-year board limit with the intention to create more churn in senior roles. This provides more opportunity for fresh faces, fresh ideas and fresh points of view. He admits that this can make the appointing of new board members more complicated but, if it's an idea which can improve a business, then go for it.

If you'd like information on how to take your business forward via proper recruitment or would like Castle Peak Group to help with your recruitment plans, contact James Carss directly on 07802 531040 or emailing info@castlepeak-group.com

You'll also read about the research and what Castle Peak Group can do for you by logging on to www.castlepeak-group.com

Wright Residential's Short Guide for First-Time Investors

Thinking about making your first property investment? It can feel a bit overwhelming, especially with all the stories about bad tenants and legal headaches. With inflation at a 41-year high, many landlords are facing rising costs for maintenance and repairs, making informed decisions more crucial than ever.

Where to Start?

Take your time—there's no rush! Start with thorough research to familiarise yourself with key legislation, like the Housing Act and the upcoming Renters Reform Bill. Understanding these laws is vital for your success as a landlord.

Your Responsibilities

As a landlord, you have several responsibilities to ensure your property is safe and compliant. This includes conducting essential safety checks and keeping the necessary documents handy. Missing out on required certificates can lead to significant legal issues and, more importantly, put your tenants at risk.

Essential Certificates:

- Energy Performance Certificate (EPC): Minimum rating of E required before renting.
- Gas Safety Certificate: Renew annually by a Gas Safe registered engineer.
- Electrical Safety Certificate: Five-year checks by a qualified electrician.
- Fire Safety Check: Ensure smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors are operational.
- Legionella Risk Assessment: Identifies potential water risks.
- How to Rent Guide: Must be provided to tenants at the start of the tenancy.



- Deposit Protection Information: Proof that the tenant's deposit is secured.

Welcoming Tenants

Screen your tenants carefully—conduct credit checks and verify their rental history. Once you've chosen a tenant, set up a reliable rent collection system to ensure timely payments. Maintaining a positive relationship with your tenants is key to preventing disputes.

While becoming a landlord can be rewarding, it requires preparation and awareness of legal changes. Wright Residential has been guiding landlords since 1998.

Get in touch with us today at 0191 240 1818 or visit us at 176 Chillingham Rd, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 5BU. For more information, check out our website: www.wrightresidential.co.uk or email us: info@wrightresidential.co.uk

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Johnston Carmichael welcomes top tax talent to Newcastle team

Leading accountancy and business advisory firm Johnston Carmichael has welcomed three significant tax hires to its Newcastle team, further enhancing their expertise in the region.

Will Hamilton has joined as Corporate Tax Senior Manager, Zita Duggan as Specialist Tax Manager, and Rebecca McColl as R&D Manager.

Will Hamilton has joined the team with 24 years of experience in corporation tax compliance and advisory work, bringing significant technical expertise. He said: "Johnston Carmichael stood out as a dynamic, fast-growing firm with an outstanding team. The opportunity

to contribute to the development of the Newcastle practice was really appealing to me."

Rebecca McColl brings extensive experience in innovation tax, including R&D tax relief and Patent Box incentives. She said: "Being part of Johnston Carmichael's expansion into the North East, particularly in my hometown, is an exciting prospect. I'm really looking forward to engaging with local businesses and supporting their innovation initiatives."

Zita Duggan has over 30 years of experience in tax, with a focus on employee share plans and employment-related securities. She commented: "I am passionate about helping businesses implement tax-efficient solutions for their employees and investors, and I am delighted to be working with such a highly regarded team."

Paul Shields, Partner and Head of the Newcastle office, added: "Will, Rebecca, and Zita are incredible additions to our team. Their knowledge, drive, and fresh perspectives will be invaluable to both our clients and our growing presence in the region. We're excited to see them shine at Johnston Carmichael."



Mincoffs returns as Northern Football Club sponsor

Newcastle-based Mincoffs Solicitors has returned as shirt sponsor for Northern Football Club's youth and mini teams' next season.

Founded in 1875, the organisation is based at McCracken Park, Gosforth and has a large offering for young people with 14 groups – ranging in age from under 6s to under 16s – training at the grounds each week.

The club has strong links with Newcastle Falcons and, from U14s upwards, regularly has players go through the development player programme and academy.

Mincoffs, which has a team of more than 115 staff at its Jesmond offices, supports a range of sports, charities and community groups as part of its ongoing ESG strategy.

Paul Hughes, senior partner and head of corporate, looks forward to following the team's progress.

"After a fantastic last season across all age groups, we're delighted to be backing Northern Football Club as shirt sponsor for another year," he said.

"The club provides a really important space for young people and allows them to develop skills such as resilience, commitment and working together as a team, which will set them in great stead for their futures.

"Northern Football Club does amazing work for the North East sporting community and are an organisation we are proud to support."

Chair of youth rugby at Northern Football Club, Ben Hunter, said: "As chair of youth rugby, I would like to thank Mincoffs on behalf of all at Northern for their continued partnership.

"This will help us continue to support all the age groups to develop the players as individuals and as a team.

"The funds are used to support players throughout the season and help the teams go on a mini tour. This trip away is a highlight of the year where players strengthen friendships, create memories and celebrate the successes of the season."

Muckle LLP strengthens Teesside offering with strategic appointment

Leading law firm Muckle LLP has appointed a new partner to enhance its Teesside offering and grow its private client portfolio.

Leah Duffield, born and bred in Middlesbrough, joins Muckle to build on the firm's Teesside presence and add to the private client team.

The firm already advises many of the region's leading organisations, including Teesside International Airport, Tees Valley Combined Authority, Great North Air Ambulance and Wilton Universal Group. Muckle also supports charities such as Middlesbrough-based Clean Slate Solutions on an ongoing basis.

Leah has become the latest lawyer to join Muckle. After studying at the University of York, Leah returned to Teesside and worked in the region since qualifying in 2012. Leah, who will join the team as a partner, is experienced in advising clients on their succession strategies and all



aspects of their personal planning.

Leah said: "Muckle has a brilliant reputation across Teesside and the North East. I really value working with great clients and colleagues so joining Muckle feels like a perfect fit.

"I am excited to be part of the private client team at Muckle. It is a big opportunity both for me and for Teesside that Muckle is looking to build its Teesside base. I am passionate about giving back to local communities and Muckle has an established framework and culture for encouraging staff to give their time and energy through pro bono work, volunteering and trusteeships."

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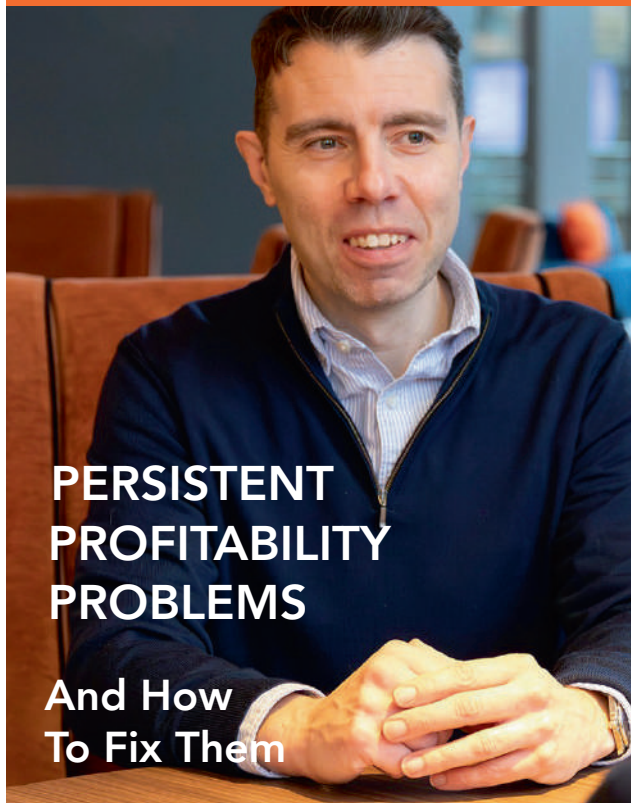


INTERESTING TIMES

The Finance Newsletter That You'll Actually Want To Read | NORTHERN INSIGHT VERSION

Who said that accountancy and finance can't be interesting? (We'll do our best!)

ONE SUBJECT | THREE TIPS



You saw the money coming in... So, where's it gone?

The age-old conundrum that businesses of any size face. It's not how much money comes in that matters. It's what you have left. Here are three tips to protect profitability.

1. Price Based on What's Profitable, Not What Feels 'Fair'

Too many business owners set prices based on gut instinct or what competitors charge without properly working out what they need to charge to make a profit. If your prices aren't covering costs and giving you a healthy margin, you're working hard for nothing. Calculate true costs and set prices accordingly.

2. Making Decisions Based on Data, Not Bank Balance

Checking your bank balance is not business strategy. Many small businesses make decisions reactively, spending when there's cash, cutting back when it's tight, without properly understanding what's driving profitability. Use financial reports to spot trends, plan, and make informed decisions. Focus on more than just year-end accounts. The goal isn't just to survive another year; it's to build a business that grows on purpose, not by accident.

3. Don't Confuse Turnover With Profit

It's easy to celebrate big sales, but turnover means nothing if too much disappears in costs. Many businesses assume that if money is coming in, they're doing fine – until they check the bank balance! Track profit margins properly. If margins are too tight, review pricing, cut costs, or rethink your business model. A business that's busy but barely profitable is just an expensive hobby.

Give these a try. See how you go. Call me on 0191 603 1760 if I can help you. **Mark Melville.**

INTERESTING QUOTES

*The first copper you save
is the seed from which
your tree of wealth shall grow.*
George S Clason.



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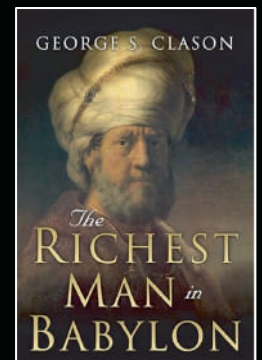
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Gateshead bookkeeper champions neurodivergent business owners

Emily Rodgers, the founder of Bookgeeking Ltd, is revolutionising bookkeeping for small businesses with a unique focus on neurodivergent entrepreneurs.

Based in Gateshead, Emily combines her financial expertise with a deep understanding of neurodiversity, ensuring her services are tailored to the needs of creative and neurodivergent business owners.

With a strong background in finance departments across the North East, Emily decided to channel her experience into helping small businesses thrive. After finishing maternity leave, she identified a gap in the market—bringing corporate-level expertise to independent businesses in an accessible and supportive way.

“I’ve always loved working with individuals rather than large corporate departments,” says Emily. “I particularly enjoy supporting neurodivergent creatives. They’re the people I connect with best, and my own experiences mean I understand their challenges first hand.”

Diagnosed with dyspraxia at an early age, Emily later received an ADHD diagnosis, which helped her better understand her own working style. “It gave me a new level of empathy for myself and my clients. Many neurodivergent people struggle with financial organisation, and I want to provide them with the systems and support they need to succeed.”

New appointment at Swinburne Maddison

Durham City’s leading law firm, Swinburne Maddison LLP (Swinburne Maddison) has announced the appointment of Helen Lyne, an experienced commercial litigation partner to its dispute resolution team.

Helen, who studied Law at the University of Northumbria and qualified in 2012 joins Swinburne Maddison from two prominent regional law firms in Teesside, where she developed a strong network of contacts and business clients.

Her appointment, as a senior member of the team, will see her working alongside Swinburne Maddison’s dispute resolution partner, David Low, to generate instructions from both new and existing contacts. This appointment is part of the firm’s ongoing growth strategy and marks an exciting milestone as the department expands to 26 members.

With experience of all types of litigation and insolvency cases, Helen is used to supporting a range of clients from high profile individuals through to public and private sector bodies. Her ability to attract



national and multinational clients will further strengthen Swinburne Maddison’s reputation within the North East business community.

Jonathan Moreland, Swinburne Maddison’s Managing Partner and Head of Dispute Resolution, commented:

“We are delighted to welcome Helen to the firm. Last year, our commercial litigation team earned a Top Tier ranking in the latest Legal 500. Helen’s appointment will enhance the expertise of our team and align perfectly with our ambitious growth plans.

“With an incredibly impressive track record and standing in the profession, Helen is a remarkable addition, and we are excited to have her on board.”

Hay & Kilner advise on the acquisition of The Dubliner York

Hay & Kilner, the full-service law firm, has acted for Daniel Van Hymus on his acquisition of The Maltings in Tanner’s Wharf, York, for an undisclosed sum. Upon acquisition, the pub was refurbished and rebranded as The Dubliner York, an Irish-themed pub with live music.

Mr Van Hymus already runs a successful Irish pub and live music venue on Newcastle’s Quayside, The Dubliner, and was looking to bring that same success to York. Daniel started considering bringing The Dubliner to York after the rate of their growth in the North East and the fact that there were no Irish pubs in the city.

Hay & Kilner’s Commercial Property and Employment team provided legal advice on the acquisition and refurbishment to Daniel Van Hymus, led by Georgia Whitfield and supported by Tom Clarke.

Daniel Van Hymus, owner of The Dubliner said: “We’re buzzing to bring the magic of The Dubliner to York! The venue has created a dozen new jobs, and will inject almost £200k a year into the local music scene.



“It was critical we got the deal done before the height of the Christmas period in York - so would like to thank everyone involved in getting it over the line so quickly, in particular Georgia Whitfield of Hay & Kilner representing us, Elliot Newby of Stephenson’s Property and the former proprietors Anita, Sean and Maxine. We also could not have done it without local building firm Sorrell’s and a host of other local tradesmen.

“We’ll continue to be on the lookout for exciting new opportunities that help us in our goal to bring special moments to thousands of people every week, and creating incredible opportunities for those that help make it happen.”

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Payrolling benefits in kind – get ahead of the changes

By Louise McGuire, head of payroll services at RMT Accountants & Business Advisors

With changes to employee benefits reporting just a year away, now is the perfect time for you to be taking proactive steps to future-proof your business's payroll processes.

HMRC has announced that, from April 2026, reporting and paying income tax and Class 1A National Insurance Contributions (NIC) on benefits in kind through payroll will become mandatory as part of the government's efforts to streamline reporting and improve tax transparency.

Payrolling benefits is a method of reporting the taxable value of employee benefits such as company cars, private medical insurance and gym memberships through your monthly payroll system, instead of annually via a P11D form.

This will allow employees to pay the tax in real-time, rather than through a tax code adjustment in the following year.

These changes will require businesses to adapt their payroll systems to ensure compliance – and while this may seem like a major task, acting early on the new approach provides real opportunities for business owners.

Advantages of payrolling employee benefits

1. Simplified administration

Payrolling benefits removes the need to file P11D forms at the end of the tax year, significantly reducing the administrative burden on businesses. All benefit tax is calculated and collected monthly, ensuring a smoother, more predictable process.

2. Improved employee experience

Employees can see the tax impact of their benefits in real-time on their payslips, avoiding surprises or confusion from underpaid taxes later. This transparency fosters trust and makes it easier for employees to manage their finances.

3. Efficient tax handling

By payrolling benefits, businesses ensure that taxes are calculated accurately throughout the year, reducing the risk of errors or delays that can occur with annual reporting.

4. Enhanced cash flow management

For both employers and employees, spreading the cost of benefit-related taxes over the year can ease cash flow pressures.

How easy is it to make the switch?

Switching to payrolling benefits is straightforward, especially if you work with an experienced payroll team. RMT Accountants' specialist payroll team can handle the transition for you, ensuring your payroll system is updated and

compliant with HMRC guidelines.

Our outsourced payroll services take the stress out of managing employee benefits, allowing you to focus on running your business.

Key steps include:

- Registering with HMRC to payroll benefits.

- Updating payroll software to include taxable benefits.

- Communicating changes to employees to ensure they understand the new process.

Why you should act now

Although the mandatory deadline is April 2026, waiting until the last minute could create unnecessary challenges.

By implementing payrolling now, you'll avoid the inevitable rush closer to the deadline, giving your business time to adapt smoothly.

Making the switch before the April 2026 deadline also means you'll start enjoying the administrative and financial benefits immediately, and ensures your employees are comfortable with the changes well ahead of time.

Our expert payroll team is here to guide you every step of the way. With years of experience helping businesses across the North East, we can manage the entire process for you—from registration with HMRC to employee communication.

For further information and advice on how payrolling benefits can work for your business and to get started as soon as possible, please contact Louise McGuire at RMT Accountants & Business Advisors on 0191 256 9500 or via advice@r-m-t.co.uk



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The Benefit of Peer Group Membership

Andrew Marsh is chair of Vistage North East and Northumberland. He currently runs a number of peer groups in the region with members ranging from business owners to CEO's and senior leaders in organisations of all sizes.

Here he talks about the impact membership is having on the region, and the benefits enjoyed by members.

"Vistage is a global organisation that provides peer advisory groups for CEOs, business owners, and executives to help them make better decisions, achieve better results, and become better leaders. Members of Vistage typically receive a range of benefits designed to support their personal and professional growth. We also have some exciting events with world class speakers.

"Vistage members meet monthly in small, confidential groups with other business leaders. These groups offer a safe space to discuss challenges, share experiences, and provide insights. The diversity of industries and experiences amongst members allows for unique perspectives and solutions.

"We do a monthly sign in which encourages members to share in Chatham House rules as the peer groups operate on a foundation of confidentiality and trust, allowing members to discuss sensitive issues that may not be suitable for other settings, such as board meetings or with employees. This approach fosters collaborations, and the opportunity to learn from others facing similar business challenges as well as members set goals and action plans and report back to their groups on their progress. This accountability helps them stay focused, motivated, and on track toward achieving their business and personal objectives.

"Vistage members benefit from the collective wisdom of their peer group and the guidance of their Chair. This leads to better decision-making, as members can discuss their decisions, get feedback, and explore alternative perspectives before taking action. Vistage groups also provide a sounding board for strategic and operational decisions, reducing the isolation that many business leaders face.

"Alongside all of these benefits of the peer group, members receive personalised coaching, helping members navigate challenges, set goals, and develop strategies for personal and business success. This coaching is designed to foster leadership growth and business effectiveness.

"Every quarter I bring my members from my peer groups together for a joint meeting, where we enjoy a world class speaker. They have ranged from speakers who inject fun into the working day, to those who make us think seriously about strategy, finance, marketing, industry trends, best practice, growth and people. We have even had a hostage negotiator talk to us about negotiation in business! Many members say these sessions are invaluable as they can take back their learnings to the rest of their team.

"Members also get access to leadership development resources and frameworks that help members grow as leaders. This includes learning new decision-making techniques, improving team leadership, enhancing communication skills, and managing company culture effectively. Leadership development programs are designed to help members grow not just as business owners or executives, but as individuals, fostering both professional and personal growth.

"As well building stronger local relationships with like-minded people, Vistage also provides access to a global network of over 24,000 CEOs, executives, and business owners, creating opportunities for cross-industry networking and partnerships, which can lead to new business opportunities and insights.

"Online, Vistage provides a wealth of resources, including articles, research reports, webinars, and tools that can be used to enhance decision-making and improve business operations. These resources help members stay up to date with the latest trends and best practices in business management. And members often gain exclusive access to proprietary Vistage content.

Members feedback include:

"My imposter syndrome has completely disappeared since joining Vistage."

"We enjoy the best speakers, who ignite us into making positive change."

"The monthly 1-2-1 are invaluable and keep me on track."

"As a leader we often forget our own wellbeing but the peer groups check in and it makes all the difference."

"In conclusion, Vistage provides a comprehensive support system for business leaders through peer advisory groups, executive coaching, leadership development, and access to an exclusive network of industry professionals. This combination helps members enhance their decision-making, improve their leadership abilities, and achieve both business and personal growth. Sound like what is missing in your leadership journey? Then get in touch to discuss the opportunities to join!"

Andrew also runs independent peer groups for emerging leaders so if someone in your team would benefit then get in touch for more information.

Andrew.marsh@vistagechair.co.uk



“

*...We have even
had a hostage
negotiator talk
to us about
negotiation in
business...*

Andrew Marsh

Historic Tees hotel reimagined as £2m wedding destination with backing from Develop North

A £2 million transformation of The Croft Hotel near Darlington is breathing new life into a landmark property—creating a thriving wedding and events venue backed by Newcastle-based investment fund, Develop North PLC.

The Grade II-listed hotel, located at Croft-on-Tees, is the latest addition to The Apartment Group's expanding portfolio of distinctive hospitality destinations across the North East. With financial support from Develop North, the property has undergone a complete renovation including an Enchanted Wedding Chapel, upgraded restaurant and wellness facilities, a new function suite, landscaped gardens and six additional bedrooms.

The project has already created 17 new jobs, with further roles expected as the venue grows in popularity.

Brendan O'Grady, Fund Manager at Tier One Capital, which manages the fund, said: "We're proud to have supported The Apartment Group in transforming The Croft Hotel into a high-quality wedding venue. This project highlights how Develop North's alternative lending can help dynamic, entrepreneurial businesses make a meaningful impact on the local economy."

Originally built in the early 19th century as a spa hotel, The Croft Hotel's picturesque setting—overlooking the River Tees and within reach of the Yorkshire Dales and North York Moors—makes it ideally positioned as a regional events destination.

Stuart Bailey, CEO of The Apartment Group, said: "The Croft Hotel has become an outstanding addition to our portfolio, and the investment has delivered a spectacular setting for weddings and



events. Develop North's support was invaluable in realising our vision. It's fantastic to partner with a fund that truly believes in the potential of businesses like ours."

Develop North PLC has now provided more than £80 million in funding to property developments across the North of England and Scotland, helping to regenerate communities and support economic growth.



Major investment powers regeneration of former Sunderland police station site

A major regeneration project is under way in Sunderland, where property developer Almscliffe Dhesi (AD) is transforming the former Farringdon Police Station into a fully let, multi-million-pound retail park that will create up to 150 local jobs.

The development has been supported by a £6 million loan from

the North East Commercial Property Investment Fund, managed by FW Capital and backed by the North East Combined Authority (NECA). It is the largest deal completed by the fund since its launch in 2023.

Further investment has come from Develop North PLC, the Newcastle-based property investment fund managed by Tier One Capital. Develop North provided both the initial capital and a follow-on mezzanine facility, bringing its total investment in the project to £930,000.

The 32,100 sq ft retail scheme will include national brands such as B&M Homestore, Costa, Greggs and Westway Vets.

Neil Greeney, Director at AD, said: "This investment is helping us repurpose a derelict site that had become a magnet for anti-social behaviour. Now, it's a thriving retail hub that will boost the local economy. The support from FW Capital and Develop North has been fundamental to the project's success."

Tony Cullen, Fund Manager at FW Capital, said: "It's great to be working with AD again on a scheme that brings real employment and investment to the region."

Brendan O'Grady, Fund Manager at Tier One Capital, added: "We're proud to support a project that demonstrates how alternative lending can help unlock regeneration and job creation in the North East."

The development is part of a wider strategy by NECA to attract investment, improve infrastructure, and generate thousands of jobs through targeted funding.



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Develop North PLC fund managers outline the importance of regional investment for growth at major international real estate event



'Bright outlook' John Seager and Fergus Trim, Broadoak Asset Management, don specially branded Develop North PLC sunglasses, handed out to visitors to the Invest Newcastle stand at MIPIM

Newcastle upon Tyne based Fund Management specialists Tier One Capital (Tier One), the fund manager to North East investment company Develop North PLC (Develop North), has taken to the world real estate stage to outline the importance of regional investment for economic growth, job creation and social impact.

The Tier One Fund Management team joined the Invest Newcastle delegation at MIPIM in the South of France, where they engaged with delegates on the evolving landscape of regional investment.

They emphasised the growing importance of investing with purpose across the UK's wider regions to ensure that capital aligns with opportunity. Their discussions highlighted how strategic investment can drive regional economic growth while delivering long-lasting social benefits for local communities.

Develop North is a North East based investment company listed on the main market of the London Stock Exchange and is a leading provider of finance solutions of between £0.5 million and £5million to credible professionals and businesses across the North of England and Scotland.

As a Public Limited Company (PLC), Develop North has the financial strength, credibility and professionalism expected of a business listed on the London Stock Exchange, while also offering the flexibility, creativity and common sense of an approachable, local business.

The company's objective is to provide investment and alternative finance solutions to professional, credible and capable businesses in the North of England and Scotland, whilst simultaneously generating attractive returns for investors.

Since 2017, Develop North PLC has invested almost £100 million in funding 40 projects across the North of England and Scotland and has helped create over 3,200 jobs with a gross development value of over £250 million.

Recent successful projects have included a £2.2million, 30-month facility to fund the construction of a new warehouse in Darlington, a £1.1million, 24-month facility to refurbish a hotel and wedding venue in North Yorkshire and a £2.7m residential development in Hexham, Northumberland.

MIPIM is the world's leading real estate event, bringing together the most influential players in the international property industry for four days of networking.

Speaking at the event, Fergus Trim, Broadoak Asset Management, representing Tier One Capital, said: "As a key sponsor

of MIPIM and partner of Invest Newcastle, we wanted to fly the flag for the North East region to influential players in the international property industry, at the same time highlight the importance of the Develop North Fund and the role regional investment can play supporting SME's and economic growth.

"Devolution and a changing investment and development landscape has created real opportunities for a trusted local fund with a focus on the North East and a real depth of knowledge of the local market.

"MIPIM is an ideal platform for us to outline our plans and the fund management team at Tier One is now looking to capture exciting growth opportunities in the next stage of the strategic growth, as we explore investment opportunities and develop potential new partnerships."

Dr Sarah Green OBE, Chief Executive, NewcastleGateshead Initiative, said: "We are delighted to have welcomed the Fund Management team from Tier One Capital representing Develop North PLC to our MIPIM delegation this year, helping us champion the North East on the global stage.

"A diverse funding landscape is central to our investor offering, so we were thrilled to have Develop North join us in Cannes to discuss their fund and support our broader mission of driving investment into places and communities."

www.tieronecapital.co.uk

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Maven leads multi-million investment in Kani Payments to fuel growth

Maven Capital Partners has led a multi-million investment into Newcastle based fintech specialist, Kani Payments.



The transaction includes an investment from the Maven VCTs alongside NPIF II - Maven Equity Finance, which is managed by Maven as part of the Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund II.

Founded in 2018, Kani was created to address the complex challenges of payment reconciliation and reporting faced by banks, payment companies and other fintechs. The company's award-winning SaaS platform automates, simplifies, and streamlines the process to save clients time and money, while ensuring compliance with industry and regulatory requirements.

The combined investment will be used to further develop Kani's highly scalable platform, grow its team, and support international expansion. With increasing digitisation in financial services, alongside greater global safeguarding regulations, the requirement for compliant reporting solutions is greater than ever, positioning Kani for continued success.

Kani operates across five continents and has reconciled over €24 billion in processed payments to date. Kani's innovative platform is currently used and trusted by many leading financial services companies such as Cardaq, Paysafe, Pluxee, and Transact Payments.

Rebecca MacDermid, Investment Manager at Maven Capital Partners, said: "Kani has developed an innovative, award-winning platform that is addressing a critical challenge in the fast-evolving payments industry. The company's proprietary technology, coupled with the team's deep sector expertise, has helped the business achieve year on year growth with annual recurring revenues sharply increasing

in the last year, driven by a 70% increase in clients. With the increasing complexity of payment reconciliation and regulatory compliance, demand for Kani's solution is set to grow further. We are excited to support Aaron and his team as they scale the business and expand into new global markets, particularly with significant opportunities emerging in the US."

Aaron Holmes, CEO at Kani Payments, added: "This investment marks a pivotal moment in Kani's evolution as we expand our automated reconciliation platform to meet surging global demand. With processed payments exceeding €24 billion and our client base spanning five continents, we see firsthand how critical automated reconciliation has become for financial institutions. Maven's backing will accelerate our platform development and global expansion, particularly as we see increasing opportunities in markets where regulatory compliance and payment reconciliation complexity continue to grow."

Tony Kerr and Craig Dewar, Co-founders and Directors at Kani Payments, said: "This is the perfect time for Kani to bring on investment from an institutional firm like Maven. Their backing is a strong endorsement of Kani's vision, capabilities, and growth trajectory. This investment not only validates its position in the payments sector but also fuels the ability to scale rapidly, innovate further, and expand into new markets. With Maven's support, the business is well-positioned to accelerate its mission of transforming payment reconciliation and reporting for businesses worldwide."

Sarah Newbould, Senior Investment Manager, at the British Business Bank, said: "The North East has experienced a recent boom in tech growth and is now home to a broad ecosystem of thriving businesses. NPIF II was created to help foster growth in innovative companies like Kani Payments to further drive the region forward, create highly skilled jobs and cement the North East as a hub for tech talent."

Maven is one of the UK's most active private equity investors and has a track record of identifying and nurturing technology-driven businesses. If you are looking at private equity as a solution to fund future growth we would love to hear from you.

Find out more at mavencp.com

“

...This investment marks a pivotal moment in Kani's evolution...

Aaron Holmes



Naomi Townsend (sixth from left)
with UNW's corporate finance team

UNW continues to invest in Corporate Finance team with senior hire

Newcastle-based independent chartered accountancy and business advisory firm UNW has further strengthened its growing Corporate Finance team with the appointment of award-winning dealmaker Naomi Townsend (née McDiarmid) as Senior Manager.

A native of the North East, Naomi studied Law at the University of Leeds before joining KPMG Newcastle in 2014, where she gained extensive experience across audit and corporate finance over seven years.

As a Corporate Finance Manager at KPMG, she provided lead advisory services to businesses across the North, notably on the sale of Visualsoft to Livingbridge, the investment by LDC in WCCTV, and the sale of Bloom Procurement to BGF – achievements that led to her being named 'North East Emerging Dealmaker of the Year' in 2021.

In 2021, she joined mid-market private equity firm LDC as Investment Manager, supporting management teams across a broad range of sectors in the North East. Her work in the region was further recognised when she was named 'Young Financier of the Year' at the North East Young Professionals Awards in 2022.

Naomi joins one of the largest Corporate Finance teams in the North East, known for its strong track record of delivering deals both regionally and nationally. Her appointment follows a standout 2024 for UNW Corporate Finance, during which the team completed a number of high-profile deals, ranked among the region's most active advisors, and won both 'Transaction Services Team of the Year' and 'Dealmaker of the Year' (Chris Wilson) at the North East Dealmakers Awards.

Speaking of her motivations for joining the firm, Naomi said: "I've always admired UNW's reputation – not just for the quality of its work but for how it supports its people. Having worked alongside the team in various capacities over the years, I could see firsthand how much trust clients place in them, and I'm excited to now be part of that."

"UNW has built a fantastic Corporate Finance team, and I'm looking forward

to working with ambitious businesses across the region, helping them navigate their growth opportunities. I'm also really pleased to be working with Chris Wilson and Nick Broadhead again, having previously worked together at KPMG. This is an exciting new chapter for me, and I can't wait to get started."

Naomi's arrival follows the recent move of ICAEW-qualified Jack McCullagh, who joined the Corporate Finance team as an Executive in January 2025 after previously working in UNW's Audit department.

Chris Wilson, Partner and Head of Corporate Finance at UNW, said: "We're thrilled to welcome both Naomi and Jack to the team. Naomi's extensive experience and proven track record in dealmaking – as both an advisor and an investor – will offer a unique perspective and provide immediate value to our clients. At UNW, we've consistently stated that we want to provide the highest quality advice to our clients and having the best and most experienced people is a big part of that strategy."

We are also committed to creating opportunities for talent to develop and progress. Jack's recent move from Audit to Corporate Finance is a great example of how the firm invests in its people and offers varied career paths.

With Naomi and Jack on board, our team is stronger than ever as we head into another exciting and busy year."

unw.co.uk

The Robson Laidler Growth Hub 2025

A series of practical workshops throughout the year to accelerate your business growth - designed for leaders who want results.

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- ✓ **Strategy, confidence & accountability**
- ✓ **Peer collaboration & real-life case studies**
- ✓ **Monthly check-ins to keep you on track**

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16th December - High-performing cultures

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Cost: £75+VAT per month for annual membership (£225+VAT per session).

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*Note Attendance at all three sessions is required as part of the Growth Hub package to gain the full impact.

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“

*...Start with
the end in
mind, have
a plan, and
be ready to
adapt...*

Sarah Siddons

In Conversation With

Northern Insight talks to...

Sarah Siddons

Senior Adviser, Bowcliffe Wealth Management

What were your career ambitions growing up?

I attended a traditional all-girls school in the 1980s, where a career in finance wasn't even on my radar! I initially wanted to be a PE teacher until mine pointed out I could continue playing sports without having to teach them. After completing a Politics degree at Warwick University I started my career in advertising, spending 14 years in both London and Leeds working with agencies before deciding to switch industries. In April 2008, I retrained as a financial planner through the St. James's Place Academy Programme and set up my own financial planning practice that September. After 17 years of building my business and qualifying as a Chartered Financial Planner, I merged my practice with my colleague Adrian Brook in October 2024.

Tell us about your current role.

I spend my days meeting clients who want to take control of their financial future. Many already have pensions and investments but aren't sure if they'll have enough for retirement. I love helping them create a clear plan and peace of mind.

Having been through it myself, I'm particularly passionate about supporting women through divorce, helping them navigate financial decisions with confidence. Divorce is challenging, and many women find themselves managing finances alone for the first time. I help them understand their position, make informed choices, and build a secure future. Drawing up a solid plan provides much-needed stability during a difficult transition.

What is your proudest business achievement?

Leaving a well-paid job to work for myself, just after having my first child. I wanted to create a work-life balance that allowed me to run my own business while being present as a mum. Seventeen years later, I have two wonderful children and have grown my business from no industry experience or clients to managing nearly £70 million of clients' wealth by the end of 2024.

How has your industry changed in the last decade?

Technology has transformed the way we work. There's more paperwork, but it has also improved client interactions, making meetings more engaging. I now use cashflow modelling tools which brings financial plans to life in a way that wasn't possible when I started. However, one thing remains unchanged - the importance of building long-term relationships. Face-to-face meetings are still key, especially when dealing with something as personal as finances.

What are you currently working on?

We're in the early stages of merging Siddons & Co with Bowcliffe Wealth Management, so there's a lot of work happening behind the scenes.

Tell us about the team you work with.

The Bowcliffe team is friendly and highly professional, clients may not see all the work that happens in the background, but our support team is invaluable, they make everything run smoothly.

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

"Start with the end in mind, have a plan, and be ready to adapt."

What has been your biggest challenge?

Balancing running my practice, studying for my Chartered qualification, and being present for my family was my toughest challenge. It took two years of hard work, but I qualified as a Chartered Financial Planner in 2019. An achievement I'm proud of, given that less than 20% of UK financial planners hold this qualification.

Who are your heroes inside and outside of business?

I wouldn't say I have 'heroes,' but I found the late Mike Wilson, one of the founders of St. James's Place, incredibly inspiring. He built a hugely successful business that now serves nearly a million clients across the UK. I'm proud to have been part of that journey for the past 17 years.

How do you unwind outside of work?

I love playing tennis at my local club, spending time with family, and travelling - so much so that my friends have nicknamed me 'Judith Chalmers'!

Favourite book and box set?

I love crime thrillers but don't have a single favourite book. My favourite box set is *The Crown* - my kids laugh at me because I've watched it so many times!

Sarah Siddons is a Senior Adviser at Bowcliffe Wealth Management, a Senior Partner Practice of St. James's Place Wealth Management

www.bowcliffewm.co.uk/sarah-siddons

Funding boost helps Paralloy to make a significant impact across Teesside



L-R - Joanne Whitfield, FW Capital, Robert McGowan, Paralloy, Alex Gent, FW Capital, Michael Dolan, Paralloy, Councillor John Kabuye

Tees firm benefits from first investment using the £20million Teesside Flexible Investment Fund.

FW Capital launched the £20 million Teesside Flexible Investment Fund in 2024, to tackle identified funding gaps in the region and assist economic growth.

The Fund, launched with investment from the Teesside Pension Fund, is supporting economic development in Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Stockton-on-Tees and Redcar and Cleveland through a mix of property development funding, contract-related bond finance and finance to support management teams in buying a business.

The Fund has now completed its first investment, with Teesside stainless steel alloy specialist and manufacturer Paralloy Group receiving a seven-figure loan.

The investment has helped Paralloy with their next stage of growth, facilitating activities that will generate new jobs locally and have a significant impact on the Teesside economy while meeting the increased demands from industrial markets and advances in new technologies.

Since the launch of its Billingham site in 1967, Paralloy has specialised in the transformation of raw elements into

world-class products that power the Syngas and Ethylene industries. Paralloy's products are used for power generation and transportation for manufacturing and critical chemical industries.

Today Paralloy is a global business working across five sites in the UK, with headquarters in Billingham and a presence in Middlesbrough and Sheffield. It is the third largest operator in its field and doubled its workforce in the last five years to employ over 500 people across the North East and over 1000 globally. The firm was also awarded a 2024 King's Award for Enterprise.

Robert McGowan CEO said: "Paralloy is proud to be based in Teesside, employing local people and showcasing our local capabilities alongside our global presence. We're committed to driving economic growth and this is why we are working with FW Capital and the Teesside Flexible Investment Fund.

The North East is making a solid claim as a key player in the UK's energy transition and we're well positioned to support the next generation of industry and the fuels of the future."

