

NORTHERN

INSIGHT

May 2025

Issue 112

A man in a dark suit and red tie stands at a purple podium, holding a large brass trophy. The podium features the RGS Newcastle logo and a large '500' graphic. Behind him, a school orchestra is performing on a stage. A young boy in the foreground is playing a double bass. The background shows an audience seated in a hall.

ROYAL GRAMMAR SCHOOL NEWCASTLE
Marking 500 years on centre stage

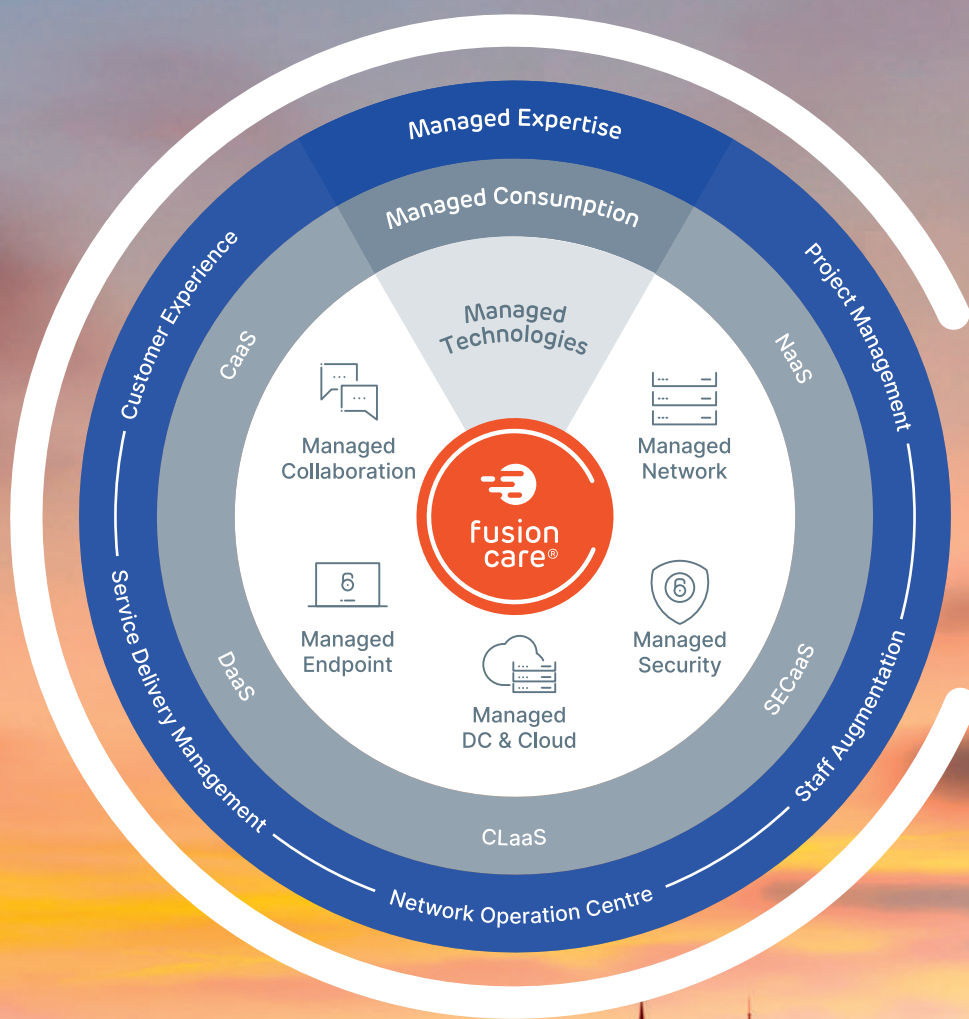
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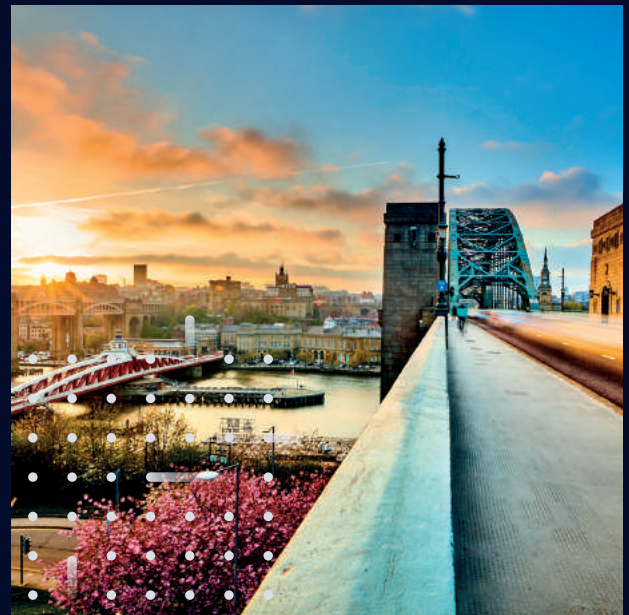
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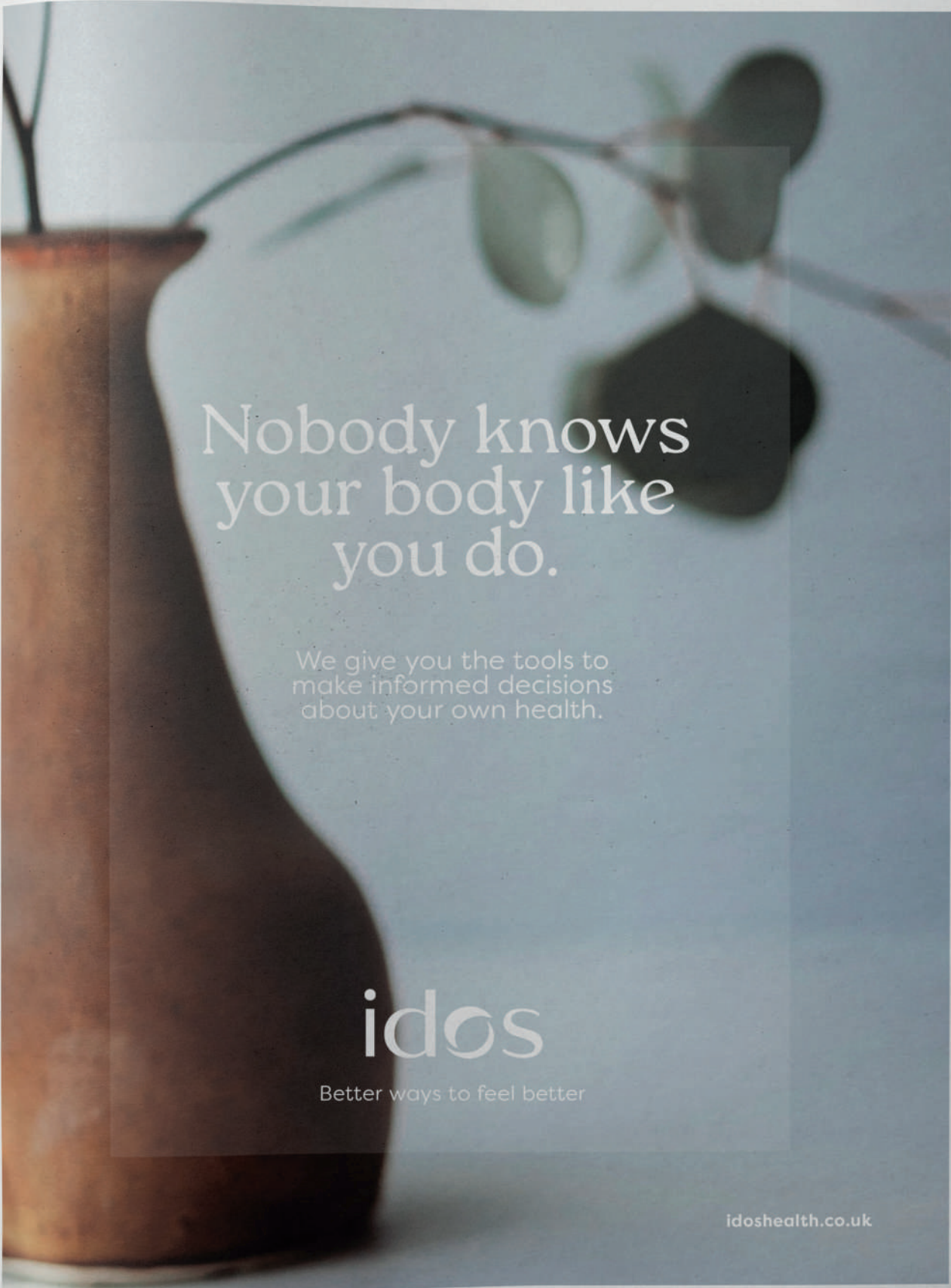
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Forword

FOREWORD

Welcome to the May issue of Northern Insight.

In another vibrant issue our cover stars are The Royal Grammar School who celebrated their Quincentenary with the RGS 500 Choir and Orchestra concert at the iconic Glasshouse Centre for Music.

Elsewhere we showcase North Tyneside Business Forums Showbiz 25 event which we were very proud to sponsor.

In the return of our popular Accountant of the Month feature we talk to Nick Wilson and Amy Park who have recently been appointed Co-Managing Directors at Robson Laidler Accountants.

St. Cuthberts Care are our Charity of the Month and talk about their commitment to helping improve the lives of some of the most vulnerable members of our communities.

On our travels we make welcome returns to The Rabbit Hole and Jesmond Dene House as well as a first visit to the Barn Door in Heaton, a rustic Northumbrian inspired eatery with a country music vibe.

As ever we are proud to offer a platform where local success is amplified and fresh perspectives are shared. We hope you enjoy this issue.

*Thank you to all concerned
for your continued support.
Till next month...*

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

MTG



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From Green Street to a Green Community

Green Street, an initiative dedicated to creating greener British high streets and fostering prosperity in the retail and hospitality sectors, has been working with businesses across Newcastle's East End to help them become more sustainable, cut costs, and make a positive impact on the environment.

The initiative has successfully supported 37 businesses in Byker, Heaton and the Ouseburn exceeding its original goal of 25. Businesses received tailored advice on energy efficiency, waste reduction, and sustainable packaging.

Victoria Robertshaw, Founder and Director of Green Street explains the process: "We work with businesses to understand their priorities and sustainability goals. After an initial consultation, we provide a detailed report with practical recommendations to help them save energy, reduce waste, and cut costs. Businesses also receive a £1000 grant to implement sustainable changes, and they are provided with the Green Street Working Towards a Greener Newcastle branding so customers can easily find the businesses taking part."

"We've worked with an incredible variety of businesses, from cafes to repair shops, hairdressers to fish and chip shops and even a city farm, helping them find practical, cost-effective sustainability solutions. Customers care about sustainability, and this project helps businesses meet that demand in a manageable way."

One of the businesses benefiting from this initiative is The Cumberland Arms. Owner Jo Hodson shared her enthusiasm for the programme: "My favourite part has been planting wildflowers to create a meadow space, making the area more beautiful and bee friendly. We plan to host music sessions in the meadow during summer. Green Street has also helped us improve insulation and upgrade to energy-efficient lighting, which not only benefits the environment but also saves us money."

Lumo begins roll-out of a bolder and brighter new-look

Great value rail operator, Lumo, is offering customers the chance to select the best seat in the house thanks to the introduction of its new online seat selection tool alongside a brighter new look for onboard seating from this month.

Whether a window gazer, table chaser or aisle stretcher, the free new digital service now allows customers to customise their journey and choose their perfect seat on the train when booking directly through the Lumo website.

In addition to its seat selection tool, Lumo seats will also be debuting a brand-new design from this spring, with a comfier and harder wearing material to further enhance customer comfort while staying true to Lumo's bold blue look and feel.

Lumo has recently secured an 85% customer satisfaction score as part of an independent survey by the UK Customer Services Institute. This has beaten all UK



transport sector scores in their annual benchmark report which includes transport operators across the sector, not just rail.

Martijn Gilbert, Managing Director of Lumo, said: "It's very easy to go about our busy days never really looking up and appreciating all of the beauty around us. Our Lumo services travel through some of the most beautiful, scenic routes in the UK including the North East England coastline connecting Scotland with England, so there's no better way to relax than to sit back and take in the views. With the introduction of our new seat selection tool, we are excited to remind our customers to appreciate the journey itself and to allow them the freedom to personalise their journey onboard our services with our great value fares."

Laura launches events business to Balance career and family life

Laura Sharpe, a highly successful Newcastle recruitment professional, has embarked on an exciting new chapter in her career with the launch of Connect Events. After 16 years of running Sharpe Recruitment alongside her mother, Julie, Laura has decided to pivot towards event management, a move that allows her greater flexibility to care for her daughter, Lucy, who was born with Down syndrome in 2021.

Her experience in organising Design It; Build It, a major tech and creative conference in 2013 and 2014, planted the seed for this new venture. Now, nearly a decade later, she is excited to return to the world of conferences with Tech Connect – an event dedicated to the future of AI.

Taking place on Tuesday, September 30, 2025, at The Catalyst in Newcastle, Tech Connect will bring together experts from across the tech industry



to discuss the latest developments in artificial intelligence. Speakers already confirmed for the event include Hannah Underwood – discussing AI and data, Lucy Batley providing insights on AI applications and Daniel Roe, a front-end developer exploring AI in development.

The Keynote Speaker (to be revealed soon) is a leading astrophysicist with unique insights on AI.

Tech Connect is designed with inclusivity in mind. The event will feature quiet areas equipped with fidget toys, well-being walks at lunchtime, and opportunities for volunteers with learning disabilities to participate in the event.

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NE agency chosen to deliver prestigious international event

Newcastle-based BeaconHouse Events has been awarded the contract to deliver the 14th World Conference of Science Journalists, which will take place in London in 2027.

The North East-based team beat agencies from around the UK in a competitive tender process to be awarded the contract to design and deliver the prestigious global event. The conference, which takes place biennially, will see hundreds of science journalists come together in London to share best practices with international colleagues and learn

from each other.

The World Conference of Science Journalists aims to create an environment to build and strengthen the community of science writers and communicators globally. The event will bring together science journalists, researchers, and media professionals from around the globe to explore the future of science journalism and its impact on global issues. It provides a platform for discussion, collaboration, and idea exchange on the challenges and opportunities facing science journalism in an increasingly complex world.

Winning the contract is a full-circle moment for the agency. Thirteen years ago, the team provided event management support for the 7th World Conference of Science Journalists in Doha, Qatar, overseeing the onsite planning and delivery, following key team members' involvement in the previous London conference two years earlier. The decision was made to award the 2027 conference after an extensive evaluation process by ABSW's board, who praised BeaconHouse's strategic approach, robust experience, innovation and commitment to delivering an exceptional international event, sustainably and inclusively.



Pro-Ad celebrates 10th Promotional Products Expo

The Pro-Ad Expo 2025 was the ultimate promotional products experience. Held at the iconic home of the Newcastle Falcons at Kingston Park, this year's event was all about pushing the boundaries with the theme Bigger, Better, Greener – and it delivered in style.

Marketing and procurement professionals from across the region and beyond visited the event, keen to explore the latest in promotional merchandise solutions. With over 30 stands and hundreds of products on show, covering specialist categories – from trending innovations to tried-and-tested favourites – the Expo offered something for every brand looking to make a lasting impression. From eco-friendly, British-made gems to the latest in corporate clothing, the event proved there's no one-size-fits-all approach to making an impact with memorable and sustainable branded merchandise.

Carlo Nardini, founder of Pro-Ad, said: "This wasn't just another trade show – this was a full-on experience! We set out to inspire, innovate, and show how creative merchandise can make a brand unforgettable. The buzz on the show floor was electric, and the feedback from our visitors was beyond exciting and heart-warming."

Lumo proudly partners with Newcastle Pride 2025

All aboard for an unforgettable ride this Pride, as Newcastle-based train operator, Lumo, continues its support for Newcastle Pride festival. With the return of the popular Lumo Platform stage and Newcastle Pride Market Village, Lumo is helping to make this year's celebrations bigger and better than ever.

The Lumo Platform will continue to bring the city's queer community and allies together. A call out for local performers is currently underway to take part on the stage, with opportunities for North East artists to showcase their talents and highlight what it means to them to be 'unapologetically visible'.

Newcastle Mela will once again be joining the celebrations, bringing culture and music to the Lumo Platform stage.



The Newcastle Pride Market Village will take over the heart of the city centre at Grey's Monument and Old Eldon Square with a wide range of LGBTQIA+ businesses and independent creators. With market stalls getting booked up fast, vendors are encouraged to apply now to secure their spot to be a part of this year's festivities.

Martijn Gilbert, Managing Director at Lumo, shared, "We are extremely proud to be supporting Newcastle Pride for a third year. Diversity and inclusion is an important part of our culture and service at Lumo, and Pride is an event that means a lot to our team, customers, and local community, so we are really pleased to be able to continue our support."

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Cover Story...



A Musical Milestone

By Geoffrey Stanford, Headmaster, RGS Newcastle

The Royal Grammar School (RGS) Newcastle Quincentenary takes Centre Stage.

There are moments in the life of a school that feel timeless. The RGS 500 Choir and Orchestra Concert, which was held at the North East's iconic Glasshouse International Centre for Music, was one of those rare, unforgettable moments. It was not just a performance - it was a celebration five centuries in the making; a spectacular showcase of musical talent, unity and pride that brought together generations of the RGS Newcastle community.

To stand on the cusp of half a millennium is no small thing. It is hard to overstate the significance. Ours is a school that predates Shakespeare's writings, the formation of the United Kingdom, and even the invention of the steam engine. Yet, here we are - still learning, still leading, still celebrating, and what better way to mark such an extraordinary milestone than with music which has played a key role in the school since our founding?

From the very first note played on Wednesday 19 March 2025 there was an electricity in the air. The Glasshouse, with its world-class acoustics and panoramic views over the River Tyne, proved a



fitting stage for such an historic evening. The energy and anticipation were palpable as students from across the school - some performing in a venue of this stature for the first time - took their places with poise and purpose. What followed was a joyful, powerful, and deeply moving evening of music that lit up the night and left a lasting impression on students, families, staff, alumni, and special guests.

His Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant of Tyne & Wear, Ms Lucy Winskell OBE, opened the concert with a powerful reflection on RGS's rich legacy and enduring commitment to education and the arts. "For five centuries, RGS has stood as a pillar of education, inspiring young minds and shaping future leaders," she remarked. "What better way to launch these celebrations than through music - a universal language that unites us all."

The newly commissioned RGS 500 Fanfare, composed by senior student Alissa L (Year 12) provided a rousing introduction to the evening. The bright and brilliant voices of our Junior School Choir followed with their stirring rendition of *Swing Low* and a medley of traditional North East songs that had the whole crowd signing (and dancing) along.

A special mention must go to our young Junior Choir soloist, Scarlett K (Year 6), who stepped into the spotlight with poise far beyond her years. "It was amazing to have the chance to perform at The Glasshouse - a once in a lifetime opportunity!" she said afterwards. That sense of wonder and pride echoed throughout the night, as performers of all ages brought their very best to the stage.

The Senior ensembles followed with a rich, textured programme that beautifully reflected both our history and our future. From classical masterpieces including the Senior Choir's Tudor-inspired set, to stirring contemporary works including the Chamber Choir's own take on the Spice Girls' pop-culture classic *Wannabe*, which proved a big hit with the crowd.

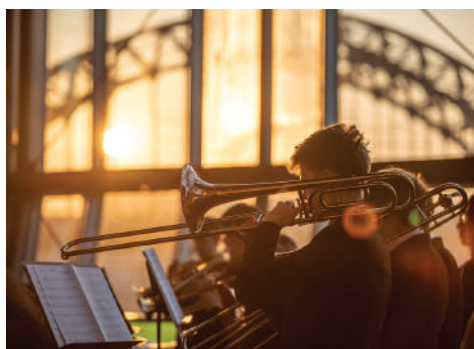
A particular highlight was the massed performance of *Gloria* with the school choir and the RGS community choir being accompanied by the school orchestra. This was followed by a revised and reorchestrated version of our school song *Triumphans*, conducted with boundless energy and passion by our incredible Director of Music, Mr Smith, and supported by his team of dedicated music staff including Mrs Clappison, Ms Bolt and Ms Fisher. As one Old Novocastrian audience member observed: "It was moving to see the school achieve something so ambitious with such spirit, enthusiasm, and fun."

The atmosphere in the auditorium was electric, and as the final notes rang out there was a palpable sense of pride and achievement shared by performers and audience alike. For me, the night was a true testament to the strength of our community and the legacy of this remarkable school. The performances were outstanding, and I am incredibly proud of our students and staff for creating such a memorable occasion.

As we continue to mark our 500th anniversary over the coming twelve months, through 2025 and into early 2026, there is so much more to look forward to - events that will bring us together again in celebration of our heritage, our achievements, and our future. I warmly invite every member of the RGS family - past and present - to join us in marking our historic milestone.

To stay up to date with all our anniversary plans, I encourage you to explore our newly launched RGS 500 microsite. It is a digital home for our treasured artefacts, beloved stories and a place to reflect how far we've come, and where we're headed next.

www.rgs.newcastle.sch.uk/500th





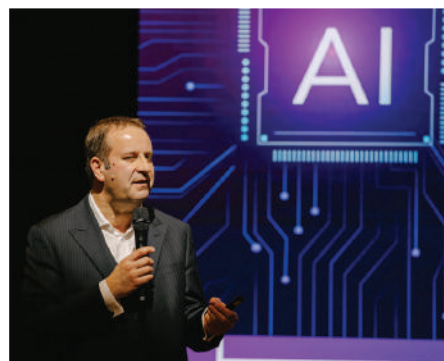
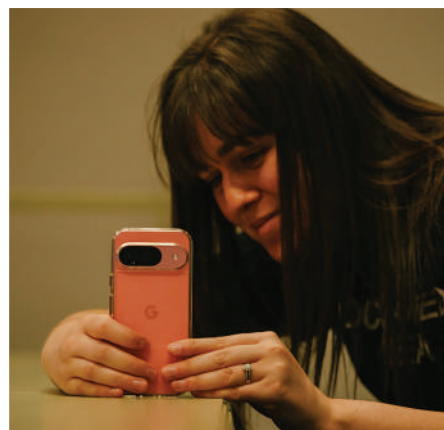
Spotlight on Success: Showbiz 25

North Tyneside's business scene lit up with fresh energy and forward-thinking insights at the Showbiz 25 event, hosted by the North Tyneside Business Forum at the stunning Exchange 1856 in North Shields. This standout event sponsored by Northern Insight Magazine brought together entrepreneurs, local leaders, and business innovators for a celebration of connection, creativity, and community.

Lisa Bean, whose session "How to Sell Masterclass – Use Your Edge, Increase Your Reach, Show Don't (Just) Sell" challenged and inspired attendees. Lisa delivered a dynamic and refreshing take on modern-day business growth, emphasising authenticity and community building over traditional sales tactics.

Following Lisa, Jeni Smith, founder of NetKno, took the stage with a compelling talk on the power of intentional networking. Drawing on her academic research with Durham University and her experience in the field, Jeni provided attendees with a toolkit for transforming small talk into real opportunity.

Rounding off the speaker lineup was Pascal Fintoni, a respected digital marketing trainer and speaker, who brought the power of AI into the spotlight. Pascal explored how businesses can leverage AI tools to create virtual teams that boost efficiency, strengthen engagement, and streamline growth.





CMYK Business Technology partners with international software house Taopix to deliver managed IT services

Under this new partnership, CMYK will handle all IT related challenges for Taopix people both UK and Internationally based, covering all aspects of the group's IT infrastructure and cybersecurity requirements.

Taopix will also take advantage of CMYK's specialist Mac in the Enterprise support offering, software licensing and procurement services.

Taopix was founded in 2007 specialising in developing software platforms for personalised photo products like photobooks, calendars, and gifts. Taopix solutions support web, macOS, Windows, iOS and android mobile operating systems, offering a customisable white-label user interface, 3D previews, AI tools, and flexible integration via API's. Headquartered in Newcastle upon Tyne, Taopix serves a global market with clients such as Tesco Photo and Albumworks.

Adam Grieve, managing director at Taopix, commented; "We've been in the software development industry for over 18 years now, and we recently felt the need to re-strategise the business. In order to support our growth, as well as enhance recruitment and business connections going forward, we made the strategic decision to relocate our headquarters to the heart of Newcastle City Centre. CMYK has been an invaluable partner in achieving this goal. Their expertise enabled a seamless transition in a matter of weeks, and our team is already thriving in our new facilities."

Adam added; "As part of this move, we've also embraced a flexible, hybrid approach to office hours, a transition that CMYK facilitated with remarkable ease. Our new home, Alderman Fenwick's House, is a beautifully refurbished boutique office space steeped in history, dating back to the 17th century. We are excited to begin this new chapter and establish Taopix's presence in this iconic building for years to come."

Craig Pratt, regional sales director at CMYK shared his excitement about the new partnership with Taopix; "We're thrilled to welcome Taopix to the CMYK family and support the transition to their new

HQ, whilst providing ongoing tech support to help enable their ambitious growth strategy. Our shared values, aligned principles, and strong synergies make our collaboration all the more special and it's an absolute delight to work alongside the Taopix team. This announcement further signifies our momentum in supporting the North East's tech sector, reinforces our commitment to demonstrating service excellence and highlights our industry expertise."