Joanne Whitfield, Fund Director at FW Capital added: "It's fantastic to complete the first deal under the Teesside Flexible Investment Fund. We've been supporting businesses in Teesside for 13 years and Paralloy is a great example of how the

finance from our new fund can help firms to scale up following acquisition, bringing new opportunities and jobs to the area. We have a long-standing relationship with Paralloy and this investment has been an opportunity for us to support their next stage of growth. There's a lot happening in Teesside and we're thrilled to help unlock vital finance for local businesses with this new fund. We are keen to talk to businesses across the region about their future plans and how we might be able to support them."

The Teesside Flexible Investment Fund can be used for:

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

If you want to find out how we can support your business please email info@fwcapital.co.uk or visit our website www.fwcapital.co.uk



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All businesses and organisations benefit from the work we do in Sunderland. Therefore, we're extending many of the benefits that levy payers enjoy to non-levy payers and other businesses in and around Sunderland by creating an Affiliate Scheme.

Affiliates of the BID can benefit from appropriate services and get involved in relevant projects and campaigns. Just a few of these benefits are -

- Promote your business via Sunderland BID channels, including social media, newsletters and digital screens
- Unique networking opportunities
- Regular email updates about BID initiatives and events in Sunderland
- Volunteering opportunities for your staff
- Invitations to BID events, meetings, training sessions and seminars
- Corporate sponsorship opportunities and visibility for your brand

“ Most importantly, you will be supporting our local economy by getting involved with an organisation that protects local business interests. ”

Scan to find out more about the scheme!



GET IN TOUCH.

Email: roberta@sunderlandbid.co.uk

Telephone: 0191 722 1002



**Sunderland's
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Confessions of an Entrepreneur

Ryecroft Glenton had the pleasure of co-hosting, alongside law firm Ward Hadaway our first ever Confessions of an Entrepreneur LIVE event on Thursday 6th March 2025, where RG's very own Partner and Head of Corporate Finance, Carl Swansbury had the pleasure of facilitating a Chatham house, no-nonsense, panel discussion with four very experienced, highly esteemed panellists Sara Davies MBE, Peter Kirkham, Geoff Ramm and Geoff Hodgson.

As an extension to Carl Swansbury's Confessions of a CEO/entrepreneur podcast series, the panel discussion was delivered live in front of 120 entrepreneurs, CEOs, advisors, and investors, who were our guests for the evening. The panellists shared with our guests an insight into their journeys to date, their successes, biggest challenges, the advice they would give their 16 year old selves, and more.

If you would like to listen to Ryecroft Glenton's "Confessions of a" podcast series, where Carl has most recently had the pleasure of inviting Sara Davies MBE, founder/CEO, investor and entrepreneur onto, please visit our YouTube channel - Ryecroft Glenton or alternatively listen to the podcast on amazon, Apple or Spotify by searching Confessions of a CEO - Carl Swansbury, where you can also access all other podcasts from the series.





Taking care.

Caring law firm with people at its heart reveals new branding

Jacksons image now aligned with internal vision.

When any business goes through a rebrand, there is a lot more to think about than choosing nice bright colours and font types and creating a new logo.

In the case of Jacksons Law Firm, the current partners were aware there was a disconnect between the brand's visual identity and the people representing the firm.

Erica Turner, Jacksons head of legal explains: "The feedback we were receiving from people when they met the partners was that they were not what they expected - and we took this to mean our internal image didn't match our external image.

"We are a people first organisation that is looking to the future with a dynamic range of individuals, which is the reason why we have such a long and proud heritage in the North East.

"The new brand reflects Jacksons as the North East's trusted independent law firm and we now have our external messaging aligned with our internal vision."

Jacksons worked with Mark Easby, founder and managing director at Better Brand Agency, to create a narrative around why colleagues come to work at Jacksons and what they deliver for clients.

Discussions were held with Emily Bentley, the firm's head of marketing and business development, the partners and the wider workforce as well as clients, to get a feel for who the people at Jacksons are and the perception of people in the region about the brand.

"Branding is about working together and scratching the surface of a business to see what makes it distinctive and special – and ensuring the rebrand captures that," Mark said.

"The first stage is talking to the team and getting the senior leaders around the table.

"Internal stakeholders and external clients have all fed into it.

"The narrative is built; the visuals come last."

The eagerly anticipated new brand for Jacksons was exclusively revealed at events at Wyngard Hall and Baltic's Riverside suite, attended by colleagues from the firm's Teesside and Newcastle offices as well as business leaders from across the region.

It features merging coloured lenses with the red and orange representing the firms' caring employees working in collaboration with clients.

Clients are represented by a blue-green lens, colours which reflect clarity and confidence – and the merging lenses reflects the firm's long heritage of providing a caring and tailored service when collaborating with clients.

The brand also anticipates an exciting future where the best is yet to come for Jacksons, its employees and the community it serves.



However, while it is attractive and distinctive, the key objective of the new brand is to reflect Jacksons' culture of care for both clients and staff.

Amie explained: "Buying a house; arranging a will; selling a company; resolving a dispute. For generations, Jacksons have been a guide through life's biggest moments – and we've always done so with genuine care.

"Through times of joy and happiness, pain and stress; through the ups and downs, the highs and the lows; at every milestone and every challenge – we take care.

"Whether it's business or personal – we provide expertise, reassurance and peace of mind. We listen with empathy and guide with clarity."

Mark added the word 'care' was important to include as part of Jacksons' narrative, as this is a big part of their heritage.

"They would not have been around this long if they weren't special and they didn't care," Mark said.

"Purpose is a big thing – for clients and the team – and branding joins that together.

"Branding isn't only about sales and marketing; it affects the whole team, relationships with clients, recruitment and retention, across the board."

For more information on how Jacksons can support you through life's big events, visit [jacksons.law](https://www.jacksons.law)



David Wozniak



It's time to sink or swim: How to avoid major fines under the DMCCA

The choppy waters of consumer law are becoming increasingly difficult to navigate. When the penalty for breaching these laws is more than reputational damage alone, your business must adapt quickly to avoid drowning in serious fines. Muckle LLP explains how you can stay compliant.

From April, the Digital Market Competition and Consumers Act 2024 (DMCCA) will introduce changes to UK consumer law, including the ability for the Consumer Markets Authority (CMA) to impose fines on businesses that breach consumer law.

Key changes to consumer law under the DMCCA

1. More severe enforcement powers for the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA): under the DMCCA, the CMA will be granted the authority to impose substantial fines up to 10% of global annual turnover on businesses found to have infringed consumer law. This is massive as it introduces swifter and more impactful enforcement action. Keep reading!

2. A crackdown on misleading practices:

a. Fake reviews: businesses are prohibited from hosting or displaying consumer reviews without taking "reasonable and proportionate steps" to verify their authenticity. Additionally, the commissioning or facilitating of fake reviews is explicitly banned.

b. Drip pricing and other misleading pricing practices: the DMCCA aims to crackdown on misleading pricing practices, such as "drip pricing", where additional charges are added to the advertised price of a product or service at a later stage during the purchasing process.

3. Regulation of subscription Contracts: businesses will be required to provide

clear information about subscription terms, facilitate easy cancellations, and send reminders before auto-renewals of product subscriptions and allow "cooling off" periods. These measures aim to prevent consumers from being trapped in unwanted subscriptions. Whilst these provisions are not expected to come into force straightaway (with their implementation being scheduled for 2026), they may require significant changes to internal processes and IT systems of businesses to ensure compliance when they come into force.

The price for non-compliance

Businesses will face severe consequences for infringing consumer law, following the introduction of the DMCCA. Not only will their reputations be on the line, but they will also face a much higher risk of a substantial financial hit from serious non-compliance.

1. Monetary fines

The DMCCA empowers the CMA to impose fines of up to 10% of a company's global annual turnover. This is higher than in most EU countries. In certain circumstances, the DMCCA will also give the CMA power to hold parent companies accountable for breaches of consumer law by their subsidiaries.

2. Redress orders

Under the DMCCA, the CMA will also be able to impose "enhanced consumer measures", which may require businesses to compensate consumers who have suffered harm or allow early termination of contracts.

3. Private enforcement

In addition to remedies available under the DMCCA, businesses face the risk of private claims from individuals. In addition, there has been a rise in law firms specialising in bringing class actions on behalf of consumers who have been harmed by anti-competitive behaviour or unfair trading practices. The costs of litigation and potential settlements could be substantial to businesses in such cases. Whilst the DMCCA doesn't change the substantive law here, it is likely to encourage claimant law firms to explore more opportunities to bring claims in this area.

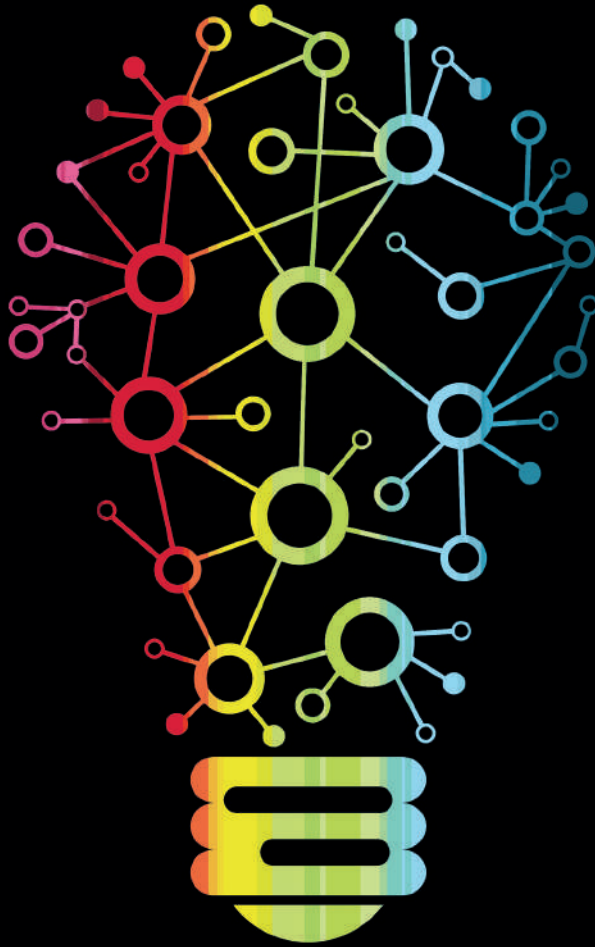
Why these changes matter

For businesses, it's a reminder that staying competitive means not just innovating, but also complying with regulatory standards of fairness and accountability.

Ushering in a new era of oversight, the DMCCA poses severe reputational and financial risks to businesses that fail to move with the times.

With all business now under the microscope of the DMCCA, staying competitive means not only innovating, but also complying with new regulatory standards of fairness and accountability.

For more information on keeping your business compliant, contact David Wozniak at david.wozniak@muckle-llp.com or on 0191 211 7831.



They're your ideas.
Don't let someone else take the credit.

For a chat on protecting your brand, your trade secrets and the way you do business, please get in touch.

Call 0191 211 7777 or email advice@muckle-llp.com

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Hannah Flowers, associate solicitor
at Mincoffs Solicitors

Protect your business identity – a guide to UK trade mark registration

Hannah Flowers, an associate solicitor in Mincoffs Solicitors' commercial services team, provides a brief overview on how trade mark registrations are made in the UK.

A trade mark is effectively an identifier which distinguishes one business' goods and services from those of another and protects your brand identity.

Most people will be familiar with the common forms of trade marks, such as word and logo marks, however trade marks can also be used to protect less conventional signs, such as shape, colour and sound marks.

If your mark is capable of being represented clearly and precisely, it will likely be capable of registration and protection as a trade mark (subject to it not falling foul of the "absolute" and "relative" grounds of refusal, discussed further on in this article).

Consider what goods and services the mark will be used on

When applying to register a trade mark, an application must be filed against certain classes of goods and services, known as a class specification. A trade mark can be registered against multiple classes however the more classes included, the more expensive the application will be. Goods and services are classified under a system called the Nice Classification System,

totalling 45 different classes. Ensuring you have chosen the correct classes in your application is crucial as this ultimately defines the scope of your protection.

Check your mark is available to use

It is important to assess whether your mark is available for use and registration by undertaking a trade mark clearance search, which will highlight any pre-existing trade marks which may conflict with yours. Whilst undertaking trade mark clearance searches prior to applying for a trade mark is not mandatory, it is arguably one of the most important steps to take when looking to secure a trade mark for your brand. Trade mark clearance searches can help businesses avoid legal disputes, have to deal with a potential rebrand or have their application rejected.

File an application through the UKIPO

Once you have undertaken trade mark clearance searches and are content your mark is available, a trade mark application can be filed with the UK Intellectual Property Office (UKIPO) - the government agency responsible for intellectual property rights in the UK. When a trade

mark application is filed, it will firstly be examined by the UKIPO to ensure that it is inherently capable of being protected as a trade mark and that it does not fall foul of the absolute and relative grounds for refusal of registration. The absolute grounds cover things such as the mark lacking distinctiveness, being descriptive of the goods and services or being contrary to public policy or morality. The relative grounds cover situations where the application conflicts with earlier existing trade mark registrations.

Registration

If you are successful in obtaining a trade mark registration, your business will be able to reap the legal and brand protection benefits a trade mark provides. Your registration can also last indefinitely, provided it is renewed every 10 years, which can add a great deal of commercial value to your business.

More than just a brand or logo, a trade mark is your business' identity, reputation and what sets you apart from others. Mincoffs Solicitors' commercial services team have vast experience in securing and protecting trade marks in the UK and overseas, along with licensing and assigning, and dealing with trade mark disputes.

To speak to an intellectual property lawyer, call our commercial services team on 0191 281 6151 or email Hannah Flowers at hflowers@mincoffs.co.uk

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Mincoffs Solicitors

Age Discrimination in spotlight from Parliament to the Employment Tribunal

Roland Fairlamb is an Associate Solicitor at specialist employment law firm, Collingwood Legal. Roland considers a recent case concerning age discrimination and considers calls to reform the law in this area.



Roland Fairlamb

Scott v Walker Morris LLP

Age is a unique characteristic under the Equality Act 2010 ("EqA 2010"). Unlike direct discrimination claims relating to the 8 other protected characteristics identified within the EqA 2010, when an employee raises a claim of direct age discrimination it is open to the employer to defend itself by saying that its actions, while discriminatory, were objectively justified.

These competing concepts played out in the case of *Scott v Walker Morris LLP*, where the employee alleged that his employer's refusal to accept his application to extend his Partnership and delay his retirement constituted direct age discrimination. His employer accepted that the application of its retirement age was discriminatory but argued that it was a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim (being to protect the interests of business and ensure inter-generational fairness).

The Employment Tribunal ("ET") accepted that the retirement policy had legitimate aims, namely, to avoid difficult performance management of older Partners and to aid succession planning to ensure that the business had enough Partners to run a profitable business. However, the ET held that the treatment of the employee was not appropriate or reasonably necessary to achieve those aims. The ET concluded there was no evidence that the employer's policy aided succession planning or that performance was deteriorating when Partners reached their 50s and 60s. The ET added that these aims could have been achieved by less discriminatory alternatives.

Parliamentary committee looks to tackle "ageism"

In the decision in *Scott*, the ET commented that some of the assertions made by the Respondent in seeking to justify its retirement policy were based on discriminatory assumptions (for example, that energy levels began to reduce for Partners in their 50s and 60s).

The Women and Equalities Committee in Parliament has recently published a report, *the Rights of Older People*, which suggests that discrimination law is not providing sufficient support for older people and that ageism (and assumptions around age) are widespread in the UK. It proposes that the Equality and Human Rights Commission review the protections which exist in the EqA 2010 and whether there should be a requirement for an employer to take reasonable steps to prevent age discrimination (similar to the new obligation on preventing sexual harassment, introduced in October 2024).

What can employers learn from the ET and Parliament

There is no suggestion that age discrimination law is going to change imminently, and while Parliament is clearly concerned about age discrimination, the case in *Scott* highlights that employers face an uphill struggle objectively justifying retirement policies, especially where claimants argue that the rationale behind the policy is tainted by assumptions based on age. Retirement policies are less common in workplaces now, but employers

should be mindful of the risk of being consciously or unconsciously influenced by assumptions based on age.

How we can help – Essential Manager Training

Dealing with risks concerning discrimination and harassment are covered in Collingwood Legal's Essential Manager Training from April to July 2025.

Each module below is 90 minutes long and takes place remotely:

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 email sue.graham@collingwoodlegal.com or view the Events section of our website www.collingwoodlegal.com for further information.

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Q&A with Sweeney Miller

Sweeney Miller Law's Head of Corporate Jess Fenwick responds to the most asked questions the firm receives from business clients.

The lease on my business premises ends soon – what are my renewal options?

If both the landlord and tenant are happy to continue with the existing terms, these can be negotiated informally; if either side wishes to initiate formal renewal or make changes, a Section 25 or 26 notice should be served. For both sides, renewal is an opportunity to renegotiate the best terms. However, any renewals made under the Landlord and Tenant 1954 Act will be largely on the same terms as the current lease (other than the amount of rent).

Do I need a lawyer to go through and negotiate a business lease?

Whether you're a landlord or a tenant, a well drafted lease sets out the agreed terms for both. Leases are complex legal documents and a poorly written lease, or one with mistakes or that is unclear leading to a dispute, could cost you far more in the long run.

How do I sell the business I've owned for years?

Start by thinking about who is going to buy it – competitor, people already in the business, or a third-party investor? Will you be selling individual named assets of the business (asset sale) or will you be selling your shares in the company (share sale)? The business then needs to be prepared for sale – ensuring the company structure, financials and leases are all in order to maximise its value. Tax implications also need to be considered at an early stage.

What should I look out for when buying a business?

Do your research and get the best expert advice, be it from accountants, surveyors, funders, or lawyers. Examine the business' history, financial performance, projections, reasons for sale, disputes, regulatory implications, stock, goodwill, premises, and staffing. Having advised hundreds of businesses, we know what to look out for, the likely hurdles and how to deal with them.



Jess Fenwick

How do I buy a freehold business premises instead of renting?

If you are looking to buy a commercial property, expert advice can ensure you negotiate the best terms, satisfy the lender's strict requirements and have the right paperwork. Be clear on the best strategy – for example, is it more beneficial for you or your company to buy it and what are the tax implications?

If I retire, how can my employees buy the shares in my company?

A good option is a Management Buyout (MBO) – selling the business to management or key employees, after all they know the business better than anyone. The process varies widely depending on the business, so advice from experienced legal advisers and corporate finance specialists from the planning stage will give you the best chance of a seamless and positive outcome for you and the new owners.

How can I refinance my commercial property portfolio with a new lender?

Refinancing can be a sensible financial decision for business owners looking to grow, possibly by reducing mortgage payments or renegotiating terms to free up

cash. Each bank has its own requirements and you need someone on your side who can navigate the complexities and jargon. Before refinancing, consider maximising any equity from your portfolio; for example, titles could be split, and individual units remortgaged rather than mortgaging a full block of properties to create more equity.

Should I use a limited company when buying a property portfolio?

There are pros and cons – there may be tax and commercial benefits, however, lenders can be reluctant and may require personal guarantees. The end goal should often be the starting point. Are you acquiring properties for retirement income or to pass wealth to the next generation? Speak to experienced tax advisers and property lawyers to advise on the best route.

Expert advice

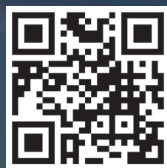
These are just a few examples and as each case is unique, they should not be taken as legal advice. If you are a busy business owner or property investor looking for answers to your business questions, call 0345 900 5401, email enquiries@sweeneymiller.co.uk or visit sweeneymiller.co.uk

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Derek Pack and Jo Scott

A progressive approach to family law

Sintons' family law team is headed up by two vastly experienced lawyers, each with more than three decades of expertise. We talk to Derek Pack and Jo Scott about the approach the award-winning team takes to all aspects of family law.

Derek Pack is known and respected throughout the North East for his legal knowledge. With more than 38 years of experience, he has established himself as a go-to name in family law.

"I've worked in several other law firms but I wanted to join Sintons because of the quality of the work that is done here. That quality is achieved because we have a team made up entirely of specialists who have chosen to focus their careers on family law and who are dedicated to getting the best possible results for our clients," said Derek.

"We're a team which takes a modern and progressive approach to family law; it's no longer just about litigation, it's about helping people choose the best way to resolve the particular issues they are facing as the result of a relationship breakdown.

"There are many paths which can be taken, from mediation to collaborative law, and we have the experience and the knowledge to assess each person's circumstances, recommend the best option for them, and support them throughout the process.

"Jo and I are both qualified as collaborative lawyers and are non-practicing resolution trained mediators, and everyone in the team takes a holistic approach to resolving disputes. This is how we make sure every client gets advice which is tailored to their situation.

"Everyone we work with – our clients and our colleagues – has the benefit of our years of experience and our ongoing development. As well as leading the department and meeting with clients, Jo and I actively pass our knowledge on to other members of the team and we regularly speak on various family law topics at free events and on Sintons' podcasts."

Jo Scott has more than 30 years' experience in family law and, like Derek, is qualified as a collaborative lawyer and a Resolution Together specialist, supporting people to resolve issues out of court.

"Whether a case involves finance, children or is about pre or post-nuptial agreements, we support the whole person and, as part of a full-service law firm, our

clients also benefit from direct access to experts in other areas of law – like wills, trusts and estates, court of protection and neurotrauma matters, for example," explained Jo.

"So, no matter how complex or challenging a case is, we are in a position to deliver advice and support which will get the best result for our clients.

"We're a team with incredible depth of experience but also the understanding to help people through a difficult time in their lives.

"Everyone within the team holds themselves to the highest standards. And when we recruit, we look for people who are at the top of their field, who will bring proven knowledge and experience, alongside empathy, diligence and absolute dedication to advocating for our clients.

"Our family law team is one of the most experienced in the north of England and is frequently named in rankings such as Chambers and Partners, which identifies the best law firms and lawyers in the UK.

"The feedback we get from clients tells the same story, with people saying they feel listened to and supported. Our clients frequently tell us they're so glad they chose to come to us for their legal advice, and that is the best confirmation that our approach makes a difference."

Sintons' team of family law experts is based in the firm's newly-redeveloped head office in Newcastle city centre.

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Barry Speker OBE

Comment

By Barry Speker OBE

After a drought of 70 years, Newcastle United have won a domestic trophy at Wembley.

The last such victory was in 1955 when the Magpies won the FA Cup and I recall the day clearly, my father having gone to London for the final. On his return he told me “Wembley is our lucky ground, Newcastle have never lost there” and that was true.

Since then from 1974 I have attended every Wembley match Newcastle played and they lost every one!

So we are entitled to be euphoric and ecstatic at beating Liverpool (the Premier League Champions in waiting) by 2-1, and thoroughly deserving the win. Heroes all! - despite the grudging put-downs of pundits.

After such a long silverware drought and in advance of the celebration parade there is talk of Dan Burn getting the Freedom of Northumberland and Eddie Howe (perhaps the whole team) the Freedom of the City.

There may even be a statue of Eddie, in line with Newcastle custom - the only modern statues being of Jackie Milburn, Sir Bobby Robson and Alan Shearer; not forgetting the Angel of the North (himself/herself/itself festooned in a black and white shirt) and Cardinal Hume, a lifelong United supporter. It was a great day at Wembley - could this win be the start of a golden - or silver- era?

The importance of resilience, risk strategy and preparedness cannot be better shown than by the recent debacle at Heathrow Airport.

Following an unexplained fire at the North Hyde electrical substation a few miles from the airport, terminals were plunged in darkness, disrupting 1,300 flights and affecting 300,000 passengers.

Heathrow is Europe's busiest airport with power requirements said to be akin to those of a small city. It might be reasonable to expect that the National Grid would have suitable back up structure in place should the electricity supply be disrupted. The closure will cause significant reputational damage to the airport and to the UK as a transport hub.

The inevitable ‘lessons learned’ review as to the airport and the power company must answer the question whether more could have been done to prepare for such a calamity. A real wake-up call about the importance of resilience.

Some interruptions cannot be instantly resolved such as massive ash clouds from Icelandic volcanos or a Covid pandemic necessitating isolation of passengers. But power outage is normally predictable with alternatives prearranged. Crucial parts of our infrastructure must be better served.

Having said which, the inconvenience of 300,000 air passengers pales into insignificance compared with the experience of Butch Wilmore and Suni Williams. They were launched in a space ship on June 5 2024 planning to spend



not more than eight days aboard the International Space Station. Technical problems prevented their prompt return and in the event they remained on the Space Station for 286 days until being happily returned to Mother Earth, willing Guinea pigs in studies of the physical and mental effects of the long term exposure to no gravity.

Still this is a tribute to resilience and preparedness of food, air and other needs of a nine month as opposed to an eight day trip.

The critics seem to have already written off the Disney remake of Snow White but it would be fairer to allow the intended young audience to form its own view. I can recommend the thriller Black Bag starring Cate Blanchett, Michael Fassbender and an irascible Pierce Brosnan in a dramatic and tense portrayal of high British intelligence chiefs and the search for a traitor. Far more grown up than the Claudia Winkleman reality TV offering!

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Dominic Elsworth

Unlocking savings through the Patent Box System

The Patent Box system offers a significant opportunity for innovative businesses to reduce their corporation tax liabilities.

Designed to encourage investment in research and development (R&D) and innovation, the Patent Box allows eligible companies to apply a lower tax rate to profits derived from patented inventions.

Introduced in the UK in 2013, the Patent Box provides a reduced corporation tax rate of 10% on qualifying profits, compared to the standard rate of 25% (as of 2023). This substantial tax saving can free up resources for businesses to reinvest in innovation and growth.

To qualify for the Patent Box, businesses must own or exclusively license patents granted by certain authorities such as the UK Intellectual Property Office or the European Patent Office. Additionally, companies must demonstrate active involvement in the development of the innovation lying behind the patented IP.

Statistics from HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) released towards the

end of last year indicated that during the tax year 2022 to 2023 around 1600 companies elected into the Patent box, slightly lower than during the previous tax year. The total value of relief claimed rose slightly to an estimated £1469 million, with this figure primarily being driven by large companies claiming most (94%) of the relief. The area of the UK with the fewest number of companies claiming this relief is estimated to have been the North East, with only 2% of the companies claiming relief during the tax year 2022-2023 being based here.

For corporation tax payers, a patent filing strategy should consider the potential for tax savings, and the specific requirements of the Patent Box, alongside the broader strategic objectives of protecting and exploiting the business's innovations.

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Live Well with Cancer's inspirational fundraising fashion show



For almost six years, North Shields-based Live Well with Cancer has been a beacon of hope and support for individuals and families affected by cancer. Fuelled by a relentless commitment to meeting the unmet needs of cancer patients, the charity was founded by Maureen Elliott, a specialist cancer nurse of more than 30 years.

Now, the charity is thrilled to announce its highly anticipated fundraising fashion show, taking place on June 21st, 2025, at the Village Hotel, Silverlink. This special event will shine a spotlight on the strength and resilience of individuals impacted by cancer, as they take centre stage on the catwalk.

The fashion show will feature a diverse group of models, all of whom have faced or are currently facing cancer. This empowering evening aims to celebrate their courage and determination while

raising vital funds for those affected by the disease. With the event already sold out, anticipation and excitement is running high. Maureen Elliott, founder of Live Well with Cancer, said: "We are calling on local businesses to step up and support this incredible event. Our fashion show is not just about style; it's about showcasing strength, resilience, and hope. A sponsorship could make a real difference by allowing our inspiring models to take part without financial burden. This event could be life-changing, not only for those walking the runway but for the wider cancer community that benefits from our charity's work."

For more information on sponsorship opportunities and raffle prize donations, please contact Live Well with Cancer www.livewellwithcancer.co.uk

Northumberland Freemasons support Sensory Garden

Abbeyfield House in Alnwick, a well-established residential care home, has recently enhanced its sensory garden thanks to the generous support of the Northumberland Freemasons. The donation has contributed to the addition of a beautifully crafted metal arch, completing the garden space and further enriching the experience for residents.

Kerry Riddell, Deputy Manager at Abbeyfield House, expressed her appreciation for the ongoing generosity of the Freemasons: "The sensory garden is a fantastic feature for our residents, especially those living with Alzheimer's and dementia. The new arch has really finished it off, making the space even more welcoming. We also receive kind donations from the Freemasons on a regular basis, which we truly appreciate."

The sensory garden, designed with elements such as lavender, fragrant plants, and a tranquil water feature, provides a calming environment that promotes well-being.



The sensory garden at Abbeyfield Northumbria has already been warmly received by residents and staff alike, even before its official opening. It stands as a testament to the power of community collaboration, ensuring a better quality of life for those in care.

Entrepreneur flags two businesses



Simon Walker, a dedicated businessman with a passion for craftsmanship, cleanliness and quality, is the owner of two successful enterprises: The Flag Man, a flag-making business based in Morpeth, and Clean-Ex, a professional carpet and upholstery cleaning company operating in Newcastle and covering the whole of the North East.

In September 2008, Morpeth was devastated by one of the worst floods in its history submerging hundreds of homes and businesses, including The Flag Man's previous premises. The catastrophic flooding caused immense damage, leaving the town reeling in its aftermath.

While dealing with the painstaking process of restoring his own business, Simon

encountered at first hand the challenges of post-flood clean-up. Frustrated by delays and unsatisfactory workmanship from insurance-appointed contractors, he identified a crucial gap in the market. Determined to make a difference, he trained in flood restoration and established Anytime Flood Restoration, specialising in professional carpet and upholstery cleaning, with a particular focus on flood recovery.

Simon remains committed to serving the local community. AFR Clean-Ex has since become a trusted name in the North East, helping residents and businesses recover from water damage and maintain clean, hygienic spaces.

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People Doing Good!

Working together to strengthen flood resilience in Blyth

Following the devastating impact of the October floods, the Environment Agency (EA) has been working closely with Blyth Town Council to improve flood preparedness across the community.

Although Blyth Town Council does not have any direct responsibility for flood management, they have worked with the EA to develop the Blyth Flood Resilience Plan. The EA has played a key role in shaping this plan, which will provide earlier flood warnings, improve direct communication between the Town Council, the EA, and residents and maintain records of vulnerable residents who may need support.

The EA met with the Flood Wardens for Chillingham Close advising them on the flood response process and how the Town Council's plan will help forewarn and support residents. The EA's guidance and expertise continue to be instrumental in ensuring communities are better prepared for future flood risks.



Northumberland Freemasons donate £10,000 to Dragonfly Cancer Trust



Northumberland Freemasons have generously donated £10,000 to the Dragonfly Cancer Trust, a charity dedicated to supporting young cancer patients from birth to the age of 25 who are facing life-limiting cancer diagnoses.

This significant contribution will fund the creation of Sibling Boxes, a thoughtful initiative aimed at helping families navigate challenging conversations and preserve cherished memories.

The Dragonfly Cancer Trust is committed to empowering young cancer patients and their families by providing practical and

emotional support. The charity offers small cash gifts to young patients to help them create special moments, as well as Memory Boxes and Sibling Boxes designed to foster meaningful discussions and provide emotional comfort.

The donation from the Northumberland Freemasons will directly support the production and filling of these boxes, particularly for families in Northumberland and Tyneside. The funds will also help ensure that each sibling receives an age-appropriate box, enabling the family to create lasting memories together.

Norman West, representing Northumberland Freemasons, shared why this charity holds a special place in their hearts: "We've all got children or grandchildren, and the thought of losing one is unimaginable. By supporting Dragonfly Cancer Trust, we hope to bring a little ray of sunshine into what could be a very dark time for these families."

CEO of the Dragonfly Cancer Trust Jane Dennison said: "We are very grateful to Northumberland Freemasons for their generous donation. These Sibling Boxes are not just temporary gifts but are designed to grow into treasured memory boxes. Families will revisit them, reflecting on the moments and memories they created together, turning challenging times into enduring connections."

Local businesses support Kenton Food Bank with nearly £9,000 donation

Kenton Food Bank has received a significant financial boost thanks to the generosity of local businessman Rob Armstrong of Nearby Taxis and a group of supportive businesses. Together, they have raised nearly £9,000 to cover the food bank's rent for the next year, ensuring it can continue serving families in need.

Now operating under the name of Make Your Way (North East) CIC, Kenton Food Bank was founded four years ago by Loree Wilson, who was struck by the harsh realities of food poverty while delivering community furniture to families in crisis. Since then, the food bank has grown substantially, now operating from its own premises and supporting around 550 families each month.

"We started just before COVID hit, and we've worked hard to make the community aware of our services," said Loree Wilson. "We receive fantastic support from local supermarkets, collecting donations two to three times a week. Families can visit weekly to receive a parcel suited to their needs, whether they are individuals, couples, or larger households. Our aim is to help those on a tight budget, allowing them to stretch their income further and cover essential bills."

In addition to food distribution, Kenton Food Bank collaborates with local schools and community groups to raise awareness about food insecurity and offer training sessions. Looking ahead, Loree



hopes to expand the food bank's reach and develop it into a broader community hub.

Rob Armstrong, of Nearby Taxis who grew up in the area and attended Kenton School, was inspired to act after seeing the impact of the food bank on the community. "Kenton Food Bank has become a lifeline for so many people," said Rob. "It's incredible to see the local community come together to donate food and support those in need. However, the food bank has ongoing expenses like rent and utility bills, which can be a real challenge. That's why I, along with other like-minded business owners, decided to step in and help."



International Women's Day supper club raises £2k for NE Youth

Who doesn't love pizza? Add in a group of women who love to party, a live performance from Channy & a bit of fundraising and you have the recipe for an amazing night.

NE Youth are celebrating their 90th anniversary this year so the International Women's Day Supper Club stepped things up and in doing so raised over £2000!!

There was of course a serious side to the event- which included highlighting some of the issues that women and girls (WAGs) are facing here in the North East. NE Youth run programmes solely for girls, the 1-2-1 sessions help them work on their confidence, well being and mental health.

Channy- North East singer song writer performed a set which had everyone up singing and dancing the night away.

Dee Macdonald from NE Youth commented: "This is the ninth year we've put on an event to celebrate International Women's Day. Its so important to highlight the incredible work NE Youth is doing in our region whilst having a fun evening! There's nothing better than women supporting women! Big thanks to David Gray Solicitors who have sponsored our events from day one and to Channy- what a voice she has... It just gets better and better!"

The IWD event was held at The Wood Oven in Wylam



Business Beats Cancer North East lights up the region's landmarks

On Friday 7th March, Cancer Research UK's Business Beats Cancer North East (BBCNE) took over the Utilita Arena to host its largest business dinner to date, bringing over 600 people together to raise awareness and funds to support the amazing work happening in our region to fight cancer.

The record-breaking amount of £85,000 raised on the night, more than double the previous year's dinner, will go to the Cancer Research UK Newcastle Centre where millions are spent every year delivering world-leading research that accelerates the transition of lab-based discovery to the clinic, for the benefit of people affected by cancer in the region and all over the world.

To mark the occasion, BBCNE worked with the local councils to light up the region in pink and blue, with landmarks all over the North East glowing in Cancer Research UK colours on Friday 7th March. From the Tyne Bridge and the Civic Centre to Penshaw Monument, Seaburn Lighthouse, Hylton Castle, The Sunderland Empire and many more.

Nearby Taxis drive funds for the Charlie and Carter Foundation

In Summer 2024 Nearby Taxis ran a hugely successful airport campaign offering South Tyneside customers a massive £10 saving on the cost of an airport transfer as well as supporting the Charlie and Carter Foundation with a £1 donation from the company for each completed journey which raised was an amazing £6,219!

Steven Pippin, Nearby Taxis, presented the cheque to the charity's Co- Founder Sarah Cookson and Retail Manager Jacqueline Stidolph. He said "The charity was set up by Sarah and husband Chris after the tragic loss of both of their boys, Charlie and Carter, to help other parents going through a similar situation and assisting with the likes of taking time off work, help with bills and ultimately help with funeral costs if and when needed! After presenting the cheque to Sarah it was clearly visible just how much the money meant especially as she explained that times are hard at the moment. Thank you to the whole team for everything you do both for the kids and their parents in easing the strain a little bit and allowing families to make extra special memories to cherish always! Well done guys, amazing people doing amazing things! "



Sarah Cookson said "Our staff and volunteers never stop; they give their everything in memory of our two angels and our families... but without you - our supporters - and your massive hearts and kindness we would not be able to survive.

You are the ones who go that extra mile for us, you choose us, you put your heart and soul into raising funds for us... so you can help us change the lives of families who will only kiss their child goodnight for a short while, who go to bed feeling blessed they have lived another day with their child. From the bottom of our hearts, thank you"

Scan here to get involved



This April, we're inviting you to make a bold statement and raise much needed funds by participating in Wear Blue for Charlie and Carter. There are so many ways to get involved but the main thing to remember is to have fun and support The Charlie and Carter Foundation!

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





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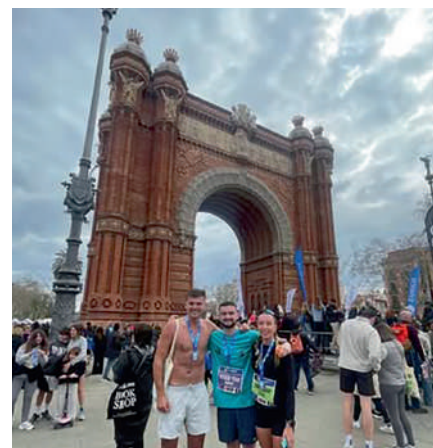
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Charity of the Month...