Craig continued; "We're proud to be chosen as Taopix's IT partner and look forward to building a strong, successful, and long-term relationship. Special thanks to the CMYK integration and service delivery teams - this is another milestone in our growth across the region and showcases our team's dedication and capability."

Warren White, head of IT at Taopix, who was instrumental in the recent HQ relocation and lead on the IT partner evaluation and selection process, will also play a central role in managing the partnership moving forward. He shared his thoughts on the new collaboration; "At Taopix, embracing the technological advances that continually sweep our industry is essential and paramount to the success of our service delivery. We are committed to this path not only to advance and grow our own business but, crucially, as a continued effort to empower our customers in this fast-paced environment. Remaining at the forefront of technology is challenging, which is precisely why we are excited to partner with CMYK. We look forward to leveraging their deep industry knowledge and highly skilled team to drive further innovation."

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“

*...We're
proud to be
chosen as
Taopix's IT
partner...*

Craig Pratt, CMYK

L-R: Warren White, Adam Grieve and Craig Pratt



Growing workload leads to new appointment at Newcastle consultancy

A consultancy which established a Newcastle office in Hoult's Yard just one year ago, has announced the appointment of Adam Robinson to its cost management team, following a steady influx of new work during 2024.

Steel River Consultants (SRC), which specialises in cost and project management, HSE and lifting compliance services, operates from four UK offices with its head office in Stockton on Tees and other offices in Edinburgh and the Midlands.

Employing thirty staff, SRC's expertise spans multiple industries, including education, residential, commercial, health and renewables projects.

The Newcastle office is pursuing an ambitious three-year strategy to significantly grow the business and take on bigger projects. Building on its current success, Adam is the first to bolster the team after firstly benefiting from a work experience opportunity with SRC while he was studying at Northumbria University.

Commenting on his role, he said: "I really enjoyed the range and variety of projects I had the chance to work on while I was studying so I jumped at the chance of employment when it was offered.

"It's a great work environment at SRC, being part of an ambitious and professional team. While I recognise that I still have much to learn, I am excited about my future career with SRC because the company is committed to training and professional development to help staff achieve their goals."



New Bernicia director appointed to lead business change

Highly experienced change management professional Michael Dent has been appointed into a key role at North East housing association Bernicia, to lead a business change agenda supporting its corporate strategy ambitions.

Michael is Bernicia's Director of Business Change – a new role overseeing the design and adoption of new systems and approaches that will enhance customer and colleague experience, ensuring services meet diverse and changing needs.

Michael was originally brought into Bernicia in a consultancy role as project director of customer service excellence.

Such has been the success of the project – Bernicia is now the first housing association nationally to deliver end-to-end repairs services through the cloud-based Salesforce platform – that he has been appointed into a senior full-time position to embed digital transformation into other areas of customer service.

"I'm delighted to have been given the opportunity to join such a driven organisation that has a strong focus on improving not only the service of its customers, but also communities in the North East," said Michael.

"Helping the team to make sure we're delivering the right changes at the right time will help support the organisation's continued success and positive impacts it creates for customers, colleagues and the region."



A Fellowship of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors awarded

Jonathan Wallis, an established land agent based in Barnard Castle, has been awarded a Fellowship of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (FRICS), a prestigious recognition of his professional achievements and contributions to the industry.

The FRICS designation is an international measure of excellence, signifying an individual's distinguished standing among their peers and within the business and public spheres. With only approximately 6,000 Fellows worldwide—representing just 4.5% of the total RICS membership of around 134,000 professionals—this honour underscores the exclusivity and prestige associated with the title.

Jonathan, an experienced land agent operating across the Yorkshire Dales, Teesdale, Durham, and Northumberland, has built a successful business over the past seven years. His journey began after years of working for a major firm of Chartered Surveyors. Taking the leap to start his own practice, he initially worked from a bedroom in his home. However, his expertise and dedication quickly led to business growth, necessitating the hiring of a personal assistant within the first year.

"I'm delighted to receive this honour, it's a recognition not only for myself but also my clients and my staff too. I'm passionate about my work and I'm pleased that this has been highlighted by the RICS."



SANDERSON
YOUNG

RARE'S EASTER EXTRAVAGANZA!



It wasn't just chocolate being consumed over the Easter period, but property was also being devoured with new homes coming onto the market, multiple viewings and sales being agreed at all price points.

Over the Easter break, my team have had some excellent properties coming up for sale, not just in the core areas of Gosforth and Jesmond but also in Northumberland and throughout the region.

We have two new wonderful properties being sold over the £2 Million price point in Gosforth and a fabulous property in Tranwell Woods at £3 Million, all receiving viewings and interest giving us confidence that buyers are starting to come back to the upper end following the drop in these higher price points after the uncertainty around the election last year.

My team have also seen an increase in the numbers of buyers looking from outside of the area, particularly families who are wanting to move from London for the change of lifestyle that the North East can offer.

We also have some excellent properties lined up to come onto the market, in particular some wonderful homes in central Gosforth that will be perfect for families, a luxury penthouse

apartment ideally located in the centre of a market town, a detached home in Darras Hall, as well as some fabulous one off estates that rarely come onto the market for sale.

In Rare I am proud that my team have such a good relationship with their clients who deal with us because of our wealth of knowledge and years of experience in the business. We offer a bespoke service for each individual that is rarely found in other estate agents with personalised viewings, a team that is available at all hours of the day, and our fantastic sales progression department who ensure that your house sale runs as smoothly as possible.

My team of Mary and Jessica, supported by Duncan Young and Harry Young, are all on hand to help you sell or buy your home. Please do not hesitate to contact myself or one of my team on **0191 223 3500** or email ashleigh.sundin@sandersonyoung.co.uk to arrange a free, no obligation valuation of your home.

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Harwood House

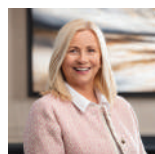
Harwood, Morpeth

Sitting in the heart of Harwood Forest in the Northumberland National Park, is this stunning detached home. Harwood House provides a beautiful farmhouse and converted farm buildings with two bed apartment, circa 3.8 acres and spectacular views. Built in the early 1900s, Harwood House and outbuildings have been renovated to provide a sumptuous family home with great entertaining space offering a business opportunity. Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax: G.



5 6 4 C

Price Guide:
£1.8 Million



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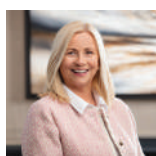
West House *Whalton, Morpeth*

West House is an extraordinary period residence, harmoniously blending traditional charm with contemporary luxury. The Grade II Listed property sits within 5.2 acres and offers a superb opportunity for those in pursuit of country living. The walled garden, grazing land, upper barn, wood store and workshop present an array of possibilities for outdoor recreation and for those with equestrian interests. Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax Band: G.



5 5 4 E

Price Guide:
Offers over £1.6 Million



Ashleigh Sundin
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SANDERSON
YOUNG



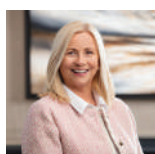
Beechfield Road Gosforth

Situated on the south side of Beechfield Road, occupying a lovely garden plot, is this fabulous three storey, semi detached family home. The property has been beautifully refurbished and completely overhauled to the very highest of standards with stunning interior design. The beautiful period residence boasts in excess of 4231 sq ft of accommodation and a significantly deep and wide south facing rear garden. Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax Band: G.



5 2 4 D

Price Guide:
£2.25 Million



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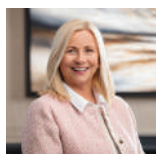
North Avenue Gosforth

This fabulous, detached family home in the heart of central Gosforth has been extensively refurbished, remodelled and improved to a superb standard with outstanding interior design and retaining many original features. The large double storey rear extension has created tremendous extra space and completes this luxurious home which is located a short walk from Gosforth High Street and only 50 yards from Gosforth Lawn Tennis Club. Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax Band: G.



5 3 3 D

Price Guide:
£2.25 Million



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A new chapter for Lakeland Retreats

Lakeland Retreats, the luxury holiday lettings agency based in the Lake District, has joined Travel Chapter, one of the UK's leading providers of high-quality holiday accommodation.

Established in 2018 by Michelle and Adam Wilkin, Lakeland Retreats has earned a reputation for delivering exceptional owner and customer service across the Lake District.

Since then, they have built a fast-growing portfolio of 220 unique holiday properties across Windermere, Ambleside, and Keswick, establishing Lakeland Retreats as a leading brand in the region.

Lakeland Retreats were advised by Newcastle-based RG Corporate Finance (RGCF), led by Partner and Head of Corporate Finance, Carl Swansbury, CF Senior Manager, Connor McBride, and CF Manager, Max Woodhouse.

RG Tax, led by Partner Simon Whiteside and Director of Taxation Services Simon Hopwood, provided transactional tax services. The firm's Outsourced | FD service line, led by Partner Dan Cooper, also supported the transaction and will continue to act as Lakeland Retreats' outsourced accountancy provider post-sale.

Legal advice to the sellers was provided by Newcastle-based law firm Ward Hadaway, led by Corporate Partner James Nightingale, with support from Max



Pamler, Louis Dinsdale, and Lucy Baxter.

Michelle Wilkin said: "We're incredibly proud of what we've built with Lakeland Retreats. From day one, it's been about delivering the best possible service to our property owners and guests, and that's only been possible thanks to the hard work of our fantastic team. We've built strong, personal relationships across the region, and we chose Travel Chapter as we know they share our values and will continue to uphold those standards."

Max Woodhouse, Manager at RGCF, said: "Michelle and Adam have created a truly respected business in Lakeland Retreats. Its outstanding reputation and exceptional property portfolio made it a natural fit for a highly regarded national brand like Travel Chapter. We are delighted to have supported them every step of the way in

reaching this significant milestone and wish them continued success in the next chapter."

James Nightingale, Corporate Partner at Ward Hadaway, said "It's been a privilege to work with Michelle and Adam, and experience the dedication of the Lakeland Retreats team in creating lasting memories for anyone looking to immerse themselves in the stunning landscapes of England's largest National Park. We wish everyone every success for the next chapter."

Jayne McClure, Chief Executive of Travel Chapter, said: "Lakeland Retreats is a wonderful addition to our portfolio, based in one of the UK's most beautiful and in-demand holiday regions. The business has been built on strong values, exceptional service and local relationships."



NPIF II - NEL Smaller Loans makes a five-figure investment to OptiMe

Teesside, UK - NPIF II - NEL Smaller Loans which is managed by NEL Fund Managers as part of the Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund II (NPIF II) has announced a five-figure investment in OptiMe, a leading workplace wellbeing Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) platform and app focused on revolutionising mental health support for employees across the UK.

The loan has supported OptiMe to unlock a grant from Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA). This is part of a wider project to help the company further personalise its platform's wellbeing content, introduce AI-driven coaching features, and expand its team by creating 10 new jobs.

With this new investment, the company is well-positioned to scale up, broaden its reach and deliver meaningful impact across diverse industries by enhancing its platform's capabilities and creating a more holistic approach to employee wellbeing. The funding will support with growth plans, which includes expanding headcount and investing in technology. This opens the door for OptiMe to onboard new clients, bring essential mental health resources to more companies and create healthier, happier workplaces, proving that employee wellbeing is not just a benefit but a key driver of success.

OptiMe's commitment to improving mental health in the workplace comes at a crucial time, with companies increasingly recognising the importance of supporting their employees' mental wellbeing. The platform is already trusted by high-profile clients such as Domino's, Costa, and Newcastle College Group, providing tailored wellbeing solutions to enhance employee satisfaction, productivity, and overall health.



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INTERESTING TIMES

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"Business leaders get trapped inside their own business far too often. Let's change that."

ONE SUBJECT | THREE TIPS



SMART v HARD

Working Smarter not Harder is not a new thought. So how come so many of us don't do it? I know. Life gets in the way. Old habits die hard. Some other off-the-shelf excuse.

Anyhow, think about these three things, then act on them, and maybe (as we advocate daily here at Concept) your business really will work more for you, instead of the other way round.

1. Apply The 80/20 Rule

Focus on the 20% of activities that generate 80% of your results. Identify high-impact tasks (like nurturing key clients or closing major sales) and prioritise them over time-wasting activities that don't contribute to your bottom line. And ask yourself: Am I the only one who can do this? If the answer is no, delegate or automate.

2. Streamline Meetings

Keep meetings concise and purposeful by setting a clear agenda and sticking to it. Make sure that the meeting is necessary and involve only those who need to be there. Set a time limit for each meeting and follow it. In addition, consider using AI note-taking tools like Otter. Ai to automatically generate meeting notes and action points. This ensures you don't miss important details while saving you time on manual notetaking.

3. Outsource Strategically

Don't try to do everything yourself. Outsource non-core tasks like payroll, bookkeeping or IT support that take up a large chunk of your time and outsource them to experts. By hiring specialists who can complete these tasks more efficiently, you focus your energy on high-priority areas like business strategy, client relationships, and growth. Outsourcing not only frees up your time but also allows you to tap into expertise that can enhance the quality of work in areas outside your core skills.

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INTERESTING QUOTE



Lessons you work out for yourself, are more powerful than rules you memorise parrot-fashion.
Dave Trott.

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£10(ish) online. **Mark Melville**



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Johnston Carmichael celebrates double shortlisting at Tolley's Taxation Awards

Johnston Carmichael Chartered Accountants is celebrating a major milestone, with two of its Tax teams having been shortlisted for the prestigious 2025 Tolley's Taxation Awards. Both the firm's VAT and Indirect Tax team and its Transaction Taxes teams have been named finalists in the categories of 'VAT/Indirect Tax Team of the Year' and 'Best Specialist Team in a Law or Accounting Firm' respectively.

The Tolley's Taxation Awards are arguably the most highly regarded accolades in the UK tax industry, recognising technical excellence, innovation, and outstanding client service across the sector.

For Johnston Carmichael's VAT team, this marks their first ever nomination at the awards – a significant achievement reflecting the depth of its expertise, its consistent delivery of high-quality advice across myriad complex VAT issues, and its huge developments in recent years. The Transaction Taxes team, led by Suzanne Brownie, has also earned praise for its expert tax advice during business transitions, from mergers and acquisitions to reorganisation, refinancing, management incentive plans and equity or debt raising.

Alex Nicholson, Partner and Head of VAT and Indirect Tax at Johnston Carmichael, based at its Newcastle office, said: "This is a proud moment for Johnston Carmichael Tax and a real milestone for our VAT team, who have secured their first ever nomination at the Tolley's Taxation Awards. It's fantastic to see their hard work, innovation, deep expertise, and commitment to client service recognised at this level. Huge congratulations to Suzanne and the team, and all other nominees. We're looking forward to joining industry peers in London this May to celebrate the very best in tax."



Shannon Signs Up With Growing RMT Healthcare Team

RMT Accountants & Business Advisors is continuing to grow its specialist healthcare division with the appointment of Shannon Mellish to a healthcare accounts senior role.

Shannon brings almost a decade's industry experience to her new position with Gosforth-based RMT Healthcare, which is one of the UK's leading specialist medical and healthcare accountancy practices.

Originally from Yorkshire, Shannon studied for a degree in mathematics at York University before moving to the North East nine years ago to join a regional accountancy firm.

She is now working across all aspects of the personal and commercial finances of a range of healthcare businesses and practitioners right across the UK.

Shannon Mellish says: "I'd heard good things about RMT during my time in the North East and really liked the people that I met when I came for interview.

"There's a lot of specialist knowledge to pick up, but I'm working with a very supportive and experienced team and enjoying getting to meet and work with my new clients."

RG promotes Audit and Assurance Directors to Partners

Ryecroft Glenton (RG), one of the North of England's leading independent business advisory firms, has strengthened its Audit and Assurance service line with the appointment of two new Partners, Andrew Cameron and Jon Routledge.

Their promotions take RG's total number of Partners to 16, reinforcing the firm's commitment to nurturing talent from within and enhancing its senior expertise across key service areas.

Andrew has been with RG since 1998, when he joined straight from university after completing a degree in Accounting and Financial Analysis at Newcastle.

Now a highly experienced Chartered Accountant, Andrew works with larger businesses, providing audit, taxation, and commercial advice, and has developed a particular specialism in financial due diligence, advising acquirers, funders, and management teams on transactions.



Jon began his career at RG in 2007, joining after graduating from Newcastle University with a degree in Accounting and Finance. Having qualified as both a Chartered Accountant and Chartered Tax Adviser, Jon has built a reputation for his work with corporate clients, particularly group structures.

The firm has also announced that Chris Potter, who joined RG as a Partner earlier this year, has been appointed Head of Audit.

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Stephen Slater and Mike Pott of RMT Accountants & Business Advisors

Stephen Slater stepping up to become RMT Accountants' new Managing Director

Stephen Slater is set to become the new managing director of RMT Accountants & Business Advisors as the Gosforth-based firm works towards implementing the next stages of its growth strategy as part of the Sumer Group.

RMT's current director of commercial services will take on his new role in the summer in place of Mike Pott.

Mike and Stephen have both been with RMT for more than 30 years, becoming partners in 1998 and 2002 respectively.

Mike took on the role of managing partner in 2010 before becoming managing director a year later when the firm incorporated.

Stephen is currently responsible for the delivery of audit and accountancy services by RMT, and was instrumental in the creation of the firm's specialist technology business, RMT Technology.

He says: "Helping successful businesses formulate and execute succession strategies is a core part of the work we do every day, and we have planned this process for ourselves very carefully.

"Mike's expertise, dedication and commitment to excellence in leading the management team has been central to RMT's transformation into the modern, forward-thinking advisory firm it is today.

"He will continue to work as an integral part of our hands-on executive team over the coming months to help deliver a smooth transition into our new

management structure.

"We've strengthened our team of directors and associate directors over recent years, and they have all taken on increasing responsibility for the future direction and performance of a thriving business that has been part of the North East professional services community for more than 70 years."

Mike Pott adds: "The professional and personal qualities of the people at RMT have been the reason why my career has spanned over 30 years with the firm, and it's been a privilege to watch so many of the team develop successful, long-term careers here.

"The accountancy profession and the wider regional economy have changed significantly during the last three decades, but we're proud that, throughout this time, RMT has been able to maintain an absolute commitment to providing unrivalled standards of expertise, insight and service to our clients."

Established in 1954, RMT Accountants provides the full range of financial and business advisory services through its specialist accountancy, tax, medical and healthcare, corporate finance and

restructuring teams, and works with UK companies of all sizes, both within and outside the North East, including a range of international clients.

In 2023, the firm became part of the Sumer Group, the UK's leading SME focussed accountancy practice, and has since made growth by acquisition a key part of its commercial strategy.

It acquired rural and agricultural specialists McCowie & Co at the end of that year, while it joined forces last summer with Durham-headquartered Ribchesters Chartered Accountants, which now operates as RMT Ribchesters, and acquired Berwick-headquartered pre-insolvency solutions specialists the KSA Group in late 2024.

Sumer is the UK and Ireland's leading mid-market accountancy practice, delivering professional support to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) across England, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and employs over 2,200 staff across more than 40 offices.

Stephen Slater continues: "We have a detailed growth strategy in place which will see us continuing to expand, supported by the extensive resources of the Sumer Group, and it's exciting for me to have the opportunity to lead our expert team into the next phase of RMT's development."

Warren Mead, chief executive officer of Sumer, says: "Since joining Sumer in 2023, RMT has grown rapidly, executed three mergers and recruited dozens of highly talented colleagues.

"Mike has been a fantastic leader throughout and I've no doubt Stephen will do a brilliant job as we continue our growth journey."

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Accountants of the month

This month Northern Insight talks to...

Nick Wilson and Amy Park

Both have recently been appointed as Co-Managing Directors at Robson Laidler Accountants, which has offices in Jesmond and Chester le Street. The duo will now take the business forward with growth plans including UK-wide business acquisitions and new service lines.

What inspired you to become an accountant? And what path did you take to get here?

Amy: I enjoyed working with numbers and was also fascinated by how businesses operated and performed so the idea of becoming an accountant excited me. I studied for a BA Hons in Accounting and Finance at Leeds University and upon graduating was offered a job at Robson Laidler where I studied with the ICAEW and became ACA qualified.

Nick: I was good at maths at school and found numbers interesting. I took the AAT apprentice route into accountancy, which gave me both practical and theoretical training. What I have discovered since, is the amount of impact an accountant can make with business owners; it's huge.

What are the most common financial mistakes individuals and businesses make?

Amy: Not understanding the financial side of running their business. Often, people will set up in business because they are good in their trade, they don't tend to have had any financial training and therefore can make mistakes early on. They need to be able to understand financial statements, manage cash flow, prepare forecasts, track debtors and creditors, or appoint someone who can support them.

Nick: The most common thing I still see is making a decision based on what cash is in the bank.

How has technology changed the accounting profession, and what tools do you rely on most?

Amy: Tasks that were once quite time-consuming can now be automated or done faster, which gives us more time to support clients in a more proactive way. Cloud based accounting systems such as XERO, document management systems such as Dext and Hubdoc, and analytical tools such as Power BI and Fathom have all helped us to shift from compliance-based mindsets to more about being an advisor and a coach, elevating our value as accountants.

Nick: I think it has allowed people to develop faster and in areas that you would have usually waited longer to get exposure too.

What advice would you give to small business owners looking to improve their financial health?

Amy: The biggest piece of advice I would give, especially to smaller business owners is to be proactive with your finances rather than reactive. Get comfortable with the basics of financial literacy and use this knowledge so you are better placed to plan ahead.

Nick: Use accounting software and become invested in the numbers. Not just financial numbers but operational ones too. Numbers are factual and don't have emotions.

How do you help clients navigate tax planning and ensure compliance with regulations?

Amy: Holding year-round conversations with our clients, not just speaking to them at the year-end is key. If we know they are looking to purchase a new asset then we can advise on the tax implications and where savings can be made. If we know they are looking to exit

their business, we can advise them on what they need to be thinking about now.

What are the biggest financial trends or challenges businesses should prepare for in the coming years?

Amy: Profits are likely to be squeezed tighter and so implementing technology that allows businesses to work smarter and to rely on financial data is going to be key.

We will also see even more emphasis on ESG reporting to track and report on environmental and social impact.

Nick: Digitalisation of the world. More services and products are based around an online presence. Using this to your advantage is going to become key although you cannot forget that the human element is equally as important too.

What qualities make a great Accountant, and how do you build strong client relationships?

Amy: A great accountant is someone that doesn't just have excellent technical skills but someone who also has excellent soft skills too. They need to be empathetic and understanding. This is how we should seek to build strong relationships with clients - listen, relate and offer support that is both personal and professional.

Nick: We have a team of people who all have different strengths, which is what makes us great. As an individual, it depends on the sector you're working with and the ability to demonstrate credibility and create rapport. The technical knowledge is pretty much assumed when you are a qualified accountant.

How do you handle the pressure of working with tight deadlines and complex financial issues?

Amy: Knowing I have a strong professional support system around me provides assurance that work can be delegated if necessary.

Nick: Discipline is key and understanding the difference of urgent versus important and the cross over. Make sure you don't overfill your diary each day.

What's one piece of financial advice you think everyone should follow?

Nick: Create a plan. A plan helps you reflect and gives you an area to focus on. It allows you to move in the direction you set when you were thinking strategically, removing emotions and obstacles and when motivation levels change.

What do you enjoy most about being an Accountant, and what keeps you motivated in your profession?

Amy: Having a purpose and making a positive difference to the individuals and businesses I look after is what I enjoy and what motivates me most. Seeing and sharing their success.

Nick: Each piece of work you do is your way of making a mark in someone's story. Seeing how they unfold is a great pleasure, and knowing you've helped is the ultimate reward.

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L-R: Amy Park with Nick Wilson

“

*...Many leaders
will experience
something in their
career that is a
game changing
opportunity...*

Pivoting for an opportunity

Andrew Marsh, chair of Vistage in the North East and Northumberland, has four incredible peer groups in the region made up of business owners, CEO's, managing directors, decision makers and inspiring leaders.

Being part of Vistage assists these leaders to develop skills, and they benefit from having shared knowledge and experience. Many of their stories are of activities that have influenced the region, including one such experience of Mitch Gaglardi, Managing Director UK and Ireland of the Sandman Hotel Group.

Mitch runs the business end of the hospitality offering of the UK part of the company and is based in the Sandman Signature in Newcastle. He and his team recently had a fabulous challenge to respond to, that reaped dividends not just for the hotel but the local business community and entire city of Newcastle. It was an iconic opportunity, that came up with no notice, that needed qualifying and actioning quickly and with gusto.

He said: "Most of you will have seen the incredible banner of Eddie Howe that was lowered down the front of our building during the NUFC celebratory parade — but did you stop to think about what went on behind the scenes to make that moment happen?

"As with everything to do with the celebration, it all came together at lightning speed. When the club called our General Manager about 2 days before parade day to ask if they could hang the banner from our hotel, we jumped at the chance. Having already admired the amazing work of Wor Flags — especially their support of local charities like NUFC Fans Foodbank — we knew this was something special we couldn't miss.

"Of course, that was before we knew just how big the banner was!