The Red Sky Foundation

Why was the charity formed?

Sergio and Emma Petrucci's daughter Luna was born with two holes in her heart. She was admitted to the Freeman Hospital for an operation to mend the holes and the operation was successful. After seeing what other children were going through on the ward, Sergio and Emma wanted to give back and fundraise for children with complex heart problems.

Which area do you cover?

Red Sky Foundation covers all things heart related. The charity supports babies, adults and children with complex heart problems.

What type of fundraising events do you have?

Our biggest event is the Red Sky Ball which takes place in March every year. There are other fundraiser events that happen throughout the year such as the Red Sky Dive, Red Sky Fireworks Extravaganza, Boxing Day Dip, Great North Run and so many more.

There's something for everyone to take part in. Lots of our supporters do their own fundraising events as well which is fantastic to see!

Who are your trustees and patrons?

Our patrons are Faye Tozer, famously known as part of the group Steps and Mackem Lioness, Jill Scott.

What have been your proudest moments so far?

There have been so many proud moments throughout Red Sky's journey. The proudest moments aren't always the most money raised at certain events, but the things that happen behind closed doors when we support families going through the toughest times in their lives when their child is waiting for a heart transplant.

What are you currently working on?

At the moment, we are working on organising the Red Sky Ball. We also have a big cardiac project that we're working on which focuses on visiting deprived communities in the North East with a high level of recorded heart disease which will test over 60s to find early signs of heart disease and failure.

What does the future hold?

There's so many more ground-breaking projects we want to fund but ultimately, continuing to save more heartbeats.

How do you get involved?

The best way to keep up with fundraising opportunities is to follow us on our social pages and visit our website
www.redskyfoundation.com

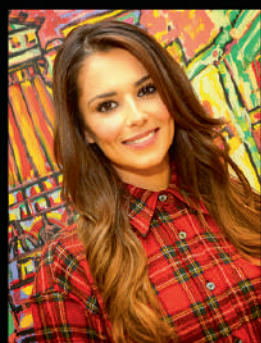
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Charity Aware



Cash for Kids Day

North East charity, Cash for Kids, is getting ready to tackle the issue of Holiday Hunger across the North East this summer.

For some local children their school dinner is the only meal of the day. During the holidays struggling families simply can't afford enough food, so they're often eating unhealthy options or even nothing at all.

Money raised this Cash for Kids Day on Thursday, 1st May will help with fun activities and that important meal during the holidays.

Who are Cash for Kids?

Cash for Kids is the charity of Bauer Media, dedicated to improving the lives of disadvantaged children and young people across the North East, from the moment they're born up to and including the age of 18.

Their mission is to be there when they need them the most, helping combat poverty, illness and neglect, making living with additional needs that little bit easier, or simply offering a helping hand. They believe that every child deserves the opportunity to thrive and be their true selves. Cash for Kids work with grassroots organisations that aim to make a difference to young lives, directly supporting families who often have nowhere else to go.



What is Cash for Kids Day?

Cash for Kids Day is an annual fundraiser and a celebration of the charity, which this year takes place on Thursday, 1st May. Funds raised will be granted to local projects providing food and activities for children during the long six-week summer holiday. According to government figures, there are around 90 days of school holiday each year where children could go hungry and almost 40% of working households have been classed as food insecure. 1 in 4 families with children struggle to afford food and 1 in 10 15-year-olds have missed meals because of poverty. These are the children Cash for Kids Day are aiming to help.

How can you get support Cash for Kids Day?

The charity is encouraging local businesses, schools and individuals to do what they can to raise money. One fundraising challenge, which is being spearheaded by the team at Hits Radio, is to help cover 68 million steps as they aim to walk around the world, but they can't do it alone! Cash for Kids is asking schools, groups and individuals to join in with the challenge, get sponsored and help reach this ambitious goal.

Raising just £52 could provide a place at a five-day sports club with breakfast and lunch, with a £5,200 donation funding places at a five day sports club with breakfast and lunch for 100 children.



What other fundraising appeals do Cash for Kids run?

Cash for Kids fundraise all year round. Their biggest appeal is Mission Christmas, which aims to ensure that every child receives a gift from Santa on Christmas Day. Last year in the North East, gifts were distributed to over 42,000 children living in poverty via their beneficiaries. Mission Christmas will return from 17th November 2025 and there are lots of ways to help, from fundraising to collecting gift donations.

The team also run their well-established Sports Challenge in the Autumn, supporting local clubs and groups to get more disadvantaged children into sport. In 2024, over £280,000 was granted out in the area via the Sports Challenge.

Other fundraisers include the popular Charva Choons Live event with radio presenters Steve & Karen and Laffs4Kids at the Utilita Arena, organised by comedian Jason Cook.

How do I find out more about Cash for Kids?

If you're interested in finding out more about the work of Cash for Kids in the local community and how you can support them, you can visit their website cashforkids.org.uk or email northeast@cashforkids.org.uk





Credit: Great North Care Record

Leading shared care record system passes one million monthly views ahead of 5th anniversary

The digital shared care record system, Great North Care Record, has reported that its system has reached one million views every month by health and care staff across the North East and North Cumbria – making it one of the most used systems of its kind in the UK.

GNCR enables health and care professionals to securely access patient data from multiple providers, all in one platform. This streamlined approach supports more informed decision-making, resulting in higher quality of care and safer experiences for patients.

Passing one million monthly views coincides with GNCR's fifth anniversary – and since its launch in March 2020, it has become one of the world's leading shared care record systems, with 25 million total views and 30k regular users. Over that time, annual views have increased by 839% – rising from 998k in 2020, to 9.3 million in 2024.

The landmark one million monthly view caps off another year of significant growth

for GNCR, including the region-wide launch of GP Connect. It is also the first shared care record in the country to have all NHS Foundation Trusts in the region sharing maternity data through one common electronic patient record.

Currently, just over half of health and care professionals in the North East and North Cumbria who can access GNCR are doing so, with its reach and impact on health and care services in the region continuing to grow. With plans to expand the system into areas such as community dentistry, the volunteer sector, care homes, and community pharmacy, Great North Care Record is set to enhance collaboration and improve patient care even further.

Lisa Sewell, GNCR Programme Director,

said: “We’re delighted to have surpassed our landmark goal of one million monthly views. It evidences the incredibly positive impact that GNCR has had at scale. It continues to enable timely and informed decision making supporting a person’s care in NENC.

“It brings immense pride for all involved to see how far GNCR has come in the last five years. It is now a core digital enabler within our region’s health and social care system. We recognise that there is still more to do to ensure the scale and quality of information presented continues to develop. Our goal continues to be that the value of GNCR is maximised for the benefit of all in the North East and North Cumbria.”

Professor Graham Evans, Executive Chief Digital and Infrastructure Officer, NHS North East & North Cumbria ICB, added: “It gives me great pride to see the service continuously go from strength to strength and support frontline care for the population we serve,

“Over the past five years, GNCR has led the way when it comes to shared care records and connecting organisations together digitally. Regionally, we must continue to collaborate and promote using Great North Care Record to maximise its value and provide greater benefit for all.”

www.greatnorthcarerecord.org.uk



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Black & Gold Ball

Friday 13 June 2025 @ Hilton Newcastle Gateshead

Join BBC's Reverend Kate Bottley as she hosts a spectacular evening of celebration and fundraising to help Oasis Community Housing shine a light for people facing homelessness.

● Drinks reception ● Three course meal ● Shared Value Awards ● Music from The Brit Pack ●

Exclusive 10% discount for Northern Insight readers
Email **BlackGold10** to fundraising@oasiscommunityhousing.org



Registered charity no.
1107554

What's your legacy?

Jen Harrison and Jonny Pearce are proud north easterners and their social enterprise, Better Places, is driven by a belief that every organisation has the potential to create positive change on its doorstep.

They're on a mission to help business leaders build legacies that matter, tackling the region's toughest social challenges so that businesses and communities thrive together.

Businesses thrive when communities do – and the North East has the pie 'n' peas to prove it

The North East has always been a region of innovation, resilience and ambition. From our industrial heritage in shipbuilding, manufacturing and mining to today's leadership in emerging technologies, advanced manufacturing and the green economy, we have a long tradition of responsible business leadership.

That spirit of business as force for good is reflected among some of our most recognised North East brands – from tackling economic hardship at The Barbour Foundation and addressing inequalities at The Greggs Foundation, through to supporting arts, culture and young people's projects at Kavli Trust.

These are now established organisations, but their community legacies started with a single act of kindness. The ingredients for The Greggs Foundation, for example, began in 1967 with nothing more than a simple 'pie 'n' peas' supper for older residents in Gateshead.

Thriving businesses need thriving communities

Right now, businesses are navigating an unpredictable landscape - rising costs, supply chain disruptions and global economic uncertainty. But despite these changing headwinds, one thing remains unchanged: long-term business success is built on the foundations of strong communities.

So how can North East businesses turn today's challenges into opportunities for a stronger, fairer and more connected future? At Better places, it's all about collaboration.

Jen's experience of working with charities, government and public services gives her a unique take on how to build partnerships that lift up communities and support



Jonny Pearce and Jen Harrison

businesses through an equal and shared vision for long-term success:

“At Better Places, we're supporting a community of leaders who are passionate about creating lasting social impact. We know that for many, the intention is there, but it's hard to turn those good intentions into action.

“That's where we come in. Through expert consultancy, collaborative programmes and fractional leadership, we help organisations connect the dots - creating partnerships that make a real difference, whether that's transforming lives through grassroots support or gathering evidence to shape policy for lasting change.

“Collaboration is at the heart of everything we do. When we come together with a shared purpose, the benefits speak for themselves – powerful communities, stronger connections and opportunities for everyone to thrive.”

Through Jonny's experience across public and private companies, he understands that supporting communities is good for business:

“Our communities aren't just where we do business, they're home to our current and future colleagues, customers, suppliers, and even investors. When communities face disadvantage, businesses inevitably feel the impact, whether through workforce

challenges or lost opportunities for growth.

“We collaborate with business leaders who are passionate about tackling issues like digital inclusion, tackling health inequalities, and addressing isolation and loneliness. They see the role their business can play in driving change but often struggle with where to start. Others have social impact embedded in their governance but lack the resources to activate it effectively.

“The good news? Businesses don't have to do it alone. By aligning strategy with action and leveraging the right partnerships, companies can create meaningful, measurable impact. When businesses invest in thriving communities, they're also investing in their own resilience and long-term success.”

So how do you make your first small step?

From strengthening communities to and creating meaningful change for future generations, the North East is brimming with innovators, creators and changemakers, each driven to make a lasting impact and power up the region.

What will your legacy be? Let Better Places help you shape it.

jen@forbetterplaces.co.uk
jonny@forbetterplaces.co.uk
www.forbetterplaces.co.uk



Peter Neal

Should trustees be paid?

Peter Neal, founder of Experience Bank Group, specialises in recruitment for charities at leadership level, specifically chief executives and trustees. In this article he explores a question he is being asked more and more – should trustees be paid for their roles?

“In the UK, trusteeships are generally unpaid voluntary roles, undertaken as a way of giving back to our local communities. However, the debate is stepping up as to whether this is ethical, fair, and sustainable as the number of leaders offering themselves as trustees becomes less.

“Currently whether trustees should be paid depends on the nature of the charity, the specific roles of the trustees, and the policies of the charity itself. Trustees are generally considered to be volunteers and are not typically paid for their work. The Charity Commission for England and Wales

expects trustees to act in the best interests of the charity, without financial incentive.

“That said, there are certain situations where trustees may be paid or reimbursed for their time and expenses.

“It is wholly acceptable that trustees are reimbursed for reasonable expenses incurred while fulfilling their duties, such as travel costs or other out-of-pocket expenses directly related to the charity’s activities. These should always be demonstrated with receipts, logged with the charities finance process and where necessary declared to HMRC by the recipient.

“There are certain situations though, where a trustee can be paid. If a trustee is also an employee of the charity (e.g., in a different role), they can be paid for their work in that capacity, but the Charity Commission must be notified, and there must be transparency. There are a number of charities in the region I know, for example, where the CEO is also a trustee. They are salaried for their executive role but not for their trusteeship.

“Trustees with specific skills or expertise may be compensated for their professional services. For example, a lawyer or accountant might be paid for the services they provide to the charity in addition to their trustee role. However, this should be clearly outlined in the charity’s governing documents and comply with charity law.

“Some larger charities with complex governance structures might pay trustees,

especially if their roles involve substantial time commitments or require specific expertise. Again, this is always clearly outlined in governing documents, with the Charities Commission and must comply with charity legislation.

“Clearly, the payment of trustees can create potential conflicts of interest. Charities need to have clear policies to manage conflicts of interest and ensure the charity’s activities remain focused on its mission and are not driven by the financial interests of its trustees. If trustees are paid, the charity must ensure transparency. This includes proper documentation and disclosure in annual reports and accounts.

“The Charity Commission closely monitors the financial management of charities, and any payment made to trustees must be in line with the charity’s articles of association and governing documents.

“In conclusion, and in my opinion, trustees in the UK should generally not be paid for their governance role, but as outlined there are exceptions. If you want to read more about this subject, then there is very clear guidance at www.gov.uk/guidance/payments-to-charity-trustees-what-the-rules-are.

“Due to the non-renumeration of these roles, many charities struggle to find quality trustees.”

If this is the case for your organisation, do get in touch to discuss by emailing peter@theexperiencebank.co.uk



Rise Learning Group Launch & Learn event

An afternoon of conversation, connection and collaboration, exploring how to support people through the end-to-end colleague journey.

Filled with inspiring conversations to understand how employee experiences impact engagement, retention, and productivity.

All perfectly complementing the Rise Learning Group Four Pillars of Excellence, which were launched at the event.

Thank you to guest speakers Elaine Bartlett, Liz Robertson, Kayleigh Burn, Iain Herdman, Kathryn Connell CeMAP CIPD and Helen Boyd.





The future of work: Enabling emotional fitness and agility

Over recent weeks and months, I'm sure I'm not the only one watching the news, wondering what will happen next.

What impact will this have on geopolitics, humanity, and the ecosystem? And that's before considering the effect decisions by our global leaders will have on the economy, businesses, and our lives. We are all interconnected, so there is no way to avoid impact.

In conversations, I'm noticing a growing sense of tension, uncertainty, and constant flux, which is showing up as busyness, scattered thoughts, and emotional rollercoasters. We're not thinking clearly, reacting calmly, or presenting our best selves. What we're experiencing is a reflection of a BANI world, a framework created by Jamais Cascio to explain our current reality.

- **Brittle:** This refers to systems that seem strong but shatter under stress. For individuals, this might be a tipping point, a rapid change, or sustained pressure causing burnout or unpredictable behaviour.
- **Anxious:** Heightened uncertainty and worry, caused by unpredictable events. What once things felt certain they are now unclear, leading to misinformation, indecision, and overwhelm.
- **Non-Linear:** Situations are complex, with disproportionate or unpredictable outcomes, leading to confusion and stress.
- **Incomprehensible:** Everything moves at a fast pace, leaving people overwhelmed with information, struggling to make decisions.

This framework doesn't offer a quick fix, but it helps explain the current circumstances. So, how can we stay emotionally fit and agile in a BANI world?

Here's what each stage requires:

- **Brittle systems** need resilience, and the capacity and agility to withstand shocks.
- **Anxiety** requires empathy, understanding and the willingness to be kind and forgiving
- **Non-linear** requires improvisation, adaptation and to be creative under pressure



Annabel Graham

- **Incomprehensible** requires us to check in with and work with our intuition, and find a way forward.

How then can we personally take care of ourselves, become emotionally fit and able to work in this current environment?

1. Build Resilience

Resilience is fostered by habits like sleeping well, eating well, exercising, and making time to reflect. Conduct a self-audit: On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate yourself in these areas? What adjustments can you make to operate at your best? When should you pause and to improve effectiveness? What changes throughout your day would help you?

2. Offer Empathy

Reflect on the pressures you're facing and their physical and mental impact. Are you recognising this? Do your colleagues and family understand? What conversations could help share this burden? Can you be kinder to yourself and seek help when needed? Who in your team needs you to offer empathy and understanding to them?

3. Step Back, Review the Big Picture, and Collaborate

Remember, you can't solve everything alone. Step back and consider the bigger picture. Gather feedback and insights from

those around you. Creativity doesn't always mean novelty—what seems “business as usual” to one person might be ‘innovation’ to another. Sharing ideas can enhance creativity.

4. Act with Integrity and Stay True to Your Values

Check in with your intuition, recognize when something feels right or wrong, and ensure your actions align with your values. This will allow you to lead with integrity and make decisions based on what you know. You can always adjust them later.

To be emotionally agile, we must recognize, accept, and be curious about our emotions as they occur. This awareness gives us the freedom to choose how we act. Under pressure or stress, our prefrontal cortex—the thinking part of our brain—loses oxygen, which impacts decision-making. Breathing, building resilience, practicing empathy, and stepping back help restore clarity, allowing us to make better decisions.

Annabel is an Executive and Team Coach, Leadership Facilitator and Coach Supervisor. If you would value a thinking space, why not reach out to Annabel for a chat via LinkedIn, annabel@successfultraining.co.uk, or visit www.successfultraining.co.uk

From Fear to Faith: My Newcastle United Journey

As a kid, I stood behind the counter of our family shop on Pitt Street, watching waves of black-and-white shirts flood past on matchdays.

The roar of St. James' Park was deafening, but inside our little shop, it felt like another world - one we weren't part of.

Drunken fans would stagger in, some shouting abuse, and Newcastle United Football Club didn't feel like my club. It felt distant, unwelcoming, even intimidating.

Across the road was Murray House, where I'd run, heart pounding, through a gauntlet of racist taunts, a bit like Indiana Jones in Temple of Doom—except this wasn't an adventure. It was just life. Football wasn't my refuge. I was rubbish at it, always the last to be picked, and every playground rejection only deepened my disconnect from the sport that seemed to define this city.

But life has a way of rewriting stories.

Fast forward a few decades, and my son, the absolute joy of my life, loves football. He plays for a team, far better than I ever was, and through his passion, I found mine. We were there at every home game. The transformation began with shared trips to matches, evolving into a cherished ritual.

Recently, we travelled to Wembley Stadium, not just to watch a game, but to witness history being made. For the first time in 70 years, Newcastle United lifted a cup—the Carabao Cup. It was an electrifying experience, watching our team triumph, a moment of pure elation that felt both surreal and deserved. Celebrating this victory together, amidst a sea of black and



Ammar Mirza CBE

white, was undoubtedly one of the best and most memorable experiences of our lives.

This victory did more than just end a trophy drought; it reaffirmed my faith in the unifying power of sport. **For 20 years, I've supported and sponsored grassroots football, from local junior teams to Newcastle University Women's team, and now, seeing Newcastle United excel on such a grand stage has further motivated me.** It has shown me the tangible impact of perseverance and community spirit.

Sport is powerful. It can exclude, but more profoundly, it can unite. This is epitomised by the Newcastle United Foundation, now situated where Murray House once was, demonstrating the power of inclusion. **As a proud recipient of the Asian Business Connexions #Inclusionbydefault award, the Foundation underscores what we stand for—unity through diversity and strength through shared experiences.**

Newcastle United once felt like it had no space for me. But now? Now, it's different. It feels like home. The club's recent triumph is a testament not only to its players and management but to its legion of devoted fans—people like you and me, whose unwavering support has been instrumental in this journey.

Because this is my city.

My region. My club.

This is Newcastle.

And we are United.

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.



Brewin
Dolphin

abc AWARDS 2025

THE GREAT NORTH EAST CELEBRATION



(image featuring: Kevin Allen and Amit Bahanda (ABConnexions) + Chris Black and Anthony Peart (Brewin Dolphin))

RBC Brewin Dolphin Announced as Headline Sponsor of the ABC Awards 2025

ABConnexions is delighted to announce RBC Brewin Dolphin as the headline sponsor for the prestigious ABC Awards 2025, reinforcing a shared commitment to diversity, inclusion, and community empowerment across the North-East.



Chris Black, Financial Planner (Divisional Director) at RBC Brewin Dolphin's Newcastle Office said:

"At RBC Brewin Dolphin, diversity and inclusion is more than a value, it is core to our purpose and a fundamental strength of our organisation. Our vision is to be among the most inclusive workplaces and successful companies, putting diversity into action to help employees, clients and communities thrive. We believe that diversity and inclusion is an engine for innovation and economic prosperity. We understand that progress on matters of diversity and inclusion has no finish line and so it is important to work with a range of partners to help us to further our work in this area, which is why we are delighted to be a part of the ABC Awards."

ABConnexions (ABC), a vital not-for-profit organisation, fosters connections and collaboration among businesses, professionals, and entrepreneurs within the North East's ethnic and broader communities. ABC acts as a dynamic platform that promotes growth, innovation, and cultural understanding by facilitating the sharing of knowledge, the exchange of ideas, and access to opportunities across diverse industries.

Chris Black added, *"We are committed to being a responsible business, from the way we interact with our clients and employees, to how we support our local communities. Therefore, we believe it is important to honour the individuals and organisations that stand united to foster inclusion and promote diversity in all our communities, including the North-East, such as the ABC Awards."*

Amit Bahanda, Director of ABC, expresses his enthusiasm for the ongoing partnership: *"It's fantastic to welcome back RBC Brewin Dolphin as our headline sponsor. Their steadfast commitment to our shared goals of diversity, inclusion, and community engagement significantly enhances our efforts. This partnership is a powerful testament to our shared values, and together, we aim to spotlight and honour the outstanding contributions to our communities."*

By supporting people in the North-East to realise their financial ambitions, we not only help more people to enjoy the things that they love but also strengthen financial knowledge and inclusion in the region. Our success in advancing diversity starts within and we thank our 300 North-East based employees who bring our vision, values and strategy to life, so we can give back to our clients and communities.

Ammar Mirza CBE, Chairman of ABConnexions, shares his excitement: *"Seeing RBC Brewin Dolphin rejoin us as the headline sponsor is truly inspiring. Their support amplifies our commitment to fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion. We look forward to another year."*



AWARDS 2025
THE GREAT NORTH EAST CELEBRATION

To download our sponsor pack or nominate someone for an award visit: www.abconnexions.org or contact amit@abconnexions.org

ABOUT RBC BREWIN DOLPHIN

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*as at 31st October 2024.

ABOUT RBC

Royal Bank of Canada is a global financial institution with a purpose-driven, principles-led approach to delivering leading performance.

Our success comes from the 98,000+ employees who leverage their imaginations and insights to bring our vision, values and strategy to life so we can help our clients thrive and communities prosper. As Canada's biggest bank and one of the largest in the world, based on market capitalization, we have a diversified business model with a focus on innovation and providing exceptional experiences to our more than 18 million clients in Canada, the U.S. and 27 other countries. Learn more at rbc.com.

We are proud to support a broad range of community initiatives through donations, community investments and employee volunteer activities. See how at rbc.com/peopleandplanet.

Disclaimer:

The value of investments can fall and you may get back less than you invested.

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Join the North Tyneside Business Forum – Your free business support network



Running a business can be incredibly rewarding—but it can also be challenging and, at times, isolating. That's where the North Tyneside Business Forum comes in.

Established in 2020 and led by a team of dedicated business owners, this unique community exists to connect, support, and empower local businesses across the borough. Whether you're a start-up, a growing enterprise, or an established business, we're here to help—and the best part? Membership is completely free!

Why join the North Tyneside Business Forum?

As one of the largest peer-to-peer business networks in the North East, our forum brings together a mix of local entrepreneurs, offering valuable opportunities for networking, mentorship, and collaboration. We understand that running a business can sometimes feel like a solitary journey, but at the Forum, you're never alone. Every member is welcomed with a friendly face and an open door to expert advice, business support, and community-driven initiatives.

What you'll gain as a member

- **Peer Support & Networking** – Connect with like-minded business owners who understand the challenges you face. Build relationships, exchange ideas, and forge valuable partnerships.
- **Expert Guidance & Resources** – Gain access to industry experts and local advisors who can provide tailored support to help your business thrive.
- **Events & Workshops** – Attend our free events and workshops designed to equip you with the latest insights, strategies, and skills for business success.
- **A Voice in Your Community** – Influence local business policies and be part of a network that works collaboratively with North Tyneside Council to support and promote businesses in the borough.

Keeping business local & thriving

The North Tyneside Business Forum isn't just about networking—it's about building a stronger, more resilient local economy. By joining, you're contributing to a movement that encourages businesses to support each other, share knowledge, and drive collective

success. Our events and initiatives nurture a culture of collaboration, ensuring that local businesses stay connected, stay supported, and stay local.

No cost, just opportunity

Thanks to the support of North Tyneside Council, membership in the Forum is completely free. There are no hidden costs—just genuine opportunities to grow your business and connect with a supportive community.

Join today!

If you're a business with a trading address in North Tyneside, don't miss out on this fantastic opportunity. Join the North Tyneside Business Forum today and take the next step in growing your business with the support of our community.

northtynesidebusinessforum.org.uk



Scan me!

Innovative software is helping to support the UK's net zero targets

In the evolving landscape of energy efficiency and sustainability, the innovative Green Hub software from Brighter Compliance has emerged as a pivotal tool for achieving and maintaining retrofit certification.

As the UK pushes towards its target to reach net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, the push for sustainability and retrofit projects has never been more in demand.

For businesses involved in the sector who wish to gain access to funding opportunities and enhance customer trust, the PAS 2030 and MCS certifications are an essential part of their compliance and growth plans, also being mandatory for companies seeking to participate in government-funded schemes like the Energy Company Obligation (ECO).

The Green Hub software, which was designed to streamline the processes associated with PAS 2030 and MCS certification, addresses the complexities of documentation and compliance, assisting energy-efficiency installers in several key areas:

Pre-Written Procedures Ready for Assessment

Version-controlled procedures are pre-written to comply with PAS 2030 standards, this feature simplifies the initial certification assessment, ensuring that all necessary protocols are in place and up-to-date.

Company Profile Management

The platform offers a dedicated area to manage all relevant company information required by certification bodies during assessments, this centralised database ensures that critical data is organised and readily accessible.

Installation Management

Pre-populated forms ensure compliance with both standards, this functionality simplifies the recording of information

from design through to customer handover, ensuring ongoing compliance and efficient project management.

People Training and Competency

The system enables easy management of installer and subcontractor records, ensuring full compliance with competency requirements for all standards, this feature is crucial for demonstrating that personnel meet the necessary qualifications and training.

Accessible 24/7

As a cloud-based platform, Green Hub is accessible around the clock, allowing teams to update and view records whenever necessary, ensuring that compliance and project management are not confined to traditional office hours.

Fully Auditable

Due to its organisational strengths, Green Hub is the software of choice for certification bodies, making assessments more straightforward and transparent.

Adapting to Changes in PAS 2030 Standards

To ensure adherence to British Standards, the system is updated regularly to remain fully compliant with the latest standards, helping clients navigate transitions seamlessly.

Managing Director of Brighter Compliance, Austin Gibbons, is delighted with how

the software has been received by clients, commenting, 'Users of Green Hub have reported significant improvements in efficiency and compliance management. With our flexible model and comprehensive training with our clients, they feel at ease using the software and are confident that when their audit arrives, they are prepared and compliant.'

As the push to net zero continues, achieving PAS 2030 and MCS certification has never been as important for organisations or professionals looking to work on domestic energy efficiency retrofit projects under government-backed initiatives.

Working within the industry for many years, our experienced team are well versed as to the resources and support required to gain and maintain the standards, however, for small businesses, it can be a daunting process.

Following extremely positive feedback from our clients and the recent announcement that we are the chosen compliance partner of Warmworks in Scotland, we're delighted that the software is supporting businesses and is helping towards the wider economic impact of sustainability and the UK's net-zero housing goals.'

Need more information on PAS or MCS certification? Contact the Brighter Compliance team at www.brightercompliance.co.uk for further details.



Austin Gibbons

A funny thing happened to me on the way to consumer satisfaction...

Dr David Cliff explores customer service or in many cases the lack thereof.

People buy from people, of that there is no doubt. Increasingly however, online sales and offers that come from organisations that have central distributive outlets rather than local high street shops or branches, have reduced much of the purchasing experience to that of a transactional nature.

The problem is, however, particularly in the business to consumer arena, the consumer is not just buying an item that is a simple functional transaction. They are often acquiring something that gives them a form of enhancement in their life or even, an 'evolutionary advantage'. Deep within us are primal programs that ensure that we can survive. Acquiring goods or obtaining services, is consistent with that, as is the collaboration between people that ensures our sources of supply. Yes, consumerism, works at many levels other than the simply acquisitive.

Of central importance, is the nature of the relationship which upholds the transaction. If it can be relied on, trusted and can respect our individuality, we gain an advantage at so many levels. It also fosters a shed load of loyalty towards those who understand its importance.

Algorithms, automated systems and other fulfilment mechanisms simply do not give that "buzz" to people. Evolutionary psychology considerations aside, humans seek meaning, and a big part of meaning construction are the relationships we have in the external world. Whether it is friendship or commercial, the opportunity to gain personal meaning, satisfaction and fulfilment through contact is vital. Business is business, but this does not diminish much when it is a purely commercial relationship involved.

In all of this the generation of trust is fundamental and this is where good customer service in particular, is important. Where there are automated systems or even

just staff who have a low level of authority within the organisation, the ability to escalate one's humanity to someone who can respond, listen and treat you as a unique individual, is crucial. In acknowledging our humanity, transactions become so much more meaningful. It is to notice that research suggests that 70% of callers actively attempt to evade Chatbots or other automated response mechanisms, preferring to talk to a human being. Equally, whilst price may still be an acute point of consumer choice, over 60% of consumers would prefer to pay more for a better service.

When situations require customer services interventions, if these are not authentic, in real time and person centred, a valuable opportunity is lost to re-cement the organisations relationship with the customer, validate their individuality and give a sense of value, that will foster trust and brand loyalty. Too many sales operations destroy this relationship by seeking short-term, target focused objectives, where the sale is all and there is little heed to what then follows relationally. This approach fragments the customer relationship and leaves a sense of deep insecurity or even exploitation for many. Quality customer service back up can restore faith. So, it needs to be authentic, scripted and oh yes, human, wherever possible.

Some companies are very good at getting past all of this with automation, but they are few in number. Amazon's success is by the

sheer efficiency of its fulfilment operation and an unequivocal set of solutions that automatically work for the consumers benefit. No quibble returns, refunds issued before the goods get back to the warehouse, all of these things can operate and give great customer satisfaction without the human contact when they are scaled up to the size and might of an organisation like Amazon. Most companies are not like that however, and the human touch matters.

It's in this particular niche, where smaller businesses can fare very well. The opportunity to develop a trusted, congruent, visible human relationship often positively accords with brand loyalty, and courts a considerable degree of tolerance over issues such as delivery.

However automated you can become, whatever AI or algorithms you use for fulfilment, please, please never lose sight of the basic simplicity of humans listening to humans and being accessible to them in any transactional process. In simple terms, this can amount to as little as making sure "contact us" has a clear telephone number and you speak to a human within thirty seconds of it being answered. Sure, it is not as cheap as a bot, at least in the short term, but if client lifetime values have anything to commend them, they are predicated by such relationships.

www.gedanken.co.uk



Dr David Cliff



Dr David Cliff

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Quantum Controls expands control panel manufacturing capabilities with strategic growth and investment



Lauren and Jasmine at Birtley

Quantum Controls, a leader in control panel manufacturing and engineering solutions, continues its trajectory of rapid growth and investment in its panel shop, achieving an impressive 94% business growth in 2024.

This expansion has led to the recruitment of 11 additional skilled professionals, strengthening the company's ability to meet increasing demand and maintain its industry-leading position.

Strengthening the Estimating Team: Introducing Lauren Hill and Jasmine Jones.

As part of this growth strategy, Quantum Controls is pleased to announce the expansion of its estimating team with the appointment of Lauren Hill as Senior Estimating and Tendering Engineer and Jasmine Jones as Estimating and Tendering Engineer. Their expertise will play a pivotal role in ensuring the company continues to deliver high-quality, cost-effective control panel solutions while meeting the evolving needs of clients.

Lauren Hill: A Seasoned Expert in Engineering Estimation

Lauren brings 17 years of experience in the engineering and construction industry. Her journey into engineering began unexpectedly during a university gap year while studying law. Starting as an Engineering Assistant at 19, she discovered a passion for the field and worked her way up to Estimating Manager before joining Quantum Controls.

"Quantum Controls is a rapidly expanding business, and I was excited at the thought of joining the team to contribute to its future growth," said Lauren. She is committed to staying ahead of industry trends, leveraging automation, cost analysis, and historical data to refine tender estimates and improve efficiency. Her expertise in project planning and estimation will be invaluable in driving the company's continued success.

Jasmine Jones: A Passion for Estimating and Engineering

Jasmine brings nearly seven years of experience in estimating, having started in July 2018 as an entry point into engineering. She quickly developed a passion for the field, appreciating the fast-paced environment and daily challenges that drive continuous learning.

"I initially saw estimating as a way to build commercial awareness alongside technical knowledge, but I found a genuine

passion for it. It's incredibly rewarding to be part of projects ranging from major UK infrastructure to smaller, personal installations," Jasmine shared. "One of the best parts of my job is driving past sites and being able to say, 'I helped with that.'"

She also emphasises the importance of continuous learning and relationship-building in the field: "Take any and all training opportunities, don't be afraid to ask questions, and build strong client relationships, these are key to securing new projects and advancing in the industry."

Investing in the Future of Control Panel Manufacturing

Quantum Controls' investment in its panel shop and expansion of the estimating team underscore the company's commitment to growth, innovation, and excellence. With a focus on energy-efficient solutions, modular designs, and renewable energy integration, the company is positioning itself as a leader in the evolving landscape of control panel manufacturing.

The company remains dedicated to investing in top talent, advanced technology, and enhanced capabilities to better serve clients across various industries.

For more information about Quantum Controls and its industry-leading solutions across the North East, please visit quantum-controls.co.uk or contact sales@quantum-controls.co.uk

Sustainability and the Bottom Line

Sustainability is becoming an ever more pressing business need – driven by supply chain pressure, funding requirements and ever-changing environmental legislation.

Many businesses are recognising that implementing an Environmental Management System (EMS) isn't just good for the environment; it's a strategic move that drives efficiency, cost savings, and long-term resilience.

Running a business means managing costs, improving efficiency, increasing customer satisfaction, and staying competitive. Genee delivers a nationally recognised environmental accreditation programme called Investors in the Environment across the North of England, designed to help businesses combine operational efficiency with environmental stewardship.

Investors in the Environment is a structured approach to sustainability which provides a clear roadmap to identify cost-saving opportunities while also meeting the growing demands for environmental accountability from customers, suppliers, and tender applications. With iiE's bronze, silver and green accreditation levels, businesses can progress at a pace that suits them, implementing tangible improvements along the way. This step-by-step approach allows you to gradually integrate sustainability into your operations, ensuring that every change delivers measurable value.

One of the biggest financial benefits of an Environmental Management System is cost reduction through improved resource efficiency. Energy-saving measures, such as LED lighting, smart heating systems, and better insulation, can lead to significant reductions in utility bills. Many businesses also find savings through simple operational changes like reducing unnecessary printing, optimising logistics routes, or improving equipment maintenance to avoid energy wastage.



Jo Holmes

Beyond energy, water efficiency and waste reduction offer further cost-cutting opportunities. Businesses that track and minimise water use can significantly lower their bills, while better stock management and lean production techniques reduce waste and unnecessary spending on materials.

Sustainability is also becoming a key factor in procurement decisions. More suppliers and contractors now require businesses to demonstrate environmental responsibility, with some tenders even specifying the need for an externally verified accreditation like iiE. Having a recognised certification not only improves credibility but also gives businesses a competitive edge when bidding for contracts.

A common misconception about sustainability is that it's too expensive for small businesses to adopt. Many fear the upfront investment, however, the reality is that the financial returns far outweigh the initial costs. A structured EMS helps businesses see exactly where their biggest cost savings lie. iiE's staged approach makes it even easier to implement changes gradually, ensuring financial sustainability alongside environmental progress.

As regulations tighten and consumer preferences shift towards greener brands,

companies that have already embedded sustainability into their strategy will be the ones leading the market. By adopting an EMS and gaining accreditation with Investors in the Environment, your business can enhance its reputation and trust with customers, gain a competitive edge in tenders and secure financial saving

Many see sustainability as an added cost, but in reality, it's an investment. In the long run, sustainable practices can unlock new markets, enhance your company's reputation, and reduce risks associated with environmental liabilities. Businesses with a proven commitment to sustainability are often favoured by investors, partners, and customers, leading to higher profits and a more resilient bottom line.

Think of sustainability as a way to future proof your business. As environmental regulations tighten and consumer demand for eco-friendly products grows, those who have already adopted sustainable practices will be ahead of the curve. They won't be scrambling to catch up - they'll be leading the way.

To discuss your business' environmental impact and how to reduce it, contact us at jo@genee.org.uk or visit our website www.genee.org.uk

Collaborative Search: Making waves in global eCommerce



Shoptalk 2025 proved to be a game-changing event, and Collaborative Search was thrilled to be a part of it.