"To pull it off, we turned to Paul Farrier, Director at Custom Coatings and Maintenance, who we've worked with many times. His team, all passionate NUFC fans, didn't hesitate. In a brilliant gesture, they agreed to take on the job with one condition — that the fee be donated to the charities Wor Flags support which we matched. From there, their skilled abseilers tackled the technical challenges, including managing high winds and working with a banner roughly three times the size of a sail.

"The tension was real as we prepared to lower it, but it went off without a hitch! It didn't even cover the hotel signage, making for an impactful visual and brilliant brand exposure. It's safe to say fans everywhere now know exactly where to find us in Newcastle.

"Of course, a few hiccups are inevitable. Some guests had booked rooms specifically to watch the parade from above and suddenly found their windows covered by the massive banner. But our team acted quickly, coming together to offer them a once-in-a-lifetime alternative: the chance to view the celebration from the safety of our rooftop. Problem solved, and guests were delighted!

"A huge well done to the Sandman Signature team for coming together to make this happen, and to NUFC for such a memorable win. We also want to shout out the incredible NUFC supporters for their energy, positive behaviour, and the sense of community that surrounded the entire day.



"The results spoke for themselves, both the hotel and Shark Bar saw a positive impact, as did businesses across the city. Newcastle City Council deserves real credit for pushing through the parade, which proved to be a huge benefit not only commercially, but in building community spirit.

"And the cherry on top? Our Sandman Signature head office in Canada was thrilled and even used our teams' mobilisation as an example at a recent conference, to highlight how to be a part of the communities we operate in.

"We're proud of the connection we've built with Wor Flags and are excited to continue supporting their amazing work in the city we call home."

Andrew, who is often the first port of call when his clients have challenges, said: "Many leaders will experience something in their career that is a game changing opportunity. This was the first challenge like it that the Sandman team and probably anyone in Newcastle had ever faced and although it sounds simple in reality it was hard and complex... It is great that it was recognised that getting the right expertise was crucial and that the team all got behind it. Mitch has told me many are season tickets holders and most of them are Geordies, and it really was all hands on deck to make it come together.

"This example of positive reaction to a challenge tells me that there is evidence of a great team at the Sandman Signature, that they have very good relationship with suppliers, are part of the community in Newcastle and that they work hard to be positive part of our city. Well done to all."

If you would like to join a Vistage peer group and benefit from working alongside decisionmakers like Mitch, then do get in touch with Andrew on Andrew.marsh@vistagechair.co.uk

Tough times for Charity Leaders

Addressing the Current Challenges for Charity Leaders through Strategic Trustee Recruitment

Peter Neal, founder of The Experience Bank Group, leads the way in leadership recruitment for charities in the North East. Here he tackles the current challenges that can be addressed by strategic trustee recruitment.

It won't surprise anyone that all of the charity leaders across the North East, that I have spoken recently, share the same concerns. They face a challenging environment, characterised by financial pressures, rapid technological advancements, and increasing demands for accountability and impact. Chief Executives are under stress and quite rightly expect their boards to step up, providing effective direction and support.

To navigate these challenges effectively, charities must ensure their boards of Trustees possess the necessary skills and expertise.

Charities are experiencing a sudden increase in operational costs whilst constantly struggling to maintain income levels. The current economic crisis is impacting funders/donors so diversifying income streams, exploring new fundraising methods, and ensuring financial resilience are critical.

Charities have to adopt new technologies to improve efficiency, reach wider audiences, and enhance service delivery. This includes investing in digital infrastructure, boosting online fundraising capabilities, and utilising data effectively. Concerns around data security, cybersecurity, and ethical considerations related to technology are paramount.

Maintaining public trust and confidence requires strong governance, transparency, and accountability. Charities must ensure compliance with regulatory requirements and demonstrate their impact.

There is increasing pressure on charities to address systemic inequalities and ensure operations, and governance, are equitable and inclusive. Boards are expected to reflect the diversity of the communities they serve.

Attracting, retaining, and supporting skilled staff/volunteers is essential for service delivery. Charities face recruitment, training, and well-being challenges



Peter Neal

in a competitive environment whilst experiencing a surge in demand for their services, placing strain on resources and capacity.

To effectively address these challenges, charities should regularly review (and enhance) the skills and expertise of their boards of Trustees. A skills audit helps with this process.

A board equipped with the right skills strengthens financial management and provides effective oversight playing a crucial role in ensuring good governance, financial stability, and legal compliance. Diverse expertise and perspectives contribute to more informed and robust decision-making enhancing strategic direction whilst trustees with experience in technology, digital transformation and change management help charities adapt to evolving environments.

Trustees with fundraising experience and strong networks help to secure vital resources. And of course, recruiting trustees from diverse backgrounds ensures the board reflects the communities served, bringing a range of perspectives.

The Value of using The Experience Bank (TEB) for Trustee Recruitment

Engaging with The Experience Bank (TEB) offers several advantages in recruiting new Trustees:

Specialised Focus - TEB specialises in placing experienced professionals in Trustee roles, possessing a deep understanding of the charity sector's specific needs.

Most Extensive and Relevant Network - For over 20 years, TEB has curated the region's largest network of highly qualified, non-

executive/Trustee candidates with diverse skills/backgrounds, including expertise in finance, HR, marketing, technology, law, and governance.

Efficient Process - TEB streamlines the recruitment process, saving charities time and resources.

Strategic Matching - TEB works to match candidates with the charity's specific requirements, ensuring a fit in experience, skills, culture and values.

Commitment to Diversity - TEB is committed to promoting diversity and inclusion in Trustee recruitment.

Reduced Risk - Working with TEB mitigates the risk of unsuitable appointments. Guidance and support throughout the recruitment and onboarding process is provided.

Conclusion

Charity leaders in our region face significant challenges that demand proactive and strategic responses. Ensuring that boards of Trustees possess the necessary skills and expertise is essential for effective governance, financial stability, and organisational success.

Partnering with a specialist recruiter is value-adding and risk-mitigating, enabling charities to recruit highly qualified, diverse Trustees who make a meaningful contribution.

The Experience Bank is committed to supporting charities of all sizes located in the North East and can tailor support to suit all budgets (honestly). If you would like to explore how The Experience Bank can help your charity, let's arrange a chat.
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10 reasons SMEs need a part-time Finance Director

I personally believe that every company, regardless of its size, deserves access to high quality financial management.

But I also appreciate that it can take business owners some time to understand the value that senior finance professionals can provide, especially if they are used to keeping all their finance-related tasks in-house (either to remain in control of the numbers, or to save on costs – or both).

If you're on the fence about whether your firm might benefit from impartial insights from someone who lives and breathes business finance – here are 10 reasons why you should consider hiring a part-time finance director.

1. Gain strategic financial oversight

A part-time finance director can develop and execute financial strategies that are completely aligned with your company's long-term goals, offering constructive expertise without the cost of a full-time hire.

2. Improve cash flow management

Effective cash flow forecasting and management will ensure your business has the right level of liquidity to meet its operational needs, pay its debts, and invest in growth for the future. This is often an area where SMEs fall down, usually due to time constraints or lack of skills.

3. Access expert budgeting and forecasting

Your FD can create up-to-date budgets and financial forecasts, both of which provide you with a more accurate and longer-term view of your company's financial health (and can help you avoid any costly surprises).

4. Better manage compliance and risk management

Your finance director will be on hand to ensure your business adheres to regulatory requirements, and best practice, reducing

the risk of penalties or reputational damage through mismanaging these obligations, or simply forgetting all about them.

5. Enhance your profitability

By analysing financial data and identifying inefficiencies in your spending or areas where costs can be reduced, your FD will help improve your organisation's overall profitability.

6. Prepare for funding

Finance directors have the expertise to prepare financial reports, business plans, and pitch presentations to secure loans or attract investors, giving you more confidence to pursue these kinds of opportunities.

7. Get ready for faster growth

Their experience can help you manage any growing pains by implementing scalable systems, processes, and financial controls that will give your company firmer operational foundations.

8. Develop your team

A part-time finance director can mentor your existing financial staff to improve their skills and pave the way for a stronger,

more adaptable internal finance team that's fully on board with your mission as a business.

9. Support for the big choices

Your FD will provide data-driven insights and financial analysis to support any major decisions that are on the horizon, such as entering new markets, launching products, or making significant investments.

10. Flexible agreements that save you money

Hiring a part-time finance director enables you to access the high-level expertise you're looking for, without incurring the expense of a full-time salary, benefits, and other recruitment-related overheads.

There you have it – 10 reasons why you may need a part-time finance director to help you bridge the gap between basic bookkeeping and effective financial leadership! If this article has convinced you to explore your options in more depth, please reach out.

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Management buyout positions CCBS Group for another decade of growth



Award-winning commercial finance specialist CCBS Group has completed a management buyout, positioning the North East business for a dynamic new chapter following the celebration of its 10th anniversary last year.

The buyout sees Graeme Harrison, who joined CCBS five years ago to drive business development, take over as Managing Director. Founder Peter Cromarty, who established CCBS in 2014, will remain involved as Non-Executive Chairman, supporting the leadership team and continuing to work closely with clients.

Graeme Harrison said: “We’ve built a resilient, client-focused business with an unwavering passion for delivering exceptional results for our clients. This transition marks an exciting new phase, and I’m looking forward to working with Steven Foley, Michael Horner, Matt Lister, and the wider team to bring our ambitious plans to life.”

CCBS Group, known for its expertise in delivering bespoke funding solutions for businesses across the North East, has experienced consistent year-on-year growth since its inception. The company prides itself on providing clear, strategic advice for clients navigating funding landscapes, particularly during uncertain times and when traditional routes may be unavailable due to complex factors.

Reflecting on the journey to date, Peter Cromarty commented: “It’s been an incredible journey, building CCBS from a one-man operation to a leading independent finance boutique with a

team boasting over 125 years of lending experience. We’ve supported businesses through every stage of growth - from acquisitions and management buyouts to international expansion. I’m immensely proud of everything we’ve achieved, and I’m excited to see the business continue to flourish under Graeme’s leadership and the new management team.”

The strategic move, supported by NEL and advised by Square One Law and BK Plus, ensures the business remains independently owned and firmly rooted in the North East. Management team members received legal and financial advice from Clark Mairs and The Advisory Group, helping to secure a seamless transaction process that underpins CCBS’s ambitions for long-term growth.

Harrison added: “While to the outside world CCBS will look very much the same, this internal evolution strengthens our ability to deliver even more for our clients. Our ethos remains firmly in place - understanding client needs and delivering exceptional funding outcomes - but with a renewed energy and shared vision for the future. With our experienced leadership team, robust network of funders, and unwavering commitment to the businesses we serve, we are well placed for another decade of success.”

Looking ahead, CCBS plans to continue



expanding its presence across the North East, building on its strong reputation for client service, industry expertise, and resilience. Recent investments, including the opening of a new office in Teesside, reflect the company’s ambition to support even more businesses across the region.

Harrison concluded: “This is a proud moment for the team. We are passionate about the future and committed to growing CCBS in a way that stays true to our culture and values, and contributes positively to the North East business community.”

www.ccbssg.co.uk

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CELEBRATING
10 YEARS OF CCBS GROUP



Ross and Alexandra Longton

NPIF II - Maven Equity Finance invests £1 million in Tiba Tempeh

NPIF II - Maven Equity Finance has invested £1 million in fast-growing plant-based food business, Tiba Tempeh. The investment will support Tiba to invest in marketing, sales and further product development, with exciting new products lined up to launch in 2025. The transaction is part of a £1.1m funding round including follow on investment from Perfect Redd, the investment arm of Samworth Brothers.

Founded in 2019 by Alexandra and Ross Longton, Tiba Tempeh is a certified B-Corp that has grown rapidly in the plant-based food market, where consumers are demanding more natural and nutritious products.

Headquartered in Newcastle, Tiba Tempeh's products are available in major UK and European supermarkets including Sainsbury's, Waitrose, Morrisons, Ocado, Carrefour and Leclerc. The business is now gearing up for further UK and European expansion.

As consumers continue to move away from ultra-processed foods and with many people now either avoiding or reducing their meat consumption, tempeh is now one of the fastest growing meat-free segments on the market.

The business offers a range of innovative tempeh products including an Original Block, Plant-Based Mince, and a range of Marinaded Pieces that provide a meat-free solution for everyday meals. Unlike most meat alternatives, Tiba Tempeh is made from 100% natural and organic ingredients and is high in protein and fibre, gut-friendly, 1 of your 5 a day, vegan and gluten-free.

Alex Longton, CEO and Founder at Tiba Tempeh said: Maven will add significant value to further scale our business and help us on our mission to create a healthier world by inspiring people to eat more naturally healthy and sustainable plant-based foods.

Rebecca MacDermid, Investment Manager at Maven, said: "Tiba Tempeh is an exciting brand, in a growing market where there is increasing demand for less processed, healthier meat free alternatives, with a focus on higher nutritional and protein content, which Tiba products provide.

Alex and Ross are a fantastic team and bring a wealth of experience coupled with their passion for healthy, sustainable food alternatives will allow the business to experience continued success. We are pleased to support the next stage of their growth as they scale operations and expand their market presence across the UK and Europe."



Sarah Newbould, Senior Investment Manager at British Business Bank said: "Access to healthier food options is a fast-growing market, and we are excited to see how this equity investment will give Tiba Tempeh the capabilities to launch its new products, with further expansion nationwide and into Europe. The Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund II provides important funding to support businesses like Tiba Tempeh with their growth plans."

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

Retail boost for Sunderland as Develop North supports major regeneration scheme



L-R: Bal Singh (Almscliffe Dhesi), Cllr Michael Mordey (NECA), Tony Cullen (FW Capital) & Ian McElroy (Tier One Capital)

Develop North PLC, the North East-based investment fund managed by Tier One Capital, has played a pivotal role in the redevelopment of the former Farringdon Police Station site in Sunderland, backing the project with a flexible mezzanine funding package to help bring the scheme to life.

The project, led by Newcastle-based developer Almscliffe Dhesi (AD), will deliver a 32,100 sq ft roadside retail park, featuring leading national retailers including B&M Homestore, Costa, Greggs, and Westway Vets. Once complete, the site is expected to create up to 150 new jobs for the local community.

The scheme was initiated with funding from Develop North, which provided an initial £580,000 facility, followed by a £350,000 follow-on, helping take the project through to delivery. This was delivered alongside a wider funding package that included a £6 million loan from the North East Commercial Property Investment Fund, managed by FW Capital.

Neil Greeney, Director at AD, said: "We really appreciate the support from Develop North PLC, Tier One Capital and FW Capital whose combined support demonstrates confidence in our scheme. The advice and funding from Develop North, which initiated this project, has been excellent and fundamental to the progression of this economically important scheme."

The project is the latest in a growing list of impactful developments backed by Develop North, which offers alternative finance solutions to credible professionals and businesses across the North of England and Scotland. The fund typically provides loans of between £0.5 million and £5 million, with a focus on regeneration, job creation and sustainable growth.

Brendan O'Grady, Fund Manager at Tier One Capital, said: "We're delighted to be working alongside FW Capital to support AD on this important job-creating regeneration project. Develop North is a specialist in alternative lending and providing mezzanine funding is an important element of the financing structure of projects like this."

Since its inception in 2017, Develop North has deployed nearly £100 million in capital, supporting over 40 projects, creating more than 3,200 jobs, and generating a gross development value of almost £250 million across the North and Scotland.

Develop North PLC is an investment trust listed on the main market of the London Stock Exchange and specialises in providing finance to the residential and commercial property sector.

Tier One Capital Ltd is the investment adviser and fund manager for the London Stock Exchange main market listed Develop North PLC.
www.developnorth.co.uk
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Abu Ali

Corporate Finance Partner

abu.ali@frpadvisory.com

A balancing act

Talent shortages & the rise of automation in accounting.

The accounting profession is no stranger to change, but recent years have accelerated a shift that's shaking the foundations of traditional finance functions. A talent shortage has led to a growing reliance on automation, especially Robotic Process Automation (RPA), to bridge the gap.

We're seeing firms of all sizes grappling with the same challenge: how to maintain high standards and deliver value in an environment where experienced professionals are harder to come by.

Where have the accountants gone?

It's no secret that the accounting profession is struggling to attract and retain talent, through a combination of factors:

- **Changing career aspirations:** Younger professionals are drawn to more dynamic and flexible roles.
- **Retirement wave:** A significant portion of experienced accountants are exiting the profession.
- **Perception problems:** Accounting is sometimes (unfairly) viewed as outdated or monotonous.

The result? Leaner teams, longer recruitment cycles, and added strain on those still in the roles.

Enter: Automation and RPA

As the talent pipeline narrows, technology has stepped up. Tasks that were once time-consuming and manual are now handled by software, freeing up capacity and allowing teams to focus on more strategic work.

Automation in accounting isn't new, but the introduction and growth of **Robotic Process Automation (RPA)** is reshaping what's possible.

So, what is RPA?

Think of RPA as digital "robots" that can mimic repetitive human actions across systems - clicking, copying, pasting, logging in, pulling reports. The key is that it works with your existing software, reducing the need for complex system overhauls.

This isn't just about efficiency, it's about reducing friction, error, and dependence on overstretched teams.

And with cloud-based platforms and AI tools becoming more sophisticated, automation is no longer just for the large firms, it's accessible to SMEs too.



Dan Cooper

RPA & Automation: Tools for the Modern FD

As a Partner in charge of RG's Outsourced FD service line, I've seen firsthand how automation and RPA can transform the way finance functions operate - especially in businesses with small teams or growing complexity.

Here's where automation (including RPA) adds real value:

- **Reduces repetitive workload:** Freeing teams to focus on insight and decision-making.
- **Boosts accuracy:** Especially in data-heavy tasks like reconciliations and reporting.
- **Increases scalability:** Systems can manage higher volumes with minimal extra resource.
- **Delivers consistency:** Processes become standardised and less prone to manual error.

It's a powerful way to build resilience into your finance function, especially when people are hard to find and harder to retain.

Getting started with Automation and RPA

You don't need to be a tech giant to benefit from automation. Many cloud platforms and off-the-shelf tools are already incorporating RPA-like features or can be integrated with standalone RPA tools.

Practical starting points:

- **Identify the bottlenecks.**
- **Choose automation-ready tools.**

- **Start small.**
- **Engage the team.**
- **Stay adaptable.**

The Shift: From more people to smarter processes

The talent shortage isn't just a short-term pain, it's nudging firms to rethink the structure of their finance functions. Rather than solving it by hiring more, many are solving it by working smarter.

With automation and RPA, firms can:

- Operate leaner while maintaining (or improving) service levels.
- Upskill their teams to focus on strategic advisory-led services, not admin.
- Attract younger talent by offering more strategic, tech-led roles.
- Deliver more value for clients, faster and with deeper insights.
- Improve staff retention by reducing burnout and enhancing job satisfaction.

We're certainly at a turning point. The traditional finance function is evolving and, in many ways, for the better. The scarcity of talent might be the catalyst, but automation and RPA are the enablers of a more strategic, efficient, and modern approach to accounting and advisory.

The key is balance. **It's not about replacing people; it's about enhancing them.** When you combine the right tools with the right people, you create a finance function that's not just future-ready, but future-leading.

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Paul McGowan

Solicitor of the month

This month Northern Insight talks to...

Paul McGowan

Managing Partner, Collingwood Legal

Tell us about your current role.

I'm the Managing Partner of the Newcastle based specialist employment law firm Collingwood Legal.

I am responsible for the running of the firm. I also actively work as a specialist employment lawyer. This role involves me working closely with our business clients and senior executives providing advice to support their needs and deal with any employment law issues they may have.

What is your proudest business achievement?

Setting up Collingwood Legal in 2010 in the aftermath of the credit crisis was quite a challenge but one that I am proud of. I am also proud that the firm is classed as "Top Tier" for employment advice by the Legal 500 based on research including client feedback. Most recently I was hugely proud to be awarded Employment Lawyer of the Year at the Legal 500 Northern Powerhouse Awards in Manchester in March.

I'm most proud of the development of the people in our team and it is great to see careers develop in the firm.

How has your industry changed in the last decade?

The firms geographical reach outside of the region has increased significantly. We deal with employment law issue and tribunal claims throughout the UK now. IT systems and software systems have helped us grow but we remain a "people" focussed business. The work that we do always involves people issues. As a firm we always look to deliver personalised and thoughtful solutions - which can't be replaced by a software system or AI.

What are you currently working on?

A variety of employment tribunal cases throughout the UK. We generally act for the employers in defending tribunal cases. At the moment, we are defending claims including allegations of disability discrimination, sex discrimination and unfair dismissal. No case is the same and the variety of the work helps keep us all sharp. In my role as Managing Partner, I am also responsible for growth plans for Collingwood Legal and we have exciting plans for the next five years.

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

"Back yourself and keep learning".

What has been your biggest challenge?

Earlier this year I signed up for a fantastic course called "Confidence Through Comedy" run by the brilliant Alfie Joey and Cal Halbert. I took the course as I wanted to challenge myself and put myself out of my comfort zone. The course ended with a group of nine of us delivering our first stand-up comedy set to a live audience of around 100 people. It was both a terrifying and exhilarating experience.

Who is your hero outside of business?

As a Newcastle United fan growing up in the 1980s my answer is Kevin Keegan. I loved his passion as a player and later as a manager of the club. That said from a business perspective Kevin Keegan also chose to back himself and took an unconventional approach to his own career when he dropped down to the old second division to join our team. When he joined Newcastle United as a player in 1982, he negotiated a clause in his contract that linked his earnings to the Club's gate receipts. This meant he had full motivation to create something special at the club at the time and increase crowd numbers.

How do you unwind out of work?

As a father of three active boys, I keep busy! I have spent a lot of time by the side of football, rugby and cricket pitches. When I do get time to myself, I love getting out on the golf course and also catching up with friends over a meal.

What are you reading at the moment?

See, Smile, Say Hello, which is the book about building trust creating customer loyalty and delivering outstanding service by Michael Heppell.

collingwoodlegal.com

Gender and the Equality Act

Considering the Supreme Court's decision that the term "sex" refers to "biological sex" in an employment context

Roland Fairlamb is an Associate Solicitor at specialist employment law firm, Collingwood Legal. Roland considers a recent Supreme Court decision in respect of the definition of "sex" under the Equality Act 2010.

Supreme Court's ruling on the meaning of "sex" under the Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act 2010 (EqA 2010) provides protection to individuals from discrimination relating to one of the nine identified "protected characteristics". The protected characteristics include "sex". Specifically, paragraph 11(a) of the EqA 2010 states in respect of sex: "a reference to a person who has a particular protected characteristic is a reference to a man or to a woman".

The Supreme Court was asked in the matter of *For Women Scotland Ltd v The Scottish Ministers* [2025] UKSC 16 to determine how such a definition should be interpreted. In particular, the arguments put forward centred around whether a transgender woman with a Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC) should receive the same protection under the protected characteristic of "sex" as a biological woman. The Scottish government argued that obtaining a GRC amounted to a change of sex "for all purposes", and therefore the protection of "sex" under the EqA 2010 should extend to a transgender woman with a GRC.

However, the argument put forward by the Scottish government was unsuccessful. The unanimous decision of the Supreme Court was that the proper interpretation of the terms "woman" and "sex" in the EqA 2010 refer to "biological woman" and "biological sex". This conclusion was partly led by the rationale that the application of these words in a legislative context needs

to be clear and consistent, and that using the definition of "certified sex" would create confusion and impact the protected characteristic of "sex" under the EqA 2010 in an "incoherent way". The Supreme Court was also concerned that it would potentially weaken the protection offered to other protected characteristics, such as "sexual orientation", and could therefore have wider, unintended, implications.

The Protected Characteristic of "gender reassignment"

It is vital to note that, regardless of the conclusion reached, the Supreme Court was at pains to emphasise that the decision should not be taken as a "triumph for one or more groups in our society at the expense of another". In particular, the Supreme Court wished to offer reassurance that transgender people do have protection under a different protected characteristic identified in the EqA 2010.

Specifically, paragraph 7 of the EqA 2010 identifies "gender reassignment" as a protected characteristic. Lord Hodge took steps to reiterate that transgender people therefore benefit from "protection, not only against discrimination through the protected characteristic of gender reassignment, but also against direct discrimination, indirect discrimination and harassment in substance in their acquired gender".

What does this mean in practice?

It is important to note that this was not a decision specifically made in an employment context – it is a decision regarding the interpretation of the EqA 2010.

However, there will be clear implications in an employment context. One example is where "positive action" may be taken by an employer specifically to support a group of people who share a protected characteristic. In a scenario whereby such positive action is taken by an employer to support women, for example, such positive action should not extend to transgender women. In other words, the distinct needs and disadvantages of one group (e.g. women) should be considered separately to those of another group (e.g. transgender women). This is an important factor for public bodies that have a public sector equality duty. There are therefore clear implications for employers to consider moving forward.

About us

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

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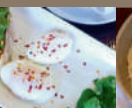
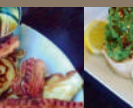
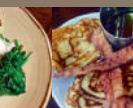


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A new brand for Jacksons

The North East's trusted independent law firm, Jacksons, launched its new brand at exclusive events at Wynyard Hall and Baltic's Riverside Suite.

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

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DIY SOS

The dangers of not instructing a solicitor when drafting your will

'If you want something done right, do it yourself' may be a solid mantra in many aspects of day-to-day life, but not when it comes to drafting one of the most important documents you'll ever possess: your will.