Amongst more than 10,000 attendees, we had the incredible opportunity to connect with industry leaders, engage with cutting-edge innovations, and solidify our expertise in the ever-evolving eCommerce landscape. Held in the vibrant city of Las Vegas, the event brought together retailers, brands, and technology pioneers to discuss the future of retail and digital commerce.

At Shoptalk 2025, our team met with several forward-thinking companies that are revolutionizing the eCommerce industry. From AI-driven customer engagement solutions to groundbreaking supply chain optimizations, the innovations on display demonstrated the rapid advancements shaping the future of online retail. Our discussions with these companies provided us with valuable insights into emerging trends, including personalized shopping experiences, omnichannel strategies, and advancements in machine learning for search and discovery.

One of the most exciting aspects of the event was the chance to explore new technologies that align with our mission of enhancing eCommerce search capabilities. We connected with thought leaders who are pushing the boundaries of digital transformation and identified opportunities to integrate the latest tools into our own solutions.

As an organization dedicated to improving search experiences in eCommerce, we recognize the importance of staying at the forefront of industry developments. Attending Shoptalk 2025 was an essential step in expanding our knowledge base, fostering strategic partnerships, and refining our approach to delivering top-tier solutions.

From keynote sessions led by retail executives to interactive panel discussions, we absorbed key takeaways that will influence our strategies moving forward. Topics such as AI-driven personalization, voice commerce, and data-driven decision-making underscored the significance of continuous learning in a competitive digital marketplace.

Collaborative Search remains committed to advancing our expertise and applying the latest industry insights to benefit our clients. By leveraging the knowledge gained at Shoptalk 2025, we aim to enhance our capabilities and drive even greater value for

eCommerce businesses seeking optimized search solutions.

Our experience at Shoptalk 2025 reinforced the importance of collaboration and innovation in shaping the future of retail. As we return from Las Vegas, we are more energized than ever to implement new ideas, explore emerging technologies, and continue our mission of transforming eCommerce search.

At Collaborative Search, we are also deeply committed to investing in our consultants and supporting their professional expertise. By fostering an environment of continuous learning and development, we ensure that our team remains at the forefront of industry advancements. This dedication enables us to deliver innovative and impactful solutions to our clients, driving success in this ever-evolving landscape.

Collaborative Search continues to grow, and we are excited about the future ahead. We welcome new opportunities to collaborate, innovate, and push the boundaries of search solutions across all of the major industries in which we operate.

If you would like to learn more about our expertise and how we can support your business, please reach out to us on contact@collaborativesrch.com

The Cup of Life

The entrepreneur behind a multi-award unique North East centre for sustainability has launched Cup of Life Coaching, to help businesses – and their employees – stay in the best of health in every sense of the word.

Of all the obstacles and challenges businesses face, improving business profitability and reducing staff costs – without losing staff or paying them less – are surely key.

Yet, the nation's health has taken a nosedive in recent years with an estimated 186 million working days lost through ill health and employee sickness absence believed to be costing UK businesses around £30 billion annually.

But now one of the region's leading health and wellbeing experts is addressing that, with a series of coaching courses designed to boost health, wellbeing, presence and performance of employees and business leaders.

Dr Jenny Connor, MB.ChB.FRCR.MA(LIC), founder of Cup of Life Coaching, boasts 40 years' experience in the NHS, where she held senior medical and leadership positions, combined with several decades working with plants for food and medicine.

It is her background of both conventional medicine and lifestyle medicine which puts her in a unique position to help everyone in the corporate world – maintaining that most chronic diseases can be halted, reversed or even cured through simple lifestyle changes.

Since retiring from the NHS, Jenny has studied vegan and whole food, plant-based nutrition, coaching, and root cause lifestyle medicine, while setting up her Vegan Fruit Farm and the School of Sustainable Living and Wellbeing at Dalton Moor Farm, at Seaham.

And she says improving employee health will not only help businesses boost productivity but could save them around £2000 per employee.



Dr Jenny Connor

"Sick leave and presenteeism – where staff are at work but not functioning productively – are on the increase and the damage that is doing to businesses and the wider economy is enormous," said Jenny.

"Businesses are losing productivity, wasting time, losing staff and skills, losing orders, losing opportunities, losing money and losing reputation.

"But that damage can be reversed, by using a holistic approach to staff – and employer – wellbeing."

Cup of Life Coaching offers five programmes for groups of different sizes, covering topics such as Physical Symptoms and Health, Food and Nutrition, Social Environment, Relationships and Movement and Exercise.

Other areas covered in the programmes, which are tailored to each client, include Lifestyle, Ambitions and Expectations, Stress Management, Overwhelm and Burnout, Emotional Health, Beliefs and Habits and

Physical Environment.

And the success of the year-long courses – which comprise a combination of face-to-face meetings, quarterly reviews and monthly catch ups – lies in the emphasis they place on mental as well as physical wellbeing.

"We also hold monthly group coaching workshops," said Jenny, "and these cover everything from food and nutrition to lifestyle, trauma and support.

"So, in short, we are a one-stop shop for people to develop the physical and emotional tools they need to stay as fit and healthy as possible – and that's not only good for them but it's good for their employers."

All coaching courses – *Acorn*, *Seedling*, *Sapling*, *Oak Tree* and *Mighty Oak* – include an initial meeting to discuss the issues the business and its team are facing, examine data and agree targets for improvement.

And progress is measured through quarterly review meetings which identify successes, determine remaining challenges and redirect resources if needed.

Wellbeing Residential Retreats at Dalton Moor Farm – comprising two days and nights of healing for up to 12 staff – are also included in the *Mighty Oak* programme, and can be included as options in the *Acorn*, *Seedling*, *Sapling* & *Oak Tree* programmes.

**For more information contact
jenny@cupoflife.co.uk or call 07887551643.**





Stephen Patterson

High Streets UK urges action to protect businesses and the economy

By Stephen Patterson, Chief Executive at NE1 Ltd

Death and taxes are memorably the only certainties in life. This month, taxes will be the number one concern for businesses as they face a maelstrom of increasing costs.

A triple whammy made up of the hike in Employer National Insurance Contributions, the rise in the minimum wage, and cuts to business rate relief will create a perfect storm, hitting at a time when many businesses are already struggling with soaring operational costs and volatile economic conditions. High street retail and leisure businesses, reliant on bricks and mortar premises, will be hardest hit.

Without government support and action, job cuts, loss of investment, poor growth and business closures are likely, as well as price rises for customers. In the long term, without action, the very survival of our flagship high streets, the lifeblood of our country, is under threat. This is not scaremongering; the government itself has acknowledged the critical role UK high streets play as engines of growth both nationally and locally. Without a robust plan, flagship high street destinations could feasibly become unsustainable and risk collapse.

Working on behalf of our businesses to address these issues, NE1 is proud to have joined forces with other business partnerships nationally to form High Streets UK, a pro-growth coalition representing over 5,000 businesses across the country that contribute over £50 billion in Gross Value Added (GVA) annually. Business representatives from Aberdeen, Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Leeds, Liverpool, London, and Newcastle have come together to tackle the most pressing issues facing the UK's flagship High Streets and to unlock local and national growth.

One of the immediate and most pressing challenges high streets face is the crippling and complex business rate system in this country which has been

recognised for many years as unwieldy and not fit for purpose. We welcome this government's long-overdue commitment to reviewing and reforming business rates, which was announced in the Autumn Budget, and have actively contributed to the Government's Business Rates Discussion Paper.

More importantly, following High Streets UK's inaugural quarterly forum, held in Liverpool, we submitted a series of policy recommendations to the government; all are realistic and achievable and have been shaped by insights from our 5,000 business members operating on flagship high streets nationwide. We have called for decisive action to avoid store closures and job losses, two of the unintended consequences we foresee resulting from rate rises.

Under the government's current proposed reforms, properties with rateable values exceeding £500,000 could face a business rate multiplier of up to 10p higher than the current level. This would place an unfair and disproportionate burden on physical flagship high street locations. Upcoming rates revaluations which are scheduled for 2026 fuel additional uncertainty and will deter short to mid-term investment.

Whilst we support a permanent rate reduction for smaller retail, leisure and hospitality businesses when the temporary relief ends in 2026/2027, the current proposals place an excessive burden on flagship high streets and large businesses based there. We are also pressing for a full impact assessment of the proposed multiplier increases and a freeze on any rise in the higher multiplier until 2027/28 to provide businesses with much-needed certainty and time to plan.

Properties in the heart of city centres – often occupied by large retail, hospitality, or leisure operators, and businesses in professional services – play a vital role as major employers, anchors of their local communities and drivers of footfall. If these businesses falter, the ripple effect will be felt throughout the high street and beyond.

We urge the government to adopt our proposals for reforming business rates to protect the high street, encourage investment and create a fairer, more sustainable system.

www.newcastlene1ltd.com

The new Procurement Act is good news for social businesses and society

The new act, follows the intentions of the Government to simplify the procurement process enabling voluntary, community and social enterprises (VCSE) along with local small businesses to bid competitively.

It's been refreshing to hear the Government give recognition to the VCSE sector stating "they are more likely to generate diverse and thriving local economies, creating jobs and economic growth".

Some of the positive changes ensure fair and just business practice such as the 30-day payment practice. Other changes within the act will hopefully reduce barriers for businesses and ensure maximum value for society going forward. The move supports sustainability and ethical growth.

Whilst the act is related to public procurement, it's a significant opportunity for all businesses to reflect on their own procurement processes and the buying powers they hold. It's legislation that can be adopted into the policies of any organisation to ensure the eco-system within and around your business has a positive contribution on the world, with the services delivered and beyond.

Our supply chains and partners significantly influence the change we can create and the impact we have on society, their values are our values too. For all the good you may be doing, your supply chain could be significantly damaging society and you are supporting them to do so. An impact lead procurement process is fundamental to protecting the ethos and credibility of our businesses.

Do your suppliers and partners align with your ethical values? Do they help you achieve your social goals?

If you want to win bids for public sector contracts, and stand out from your competitors then now is the time to create a change in your business, whether you've got ethical goals you haven't put into action yet, or you've not considered ethical practice before, acting now is essential.

The public sector spends on average over £350 billion annually on procurement. That's £1 in every £3 of government spending.

Imagine the difference that will be achieved if that £350 billion is contracted to businesses that care, and positivity impacts our world!

But more importantly, it's a revenue opportunity that is much needed in the social sector, with 180,000 organisations struggling to stay open, the opportunity to bid alongside more commercial operators will help sustain the sector.

This new policy sits alongside the Government's Social Value Act, aligning itself with the ambition to ensure public money is spent in the best way possible and every business that benefits from public money is adding genuine positive impact back into society.

Ultimately, the Procurement Act ensures every £1 really matters. It ensures good business thrives.

www.kindcurrency.co.uk



Michelle Jones



Empowering communities through ethical finance

Celebrating the legacy of MD Patricia Alexander.

As Shared Interest marks its 35th anniversary, the organisation prepares to bid farewell to Managing Director Patricia Alexander, who will retire later this year after nearly two decades of transformational leadership.

Since joining in 2006, Patricia has helped expand Shared Interest's global impact, strengthen ethical investment, and support thousands of farmers and artisans in developing countries. With an MBA from Durham University she brought a strong blend of strategic insight and purpose-driven leadership.

Prior to joining Shared Interest, Patricia held a senior role at Saint-Gobain Quartz Group. However, her desire to create social impact led her towards ethical finance. "When the opportunity came up, I knew it was the right move. It was a chance to use my experience to make a real difference," she said.

At that time, Shared Interest had just 15 staff and slower decision-making processes. Today, thanks to improved governance, financial oversight, and digital transformation, the organisation operates more efficiently while staying true to its core values.

Shared Interest's model is unique: supported by its members, it provides loans to farmers, artisan groups, and fair trade buyers in communities facing challenges such as climate change, corruption, conflict, and economic instability. These loans enable access to working capital, order pre-financing, and essential equipment—offering people the chance to build sustainable livelihoods. Once repaid, the funds are reinvested into other communities in need.

Under Patricia's leadership, Shared Interest opened regional offices in Kenya, Costa Rica, Peru, and Ghana, broadening its reach and deepening relationships with producer groups. Membership increased from 8,402 in 2006 to 11,800 today, and share capital more than doubled—from £20 million to £52 million. Lending also rose significantly, with 82% of capital currently in use.

Patricia's time at Shared Interest has not been without its challenges. She led the organisation through the 2007 financial crash, Brexit, and the COVID-19 pandemic. "The crash forced us to rethink our model—making lending income our main revenue stream. Brexit weakened the pound overnight, reducing our lending capacity. But careful financial management helped us stay on course. During COVID-19, we moved online within days and became the only social lender to introduce virtual due diligence, allowing us to continue lending when others paused. That adaptability kept us strong."

Patricia also played a key role in growing the Shared Interest Foundation—the organisation's charitable arm—providing training and capacity-building to help producers thrive. Under her leadership to date, the Foundation has delivered 51 projects across 15 countries, reaching over 13,000 individuals.



Witnessing the impact first hand has been one of her greatest career highlights. "In Rwanda, I met widows who had lost everything in the genocide. With our support, they rebuilt businesses, fed their families, and sent their children to school. In Kenya, a group of Maasai women turned their beadwork into a business, brought electricity to their village, and funded their daughters' education. Some even returned to education themselves."

She believes that access to finance is powerful, but must be paired with the right support. "People don't want handouts. They want the dignity of providing for themselves. That's what makes Shared Interest so special."

Patricia credits Shared Interest's strength to its members and team. "Our members put their money where their values are. Their patience and commitment have been vital to everything we've achieved."

As Patricia prepares to step down, the future looks bright. Kerrey Baker—who has been with Shared Interest for 14 years—will take on the role of MD. With a background in marketing, finance, and the non-profit sector, she shares the organisation's deep commitment to empowering communities.

Patricia's legacy is one of resilience, compassion, and lasting impact—shaping Shared Interest into a trusted force for ethical finance.

To find out how you can support Shared Interest by investing in a fairer world, visit: www.shared-interest.com



Alison Schreiber

Keeping up with the changes

Business owners are being kept on their toes this year with all of the employment legislation now being implemented and in the pipeline!

In April, as well as the increases to National Living Wage, Employer National Insurance and statutory payments, the introduction of Neonatal Leave means that new parents whose child has to have neonatal care can take up to 12 weeks' leave to help them through this distressing time. If eligible, parents will also be eligible for Statutory Neonatal Pay.

There are always regular changes to employment law but the Employment Rights Bill is the most significant overhaul in a long time!

Following the conclusion of government consultations, a number of amendments have been proposed to the Bill. These changes could affect your business in various ways, including the need for additional budgeting and changes to policies and procedures.

The proposed changes to how zero-hour contracts work – which includes the offer of guaranteed hours at the end of a

reference period, the right to reasonable notice of changes in shifts and the right to payment for cancelled or curtailed shifts – is to be extended to agency workers. The government has confirmed it will table this amendment to include a framework for the extension of these measures, however how they will work is as yet unclear. This follows a consultation on the implementation of the ban on 'exploitative' zero-hour contracts. It has also been confirmed that the responsibility to offer guaranteed hours to qualifying agency workers will fall on the end hirer.

One change that will not be implemented is the 'right to switch off', which the government has dropped from its plans. The right to switch off would have prohibited businesses from contacting employees outside of their standard working hours. Whilst the government have not ruled it out in the future, it will not be included in this initial Bill.

An amendment that is being carried through is the expansion of two weeks' parental bereavement leave to couples who suffer a miscarriage before 24 weeks. This is already in place for miscarriages that occur after 24 weeks gestation, however this amendment would apply the right to leave for the entire pregnancy period. Though this is something many organisations already offer, it will now become compulsory.

Various changes to the legislative frameworks in which trade unions operate have been proposed in these amendments. This includes lowering the notice period for staging action, giving the government

power to lower the threshold at which employees can ballot for union recognition and increasing the length of time before a mandate for industrial action expires. Overall, these changes will make it easier for employees to join unions, to organise and to take part in industrial action.

The government had already announced that statutory sick pay will become available to employees from day one and had previously indicated that they wished to make this available to those on the lowest pay. They have now suggested that low paid employees should receive either 80% of their average weekly earnings or the current rate of SSP – whichever is lowest.

The government is also proposing changes to the protective Awards for failure to consult during collective redundancies and as a way of penalising companies that engage in the 'fire and rehire' practice. They have doubled the maximum period of the protective award from 90 days to 180. The protective award is pay due to any employee who has been affected, and it must be full pay. Collective redundancies are for more than 20 people, and additional rules apply including a 30-day consultation period and Government form to complete. We will always be available to help business owners with this.

If you require any help with any of the above changes, The HR Dept is here to help.

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

Understanding Lasting Powers of Attorney: A vital step for your future



Let's talk about something that, while not the cheeriest of subjects, is incredibly important: Lasting Powers of Attorney (LPAs).

These crucial legal documents allow you to appoint people you trust (Attorneys) to make decisions on your behalf if you find yourself unable to do so due to illness, injury, or age related conditions.

We at Brenda Beveridge Wills and Trusts understand that contemplating these scenarios can feel daunting, but setting up LPAs offers invaluable peace of mind for you and your loved ones, ensuring that your affairs will be managed by people you know and trust.

We strongly believe that in an ideal world, everyone over the age of 18 should have LPAs in place, as none of us know if we're going to have an accident or illness that will incapacitate us, even on a temporary basis.

Imagine this: without LPAs in place, if you were to lose your mental capacity, your family would have to go through the lengthy and often stressful process of applying to the Court of Protection to appoint a Deputy to manage your finances. Not only can this be time-consuming and expensive, but it also adds emotional strain during an already difficult time. However, with LPAs in place, your trusted Attorneys step straight in, making the whole experience smoother for everyone involved.

There are two types of LPA to consider:

one for financial decisions and another for Health and Welfare. A Financial LPA grants your Attorneys the authority to manage your bank accounts, pay bills, and make decisions about your property and investments. This can be a real lifesaver if, say, you're in hospital and need someone to handle your finances. Without it, your family could face significant hurdles in accessing your accounts or covering your expenses. These can also be used with your permission while you still have capacity, you could be abroad and need a financial situation sorted while you're away.

On the other hand, the Health and Welfare LPA covers decisions related to your medical treatment, care, and personal living arrangements. This document becomes vital if you're unable to express your wishes due to illness or injury. The Attorneys you choose can ensure that your care is in accordance with your preferences—whether that means staying at home with carers or moving to a care facility. Without LPAs, decisions may fall to doctors and social services, which could lead to family disagreements.

Setting up LPAs can also help prevent disputes among family members. If there's disagreement about your care or finances, having LPAs gives legal power to your chosen Attorneys, removing the need for family members to battle it out in court. It respects your wishes and alleviates the emotional burden on your loved ones during an already challenging time.

There are also General Powers of Attorney (which not many people know about) that give your Attorneys the ability to manage your financial affairs while you have capacity. These can be useful if you don't

have the time to put LPAs in place and are going on a long holiday, moving abroad, going into hospital or other situations where you might need someone to act on your behalf on a temporary basis.

The key difference between Lasting and General Powers of Attorney is that a General Power of Attorney is effective as long as you retain mental capacity, whereas LPAs continue to be valid even if you later lose mental capacity. General Powers of Attorney do not need to be registered, so they can be put in place quickly.

It's wise to act early and establish LPAs while you still have mental capacity. Once conditions like dementia progress, it may be too late to create one. The registration process for LPAs typically takes about 8 to 12 weeks, so it's best to prepare ahead of time. At Brenda Beveridge Wills and Trusts, we offer free, no-obligation consultations to help you understand how to create LPAs to suit your individual requirements.

Lasting Powers of Attorney are an essential part of planning for the future. They provide peace of mind, ensuring that your financial and healthcare decisions are made by people you trust if you can no longer manage them yourself. At Brenda Beveridge Wills and Trusts, we're here to guide you through the process of setting up LPAs, offering tailored advice to meet your individual needs.

Take control of your future today by setting up your LPAs and ensuring your wishes are respected.

For more information, please get in touch with us at www.brendabeveridge.co.uk or call us on 07485 619415.

The importance of a value proposition for your business



Ian Kinnery

As a business coach, I've witnessed first-hand how a strong value proposition can transform a business.

A value proposition transcends a mere marketing slogan; it's a clear articulation

of the unique benefits a company offers. It describes how a product or service solves specific problems, enhances situations, or satisfies needs better than competitors can. This clarity is not just important for external communications—it also provides internal direction, aligning the entire team around the core values and objectives of the business.

Working with Chris Carroll at MGC Agency highlighted the importance of this. We redefined MGC's value proposition to align more closely with the evolving needs of the market and their clients, shifting the company from transactional operations to a relationship-driven approach.

The challenge was to evolve from merely creating websites to offering comprehensive solutions like fixing historic problems, maintenance packages and developing new apps and software. The revised value proposition centered on this transformation, emphasizing their capability to deliver ongoing value rather than one-off services.

Crafting an effective value proposition involves deep reflection and strategic thinking. Businesses need to answer critical questions:

- 1. What pain do we solve?** Identifying the specific challenges your customers face.
- 2. What is the ideal solution?** Describing the optimal outcome for your customers.
- 3. Why are we the ideal provider?** Highlighting what sets your offering apart from the competition.

As always, these three questions appear to be simple. However, the devil is always in the details, and answering all three will truly define the success of your business.

Your value proposition should be embedded into every aspect of your business—from how you communicate on your website to how you interact with clients and train your staff. It should guide decision-making and help maintain focus on delivering consistent value, thereby building trust and loyalty.

The journey with MGC Agency is a testament to the power of a well-crafted value proposition. It not only sparked significant growth but also redefined their market presence, underscoring the crucial role of strategic clarity in achieving long-term success and customer satisfaction.

Kinnery.co.uk

Unlocking business potential with Ian Kinnery

Q&A with Jarrett Palmer, Head of Global Operations Procurement, Astra Zeneca

Why did you decide to work with Ian Kinnery?

Back in 2011 I was at a pivotal moment in my career. I had been promoted and suddenly faced the challenge of leading a team that had once seen me as a peer. My HR director introduced me to Ian, recognising a mismatch with my previous coach. From our first meeting, Ian's approach resonated with me, especially his ability to relate leadership in business to sports strategies, which made a significant impact on me.

What were some of the initial challenges you faced in your leadership role, and how did Ian assist you?

Ian was instrumental in shifting my perspective from being task-oriented to focusing on strategic leadership. He pointed out that I was trying to do everything myself, which was a game-changer for me. He guided me in delegating effectively and using my leadership team to their full potential.

How has your leadership style changed since working with Ian?

Ian has transformed me from a hands-on manager to a strategic leader. This change was not just about business growth but also about personal development. Ian encouraged a leadership style that emphasised clear vision and purpose, which has enhanced our operational effectiveness and helped us scale our business operations more efficiently.



Jarrett Palmer

How has Ian's coaching influenced your approach to work-life balance?

Ian's coaching transcended traditional business mentoring. He emphasised the importance of work-life balance and helped me realise the necessity of taking time for personal growth and well-being. This approach not only improved my productivity but also my overall job satisfaction and health.

For those considering a business coach, what advice would you offer based on your experience with Ian?

Engaging with a coach like Ian can be transformative. It's crucial to be open and committed to the process, as the real value comes from applying the learning and embracing change. Ian's mentorship offers a blend of challenge and support, pushing for growth while providing the necessary tools to achieve it.

Ready to grow your business? Visit [Kinnery.co.uk](https://kinnery.co.uk) or contact ian@kinnery.co.uk to schedule a conversation.

Are you doing enough to support your accidental managers?



In workplaces across the North East and beyond, we see a familiar scenario unfold time and again: high-performing employees are promoted into management roles with little to no leadership training.

While these individuals excelled in their previous positions, stepping into management brings an entirely different set of challenges - decision-making, performance management, team motivation, conflict resolution, and strategic thinking.

This is the reality of the “accidental manager”: someone thrust into leadership without the preparation or support needed to succeed. The problem is widespread, and the consequences can be severe, not just for the individual but for the teams they manage and the businesses they serve.

According to recent research from the Chartered Management Institute (CMI), a staggering 82% of UK managers have never received formal leadership training. This lack of preparation results in avoidable workplace challenges, from disengaged employees to high staff turnover.

CMI's report, *Rigid, Reluctant, Demoralising – Accidental Managers at Work*, highlights that nearly one in three employees has left a job due to poor management. When leaders lack the skills to inspire and engage, businesses suffer. Poor leadership leads to decreased productivity, low morale, and a culture of stress and uncertainty.

But the consequences of untrained managers extend far beyond just day-to-day frustrations. A study by Unmind's Closing the Leadership Skills Gap Report revealed that:

- **39%** of employees believe their managers lack the necessary training to lead effectively.
- **58%** feel their managers would benefit from further education and leadership development.

When businesses fail to invest in leadership development, they risk:

- **High employee turnover** – poor leadership is a key driver of staff resignations.
- **Ineffective managers** create toxic workplaces, reducing both team engagement and their own motivation.
- **Lower productivity** – without strong leadership, teams struggle to perform efficiently.
- **Missed business opportunities** – a lack of leadership skills prevents managers from driving strategic growth.

For businesses in the North East - where industries such as manufacturing, technology, and professional services are rapidly evolving - the ability to cultivate strong leadership is more critical than ever. At People Spark Solutions, we firmly believe that effective leadership isn't an innate talent - it's a skill that can be developed. As Vicky Arnold, Head of Organisation Development, explains: “Leadership isn't just about technical expertise or seniority - it's about developing the confidence and capability to bring people together, communicate effectively, and create the right environment for success. Organisations that invest in leadership development see stronger engagement,

better collaboration, and more resilient teams.”

One of the most effective ways to develop leaders is by fostering a strong community of leadership within an organisation. Purposeful leadership development is proving successful in creating peer-to-peer support networks, where managers can learn from each other, share challenges, and develop solutions together. This collaborative approach fosters a culture of continuous improvement, helping organisations create leaders who inspire, engage, and drive real results.

We specialise in leadership development, psychometrics, facilitation, and coaching, helping businesses build confident, capable managers who lead with impact.

Our tailored programmes equip leaders with:

- **Essential leadership skills** – from communication to conflict resolution, we ensure managers have the practical tools they need.
- **Emotional intelligence and self-awareness** – helping leaders understand their impact on others and develop stronger relationships.
- **Change management and resilience** – preparing managers to navigate challenges and drive strategic change.
- **Peer-to-peer leadership communities** – creating internal networks where managers can support and learn from each other.

Are You Doing Enough to Support Your Managers? - To discuss your management and leadership development needs, contact Scott at scott@peoplesparkolutions.co.uk

One size no longer fits all

Bryony Gibson, Director of Bryony Gibson Consulting, shares her thoughts on the evolving role of recruitment and retention when your organisation has multiple generations of talent.

Your recruitment strategy plays a crucial role in shaping organisational culture, performance, and success. From communication and benefits to learning styles and career progression, if you believe people are your greatest asset, understanding what engages them as individuals and tailoring your approach will improve your ability to attract and retain top talent at all levels.

This is particularly true in the modern workplace, where teams often span multiple generations. What inspires one individual may not resonate with another, making a one-size-fits-all approach ineffective.

GENERATION X (Born 1965-1980)

Communication

Generation X typically prefer clear, direct communication via email or phone. They value autonomy and efficiency and frown upon unnecessary meetings. To keep them engaged, avoid over-communication and ensure that messaging is clear, concise, focused and relevant.

Benefits

Financial security, healthcare, and work-life balance are key motivators for Gen X. Offering competitive salaries, robust pension schemes, comprehensive health insurance, and clear career progression will appeal most to this group.

Training and Development

Gen X prefers structured learning, such as workshops, classroom training, and leadership development programs. They respond well to practical, career-oriented training that supports career progression.

Recruitment

When attracting Gen X candidates, emphasise job security, career progression and pathways, and stability. Highlight the



Bryony Gibson

long-term vision of the company, and how their role can grow within it to appeal to this generation.

GENERATION Y (Born 1981-1996)

Communication

Also known as 'Millennials', these workers lean into instant messaging, video calls, and collaborative digital platforms like Slack or Microsoft Teams. Transparency and regular feedback are key drivers of their engagement.

Benefits

Flexible working arrangements, purpose-driven work, and growth opportunities motivate Millennials. They appreciate remote working options, wellness programs, personal development budgets, and student loan assistance.

Training and Development

Gen Y enjoys self-paced, online learning. They respond well to mentorship and coaching, skill-based certifications, and access to digital learning platforms like LinkedIn Learning.

Recruitment

To attract Millennial talent, focus on employer branding. Showcase company culture, values, and opportunities to grow. Millennials want to work for companies that have a positive purpose. And one that aligns with their values.

GENERATION Z (Born 1997-2012)

Communication

Gen Z prefers fast, visual communication, such as short video clips, social media style tutorials, and real-time messaging apps

like Telegram. Lengthy emails and formal meetings can disengage them, unlike interactive platforms.

Benefits

Putting high importance on mental health support and wellbeing programmes, salary transparency, and personalised benefits, Gen Z values authenticity and inclusivity in the workplace.

Training and Development

Interactive, gamified learning and short microlearning platforms connect with Gen Z best. They want fast, mobile-friendly, practical knowledge delivered in a digestible and engaging format.

Recruitment

Gen Z talent is drawn to companies that demonstrate authenticity, social responsibility, and diversity. Recruitment strategies should include strong, engaging social media content and a fast, streamlined, digital hiring process.

The Key to Success

While the focus of recruitment and retention remains the same, how it is executed needs to evolve if you want to meet the needs of a multi-generational workforce.

Adopting tailored communication styles, benefits packages, and development strategies will help you create an environment where every employee feels supported and motivated. By recognising generational differences and adapting your recruitment strategy accordingly, you will attract top talent and cultivate a high-performing and loyal workforce.

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



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APRIL 2025

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The perfect role for an Accountant (qualified or by experience) who enjoys the variety of work that comes with being part of a local accountancy practice. With a great working environment and work-life balance, you will enjoy a varied role including preparing year end statutory accounts, quarterly VAT returns, Tax returns and management of both financial and accounting systems. Hybrid or Office working.

AUDIT & ACCOUNTS MANAGER

COUNTY DURHAM, Ref: 2340

A regional accounting firm with client relationships established over a long period are thinking ahead with succession planning and looking for an experienced Manager to further nurture relationships. One for those who enjoy the benefits of working with an Independent firm and a local client base. We are particularly interested if you are keen to work towards an Audit qualification (RI). Office based.

CORPORATE TAX SENIOR ASSOCIATE,

NEWCASTLE, Ref: 2334

A national accountancy firm with a base in Newcastle are looking to appoint a tax professional with experience advising on corporate tax matters to private businesses. Joining a team who hold a large number of years experience collectively, you will be well placed to fast-track your knowledge and career. Applicants must be ACA and or CTA qualified. Hybrid working.

COMPANY SECRETARY

TEESSIDE, Ref: 2339

Joining a modern and vibrant working environment this national firm are keen to appoint a Company Secretary to provide first-class secretarial and governance services to a large number of its corporate clients and LLP's. A great opportunity for a qualified (ACA /ACCA) accountant who enjoys compliance and statutory reporting. Office based.

AUDIT SENIOR

DURHAM, Ref: 2268

This fast growing accountancy firm is looking for a qualified Auditor to take ownership of a client portfolio. Working with both corporate and not-for-profit clients, you will be responsible for the planning and completion of audit assignments both remotely and on-site. Internal training programmes are available for promotion to Manager and a very flexible work-life balance make this a very sought-after opportunity. Hybrid working.

PRIVATE CLIENT TAX ASSOCIATE

NEWCASTLE, Ref: 2337

An international accounting firm who know how to nurture talent are seeking a Personal Tax Associate with up to three years experience in tax compliance. Supporting a portfolio of HNWI's you will quickly enhance your technical understanding of tax affairs. Alongside support with ATT and CTA, this role offers a great long-term career and with fantastic city centre offices you may not want to take advantage of their hybrid working.

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

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North East Procurement Organisation strengthens team with dual appointments

North East-based procurement organisation, NEPO, has bolstered its team with two personnel appointments as the business looks to extend its offering in 2025.

The move will see Kaye Wallace assuming the post of Partnership Specialist and Brett Sharkey joining as Organisational Development Specialist, as the team looks to support its members and drive innovation within the public sector.

In her role, Kaye will support the drive for significant framework performance, nurture pivotal external partnerships, and work across the portfolio to maximise support and further embed NEPO in the industry. Kaye joins NEPO with extensive expertise in partnership development from her time working in the pharmaceutical sector. Brett will work alongside Kaye and the wider NEPO team to implement a programme of development initiatives to reinforce the organisation's vision of providing progressive sector-wide solutions.

The ambition of the NEPO senior management team to position the organisation as a national leader in procurement has led to an expanded role for its Organisational Development Specialist. Brett, a new hire to the team, will support apprentices while also facilitating training and skills development plans at all levels within the business with the aim of harnessing technology and innovation to deliver pioneering procurement solutions.

Nicola Shelley, Managing Director at NEPO, said: "We are delighted to be able to announce this dual appointment as we work towards our ambitious plans for 2025. Our aim is to position NEPO on a national stage, providing the best opportunities for our members."



Bilclough takes grid and operations director role at Sunderland's OnPath Energy

Leading renewable energy developer OnPath Energy has strengthened its senior management team with the appointment of Andy Bilclough as its new grid and operations director.

Andy brings almost 30 years' energy industry experience to his new role, in which he is responsible for managing the firm's health and safety, operational and grid teams and contributing to OnPath's wider business growth strategy.

He began his career as an apprentice linesman with National Grid and spent 12 years working his way through different positions within the business before taking on a project manager role.

He then moved to Northern Powergrid to head up its £50m overhead powerline capital investment programme before becoming its head of connections delivery.

Andy Bilclough says: "Being responsible for the 24/7 operation of essential power infrastructure has given me a huge amount of experience, knowledge and insight that is directly relevant to the role I'm now playing at OnPath.

"Moving to the energy generation side of the power industry for the first time gives me a fantastic opportunity to continue learning while also using my knowledge and network help secure the best grid connections for OnPath's growing project portfolio.

"When OnPath first approached me, I had a really positive gut feeling about the role that was on offer and it's proved to be an accurate one.



New appointment for Port of Tyne

The Port of Tyne is taking another bold step towards shaping the future of maritime by strengthening its 2050 Maritime Innovation Hub with the appointment of Elaine Scott as Innovation Partnerships Manager.

This announcement underscores the Hub's commitment to developing the skills, partnerships, and technologies that will drive sustainable growth and innovation in the maritime sector, both regionally and nationally.

Elaine brings a wealth of experience from her time at Space North East England, where she led the development of the region's Space sector with support from Business Durham, the UK Space Agency, and local Universities.

The North East has seen significant investments to increase the facilities and skills development, and businesses thriving in the sector. Now, she will focus on the skills and innovations needed to future-proof the maritime industry.

In this newly created role for the 2050 Maritime Innovation Hub, Elaine will build and nurture strategic relationships with external partners across industry, academia, and government to help businesses and start-ups to accelerate their ideas into commercial success. To deliver this, she will also be looking at growing the networks and capabilities at the Hub and the Port of Tyne to provide the testbeds and support these companies need over the coming years.



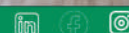
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Laura Gage (foreground) marketing and PR manager, North East Automotive Alliance, with (left to right) Sarah O'Mahoney, Michael Knowles and Samantha Vassallo

Trio of agencies collaborate to assist long-term unemployed

The North East Automotive Alliance (NEAA) is working with a trio of marketing, communications and digital agencies to deliver a pilot campaign to assist long-term, unemployed residents in South Tyneside, secure entry-level roles and raise the sector attractiveness of the advanced manufacturing industry.

Horizon Works is to develop a branding, messaging and a comprehensive digital toolkit. Bradley O'Mahoney will deliver a communications and stakeholder engagement campaign, with ROAR Digital Marketing delivering a strategic multi-channel online campaign to generate online awareness and engagement. All three companies are members of the NEAA.

The toolkit will extend beyond this pilot, being used in schools, colleges and community outreach to raise the attractiveness of the automotive sector and promote career pathways in advanced manufacturing.

The project, funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UK SPF), has an initial aim of getting unemployed or NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) South

Tyneside locals into entry-level automotive jobs to address significant worker shortages. It will also support a further cohort to access a vocational skills pathway leading to employment in advanced manufacturing. The innovative approach seeks to be self-sustaining and support best-practice pathways in other sectors, including construction and health.

It will create opportunities for a diverse range of local residents, including women and those with Special Educational Needs (SEN). Participants will receive practical resources, confidence-building support and clear pathways into employment. The initiative focuses on overcoming barriers such as low self-esteem and a lack of work experience, empowering individuals to see their potential and take the next step into the workforce, as well as showcasing career pathways and success.

Unemployment and economic inactivity are acute issues in South Tyneside, disproportionately impacting residents and constraining the local economy. The unemployment rate is the highest in the North East, with some wards experiencing rates twice the regional average.

Over 20% of local households are workless and around 14% of 17-year-olds in South Tyneside are NEET. A quarter of the working-age population is economically inactive, with 40% attributed to long-term health conditions, the highest level of core or work-limiting disability in the North East (34%) and the lowest proportion of disabled people in employment (39%) – increasingly impacting the future workforce.