Spring has finally arrived and now seems as good a time as any to get your personal affairs in order. While DIY-ing is an option that seems like an attractive way to save money initially (particularly in the current climate), the potential for mistakes and poor execution could cost you much more in the long run.

Why should you have a will?

Shockingly, almost two-thirds of UK adults do not have a will in place, meaning there is no formal record of what they want to happen to their estate (and crucially, any children or dependents) if they die.

Your will is one of the most important documents you will ever sign as it ensures that, should you die, your intentions will be carried out as you would have wished. Wills are legally binding and outline what you would like to happen to:

- your money
- your property and possessions
- any children or dependents you have

It also details who you would like to carry out these wishes on your behalf, known as your executor(s), and who you would like to leave certain assets to, known as your beneficiaries.

Why should you instruct a solicitor to help you write your will?

Unfortunately, will-writing services are not regulated in the UK, meaning that while there are many options available for drafting your will, there are no protections available to you if the end product is not fit for purpose. The quality of unregulated will-writing services and DIY wills can also vary significantly, and, as wills can be

invalidated if they contain mistakes, this can be a costly option in the long run.

Solicitors, however, are regulated by the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA), so you will be covered under their protections, adding an extra layer of reassurance that what you are paying for is safeguarded.

Sweeney Miller's Wills team can help

Wills can vary in format and detail depending on your circumstances – from a basic or 'simple' will to a much more 'complex' one. A solicitor will be able to advise you on the best type of will for you, your family, and your assets.

Our experienced, compassionate solicitors will discuss with you your assets, marital status, family, who you would wish to deal with your estate, and who you would wish to benefit from your estate on your death.

While our will-writing service prices are competitive, you will also get the added reassurance of our experience and

expertise and the protections available to you by using a regulated service. 'If you want something done right, do it yourself' might be true when you're painting your hallway, but when it comes to writing your will, if you want something done right, ask an expert!

We can also advise you on and help you draft a Lasting Power of Attorney (LPA) at the same time as writing your will. An LPA is a formal legal document where you appoint one or more people (attorneys) to make decisions on your behalf if you can no longer do this yourself; for example, you become incapacitated or unwell and can be just as important as your will, particularly if you are a business owner.

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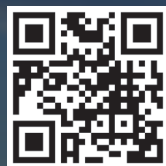
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In conversation with...

Jonathan Waters

Jonathan Waters

Jonathan Waters is Managing Partner of full service law firm, Hay & Kilner based in The Lumen at Newcastle Helix.

A business that puts their people, clients and values at the core of everything they do, Jonathan is proud to have been at the firm for over 26 years, starting out as a trainee solicitor, progressing through the business, taking on a number of different roles along the way.

Here he shares more about the firm, its values, the importance of giving back, nurturing the next generation and creating a great place to work.

About Hay & Kilner

Starting life as a post-war practice in 1946, the fast growing and multi award-winning firm continues to go from strength-to-strength offering a wide range of commercial and private client services to companies and individuals both from the North East and further afield.

Creating a great place to work

"I am incredibly proud of our longstanding legacy as one of the region's most reputable law firms. Our focus on our people and client service is something that resonates across our entire business alongside our core values of being engaging, relatable, dynamic, passionate and supportive."

"We are also proud of our impressive

retention rates at Hay & Kilner so hopefully that means we are doing something right! Something I can personally vouch for having been with the firm for over 26 years after starting my career as a trainee solicitor and progressing through the business. I genuinely wouldn't have wanted to have been anywhere else, and it's wonderful that so many of our colleagues say the same too."

Supporting the next generation of talent

"Mentoring our talented next generation is something I find personally fulfilling as well as being involved in the training and development of our junior lawyers. It's something I've always been incredibly invested in, having been given the same support during my time with the firm."

"We recently won an Investors in People award and it's great to get independent verification of our ongoing commitment to the development of our team and being a great place to work."

Giving back to the local community

However, doing good business isn't just about financial success. Hay & Kilner are proud of their North East roots and commitment to giving back to the local community, recently donating £10,000 to Great North Air Ambulance Service. From internal mentoring schemes, partnering with the Social Mobility Foundation, sponsorships and time off for volunteering, giving back is something the whole team enjoys.

Jonathan is also a proud trustee of the Chronicle Sunshine Fund, a charity that provides specialist and adapted equipment to children aged 0-19 living with disabilities.

"It's amazing to be involved with a great team that makes such a difference to the lives of young people and their families."

2025 outlook

"2025 is already proving to be another exciting year for the firm, as we continue our commitment to growth, supporting our people and clients in the way we know best."

"We've seen a strong start to the year, with a number of ongoing deals and investments paired with a strong pipeline. We're also making a number of high profile external appointments to key growth areas in the business as well as promoting internal talent."

"However, the current climate is testing and many businesses across the North East are facing challenges right across the spectrum. As a full service commercial firm, we are well placed to support clients to act as a trusted advisor and we take a proactive and holistic approach to help them navigate the bumps along the journey."

Despite the context of wider economic changes, Jonathan says that there is a lot of cause for optimism in the North East and further afield.

"There is a resilience and buzz in the region across the business and professional community."

As for the future at Hay & Kilner, he adds: "It's about moving forward, embracing new processes and technology, investing in the right talent, and being a firm where people love working and one that clients love working with."

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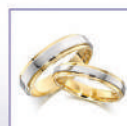
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Sarah Reid, MD and Phil Moir, Director

Richard Reed marks 77th year with fresh rebrand

Big enough to know, small enough to care, well-known and respected law firm Richard Reed Solicitors have unveiled a transformative new visual brand identity as they celebrate their 77th year in business.

Heavily rooted in Sunderland with a strong heritage to be proud of, the firm has come a long way since inception in 1948. Fast forward to 2025 and the growing team of 40 are celebrating an exciting new chapter as guests gathered at Sheepfolds to see a first glimpse of the unveiling alongside the launch of their new podcast, Legally Sound, marking an exciting milestone for the firm.

Highly regarded in the industry for their legal advice for all aspects of personal and business life, investment has been and continues to be made to ensure that the firm's further growth is achieved. With the needs of both their clients and employees in mind, the rebrand reflects the firm's ongoing commitment to innovation, client success and continuous evolution within the legal sector.

Sarah Reid, Managing Director, Richard Reed Solicitors: "This moment marks more than just a fresh look; it represents the evolution of our firm. Just as Sunderland is a city of transformation, we too are growing, adapting, and embracing new opportunities. We are proud to be a part of that journey. As our city evolves, so do we, ensuring that we continue to meet the needs of our clients, our community, and the businesses we collaborate with.

Our new branding reflects this evolution. It is not just a design change, it is a representation of who we are and what we stand for, and this transformation aligns with our mission to deliver exceptional legal services while adapting to the changing needs of clients."

Under the new all-encompassing rebrand, Richard Reed Solicitors will continue to raise the bar while offering the personalised customer-centric service which distinguishes the firm and elevates the practice in the sector.

Laura Kerry, Marketing & Business Support Executive, Richard Reed Solicitors added:

"We are so excited to introduce our new brand which better reflects who we are as a firm. The rebranding reflects a natural evolution, and clients will enjoy the same client focused approach - we might look a bit different, but we are still your trusted legal firm.

The rebranding process has been a strategic journey and we've always been keen to respect and play homage to our roots. Input was gathered from key stakeholders, including staff, clients, and partners, through extensive market research to ensure we captured the essence of what our firm means to our clients and our people.

The rebrand reflects our values, expertise and target audience, and aligns with our firm's goals, alongside resonating with current and potential clients."

The journey to collectively build and secure the future of clients, colleagues and the community remains a key focus for the firm, and the dynamic and forward-thinking leadership team have a vision to take Richard Reed Solicitors to new heights with lots of exciting plans for growth ahead, including the launch of the new Legally Sound podcast series.

Legally Sound aims to simplify the law and explores how it affects our daily lives, and to show listeners how to navigate legal changes effectively. The first episode is now live hosted by Sarah Reid, who is joined by legal experts Phil Moir and Kat Moody to break down the Housing Act and discuss the 2025 changes to the Renters Bill.

Sarah added: "We are taking things a step further with the launch of our podcast, Legally Sound. It's straight talking and breaks down the jargon, and it's very different from what you'd usually expect from a law podcast.

We are incredibly excited to air the next batch of podcast episodes and for what lies ahead for the firm and for the city of Sunderland, we look forward to continuing to grow alongside our city, our clients, and our community."

Listen now to the all-new Legally Sound Podcast: rss.com/podcasts/legally-sound-with-richard-reed



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L-R: Tom Justice, Alex Speirs, Beth Thompson, Sara Worsick and Anthony Evans

Award-winning North East law firm announces four new promotions

Muckle LLP is continuing to invest in the best legal talent the North East has to offer and has announced four new promotions this April. This marks an exciting period of growth for Muckle and succession at the firm.

The promotions emphasise the firm's prioritisation of its people. The firm's approach of recruiting and developing the best people is at the heart of its focus on delivering excellent client service.

Alex Speirs, Tom Justice and Sara Worsick have been promoted to partners in the firm's dispute resolution, commercial and corporate teams respectively, while Beth Thompson has been promoted to senior associate in the real estate team.

Legal 500 UK hails Alex Speirs as a 'Rising Star'. She has extensive experience in commercial litigation, supporting corporate clients and individuals in the North East and Cumbria. Alex advises on a range of issues, including shareholder disputes, contentious probate, professional

negligence and reputational issues.

Ranked as a Leading Associate in last year's Legal 500 UK, Tom Justice works with the firm's commercial, media and digital/tech client base. He advises businesses and organisations across a range of sectors, specialising in intellectual property and regularly advising on commercialisation as well as overarching brand management. Tom's experience includes acting as lead adviser for international businesses in the sports and cosmetics industries.

Sara Worsick was named Young Lawyer of the Year at the Insider Young Professionals Awards 2024. A leading lawyer in the firm's corporate team, she leads significant UK and international transactions and works with a range of businesses on all types

of corporate finance transactions, such as Kitwave Group's acquisition of Creed Foodservice in 2024.

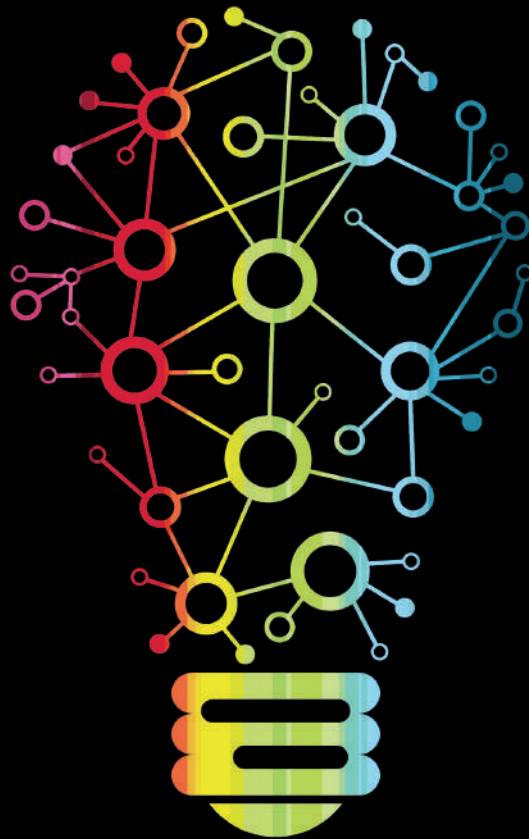
Providing excellent legal advice to landlords, tenants, and investors, Beth Thompson is highly experienced in the property-related aspects of corporate sales, acquisitions and investments. Beth was also shortlisted for the Young Lawyer of the Year at the North East Young Professional Awards 2022.

Anthony Evans, managing partner at Muckle, said: "We are deeply committed to our people and want everyone in the firm to have the ability to learn and develop and take the next step in their careers. This is an exciting time for the firm and I am absolutely delighted to announce these four promotions.

"Each is thoroughly well deserved and a testament to their talent and dedication. It has been a huge pleasure to see each of them develop their careers with us.

"Alex, Tom, Sara and Beth have very exciting futures ahead of them and I'm excited to see what they achieve."

For more information about working at Muckle, visit www.muckle-llp.com



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Partner among appointments at Mincoffs Solicitors



L-R: Associate solicitor Anne-Marie Thompson, partner Ashleigh Warne, associate solicitor Laura Liddle and trainee solicitors Leah McIntyre and Molly Kilgour

A leading North East law firm has announced two senior promotions among a raft of appointments, as it reflects on the success of the last 12 months.

Ashleigh Warne has joined the partnership at Newcastle-based Mincoffs Solicitors, while Laura Liddle has progressed to associate solicitor as part of the firm's April promotions.

Working closely with partner and head of residential conveyancing, Emma Liddle, Ashleigh has been with the firm for eight years and stepped into the role of assistant manager of the team in 2021, with vast experience managing a range of complex property cases.

In the employment team, Laura manages a caseload of both contentious and non-contentious matters and supports

partner and head of the team, Nick Smith, in growing the department, along with supervising and training new starters.

The residential department has also appointed associate solicitor Anne-Marie Thompson to help with increasing client demand – bringing more than 20 years' experience working on a wide range of property transactions at a number of Newcastle law firms.

Two new trainee solicitors have recently commenced training contracts at Mincoffs, bringing its total to four, with Leah McIntyre – formerly a paralegal with the firm – starting her first seat in the real estate department, and Molly Kilgour beginning her training with the residential conveyancing team.

Paul Hughes, senior partner and head of corporate, said: "We are delighted to announce a series of appointments to our employment, residential conveyancing and real estate teams.

"Ashleigh and Laura have been at the firm for a number of years now, during which they have been assets to their departments,

and I have full confidence that they will take their new positions in their stride.

"Anne-Marie, Leah and Molly excelled in their interviews and we look forward to them taking up their roles across the firm.

"Mincoffs Solicitors has expanded significantly over the last five years and we have plans for further growth in the near future."

Across the last 12 months, Mincoffs has welcomed 19 new staff across the firm, with recruitment ongoing for a number of additional roles.

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

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

For more information visit www.mincoffs.co.uk

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Dominic Elsworth

International Trade, Tariffs and Intellectual Property Rights

What do tariffs and intellectual property rights have in common? Both are trade barriers.

Intellectual property rights award monopolies which allow the owner to exclude all others, whereas tariffs seek to exclude foreign goods by making those goods more expensive.

Tariffs have been around for longer than patents and are once again en vogue. Trump thinks they will make America great again. The EU and China think that retaliatory tariffs will protect their own markets. History tells us that both are wrong, but businesses have to deal with the hand they are dealt. It looks as though this will involve navigating tariff walls for some time.

For decades, developing countries have

linked their intellectual property and international trade policies to promote the localisation of manufacture. On the one hand, company X may be granted a patent in country Y, but on the other, company X may be required by country Y to set up local manufacture or grant licences under the patent to local third party manufacturers or company X may face having its patent rights diluted. Such policies often impose a very hefty tariff on the import of manufactured goods to further “encourage” local manufacture.

For UK businesses engaged in trade with countries that impose significant tariffs, intellectual property rights can form the basis of a marketing strategy that avoids tariffs. With a patent in hand, manufacture of the patented item may be licensed to a business within the country imposing the import tariff. Alternatively, direct local manufacture could be established.

It is not only patents that can help a business navigate the tariff wall. Trade mark registrations also have an important role. The political purpose of tariffs is usually to encourage consumers to buy products made within the country imposing the tariff. However, the consumers may be attached to a particular brand. American citizens may prefer a British brand to an American brand. A trade mark owner having a trade mark registration in the USA could license the

manufacture of a product and application of the trade mark to a US based business instead of exporting a product made in the UK (or elsewhere in the world). A trade mark registration strategy is faster to implement than a patent strategy. For UK businesses who have been exporting to the USA without having registered their trade marks in the USA, trade mark registration should be considered immediately.

For business exporting goods to the USA who do not have patents in the USA, a longer term strategy should be considered. In most cases it will not be possible to obtain patents for goods that are already being exported to the USA, because they will be in the public domain and so not patentable. However, the USA is one of a handful of countries to provide a grace period (of 12 months) during which one's own disclosure, whether by sale or publication, is discounted when the USPTO assesses patentability.

Businesses considering their approach to intellectual property rights (be they patent applications, design registrations or trade mark registrations) may be able to take advantage of the UK IPO's IP Advance programme, which provides targeted support to innovative, high growth potential SME's, regardless of whether they already have existing portfolios.

www.heip.co.uk

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The Storytelling Celebrant from Sunderland

Steven Udale, an actor, author, and celebrant from Sunderland, has made a name for himself as “The Storytelling Celebrant.” His journey into storytelling began unexpectedly during the lockdown when he noticed a need for calm and engaging content online.

Rather than singing like many others, Steven turned to classic storytelling, beginning with well-loved tales such as The Three Little Pigs and Snow White.

The response was overwhelming, and soon, people were requesting specific stories, leading Steven to develop his own original narratives.

Encouraged by this success, Steven authored two children's books, both published in the British Library. His stories revolve around Ed, a young version of himself, who wears a magical bobble hat that helps him navigate tricky situations—something he wished for as a child. His books aim to teach young readers valuable lessons about responsibility, consequences, and kindness.

Beyond children's storytelling, Steven has also found a profound role in celebrant services. His storytelling skills are beautifully transferable, allowing him to craft heartfelt and meaningful ceremonies for weddings and funerals. His journey into celebrancy began when an old friend reached out with an urgent need for a wedding officiant. Though unfamiliar with the role at the time, Steven stepped up to the challenge and soon realised he had a gift for narrating the most important moments in people's lives.



Blue Flames' Holiday Clubs For Disadvantaged Kids Get New Equipment Grant Boost

Dozens of disadvantaged kids from across Newcastle and North Tyneside will get the chance to try new sports this year thanks to a four-figure equipment grant from a regional employer.

The Blue Flames Sporting Club is running free holiday clubs at its Benton sports ground over the Easter, summer and Christmas school holidays for 5-12 year-old children, with activities ranging from tennis, football and cricket through to badminton, gymnastics and craft sessions.

The holiday clubs are designed to engage local young people in different activities that might otherwise be out of reach to them for financial reasons, as well as to help them build their self-confidence, make new friends and stay active.

A hot meal is provided as part of each day's schedule, with information also being shared on healthy eating and nutrition, while lots of signposting information is also made available to attending families on services that might help them address other individual needs.

The Blue Flames team had been looking at how they might refresh their equipment stocks, so that this year's intake could get to try some different activities.

And after securing a £2,000 grant from the Banks Group, it has now bought the equipment required for playing pickleball, an indoor racket sport which combines elements of tennis, badminton and table tennis and which has become one of the UK's fastest-growing sports.

New futsal goals have also been purchased with the grant to give more young people the chance to get onto the club's football pitches at the same time.

The Blue Flames Sporting Club is a not-for-profit business whose mission is to provide quality sport and leisure facilities at affordable prices to communities across Newcastle and North Tyneside.

It's the second time that Banks has supported the club's work, with a £15,000 grant from the Banks Community Fund in 2017 enabling the Club to purchase two new sets of lightweight full-size goals, as well as new sets of five-a-side goals, netball posts, tennis nets, gym mats and badminton nets.

New Fund Launched To Support Young People In Stockton

A Stockton community charity is launching a new fund to make sure local children in deprived areas don't miss out on opportunities that most people take for granted.

The Stockton Family Action & Outreach Service offers a variety of support and advice to families living across an area including Billingham, Stockton, Thornaby and Ingelby Barwick who are facing a range of different challenges.

Delivered in partnership with Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council, the service aim to provide support to families when they first need it and develops new initiatives which meet their developing needs.

Developed in response to issues identified by the Stockton Child Poverty Network around the impact that the cost-of-living crisis is having on children, young people and families, Family Action is now launching a new



Family Support Fund.

The fund will provide micro-grants that enable children and young people to take part in activities and experiences that will help reduce feelings of isolation, address mental ill health and enhance family life, with each approved application also seeing the recipient receiving an age-appropriate gift, such as books or bath toys, which will help to promote positive engagement and interaction with parents/carers.



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Alan Shearer Centre hits £7 million fundraising milestone - but fundraising drive continues



Football icon Alan Shearer is celebrating one of the biggest wins of his post-playing career after helping raise £7 million for the Alan Shearer Centre — a specialist facility in Newcastle for people with profound disabilities and acute sensory impairments.

But the Premier League's all-time leading scorer is already focused on the next goal, pledging to boost fundraising efforts to meet growing demand and rising costs.

"When I finished playing in 2006, a good friend asked if I would consider supporting a new activity centre for people with complex disabilities," said Alan. "The moment I saw the vision and plans for the facility — and realised the life changing impact it could have and the difference it could make to people's lives — I was all in."

Since then, Alan has remained closely involved with the centre and, in 2012, launched the Alan Shearer Foundation (ASF) to help secure its future. Today, the facility supports more than 5,000 members from across the North East, providing free access to therapies and specialist care.

"It just felt right for me to be giving back to help other people and good causes," said Shearer. "I've been hooked ever since and I'm fully committed to raising as much money as I possibly can, for as long as I



can, to sustain the fantastic work that takes place every day at the activity centre."

Shearer had originally pledged to raise £250,000 per year — a target that has helped build and maintain vital services. But with costs rising, the centre now requires at least £320,000 annually to continue operating at its current level.

"I founded the Alan Shearer Foundation to make a real difference to the lives of people with a wide range of abilities and complex needs," added Alan. "To keep the activity centre free for our members, we now need to raise an additional £70,000 every year."

"Every donation, fundraising event and contribution — however big or small — helps us to maintain and grow these vital facilities and ensures that people get the care and experiences they deserve."

"We need to do more if we are to help and support families who require specialist care facilities."

The centre, operated and managed by regional charity St Cuthbert's Care, is a unique facility supporting families from across the North East.

"Every day I meet people who are truly passionate about raising awareness and tackling the stigma that can be attached to those suffering from profound disabilities," Alan added.

"There's still loads to do and I'm looking forward to getting behind the next wave of fundraising. I want to do whatever I can to make sure that the centre not only survives but thrives for years to come."

His commitment remains hands-on and he sees his involvement as more than symbolic.



"Legacy means showing up, not just lending your name to something and that's what this centre has always been about," he said. "Giving your help and time can be so rewarding and to see happy, smiley faces and see the appreciation and how grateful people are for your support is an incredible and humbling feeling."

Nic Gilbert, Chief Executive of St Cuthbert's Care said: "To reach the £7 million mark is an incredible achievement and a major milestone for us. Alan has unselfishly devoted his time to the activity centre since day one and we are incredibly lucky to have such a high-profile figure to support our fundraising endeavours."

www.alanshearerfoundation.org.uk



Jackie and Bryan. Friendship and fun in motion at The Hub@Parkhead

Charity of the month...

St Cuthbert's Care

St Cuthbert's Care is committed to helping improve the lives of some of the most vulnerable members of our communities, including people with profound disabilities, children in care, older people and those living on the margins of society.

Here we talk to Nicola Milne, Communications and Engagement Manager for the Charity.

Why was the charity formed?

St Cuthbert's Care was founded in 1946 to support children orphaned after the Second World War. Inspired by Catholic values, we've grown and evolved to meet the changing needs of people across the North East. Today, we're proud to be one of the region's longest-established social care charities, offering a wide range of services for children, older people and adults with disabilities.

What type of fundraising events do you have?

While most of our services are funded through statutory contracts, it's the generosity of our supporters that helps us go the extra mile. Fundraising plays a vital role in keeping the Alan Shearer Centre free of charge for over 5,000 members with disabilities - we need to raise at least £320,000 each year to make this possible. The Alan Shearer Foundation leads the way with high-profile events, including an annual ball and charity golf day.

Thanks to regular donors, legacy gifts and community fundraising, we're able to support other important areas of our work. This includes helping adults with learning disabilities at our Ashington day centre develop vital life skills,



Dan, enjoying the sensory light display at the Alan Shearer Centre



Independent supported living with friendship at its heart. Lucy and Claire

providing sleeping bags and essentials to people facing homelessness, enriching daily life in our nursing homes and funding Young Stars - our youth club that brings together children in foster care to enjoy fun activities and build friendships with others who understand their experiences.

Who are your trustees and patrons?

We're supported by a dedicated board of trustees from business, care and community who provide governance and oversight, helping us maintain the highest standards of care.

We're also fortunate to have patrons who passionately raise the profile of our work. These include Alan Shearer CBE and his wife Lainya as well as Lady Elsie Robson, Mike Browne and television presenters Ant and Dec OBE. Their support helps to shine a spotlight on the difference we make to people across the North East - we can't thank them enough.

What have been your proudest moments so far?

We've had many proud moments over the years, each one a reflection of the dedication shown by our teams. Ensuring the Alan Shearer Centre remains free to thousands of families is a huge achievement, made possible through the ongoing support of the Alan Shearer Foundation. Thanks to this support, we've been able to expand our playground, upgrade our hydrotherapy pool and provide free meals to families experiencing cost-of-living challenges.

We were also the first charity in the North East providing adult social care to become a Living Wage Foundation employer - an achievement we've proudly sustained ever since.

We're equally proud of the young people leaving our residential children's homes who go on to live independently, pursue education or employment and feel confident about their future.

Most recently, we celebrated a milestone at St Catherine's, our nursing home in Newcastle, which became the first in the city to be awarded the prestigious Gold Standard Framework for end-of-life care - recognition of the compassion and professionalism of our team.

What are you currently working on?

We're always focused on delivering the highest quality care and are continually developing our services to meet new and emerging needs. Right now, we're expanding our support for disabled children, ensuring we can meet their needs both now and in the future.

We're also growing our community services to reach more people facing hardship - particularly those experiencing complex or hidden challenges. Whether through tailored support, safe accommodation or inclusive activities, we aim to provide stability, confidence and new opportunities for those who need us most.

What does the future hold?

Like others in the sector, we're feeling the strain of rising demand, funding pressures and the recent increase in employers' National Insurance contributions. As a Living Wage Foundation employer, we're proud to fairly reward our employees for the vital work they do - despite the financial pressure this creates.

Yet we remain positive. We're lucky to have a skilled and dedicated team, united by a commitment to those we support. It's this strength that gives us confidence in a future where we continue to adapt, grow and deliver care that truly makes a difference.

How can people get involved?

There are lots of ways to support St Cuthbert's Care. You could volunteer your time, help raise awareness, take on a fundraising challenge or even consider becoming a trustee. Every act of support helps us reach more people in need and continue providing life-changing care across the North East.

However you choose to get involved; you'll be making a real difference - we'd love to hear from you.

For more information visit our website:

www.stcuthbertscare.org.uk or call

Nicola Milne, Communications and Engagement Manager on 0191 242 4809.



Selma and Lindsay sharing warmth, companionship and conversation at St Catherine's Nursing Home

People Doing Good

Birtley Community Pool thriving

Birtley Community Pool has seen impressive growth and community engagement since reopening in September 2024 as a community-run charity.

The pool is flourishing, offering a warm, welcoming, and family-friendly environment. The pools are maintained at comfortable temperatures providing a much-needed respite during the colder months. Additionally, new LED lighting has enhanced the brightness and ambiance of the pool area, creating a better experience for both swimmers and spectators.

The pool caters to all ages and abilities, operating seven days a week. Swimmers can choose from multi speed lane swimming, aquafit classes and family fun sessions on the inflatables, while floating sound bath sessions give swimmers a unique and calming well-being experience”

Matthew Grant, Treasurer of Birtley Community Pool Trustees, commented: “Our regular customers are enjoying these activities

and giving us great feedback. It’s been a good six months and the faith all our team have put into the pool has paid off, with the local community being the overall winner. If you haven’t yet visited us, please come along, try one of our activities, and support this invaluable community asset.”

For more information www.birtleycommunitypool.org.uk



Healthwatch Gateshead and Healthwatch Newcastle welcome new team members



Healthwatch Gateshead and Healthwatch Newcastle are pleased to announce the addition of two new members to their team, bringing fresh perspectives and expertise to their vital community engagement work.

Dan Milburn, from Consett, has joined as the Lead Officer for Healthwatch Newcastle. Reflecting on his career transition, Dan shared, “Before this, I worked in a leisure centre in management

and as a lifeguard. This role is a big change for me, but I’m excited to oversee our team’s engagement and outreach efforts. Our focus is on working together to improve health and social care services through community involvement.”

Becca Neale, originally from Kirkwhelpington, has taken on the role of Engagement and Involvement Officer for Healthwatch Gateshead. With a background as a mental health caseworker and a recent MSc in Psychology focusing on women’s health, Becca is eager to make an impact. “Joining Healthwatch Gateshead felt like a natural step for me. It aligns perfectly with my studies and passion for community health. The team has been amazing, and I love being out in the community, building relationships with local groups. A great example is our work with Age UK Gateshead and their 65+ friendship group.”

Both Dan and Becca are committed to engaging with residents to ensure their voices are heard in shaping local health and social care services. Their work will help strengthen Healthwatch Gateshead and Healthwatch Newcastle’s mission of empowering individuals and improving health and social care services through public feedback.

Photography business develops from friendship

Two Tyneside men, Alan Bell and Andy Thomson, have turned their personal battles with mental health into a powerful new venture that aims to inspire and support others.

The pair met on a photography course at college and bonded over their shared experiences, ultimately forming a close friendship that led to the creation of their own video and photography business—Vision Impact Photography.

Alan and Andy have come from diverse professional backgrounds. Alan spent years working in security, including roles at major retail and industrial organisations, while Andy worked in the renewable energy sector, building offshore wind turbines. Despite their different paths, both struggled with mental health challenges that shaped their journeys.

Photography became a crucial outlet for them, offering a creative way to manage their well-being. Their shared passion evolved into something bigger—using visual storytelling to document and highlight mental health and neurodiversity issues, breaking stigmas and encouraging open conversations.

The mission behind Vision Impact Photography is to provide a

platform for individuals to share their stories of resilience. Through powerful visual narratives, Alan and Andy aim to help people open up about their struggles and triumphs, emphasising that it’s okay to talk about mental health.

Their projects range from covering MMA and jiu-jitsu events—capturing the mental and physical battles of fighters—to more socially impactful work, such as creating a training video for school transport workers to better understand the experiences of neurodiverse children. This groundbreaking initiative, filmed from the child’s perspective, aims to build empathy and awareness in those responsible for their daily transport.





ARE YOU SEEKING A CHARITY TO SUPPORT THIS YEAR?



The Charlie & Carter Foundation (CCF) provides financial support to parents of seriously ill children with life limiting conditions.

Founded by the parents of 'the boys', Chris and Sarah Cookson work tirelessly alongside a committed team to support families in their time of need.

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Physical
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Annual
Ball

Thank you



Contact Laura Jane Forbes

T: 0191 466 1428

E: Laura@ccfemail.co.uk

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Teesside
HOSPICE

Teesside Tartan 500

10th - 14th September 2025

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NE Youth celebrates 90 years of impact with gala event

On April 10th, NE Youth marked an incredible milestone by hosting their 90th Anniversary Gala at The Fed in Gateshead.

The evening was a celebration of nearly a century of dedicated service to young people across the North East, with over 400 guests in attendance to honour the organisation's enduring legacy.

Since its beginnings as the Northumberland Association of Boys Clubs, NE Youth has evolved and grown, continually adapting to meet the changing needs of young people. Today, they offer a mix of open-access and targeted programmes that continue to transform lives. Over the past 90 years, NE Youth has supported more than one million young people, remaining a steady presence through wartime, economic downturns, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the current cost-of-living crisis.

As part of their anniversary celebrations, NE Youth launched the One in a Million campaign. This initiative aims to reconnect with individuals who have been part of the charity's history. They plan to produce a commemorative film featuring personal stories and interviews with those whose lives were touched by the organisation.

The charity already holds an extensive archive of documents, annual reports, press cuttings, photographs, and memorabilia. Through the One in a Million campaign, selected images from across the decades are being shared in the hope of identifying and reconnecting with the people featured in them.

NE Youth CEO, John Niblo, reflected on the evening: "Ninety years is a long time—and the fact we're still going strong is incredible! Our Gala allowed us to celebrate NE Youth's rich history, reconnect with old friends and supporters, and showcase the talents of some amazing young people. We also raised a few quid along the way!"





With continued financial support, we can keep our promise to the young people of this region. Huge thanks to our sponsor Robertson North Ltd and everyone who donated on the night—we raised around £12,000, which will go directly toward supporting more young lives. What an unforgettable night!”

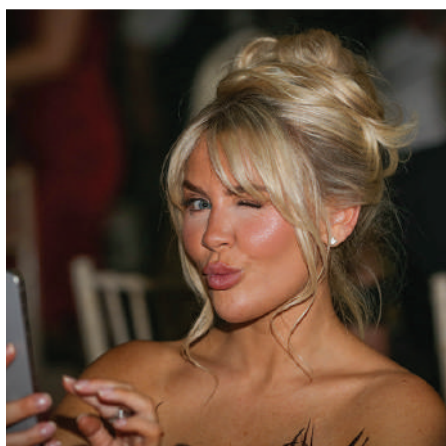
Ian Robertson, MD of Robertson North Ltd, main sponsor commented: “Providing assistance, support and sponsorship to NE Youth and the services they provide for our young people is, for me, an easy choice. I consider giving a little back for the positive impact that youth services had on me to be a privilege.

For anyone out there who, like myself, has been part of a Boys’ Club, Youth Club, dance club or any youth service and is considering getting involved — do it.”

The event was hosted by BBC presenter and NE Youth advocate Anna Foster. Entertainment included powerful performances from Lawnmowers, Josie Littlewood, Alf Hill, and a headline set by singer-songwriter Channy.

Looking ahead, NE Youth has set an ambitious goal to raise an additional £90,000 throughout their anniversary year, helping them extend their support to even more young people across the North East.

For more information go to: www.neyouth.org.uk



A Night to Remember

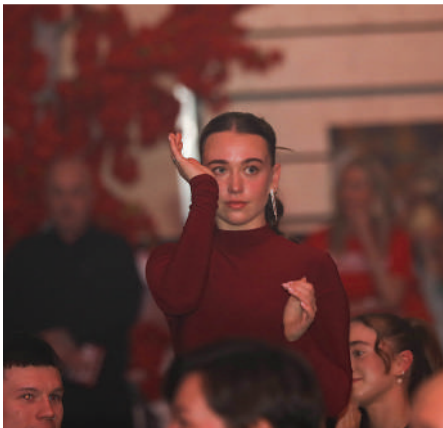
The Red Sky Ball has once again proven to be a night to remember, raising an incredible £203,970.26 to support Red Sky Foundation's vital work for babies, children and adults with complex heart conditions.

The charity's biggest annual fundraiser delivered a spectacular evening filled with entertainment, fine dining, and inspiring stories - all in aid of funding life-changing cardiac projects.

The funds raised will support key initiatives such as a major new community cardiac project which will provide early heart disease screenings for over-60s in high-risk areas across the North East.

Additionally, the money will help Red Sky Foundation continue its extensive defibrillator campaign, ensuring more life-saving devices are placed in communities and grassroots football clubs across the region.







In conversation with

Northern Insight talks to...

Jackie Sewell

Owner of Buy the Kilo which offers zero waste, plastic free shopping with an inhouse art gallery.

After graduating in 2013 in Fine Art, I decided to give up my interior design business of over 20 years and concentrate on an art career.

My practice had been developing over the previous six years which it took me to complete my part time degree. Working with and researching about the devastation of plastic in the world, my environmental journey began.

My youngest daughter was studying in Cornwall and already living a plastic free life which included shopping locally at the butchers, bakers and fishmongers, as well as getting her vegetables and milk delivered to her door. She was also shopping at a zero waste shop in Truro and that's where I was introduced to it all. This is about buying what you need, rather than what you are forced to buy at the supermarket. However reusing your one-use plastic container to refill became more necessary as research became more intense.



Jackie with daughter Rachael



My oldest daughter Rachael was also enthusiastic about the concept and together we started to research to see if there were any shops in the North East. We found there was nothing between Darlington and Berwick and so our journey began.

We spent a lot of time visiting the new shops that were opening around the country, to see what we wanted to do. We also got a lot of help from Hannah in Cornwall

who had The Little Refill Store. Buy The Kilo was born and the enthusiasm for our shop was immense within our first year. Many

people asked us to open Buy the Kilo's all over the NE but our story was unique and couldn't be diluted into other stores, so we started to help and advise other people who wanted to open a zero waste shop.

Sharing our experiences of setting up, created a fantastic community of zero waste shops, working together to promote the concept of getting people involved in environmental issues.

Our first year was incredible but Covid hit and the ethos of the shop got lost in the pandemic, we are still recovering now and sadly all but one of the shops, that we helped open, have now closed. The climate hit the zero waste community hard and there are still many shops closing every day.

Rachael and I worked extremely hard to create a wonderful community around



our shop and that is still working now. We have a great support network and we have always called it a safe space for a lot of people. Rachael left a couple of years ago to look after her two young children and pursue her own career path as an artist. Through Covid and over the last few years, we have been privileged to become custodians of customers personal information. We have laughed and cried with many of our customers and friends, I feel very proud at what we have created.

We can't compete with the supermarkets but its great when someone comes into our shop and connects, making a life choice to shop with us and start their journey however small to make a positive change for the environment and the future. I am making a huge decision to take out another lease, continuing our journeys together and I know my customers will support me. I know and they know, that the alternative of closing would be devastating for everyone. I often talk to people who ask questions about starting a business and about being in business and I try and help as much as I can.

Having a business brings lots of different issues and in this climate, I admire anyone who considers starting up. Our family motto has always been, "treat people how you would like to be treated yourself". I always think, if you take this through your life, you will reap what you sow.

Buy the Kilo has been a wonderful experience over the last six years. There have been many highs and many lows but what we have achieved has been amazing. I look forward to the next few years and hope many more people engage with the concept and help the environment!

www.buy-the-kilo.com



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Cracks in the flow

By Helen Butler, Simplified Operations.

The hidden cost of misalignment between teams.

A common (and costly) issue we regularly see inside growing businesses is that despite work getting done, no one is quite sure where one person's responsibility ends and the next begins.

- **A client wins a new job** - but the sales handover is light, and the operations team spends hours chasing missing details
- **A job leaves the factory** - but key info isn't passed on to the site team, so they're left scrambling.
- **The quote is signed off** - but no one's updated the project schedule, checked resourcing, or briefed the delivery lead.

These moments - the handovers between people, teams, or departments - are where things often fall apart.

Not because people aren't doing their jobs. Most of the time, they're doing their best. But when handovers rely on memory, goodwill, or last-minute chats, things get missed. And when things get missed, the impact ripples quickly: time is lost, mistakes are made, clients get frustrated, and your team ends up firefighting.

It's a quiet cost that builds up fast. Hours spent clarifying what should have been clear. Deliverables delayed because someone didn't know they were next in line. Confidence lost—internally and externally—because everything feels more reactive than it should be.

And yet, it's one of the easiest areas to improve.

A good handover isn't about adding bureaucracy or writing long documents that no one reads. It's about building in *clarity*. Everyone involved knows:

- When a handover should happen.
- What information needs to be shared.
- Who is picking it up next.
- Where the responsibility clearly shifts.

It's about creating a repeatable rhythm that reduces friction and keeps things moving.

The challenge for many small businesses is that their processes have grown organically. They've been built around the people doing the work, not around sustainable delivery. So even though the team is

capable, they're often relying on habit and experience rather than clear systems. And as soon as you add new people, more volume, or complex projects - that approach starts to break down.

If you're noticing more firefighting, repeated issues, or people "not quite knowing what's going on" across departments - it's worth looking closely at how you manage your internal handovers.

Start by asking:

- Where do jobs, tasks, or projects get passed between people or teams?
- Is there a consistent method for doing that—or does it vary depending on who's involved?
- Does each person know when their responsibility ends—and what's needed to hand over well?
- Are there unnecessary delays or misunderstandings happening at these points?

It's easy to overlook this area when you're busy. But improving handovers is one of the fastest ways to make things run more smoothly without needing more people or more hours in the day.

Getting it right can significantly improve performance, accountability, and delivery speed—while reducing stress across the team.

If you're not sure where the gaps are—or how much they might be costing you—our Operational Diagnostic is a good place to start. It gives you a clear, independent view of what's really going on beneath the surface and helps you pinpoint where operational improvements will deliver the biggest impact.

Sometimes, just seeing things differently is enough to unlock what's next.

***Interested in exploring what's possible?
We'd love to have a conversation...***

**Contact us on 0191 694 1349 or
helen@simplifiedoperations.co.uk
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“

*...seeing things
differently
is enough to
unlock what's
next...*

Helen Butler

The Future of Work: Boundaries & navigating the pace of change

Over the last few months, many leaders have had to revisit their strategies due to the ongoing flux within the economy and geo-political landscape.

This creates unrest for them and their people, which takes a toll. Couple this with a 2024 study by Lattice and YouGov finding that 47% of UK managers surveyed reported feeling “too overwhelmed” with their routine responsibilities in the last six months to perform effectively, we can see that navigating the current pace is causing challenges.

I’m seeing this increasingly with the leaders I work with. BAU is dominating, even for those who should be working at a strategic level. Head space to think and plan, which they badly need, is the first to go, as is the time spent connecting and developing their teams.

All this leads to people playing out of position, focusing on the wrong things, and frustrated at not achieving what they really want to do. Frankly people are knackered and just need a break!

If this sounds like you, here is how you can create the space you need to truly lead.

1. Identify What Is Essential

Distinguish between tasks that are critical to your strategic focus and objectives and those that are peripheral. Use frameworks like the Eisenhower Matrix to split tasks based on urgency and importance, allowing you to concentrate on what really matters. Taking time to plan, at least four weeks in advance, will give you more control, making sure those essential things get time in your diary.

2. Clarify Priorities

Once essential tasks are identified, rank them to establish a hierarchy of priorities. Then align with your colleagues. You don’t operate in a vacuum, so don’t ignore the fact that your priorities need to be aligned upwards and sideways to enable you and your team to be focussing on the right things. Once done, set specific, measurable goals with defined timelines to provide

direction and track progress. Regularly review these and adjust as things change – but don’t kick the can down the road! Rolling a deadline won’t help – challenge why things aren’t happening, and take responsibility!

3. Define Your Boundaries

Where have these slipped or not existed at all? You have wants and needs too – and you need to define your boundaries and make sure others know about them. Set limits on your availability, define your working hours, and communicate these to your stakeholders. Make sure over the month you include time for strategic planning, team engagement, personal development, and self-care to enable a healthy work-life balance. By protecting your time and energy, you can focus more effectively.

4. Set Expectations

Be really clear on what you expect of your team members, and stakeholders. This creates accountability and alignment. Together clearly define roles, responsibilities, and performance standards, ensuring that everyone understands their role and deliverables. Create regular check-ins and feedback

sessions to follow up on progress. Don’t let things drift. This clarity supports individual performance and also strengthens team cohesion and individual relationships.

5. Be Comfortable with Saying No

Remember, taking on too many commitments can dilute your focus and hinder performance. It also erodes trust if you don’t achieve those commitments. Therefore assess each new request or opportunity against your priorities and be prepared to decline those that don’t fit. Saying no is not a refusal to collaborate but a strategic decision to safeguard your capacity for tasks that truly matter. By doing this you maintain the quality of your work and back yourself to achieve long-term objectives.

Consider which of these will make the biggest difference for you, and make sure you do it this week!

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



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*...I genuinely
look forward
to coming in
each day...*

Hidden in plain sight

Discover Haylofts, the city centre workspace you'll wish you found sooner.

Tucked away just off St Thomas Street in Newcastle, you'll find one of the city's best-kept secrets: Haylofts. Step through the archway, and you're instantly transported from the buzz of the city into a calm, creative courtyard that feels like a world of its own.

Haylofts is part of the family of workspaces created by Hoult's Yard. Like its sister sites in Ouseburn and Gateshead, it's all about community, flexibility, and character. But what makes Haylofts truly special is its hidden-in-plain-sight location and its story.

From Stables to Success Stories

Originally built as a stable block for Newcastle Breweries, the building's heritage is woven into every beam and brick. When Hoult's Yard took over the site, the vision was clear: to create a unique workspace that combined the building's original charm with everything modern businesses need to thrive.

Today, that vision has come to life. Haylofts is home to private offices and meeting rooms, all wrapped around a cool central courtyard, complete with bleacher-style seating that works as a great spot to host events too. There's superfast internet, bookable meeting rooms, communal breakout spaces, bike storage, and a friendly on-site team ready to help however they can.





A quiet hub in the heart of the city

Location-wise, it doesn't get much better. Haylofts is a two-minute walk from Haymarket Metro, with Monument, Northumberland Street, and the university quarter all within easy reach. Whether heading to a client meeting, grabbing lunch, or popping out for after-work drinks, the best of the city is right on your doorstep.

But for those who work here, it's the quiet energy of the place that really sets it apart. It's not flashy, it's not noisy—and that's the point. It's a calm, tucked-away space where businesses can focus, grow, and connect with like-minded people.

Big ideas in small spaces

Haylofts is particularly popular with small teams, startups and established businesses who want something a little more inspiring than your average corporate office. Tenants range from recruitment pros and design studios to tech companies and biomedical scientists, all drawn in by the mix of location, atmosphere, and the kind of friendly professionalism that has become Hoult's Yards trademark.

And while it may be a peaceful spot, Haylofts is full of ideas. Tenants often collaborate, share advice over coffee in the courtyard, or come together for events and socials organised by the Hoult's Yard team.

As one current tenant puts it: "It's got everything I need, but it doesn't feel like an office—it feels like my own little HQ. I genuinely look forward to coming in each day."

The verdict?

If you're looking for a city-centre base with bags of character, proper community vibes, and just the right level of calm, Haylofts might be your perfect fit.

You might not have known it was there, but once you step inside, you'll be glad you found it.

Want to see it for yourself?

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West Moor entrepreneur joins North Tyneside Business Forum management team



Lauren at Killingworth Lake near her home

Lauren McWilliams, a successful branding and photography expert from West Moor, has been appointed to the management team of the North Tyneside Business Forum.

Known for her dynamic approach to personal branding and visibility, Lauren will take on this new voluntary role to help support and champion local businesses across the region.

Chair of the Forum, Michael James, shared his delight at Lauren's appointment, saying: "We're thrilled to welcome Lauren to the management team. Her creativity, energy, and deep understanding of what makes businesses stand out will be a huge asset to the Forum and the wider business community in North Tyneside."

Lauren runs a thriving personal branding and photography business, working

primarily with entrepreneurs and coaches to help them elevate their visibility.

"I call myself a brand photographer and visibility strategist but what I really do is help people to understand their personal brand and confidently put themselves out there. It's not just about photography, it's about building their confidence, finding speaking opportunities, getting into the press, and showing up both online and in-person."

She believes that in today's crowded digital space, standing out is more important than ever: "Since COVID, there's been a big rise in new businesses, and online competition is fierce. A lot of people copy similar messages, so it can be hard to stand out. But I always tell my clients — the key is to figure out who you are and fully own that. You don't have to pretend to be someone else. Your uniqueness is your power."

Despite a busy schedule, Lauren didn't hesitate when the opportunity to join the Forum's leadership team came up.

"The North Tyneside Business Forum played a massive part in my own journey. When I started my business six years ago, I didn't know a thing about networking or making connections. The Forum gave me

a trusted place to ask questions and meet people — many of whom became both friends and clients. I always said that when I was in a better place, I'd give back, and this feels like that chance."

With her energy, expertise, and passion for community, Lauren is set to be a valuable addition to the North Tyneside Business Forum's leadership — and an inspiration to business owners across the region.

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

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

Email us at: business.forum@northtyneside.gov.uk or visit www.northtynesidebusinessforum.org.uk T:0191 643 6000

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#SPEARSSUMMIT



Encouraging Agency

Dr David Cliff explores how leaders can foster decision-making and create a culture of autonomy.

I am not someone who believes people should be “maverick” for its own sake. Rules and procedures are necessary—they provide consistency, protect rights, and ensure a minimum standard of service.

Over a century ago, sociologist Max Weber viewed bureaucracy as a potentially fair and egalitarian means of distributing services across populations. He saw it as a way to bring order to the inherent variability of human systems, even advocating for impersonal relationships in the name of efficiency and consistency.

However, in many organisations today, the same mechanisms meant to promote fairness are often used to avoid risk. Everything is templated, scripted, and standardised—or at least appears to be. Internally, this creates a shared understanding of what constitutes

customer service while externally minimising liability. But this procedural “de-risking” often fails to meet the real, in-the-moment needs of individuals. Staff are left unable to respond meaningfully because, in effect, the computer says no—or more accurately, the rules say no.

This results in service that is organisationally focused, not customer-centred. It can be inefficient, dismal, uninspiring, or simply frustrating for those on the receiving end—whether they are paying clients or citizens meeting obligations like taxation.

Examples of this are everywhere. We now click through multiple screens to meet data privacy laws, at the cost of productivity. HMRC callers wait hours just to hand over their hard-earned money. We’re required to use online portals when many simply want to speak to a person. The victims of the infected blood scandal are treated equally—so equally that many will die uncompensated, awaiting resolution. National call centres have replaced local offices, and staff—under tight time management—are left fielding the frustration of customers they can’t help beyond the template.

If we want staff to be robotic, administering only what’s prescribed, then we will continue to see what we already have:

low initiative, burnout, poor productivity, systemic delays, and in public services, long waiting lists. But if we encourage independent thought—and crucially, support it even when it leads to mistakes—organisational cultures change. We begin to nurture learning, autonomy, behavioural flexibility, mental well-being, and, most importantly, meaningful service.

This all hinges on leaders’ attitude to risk. It’s far easier to lean on procedures and reassure stakeholders that “we followed the rules.” But that approach has a limited shelf life. Before long, AI will be able to handle rule-following perfectly. If human contribution is limited to box-ticking, why have humans at all? We edge closer to a bland, Weberian world of bureaucratic certainty and lacklustre delivery—administered without thought, compassion, or responsibility, and defended only by procedural compliance.

Does anyone truly want to live in a world like that?

True leaders don’t settle for this. They empower, foster autonomy, encourage unique responses to unique situations, and value human individuality. They preserve humanity in an overloaded world—and, in doing so, make the extraordinary possible.

www.gedanken.co.uk



Dr David Cliff

Enjoyed this article? Take the next step!