Paul Butler, CEO of the North East Automotive Alliance, said: “We believe this is the start of a much wider initiative aimed at raising sector attractiveness and the variety of roles available in the sector.

“The pilot is a vital step towards filling the many unfilled roles in the region's automotive sector. At the same time, it provides long-term unemployed residents with the support they need to gain meaningful employment. By focusing on inclusivity, confidence-building and support, the programme offers a unique opportunity to succeed in a sector that needs workers and can offer a life-long career.”

northeastautomotivealliance.com

Escaping the Decision Trap: Removing Decision-Making Bottlenecks in SMEs

In the early days of running a business, decision-making often feels easy. With a small team - often just the founders or a few trusted individuals - everyone has their finger on the pulse. Decisions are made quickly, action is taken swiftly, and the business remains agile and responsive.

But as a business grows - taking on more clients, hiring new team members, introducing new services or products - the simplicity of decision-making starts to erode. The structure that once enabled quick progress can begin to create friction.

More people need input, more layers are added, and suddenly, what used to take minutes now takes days. Business owners find themselves stuck in a cycle of approvals, constantly answering questions, and being pulled into decisions that don't really need their input. What once felt like control now feels more like firefighting.

Understanding the Emergence of Decision Bottlenecks

Decision bottlenecks rarely appear overnight. They develop gradually and often without much notice. In the early stages, the founder-led model makes sense - quick decisions, full oversight, and a hands-on approach. But what worked when the team was five people doesn't scale when the team is fifty.

Often, the issue stems from a lack of clarity around who is responsible for making which decisions. When no one knows where authority begins and ends, people naturally look upward for approval. Team members second-guess their choices - not because they don't know what to do, but because they're unsure whether they're allowed to do it. This hesitation leads to delays, duplicated efforts, and growing frustration.

These bottlenecks often arise from:

- **Unclear ownership:** Without defined accountability, decisions stall as people wait for others to take the lead.
- **Lack of process:** Teams have no consistent method to evaluate options or move decisions forward.
- **Cultural dependency on leadership:** If the team is used to running everything past the founder, it becomes ingrained to always seek sign-off.

The Hidden Costs of Centralised Decision-Making

The consequences of this centralisation go far beyond a few delays. It affects every part of the business.

Projects lose momentum. Clients get frustrated with slow responses. Teams become demotivated, feeling their input isn't trusted. Innovation suffers because no one feels confident enough to take initiative. Meanwhile, the owner - who should be focused on strategy - is bogged down in day-to-day decisions others could handle.

Over time, this creates a fragile business model. One that relies too heavily on a few people and lacks the resilience to scale. Growth becomes exhausting instead of exciting, and opportunities are missed because the business can't move fast enough.

Strategies to Alleviate Decision-Making Bottlenecks

The good news is that this challenge is solvable. Shifting away from centralised decision-making doesn't mean letting go of control - it means creating a business that can function smoothly without everything going through you.

Here are some practical ways to begin:

1. Define Roles and Responsibilities

Make sure everyone knows what they're responsible for and what they have authority to decide. Clarity builds confidence and reduces the need for constant sign-offs.

2. Introduce Simple Decision-Making Frameworks

Provide your team with a consistent way to assess problems and make decisions. Even a basic structure - defining the issue, exploring options, agreeing on a solution - helps people act faster and with more confidence.

3. Promote a Culture of Empowerment

Encourage your team to take initiative within their roles. Let them know it's okay to make decisions, even if they occasionally get it wrong. Mistakes are part of growth and improvement.

4. Leverage Technology to Streamline Information Flow

Use tools that give people access to the data and updates they need. Workflow systems, project platforms, and communication tools help reduce back-and-forth and speed up decisions.

The Benefits of Decentralised Decision-Making

When you reduce decision bottlenecks and empower your team, the results are immediate and long-lasting. Projects move faster. Client satisfaction improves. Leaders can focus on growth rather than approvals.

You'll see greater team engagement, better use of talent, and a culture where people take ownership. Most importantly, your business becomes more resilient and better equipped to grow without relying solely on you.

Ready to step away from every decision? We'd love to talk

At Simplified Operations, we work with business owners to break decision making bottlenecks and build self-sufficient teams. If you're ready to stop being the default decision-maker and start building a more resilient operation, get in touch and let us share how we can support your journey.

www.simplifiedoperations.co.uk

“

*...The goal
isn't to take
leadership
out of the
equation...*

*Helen Butler
Managing Director - Simplified Operations*

Talented mum to deliver sales summit after first successful year

Success for Cheryl Spears comes despite twin daughter's complex healthcare needs.

A talented mum is set to turnover £250,000 in her first full year of business, after putting her self-employment plans on hold while caring for one of her severely ill twin girls.

Cheryl Spears, the award-winning owner of Stockton-based Spear-heads sales support and training consultancy, immediately had a full order book when she told her 18,000+ LinkedIn connections she was launching her own business.

So, in September 2023, she made the leap into self-employment with confidence.

However, just two months later, she was devastated when the pacemaker one of her twin girls has failed - and she had to put most of her new business plans on hold as little Mia recovered from life-saving surgery at The Freeman Hospital.

Cheryl, current holder of the Tees Businesswomen Awards 'Best Newcomer' title and 'Best New Sole Trader' from November's Best New Tees Business Awards, said: "I was able to keep the business ticking over to a small extent and most of my clients were really supportive.

"So, when I relaunched properly in March 2024 once Mia's health had made a significant improvement, my order book was full again within a week."

Cheryl's expertise as a sales professional is so sought after, that she was immediately able to take on six freelance sales professionals to support her with the new influx of clients.

Now, she is able to demonstrate a healthy six-figure turnover, as well as continuing to take on more and more staff to help her with her many clients, while she provides one-to-one coaching and group training in all things sales.



Cheryl with husband Stuart and Twins Fay left and Mia, right

"It sounds impressive, but the figures don't mean a great deal to me - I just want to provide a good life for my family and be a positive role model for my daughters," Cheryl says.

"At the moment, as well as life with my husband and twin girls outside of work, I'm focused on putting on a sales summit in July, where I will share some of my tips, tricks and techniques - and I will have guest speakers and panellists also offering advice.

"I strongly believe in businesses in the Teesside area helping each other out, sharing ideas and collaborating - and that's why I have come up with this event."

Cheryl believes sales is one of the toughest areas of being your own boss - and something which is still feared and dreaded by many entrepreneurs.

However, she strongly believes it needn't be like that.

She says: "People involved in sales, especially business to business sales, are basically helping other professionals to overcome their pain points.

"If everybody viewed their business as

offering expertise which helps another business to function better in a specific area, then they would find it easier to sell that expertise.

"However, a lot of highly successful and useful businesses are still too shy or modest to reach out to the businesses they think they could help and want to work with - that's where I come in."

Cheryl's sales summit will take place at Hardwick Hall on July 9, with early bird tickets now available at £70 instead of £90, which includes two meals plus refreshments. Both prices are inclusive of VAT.

Cheryl is on the lookout for a headline sponsor for the summit and is open to collaborating with other sales and marketing professionals.

A wide range of sponsorship opportunities and exhibition stands are available.




For more information, including sponsorship opportunities, contact Cheryl by email at Hi@Spear-heads.co.uk or drop her a DM on LinkedIn at www.linkedin.com/in/cheryl-spear

Sales Summit

JULY 9TH 2025 | HARDWICK HALL HOTEL

BREAKFAST PASTRIES • 2-COURSE BUFFET LUNCH

What will be covered?

-  **Telesales** why it's still the best technique
-  **Sales Through LinkedIn**
-  **Social Selling Tips**
-  **Selling Through PR**
-  **Managing Difficult Conversations in Sales**
-  **How to Network Effectively**

Sponsorship

-  **Expo Stand** **£200**
-  **4 x Merchandise Sponsorship Opportunities** **£800**
all delegates will receive tote bags on arrival
-  **Tea & Coffee Sponsorship** **£350**
-  **Programme Sponsorship** **£300**

*All sponsorships include 2 summit tickets

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To find out more simply pop Cheryl a DM on LinkedIn
or email: hi@spear-heads.co.uk



Martin Connelly

THE ULTRAMAPGLOBAL SERIES

Over 16 years, Newcastle based UltramapGlobal has grown from Customer Number One, to World Number One. In each issue of Northern Insight, Co-Founder Martin Connelly focuses on one area that's been important along the way.

This issue: STORYTELLING

“Considering we have a brilliant sales team and a determined approach to growth,” explains Martin, “We’re not that salesy.”

“There’s no aggressive prospecting or chasing. We just keep an eye on product quality, software development and results. Then tell our story as we go. Storytelling is a big part of what makes us tick.”

In the beginning, UltramapGlobal was just Ultramap. They had one client, one problem to solve, and one software solution with which to solve it. Sixteen years later and UltramapGlobal’s flagship software – AssetMonitor – is the world’s most used subsea asset monitoring software.

And as each year passes, Martin and the team continue to storytell how the business has grown from client number one – to world number one.

Think Like a Publisher. Not Like a Marketer.

When it comes to telling the UltramapGlobal story, Martin and his team think differently to the rest at a fundamental level. They think like a publisher. Not like a marketer.

This means there’s a real focus on producing enjoyable, palatable copy and content that people actually want to read. Because whilst a marketer might be thinking about selling and persuading, a publisher is thinking about building a loyal and genuinely interested readership. This holds on to the ‘not yet’s’ until they’re ready to buy.

“We write about our business about six times each month. And we publish what we write on LinkedIn, at our website blog, and in our newsletter.

“Pretty much the same content goes out on each channel, because nobody reads everything. The newsletter goes to a few hundred people, and almost half of people open and read it. Which is pretty good.

“Because we think like a publisher, most of our stories are – broadly – about the global marine

industry, and what we think people in the global marine industry actually want to read. So we’re just as likely to write about a wonderful coastal whisky distillery, or the latest onboard compass for sailing hobbyists, as we are about how we’re doing here at UltramapGlobal. That way, we’re interesting. Who wants to sit next to someone at a dinner table that only talks about themselves? And who wants to read yet another newsletter that talks only about the business that sends it?”

Annual Storytelling Themes

Here are the storytelling themes that UltramapGlobal has focussed on for the last four years...

2022 – Surety. A one-word theme. Bolstered by the line, ‘Some think they’re protected. Others – they know.’

2023 – Better Informed Means Better Protected. This line allowed us to talk about the connection between more clients, more data and more protection.

2024 – Insights. Infrastructure. Interpretation. This was the year of investment – in how we interrogate information, robustness of infrastructure, and the useful application of data.

2025 – From Client Number One. To World Number One. A zoomed-out narrative of how UltramapGlobal has become the global frontrunner.

See www.ultramapglobal.com for more.

PATIENCE | RESILIENCE | **STORYTELLING** | TRAVEL | TEAM | CONSISTENCY | NUMBERS

Navigating redundancies in small businesses: A practical guide

By Kathryn Rodgers, face2faceHR

Redundancies are never an easy topic, and for small business owners, they can be particularly challenging.

Unlike large corporations with HR teams to manage the process, small businesses often have to handle redundancies with fewer resources—while also considering the personal impact on valued employees.

With the pending increase to employers' National Insurance contributions and ongoing economic uncertainty, many business owners in the North East are reviewing their staffing needs. If you're facing the difficult decision of making redundancies, it's essential to approach the process fairly, legally, and with compassion. Here's how to manage redundancies effectively while supporting both your business and your employees.

Understanding Redundancy in a Small Business

Redundancy isn't about individual performance—it occurs when a job role is no longer required due to business closure, workplace changes, or a reduced need for certain roles. Being clear on this distinction helps ensure a fair and legally compliant process.

In small businesses, every team member plays a key role, so reducing staff can feel personal. However, handling redundancies professionally and empathetically can help maintain morale and protect your business's reputation.

A Fair and Transparent Selection Process

If you need to reduce roles rather than closing your business entirely, selecting employees for redundancy must be based on fair, objective criteria. Common approaches include:

- **Skills and experience** – Who has the expertise that will be most needed in the business moving forward?



Kathryn Rodgers

- **Performance records** – Using documented evidence rather than subjective opinions.
- **Attendance records** – But be careful to exclude absences related to maternity, disability, or other protected reasons.

Avoid using “Last In, First Out” as the sole method, as this could be seen as discriminatory. Instead, a balanced, well-documented approach ensures fairness and reduces the risk of legal claims.

Consultation: Open Communication is Key

Even when dealing with just one redundancy, UK employment law requires a fair consultation process. This means discussing the redundancy with the affected employee before making a final decision.

A good consultation process includes:

- **Explaining the reasons** – Be open about why redundancies are necessary.
- **Listening to employee input** – They may have ideas to avoid redundancy, such as reduced hours or job-sharing.
- **Exploring alternative roles** – If there are other vacancies within the business, discuss these as potential options.

Even if the outcome doesn't change,

employees appreciate being heard. Clear and respectful communication can help reduce stress and uncertainty.

Support During and After Redundancy

Redundancy is tough, but small businesses can support employees through the transition by:

- **Providing clear redundancy notices** – Following legal notice periods and making final payments promptly.
- **Offering practical help** – Giving time off for interviews, providing references, and signposting to job search resources.
- **Maintaining professionalism** – Employees who feel respected during redundancy are more likely to speak positively about your business in the future.

Redundancies are never easy, but handling them with fairness, transparency, and empathy can help you protect your business while supporting your employees. If you're unsure about the process or need guidance tailored to your situation, face2faceHR is here to help.

For friendly, expert advice, contact Kathryn Rodgers, [face2faceHR.com](https://face2facehr.com), 07946 330 025.



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1999

Howie White

RESOURCING

Professionalising the Sales Industry



Just Williams turns 10 this year. The business was originally established as a sales consultancy and has since evolved into a sales and marketing agency. The Just Williams Sales Academy was established five years later to support the industry with training, online and in person. Our original ethos remains.

To professionalise the sales industry – to create an industry standard – to elevate the profession to a higher level and create an industry people choose to work in rather than one many fall into. This remains key and now having trained over 4500 in the last 5 years, we've learnt a lot about what sales teams, sales managers and businesses want and need in this space.

The sales industry remains unregulated with few qualifications or certifications easily accessible and in my opinion a significant lack of investment in continued professional development. So it's been heartening to see so many through our doors over the last few years. To learn, grow and invest in themselves to improve and move onward and upward. Here are some of the key challenges our sales professionals, account managers, team leaders and customer service professionals have come to us with over the last few years;

- Improving Retention
- Increasing Existing Customer Spend
- How to Communicate Effectively
- Creating Sales Processes



- Customer Excellence Delivery
- Customer Lifetime Value
- Account Management
- Aligning Sales and Marketing for Impact
- Metrics and Management Tools and Techniques

Over the last few years we have strived to bring professionals in the industry together through our network and annual Sales, Service and Success conference.

This year sees our 4th conference which is being held in October at Wynyard Hall. Where we encourage the sharing of best practices and a network of like minded sales people.

Sales has never been and should never be in my mind transactional, pushy or solutions focused as the industry has in the past been depicted.

Our focus should be on creating curious professionals with a growth mindset who provide solutions and develop long term relationships creating customer lifetime value from the outset.

Account managers may not always be responsible for new business growth but that does not make them exempt from growth metrics. We instill a 5 point toolkit for internal growth to include customer satisfaction scores, referrals received, average services or products held, retention



rate and overall financial growth within a portfolio.

These five metrics give a comprehensive overview of performance and the health of your accounts and customers.

This year we are making some changes to the businesses, taking them to the next stage as we venture into our second decade

(that's as terrifying to write as it sounds!)

So if you'd like to start to develop a CPD for your sales and marketing teams or looking to grow and need some support from a local business who's been around the block – we would love to hear from you.

www.justwilliamsLtd.co.uk

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Pasimo announced as Winner of the All Access Pass Programme

Sunderland Software City is delighted to announce Pasimo as the winner of the All Access Pass programme's pitch event, supported by the North East Combined Authority and Destination North East England.

This highly anticipated pitch event, held on Friday the 14th of March, marked the end of the All Access Pass programme and saw eleven North East organisations pitch their innovative ideas to a panel of judges, all competing for a £10,000 prize pot provided by England's first Destination Development Partnership, Destination North East England.

This initiative was designed to support regional organisations harness the power of 5G and immersive technologies, designed to make the North East's visitor economy more inclusive and accessible.

Over the last 10-weeks, the cohort have rapidly evolved their solutions from idea to build stage. The bespoke programme included specialist design support from Seated Consulting and Digital Poverty Alliance, with technical expertise provided by Vodafone and Accelleran.

In addition, participants had access to Digital Catapult's 5G Immersive Lab in Eldon Square with a standalone 5G testbed, immersive headsets and 360 cameras to help them bring their product to life.

Following a compelling pitch, Andrew Blance was selected as the winning organisation and will now receive a £10,000 to further develop his immersive sign language learning app.

Tech community backs drive to tackle digital poverty



Hundreds of people from the North East tech community have lent their support to a new fund aimed at tackling digital poverty across the region.

Dynamo's inaugural North East Tech Charity Dinner, held at Wylam Brewery recently, saw nearly 200 guests come together to raise funds and celebrate the launch of the Dynamo North East Digital Inclusion Fund.

Initiated by Dynamo North East, a not-for-profit tech sector membership organisation which is the region's largest tech cluster, and managed by the Community Foundation, the fund aims to support initiatives to help people gain confidence in digital technologies and create pathways into employment.

Businesses, entrepreneurs and foundations from across the region have already raised over £40,000 towards the fund. A generous donation by the Reece Foundation and a matching fund of £20,000 pledged by Tony and Anne Platten have also helped to launch the initiative.

The UK Government recently launched a dedicated Digital Inclusion Action Plan to help close the digital divide in the UK, ensuring that the benefits of technology can be felt by all.

According to Lloyds Bank, over 1.6 million people in the UK are currently living offline, with the North East having some of the lowest levels of digital capability.

Common causes of this can include people suffering worse health outcomes, higher costs when shopping for everyday items and being over five times more likely to be unemployed.

Through the Dynamo North East Digital Inclusion Fund however, Dynamo is seeking to tackle the root cause of the problem, by supporting initiatives which provide people with the confidence and skills to be more digitally capable.

Dr David Dunn, Chief Executive Officer of Dynamo North East, said: "We are incredibly proud as an organisation to be leading the charge to improve digital inclusion and to be helping lift communities across the region out of digital poverty.

"It is disappointing in this day and age that so many people in the region are digitally excluded, meaning they don't have the skills, confidence, devices or connectivity to reap the benefits of technology.

"Digital inclusion is a key driver of economic growth and is key to bridging the digital skills divide, which is why it's so important that we tackle the issue at the root cause and do all we can to level the playing field.

"This is why we launched the Dynamo North East Digital Inclusion Fund, to bring together people from across the industry to tackle digital poverty and to ensure people from all backgrounds and communities benefit from the life-changing opportunities that will be presented as our sector continues to grow.

"By working together, we can help bridge the gap, enabling individuals and families to access education, employment, and essential services that are increasingly online and secure long-term, skilled employment opportunities right here on their doorsteps."

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Total Business Group appoint total businessman

Paul Anderson...one of the region's most respected IT experts, joins the Gateshead company.

If you have a company...doesn't matter what sort of size...there are certain contact details you need to keep on a speed dial.

If something goes wrong with anything like IT, printers, telecoms, copiers or even with some furniture, you'll need to get it sorted as quickly as possible because you should be spending time on running your business and dealing with suppliers and clients rather than trying to figure out why the shredder is jammed or why your computers won't connect to the internet.

Which is where Total Business Group come in handy. Give them a call or fire off an email and they'll quickly put wheels in motion to get you up and running again.

As with every business, it is the people you deal with who can have a massive impact. You need leaders who can lead...leaders who know how to make things happen.... quickly.

Which is precisely why Total Business Group have appointed Paul Anderson as their Head of IT.

"I started working in IT in 1982 and have spent most of the past 43 years based here in the region...so it means I know a lot of people and probably even more know about me," said Paul. "My first position was with North East business Sumlock Electronics where I learned my trade and worked my way from being a junior technician to become Installation Manager. Things were very different back then but there are similarities with current tech especially the core hardware components which remain the same...disk, memory, cpu and connectivity. A special mention to Bromley Towart who helped me get to where I am today."

In 2000, Paul made a key decision. He and three colleagues, Garry Sheriff, Michael Jopling and Joe Olabode, took the plunge to start their own business and formed ITPS based in Dunston. The company would go on to become one of the region's



L-R: Paul Anderson with Neil Rock

largest data centre and managed IT service experts.

"It was a fantastic business. We built our own Tier3 Datacentre in Durham hosting systems for government departments as well as for firms involved in finance, manufacturing etc. I helped grow the business to employ 120 permanent staff with an annual turnover of £20m. I led a technical team of 50+ engineers, monitored performance and ensured they had the necessary strategies, training and development plans to consistently achieve in line with business objectives. However, all good things come to an end and in 2021 ITPS was sold. It was time for a change of career."

Paul then joined Experis, part of the Manpower Group, a £5bn turnover global recruitment organisation, in a senior position as Practice Lead Cloud and infrastructure. He would be the first admit that he learnt a lot in a short space of time, principally that smaller businesses are much better than big companies at some things...but not others. On the plus side, he did benefit from training where he attained Microsoft Azure Solutions Architect and

AWS practitioner in Cloud and Artificial Intelligence.

And now he's with Total Business Group in Gateshead as their Head of IT, leading the team which looks after the Service Desk, Field Engineers and Installations.

Which, bearing in mind his incredible level of experience in the IT industry, means he's likely to be brilliant in this new role which, no surprise, came via one of the hundreds of contacts he's made over the years...Neil Rock, a former customer and now a good friend of 25 years.

Which of course is good news for you if you have any IT issues. Paul plainly knows what he's doing...he knows how to grow a business...and he knows IT inside out. He's also a decent golfer...beware.

Need some help or advice? You can contact Paul Anderson and his team...as well as the other departments at Total Business Group by calling 0191 490 0822.

You can find out more details about the services available by logging onto their website...www.totalbusiness.co.uk

Circle Cloud marks another year of rapid growth in Teesside

Circle Cloud, the Teesside-based IT Managed Service Provider, is celebrating another year of rapid growth with contracted revenues growing over 20% in 2024 & on track to exceed £2M in 2025.

As specialists in providing IT Support & Cyber Security packages to SMEs (small & medium-sized organisations) nationally, Circle Cloud have a strong regional focus & a unique 'money back guarantee' offer in the unlikely event that any SLAs (Service Level Agreements) are missed.

Headquartered at the Fusion Hive building in Stockton, the ambitious business is led by CEO Tomas Roberton & recently appointed non-executive chairman Neil Stephenson to their board, bringing his own experiences of building IT infrastructure, data & support business Onyx Group into the region's company of the year in 2010.

As Microsoft Gold Cloud Platform Partners with extensive experience in delivering Office 365, Teams & Azure projects over the past 10yrs, Circle Cloud offer prospective clients free technology audits on the security of their systems & are able to help them manage their consumption of cloud services to bring exceptional value for money IT Support with built in Cyber Security.

To highlight their position as a specialist IT provider for SMEs, Circle Cloud are sponsoring PLATFORM, the popular business networking & growth advice events that take place in Middlesbrough, Sunderland, Newcastle & Edinburgh each month.

Commenting on the sponsorship, Tomas Roberton said "We are



excited to be the IT sponsor for PLATFORM which is on a similar growth journey to our own & now operates actively in all our core geographic markets. The team recently announced they were adding a Middlesbrough event to their monthly schedule from March 2025 onwards & we see that as a valuable way of enabling business owners & leaders across the North East of England, Teesside & Scotland to connect, collaborate & learn how to be more successful through better use of IT services."

The brainchild of award-winning entrepreneur & 'SuperConnector', Paul Lancaster, the PLATFORM events were launched in January 2024 & now operate on a weekly basis with free-to-attend events for ambitious business owners & leaders that typically attract 60-80 attendees to each event (over 700 in 2024).

North East tech leaders join forces to help businesses navigate the evolving cyber assesment landscape



Two of the North East's leading tech firms, Hicomply and Waterstons, are combining their expertise to help businesses align with a government-backed framework to strengthen their cybersecurity and access new opportunities.

The Cyber Assessment Framework (CAF) was developed by the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) to assess and improve cyber security and help combat substantial risks from increasing and sophisticated cyber-attacks.

CAF has been in place for a number of years, but 2024 saw a pivotal shift as early adopters across key sectors began their journey to align with CAF, including the NHS. Further adoption with compliance timelines will kick in this year for Government bodies and regulated sectors such as healthcare.

Whilst the framework is particularly relevant for organisations covered by the Network and Information Systems (NIS) Regulations, it is becoming increasingly important for those working across supply chains within critical national infrastructure, as well as regulated industries such as healthcare and finance. It is also essential for those seeking to win tenders and opportunities with organisations and sectors that will be bound by CAF regulation.

With cyber threats on the rise, businesses of all sizes and sectors are under increasing pressure to protect their systems, data, and customers. The CAF provides a more advanced approach to measuring how well organisations manage cyber risks – built upon four objectives: managing security risk, protecting against cyber-attacks, detecting cyber security events, and minimising the impact of incidents.

Hicomply, a UK leader in information security management software, is partnering with Waterstons to help businesses to navigate the complexities of the CAF and to build on the foundations they may already have from other certifications such as ISO 27001.



Take the hassle out of managing your IT so you can focus on growing your business. Whether you're streamlining daily operations, securing your data, or launching a new business, we ensure your technology works seamlessly across cloud, mobile, and office environments. With expert guidance and hands-on support, we help you stay efficient, secure, and ready for the future.

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Celebrating B Corp Month with Brave & Heart

We believe that business can be used as a force for good.

Now, as a B Corp certified agency, we're proud to be part of a global community of businesses that meet high standards of social and environmental impact.

March is B Corp month, which means that 2,500 business across the UK, including us, used their platforms to talk about what B Corp means to them, and to the future.

This year, the theme of B Corp month was "Generation B" – the generation changing the world of business for the future.

What does Generation B mean to us?

Generation B is the next generation of companies who know that there is a better path to a better world - one of action and purpose, inspiration and community.

For us, the actions we've taken to become a B Corp are at the heart of our identity as a digital agency offering strategic digital solutions to allow businesses to reach their full potential.

By integrating B Corp's rigorous standards into our business practices, we have created a sustainable and socially responsible operation that benefits our team, clients, communities, and the

environment – and we think we're better for it.

How did we celebrate B Corp month?

In the spirit of helping the next generation, our team attended an International Women's day event in Newcastle which focused on how to "pay it forward" to the women coming next in the workplace.

One of the facts that shocked our team was that it would take 100 years to end the gender gap in the workplace, hopefully the Gen B movement can help close that gap sooner.

We also recorded a B Corp special edition of our tech news round-up podcast, Tech & Trends, discussing the movement and what it means for the future, such as the ethical and environmental questions around AI.

Taking B Corp month further

We're not only passionate about B Corp during the month of March, we commit to many facets of the vision and mission across our business practises.

For example, we're proud to be accredited by the Living Wage Foundation as an official employer. If we want to offer the highest-quality work to our clients, we need to offer our employees a high quality of life.

We're also Silver Sponsors of the North-East STEM Foundation (NESF), joining employers who aim to break down barriers for young people to enter careers in science, technology, engineering, and maths (STEM).

We think it's important to give back to our communities, and where better than our spiritual home, the North-East.

What we can do for you

At Brave & Heart, we're passionate about helping businesses succeed by aligning strategy, empowering teams, and using digital transformation to drive real growth and resilience.

We don't sell "stuff" to make money; we ensure to add real value and provide honest and impartial advice - delivering practical solutions that make a real difference.

Our team focus on integrating strategy, people, and technology—in that order.

We focus on crafting tailored solutions that enable organisations to manage risks, streamline operations, and achieve sustainable success, and our approach consistently addresses all three pillars: Strategy, People, and Technology.

Contact Us

We work with client across the globe, from global logistics giants DP World to UK public sector companies like CPI and The MTC.

Are you a B Corp? Get a 5% discount off any of our services.

Are you a public sector company? Find us directly on G-Cloud 14.

Contact us at info@braveandheart.com or check out our case studies at www.braveandheart.com

Plus, listen to our podcast Tech & Trends on Apple Podcasts or Spotify to catch up with all weekly tech, strategy and people news.



John Behan

Countering Cyber Threats

In today's digital landscape, cyber threats are more sophisticated and relentless than ever.

With a cyber attack happening every 39 seconds, safeguarding business data is no longer optional, it is a necessity, and it is now vital to consider every area vulnerable to attack, including often overlooked technology like multifunction printers.

Team Valley-based office technology company, SOS Group, is well-placed to provide IT security advice and support for any business or organisation.

Established in 2002, SOS Group specialises in providing copy, print, scan solutions for clients from local start-ups to multi nationals and holds both ISO 9001, the internationally recognised Quality Management System standard, and ISO 27001, the highly prized IT security accreditation.

SOS Group Director, John Behan, says: "Achieving ISO 27001 shows we have the policies, procedures and risk controls needed for robust IT security management. "It also demonstrates how securely we

treat client data and information, and our expertise to support clients to do the same.

"Cyber security is one of the biggest threats to every business in today's world and the move to remote working and change in practice by most businesses has heightened risks still further.

"It's never been more important to integrate effective cybersecurity throughout your business and that must now include print systems.

"Multifunction printers (MFPs) are often connected to networks, process sensitive data, and interact with devices such as USB drives and email systems. These functions make them a prime target for hackers.

"It's vital to consider every possible weak point and provide a robust defence."

As a proud Develop partner, SOS Group offers a strong solution to elevate print system security for MFPs.

By integrating Bitdefender®, the industry leader in cybersecurity, with Develop

devices, SOS Group can provide unmatched protection against evolving threats, ensuring sensitive data stays safe.

Develop devices are already among the most secure MFPs on the market, delivering reliable performance and robust data protection.

By adding Bitdefender®, these devices offer advanced antivirus scanning in real time, creating a fortified shield against modern cyber threats.

John adds: "With cyber threats increasing daily, it's essential to be proactive, not reactive.

"And adding Bitdefender® to Develop devices is a powerful security weapon to have in your armoury.

"It will detect and stop malware, ransomware, and other threats before they can compromise your systems and is designed to work effortlessly with Develop devices, so you can enhance security without impacting performance or usability.

"Real-time and on-demand scanning provides continuous protection, while automatic updates ensure your virus definitions are always up to date, safeguarding your systems from the latest threats.

“And, once activated, Bitdefender® secures your Develop device for its entire service life at no additional cost.”

Businesses partnering with SOS Group for Bitdefender® integration will benefit from an expert assessment ensuring solutions are tailored to your unique needs.

Seamless setup and support is guaranteed, as the experienced SOS Group team handles the installation and setup, ensuring a smooth transition to a secure print environment.

John adds: “We know cybersecurity is vital and you can demonstrate to your own customer or client base that your business prioritises security by using Bitdefender®-enabled Develop devices.

“It’s absolutely a win, win scenario. Not only are you securing your own data and systems, and securing your clients’ networks and data, you’re also enhancing your own reputation as an organisation to trust.”

As a Develop partner, SOS Group can help you integrate Bitdefender® into your print environment effortlessly, guiding you through every step, from selecting the right devices to providing ongoing support.

Contact SOS Group today to learn how Bitdefender® and Develop devices can secure and transform your business.

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John Behan



AWS in focus: Bringing the northern tech community together

From startups to global enterprises, businesses are under increasing pressure to improve operational efficiencies through modernisation, driven by rising customer expectations, economic changes and the accelerating pace of innovation.

But whilst the move to the cloud offers enormous potential, it leaves many businesses asking the same question: how do we modernise without disrupting what already works?

For many, the challenge isn't just technical, it's strategic. With cloud skills shortages, rising costs, and evolving best practices, businesses are looking for ways to make smarter decisions around cloud adoption. And for organisations outside of the major tech hubs, access to the right knowledge, skills and community support can be harder to come by. That's where the value of shared learning comes in.

The business case for cloud modernisation

According to Grand View Research, the cloud migration services market is experiencing strong, robust growth and the UK market is expected to grow at a CAGR of 25.9% from 2025 to 2030. This growth is predominantly being driven by companies increasing their expenditure on cloud solutions and the associated expertise required to introduce these systems.

Despite this rapid growth, many businesses struggle to navigate the complexities of cloud modernisation. "Cloud adoption isn't just about technology, it's about making the right strategic decisions" says



Steve Morland, CTO at Leighton. "We see companies investing heavily in cloud solutions but often facing roadblocks when it comes to optimising cost, performance and scalability."

One of the biggest gaps is knowing what 'good' looks like in practice, like how to balance innovation with stability. When to refactor versus rearchitect. And how to avoid spiralling cloud costs. These are decisions that can't be made in isolation, and increasingly, businesses are looking to peer-led discussions, user groups and industry events to fill that gap.

The rise of community-led cloud learning

The North East has been no exception to this trend. Over the past few years, we've seen a growing appetite for in-person

events that go beyond theory and dive into practical, hands-on cloud discussions. AWS and serverless user groups in the region have steadily expanded, and yet, many cloud professionals still find themselves travelling to London or further afield for major AWS-focused events.

This highlights a broader challenge in the UK tech ecosystem: while cloud adoption is booming, access to real-world, peer-driven learning opportunities is still unevenly distributed. Tech clusters outside of the capital are thriving, yet regional events that bring together engineers, architects, and leaders remain scarce.

In response, cloud computing advocates from the North's leading AWS software development business, Leighton, decided to take action. The goal? To create a space where businesses and technologists in the



The team behind AWS North

L-R: Steve Morland, CTO, Dan Pudwell, Solutions Architect, Lee Gilmore, Principal Solutions Architect, Claire Cundill, Chief Business Officer, Holli Taylor, Head of Marketing

region can share real-world experiences, learn from experts, and contribute to shaping the future of cloud adoption.

The result is the AWS North Community Conference, a specialist event designed to provide a platform for AWS practitioners, technical leaders, developers, and businesses to exchange insights on cloud transformation, explore how AWS is transforming the tech landscape, and how as a community we can transform how we design, build and scale software solutions to increase operational efficiency.

Speaking about the event, which will be funded by Leighton and supported by Dynamo North East, organiser Steve Morland said: "There's a real gap in the region for a place where our cloud professionals can come together and innovate. While many businesses are

pushing forward with modernisation, they need the right conversations, real-world examples, and connections to do it well."

Unlike large-scale vendor-driven conferences, community-led events like AWS North take a more grassroots approach, focusing on practical solutions, peer collaboration, and direct engagement with experts. This model is already thriving in other regions, with similar AWS community conferences helping to bridge the knowledge gap between large enterprises, SMEs, and startups.

The future of cloud adoption if community-driven

The response so far suggests strong demand for this kind of event. "We're already seeing huge interest from developers, architects, and business leaders

eager to share experiences and learn from one another," says Steve. "It's a sign that the tech community in the North East is ready to shape its own future, rather than waiting for resources to come to them."

As cloud adoption continues to accelerate, so too does the need for collaborative, community-driven learning spaces. Whether it's through events like AWS North Community Conference or the broader network of AWS professionals across the UK, the ability to exchange ideas, troubleshoot challenges, and stay ahead of industry changes will define the next phase of cloud innovation.

For further information about AWS North please visit the website: www.awsnorth.com



“

...Pick a niche, do it well and repeat it...

Peter Joynson

Talking Technology and Digital

This month Northern Insight talks to...

Peter Joynson

Chief Executive Officer, Synergi.

What inspired you to start your technology business, and what was the biggest challenge in the early days?

Having been in tech for 20 plus years and selling traditional server-based solutions, it was time for change and the emergence of Microsoft's cloud strategy, Office 365, was the perfect timing to start Synergi back in 2013, the early challenge being people's initial reluctance to move to the cloud: how times change!

How has your company evolved since its inception, and what key milestones have shaped its growth?

Although the technology landscape continues to evolve, our purpose has always been to help businesses improve using modern technology, this focus has not changed. Across the 12 years, we've grown from £500 thousand turnover to £8 million, and the team from five staff to 60. The key milestones include the addition of our Dynamics practice in 2017 and our managed services team in 2020.

What sets your business apart from competitors in the tech industry?

The power of three! Synergi is perfectly positioned to help businesses across all industry sectors and size, our three focused practices can work in isolation or combine to deliver a unique, modern technology strategy from one supplier relationship.

What trends in technology do you believe will have the biggest impact in the next five years?

It's the most obvious answer really but AI is the buzz around every business strategy just now; however, there is still much to do in terms of understanding, educating and readying your business for this next wave of evolution. Naturally, Synergi can help with this, most businesses can absolutely benefit from elements of AI, but often we find that most need to step back and understand the processes they are actually trying to improve. We are experts in process mapping and this is a big growth area too.

How do you stay ahead of rapid technological advancements and market changes?

Well, personally I don't, but thankfully our very capable CTO and technical experts do! Don't ask me how, but they

just have a knack of having the right products ready at the right time to ensure our customers technology strategy, security and business efficiency continues to improve.

What's been the most exciting innovation or breakthrough your company has achieved?

Building out from our core cloud solutions into our three practice areas, bringing them together under our new branding in January this year, as Agiliti, Unifi and Sentri, has enabled each of them to go from strength to strength.

How do you balance innovation with practicality in your business strategy?

The tools we position need to deliver real life improvements and results, be that improving an ageing finance/ERP system with Microsoft Dynamics, or building an improved security and resilience to all business users or driving improved process changes to deliver streamlined efficiency, everything we do is outcome focused.

What advice would you give to aspiring entrepreneurs looking to break into the tech industry?

Pick a niche, do it well and repeat it... quickly!

What role does sustainability and ethical responsibility play in your business decisions?

As an SMT we lead a culture that is focused on environmental sustainability and ethical responsibility, an example of this is our Synergi Forest, we recently began to plant a tree for every service day we deliver, we are proud to have over 3600 trees already in our Synergi forest.

What's next for your company, and what can we expect to see in the future?

Continued growth, change and dedication from all our team to deliver on our promise.

www.teamsynergi.co.uk

My Weekend...



Jackie Webster

Jackie Webster

A well-being coach, is the founder of Soul Purpose.

Here she tells us how she likes to spend her weekend.

Do you ever have to work weekends?

I am pleased to offer sessions every other Saturday morning, providing an opportunity for individuals who work regular 9-5 hours to still engage in my services. This is very different to the many years that I worked with horses, which even though a total joy, didn't ever allow anything other than every other Sunday off.

Are most weekends the same?

Primarily, yes. I function most efficiently when my life follows a routine, whether it is a weekday or a weekend. However, even though the kind of things I enjoy doing at the weekend may be the same, the venue can differ, and it is always a joy to welcome visiting family and friends to our home.

Do you find it hard to switch off?

I have had to work hard over the years with being too productive and a perfectionist. I always tell my clients that we are all something of a work in progress. Thankfully, I now have an excellent toolbox of resources that I dip into every day. They always help me and my clients to realise the

importance of rest and renewal in our lives.

What do you do at a weekend which you can't fit in through the week?

I love being self-employed because it means I can use my time and energy as wisely as possible. Sometimes there isn't much of a demarcation because there is joy in ordinary life at any time of the week. Having time to just potter about doing housework, food shopping, chatting with friends and family can easily be fitted into the week which leaves most of the weekend for relaxation and fun.

Morning exercise or a recovery lie in?

I tend to get up at 7.30 each morning and if the Devon weather isn't horrendous, I go for a walk in the woods. It gives me the daylight and fresh air to let my body know the day has started. It fills my Soul with hope.

Big night out or a night in the house?

I am a night in the house type of person! The days of being out clubbing or even out after 9pm are in the past. Nowadays I really value the simple pleasures of life with the log-burner and a good series to enjoy. Being at home with my husband makes me happy.

Do you watch or play sports on the weekend?

Even though I am not sporty I do love to watch the 6 Nations rugby and Formula 1 which entertains my daughters because I seem to have amassed a considerable knowledge about both endeavours, even

though the off-side rule still puzzles me and obviously the equestrian sports too.

Where do you like to eat out at a weekend?

If it's a summer evening, Fish and Chips on the beach watching the sunset; at lunchtime it would be The Depot in Devon as they have a good selection of gluten and dairy free options.

How important is the weekend to you?

It is very important to me. Mentally it brings one working week to a close, have quality time with my husband, and then that allows me to recharge for the week to come, so that I can support my clients on a 100% battery.

What's the best thing about weekends?

Getting out and about, enjoying the stunning scenery of North Devon, having a cup of coffee somewhere with my husband and making each other laugh.

Of a weekend, you'll usually find me most happy..?

With my husband, on the beach with crashing waves and sand in between my toes, it really is my Soul's home where the energy invigorates me. One of the most joyous blessings about the beach is the chance to cuddle other people's dogs and stroke any pony we might meet.

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North East Communications announces B Corp status



McBryde & Co, an award-winning communications consultancy, is celebrating becoming a B Corp, joining over 2,400 other UK organisations committed to high social and environmental standards, and one of only 31 organisations in North East England.

Verified by B Lab, the not-for-profit behind the B Corp movement, this certification recognises the consultancy's dedication to transparency, accountability, and making a positive impact.

Achieving B Corp status requires organisations to meet rigorous standards across five key areas: governance, workers, community, environment, and customers. Last year, McBryde & Co underwent a comprehensive assessment process to demonstrate its commitment to ethical

business practices and sustainability. From registering as a Living Wage Employer, ensuring fair wages to professional development opportunities for its team to embedding sustainability into its operations, the consultancy has proven it is serious about being a business for good.

Rachel McBryde, founder and director of McBryde & Co, said: "Becoming a B Corp is a huge milestone for us. As a team, we've worked towards certification for many months, because we believe businesses should be a force for good."

"We wanted to be part of a wider movement that prioritises people and the planet, not just profit. This certification reinforces our commitment to running a business that has a positive impact."

Gardiner Richardson rebrands North East's biggest cultural organisation ahead of expansion

Newcastle-based strategic brand communications agency Gardiner Richardson has unveiled the new brand for the biggest North East cultural organisation.

Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums (TWAM) became North East Museums in late 2024, a regional museum, art gallery and archives service that manages nine museums and galleries across Tyneside and the Archives for Tyne and Wear.

Keith Merrin, Director of North East Museums, said: "Our new name and identity created with the team at Gardiner Richardson puts us in a fantastic position as our organisation grows into Northumberland managing three additional venues from April onwards."

"Our new brand was front and centre for our campaign to drive visitor numbers for February half term across our venues,



and we've seen a real boost to footfall and interest in our organisation."

The rebrand is the result of months of work including meeting with visitors, employees and the wider community to ensure the new brand would be authentic to the people at the heart of the organisation.

Gardiner Richardson developed brand positioning, identity and a social media campaign for North East Museums.



North East PR agency launches PR podcast

A North East PR agency has launched a new 'pocket-size' PR podcast to help marketing professionals access industry-leading tips and insights from today's top communications experts.

Harvey & Hugo, based in Darlington but working with clients across the UK, has created the Pocket-size PR podcast as a go-to source for concise, actionable PR and marketing insights designed for busy marketing professionals. Founder and CEO Charlotte Nichols' mission is simple: deliver pocket-size portions of PR wisdom through insightful interviews with top communications experts.

Harvey & Hugo was founded in 2009 by Charlotte, who has just under 20 years of experience in PR and communications.

She said, "Every business and brand has a unique voice that needs an individual strategy to be heard. But in an ever-changing digital world, it can be very hard to keep up with the latest news, trends, and tips from the PR industry. The PR industry has lost its identity. By launching this new podcast, we are aiming to be the go-to resource for marketing and PR professionals who want to keep up with their peers and industry news."

The pocket-size PR podcast has already welcomed Ashleigh King, a creative entrepreneur, podcaster, trainer, and the creative director of Flamingo Heights Podcast Studio; Emily Bentley, marketing and business development manager at Jackson's Law Firm and director of Tees Valley Business Club; and Dan Smith, venture director at Growth Capital Ventures.

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North East Agency of the Year targets export growth

The Unknown Creative, the Newcastle-headquartered independent brand agency, has outlined its ambitions as it enters its sixteenth year. The agency's international client mix now makes up 80 per cent of its overall portfolio, led by major projects in life sciences, aviation technology, transport and green energy.

The agency now plans to grow revenue by an additional 25 per cent in the next eighteen months, to hit the £1.25 million mark.

Recently named Agency of the Year at the North East Marketing Awards, The Unknown Creative has doubled its headcount in the last five years, launched its own Design School to nurture upcoming local talent, and entered new international markets, particularly in North America.

Commenting on these recent successes, founder and creative director John Dunne said: "2024 was a strong year for us. Our team grew by 20 per cent, our client base by 30 per cent, and we saw a 25 per cent revenue increase in specialist international projects across life sciences, biotech, aviation technology and green energy.

"We have big ambitions for 2025, aiming to upskill, strengthen and nurture talent within our team, as well as hiring for two new roles.

"Since launching The Unknown Creative in 2009, we have worked hard to deliver outstanding creative work, top-tier client service, and a legacy of craft, originality and integrity."

Global PR agency returns to North East BIC home

A Sunderland-born entrepreneur has returned to his roots, setting up a global performance PR agency at the North East BIC.

Set up in August 2024, Jake Holyoak, founder of One March, has made waves across the sector, securing global clients from the USA, Australia and Asia.

For Jake, launching his business at the BIC was a full-circle moment, having started his career there over a decade ago as an apprentice at Claro Creative.

Jake realised a gap in the market to build a business that prioritises measurable results, ensuring PR efforts directly impact clients' success, and with over 12 years of experience in PR, Jake took the leap and started One March, with its approach setting it apart in the industry.

One March specialises in performance PR with campaigns tailored to each client to help generate leads and build brand awareness and engagement, working with household names such as Ladbroke's, Michelin and Ralph Lauren.

Jake said: "The BIC was an obvious choice for me. Not only is it where I took my first steps in the industry, but the access to business experts, events, networking opportunities and the wider community make it an invaluable asset for a growing business.

"There's a real energy here in the North East that drives innovation and success and I'm really keen to show the incredible talent and be a part of the movement that's putting Sunderland on the map."



Outrank named 3rd on the UK's 100 'Best Workplaces' list

Leading Teesside-based digital marketing agency, Outrank, has been ranked the third best small business to work for in the UK on the prestigious 2025 Great Place to Work® list, marking its second year receiving this recognition and its first time in the top 10.

The Great Place to Work® awards, created by the global authority on workplace culture, recognise UK companies that actively invest time, energy, and resources into the development and well-being of their employees.

"We are absolutely thrilled to be named one of the top 10 places to work in the UK" said Stephen Robinson, Founder of Outrank. "This recognition is a testament to the incredible team we've built and the strong culture we've nurtured. Since we launched back in 2018, we've always focused on creating a supportive environment where our people can grow and succeed."

The small business category on the UK Best Workplaces™ list includes companies with fewer than 100 employees. Outrank, which currently employs 43 people, has already welcomed six new hires this year, further strengthening its in-house capabilities. These new team members have played a key role in enabling Outrank to deliver a comprehensive, full-service offering, now covering PPC, organic and paid social media, customer success management, and email marketing in-house.



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Marketing and Media Matters

In the latest of this popular series of features Northern Insight talks to...

Ryan Briggs

Managing Director, Shout Loud Social

Did you always envisage a career in the marketing and media industry?

Media? Yes. Marketing? Not at first. I've always been creative, and after editing videos for a decade and initially running a successful YouTube channel, running my own business wasn't on my radar. That changed when I started working at Durham BID, where I saw how businesses struggled with marketing. Now, I get to use creativity with purpose, and I love it.

What has your career path been so far?

After college, I became the Students' Union President at New College Durham, which sparked my interest in leadership. Helping my partner's family open Cafédral Durham introduced me to the business world, leading to a role at Durham BID as their Social Media & Engagement Officer. There, I saw first-hand what businesses needed to thrive online. When I left Durham BID, that's when my partner and I launched Shout Loud Social. It has grown from a bedroom startup to a full agency with an office, boardroom and a fancy new recording studio at Ushaw Historic House, Chapels and Gardens.

What have been the biggest challenges you've faced so far?

Growing a business while working with my partner haha! We started Shout Loud Social just before the pandemic, so adapting to uncertainty was a huge challenge. As we grew as a team, it was then about learning when to push forward and when to step back, which has been key. Balancing work and life is always a challenge too, but I've learnt to set boundaries (most of the time!). Once upon a time, I was still in the office at 3 am!

What is your greatest strength?

Trusting my gut while constantly learning. I have a natural instinct for what works, but I also take in strategies, trends and content that shape my decisions. It's not just about following the latest hype; it's about understanding what actually connects with people and delivers results. I absorb what's happening in the industry, spot patterns and adapt quickly, which means I can make smart, creative decisions without overthinking. That balance of instinct and insight helps me create marketing that stands out and actually works. Watching some of our clients go viral organically has been exciting!

What is your biggest weakness?

Switching off. When you run your own business, it's hard to step away and not let work take over every part of your life. I'm always thinking about the next idea, the next project or how to improve something. It's a strength in some ways, but it can make it difficult to fully relax. I'm getting better at setting boundaries, but it's a work in progress!

Which fictional character can you most relate to?

Apparently, people in the office (and friends) think I'm Hyacinth Bucket, which somewhere deep inside me I take as a compliment. I do love her. High standards, a touch of drama, and a firm belief that things should be done properly. There's also Cam from Modern Family, enthusiastic, a bit over-the-top at times, but always meaning well and fully committed to whatever he throws himself into!

What has been your proudest achievement?

The ability to give multiple people a job is amazing. Starting as a small business, it felt surreal when we got to the point of hiring our first team member. I'm really proud of knowing that the business I built can support other people's careers. It's not just about growth, it's about creating opportunities and building something that lasts.

What are your future career aspirations?

To keep growing the business while staying true to why we started, helping businesses who don't know where to begin and don't have the time to figure it out. I want to build a strong, talented team, create more opportunities for others and work with brands that genuinely excite me.

What is the best piece of advice you've been given?

My dad has taught me not to burn bridges. You never know when you'll cross paths with someone again, and how you handle things matters. Business moves fast, but relationships and reputation last. Even when things don't work out, leaving on good terms can open doors in the future.

How do you see your industry evolving in the next 10 years?

Marketing will keep moving faster. AI and automation will play a bigger role, but creativity and genuine connection will always win. I think we'll see a shift away from vanity metrics and surface-level content, with brands focusing more on authenticity and real engagement. The challenge will be keeping up without losing the human touch.

How do you like to unwind?

I have two Goldendoodles, Rubin and Bonnie, so walking is a big part of my routine. Every Saturday, I walk the old railway line to a local farm café. It's my time to switch off, listen to a podcast and enjoy the walk. It's a simple routine, but I look forward to it every week. I also go to a quiz every week with my friends which I love. It's become a bit of a ritual, or as the host says, a cult.

shoutloudsocial.co.uk

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“

*...The ability to give
multiple people a job
is amazing...*

Ryan Briggs



North East at Heart: Phonetic Digital's commitment to community

The sense of community has always been a cornerstone of the North East.

Phonetic Digital recognises this, actively supporting their local community working alongside over thirty businesses across the region. Whether it's collaborating with other organisations or getting involved in North East events, they are committed to championing the region we all call home.

What community means for us at Phonetic Digital

As we head into our second year of business, we're taking a moment to reflect on what worked well, and one thing stands out: our greatest successes happened when we were most connected to our community. Last year, we had the pleasure of collaborating with key local organisations such as Sunderland BID and the North East Chamber of Commerce, offering our expertise in website design, refreshes and maintenance. Working with these regional leaders introduced us to new networks and allowed us to immerse ourselves even deeper into the local business landscape.

But for us, community isn't just about working with the big names, it's about supporting businesses of all sizes! We've been lucky enough to work alongside many smaller businesses, who have played a huge role in shaping the local community too. Through word of mouth recommendations we've built some brilliant relationships that keep us closely connected to what's happening in our city.

Our community connections

Staying connected with Sunderland's thriving business community is a top priority for us. We're always eager to attend local events and workshops when we can, and on the 8th of May we'll be heading to the North East Expo, exhibiting our services and connecting with other businesses from across the region.

Sunderland, in particular, is at the forefront of development and opportunity. The community is rapidly expanding, with new business prospects emerging all the time. Even our office space, which was once a neglected building has been transformed into a vibrant hub that houses numerous local businesses.

Offering local opportunities - Building the future right here

Supporting all areas of our community is so important for us as a business. We recently hired a University of Sunderland MA Marketing student, Jess Davey. Jess shared "I feel so welcomed by Sunderland and its strong sense of community, I feel fortunate to have this opportunity and be able to stay in this local area". She also added, "This role lets me put into practice the skills I have learnt from my masters degree and get real hands-on experience at the same time".

Education and professional growth are key for us, which is why we've also partnered with a local college to offer internships. Every week we work with a student, providing them with real life office experience, building on the skills they're learning in college. These internships are designed to be flexible, allowing the students to take ownership of their learning by choosing from a range of subjects that we specialise in, from website development to social media strategies and SEO.

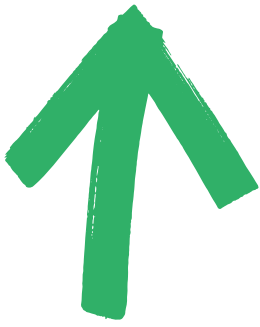
Taking sustainable steps, small changes, big impact

We are deeply invested in our community, so it's important that we take the correct steps when it comes to the local environment. While sustainability can become a buzz word in business, and often gets associated with large-scale changes, we believe that even the smallest of steps can make a significant impact. In our office, we take recycling seriously, ensuring we reduce our waste and operate in an environmentally responsible manner. Our focus on the environment isn't a side project, it's the heart of a responsible business strategy.

The future of our business community: Growing together

It's exciting to see how fast the North East's business community is developing just in our first full year in business. We're committed to continuing our efforts to positively impact the community and look forward to growing alongside it.

If you'd like to learn more about our journey or the services we offer, get in touch with us at hello@phoneticdigital.co.uk



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Veronica Swindale

Motivation in Marketing

Marketing is an exciting and constantly evolving field; however, sustaining team motivation and engagement in such a fast-paced industry can be challenging due to shifting trends, tight deadlines, and increasing expectations.

Lucas Peregrin has recently joined the nesma team as Marketing Manager. He shares his thoughts on maintaining team motivation with Managing Director Veronica Swindale.

What motivated you to become a marketer?

Like many marketing professionals, I was drawn to the industry by the creativity and storytelling aspects. I've always been fascinated by how brands connect with their audiences, influence decisions, and shape perceptions. There's always a new challenge to tackle, a new strategy to test, or an emerging trend to explore.

What attracted you to being a member of the nesma team?

It's a small yet rapidly growing organisation specialising in marketing training, and the opportunity to collaborate with marketing experts genuinely excited me about this new chapter in my career.

What motivation strategies have inspired you throughout your career?

Throughout my career, I've found that adaptability and continuous learning are key to staying motivated. Embracing new technologies, testing innovative campaigns, and learning from successes and failures have shaped my marketing approach. I strongly believe in the power of mentorship. Learning from experienced marketers and, in turn, mentoring others has helped me stay connected to my passion for the industry. Being part of professional networks and attending industry events has inspired and engaged me.

What impact does motivation have on collaboration and team dynamics?

Motivation acts as the glue that unites a marketing team. A highly motivated team is not only more productive but also more creative, innovative, and resilient. When team members feel inspired and valued, they are more likely to share ideas and support one another. Conversely, lacking motivation can lead to disengagement, high turnover, and uninspiring ideas. Fostering an environment where team members feel empowered to contribute, take ownership of projects, and celebrate successes can significantly boost motivation.

How can organisations sustain a marketers' long-term motivation?

In my experience, they should support both professional and personal development. This can be achieved by offering clear pathways for career progression, providing access to training and learning opportunities, and encouraging experimentation and innovation. Promoting a healthy work-life balance is equally important. Marketers often face pressure to achieve results quickly, but burnout can drain motivation. Leaders should ensure that workloads



Lucas Peregrin

are manageable and employees have the necessary flexibility. Recognition and rewards play a significant role, too. Whether celebrating small wins, offering incentives, or simply acknowledging work well done, showing appreciation can go a long way in keeping teams motivated.

What role do learning and development play?

Continuous learning is one of the most powerful tools for maintaining motivation. The marketing landscape constantly evolves, with new technologies, platforms, and consumer behaviours continually emerging. Training can play a significant role in equipping individuals with the right tools to progress in their jobs and develop solutions that have a positive effect. It promotes an educational mindset and inquisitiveness. At nesma, we've seen firsthand how upskilling and staying informed about industry trends can empower marketers to be more confident and innovative. When teams feel they are growing, they are more likely to stay motivated and committed to their organisation.

Do you think the trend for purpose-driven marketing campaigns will contribute to a marketer's sense of fulfilment?

Absolutely. Purpose-driven marketing aligns brands with meaningful causes, which can be incredibly motivating for marketers. Knowing that your work contributes to something greater than sales, whether sustainability, social justice, or community impact, can provide a profound sense of fulfilment.

Consumers today expect brands to take a stand on important issues, and marketers play a crucial role in shaping those messages. Working on campaigns that make a real difference strengthens brand loyalty and gives marketers a more profound sense of purpose.

My Final Thoughts

Marketing is demanding yet rewarding, and keeping teams motivated requires a proactive approach. By fostering a learning, collaboration, and purpose culture, organisations can ensure their marketing teams remain engaged, inspired, and ready to take on new challenges. Investing in continuous development, recognising achievements, and creating meaningful work will fuel long-term success for individuals and businesses.

nesma is committed to helping marketers grow their skills and careers. If you want to upskill your team or advance your marketing knowledge, contact Jen Lorimer at 07734 222 254 or jen.lorimer@nesma.co.uk to learn more.

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...Keeping one step ahead in business...

Highlights PR's Keith Newman asked some of his RADAR members to tell us how they respond to change either in their business or to help their customers?

As a website development company, we embrace change as an opportunity for growth and improvement.

Whether it's adapting to new technologies, industry trends, or customer needs, we stay ahead by continuously learning and evolving. We actively listen to our clients, ensuring our solutions remain relevant and effective.

Whether it's updating a website for better user experience, integrating the latest security measures or adding additional functionality to the site, we approach every change with a problem-solving mindset.

Our goal is not just to react to change but to anticipate it, ensuring our clients stay competitive online.

*Rutva Patel,
Ridgetek Web Solutions
www.ridgetek.co.uk*



My Newcastle Gallery will close when the lease ends in July as I drift into semi-retirement. The Newcastle Gallery has been an incredible part of my journey, but this change allows me to focus more on painting, spending time in Glasgow, and continuing to connect with people through pop-up exhibitions and online. Although I'm looking forward to spending time travelling and painting subjects based on my experiences at new locations, you'll never take Newcastle or Glasgow away from my soul. It's in my heart.

Alexander Millar, www.alexandermillar.com





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John Dixon,
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Being agile and adaptable is at the core of how I approach life both personally and professionally. The only constant is that things will always change and the trick is to embrace it and make the most of it. Whether it's market trends, customer needs, or new technologies such as AI, I stay ahead by listening, learning, and innovating.

For my customers, that means offering flexibility, personalised support, and forward-thinking strategies to ensure they succeed in any environment.

My goal is to make embracing change a competitive advantage for both my business and my customers. I am running a series of online AI workshops currently that support that goal - register at www.trybooking.com/uk/EMIG

Kate Watson,
www.askmrswatson.com



Last month our RADAR members appeared on BBC TV, BBC Radio, Local TV and many magazines and newspapers. To find out more about the benefits of becoming a RADAR member, contact keith@highlightspr.co.uk or call Keith on 07814 397951.

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Leanne with her East Durham Business Network colleagues Gursh Kahlon, Guy Bashford and Ranj Gill

Back to where it all started

Communications consultancy LEC was launched by experienced journalist and public relations professional Leanne Fawcett 13 years ago. And although the business has grown by offering a full suite of PR, marketing and web services, Leanne is now looking back to where it all started in her ambition to take LEC forward. Here she talks about why she's keen to go back to basics...

It was back in 2012 that I made the decision to start my own business. And I'd be lying if I said there aren't times that I have regretted that decision.

That might seem like a strange thing to say when I am talking about the future and what I would like to achieve.

But I genuinely think no one understands how hard, emotionally and mentally, being self employed is until you do it.

Yes, it's flexible, and yes, to a certain extent, you get to pick and choose who you work with.

I have also been lucky enough to spend invaluable time with my children over the years, something that were I employed full time, I wouldn't have been able to do. The flip side to that is, that while nothing is more important than your children, being a full-time mam did take me away from the business – my priorities changed however I still had a business to run and juggling the two was tough.

However, there has also been far too many sleepless nights and months where money is so tight I have wondered whether I can keep the wolf from the door any longer.

Somehow, though, by hook or by crook, I have managed it and now, my focus is on what I want to achieve from my business and what I have to do to get it to the point where my love for what I do has fully returned.

As a journalist by trade, LEC was launched to enable me to work with ambitious regional and national businesses that wanted to celebrate their successes and highlight to the outside world why they are so good at what they do. And as the business grew, we started adding more strings to our bow, including internal communications, web development, social media profiling and marketing. And in turn, our portfolio of clients expanded.

Today we work with businesses and organisations from a diverse range of sectors, including automotive, childcare, accountancy, software development, business coaching and domestic and commercial services.

I am also communications lead for East Durham Business Network, a role I have had since the group was created back in 2014, initially as Peterlee Business Park Group before the rebrand in 2021, which LEC managed.

Through my role with the network, I work closely with Business Durham, Clearwater Developments (the network's co-chairmen are Clearwater directors Ranj Gill and Gursh Kahlon) and the many companies who are members of it. Our aim is to drive prosperity, share opportunities and give our employers the right platforms to share their good news, whether that be through our quarterly networking events or our website, social media channels or email newsletter.

It's through this venture that LEC launched East Durham Business magazine, the flagship magazine which celebrates our wonderful area and the many companies and organisations that are based within it.

But like with LEC, it hasn't all been plain sailing - securing the sponsorship and advertising revenue we need to fund

production of the magazine has at times been impossible and left me wondering if it had a future (certainly in print). However, after several meetings with Business Durham and Ranj and Gursh, and discussions with our members, we have decided to continue with it, so the priority now is to find those businesses who are prepared to back the magazine financially.

So, what is next for me and LEC?

Recently I have done a lot of soul-searching regarding the business. Is the love I had when I started it still there? Does it suit me to continue to be self employed given my personal circumstances (I am a mam of three including to a two-year-old)? Would the security of employment be a better option?

I came to the conclusion that the answers are yes, yes and no.

What that means for me is, I need to be more proactive. In today's challenging climate, I can't expect work to come to me and I can't rely on retainers, as I have done in the past. I have to go and find it and that is exactly what I am doing.

At the start of the year, my aim was to get in front of as many businesses as possible – to show them what LEC can do for them as their strategic communications partner. And if I can convert a handful of those potentials into clients, I will be heading in the right direction.

It feels like a fresh start and that I am going full circle, back to where it all began, but that feels to me like more of a leap forward rather than a step back. And that can only be a good thing.

www.lecc.co.uk



Leanne Fawcett

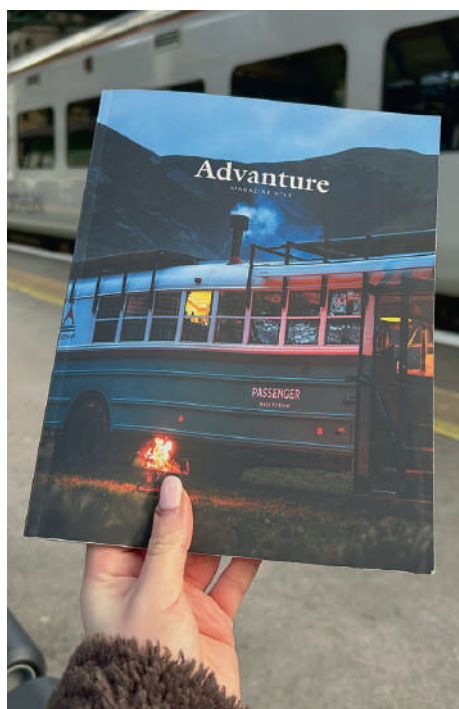
A clear identity

Over the past year, Unique Magazines has undergone a significant transformation. We've redefined our identity, clarifying to our customers exactly what we do. In an industry where roles can be misunderstood, we've taken great strides to ensure there is no confusion—we are not publishers; we sell printed magazines but our passion for them is no less than those who create them.

This year, one of our major initiatives has been the establishment of a new room dedicated entirely to independent magazines. This space is a departure from our traditional focus, which had long been dominated by mainstream titles. The independent magazine room not only diversifies our offerings but also represents a shift in our identity and mission, marking a new chapter in our journey.

Our vision for the future of publishing is clear: we believe that magazines will transition to being published less frequently, with increased focus on quality and, consequently, at a higher price point. Establishing a dedicated hub to support this evolution was imperative. We wanted to not only keep pace with the changing landscape of the publishing world but to be at the forefront of this transformation.

The introduction of our magazine room was met with enthusiasm from the independent publishing community. We received numerous inquiries from publishers who were eager to see their works featured in our store. Previously, we had mostly worked with suppliers for our inventory.



However, with each new inquiry from an indie publisher, we found ourselves asking, “Why not embrace this change?” This opened up a thrilling opportunity to offer titles that are not only unique but also exceedingly rare in the commercial market, by getting them direct from the source- independent publishers.

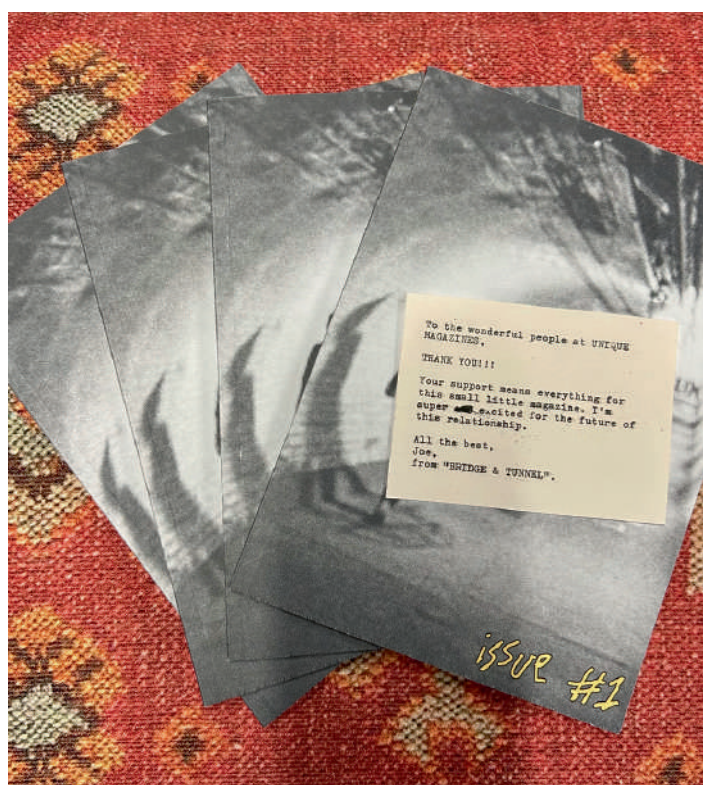
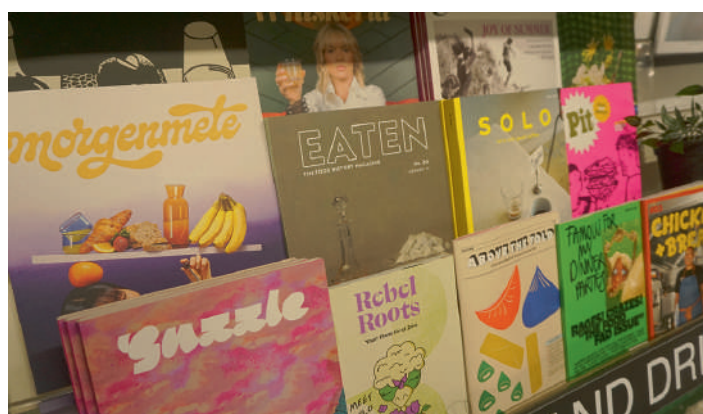
Working directly with these independent creators has been an eye-opening experience. Typically, these publishers are small presses or nonprofit organizations that operate with a clear mission and purpose. They are driven by passion and a desire to make a meaningful impact through their publications. Whether it's a magazine dedicated to the niche joys of rollercoaster adventures or a deep dive into the world of backpacking, the diversity and richness of content have been astounding. We have truly seen it all here at Unique Magazines and we want to ensure we can offer something for everyone.

Since opening our magazine room in April, we've managed to secure 44 unique titles from 44 different indie publishers. This number proudly excludes major, focusing instead on those who embody the spirit of independence and innovation in print.

Our new focus has had a particular resonance here in the North. Historically, we've observed that opportunities for cultural and creative engagement can be more limited here than in the South. By establishing a northeast hub for independent magazines, we've bridged that gap, making these unique and inspiring publications accessible once more as well as giving these independent publishers a chance to spread their craft to as many people as possible.

The relationships we've built with these publishers have been invaluable, not only for our business but for our community. We've introduced these magazines to universities and student events, where they have become a cornerstone of inspiration for students engaged in final projects or seeking creative stimulation.

Our commitment is to continue expanding our magazine room, bringing in new titles from a variety of backgrounds and perspectives. We aim to connect with enthusiasts who appreciate and seek out rare finds in the world of print. We are dedicated to working closely with more independent publishers, continuously enriching our collection and reinforcing our commitment to the evolving landscape of print media.



Being a part of this dynamic, ever-changing industry feels incredibly rewarding. As we move forward, our mission is clear: to enrich, inspire, and provide access to the best of independent print media.

www.uniquemagazines.co.uk

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Our Blog: www.themagazineclub.co.uk

Marketing consultancy celebrates birthday milestone

Washington based Riverside Marketing Solutions is celebrating five years in business following its launch at the beginning of the Covid pandemic.

When owner, Nicola Halse, found herself out of work in March 2020, she decided to take the plunge and set up the marketing and business development business. Since then, she has worked with over fifty organisations from a variety of sectors including engineering, logistics, insurance, construction, accountancy and most recently, cyber security.

Nicola, who has over 30 years' experience within marketing, sales and business development, decided to offer Riverside's range of services on a completely flexible basis, with companies not committed to signing any short or long term agreements.

With services covering fractional marketing manager support, social media management, email campaigns, business development and tailored LinkedIn training sessions, the 'no ties' approach is something which North East SME's have certainly taken advantage of.

Last year, due to an increase in demand for her services and with an eye on the current and future investment in the Sunderland area, the business took up a co-working space at the North East BIC.

Commenting on the birthday milestone, Nicola said, 'Who would have thought that in the turmoil that was the start of the Covid pandemic, I would be sitting here five years later celebrating my fifth anniversary.'

Whether it's on a long term basis or one-off projects, I've worked with so many fantastic businesses and have been delighted to be a part of their success. As a general rule, I've found the North East tends to



Nicola Halse

keep under the radar about the fantastic things we do and that included many of my clients. From employing apprentices, winning awards, increasing turnover or moving into larger premises, it's important that organisations share the successes they experience and that's where marketing is an essential part of their business strategy.

The last five years have definitely not always been easy and especially launching in such a difficult period, however, with the support of my family, friends and the fantastic North East business community, I'm immensely proud to have made it this far.

Locating to The BIC last year was a real turning point for me, it's provided fantastic opportunities to access their business support and connect with fellow organisations within the centre, several of which are now clients.

Not only has the business given me the

opportunity to share the successes of my clients but it's also given me the flexibility to focus on a subject I'm passionate about, which is supporting and advising young people about the world of work.

I became an Enterprise Advisor at Durham Sixth Form in 2022 and have recently also taken up the role of a STEM Ambassador, these have given me the opportunity to support students through career talks, advice with projects and attend many mock interview sessions (a big thank you to my clients too who regularly get asked to attend with me!).

I'm looking forward to working with fantastic North East businesses and showcasing the very best they can do while supporting young people in my community, here's to the next five years!

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Will Fatherley, ProFire Safety and Training

"I have loved working with Nicola, she made it stress free and
easy and was very proactive around our posts and content."

Sarah Reid, Richard Reed Solicitors

"Nicola has been fantastic to work with, her first email campaign
for us resulted in a conversion that is now a closed sale."

Kieran Turnbull, Zenith Systems



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For further information contact Nicola Halse on 07908 623 405

Email: nicola@riversidemarketingsolutions.co.uk



Stepping into its 100th year, a look inside a shoebox of memories



2024 marked the 100th anniversary of North East family-run footwear retailer Charles Clinkard, and to celebrate O agency was tasked with opening a shoebox of memories... literally!

Following a visit to the company's headquarters in Middlesbrough, the creative team from O agency were given a unique opportunity to dig through the archives.

Kari Owers, founder of O agency, said: "We had such a wonderful time opening up old shoeboxes stuffed with vintage footwear, old newspaper clippings, sales ledgers and photographs. The company's rich 100-year history shone through, with memories of people bringing their children in to store to try on their first pair of shoes, or picking out a special pair for their wedding demonstrating how central the stores were in people's lives."

"We wanted to bring that sense of community and memory-making to the fore in an integrated creative campaign that everyone from staff to customers could enjoy to celebrate its 100th birthday."

O agency created a campaign to increase awareness of the Charles Clinkard brand across all channels and showcase the entrepreneurial spirit of the founding family that shaped the company's history to date and drives an exciting future forward.

Taking its inspiration from the heyday of the silver screen in the 1920s, when the company first formed with one

store in Middlesbrough, we developed an overarching campaign creative that would soon underpin every element of the campaign. Old archive imagery with the strapline "A lifetime of memories" led across all on and offline marketing, providing a new visual identity for the year ahead. This included a gorgeous logo lock up that appeared across every birthday touchpoint including point of sale, creative window displays and lookbooks, as well as an online takeover on the brand's social media channels and website.

"We took inspiration from the art deco era, creating a special CC100 logo for window decals that could be used across all stores and an in-store display that used some of the archive photos we found right back on day one. Commemorative gift bags and a special edition newspaper helped us celebrate the event with customers," added Kari.

A 100th birthday footwear collection was launched to commemorate the anniversary, with social media influencers gifted their choice of style to help share the story, which boosted ecommerce web traffic and social engagement, and reached over 68,000 people.