If you've found David's perspective thought-provoking, why not explore how it could transform your leadership, work, business, teams, and personal development? You will never truly know if this approach is right for you just by browsing the web or window shopping online, you have to experience it.

***Book a 45-minute, no-obligation
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Quantum Controls launches Q-Hire

A new division delivering Construction & Industrial Equipment Hire for businesses

Quantum Controls, a trusted name in the UK for Variable Speed Drives and Motors, has officially launched a new division, Q-Hire, marking a significant expansion of its existing equipment hire services for construction and industrial clients.

Headquartered in Prudhoe, Northumberland, the company has long supported customers with temporary power solutions, including VSDs and generators. The launch of Q-Hire builds directly on this strong foundation, offering a broader and more integrated range of hire products under one dedicated brand.

Expanding on What Works

Q-Hire brings together the various hire services Quantum Controls has delivered over the years into a streamlined, full-service division. The offering now includes:

- Temporary Power & Renewable Energy
- Welfare Facilities & Site Accommodation
- Barriers & Fencing ● Temporary Lighting
- Access Equipment ● Waste Management
- General Tool Hire ● Plant Equipment

Kevin Brown, Owner of Quantum Controls, explained the motivation behind the move: “We’ve been delivering hire services to our customers for years—mainly around temporary power—but we kept seeing a need for a more complete, joined-up solution. Q-Hire brings everything under one roof, so customers can get the equipment they need, from a name they already trust.”

A Practical, Customer-Focused Expansion

With Q-Hire, Quantum Controls is responding directly to what its customers have been asking for: a single source for temporary site hire that includes expert support, reliable equipment, and fast nationwide delivery.

Built for businesses across the construction, industrial, infrastructure, and event sectors, Q-Hire offers flexible terms with hire periods starting from just one week.

All equipment is HSE-compliant, maintained to high standards, and supported by Quantum’s award-winning customer service.

The division also includes options to support sustainability goals, such as renewable energy systems, eco-friendly lighting, and smart fuel management tools.

Trusted Support, Same Reliable Team

This new division doesn’t represent a change in direction, but rather an evolution of Quantum Controls’ long-standing approach, supporting clients with practical, reliable, and responsive services that meet the needs of real-world projects.

Project managers, site teams, and facilities professionals can now access a wider range of solutions while continuing to work with a company they know and trust.

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www.quantum-controls.co.uk/q-hire

Case Study - Power Hire Solutions

Temporary Power Variable Speed Drive Solutions

A leading UK OEM in the pump manufacturing industry, faced a significant challenge: testing their new high-capacity pumps without breaking the bank. Their existing mains supply systems could not offer the required mains supply options required, and buying new ones was out of the question.

The Problem: An Urgent Testing Dilemma

Our client needed a powerful, cost-effective solution to perform full string and factory acceptance tests on their latest pump models. The answer? Partnering with Quantum Controls for a smarter approach.

Our Solution: The Ultimate Turnkey Experience

We stepped in with a comprehensive solution, providing:

- High-Capacity VSDs: Over 1500 VSDs in stock, capable of handling up to 4.5 MW, all voltages, delivered right to their facility.
- Expert Installation and Commissioning: Our seasoned technicians seamlessly integrated the VSDs into their systems.
- All Necessary Power Cables: Ensuring flawless connectivity and operation.
- Specialist Engineering Support: Our engineers are specialists in sizing the correct VSD and system to match your specific needs, ensuring optimal performance and efficiency.

The Benefits: Efficiency and Cost Savings Unleashed

Our expert team ensured seamless operations and maximum efficiency, allowing them to concentrate on their core business—manufacturing high-quality pumps. By eliminating the need to purchase costly VSDs, the OEM preserved their capital, investing it in other critical areas of their business. The result was not only enhanced testing capabilities but also significant cost savings and operational efficiency.

Real, Tangible Benefits

- Enhanced Testing Capability: Conduct extensive tests with confidence and precision.
- Significant Cost Savings: Avoid the high cost of purchasing expensive VSDs. Instead, hire the correctly sized unit and preserve your capital for other critical investments.
- Operational Efficiency: Enjoy a hassle-free experience with zero downtime.

Client Testimonial

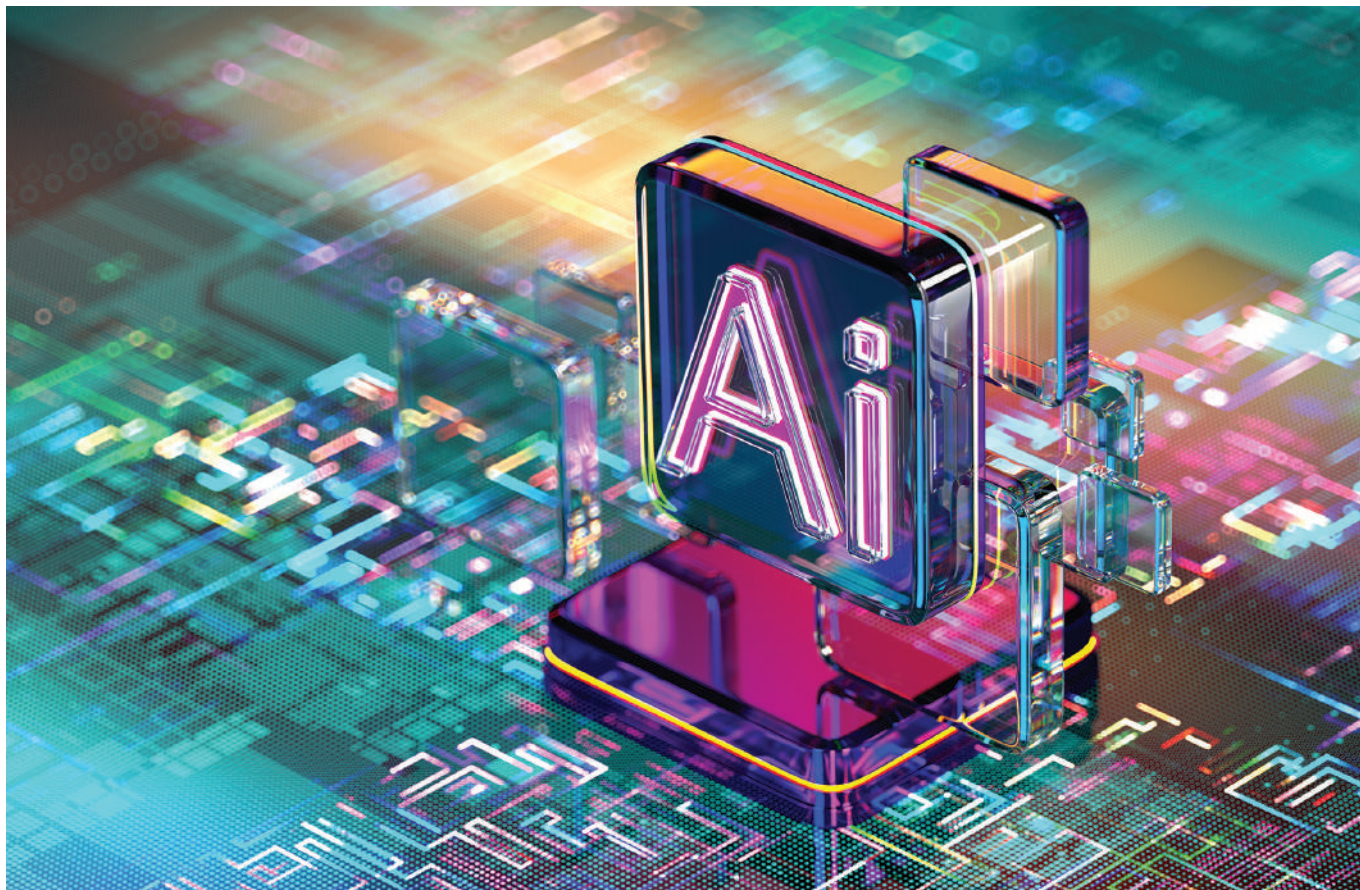
“Partnering with Quantum was a game-changer. Their VSD rental service was seamless and cost-effective. The team’s expertise and support were unparalleled. We couldn’t have asked for a better solution.”

– Tony McNally, Operations Manager



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*...Q-Hire
brings
everything
under one
roof...*



Collaborative Search's AI Adoption: A turning point for recruitment and beyond

By Scott McGowan, Head of AI, Collaborative Search.

In today's rapidly evolving digital landscape, the recruitment industry is undergoing a quiet revolution—one fuelled by artificial intelligence (AI).

Collaborative Search are a Newcastle upon Tyne based forward-thinking recruitment company, and we have recently adopted AI technologies to enhance and streamline our operations.

This strategic move signals a broader trend in the recruitment sector that we believe offers a compelling case for why AI should be embraced rather than feared across all industries.

At its core, recruitment is about people—identifying talent, understanding aspirations, and connecting individuals with meaningful opportunities. Yet, the process has long been plagued by inefficiencies, from sorting through mountains of CVs to scheduling interviews and managing communications. Collaborative Search's adoption of AI addresses these pain points head-on. By integrating AI into our workflows, we are able to automate repetitive tasks, analyse candidate data more effectively, and make smarter, data-driven hiring decisions.

One of the key advantages AI brings to recruitment is speed. Traditional hiring processes are time-consuming, often taking weeks or even months to finalise a hire. AI algorithms, however, can scan thousands of resumes in seconds, identifying top candidates based on predefined criteria. This not only shortens time-to-hire but also increases the likelihood of finding a better match between candidate and role.

Moreover, Collaborative Search is leveraging AI for bias reduction. By using machine learning models trained on diverse datasets, we are working to minimise unconscious human bias in the hiring process. This has the potential to create more equitable opportunities for candidates and foster diverse, high-performing teams—a goal that every modern company should strive for.

But the importance of Collaborative Search's AI initiative extends beyond recruitment. It exemplifies a broader truth: AI is not here to replace humans; it's here to augment human capabilities. Across

industries—from healthcare and finance to education and entertainment—AI has the potential to take over routine tasks, allowing professionals to focus on what they do best: strategic thinking, creativity, and human connection.

The fear that AI will replace jobs is understandable, but it's also misplaced. While certain roles may evolve or become obsolete, countless new opportunities will emerge. History shows us that every major technological advancement—from the steam engine to the internet—has led to the creation of new industries and roles. AI is no different.

Collaborative Search's approach sets a blueprint for responsible AI adoption. By investing in AI tools while upskilling our human workforce, we aim to demonstrate how technology and talent can work hand-in-hand. Our message is clear: AI is not a threat, but a tool. One that, when used ethically and intelligently, can elevate an entire industry.

As businesses grapple with how to remain competitive in an increasingly digital world, Collaborative Search's story offers both inspiration and a roadmap. Embracing AI is no longer optional; it is essential. And those willing to lean into innovation—not resist it—will be the ones who lead the future of work.

For more information, please feel free to reach out to scott.mcgowan@collaborativesrch.com
www.collaborativesrch.com

Embedding Social Equity into Sustainability

Genee Consulting Ltd, North East based sustainability specialists who deliver Investors in the Environment (iE), in collaboration with Positive About Inclusion, North East equity, diversity and inclusion consultancy and training provider.

When businesses talk about sustainability, conversations often gravitate toward carbon emissions, energy use, and waste reduction. These are undeniably important, but they're only part of the picture. Increasingly, forward-thinking businesses are recognising that sustainability isn't just environmental, it's social too.

To truly create lasting, positive change, businesses must embed social equity at the heart of their sustainability strategies. Genee work closely with Positive About Inclusion to ensure this is at the centre of our own operations, and through our delivery of iE, we integrate this into our work supporting businesses across the region.

What is social equity?

Social equity means ensuring that all individuals, regardless of background, identity, or circumstance, have fair access to opportunities, resources, and support. It's about removing systemic barriers and creating inclusive environments where everyone can thrive.

In the context of sustainability, social equity ensures that the transition to greener business practices is fair, inclusive, and beneficial to all.

Why this matters in the North East

The North East has long been a region defined by resilience and community. As we look toward a net-zero future, there's a unique opportunity for our businesses to lead the way, not just in going green, but in doing so fairly.

Social inequality and climate vulnerability are often two sides of the same coin. Marginalised communities are more likely to be disproportionately affected by climate change and less likely to have access to green jobs or resources.



L-R: Jo Holmes, Managing Director, Genee Consulting Ltd; Karen Faulkner, Co-Founding Director, Positive About Inclusion; Lucy Malarkey, Co-Founding Director, Positive About Inclusion

Embedding social equity into sustainability efforts helps ensure that green job creation is inclusive and accessible; that training and upskilling opportunities reach underrepresented groups; and that supply chains reflect this diversity and fairness.

Practical ways to embed social equity in your sustainability strategy

- Sustainability strategies should be co-designed, bringing in perspectives from across your workforce and community, especially those who are often underrepresented.
- Work with training providers to offer pathways into sustainability-focused roles for people from diverse backgrounds. Apprenticeships, mentorships, and targeted outreach can all help.
- Embed ethical and inclusive criteria into procurement policies. This might include working with local social enterprises, minority-owned businesses, or organisations with strong environmental and social credentials.
- Track and report not only environmental KPIs but also indicators around diversity, equity, and inclusion within your sustainability initiatives. Transparency builds trust and drives improvement.
- Partner with groups already doing work on the ground, whether that's youth programmes, refugee support services, or disability advocacy groups. This helps align your sustainability work with real local needs.

The Investors in the Environment framework

The Investors in the Environment accreditation scheme looks at sustainability holistically, recognising that true

environmental stewardship must include social equity, staff engagement and community impact.

The iE framework supports organisations to integrate social value considerations into their environmental management systems and sustainability strategies, engage staff from across the breadth of the organisation to ensure every voice is heard, and build stronger connections with their local communities.

This comprehensive approach ensures that organisations are not just reducing their environmental impact, but are also creating workplaces and communities that are more inclusive and resilient.

Sustainability that works for everyone

By embedding social equity into sustainability, North East businesses can lead the way in creating a greener future that leaves no one behind. This is a business opportunity, as companies that prioritise inclusion and equity with authenticity and intention, tend to be more innovative, attract better talent, and build stronger customer loyalty.

Embedding social equity means looking at the bigger picture and designing a future that works for everyone. That's how we create truly resilient, future-fit businesses.

For more information on simple ways to embed social equity into your sustainability approach, contact Positive About Inclusion at hello@positiveaboutinclusion.com

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

Safety in numbers: Newcastle's collaborative approach to city centre security

By Mark Sumner, Head of Operations at NE1 Ltd.

Anniversaries come in thick and fast at NE1 at this time of the year, making spring the perfect time for reflection and celebration.

April marked the first anniversary of the City Safe scheme, a pioneering three-way partnership between NE1, Newcastle City Council and Northumbria Police. Launched with the sole mission of tackling crime and antisocial behaviour in the city centre, City Safe has already recorded some impressive results.

In its first twelve months City Safe was bolstered by stats showing an 8% reduction in overall crime, 37 criminal and banning orders issued, keeping serial offenders out of the city centre, and increased visibility due to the deployment of an extra 11 police officers on the beat.

NE1's Street Rangers play a major role in this partnership, not only adding an extra, reassuring and highly visible layer of on-street support but also as the eyes and ears of the group, spending almost all of their time on the city's streets. The team often act as first responders for businesses and the public when issues arise.

The timing of City Safe's launch couldn't have been better; when cities and towns across the UK were discussing the rise of on-street crime, shoplifting, and antisocial behaviour, Newcastle was already taking proactive steps to tackle these issues head-on, making on-street safety a priority.

One of the major advantages of City Safe, and a key factor in its success, is that the team operates from a shared workspace in the heart of the city. Working collaboratively and in a shared space has fostered a truly coordinated, consistent and cohesive resource with daily briefings and action plans based on real-time information.

City Safe's rapid success has been helped in part by the groundwork laid by another of NE1's citywide safety schemes, the Newcastle Business Crime Reduction Partnership (NBCRP), which celebrates its third anniversary this May.

Established in 2022, the NBCRP has grown to become one of the largest and most effective BCRP schemes in the UK, boasting over 350 business members in the city centre.

The NBCRP complements and feeds into City Safe, by providing businesses with a streamlined reporting and intelligence-sharing system, similar in focus to a Neighbourhood Watch Scheme. Businesses are encouraged to play their part in helping make Newcastle even safer by reporting any incidents, giving the partnership a clear picture of what's actually going on in the city. Integrating City Safe with the NBCRP has created a comprehensive multi-channel and multi-agency approach to tackling crime and antisocial behaviour in the city.

Members get access to an online forum to record incidents, share information and raise the alarm to help prevent crime in the city centre. As well as reporting into the system, members are alerted when known offenders are operating so they can be

vigilant and help prevent incidents from happening.

What truly sets Newcastle's BCRP apart is its commitment to engaging with businesses. Before its launch, NE1's research showed that over 90% of businesses had stopped reporting minor crimes because they had lost faith in the system and felt it was a waste of staff time.

By creating this streamlined crime reporting scheme and encouraging active participation, the NBCRP has built a network that responds to immediate issues and identifies patterns and hot spots, to create long-term solutions.

To date, the partnership has logged over 3,300 incidents and has resulted in more police officers being deployed in the city. NE1 have also funded a dedicated CCTV operator to monitor the network solely in the city centre.

The combined efforts of City Safe and the NBCRP have created a virtuous circle, where one initiative and its successes feed into the other, driving continuous improvement. The success of this approach has not only reduced crime but has fostered a greater sense of community and shared responsibility among businesses and partners.

Newcastle's innovative approach is gaining traction and our success has helped position the city as an exemplar of best practices in urban safety and collaboration. We have received enquiries from other cities keen to learn from our experience and from national media and TV production companies keen to publicise our efforts.

As a city, we will continue to refine and expand these initiatives. The next step is to grow NBCRP membership, ensuring that all business sectors are represented and that everyone plays their part.

Our efforts remind us that safety is not just about numbers; it's about people, partnerships, and the power of working together. Newcastle is leading the way, proving that cooperation is the key to creating vibrant, secure urban spaces.

Businesses interested in joining the NBCRP and contributing to Newcastle's success story, or interested in more information about City Safe should contact NE1's Head of Operations, Mark Sumner, at mark.sumner@newcastlene1ltd.com



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*...cooperation is
the key to creating
vibrant, secure
urban spaces...*

Mark Sumner

'The North East is holding young people back'

Reading this headline was disheartening and disappointing.

Whilst we are vastly aware of the crisis situations facing our young people, from record levels of children living in poverty to a significant rise in teenage mental health illness, there isn't much awareness around the aspirations of our children, and how we are failing to support them with opportunities to achieve them.

My partner and I had made the decision 20 years ago to make Newcastle our home, we moved here to have a family.

I grew up in the south of the region in Hartlepool and left at 18, to seek opportunity. Every school leaver was encouraged to go into higher education at the time. Apprenticeships didn't exist, we were experiencing huge shifts in the labour market as the world changed around us, the once thriving industries on our doorsteps ceased to exist and for me personally, the sector I wished to explore wasn't available to me locally.

I didn't have a choice; I had to leave.

But this beautifully abundant region drew me back. And for all the reasons why that headline is disappointing to read.

We sought a better quality of life. A life that couldn't be achieved in the three regions we had lived outside of the North East.

One that allowed us to reap the benefits of having the countryside, coast, and city within close proximity to one another.

Benefit from affordable housing, a home with a garden with friendly, kind, and caring neighbours, where no one is a stranger and there's always a helping hand.

The benefit of a rich heritage, creators of innovation and proud leaders in modern revolutions.

It's difficult to read that headline as my first-born is now the same age I was when I looked beyond the region for hope and opportunity.

But the story reflects the problems we face in the region in relation to social mobility.



The same problems I faced 30 years ago.

It's hard to accept it is true, but it is based on factual evidence. There's good news however, there's an abundance of activity in the region at present to prevent the growth of these problems and strategies are evolving to reduce the inequalities the region is facing to develop opportunity to meet the aspirations of our young people.

Fundamentally, we need action, and there's opportunities for us all to work collectively to put the planned strategies into effect and create opportunity for our young people.

Interestingly, I've been told on many occasions, I would access more opportunity if I based my business in other regions. I've chosen to ignore the advice. I believe the region is a good place to start and run a business; I also want to be part of the solution in creating a prosperous region.

We talk persistently about businesses needing to be socially responsible and provide social value, fundamentally it comes down to strategic action that ensures our businesses thrive to enable the opportunities that support society, our region and the future.

Whilst the data and headlines are currently bleak, opportunity is there if we chose to act on it.

We have a region full of talent, of enthusiastic risk-takers developing solutions to deliver change, of globally recognised institutions, of makers, producers, and creators. A region of hard-working people.

A region full of people, who see the potential, and want to support the region to thrive. I personally see the region as leaders in the social revolution, leaders of change delivering business and opportunity for the betterment of all.

Most importantly, we have a region of young people who want to live, and work here, and have a positive impact in the region they grew up in and love. They are looking to us, hopeful.

Wouldn't it be great to be the generation of leaders and businesses that changes that headline and answers the call of hope?

That gives young people the choice to stay in the region.

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WE'VE BEEN BUSY...

Hosting Visits & Events

Visits and tours of the facility have been back to back, while hosting some of the North East's most successful business communities and networks such as the Entrepreneur's Forum.

Networking & Community Building

The team have been busy building our community, networking and arranging events not only with local Scale Ups but trade bodies, focus groups and international commerce delegations. We're receiving more and more enquiries from 'Scale Ups' that are expressing a commitment to grow global with us and joining our community.

Top Trumps

As a child growing up in Newcastle, we didn't have a lot in terms of material possessions — but what we did have, we treasured.

One of my all-time favourite things was a battered old pack of *Top Trumps* cards. If you remember it, you'll know the thrill: warships, fighter jets, supercars — all battling it out, one stat at a time.

In a household where luxury was rare, those evenings huddled together, arguing over whether an F-14 Tomcat could outgun a Tornado (it could, and I had the card to prove it) were pure gold. ***Top Trumps* was a wonderful blend of luck and skill** — sure, you had to have the right card at the right moment, but you also needed to know when to play your strongest hand, and when to bluff and hope.

Fast-forward a few decades, and it seems another player is treating the world stage like a giant game of *Top Trumps* — a man whose very name seems destined for it: Donald Trump.

Over the past few years, we've watched Trump (and others following his lead) trying to 'trump' rivals with tariffs, trade wars, and an almost playground-like game of brinkmanship. **In the world of international trade, it's no longer enough to have the best products or the most efficient supply chains; now it's about flexing muscles and slapping down the "biggest" numbers, whether that's 25% tariffs on steel or billions in retaliatory measures.**

According to the World Bank, global trade growth slowed to just **0.8% in 2023**, compared to the historical average of **3.4%**. Meanwhile, the IMF reports that **global GDP growth** for 2024 is forecast at a modest **3.1%** — hardly the roaring twenties we might have hoped for post-pandemic. Trade uncertainty alone has shaved **up to 1%** off global growth, meaning that all this tit-for-tat tariff action isn't just political theatre — it's impacting jobs, businesses, and families.

In a world that feels increasingly dominated by chest-thumping and tariff-trading, you might ask: where's the real *Top Trump*?

For me, the answer is simple: Innovation.

While others are busy trying to outgun each other with brute force, the most forward-thinking businesses are quietly reshuffling the deck, crafting entirely new ways to play. Through my work in **Business Model Innovation**, I've been helping companies



Ammar Mirza CBE

not just react to the changing world — but shape it.

Whether it's small SMEs pivoting to new markets, or larger organisations reimagining their value propositions, those who embrace innovation aren't just winning more rounds — they're changing the rules altogether.

Business Model Innovation is the real ace in the pack. It's about understanding that today's competitive advantage isn't found by slapping on a few tariffs or shouting the loudest. It's about deep, strategic creativity: seeing how technologies, markets, and customer behaviours are shifting — and then designing your model not just to survive but thrive.

One example? Companies that adopted **servitisation models** (selling services rather than just products) grew **five times faster** than traditional manufacturers during the last economic slowdown. Another? Businesses that integrated **sustainability** into their core offering outperformed their peers by **over 20%** in stock market returns.

Innovation isn't luck. It's not about waiting for the right card to fall into your hand. It's about deliberately building the strongest

deck you can — thinking smarter, acting faster, and daring to imagine a different kind of future.

Looking back, those childhood games of *Top Trumps* taught me more than I realised. Yes, a bit of luck helps. Yes, sometimes you win just by having the right card at the right moment. But in the end, it's the players who knew their strengths, who thought a few steps ahead, who really triumphed.

Today, whether you're in business, politics, or playing on the global stage, the same lesson holds true. And if you ask me, it's not about having the fastest car or the biggest battleship anymore.

It's about having the **sharpest mind**, the **boldest ideas**, and the **most innovative spirit** — because when it comes to the real *Top Trumps* of the future, Innovation will always beat bravado.

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.

Raymond James, Monument Announced as Official Supporter of the ABC Awards 2025

ABConnexions (ABC) is proud to announce that Raymond James, Monument has joined as an official supporter of the ABC Awards 2025, underlining a shared commitment to inclusion, opportunity, and community growth across the North-East.



Raymond James, Monument was founded to deliver personalised, high-quality wealth management services with integrity and transparency. Located in the historic Monument area of Newcastle, the firm serves a wide range of clients—including individuals, families, business owners, trusts, and charities —across the region and beyond.