Following a series of in-store launches for staff and customers, O's PR team set up media interviews with the founder's grandson Charles Clinkard and the retailer's Managing Director for Retail, Tim Payne, revealing its growth and plans for the future achieved regional and national editorial coverage, including features with Drapers and BBC Look North, as well as Newcastle Chronicle and The Journal achieving a total reach of 18 million people for the anniversary news.

Rebecca Elvis, Charles Clinkard said: "Celebrating 100 years of Charles Clinkard was a momentous occasion, and working with O Agency to bring our history to



life in such a creative and engaging way made it even more special. Their support throughout the campaign helped us truly capture the essence of our company - the results were fantastic, creating a real sense of pride amongst our team and bringing our history alive for our customers."

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Sarah Walker with her two sons, Alexander left and William right

Helping put Croxdale Group on the map!

From test driving new EVs to writing about the need for better EV charging infrastructure, SASS Media goes the extra mile for clients.

At SASS media Ltd, we pride ourselves on going the extra mile for clients.

For the last six months, we've been working with Croxdale Group, a Durham-based car dealership, car and van rental company and servicing and repair centre, to generate press coverage and write a series of articles that could be used on LinkedIn and the company website.

For Sarah Walker, a once reluctant driver who only passed her test at the age of 27 when doing so was mandatory for a working journalist, this posed a challenge - but one that she has really enjoyed!

Sarah borrowed an MG4 Electric Vehicle for the weekend as part of her work and wrote an honest review based on how the car fitted into the life of a working mum.

As the MG4 is fully electric, this also gave Sarah the opportunity to get a real world feel for what making the switch from an ICE vehicle (internal combustion engine) would mean - and the conclusion was that better charging infrastructure is needed across the region and the UK.

This also formed the basis of a thought leadership piece by Croxdale Managing Director Anthony Rockingham, who welcomed the efforts being made by Durham County Council to install more electric vehicle charging points across the city.

Anthony also welcomed the £65m investment in electric charging infrastructure, promised by Chancellor Rachel Reeves, as part of a raft of new measures to kickstart the economy - but urged the Government to do even more.

This comes as the Government's Zero Emission Vehicles (ZEV) mandate places increasing demands on manufacturers, by requiring 28% of new cars sold in 2025 to be electric.

"As demand for electric vehicles continues to grow, it is vital that the charging network keeps pace," Anthony said.

"More publicly available chargers will make it easier for drivers to make the switch to electric, particularly for those without off-street parking."

For Sarah W at SASS, making the switch to an EV would make economical sense, since she has a driveway and charging at home would cost significantly less than petrol,

so it's something she is now seriously considering, thanks to the extended test-driving opportunity.

Sarah is also looking forward to continuing to work with Croxdale on articles covering a range of new topics, from how AI can benefit the business and improve customer service to supporting young drivers and their preferences for brand new cars.

Croxdale also prides itself on taking on apprentices and Sarah has been delighted to promote the success of Bethany Coleman, who started her career in accountancy with Croxdale at the age of 18 while studying at college and is now group accountant seven years on.

Croxdale has also recently extended its range of cars to include Alfa Romeo, Jeep and Leapmotor and these developments in the expanding business have given Sarah plenty of positive news to write about, as well as the opportunity to develop her photography skills.

For someone who was once such a reluctant motorist, it has been exciting to work with a large automotive business which is doing so well in the region!

If you feel that SASS could benefit your business, whether this is through lifestyle content promoting your products or services, or celebrating success in your organisation in the media, please get in touch!

Email sarah.walker@sassmedialtd.co.uk or call 07896 894538.

Siobhan Byrne Talks Search & Strategy

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.

Siobhan Byrne, SEO & Content Director and co-founder of Bonded, shares her insights on the evolving search landscape, why Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) is a long-term game, and how automation is unlocking new opportunities.



Siobhan Byrne
SEO & Content Director

“If you get SEO right, the work you do in one year can drive performance many years later.”

Q: Are there any upcoming developments in SEO that you're excited about?

Siobhan: I think we are seeing a diversification of search platforms and search behaviour. From younger generations using social platforms for search and the explosion of ChatGPT.

We will start to see more strategies around targeting these platforms, and hopefully the data and insights to back up these strategies which is currently lacking.

I'm very keen on automation, and I think we are in a golden age of creating efficiencies for clients and freeing up teams from repetitive tasks for more interesting work. Improved job satisfaction and better client results? I'm all in!

Q: What does Bonded's core belief of connection mean to you?

Siobhan: At the minute, connection means something very specific to me; switching off from work, my phone and any other distractions to connect with my daughter who is 16 months old and still very new to the world.

At work, connection means listening to team members and what they need and taking time to get to know them on a personal level. It makes for much better teamwork!

Q: What made you want to start Bonded?

Siobhan: Starting a company with people I had worked with for a number of years, that I trusted and respected felt like a no brainer.

Bonded was formed during the pandemic years, which felt like a period of significant change – many people switched from working full-time in the office to full-time at home, priorities were shifting, and it felt like the right climate to try something new.

Q: What are some common misconceptions people have about SEO?

Siobhan: Sometimes I think that there is a misconception that you can hire one person to 'do SEO' – but in reality it takes a village; from tech specialists to content writers and creatives – not to mention a driven client team who gets work live.

Another big consideration is that it is very often a slow burn – but if you get SEO right, the work you do in year one can drive performance many years later. SEO is very much the long game!

For more information visit:
www.bondedagency.com



Shaping Future Leaders

Polly Enevoldson's vision for The Royal Grammar School (RGS) Newcastle's Sixth Form

As we celebrate our quincentenary, RGS welcomes Polly Enevoldson as its new Head of Sixth Form - a leader passionate about shaping students into well-rounded individuals ready for success beyond the classroom.

The RGS Sixth Form is a special place to study beyond GCSE, widely renowned for its academic excellence and breadth of opportunities for students to discover their passions for life after school. Under Polly's leadership, our Sixth Form will combine academic success with personal growth, ensuring students thrive in their chosen careers.

Polly's career in education began in the North East, where she initially trained as a teacher before moving South to join Paddington Academy. From a dedicated science teacher to a key pastoral leader and Head of Sixth Form while working in London, she has always been drawn to helping students develop both academically and personally. "My passion is helping students to grow - not just as learners but as people," she says. "I love helping students to solve problems, guiding them through challenges, and watching them leave school with confidence in their abilities." Returning to the North East was both a personal and professional milestone. "RGS is such a well-respected school, known for its academic achievements and strong sense of community. My dad is actually a former RGS student - he was Head Boy - so coming back feels like coming full circle."

With around 350 students, including 40-50 new entrants each year, RGS Sixth Form offers an enriching environment. Polly shares our core values - a sense of belonging; love of learning; belief in each other and ambition to succeed - and our aim to balance academic excellence and students' personal development. "The RGS Sixth Form team and I work hard to ensure that students are prepared for life



Polly Enevoldson

after school, not just with A-levels, but with a sense of independence, leadership, and community spirit," she explains. "We provide an exceptional range of opportunities - from academic enrichment to leadership roles and extracurricular activities." A distinctive feature of the RGS Sixth Form is its PLUS Programme, which introduces students to external speakers, career workshops, and university preparation support. Additionally, the Complementary Studies program allows students to explore diverse skills, from sports leadership to environmental initiatives and practical skills like cooking.

Beyond the classroom, students are encouraged to broaden their horizons, explore their passions, and explore our many co-curricular activities. Whether through the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, Combined Cadet Force, music, drama, charity initiatives, or student-led societies, RGS fosters an environment where students develop confidence, leadership, and teamwork. "For me, the Sixth Form is about more than studying - it's about broadening horizons, trying new things, and creating lasting memories," Polly adds.

Ensuring every student feels valued is key for Polly. RGS takes a personalised approach to Sixth Form life with tailored UCAS guidance, career mentorship, and

academic clinics for subject-specific help. "We want to make sure no student is left behind," Polly explains. "The transition from GCSE to A-levels can be daunting, and our dedicated team—from tutors to pastoral leaders—provides individual support. Through mentoring, study skills workshops and wellbeing initiatives we ensure every student thrives." The Sixth Form also has a buddy system for new joiners, helping those from other schools feel part of the RGS family from day one. "We encourage a strong sense of peer support and opportunities to build meaningful friendships and networks," Polly added.

As the school marks its historic 500th anniversary, Polly is eager to contribute to RGS's legacy. She views her role as helping students become the best versions of themselves. Focused on leadership, personal growth and community engagement, she is determined to uphold the school's tradition of excellence while fostering an environment where students can truly flourish. "Education isn't just about grades," she says. "It's about preparing young people to enter the world as confident, capable, and kind individuals. That's what I aim to do at RGS Sixth Form."

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Daily Pour shakes up North East coffee culture



Jack Fenwick

Daily Pour, a disruptive coffee brand born from the entrepreneurial spirit of Northumbria University graduate, Jack Fenwick, is shaking up the North East coffee scene.

The brand, focused on blending coffee with musicality and community, recently held its first successful pop-up event. The DJ event, in collaboration with Minor Figures Oat Milk at Hidden Heights Creative Studio in Newcastle, saw Jack serving up his signature coffee, while DJ sets from Ally, Bradley Circles and Socialness created a fusion of music and coffee culture. It marked the first of several pop-up events planned for 2025.

Initially, available exclusively online, Daily Pour has now expanded its reach, announcing a partnership with select retailers in Newcastle and surrounding areas. Currently stocked at Local, Jesmond, Ernie and Ooze in Ouseburn and The Rare Drop in Low Fell, Daily Pour is rapidly gaining traction.

Jack, a 2016 Northumbria University Marketing Management graduate, aims to build a brand that resonates with a

counter-culture audience who appreciate art and design without the pretence often associated with specialty coffee. Using the knowledge gained from his degree, he single-handedly designed the brand from the ground up, including the website, social media presence and merchandise, all designed to reflect the brand's story and future vision.

Each bag of Daily Pour coffee, roasted in the North-East, features striking artwork by renowned North East graffiti artist Mul, famous for his record-breaking Quayside mural and 2023 exhibition at The Baltic Centre for Contemporary Arts. Mul's work, known for its bold style and vibrant energy, encapsulates the brand's rebellious, yet approachable spirit. Further enhancing the experience, a QR code on each bag links to a curated music playlist, aimed at blending the visual and auditory aspects of the brand.

Jack, said: "I wanted to create a coffee experience that was inclusive and enjoyable for everyone. My love for coffee, design and music, combined with my marketing background, all came together to form Daily Pour. It's about enjoying a great cup of coffee without the snobbery.

"We're all about community, creativity and good times. The pop-up event was a perfect way to bring together coffee lovers, music enthusiasts and artists without the need to be out at a club until 3am. It's exactly what Daily Pour is about - blending great coffee

with the energy of music, whilst building a space where people can connect and enjoy the moment."

"The skills and knowledge I gained during my time at Northumbria University played a crucial role in turning my passion for coffee into a successful brand in the North East. The marketing strategies, entrepreneurial insights and leadership training I received, laid the foundation for my success. Here's to a future built on education, determination and amazing coffee."

Beyond the product itself, Daily Pour is building a community. Plans for 2025 include more small-scale coffee events as the brand continues to deepen its roots in the music scene.

Craig Bradshaw, Assistant Professor in digital marketing at Northumbria University, said: "Jack's innovative thinking and entrepreneurial spirit are a testament to his ambition and the nurturing of his talent during his studies at Northumbria University.

"The university prides itself on building leaders of the future that create change and stimulate new ways of thinking. Many business plans have formed over a cup of coffee but, in this case, it is the coffee and the brand attached to it that is the new, innovative, business disrupting mainstream consumerism."

dailypour.co.uk



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Developing Community Strength through Partnerships

By Mr Will Scott, Principal at Dame Allan's Schools, Newcastle

If there is one thing that the North East embodies, it is community spirit - which has recently been seen in full force as Newcastle United Football Club celebrates their first trophy win in 70 years!

Geordies especially are known for being a friendly bunch, and as a Newcastle-based School Principal, I see everyday how our pupils make friends and support each other through the - sometimes challenging - teenage experience, as well as look further afield as to how they can support others outside of the school.

It's an established fact that having a shared goal or cause helps to unite employees within a business, and it is no different within a school community too. That supportive charitable spirit is something we champion inside and outside of Dame Allan's. We're passionate about supporting our local community, as well as developing our pupils into well-rounded, empathetic, and kind-hearted people.

Partnerships are woven throughout both the Junior and Senior School, starting with something as simple as non-uniform fundraising for Children in Need, or helping to litter pick and plant a garden in the school grounds. All of these things model for pupils the power of coming together as a force for collective good, where a community thrives by helping each other.

In the Senior School, charitable acts and fundraising continue to be embedded in the culture. Pupils host bake sales and collect for food banks, supporting local and national charities whilst helping to educate each other on important causes such as food and hygiene poverty. In the Sixth Form, students can choose to take part in regular volunteering placements. From schools, to Women's Centres, local charities, and care homes, our students understand how giving their time, skills, and often just a listening ear, can have a big impact on those around us.



Will Scott

Consider, is there an organisation in the North East who would make a natural partnership for your business? For example, our academic partnerships too come from reciprocal and long-standing relationships with some of the North East's most-respected cultural institutions. We have long worked with Dance City to give our dancers the chance to perform on a professional stage, as well as with local businesses such as The Alnwick Garden and Sage Wealth Management, to support events with a tailored performance from our dancers. Not only was this fantastic entertainment for guests at Sage's event, it was a wonderful opportunity for our dancers to perform live in a challenging new environment; a win-win some might say!

Similarly within our drama department, our longstanding relationship with the People's Theatre sees our pupils star in a multitude of local productions: we help them to find the next generation of talented young performers, and the Theatre offers them invaluable performing

opportunities. In sport, our partnership with the Newcastle Eagles basketball team sees regular guest coaches offer training at Dame Allan's, offering our young athletes that chance to learn from the pros, and the Club the chance to inspire a new generation of basketball stars, and raise the local profile of the game. We have also recently launched a partnership with Tynedale Rugby Club, again helping to both boost the profile of the club, whilst offering dedicated coaching to our dedicated young rugby players.

It is important to the school that we are not just an insular community. Any school, or business, operates as a vital cog in the local community, and so has the potential to make positive change within that space. I applaud any local business or institution that supports local charities, shares skills, or offers work placements to young people - it's those small, supportive acts that make the North East such a special place to live, work, and grow.

Find out more at dameallans.co.uk

Shaping the future of education recruitment

For over 15 years, The Education Network has led the way in education recruitment, connecting schools with talented professionals across the UK.

With an office in Newcastle, the agency has built a reputation as a trusted partner for schools seeking supply, interim and permanent staff. As the industry evolves, CEO Kevin Gill reflects on recent achievements, the shifting recruitment landscape and the future of The Education Network.

A year of growth and resilience

With staff shortages continuing to challenge schools, demand for recruitment services has remained high. The Education Network has recently focused on filling specialist roles to support schools where they need it most. Gill explains, "This past year has been dynamic and fast-paced," says Gill. "We saw significant growth, particularly due to the push towards addressing teacher shortages and increasing the presence of specialists in schools."

A key achievement was the reopening of the Leeds office, marking a major step in the company's expansion. "Closing that office during the pandemic was tough, but bringing it back reflects our resilience," Gill explains. "We've also strengthened our presence in Yorkshire by appointing two experienced professionals to lead our growth in the region."

Shifting trends in education recruitment

Schools are increasingly seeking flexible staffing solutions, turning to temporary and contract roles to manage fluctuating budgets. "More and more, schools rely on these options to deliver a high quality, well-rounded education to their students," Gill notes.



Kevin Gill

Schools are looking to build specialist workforces, particularly in Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). "Schools need a workforce that reflect their students' needs, and we're committed to supporting that."

Government policy and funding impacts

Recent government funding announcements have been met with cautious optimism, with hopes that increased investment will ease staffing pressures. "Any additional funding for education is positive," says Gill, "but the real challenges are implementing it effectively and ensuring that it reaches the right areas."

Prioritising SEND recruitment

One of the biggest challenges for schools remains the shortage of skilled professionals in SEND roles. With the number of children requiring additional support rising sharply, demand for specialist staff has never been greater. "One in six children aged 5-16 is likely to experience a mental health condition," Gill highlights. "That figure has surged by 65% in just three years."

Recognising this urgent need, The Education Network has prioritised SEND recruitment, ensuring schools can access the right specialists. "We have appointed an in-house SEND specialist recruiter, who can

expertly lead interviews and assessments with specialist teachers," Gill explains. "Not all recruitment agencies have SEND expertise, but we understand how vital it is to place the right professionals in these roles."

The future of The Education Network

The Education Network remains focused on "expanding its network, investing in cutting edge recruitment technology and enhancing candidate and client satisfaction. We're always looking for ways to innovate and improve," Gill confirms.

"Our core values remain unchanged. We will continue to act responsibly, ethically and with integrity whilst we push to solidify our position as a trusted recruitment partner for educational institutions."

Expansion opportunities

Looking ahead, The Education Network is open to growth opportunities, including potential mergers and acquisitions. "While organic growth is our priority, M&A could allow us to enter new markets or bring in new expertise," Gill explains. "We are open to exploring these options to ensure we evolve in ways that benefit both schools and education professionals."

With dedication, a clear vision and a passion to go above and beyond to find the best candidates for each role, The Education Network is well-positioned to shape the future of education recruitment.



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Multi-Academy Trust's strategic vision for raising standards and fostering collaborative leadership

A Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) has strengthened its standards team to support the Trust's strategic priorities and provide a 'holistic oversight' whilst maintaining its philosophy of Cohesion and not Uniformity across its thirty schools.

Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust (BCCET) has 25 primary schools and five secondary schools across the North-east in Sunderland, South Tyneside, and East Durham with 11,000 pupils and 1,500 staff members.

The MAT's standards team comprises four former headteachers – Leanne Barker, Fran Craik, Kathryn Fenwick, and Glenn Sanderson – whose remit as chief standards officers is to support the senior leadership team of each of the Trust's schools to drive consistency, achievement, transformational change, sustainable improvement, and collaborative leadership.

Their particular areas of focus will be success of all pupils,

curriculum development, professional development, and data-informed decision-making. The Trust's innovative strategy is centred on a collaborative, partnership-driven process.

The standards team roles are wider in scope than school improvement, as while quality of education is integral, the CSOs play a pivotal role in "walking alongside" school leaders and staff, identifying evidence-based practices that support improvement. They support headteachers in particular, with all aspects of their roles.

"When leaders feel well supported, they are more likely to engage in honest reflection," explains Kathryn Fenwick.

"Together, we can then identify any areas of focus and implement lasting solutions."

Glenn Sanderson, former executive headteacher at St Aidan's Catholic Academy in Sunderland, says: "Collaboration is key. The purpose of the new standards team is to collaborate with school leaders to continuously improve the quality of education and standards of the schools spanning both primary and secondary."

Leanne Barker, a former executive headteacher whose previous role was BCCET's senior school improvement lead, adds: "We all have specialities in different areas and will work together to support both primary and secondary schools across the Trust to



L-R: Glenn Sanderson, Francesca Caik, Leanne Barker and Kathryn Fenwick, Chief Standards Officers

ensure there is continuity from Early Years to Key Stage 5. If we have continuity in how we teach and assess children, then students will rise and be able to achieve even better outcomes.”

Fran Craik, former executive headteacher of St Wilfrid's RC College, South Shields, adds: “We firmly believe that sharing best practice, collective goals and collaboration will foster positive change and continuous improvement.”

The standards team regularly visits the 30 schools to speak to senior leadership teams and their input has been welcomed by senior leaders.

Lisa Ashton, executive headteacher of Our Lady of the Rosary Catholic Primary, Shotton, and St Joseph's Catholic Primary, Blackhall, says: “Our CSOs have been a tremendous support across both schools and have collaborated closely with us to ensure that there has been continuous improvement across our federation. Leaders and all staff value our CSO, who is a great listening ear to offer advice.”

Eve Alderson, headteacher of St Matthew's Catholic Primary, Jarrow, adds: “The support we have received from our CSOs is instrumental in helping us to continuously improve so that all our pupils receive the best education possible. The visits are always incredibly supportive, providing challenge, whilst also celebrating successes.”

Each school will retain its uniqueness but benefit from the “wealth of knowledge” across the different schools.

Glenn says: “One huge positive – and the power of being in a Trust – is we are working together on the data and data insights, financial and HR support so headteachers can focus on their jobs of running their own schools.”

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is one of the focuses of the team. “The whole country is in a recruitment crisis,” says Glenn.

“We want BCCET to be an employer of choice. With the right staff development, we can achieve that. We also want to be families’ first choice for their child’s education. Our schools span areas of high deprivation and more affluent areas, and we want families to know that whichever school they go to within the Trust, pupils will have the best possible high-quality educational experience and be supported to be the best version of themselves.

“We spend a lot of time talking to children and young people, as they are at the centre of all that we do so it is important that pupils’ voices are heard.”

For more information about BCCET, visit www.bccet.org.uk

Rising Star

Northern Insight talks to **Rose Underwood** from NECA who has recently won at the The Edge Apprentice of the Year awards.

What were your career ambitions growing up?

When I was younger, I wanted to be in a role that helped people, and I am so fortunate to know I get to do this in my role at NECA.

Tell us about your current role?

I currently work as a business support apprentice; this has been a very varied role which has really helped me gain knowledge and experience. NECA have supported me with my apprenticeship throughout so I can balance my day with gaining vital work experience and still completing my qualification.

How did you feel about winning one of The Edge Apprentice of the Year awards?

I felt so grateful to win the award and it was so nice to celebrate it with my colleagues.

What are you currently working on?

I am currently working on passing my driving test.

Tell us about the team you work with?

I work in the administrative team at headquarters, it has been great to learn alongside them. The great thing about all the staff at NECA is that we are all part of the same team and are happy to help one another.



What is the best piece of career advice you have been given so far?

The best piece of advice I was given was "Love what you do, and you'll never work a day in your life"

What has been your biggest challenge?

My biggest challenge is self-confidence, this has been something I have been working on throughout my time at NECA and I can say this has been helped by those around me to believe that I can achieve whatever I put my mind to.

Who are your heroes and mentors?

My heroes are my family. My mum, dad and two brother's support has been essential

throughout everything I have done, and I wouldn't be in the position I am now without them.

How do you unwind outside of work?

I love spending time with my friends outside of work, whether it is the gym, a walk or going for food in Newcastle. It is my favourite way to unwind.

Where do you see yourself in five years time?

I would love to continue developing my career in administration, but I have always been keen to travel the world.

Favourite film?

My favourite film is *Mrs Doubtfire*.



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Newcastle Theatre Royal and Michael Harrison team up to offer free theatre trips for school children

More than 5,000 schoolchildren from across the North East will have the opportunity to be the first in the world to see a brand new musical thanks to an exciting new collaboration between Wallsend-born theatre producer Michael Harrison and Newcastle Theatre Royal.

Michael, widely considered as one of the industry's leading theatre producers with credits including *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* and *Starlight Express*, has a long association with the iconic Grey Street venue and has chosen his hometown theatre for the world premiere of his newest venture, *Weird* (Wed 28 – Sat 31 Jan 2026), an electrifying pop-powered musical reimagining Shakespeare's classic tragedy *Macbeth*.

Telling the dramatic tale of the Scottish king through the eyes of the three witches, *Weird* – written by Nick Butcher (*The Little Big Things*), and siblings Kerri Watt and Fraser Watt – will combine witchcraft, mischief, mayhem with a soundtrack of newly created pop anthems, when the production hits the stage at Newcastle Theatre Royal in January 2026.

As part of an initiative to provide more pathways for young people to be able to access live theatre, Newcastle Theatre Royal has joined forces with Michael Harrison to pledge that the first five weekday performances will be earmarked for schoolchildren from across the region with ticket prices waived to enable them to see the new musical free of charge. The initiative will also provide the pupils – from Year 5 and above – with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to see a world premiere on their doorstep, inspiring them and instilling a love of theatre, culture and live performance from an early age.



Blyth Media Day inspires young filmmakers

Following the success of last year's Media Day for young people, Blyth Town Council once again hosted an engaging and educational session, providing hands-on experience in acting and behind-the-scenes filmmaking.

The event was organised in collaboration with Act 2 Cam, a performing arts school that encourages young people to explore creativity through drama, art, and filmmaking. This initiative aimed to offer an immersive experience in film production, culminating in the creation of a short film by the end of the day.

While some participants had prior drama experience, the event catered to both aspiring actors and those interested in technical aspects such as directing, producing, and operating filming equipment. Attendees not only performed in front of the camera but also gained valuable insights into the intricate processes of filmmaking, from conceptualising storylines to managing camera work. As a free half-term activity, Blyth Media Day provided an enjoyable and productive experience for the 50 young participants. Hosted at the Phoenix Theatre in Blyth, the event fostered a warm and creative environment for children to develop their storytelling skills.

Julie Summers from Blyth Town Council said: "The Blyth Media Day was more than just acting—it was about fostering a wide range of talents. From clapperboard handlers to camera and boom operators, there was a role for everyone".

Sunday for Sammy's anthem of NE talent

The Sunday for Sammy Trust is marking 25 years of championing creative and performing artists in the North East. As part of the celebrations, local musician Joe Allan, who has received grants from the Trust, has written and performed a song that embodies its mission of empowering and supporting aspiring artists in the region.

Performing under the name Ernie, Joe explains his artist moniker: "The name Ernie found me—my middle name is Ernest after my grandad, and there have been lots of Ernie's in my life, from my family to even a deli where I worked."

Joe recorded the track at Blank Studios in Newcastle, collaborating with producer Josh Ingledew and fellow artist Imogen Williams, lead vocalist of Imogen and the Knife, another recipient of the Sunday for Sammy Trust's support. Their song, *Carrying the Weight Around*, addresses the challenges of breaking into the creative industries, particularly from the North East, and encourages perseverance in the face of adversity.



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Gosforth Civic Theatre supports local SME Network

A much loved theatre venue in the North East is levelling up its commitment to local businesses through a series of initiatives.

Gosforth Civic Theatre aims to work closely with the local business community in 2025 through a series of events and corporate offerings.

First opened in 2016 by Liberdade Community Development Trust, Gosforth Civic Theatre has played host to a range of B2B events alongside its regular programming, and offers a wide range of options for local businesses to get involved and support its work.

The impressive venue, which incorporates stages, communal areas and a cafe, is available for corporate hire, while businesses are also able to sponsor events, volunteer projects and equipment, and become a corporate partner.

Most recently, the venue has been the location for new networking events by Gosforth Business Network, led by entrepreneur and Uniquethinking founder Sam Hook.

Sam, who works with business owners and entrepreneurs from across Newcastle



The latest Gosforth Business Network event at Gosforth Civic Theatre on Friday 21st February

and North Tyneside, commented: "I chose to host the Gosforth Business Network at Gosforth Civic Theatre because it's such an integral part of the local community which I live and work in, and supports a wide range of groups and initiatives.

"The team at the theatre is fantastic to work with, and with their excellent facilities and room hire options for businesses, this partnership is a real win-win."

Rob Huggins, founder of Liberdade and Gosforth Civic Theatre, said: "Gosforth Civic Theatre is passionate about forging links with other organisations, working in a reciprocal way to support the local community as it supports us.

"The support of local businesses enable us to deliver some fantastic initiatives, while the theatre, which has undergone a £2.5m transformation in recent years, is the ideal setting for a wide range of corporate and business events."

"I would urge any local or regional businesses looking for ways to support the arts and social change to get in touch and see how we can work together."

To learn more about how Gosforth Civic Theatre can work with local businesses, go to www.gosforthcivictheatre.co.uk/support-us.

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Hamilton: A revolutionary moment in theatre hits Sunderland Empire's Stage.

The Olivier, Tony, Grammy and Pulitzer Prize-winning musical is set to make its highly anticipated debut at Sunderland Empire from Tuesday 17 June.

The groundbreaking production focuses on the life of Alexander Hamilton, one of the Founding Fathers of the USA and brings his story to life through the powerful music of Lin-Manuel Miranda.

The incredible soundtrack blends a range of genres like hip-hop, R&B, and pop to create something totally unique that propels history to the modern day. The musical follows Hamilton's rise from a

poor immigrant to a key figure in the American Revolution and the formation of the U.S. government, all while highlighting the personal and political struggles that shaped his life. The fast-paced, emotionally charged performance style, combined with a diverse cast and contemporary music, has redefined what a musical can be.

A show of this calibre touring to the region is a huge opportunity: for the local community, the broader cultural landscape and the local economy. Over 80,000 visitors will be coming to Sunderland City Centre to enjoy the show bringing with them a local economic value of around £3 million.

"We are absolutely thrilled to bring Hamilton to the North East, marking a truly significant moment for the city and the entire region" says Marie Nixon, Theatre Director at Sunderland Empire.

"This world-renowned production will not only captivate audiences, but in bringing tens of thousands of visitors to the theatre it will also drive high-quality tourism and enhance Sunderland's night-time economic activity, benefiting local businesses and our vibrant cultural landscape. Hamilton is one of the most significant and celebrated shows of our time, and we are confident it will leave a lasting impression on all who experience it.

To ensure an unforgettable evening, we've also upgraded our hospitality offerings, providing more opportunities than ever to eat, drink, and socialise with friends before

the show. This is a milestone event, and we can't wait for everyone to be part of it!"

After debuting on Broadway in 2015 and transferring to London's West End in 2017, the show is now touring the UK. The show's arrival at Sunderland Empire presents a unique opportunity for local businesses to be in the room where it happens with great sponsorship opportunities that showcase your company to thousands of theatre lovers from the wider region all while treating clients to undeniably one of the most influential and exciting musicals of our time.

With so much anticipation for a six week Summer run, local fans may not realise that the production has links to our very own Wearside history. 'Founding Father' of the United States, and the country's first president, George Washington has his ancestral home at Washington Old Hall. Five generations of his direct descendants lived in the region, and Washington DC, was named in his honour – directly linking Washington Wearside to the nation's Capital.

In addition to the performances, there will be various outreach programs and community events aimed at engaging the local audience with the musical's themes and history. Schools and local groups are also likely to benefit from initiatives that bring the story of Alexander Hamilton and his contemporaries to life in a way that is relevant and engaging for modern audiences.

This tour is so much more than a debut to the region, it is a celebration of history, diversity, music, dance and culture. A captivating story, strong performances, musical theatre at its very finest. You do not want to throw away your shot, secure your tickets today!

Corporate packages available, please contact:
PaulaMitchell@atgentertainment.com
for more information.





Creative Learnings Fantastic Journey

Recently audiences enjoyed a fabulous evening at Sunderland Empire to experience firsthand the incredible work that their Charity achieves throughout the year joining their Creative Learning groups for a fantastical journey through fairy tales, from musical theatre to pop music and brand new plays.

These community projects, activities and experiences enhance the region's cultural life, providing enriching and educational opportunities that engage, accommodate and empower people of all abilities, ages, genders, races and socio-economic backgrounds.

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



Places to go...Ghent



The Eurostar service from St Pancras, just across the road from King's Cross where trains from the North East arrive, has not entirely recovered from the pandemic. No trains stop at Ebbsfleet or Ashford in Kent but that is no problem for the traveller from this region.

Trains are almost exclusively to Paris (notwithstanding WW2 bombs found by the track bed), and Brussels. Add a couple to Amsterdam, but nothing to the south of France anymore. Yet I had a trouble-free journey to Ghent in Belgium (pop 273,000) with a single change at Brussels' central Midi station, courtesy of Eurostar and Visit Flanders. You need two or three nights to do justice to this fascinating and well-preserved city. Fast trains from Brussels arrive at the Station Gent-Sint-Pieters from which point a tram will take you to the City Centre. A day ticket covering the four tram lines and additional bus lines costs only 7.50 euros, which saves using taxis.

I stayed at the Marriott Bonvoy hotel which was very comfortable and with a superb view across the river to the City Centre. Passenger boats ply up and down to give a good view of the city, both by day and night. It's a very walkable city and the maps and Official City Guide from the tourist office help you to navigate the streets and alleyways.

I enjoyed the sense of discovery, and in this region of destruction in the First World War it was good to see, in English, a window on the marketplace with the lettering "no soft smart fragile tender human tissue should ever be ripped apart because we differ." If urban graffiti is of interest, you will like any of the four graffiti streets where anyone is allowed to spray or paint their own improvements to the existing graffiti. Conceived as a temporary project during the 1995 Ghent festivities, the alley called Werregarenstraat serves as a dynamic sketchbook. Tags and pieces change daily, and the rule of the spray can is to simply respect works that are better than yours.

With more time I would have gone to the Museum of Industry at Minnemeers 10. It's the home of an original "Mule Jenny", which was smuggled out of England piece by piece. This English invention should not have been exported, but its arrival in Ghent earned the city its nickname as the "Manchester of the European mainland".

Another of the many attractions is the Design Museum which is presently being reconstructed before reopening in 2026. But that's only one of 64 attractions in the City Guide, of which the most important is St. Bavo's Cathedral, which is home of the Mystic

Lamb painting in several parts by Jan Van Eyck, completed in 1432. A virtual reality headset enables you to explore the crypt of the Cathedral and its history, before you get to see the real painting, amazingly colourful for its age. The painting has had an eventful history, and the Cathedral itself is vast and impressive, dedicated to St. John the Baptist.

Double decker trains run between Ghent and Brussels, with several carriages designated first class on the top deck, and you immigrate into the UK at the Eurostar terminal before leaving Brussels, once more getting a stamp in your passport which never happened when we were in the EU. I found the Belgians very welcoming and pleased to see visitors in a working city which has plenty to enthrall the visitor without being full of tourists.

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Alexander at his Gallery in Newcastle

Photo: The Bigger Picture Agency

Artist Alexander Millar embraces the Gadgie life

After decades of success as one of the UK's most beloved artists, Alexander Millar the creator of the Gadgie character – is embarking on a new chapter in his life.

This summer, Alex will be closing his Newcastle Gallery on Grey Street as he takes a step back from the hectic, daily business of gallery life. However, this is far from a farewell; rather, it is an evolution, as he embraces the true spirit of the Gadgie and shifts his focus towards new artistic adventures.

While the Newcastle Gallery will close when the lease ends in July, Alexander's presence in the art world remains strong. The Glasgow Gallery will continue to operate, a fitting decision given his Scottish roots and the long-established connection that his art has in that city. Additionally, he will remain highly active through online sales and exhibitions, ensuring that fans and collectors still have access to his work. "I'm not retiring – I'm just slowing down a little," Alexander shares. "The Newcastle

Gallery has been an incredible part of my journey, but this change allows me to focus more on painting, spending time in Glasgow, and continuing to connect with people through pop-up exhibitions and online."

Over the years, Alex's work has captured the heart and soul of Newcastle and beyond. The Gadgie has become an iconic representation of everyday life in the region, resonating deeply with those who see themselves and their families reflected in the characters he paints.

"The city has given me so much," he reflects. "Newcastle has been my adopted home, and the people here have embraced me in a way I'll always be grateful for. This isn't the end – I'll still be around, popping up for events, exhibitions, and, of course, enjoying a coffee in my favourite haunts."

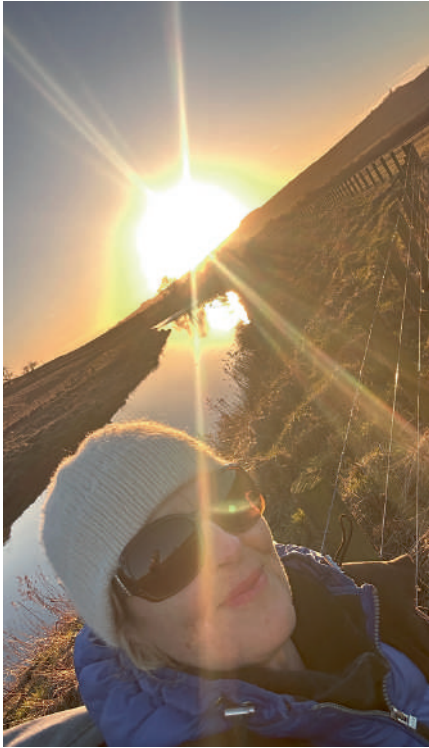
To mark this transition, Alexander intends to have a series of future pop-up events, ensuring that fans can still engage with his work in person.

Additionally, a "semi-retirement" sale is taking place starting on 15th March, giving collectors a final opportunity to acquire artwork from the gallery and view his full collection in its entirety before the Newcastle location closes. Indeed, now his work is more accessible than ever through his website and Alexander has seen a steady rise in the number of online sales.

"We live in an online world and the technology is there to connect with people all over the globe. Although I'm looking forward to spending time travelling and painting subjects based on my experiences at new locations, you'll never take Newcastle or Glasgow away from my soul. It's in my heart.

"I want this shift in my work ethic to be a celebration of everything we've built over the years," he says. "This is about embracing the next phase – becoming a Gadgie myself and enjoying the creative freedom that comes with it."

www.alexandermillar.com



Spring eternal

By Mary Ann Rogers.

Spring sprang then retreated here in West Woodburn, but progress is relentless. Snowdrops carpet the woody places, and daffodils suddenly burst into colour.

Here at Leam Cottage, we have quite a range of varieties, but my favourite is the understated, wild daffodil with its paler outer petals. They still put the sturdy, bright yellow more cultivated varieties in the shade as far as I'm concerned.