Michael Rankin, Chartered Wealth Manager at Raymond James, Monument said:

"At Raymond James, we believe that financial success should be accessible to everyone, regardless of background. We're proud to support initiatives like the ABC Awards and the Inclusion by Default (IBD) programme, which reflect our values and mission. Our office is dedicated to helping people achieve their goals, support their families, and strengthen their communities. These awards are a celebration of that shared vision."



Raymond James' support comes on the back of their Best D&I Initiative win at the 2024 Professional Adviser Awards, a recognition of their enduring commitment to promoting diversity and inclusion across the organisation and within the communities they serve. ABConnexions (ABC) is a pioneering not-for-profit organisation dedicated to empowering diverse communities, entrepreneurs, and professionals across the North East. Through programmes like Inclusion by Default, AWESome Women, and the ABC Awards, ABC provides platforms for shared learning, innovation, and collective action.

Amit Bahanda, Director of ABConnexions, welcomed the announcement:

"It's a pleasure to welcome Raymond James, Monument as a supporter of the ABC Awards 2025. Their commitment to inclusive values and community impact mirrors the ethos of ABC. Together, we can continue creating spaces where achievements are recognised, and every voice is valued."



Ammar Mirza CBE, Chairman of ABConnexions, added:

"We're delighted to be joined by Raymond James, Monument. Their belief in diversity as a catalyst for success aligns beautifully with what the ABC Awards stand for. It's through partnerships like this that we strengthen our mission to build an inclusive, empowered North-East."

As the ABC Awards 2025 approach, Raymond James, Monument's involvement highlights the growing recognition of diversity as a driver of innovation, resilience, and community cohesion.



Dealing with underperformance in small businesses

By Kathryn Rodgers, *face2faceHR*.

As a small business owner, your team is one of your biggest assets. But when someone isn't pulling their weight, it can impact morale, customer service, and your bottom line. Recruiting and training new staff is expensive, so it's important to focus on getting the best out of the people you already have.

Here's a step-by-step approach to managing underperformance constructively:

1. Spot the signs early

Underperformance rarely happens overnight. Look for patterns like missed deadlines, lower-quality work, or disengagement. Identifying the issue early makes it easier to tackle and less damaging to your team.

2. Understand what's behind it

Arrange a one-to-one chat to explore possible causes. Ask open questions like: "What's influencing your performance at the moment?"

"How well supported do you feel in your role?"

Approach the conversation with empathy – you might uncover something easily fixable, such as training gaps or workload issues.

3. Clarify expectations

Sometimes, people underperform because they're unclear on what's expected. Set specific, measurable goals using the SMART method (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound). Consider putting together a short action plan to outline targets and timeframes.



Kathryn Rodgers

4. Offer practical support

Make sure the employee has the tools they need to succeed. That could mean refresher training, extra supervision, or adjusting their workload. If confidence is an issue, pairing them with a mentor can help build them back up.

5. Check in regularly

Book follow-up meetings to keep the momentum going. Use these to review progress, give feedback, and tweak the action plan if needed. Celebrate improvements and stay solutions-focused.

6. Know when to make a call

If there's no improvement despite support and clear guidance, you may need to take further action. This could include redeployment, formal disciplinary steps, or dismissal. Document everything carefully, just in case you need to rely on it later.

7. Learn and Improve

Use the experience to reflect: Could better onboarding or more regular feedback have helped? Are your expectations clear from the start? Making small tweaks can reduce the chance of future issues.

In summary: Managing underperformance isn't easy, but tackling it early and fairly can protect your business and give your people the chance to turn things around. Handle it well, and it can be a win-win for both sides.

If you'd like help addressing underperformance in your team, contact Kathryn Rodgers for friendly, practical advice tailored to small businesses.

Kathryn Rodgers
face2faceHR.com,
07946 330 025.

NorthStandard collaborates with renowned local artist to transform Newcastle headquarters



L-R: James Dixon, Creator of Lines Behind and Paul Jennings, Managing Director of NorthStandard

who has worked with the likes of Greggs, Fenwick's, and Newcastle United.

As part of his work with NorthStandard, Lines Behind, aka James Dixon, created a 25-piece installation for the front of the building as well as a similar piece for the office's inner-atrium. The artwork captures NorthStandard's history, commitment to the region, its national and global impact, as well as a spotlight for several of its charity partners.

Paul Jennings, Managing Director of NorthStandard said: "We were delighted to work with James as part of our renovation project and he has brilliantly captured so much about what makes us NorthStandard.

"These renovations were not just about creating an environment that people wanted to work in, it was to help people know who we are and that we are a part of the North East – James' illustrations will help people to trace our history and to better understand the part shipping has to play in our everyday lives."

Newcastle-based marine insurer, NorthStandard, has partnered with the local illustrator, Lines Behind, to complete a new mural as part of ongoing renovations to its Quayside headquarters.

NorthStandard, which has been based on

Newcastle's Quayside for the last 165 years, has made significant internal and external renovations to its headquarters in a bid to modernise the facilities and enhance its brand identity. This includes the recent collaboration with the renowned illustrator,

north-standard.com

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The advertisement features a large, colorful, abstract background with a prominent white 'S' logo. Below the logo, the text 'BIGGER SCENE' and 'Large format print & exhibitions' is displayed. A QR code is located in the top right corner. A row of six small images shows various exhibition spaces and installations, including a room with a large mural, a room with a large sculpture, a room with a large mural, a room with a large mural, a room with a large mural, and a room with a large mural.



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They're always creating a scene

If you're keen to get noticed or get a message across, why not shout about it with a picture. If there are things that you'd rather everyone didn't notice, why not disguise it. Which is precisely what the guys at Bigger Scene do.

You'll have seen their work.

Have you been to a shopping centre (the Metro Centre for example) and noticed how the empty units have a something like a street scene on the windows or examples of what's going to be appearing once the new owners move in?

Have you been somewhere and spotted that a building is covered in what amounts to a giant wrap. (Bigger Scene did that at Eldon Square). The images often show what the building is going to look like once works are completed. In the meantime, you can't see the scaffolding or parts of the repairs or demolition.

One of their most recent banners was draped outside the Newcastle Theatre Royal celebrating Newcastle Utd's League Cup success.

"That was one of the quickest turnarounds we've ever done," said Bigger Scene director Mark Curry. "We went from an initial phone call from the Theatre Royal to installation on the front of the building within three days, but it showed what we can do and how quickly we can react to something."

However, it's not all about massive banners and signs.

"We get a lot of work from offices and manufacturing sites where it's a simple case of trying to make the surroundings more appealing," adds fellow director Rob Dunn. "Instead of bare walls or uninspiring view of machinery and pipework, we can provide large printed wall covering or bespoke graphics to not only make the surroundings more enjoyable and relaxing for the workforce, but also to get key messages across."

Some of our more regular work has been with schools, colleges and universities where we can print and install full wall graphics. We can even provide advertising hoardings or help promote important messages. "

Rob and Mark have over 60 years worth of knowledge in graphic design, marketing communications, and

working with large format print. They're used to helping clients develop a concept which can help them promote a product or an idea.

"We work extensively on exhibitions for clients," added Mark. "These tend to be long term projects which can take several months of planning. I've been working in this business for over 20 years and I know what works...and more importantly, what doesn't. We liaise closely with the client, discover what they're hoping to achieve, and slowly formulate a plan. Rob and I have now been working together at Bigger Scene for ten years and if we had one piece of advice for any client, it would be this...'Don't think big, think bigger.' In this business, size really is everything and is the ideal way to make an impact and tangibly promote your business."

You're probably wondering why you've not heard of Bigger Scene, bearing in mind they're based in the North East at Willington Quay next to the Tyne Tunnel. Simple...they've never needed to promote themselves.

"Most of our work comes from word of mouth," said Rob. "We have a prestigious client list including Barbour, Port of Tyne, Theatre Royal, Centre for Life, DFDS, Tata Steel and Metro Centre but we're now expanding the business and can cope with a greater amount of work for clients."

In other words, no matter how small or large....or very, very large...your requirements are, Bigger Scene can take care of everything. They have a fully skilled team who can complete installations in anything from exhibition halls to the sides of buildings using a cherry-picker.

Interested? The best idea is to contact Mark and Rob at Bigger Scene. They'll talk through your ideas and provide plenty of input to take everything forward. Either go onto their website www.biggerscene.com, call 0191 236 9603 or email info@thebiggerscene.com





Alison Schreiber

Understanding SSP Changes

As usual at the moment in the world of HR, topics relating to the upcoming Employment Rights Bill are on the tip of everyone's tongue!

Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) is one of those causing businesses a lot of concern...

So, what is changing?

Firstly, the 3-day waiting period before SSP kicks in is being scrapped. The lower earnings limit for eligibility will also be removed so SSP will apply to everyone and it is proposed that people below this limit will receive 80% of their average earnings.

For employees, this is great news as they will have at least some income when they are ill. Employers, on the other hand, have additional costs and other issues.

On the bright side, this will reduce the chances of employees coming to work when ill and either infecting the rest of the team or exacerbating their condition which

could lead to longer term problems.

However, in a lot of businesses, we are likely to see an upturn in the amount of sickness absence as the incentive to come to work with minor ailments will reduce. It is unfortunately also the case that the likelihood of non-genuine cases will increase.

As well as the direct additional cost of the first 3 days, all of this could lead to higher costs and greater disruption to business operations.

So, what can businesses do about it?

Our advice would be to have a proactive sickness absence process and to ensure that is embedded well before the legislation comes into play. At the moment, the Bill is still going through the House of Lords and, even when approved, there will be a period of time before the change is effective.

So, how can I manage sickness proactively?

The world of absence management is vast with many techniques and tools available to you. However, there are a few key principles that will help:

- Firstly, make sure you are monitoring sickness absence.
- Have a consistent approach, e.g. a 'trigger' system, but make sure you look at the circumstances on a case-by-case basis.

- Hold Return-to-Work meetings for every absence – this shows you are a caring and responsible employer and helps identify issues early on. It also lets possible malingerers know you are keeping an eye out...
- Have a supportive approach and communicate with employees – the aim is always to help people back from long-term illness and reduce frequent short-term absence to an acceptable level.
- Make sure you are not mixing up childcare with employee sickness – there are different ways to approach childcare issues!
- Unfortunately, sometimes dismissal for ill-health incapacity becomes necessary but make sure you have explored all options first.

Above all, the most effective approach to lower levels of absence is to encourage healthy day-to-day practices and a positive working environment to promote staff well-being.

If you require any help with sickness absence or any other aspect of HR, 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

Landmark Maritime London visit shines spotlight on North East Maritime sector

NorthStandard, one of the world's leading marine insurers, played host to the first Maritime London board meeting in the North East at its headquarters on Newcastle's Quayside.

To mark the occasion, NorthStandard hosted a reception (March 31st) welcoming distinguished guests including regional dignitaries, industry stakeholders, and maritime professionals.

Maritime London is an industry-led body, representing the UK's world-renowned maritime professional services sector.

The hosting of the Maritime London's board meeting in Newcastle, reflects the importance of the North East in the broader maritime landscape as well as NorthStandard's commitment to championing the region as a hub for international shipping and marine expertise.

Attendees at the reception had the opportunity to meet with key figures shaping the industry, including Jos Standerwick and Harry Theochari, CEO and Chair of Maritime London respectively, Paul Jennings, Managing Director of NorthStandard, and Mike Salthouse, Head of External Affairs at NorthStandard.

The event provided a valuable platform for dialogue, collaboration, and connection among professionals dedicated to advancing maritime services in the UK and globally.

north-standard.com



L-R: Paul Jennings, Managing Director, NorthStandard with Jos Standerwick, Chief Executive Officer, Maritime London

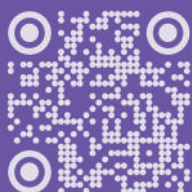


L-R: Paul Jennings, Managing Director, NorthStandard with Harry Theochari OBE Chair, Maritime London



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Right **Time**

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Routine sets you free

It is a little-known reality they don't teach you in business school.

However, the uncomfortable truth that as a business grows it becomes exponentially more complex. Every new staff member, product, client, and personalisation doesn't simply add to the complexity, it multiplies it.

The reason many businesses fail to scale is because the complexity outgrows their systems, routines and management abilities. As business leaders, if we don't have the discipline and routine to help us manage a very complex beast, we will get stuck and suffer whilst trying to battle the complexities.

One of the most effective things we can do is to establish a meeting rhythm that works.

The objective is to have less – not more meetings – and instead make them more effective so that time spent communicating and managing all the moving parts can be minimised.

This creates more time to do the important - and revenue generating things - like talking to customers and team members.

There will be several distinct types of meeting. 'Running the business' meetings, 'organising the workflow' meetings, 'financial overviews', 'personal development reviews' and '15-minute check-ins' would all be on my list.

Each one serves a separate purpose and requires a different, specific cast of characters, and rhythm.

If they are all scheduled in the diary then you will have a framework to tame the complexity.



Ian Kinnery

This will allow you - and your team - to devote enough time to the stuff that makes the business grow.

As we Scale Up coaches say, 'Routine sets you free'.

Kinnery.co.uk

The impact of business coaching with Ian Kinnery

Q&A with Mark Coleman, Managing Director, and David Frost, Operations Director at GeoAccess.



L-R: David Frost, GeoAccess, Ian Kinnery, Mark Coleman, GeoAccess

How did your work with Ian begin?

David Frost, Operations Director: We discovered Ian through a colleague's recommendation. I was initially sceptical about the need for a business coach, but my perspective changed dramatically once we began working with him.

Ian's approach and insights proved essential as we transitioned from technical roles to business management.

What were some of the changes that Ian helped implement?

Mark Coleman, Managing Director: Ian focused on foundational elements first, like optimizing our processes and improving our

organizational structure. His guidance was crucial in evolving our managerial capabilities, which was a game-changer for our growth trajectory.

Can you share specific business growth results you've achieved through Ian's coaching?

David: Since Ian's involvement, GeoAccess has seen remarkable growth. Our senior management team has expanded from five to twenty-five members, and we're projecting a record turnover of £13.6 million this year, almost tripling our revenue since we started working with Ian.

What unique aspect of Ian's coaching made a significant difference?

Mark: Ian's vast experience across various industries brings a fresh perspective that's rare. He doesn't just provide answers but prompts us to find solutions through strategic questioning, which empowers our decision-making processes.

Looking forward, why will you continue to work with Ian?

David: Ian's role as a coach is pivotal. Even as we plan for further expansion, his insights help us navigate new challenges effectively. His ongoing support ensures we remain agile and forward-thinking in our approach.

Any final thoughts on recommending a business coach like Ian Kinnery?

Mark: For any business looking to scale, a coach like Ian is invaluable. His guidance not only accelerates growth but also enhances the leadership skills of the entire team. Working with Ian has been transformative for David and I personally, and GeoAccess as a business.

Ready to grow your business? Visit [Kinnery.co.uk](https://kinnery.co.uk) or contact ian@kinnery.co.uk to schedule a conversation.



Driving technological transformation in the North East

Located in County Durham, the North East Technology Park (NETPark) has become a leading hub of innovation, driving advancements across industries and supporting regional economic growth.

Over the past 20 years, it has grown into one of the UK's top science and technology parks, demonstrating the power of vision, collaboration, and strategic investment.

Realising a Vision

Two decades ago, Durham County Council made a bold decision to create a science park to attract engineering, science, and technology companies. Today, NETPark is home to over 40 innovative businesses, employing over 700 skilled professionals. The park blends academic excellence, industry knowledge, and a thriving business community to foster an environment for innovation, contributing significantly to the region's economic success.

Milestones and Growth

2025 marks a milestone with the completion of NETPark's £100 million Phase 3 expansion. This will add 285,000 sq ft of advanced facilities, including labs, offices, and production spaces, creating up to 1,250 jobs on-site and supporting an additional 2,200 roles across supply chains. Among the first to benefit from this growth is Filtronic, a specialist in radio frequency

and microwave technologies. The company, already a NETPark tenant, is doubling its operational footprint with a custom-built headquarters in the new development. This expansion supports its growing partnership with SpaceX, supplying critical components for the Starlink satellite constellation.

Michael Tyerman, Filtronic's chief financial officer, says: "We opted to stay at NETPark due to its modern infrastructure, the presence of innovative and like-minded companies and the flexibility it provides for scaling our operations. "The new facility expands our manufacturing and office space, as well as upgrading test facilities. "It will support the continued development of our leading-edge products and enable us to scale capacity to meet growing customer demand." Filtronic's move to phase three unlocks more than 17,000sq ft of existing laboratory and office space to support new and smaller businesses joining NETPark's supportive community - nurturing the next generation of businesses in key regional sectors.

This expansion will also free up more than 17,000 sq ft of space for smaller businesses, helping to nurture the next generation of companies in key sectors.

Fostering Innovation Across Sectors

NETPark supports businesses advancing technologies in space, sustainable energy, telecommunications, photonics, and materials. Its tenants are at the forefront of innovations such as next-generation satellite communications and advanced energy storage, addressing global challenges with cutting-edge solutions.

The Power of Collaboration

A cornerstone of NETPark's success is its collaborative ecosystem. Partnerships with Durham University and the Centre for Process Innovation (CPI) help accelerate product development and commercialisation. The park offers flexible space solutions, allowing businesses to scale smoothly without disruption, from incubator units to large standalone facilities.



Tailored Business Support

Business Durham, the business support service for Durham County Council, is a key partner for companies at NETPark. Offering access to growth finance, tailored advice, and valuable connections, Business Durham supports businesses at every stage, helping them scale and succeed.

Regional Impact and Global Outlook

NETPark's influence extends beyond County Durham, attracting national and international investment. As a vital part of the North East Combined Authorities North East Investment Zone, NETPark is helping drive economic growth and create high-skilled jobs in the region.

Looking Ahead

NETPark's continued commitment to innovation, collaboration, and job creation ensures its role as a cornerstone of economic growth in the North East. More than just a science park, NETPark is a symbol of what's possible when vision and investment align.

For more information about NETPark, visit www.northeasttechnologypark.com or call 01740 625250.

Nail your next job interview

Bryony Gibson, director of Bryony Gibson Consulting, shares expert advice to help you stand out and succeed in a job interview.

Everyone gets nervous when it's time for a job interview, especially now the landscape has changed. Once a straightforward in-person meeting, the process often starts online, adding a new layer of complexity. Whether you're a seasoned interview professional or re-entering the job market, success hinges on a well-prepared and strategic approach.

Sweat the Small Stuff

Doing the right groundwork has always been crucial but in a digital world, no detail is too minor. Double-check your interview time. If your meeting is online, test your video conferencing software and ensure your surroundings are distraction-free. If your interview is in person, map out the journey and location, check for potential road closures, and plan your trip so you have time to spare. Understanding these logistics in advance prevents unnecessary stress and allows you to focus entirely on your performance.

Dress for Success

Your appearance speaks before you do. Whether the company culture leans toward formal or relaxed, align your outfit accordingly. Dressing well isn't just about impressing others - it's about boosting your confidence and creating a positive first impression.

Define Your Goals

Your job interview is a two-way street. Beyond securing an offer, what do you want to learn? Research the company, identify gaps in your knowledge, and prepare meaningful questions that give insights into their culture, expectations, and long-term vision. This will help you determine if the role is right for you.



Bryony Gibson

Knowledge is Power

There's no excuse for going into an interview unprepared. Use the company's website, social media, and recent press releases to understand its mission, values, and current projects. Demonstrating this awareness shows initiative and helps you to adapt your answers to align with their goals.

Leverage Insider Knowledge

If you're working with a recruiter, use them as a resource. They can offer invaluable insights into the company, the interviewers, and what they're really looking for. A pre-interview call with your recruiter will help you fine-tune your approach and anticipate key areas of focus. It will help you to prepare.

Build a Connection

Interviewers don't just hire skills, they hire people. Try to establish rapport, whether through shared interests, mutual connections, or simply an engaging conversation. Research your interviewers in advance, learn about their backgrounds, and find natural ways to build common ground. Creating a strong personal connection will make you a memorable candidate and give you an edge.

Own Your Story

Few things are more frustrating for an interviewer than a candidate who fumbles through their own history. Learn your CV

inside and out, and practice articulating your experience emotively. Think of it as storytelling. Highlight your achievements, the obstacles you've overcome, and the unique strengths that set you apart.

Face Tough Questions Head-On

Expect to be challenged. Whether that's explaining a career gap, a job switch, or a difficult project, honesty and confidence go a long way. Instead of getting defensive, frame these experiences as learning opportunities that have shaped your growth. Employers respect self-awareness and resilience. They understand that things don't run smoothly all the time.

Master the STAR Method

Competency-based questions are common in interviews, so use the STAR method (Situation, Task, Action, Result) to structure your answers. Have four or five strong examples ready to go that demonstrate your problem-solving abilities, leadership skills, or adaptability in real scenarios.

Final Thoughts

Nailing a job interview requires more than technical know-how. It demands preparation, adaptability, effective communication skills, and a proactive approach. If you follow this advice, I can't guarantee you will get the job, but you will increase your chances of making a lasting impression and, hopefully, secure the role you're after.

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



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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: **NUMBERS**

“There are many ways to communicate a business.

We can write and tell stories about our world and our work, from our perspective.

We can interview customers (we do) to understand what it's like to work with UltramapGlobal from their perspective.

We can set brand and business goals and storytell what they are, and how we're doing in pursuit of them.

But sometimes – a simple distillation of the whole business, down to a few key numbers, is the best way.

It's punchy. And memorable. ”

Martin Connelly, UltramapGlobal Co-founder has been around the world, many times, telling the UltramapGlobal story for over a decade.

“We monitor 100 million vessel movements around the world. Every. Single. Day.”

Explain Martin.

“If a client cable is threatened, one of our Global Monitoring Teams intervene.

Nobody has monitored more, for longer. That's why our AssetMonitor software is the world's most used.

Because Better Informed – Means Better Protected.”

The tracking of 100 million vessel movements around the world – every single day – is quite a number!

Here are some more...

100,000,000,000

UltramapGlobal monitor over 100 billion dollars of assets around the world.

2,000,000,000

UltramapGlobal has tracked over 2 billion vessel movements around the world.

100,000,000

UltramapGlobal monitor 100 million vessel movements around the world. Every. Single. Day.

500,000

UltramapGlobal monitor over 500 thousand kilometres of cables.

100,000

UltramapGlobal has delivered ‘Always on’ monitoring for over 100 thousand hours.

20,000

UltramapGlobal contacts vessels 20 thousand times annually.

0.001

Protection from UltramapGlobal can cost 1/1000th of 1 percent of the cost of one single strike.

100

Every UltramapGlobal customer (100 percent) sees fewer cable strikes once UltramapGlobal protection is in place.

60

Over half UltramapGlobal customers (60 percent) have zero cable strikes.

PATIENCE | RESILIENCE | STORYTELLING | TRAVEL | TEAM | CONSISTENCY | NUMBERS

I think I'm too young to need a Will...aren't I?

When most people hear the word Will, they picture it as something reserved for the elderly – a task to be dealt with later in life.

We're pleased to say that this trend is now changing, and the numbers back that up. According to the National Will Register, over half the population in the UK now have a written Will, including 41% of young adults (18–24) and 47% of those aged 25–54.

This growing trend toward earlier estate planning is a promising sign that more people are beginning to recognise the long-term value of having a Will in place. Are you one of them?

What is a Will?

A will is a legal document which details how you wish your assets and personal belongings to be distributed after your death, allowing you to specify who should inherit and who should manage the process (your Executors). It also lets you express personal wishes, such as funeral arrangements, gifts, and guardianship for children or pets. Without a Will, the rules of intestacy will apply to how your assets are distributed, which is unlikely to reflect your wishes.



Some common misconceptions regarding writing a Will

The legal aspects of writing a valid Will can be complex, and we often encounter questions based on common misconceptions from people—just like you! Fortunately, we're here to clear up any confusion and provide you with the correct legal information.

"I don't need anyone to write my Will, I can do it myself and it'll be legally binding"

While it's true that you can technically write your own Will, the reality is that it can easily become invalid for many reasons including not being properly executed—something that can be surprisingly difficult to get right. Is taking the risk really worth it?

"My family will look after my kids if something happens to me."

Many people assume that if they pass away, their family will automatically step in to care for their children. However, without a Will, that decision isn't up to your family. While relatives can offer to take custody, the court will ultimately determine who is the most suitable guardian for your children.

"If I've lived with my partner for a long time, I have a 'Common-Law' marriage, granting them the right to inherit."

In the UK, there is no such thing as a common-law spouse. Unmarried partners have no automatic legal right to inherit unless explicitly stated in a Will.

"My family know my wishes, so I don't need a Will."

While your family may be aware of your

wishes, they won't have the legal authority to distribute your estate as you intend, potentially leading to the wrong people inheriting your assets.

"I don't need a Will until I'm older."

It's never too early to make a Will if you're over 18 as life is unpredictable and we don't know what the future holds.

"But I'm married, so that automatically means my partner will inherit my assets, right?"

While this may be true in certain cases, it depends on the value of your estate. The only way to ensure your spouse inherits as you intend is to create a Will and appoint trusted Executors.