We have a flock of sneaky hen pheasants who turn up out of nowhere every morning to pinch the guinea fowl feed, and now the cock pheasants are on the scene, parading around, fighting and showing off generally to the ladies. Our rookery is a hive of activity, with a flurry of mating, nest building and general flirting going on. I've been making quick paintings of them directly outside the studio window – speed is of the essence!



Up on the hill, hares are being spotted more often than during the colder months, and we hope to see leverets again lying tight in the place where their mother has left them while she goes off to feed on new grass. Some years we have been lucky enough to have leverets in the garden, very close to the house, where they can be observed hopping about, washing and eating without disturbing them.

It's been a wonderful quiet start to the year, plenty of time for watching the wildlife and painting. The estate on the opposite side of the river to us has introduced a range of measures to increase the waterfowl, including digging out 'scrapes' which are really just shallow ponds which fill during floods and remain unless the weather gets very dry. A new feature has recently been created- an ancient river oxbow which was cut off long ago, has had water access channels dug through, so that when the river floods these will also fill with water, making further habitat for all sorts of wildlife and waterfowl. Our daily river walks have become a great deal more interesting, now that we see many varieties of duck, as well as geese, oystercatchers, herons and even an egret.

Huge excitement recently when a beaver was spotted on the river Rede near Otterburn. We went up to the spot, and searched along the river bank, finding much evidence of beavers- trees which had been completely felled and clear signs of beaver munch marks. It turned out that this particular beaver had escaped from an enclosure some miles away. Steve was recaptured and taken to a new location in Dorset, so I don't think we will see

him again. The releasing of beavers into the environment is quite contentious, with the 'pro' camp in favour of the increased biodiversity their activities create, also the slowing down of floods further downstream. The 'antis' fear mass destruction of trees, and problems created by constant dam building. We shall see.

It has been about two years since we saw otters on the nearby stretch of river, which is disappointing, but we always look out for them, one day maybe!

Now that the weather is less wintry, we are welcoming more visitors to the gallery. This seems to be the time of year when people think about a new look for their homes, and what could be better than a new painting or print? Our fabulous daffodil lined drive is just the most spectacular welcome at this time of year!

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Cherries on Fire: A little sweet, a whole lot of heat

Nestled in the West End of Newcastle City Centre sits the John Marley Centre; an intimate creative hub for the unique, the innovative, and the artistic.

What was built as a Secondary Modern in 1938, became Newcastle college's West End campus in 1994 until 2013, and later post-COVID lockdown found a new lease of life after being embraced by the creatives and cultural organisations who had been displaced by the Pilgrim's Quarter development.

Sitting amongst a diverse range of talent and artistry is Cherries on Fire - a bold and boundary-pushing photographer whose thought-provoking images challenge conventional ideas of beauty, sexuality, and representation, whilst exploring the intersectionality of diversity and identity.

Cherries, also more formally known as Michael McGuire, uses his photography studio to demonstrate a commitment to both authenticity and unadulterated self-expression. Whilst Cherries' portfolio is sleek, artistic, and sensual; delving deeper into the expressionism, reveals a portfolio dedicated to storytelling, provoking



Michael McGuire

emotion, developing discourse, and affirming the right to live unapologetically. Each image embraces fluidity, self-love, and implores the viewer to question the paradigms of beauty that have become the set standard.

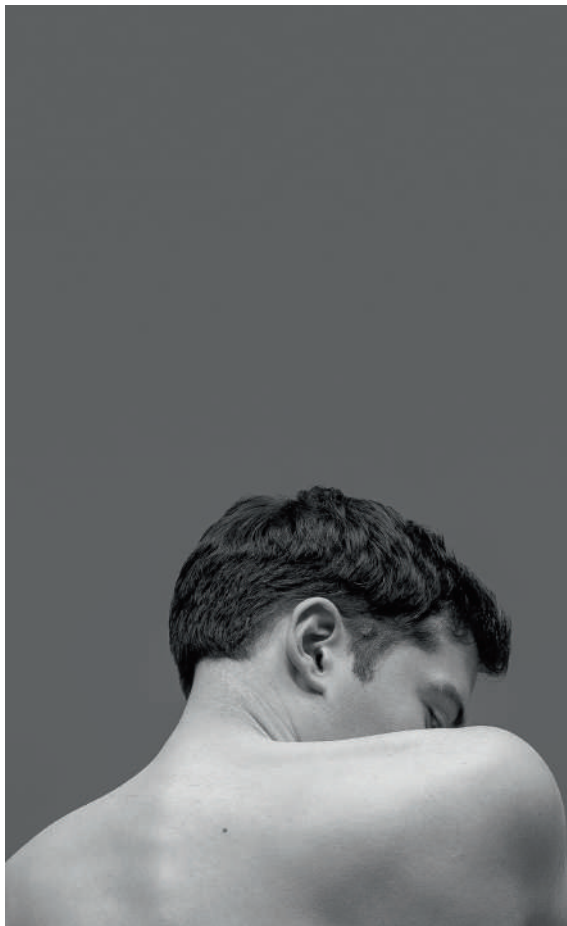
Cherries on Fire creates a nuanced perspective on what beauty means. The traditional representation of beauty in photography (and many other creative spaces), are shaped by heteronormative ideals - white, athletic build, perfect hair, perfect teeth, perfect skin - but this ideal of beauty often sidelines minority experiences. Cherries dismantles this outdated narrative by showcasing beauty in all its diverse forms. The imagery works to reject the notion that beauty, sensuality, and self-expression belong to only a select few. Instead, Cherries embrace all bodies, all sizes, all colours, all identities, all experiences - reinforcing the idea that the concepts of attractiveness, beauty, and desirability are just as diverse as the bodies in front of the camera.

Beyond aesthetics, Cherries' work serves as a form of modern-day activism. By providing a safe space to marginalized voices, Cherries' photography fosters conversations about self-worth, acceptance, and the importance of diverse representation in art. In a world that often pressures individuals to conform, this work acts as a reminder that authenticity is a powerful act of defiance against a society that enforces a particular status quo - an act that is becoming more important in a world that's slowly tilting towards an intolerance of the alternative.

Cherries on Fire's artistic approach is deeply rooted in a passion for storytelling and a commitment to not only challenging barriers and boundaries, but breaking them down. Their work inspires people to challenge their own perceptions of identity and beauty. Each photograph serves as an invitation to see beauty in places where it has often been overlooked and to celebrate the freedom of self-expression in all its vibrant glory.

Through their art, Cherries encourages audiences to embrace their individuality, question outdated norms, and recognize that beauty exists in infinite forms, beyond societal limitations. Ultimately, Cherries on Fire's photography is more than just visually striking - it is a statement, a celebration, and a revolution in the way we perceive ourselves and each other.

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Pure Padel confirms first North East indoor club

Manchester-headquartered progressive padel operator - Pure Padel - has confirmed it is to launch its debut North East club in Darlington, taking it to a three club business. The plans - the club's first to be revealed for 2025 - have been confirmed for a state-of-the-art seven court indoor set up, which is due to officially open in May 2025.

Based in a former DIY store on popular Darlington Retail Park, owned by Adderstone Group, the warehouse unit is currently undertaking a full refit to transform it into a stylish and sporty padel club, ready to welcome fans of this fashionable and accessible sport.

The new premium venue will offer seven panoramic padel courts, a pro-padel shop, a bistro-style café and bar, a heated sports lounge, fully equipped changing rooms with showers, plus access to expert coaches. Free onsite parking and wifi will also be available to customers.

The announcement follows Pure Padel's successful launch of Manchester's premier indoor padel club last September at its club on Dutton Street, as well as a club at Alderley Park, which it launched in October 2023. Moving the racket sport indoors eradicates the need for dry and calm weather and allows players to continue with their plans totally undisturbed by the elements.

With accessibility at its core, matches will be on a 'pay to play' basis allowing players of all abilities to book and play via the Playtomic app from 6am right through to 10pm. The app enables first timer or solo players to find and play with others of a similar level and matches them accordingly for an enjoyable and fair game. With no member fees, Pure Padel enables players to play as much or as little as they choose without the constraints of the traditional sports club model.

Pure Padel has demonstrated its success and ambition through its more than 13,000 players and status as the first padel club in the North West to operate multi-site facilities. The ambitious business has plans to build another 30 padel clubs in the UK over the next five years, with five currently in planning and a further 15 in the pipeline.

The Midlands and South West London are among the business' target regions, as well as further expansion across its home county of Cheshire. Meanwhile, planning permission has been logged for a second site in the North East, in Gosforth.



STACK to open four new venues in 2025

The success of a leading North East-based leisure company is set to continue this year, with plans to open four new venues.

STACK - which creates food and entertainment hubs by using repurposed shipping containers or giving new life to redundant buildings - had a highly successful 2024, with the opening of three new sites.

And that is set to be topped in 2025, with the company confirming that another four of its sites will open in the next 12 months. The highly anticipated flagship site at the historic Worswick Chambers remains on track to open in late spring as STACK Newcastle.

This will be followed in the summer by STACK Bishop Auckland, a purpose-built two storey building with a roof terrace at Newgate Street, with STACK Durham due to open in the autumn in the city's former Marks & Spencer store.

STACK Whitley Bay - housed in the former Empress Ballroom - is also scheduled to open in the winter.

Neill Winch, CEO of STACK, confirmed that alongside these projects, progress is also being made on several other sites across the country.

"We are at varying stages with our sites in Sheffield, Leeds, Carlisle, Wigan, Northampton, and Manchester, but we are making great progress with all of them," he said.

Plans also include developing a second phase at STACK Seaburn in Sunderland, with planning applications now going through the official process. This continued growth follows the success of the three STACK venues that launched last year.

STACK Lincoln, which opened in May, completely reimaged the former Argos store in the city centre, transforming it into a lively destination featuring 10 street food outlets and five bars, a roof terrace and a coffee shop, with a central plaza and stage. Along with SIDESHOW, STACK's competitive socialising brand.

In August the highly anticipated St. James' STACK presented by Sela, opened its doors, a leisure hub and fanzone jointly created by STACK and Newcastle United Football Club. The 2,000 plus capacity venue - made out of more than 50 shipping containers - brought together 11 street food vendors and six bars and became the hottest ticket in town from day one.

The demand was such that food operators had to recruit more staff almost immediately and it has now firmly established itself as one of the city's go-to places, for football fans, local people and visitors to the city.

Closing out the year, STACK Middlesbrough launched in December, transforming the underpass beneath the A66 into a vibrant hub with five street food outlets, three bars and STACK's signature programme of top-tier live entertainment.



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In Conversation With....

Nola Collinson

Director of Sales at Staybridge Suites, Newcastle.

What were your career ambitions growing up?

I was never ambitious when I was younger. So, I started life as a beauty therapist, at Ponteland Health and Beauty, I then went to Ivy Court, where I was lucky enough to be trained by of Lesley Aitken who helped me understand the world of sales. It wasn't until I met Neal Crocker, who took me under his wing at Thistle Middlesbrough. His mentoring and coaching allowed me to develop my skills for all things hotels, this is when I got the drive to focus on a career.

Tell us about your current role.

I am lucky enough to work at Staybridge Suites Newcastle, out of all the four and five star hotels I have worked at, I never thought of Staybridge Suites was any competition. One day, Lisa, my General Manager, gave me the opportunity to join the team, I can honestly say it's the best hotel I have worked at. I have been here nearly seven years; this is the longest period I have been in any role.

At Staybridge Suites Newcastle, I look after our corporate accounts implementing rates for accommodation. I collaborate with Lisa and our commercial team to create a strategy for the year that works for our hotel and the current market climate. Building relationships with our local community and the wider community creating awareness of Staybridge Suites Newcastle and Newcastle itself to our feeder markets and industry segments.

As the concept of Staybridge Suites is starting to be high on the list of companies sustainable and wellbeing agenda, having the advantage of living space and kitchen facilities in our suites, I have a broad scope of industry segmentation we work closely with.

What is your proudest business achievement?

I think one of my most rewarding achievements was being part of the team in North East Hotel's Association. Engaging with local companies who contribute and support North East Hotels Association and our annual Excellence Awards.

To be able to recognise, highlight and celebrate overachievers in our industry is a great opportunity for everyone. To be part of the awards, knowing I was a very small cog in a big wheel that made it happen, is a great achievement for me.

How has your industry changed in the last decade?

Hotels are always changing, people's taste change so inevitably so does the decor and the facilities we provide.

We are moving into a new era now, where our guest's identity and requirements are the focus for any stay. This has always been the case in a human context, but we are now starting to deliver this with new technology, building on data from industry and social platforms, to create the appropriate environment for a guest's arrival.

I am not scared of technology for our industry as I feel it will create more time for us to be engaging with our guests, our team members and building stronger relationships throughout our hotels and our communities. It's an interesting time for hotels.

What are you currently working on?

I am doing a part time course at Newcastle University in Level 7 Senior Leadership. It's a great opportunity to become a leader for the future, the world is changing and so should our leadership practice. Lisa, my General Manager, has been extremely supportive giving me the opportunity to be part of the cohort and implement some of my learning from the course into Staybridge Suites Newcastle.

Tell us about the team you work with.

Where do I start, family, friendly, just read our TripAdvisor reviews to see how great our team are. We have been number 1 on TripAdvisor for several years and there is a reason for that, not only are they all extremely friendly but they are also genuinely caring and considerate. I am very fortunate to be around such great people every day. I never get the Monday blues!

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

Any best practice I have been given has come from Neal Crocker, my mentor, all these years have passed since I have worked with him (I'm not going to name how many) and still I use the skills he taught me. Its about understanding business, delving deeper, asking questions and actively listening..... Engaging with all stakeholders.

Who are your heroes inside and outside of business?

Obviously my General Manager, Lisa. She has the trust in what we do as a team and lets us try out new things, even if the strategy doesn't work at least we have dared to be different.

Outside of business, David Attenborough, to have a one to one with him for a couple of hours would be so interesting and inspirational.

How do you unwind outside of work?

I am lucky enough to say I have an amazing group of friends around me, years of listening to my life's woes... and they are still there! Our catch ups I am happy to say are not as much alcohol orientated these days, either going out for walks, lunches or a gig, life would be very dull and stressful without them.

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“

*...where our
guest's identity
and requirements
are the focus for
any stay...*

Nola Collinson

Diary of a Hotel GM

We are delighted to introduce a new monthly feature from experienced Hotelier Jeff Hodgson looking at the latest news from the magnificent Lumley Castle

What's been happening at Lumley Castle?

As always, we take great pride in celebrating our employees. This past month, we were thrilled to award Keith Stephenson, our Assistant C&B Manager, the title of Employee of the Year! Keith was overwhelmingly voted for by his colleagues, a testament to his dedication, experience, and mentorship of the wider team. Congratulations, Keith!

We have also continued our support for The Fells, Changing Lives—a fantastic facility just outside Chester-le-Street that assists men facing homelessness. Our team has exciting plans to further support both residents and providers in the coming months, including the creation of more usable outdoor spaces and cookery classes led by our Head Chef, Thomas Knott.

We also participated in Wear Red for a Day to support the Red Sky Foundation. The team donned and crafted special, red-themed cocktails, with the Castle donating £1.00 for every cocktail purchased.

A special milestone was also celebrated this month—our talented gardener, Brian Batey, turned 60! Brian has been with Lumley Castle for an impressive 22 years and continues to win awards for his outstanding work on the Castle's grounds and gardens. Happy Birthday, Brian!

Looking ahead: Exciting times at Lumley!

This month, we are delighted to welcome back our long-standing client, Tabletop Vacations. Twice a year, they bring guests from around the world to experience the



Jeff Hodgson

magic of playing Dungeons & Dragons in a Castle! It's always a pleasure to host this unique event, and we are honoured to be their first UK destination.

The Castle, as a historic property dating back to 1389, requires continuous care and upkeep. Under the guidance of Lord and Lady Scarbrough, we—its caretakers—strive to maintain the balance between preserving its rich history and meeting the modern expectations of today's travelers. Recently, we completed a soft refurbishment of our function spaces, updating carpets and curtains, with even more improvements planned for the near future.

Exciting News!

We are thrilled to announce that a Tipi is coming to Lumley Castle from 4th July to 15th August! This will be a fantastic opportunity for those looking to host weddings, corporate events, and special celebrations in a truly unique setting. More details will be shared in next month's article—stay tuned!

That's all for now, but we look forward to sharing more updates with you next month. Thank you for your continued support, and we hope to welcome you to Lumley Castle soon!

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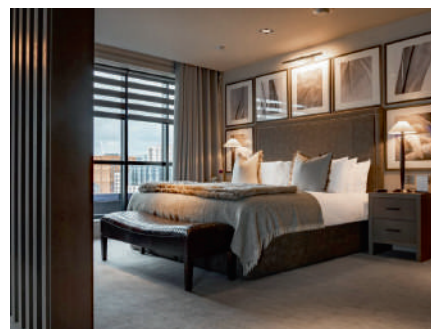
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Dakota Hotel now open in Newcastle

Award-winning boutique hotel group Dakota opens in Newcastle, marking the arrival of the sixth property in the Dakota portfolio.



Perfectly situated on St. Ann's Wharf, overlooking the riverside promenade, Dakota offers a first class service complete with atmospheric spaces, luxurious finishing touches and stunning views of the Quayside.

With 118 beautifully appointed guest rooms and sophisticated suites, decorated in soothing, muted tones, the hotel offers an elegant stay for visitors. Dakota offers 8 room types including; Classic Double Room, Classic King Room, Junior Suite, Signature Suite, Executive Suite, Deluxe Suite, and Newcastle's premier suite—the Grand Deluxe — redefining luxury as the city's largest and most opulent accommodation. This two-bedroom suite exudes sophistication, featuring a fireplace, steam shower, roll-top bath, elegant lounge, and a huge dedicated dressing-room area. In addition, a selection of Classic King Rooms offer stunning archway views across the River Tyne, allowing guests to soak up Newcastle's vibrant atmosphere. All rooms include crisp cotton linen and sumptuously soft bedding, an ensuite bathroom with rainfall shower and luxury toiletries, Apple TV with streaming apps and Sky Sports package (including complimentary high speed WiFi), a hairdryer, iron & ironing board and an in-room safe.

At the heart of the hotel lies The Grill, a refined dining destination where sleek

décor, impeccable service, and a menu of timeless classics come together. Showcasing the finest seasonal ingredients, The Grill's specialty is its prime cut steak—grass-fed, 35-day-aged beef, lightly seasoned and perfectly cooked over hot coals. Guests can also indulge in fresh seafood, hearty Sunday roasts, and decadent desserts, all crafted to elevate the dining experience.

The hotel's Bar offers a stylish and vibrant setting for coffee catchups, business meetings, or date-night drinks. With plush seating, mood lighting, and a thoughtfully curated cocktail menu, it's the perfect spot to unwind. Adding to the allure, Dakota boasts an elegant Champagne Room, an intimate space for gatherings, and a Cigar Terrace, where a humidor and a selection of the finest cigars create a sophisticated alfresco retreat.

Designed to cater to business needs, Dakota features a selection of versatile meeting spaces, accommodating groups from six to 60 guests. These include two Private Dining Rooms (8 guests), the Boardroom (10), the Champagne Room (20), the Library (30), and the Meeting Room (60). The Library, in particular, provides a striking backdrop for corporate functions and private celebrations, offering an inspiring and distinctive setting for any event.

Commenting on the opening, Mark

Spanton, General Manager of Dakota Newcastle commented "We're incredibly proud to bring this new hotel to Newcastle and can't wait to show guests visiting the North East the luxury hospitality that Dakota is renowned for. With its breathtaking views of the River Tyne, Newcastle's iconic Quayside is the perfect backdrop for this sophisticated and stylish new property."

Please visit www.dakotahotels.co.uk/newcastle to make a booking.

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*...I fell in love
with hospitality
and never
looked back...*

Mark Spanton

Meet the GM

Northern Insight talks to...

Mark Spanton

General Manager, Dakota Newcastle

What were your career ambitions growing up?

Originally, I wanted to be a football coach – I studied Sports Development with Coaching at University. During the summers, I'd work full time at Cranage Hall, and fell in love with hospitality – never looked back.

Tell us about your current role.

My role is General Manager of Dakota Newcastle, having previously been General Manager of Dakota Leeds, and Deputy General Manager in Dakota Manchester. What's different – and exciting! – about my role in Newcastle is I'm overseeing the opening of the hotel from start to finish.

I'm incredibly hands-on with a much wider facet of Dakota than previous positions: architects, interior designers, site managers. It's been eye-opening, as I'm not just a hotelier for this property – I'm dealing with different stakeholders and managing people across a broad range of industries related to the build and design.

What is your proudest business achievement?

I have recently been awarded a prestigious Master innholders scholarship – granted by The Worshipful Company of Innholders, the Lord Forte Foundation, the Master Innholders Charitable Trust and the Savoy Educational Trust. I'm incredibly proud to have been granted such an incredible opportunity; I travel to Ithica in June 2025 take part in the General Managers Programme at Cornell University.

How has your industry changed in the last decade?

Covid, and the resulting cost of living crisis, has had a massive impact. From a team side – it's made me focus even more on ensuring my team are motivated and supported; I try and create an environment they can thrive in.

From a guest perspective, I'm even more determined to make every stay as special as possible. My hotel and team should help make memories, creating moments of theatre. When guests travel now – especially within the luxury hotel space – they deserve an exceptional offering and superb service.

What are you currently working on?

Opening the hotel!

My main priority ahead of opening is fostering great relationships with the team, and seeing where I can help them develop, or offer support. 12 team members have moved to Newcastle from our other hotels, so I'm dedicated to making them feel valued.

Tell us about the team you work with.

It's a fantastic team and I'm proud to be leading them. It feels like we've all been working together for ages – there's a real togetherness amongst the group.

I've got a superb core team that really understand Dakota's values and ethos – we've also got some great newcomers that are already proving to be invaluable. I've got incredibly strong team members across every department and an outstanding support system in Cameron Chritchley (Hotel Manager) and Chris Turner (Operations Manager).



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

I like how our Managing Director, Andrew Ovenstone, operates – he's focussed on generosity, service, going above and beyond. 'Kill people with kindness': build strong relationships, and create a feeling of loyalty amongst guests.

Take ownership: if something's not right, I'll hold my hands up!

What has been your biggest challenge?

Whilst it's been fairly smooth sailing opening Dakota Newcastle, it's been a new experience for me – I've not opened a property before in my career. You have to be incredibly flexible, as such a large project will be agile and fluid with dates, progress, updates; there's then a ripple effect on the team and wider business. There's lots of moving parts!

Who are your heroes inside and outside of business?

Dakota founder Ken McCulloch, absolutely. Ken had old-school hospitality values and was known for being generous with guests.

Outside of the business, I was very close to my Granddad, who sadly passed away at 98 last year. He used to joke 'Mark works at the Savoy!', as I worked in luxury hospitality – I'm committed to making my family proud.

How do you unwind outside of work?

Being a Dad. I have two young children, so the minute I walk through the door I've put on a different hat!

Running and exercising; I completed a half marathon in 2024, and I'd love to take part in the Great North Run, now I'm based in the North East. I'm also doing 100 mile walk for MIND in August, called the Cheshire Ring Charity Walk.

Favourite Book and Boxset?

Simon Sinek: Leaders Eat Last
Sopranos (or Succession!)

dakotahotels.co.uk



Nice day for a Whitechurch wedding

Exciting news from Whitechurch in Durham- they are expanding into hosting wedding celebrations!

Having successfully tested the waters with private parties and weddings over the last few months to ensure they can offer a five star service, they will be throwing their doors open in Spring to offer newly weds the ultimate place to celebrate their special day.

The heritage of Whitechurch speaks for itself - standing at the heart of the Church Lane crossroads it has long-standing roots in the city's history as an Inn where the local community would gather. Its name pays homage to The White Church that once stood on the very site where the magnificent Cathedral now commands the vista of the city .

With Durham's new registry office a stone's throw away, the team at Whitechurch couldn't resist offering their venue as the ideal place to keep the celebration going for newlyweds.

Whitechurch is the perfect choice for couples seeking a relaxed, intimate wedding reception. With a city-centre location, a welcoming atmosphere, and an unparalleled menu, the team ensure that all celebrations will be both memorable and unique.

Their wedding packages are designed to offer the happy couple an inclusive

experience for those who want a stress-free planning process. For couples seeking more flexibility, their bespoke package allows for personalised additions to create the perfect celebration.

Packages start at £4,995 and include:

- Exclusive use of their tent, bar and restaurant from 4pm.
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- A wedding cake with a choice of two styles made by Jacqueline's Cake Company.
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New bar opens in Newcastle inspired by Northumberland countryside

A Newcastle businesswoman has realised her dream of opening a kitchen bar inspired by her childhood in the Northumberland countryside.

The Barn Door in Heaton combines Tracy Tunn's memories of growing up in Lynemouth, near Morpeth, with her experience of working in hospitality venues in Northumberland from her teenage years onwards.

"Where I grew up, the cornfields and farms were our playground," explained Tracy. "Those memories have stayed with me and I always wanted to create a venue that brings a bit of that lifestyle into the city."

Tracy has transformed a former aesthetics clinic on Chillingham Road in Heaton into a two-storey bar and kitchen serving draught and bottled beers, wine, cocktails, soft drinks, and chicken wings and burgers cooked using air fryers to reduce the amount of fat used.

Floor to ceiling 3D murals of hay bales give the appearance of being inside a barn,

while reclaimed furniture, faux cow hides and farmyard birds and animals complete the look.

"Chillingham Road is definitely on the up, and it's a great community to be a part of," added Tracy, who is running the venue alongside family members including her partner, Permi, as chef and her son, Adam, as bar manager.

"Within a few hundred metres, people can experience craft ales at Elder Beer, fine dining at The Nest, cocktails at Mother Mercy, as well as handmade pizza at Flint Restaurant and fabulous wines at Sobremesa. Now, The Barn Door, with a country music vibe, gives the option of drinks and light meals in a venue that's completely different from anywhere else in Heaton."

The licence for The Barn Door was secured by Sarah Smith, partner at Newcastle-based law firm Sintons, while senior associate Danielle Dale advised on the lease.

"Sintons were recommended to me as the best people to go to for help with licensing. I knew of the firm and its reputation, and the team completely put my mind at ease. I could relax knowing that everything was being looked after," said Tracy.



Tracy Tunn

Sarah Smith added: "Tracy's done an incredible job of creating a space that's welcoming, and the fact that it's all inspired by her own personal memories here in the North East makes it all the more special."

The Barn Door is open six days a week and offers private hire. Find out more on Facebook.

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A flying visit to London

By Stuart Forster

Two men wearing red overalls and crash helmets beckon me to join them in the Perspex-framed chamber. Speaking would be pointless over the howling wind. Leaning through the door, I continue to drop forward into a horizontal position until I feel myself being lifted.

My first indoor skydiving lesson has begun. With arms and legs outstretched, I adopt an uncertain version of Superman's flying pose. Instructors stand either side of me and gently press on my back, preventing me from rising above the height of their shoulders.

Willingly stepping out of a moving aircraft doesn't appeal to me, but indoor skydiving has long been on my bucket list. I'm ticking that box at iFLY, inside The O2 in London.

Enrico, my instructor, is an experienced skydiver who has recorded more than 8,000 jumps. After I've had a handful of goes in beginner mode, he demonstrates human aerobatics.

"In the sky, you have more room. If you can do it here, you can do it in the sky," he explains as I hand in my overalls and helmet after the experience, which has been both thrilling and fun.

With dusk darkening London's sky, I stroll towards the IFS Cloud Cable Car. Five minutes from the arching dome of the O2, it is a way to cross the River Thames. Using my



Oyster card, I tap through the turnstile and climb the stairs towards what must be the capital city's most scenic form of transport.

The car rocks gently while accelerating away from the station and rises over the waterway. Lights speckle the semi-silhouetted London skyline and the skyscrapers of Canary Wharf.

My base for my two-night minibreak in London is the Good Hotel (goodhotel.co), which floats by the Royal Victoria Dock. It's a social enterprise retraining long-term unemployed people for hospitality industry careers. Reasonably priced, it's quiet and close to public transport.

Looking out my window on waking, I spot people swimming in the dock. Wearing brightly coloured swimming hats, they loop green buoys. Dismissing the idea of joining them, I head for a warm shower before breakfast, then into the city on the Elizabeth Line.

At The Postal Museum (postalmuseum.org) in Holborn, I board another train – one formerly used to transport mail below London's streets. Running between Paddington and Whitechapel, the Mail Rail system operated from 1927 to 2003, transporting up to four million letters and parcels a day. Only a short section of track is now open, telling its story as a tourist attraction.

From there, I walk to the recently redeveloped Coal Drops Yard, near King's Cross station. At Lightroom (lightroom.uk), images and videos are projected onto the four walls of the white-walled immersive venue, which reminds me of a sports centre strewn with seating. Narrated by Cate Blanchett, *VOGUE: Inventing the Runway* is the story of how fashion houses showcase collections.



Unashamedly sporting a last-decade look rather than anything fresh from a catwalk, I continue to Covent Garden for a bite to eat before an evening in the West End. *The Lion King* (thelionking.co.uk) has been performed in London at The Lyceum Theatre since 1999 and held its 10,000th show in February 2025. Remarkably, it has also welcomed more than 20 million guests.

"People of all ages can see and enjoy *The Lion King* but what you're going to experience as a kid is very different from what you're going to experience as an adult," says Walt Disney Company's Nick Greatrex when we meet after an performance of the engaging musical that uses puppetry to tell the story of the lion Simba avenging his father's murder.

Realising I could murder a pint before returning to my hotel, I pull out my phone to identify a suitable watering hole near Covent Garden.



Travel information

The visitlondon.com website has information about accommodation, things to do and sells theatre tickets.

Getting there

Lumo (lumo.co.uk) and LNER (lner.co.uk) operate rail services between Newcastle and London.





📍 Nyhavn, Copenhagen

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Flock to the Danish capital, otherwise known as the greenest city in the world, for a true Scandinavian experience this summer. The city is brimming with vibrant culture, cutting-edge design, and a culinary scene to rival the best in the world.

Set sail on a floating hot tub around the harbour and enjoy elevated views of the city's iconic landmarks, from the Little Mermaid to the colourful Nyhavn waterfront. Afterwards, savour the flavours of Copenhagen while al fresco dining by the harbour, where fresh seafood and Nordic delicacies are paired with stunning waterside views.

For a taste of the city's renowned baking culture, stop by artisanal bakeries like Apotek 57, Buka, or Sonny, where flaky pastries and expertly brewed coffee will make every morning a delight.

No visit to Copenhagen is complete without a trip to Tivoli Gardens, the world's second-oldest amusement park, where magical gardens, concerts, captivating ballet and theatre performances, create unforgettable summer memories.

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Feeling drained?

Tiredness and exhaustion are increasingly common in today's fast-paced world.

Often they are linked to your lifestyle choices, mood, and the accumulation of daily stresses. While certain behaviors have always contributed to fatigue, modern life has amplified these pressures, leaving many feeling constantly drained.

Technology has created a society that never sleeps, and we find ourselves rushing through life without taking time to rest. As a result, our behaviors that have always existed become intensified, leading to widespread exhaustion. Some common culprits include:

- Drinking alcohol too frequently or in excess.
- Consuming too much caffeine.
- Working late shifts or extended hours due to pressure.
- Long commutes that make days and weeks feel endless.
- Eating on the go, leading to increased consumption of processed and sugary foods.
- Lack of regular exercise
- Insufficient time for relaxation and recovery due to work and daily responsibilities.

There are many reasons why tiredness and fatigue may be affecting your life, but one thing is certain, improving your diet and lifestyle can make a significant difference.

Tips to Boost Your Energy

Avoid Toxins

Choose natural, whole foods and minimize your exposure to toxins, especially sugar, caffeine, and alcohol. Focus on consuming fresh, nutritious foods such as lean meats, fish, vegetables, fruits, salads, and eggs.

Stay Hydrated

Proper hydration is crucial for maintaining energy levels. Studies show that even mild dehydration can lead to fatigue, so make sure you drink enough water throughout the day.

Rethink Your Lunch

Opt for lean protein-based meals instead of carb-heavy lunches to avoid the afternoon energy slump. A well-balanced meal can transform how you feel for the rest of the day.



David Fairlamb

Increase Fruit and Vegetable Intake

When you're tired and craving unhealthy foods, your body is likely searching for energy. Instead of reaching for processed snacks, nourish your body with at least five servings of fruits and vegetables daily.

Choose a Refined Sugar-Free Breakfast

Avoiding sugar-laden cereals and fruit juices in the morning can prevent energy spikes followed by crashes. Instead, opt for slow-releasing energy sources like porridge or eggs to keep you fuller for longer.

Exercise Regularly

Exercise not only boosts your metabolism but also enhances mood and energy levels. The endorphins released during physical

activity will leave you feeling invigorated rather than drained.

Surround Yourself with Positivity

Spending time with positive, supportive friends in a happy environment can significantly boost your mood and energy.

Manage Stress Effectively

Chronic stress and high cortisol levels contribute to fatigue. Take time to relax by practicing yoga, visiting a spa, or disconnecting from emails for a day. Once recharged, you'll feel more energized and focused.

www.davidfairlambfitness.co.uk

...David's summing up...

If you frequently feel drained at certain times of the day, examine your daily routine. Small lifestyle changes can provide the energy boost you've been craving.

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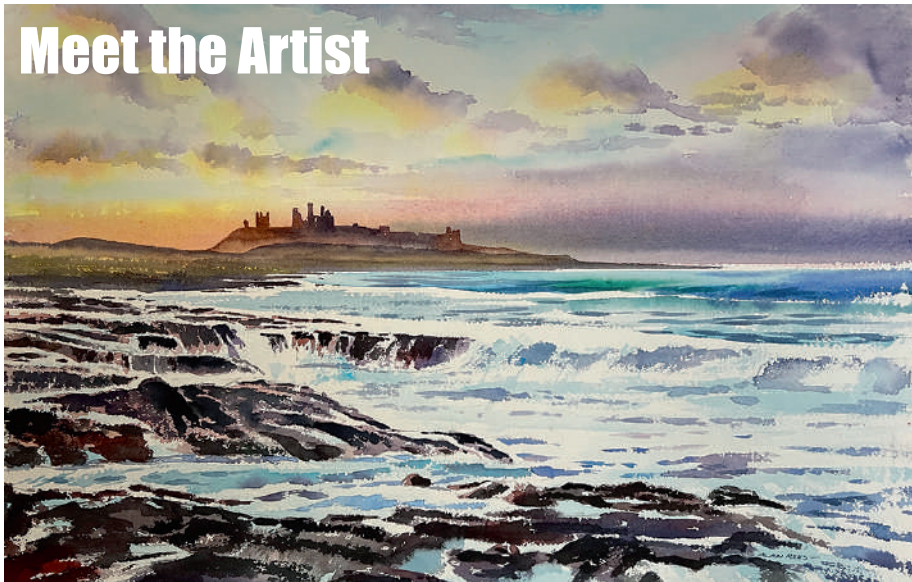
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Meet the Artist



Ahead of his 40th anniversary exhibition at the Blagdon Gallery, Michael Grahamslaw spoke to...

Alan Reed

What inspired you to pursue a career in art?

My father was a professional Artist so I very much grew up with it around me and I loved to watch Dad paint and draw. At the age of 16 I decided I wanted to be a Graphic Designer and went to what was then the College of Arts and Technology (now Newcastle College) where I attained an HND in Applied Design. I specialised in illustrations and taught myself to paint in watercolour. By the end of the course some of my tutors had started to buy my paintings.

I staged my first exhibition at Ponteland Library at the age of 19 and I was delighted when I sold everything. Over the next few years I worked on my portfolio and then took a job at the Great North Museum.

In 1984 I made the decision to become self employed with the help of the Enterprise Allowance Scheme. This very much kickstarted things and I began to exhibit in galleries, started part time lecturing in Arts and Design, made Artists impressions of

buildings working from architects drawings and even worked on an album cover for the band Blitzkrieg.

In 1990 I met my wife who had lived in Venice and she introduced me to Italy. Five years later she joined me in working in my business. In 1996 I was proud to open my own gallery in Eldon Garden.

What has been your proudest achievement?

I was delighted to do many commissions for the Government in Oman, win various awards from the Royal Watercolours Society and also attain the Circus Painting Prize in the Bath Prize.

Who are your heroes and mentors?

Unquestionably my father Ken who became a famous golf course artist and handled commissions for stars such as Gary Player and Greg Norman. I also admire John Singer Sargent who was an American expatriate artist, considered the leading portrait painter of his generation, the great landscape painter Winslow Homer and Edward Seago, an English artist who used both oils and watercolours.

What is the best advice you have received in your career?

I always return to the 31 chapters from the book of proverbs in the Bible of which my favourite is ch22 v 29 "who excels in his work stands before kings."



What are you currently working on?

My next exhibition at Blagdon Gallery which will run from Thursday 10th April to Sunday 11th May. This will be a 40 year retrospective of my career including paintings of Italy, Scotland and Oman. Some of my late fathers work will also be on show as well as my paintings of the Toon Army filing past the Strawberry to watch Newcastle United.

What has been your most challenging project?

Running the unit in Eldon Garden was difficult as I had little retail business experience. However I'm glad of the experience and we made it work. It made me appreciate the challenges that gallery owners face.

alanreed.com



Alan Reed art @Blagdon Gallery



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