How we can help you:

At Brenda Beveridge Wills and Trusts, we believe everyone over 18 should have a Will. Life is unpredictable, and without a Will, you risk leaving your loved ones with unnecessary uncertainty and stress during an already difficult time. Whether you're just starting your career, raising a family, or planning for retirement, having a Will ensures that your wishes are clearly outlined and legally recognised.

If you're uncertain about the future, or just want peace of mind, don't wait – take action now to protect yourself and your loved ones.

For any further information or a free no obligation chat regarding your planning for the future, or updating your current provision, please contact Karen at Brenda Beveridge Wills and Trusts on 07485 619415 or email karen@brendabeveridge.co.uk

North East agency chosen to deliver prestigious international event



Sophie Flanagan, Senior Event Manager

Newcastle-based BeaconHouse Events has been awarded the contract to deliver the 14th World Conference of Science Journalists, which will take place in London in 2027.

The North East-based team beat agencies from around the UK in a competitive tender process to be awarded the contract to design and deliver the prestigious global event. The conference, which takes place biennially, will see hundreds of science journalists come together in London to share best practices with international colleagues and learn from each other.

The World Conference of Science Journalists aims to create an environment to build and strengthen the community of science writers and communicators globally. The event will bring together science journalists, researchers, and media professionals from around the globe to explore the future of science journalism and its impact on global issues. It provides a platform for discussion, collaboration, and idea exchange on the challenges and opportunities facing science journalism in an increasingly complex world.

The World Conference of Science Journalists is a major programme of the World Federation of Science Journalists who award the hosting of the conference to local science journalism organisations. The UK membership body for science journalism, the Association of British Science Writers (ABSW) will host the London event in 2027, their 80th anniversary year.

Winning the contract is a full-circle moment for the agency. Thirteen years ago, the

team provided event management support for the 7th World Conference of Science Journalists in Doha, Qatar, overseeing the onsite planning and delivery, following key team members' involvement in the previous London conference two years earlier.

The decision was made to award the 2027 conference after an extensive evaluation process by ABSW's board, who praised BeaconHouse's strategic approach, robust experience, innovation and commitment to delivering an exceptional international event, sustainably and inclusively.

Catherine Duhaut, co-founder of BeaconHouse Events said, "Following our experience working to deliver the previous London conference in 2009, we were asked to work alongside WCSJ2011 event host representatives and their team in the run-up to the conference in Qatar to draw up an action plan of key priorities for the final month before the conference. We are thrilled that three of that original team are part of the project to deliver the 2027 event in London.

"Everything that we create at BeaconHouse Events is designed to make space for conversation and connection, so the mission of the World Conference of Science Journalists really resonates with the events that we deliver. This conference is a landmark event for the science journalism sector, and we are excited to build an immersive, collaborative, accessible,

and sustainable experience for every delegate. We're proud to be part of the team welcoming the event back to the UK. WCSJ27 will inspire and cultivate global networks around key topics such as global health, climate change, and water. With a rich scientific and academic history, London is the perfect backdrop for this conference. We can't wait to begin planning what promises to be an event of global significance discussing the most pressing issues facing our people and planet."

The conference will be a hybrid event for up to 1000 in-person delegates with 500 more joining remotely. It will bring together partnerships with London's world-leading research institutes, as well as some of London's landmark science venues and museums. One day of pre-conference skills-building workshops will take place for those awarded scholarships, followed by three days of main conference sessions including plenary sessions, and four parallel sessions will follow. The final day of the conference will consist of tours and visits to sites of scientific interest around the UK.

Speaking about bringing the event to London, Andy Extance, Chair of the ABSW said, "With over 700 members and a strong track record of organising conferences, the Association of British Science Writers is well equipped to welcome delegates from everywhere to the World Conference of Science Journalists 2027. Likewise, London is a dynamic, globally connected city, with a long scientific history. It offers something for every attendee."

For more information on BeaconHouse Events visit www.beaconhouse-events.co.uk



Central Employment: Setting the standard in Recruitment and Training

As the North East's premier recruitment and training partner, Central Employment combines decades of industry expertise with a forward-thinking approach to workforce solutions.

Established in 1979 and proudly independent, Central Employment has grown to become one of the region's largest and most respected agencies, delivering tailored recruitment and training services to businesses and jobseekers alike.

A legacy of leadership and experience

Central Employment's leadership team brings unparalleled experience to the sector. Following a successful management buyout in 2016, the agency is now steered by Managing Director Paul Ponton, Training Director Steve Hart, Financial Director Will Palmer, and Operations Director Mark Trett. Collectively, the directors have over 100 years of industry experience, ensuring clients and candidates benefit from a depth of knowledge rarely matched in the sector.

"Our leadership team's longevity in recruitment and finance means we've developed a blueprint for success that filters through every level of our business," explains Operations Director Mark Trett. "Clients can expect the same meticulous attention to detail and customer care from every consultant they work with, not just one individual."

Comprehensive recruitment and training solutions

Central Employment offers a full spectrum of recruitment services, specialising in both permanent and temporary placements across a diverse range of industries. While the agency's roots are in the industrial and manufacturing sectors, recent years have seen significant expansion into energy, pharmaceuticals, and professional services. This adaptability ensures clients benefit from a broad talent pool and candidates have access to a wide variety of opportunities.

A key differentiator is Central Employment's hands-on approach to workforce integration. The agency not only sources and screens candidates but also provides tailored induction and training, ensuring new hires are fully prepared from day one.

"We pride ourselves on our end-to-end service," says Mark Trett. "For businesses needing temporary staff, we handle everything—from recruitment and training to onsite induction. This means our clients can rely on a ready-to-work team, even at short notice."

Trusted by leading employers

Over the years we have worked with and recruited for some of the largest businesses and brand names in the North East. Specialising in temporary, contract and permanent recruitment across a broad spectrum of industries; supplying staff with full UK coverage.

Central Employment's client portfolio features some of the UK's most recognisable brands. The agency also supports several Tyne

& Wear-based suppliers to the Nissan Sunderland, underlining its reputation as a trusted partner for high-volume, high-quality staffing solutions.

A modern, client-focused approach

In response to continued growth, Central Employment recently relocated to a state-of-the-art, eco-friendly office complex near New Bridge Street, Newcastle. This modern, open-plan environment fosters collaboration and provides a welcoming space for clients and candidates alike.

"Our new headquarters reflect our commitment to innovation and sustainability," notes Mark Trett. "It's a space where our team can work together seamlessly and where clients immediately feel the professionalism and energy that sets us apart."

Supporting jobseekers at every stage

Central Employment is equally dedicated to supporting jobseekers, whether they're seeking temporary assignments, permanent roles, or a complete career change. The agency's consultants work closely with candidates to identify their strengths and ambitions, matching them with employers where they can thrive.

"We don't just fill vacancies—we build careers," says Mark Trett. "Our team takes the time to understand each candidate's potential and places them in roles where they can excel."

Why choose Central Employment?

- Decades of industry expertise and a proven leadership team.
- Comprehensive recruitment and training services for both temporary and permanent roles.
- End-to-end workforce solutions, including candidate induction and bespoke training.
- A diverse client base spanning multiple sectors.
- A modern, collaborative office environment designed for client and candidate success.
- Commitment to customer care and long-term partnerships.

For businesses seeking reliable recruitment and training solutions—or for individuals looking to advance their careers—Central Employment stands ready to deliver.

For more information, visit the Central Employment website, call 0191 232 4816, or email hello@centralemployment.co.uk

Discover how Central Employment can help you achieve your workforce goals.

“

*...We don't
just fill
vacancies
- we build
careers...*

Mark Trett, Operations Director

New board members will drive innovation in North East civil engineering



Front row, L-R: Stephen Grimes, Lyndsey Boagey, Mark Atkinson and Ian Glazinski, with existing board members

Civil Engineering Contractors Association North East (CECA North East) has appointed Lyndsey Boagey, commercial manager at Mott Macdonald Bentley, Ian Glazinski, commercial director at Meldrum Structural and Civil Engineering Ltd, Mark Atkinson, director at Mason Street Furniture Ltd, and Stephen Grimes, general manager at Northumbrian Roads Ltd, as new board members.

The appointments bring fresh perspectives and valuable experience to CECA North East's efforts to strengthen the sector, particularly in the face of the government's recent £600 million investment in construction to address the skills shortage.

As part of CECA North East's commitment to driving growth in the civil engineering sector, the new board members will focus on creating the talent pipeline and supporting local contractors.

Lyndsey Boagey, said: "I am very pleased to join the board alongside Ian, Mark and Stephen. I'm passionate about inspiring young people, especially young women, to pursue careers in civil engineering. I was promoted to commercial manager just nine months after returning from maternity leave and this reflects the opportunities women have to thrive and progress in this industry. As a member of the board, I look forward to raising awareness of the

rewarding career paths in civil engineering. The skills gap presents an exciting chance for young people to build meaningful careers and I'm eager to contribute to these efforts."

CECA is made up of a national body and eight regional associations, including the North East. It represents over 300 civil engineering companies that employ nearly 250,000 people and deliver £15 billion worth of work annually in the key sectors of transport, energy, communications, waste and water.

The organisation's North East branch is dedicated to strengthening the sector in the region by advocating for the interests of contractors, promoting skills development and raising awareness of career opportunities within civil engineering.

Ross Markwell, director of business development at ESH Group and chair of CECA North East, said: "The new appointments bring a diverse mix of

experience and ideas to our board, which will help us better support our members. Lyndsey, Ian, Mark and Stephen are all highly respected professionals who bring a wealth of knowledge and passion to the table. Their expertise will play a key role in strengthening our efforts to promote civil engineering as a viable and rewarding career choice in the region. Our focus is not just on overcoming challenges but on creating new opportunities for the next generation of talent, from surveyors and engineers to groundworkers and plant operatives, there is a role for everyone in civil engineering."

The new board appointments mark a continued focus on the success and sustainability of civil engineering in the North East, where CECA is dedicated to ensuring the sector flourishes.

Stuart Miller, director and company secretary of CECA North East, added: "The expertise of our new board members – Lyndsey Boagey, Ian Glazinski, Mark Atkinson and Stephen Grimes – will be vital as we continue our work to address the skills shortage and support the development of a skilled workforce. CECA North East is committed to ensuring that civil engineering in the region remains a thriving, sustainable industry and these appointments will help us move forward in that mission."

www.ceca.co.uk

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New sustainable homes coming to South Broomhill

A new zero-carbon ready housing development is taking shape in South Broomhill, only two miles from Druridge Bay and close to Amble and Warkworth. Locals can get their first look inside with the launch of the sales office, now open in the heart of Hadston.

Based in Hadston House community centre, the sales office will give people the chance to explore the design and finish of the new homes being built down the road at Woodside Gardens.

Delivered by Ascent Homes, the

development will bring 65 two-and three-bedroom houses and seven two-bedroom bungalows to the area, all designed to reduce running costs and support a more sustainable future. Each home will feature air source heat pumps and EV charging points as standard, part of a wider drive to help homeowners cut carbon emissions.

The site had stood vacant for several years, but with support from the Brownfield Housing Fund and North East Combined Authority, Ascent Homes has taken on the land and brought fresh momentum to the project.

Woodside Gardens will also offer affordable housing, helping to meet local demand and provide homes that suit people at all stages of life.

Milestone reached at Mackie's Corner

A significant milestone has been reached at Sunderland's historic Mackie's Corner, after two independent businesses snapped up the last remaining spaces.

Ashbrooke Home, a sister company of Ashbrooke Florist, has occupied the corner unit of the building. The store will offer a range of home and lifestyle products as well as coffee and cocktails and opened its doors on 14 March.

The final addition to the ground floor is Crave, further enhancing the food offering at the site with lunchtime favourites on the menu including sandwiches and salads though a deli-style set up. The store opened its doors on 17 March.

The Grade II-listed hub now boasts 28 tenants, employing over 200 people and offering a variety of services including retail, hospitality, beauty, as well as offering flexible workspace environments for creatives and professionals.

Alex Kirtley, director at Kirtley. Co, said: "We're thrilled to welcome Ashbrooke Home and Crave to Mackie's Corner,



and to announce that all spaces are now occupied.

"Since the renovated building opened its doors in 2021, we have seen 28 businesses invest in the city centre, providing a real lift to the high street and the wider city economy.

"It's yet another fantastic milestone for the historic building, which is once again at the heart of the city's business district, just like it was when it was built by the Hutchinson family back in the 1845.

"As a family business which is deep-rooted in the city, we couldn't be prouder of the impact the development has had and the pivotal role it is playing in the city's transformation now and long into the future."



Banks Group Grant Helping Lynemouth Institute Go Green

A popular Northumberland village social club is going green to beat spiralling energy costs with the help of a four-figure grant from regional employer the Banks Group.

Lynemouth Miners Welfare Institute saw its monthly gas and electric bills more than triple after the end of its most recent energy contract, leading to severe pressure being put on its finances.

The trustees of the Bridge Street building, which is celebrating its centenary this year, began to look at ways in which its energy efficiency might be improved, with sensors being installed in its bathrooms as an initial step to ensure lighting only stays on when they are being used.

A £1,600 Banks Group grant has now paid for insulation and draught excluders to be fitted throughout the building, which will help it maintain a more regular temperature, reduce the amount of energy needed to keep it comfortable, cut its carbon footprint and prevent any pests from getting inside through gaps and crevices.

Solar panels are now also being fitted to the building's roof, with all the energy efficiency measures being put in place expected to reduce its total energy usage by up to 84 per cent.

And once all the work is finished, the trustees are hoping to be able to open up the building as a warm hub in which local older people can enjoy a cup of tea and some company.

Alongside hosting local bar sports teams and private functions, Lynemouth Miners Welfare Institute also provides a base for the Bacmans Community charity, which aims to help people living in Cresswell, Ellington, Linton and Lynemouth to achieve their personal and employment goals by enhancing their skills, knowledge and experience.

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Lauren Angus

Sales Director at Miller Homes North East

Here, Lauren shares her route to her current role – and her passion for the industry.

What is about the housing industry that made you want to work in it?

I have always had a passion for property, starting from when I was very young. I remember as a child visiting show homes with my parents when they were looking for inspiration for interiors. As I got older and while studying for my degree at university I decided I wanted to sell new build homes part time and found I was successful at it. My career grew from there moving into marketing roles and then full circle back to sales and overseeing everything in-between.

How has the property market changed?

How we buy houses has changed – when I started selling new build homes we didn't even have computers on site, it was arch lever files a pen and a phone. Today this looks a lot different – tech enhancements mean we're able to provide our customers with a much better experience.

Often with new build homes customers are buying off-plan and up to a year ahead of their home being complete. Miller has an innovative approach offering some of the best visualisation software in the industry. In April we launched a new website customers can walk down 3D CGI images of the streets and into plots virtually to view the homes before they are built – I don't know any other builder who offers this on this scale.

Why are new builds so popular?

New build homes offer buyers a hassle-free option there are no hidden repair or maintenance costs that you may find with second hand homes, we give extended build and aftercare warranties for peace of mind and customer move into a blank canvas ready to make it their own.

Customers also have so many more buying options when compared to the second hand market. With our new builds we can help people through a multitude of buying schemes and without these many people either couldn't get on the property ladder or move home.

We've also seen lenders are huge supporters of new build we've seen – LTV (Loan to Value) improve, with 95% mortgage products available from more lenders against new build homes.

There are also specialist products such as green mortgages – something I think we'll see evolve over the years as the energy

efficiently of new build homes gets even better meaning running costs are lower, which in turn leaves more money in customers pockets.

What is it about Miller Homes North East that made you want to work there?

Miller have always had an excellent reputation in the industry and across the North East, not only as a house builder but also as an employer. There is a strong focus on our customers too holding the 5 star builder status for over 10 years – that's something we're all proud to be part of.

How does the future look for Miller Homes in the North East?

Miller will continue to focus on what it does best which is building high-quality homes on developments designed to allow communities to flourish. In the North East this means the launch of more new build schemes in 2025 and 2026. We will continue to invest in technology to support our customers on their buying journey and support the communities in which we operate through our community fund.

What current developments are underway?

We currently have 11 live developments across the North East, spanning from Bedlington to Durham with new launches planned later this year and into 2026. Our focus is building quality homes in areas where people want to live and our product range spans from two to five bedroom properties.

Which ones are you most excited about?

We've a beautiful scheme in Chapel Garth, Sunderland called Blakeney Green. This site is an extension to the new build development my parents bought a home on when I was at school.

It's been amazing to go back and see the high level of investment over recent years and how the area has evolved. It's a stunning development set in a fantastic established community and next to some of the best schools in the city. I have such happy memories of growing up here and there is something special about being part of creating the next community in this area.

www.millerhomes.co.uk



Blakeney Green



Blakeney Green



Blakeney Green

THE BIG INTERVIEW



Lauren Angus



Neil Turner

Heat pumps - are they worth it?

*By Neil Turner, Director,
Howarth Litchfield.*

I continuously read in the national newspaper articles on heat pumps with a great deal of negativity and scepticism.

We are told by central government that we should all be swapping across to them for new builds and refurbishments, yet even the 2035 proposed ban on gas boilers, is now reversed.

So, the advice, guidance and legislation are changing, hardly helpful to people when considering the plunge to invest in the technologies.

The technology has been around a long time - over 150 years - and was first installed in the UK in 1945. The first closed loop system (ground source - hence GSHP)

was installed in 1995 in Devon. Air source (ASHP) - is a more recent development - and to my surprise the first systems were recorded as recently as 2008. I installed my own GSHP system in 2013, so I was early to this party.

The Europeans, however, have been fitting them for many more decades with the Americans close behind.

The advantages are that they are more energy efficient than a conventional gas or oil boiler. Every unit of electricity used generates three or four and it works like a reverse fridge, for both the air and ground and/or water-based versions.

They work best at a lower temperature, compared to a gas boiler and are therefore better suited to underfloor heating than radiators.

This technology is simple to use, easy to maintain and operates on electricity, not fossil fuels. Since electricity generation is increasingly reliant on cleaner sources, with 45% from renewable sources and potentially 66% if nuclear is included, this makes it a low-carbon choice.

The downsides are the initial expense. If you join a heat pump to an existing radiator system, the result may be disappointing, so increasing the pipe size and radiators help the performance but increase the initial costs.

The air source units need to sit outside a house or office building whereas ground source pumps are located inside a plant room; additionally, some do generate noise and they are not particularly attractive units, resembling air conditioning units.

The cost of electric is high too in the UK, whilst our gas is cheaper than in Europe. So, if we are going to get more people to swap over, then the electric prices need to reduce to make the finances more attractive, or gas higher, and that is a major political issue.

The government ran a grant programme from 2011 to 2022 called the Domestic Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI), which did increase take up but it has been replaced with a fixed sum contribution worth up to £7500. This replacement grant is not as generous as the previous system. So, until the cost of the installation comes down,

then the majority of people, even if they want to swap over, can't afford the systems.

I can only say that it's been a good decision. I used a Swedish NIBE system because they had a history of understanding the technology. There are now new players in the market including UK made systems along with energy companies like Octopus. When considering a heating system for my own home, I wanted to have an efficient low carbon energy system to reduce the carbon footprint of my house on the basis that if I am going to advise people to develop greener buildings, then it's better to be consistent and do this first on my own property!

In the short-term, heat pumps are still going to cost more: they will suit some houses and not others - particularly older properties requiring greater insulation. In the medium term, the cost of units will come down and central government will need to do more to encourage their installation through grants or discounts.

Clever design needs to do more to hide them, too. The Europeans are ahead in designing them into their houses rather than bolting them to the outside with no aesthetic considerations. Architects should be looking to lead on how to incorporate them in all buildings and houses.

It's the future...it really is...but I suspect still a slow burn.

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





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Igomove officially expands into Darlington

A thriving North East estate agency, Igomove, has officially launched in Darlington, marking a significant step in its regional expansion.

After a period of research and testing the waters since May, Igomove Darlington believes there is a local appetite for its approach.

After the successful trial period there is a confidence that there is a place for its customer-focused approach in the County Durham town.

Spearheading this venture are directors Claire Mullan and Jonathan Yardley, seasoned property professionals with extensive local market knowledge, who are offering a transparent, fixed fee for home sales, regardless of property value.

“With over 25 years of combined industry experience, we were drawn to Igomove’s forward-thinking approach and commitment to client feedback,” said Claire.

“Our goal is to deliver exceptional customer satisfaction, driven by a motivated team and our collective expertise.”

Igomove prioritises a personalised service and that is something Claire and Jonathan want to deliver in a new area.

Claire said: “We tailor our approach to each client, understanding their unique needs and guiding them through every step, from valuation to key handover, with seamless partner support for conveyancing and other services.”

Claire, who has more than a decade of local experience of the property market in Darlington, is eager to spread the Igomove word and help more people sell or buy their home.

“We’re offering more than just a typical estate agency experience,” she said. “We’re committed to community engagement through sponsorships, partnerships and active participation in local business forums.”



Igomove Darlington director Claire Mullan with Igomove's managing director Mark Flint and senior manager Michelle Flint in Darlington centre

Picture: Tom Banks

Igomove’s commitment to transparency is reflected in its fixed-fee model, eliminating percentage-based commissions or upfront payments.

Claire added: “We believe in treating every client equally, regardless of property value. Whether it’s a multi-million-pound home or a £30,000 investment, our service remains consistent.”

Building on its reputation for customer satisfaction and referrals, Igomove will introduce loyalty rewards and referral incentives in Darlington.

The Igomove brand was first launched in February 2019 by managing director Mark Flint. Michael Naylor introduced Igomove County Durham a few months later before Danny Naylor started to lead Igomove Teesside in early 2020.

Igomove Durham North started in 2022 and the firm’s latest expansion has targeted Darlington believing its modern approach to selling homes provides the perfect balance between online and traditional service seven days a week.

Mark, Igomove’s managing director, highlights the company’s rapid growth.

He said: “Founded in Hartlepool in 2019, we quickly expanded to County Durham, Teesside and Durham. Our success stems from recruiting experienced, driven professionals who understand what clients really want.

“We hope to keep growing and we are proud of what has been achieved so far. Through recommendations from previous clients, and our excellent Trustpilot reviews and other positive feedback, we believe we are having a big impact on the industry in the region.

“Transparency is at the heart of our brand. We’re proud of our achievements and are committed to continued growth across the North-East and we are hugely excited now to be in Darlington with Claire and Jonathan.”

For more information, contact info@igomovedarlington.co.uk or call 01325 643005. Visit igomove.co.uk and follow Igomove Darlington on Facebook.



The re-planting of Kenton Dene

On the 29th March local volunteers (including the local Vicar, councillors and residents of Kenton Manor Care Home) joined with members of the Northumbria Wildlife Trust to plant trees in Kenton Dene.

The weather was kind and refreshments were laid on by the Trust.

The final product looked fantastic as a total of 45 trees were planted.



The continued adventures of...



Hi everyone,

The new puppy has been chosen and will be arriving soon – they are going to call it Gordon – very posh – will be posting some photos soon. The weather is warming up and the old bones are not creaking so much.

It is my 15th birthday on Tuesday so expecting to be spoilt. See ya!

Q: I have a wooden-framed, three-panelled lounge window, 4m x 2.5m, with no opening lights. I want to change it to one which opens onto a patio. The house was built in the early 50's and the window has a hidden lintel, I assume, with bricks forming the outside of the cavity wall appearing to be placed directly on top of the wooden frame. I have invited three specialist window installers to inspect, and to give me a quote.

Company One suggested that PVC-U or aluminium could be used – that a steel angle iron may be required upon further investigation (ie during the alteration) and that an external lintel may also be required.

Company Two said PVC-U would not be strong enough, and aluminium would be needed.

Ziggy and Cally!

This agent did inspect the outside of the window and said that Building Regulations would not now allow the external bricks to just rest on the frame - they would need some independent support.

Company Three insisted that PVC-U would be the best material, and he brought small samples to demonstrate their strength. He did not go outside and did not mention lintels. So, could you please try to clear up my dilemma as to which company is right?

A: In your opening lines, you say you assume that this four-metre wide window opening has 'a hidden lintel' supporting the weight of the brickwork above. This is a dangerous assumption. Nowadays there are some clever designs of steel lintel, where the main structural support is up inside the cavity (although they all usually reveal a tell-tale strip of steel between the top of the window frame and the bricks).

In the early 1950s such a design did not exist. There was usually a substantial timber lintel above the inner leaf (sometimes steel), but it was common for the first course of outer-leaf bricks to be bedded directly onto the window frame. In other cases a 'flat' brick arch would have been designed to carry the load; in time, these too might have settled, meaning that the window frame became load-bearing.

Fitters working for replacement window firms are often ignorant of this fact, or perhaps they

just don't care. All over the UK you can see examples of houses that have been damaged by cheap replacement windows - whether PVC-U, aluminium alloy, or thin-section timber. The original window had been carrying the load of the wall above - whether by accident or design. The new window is not up to the job, and after a few years a characteristic cracking pattern emerges, with a triangle of brickwork detached from the rest of the wall, and perching on top of the sagging window frame.

Your first two companies at least acknowledge that a new lintel would be needed, but appear vague about the size or type. I suggest that rather than a "specialist window installer", what you really need is a Fenestration Surveyor or Structural Engineer to survey the property, specify the best product, and inspect the final installation.



Please send me your building queries through facebook - @WDLne, website: wdlnortheast.co.uk or through my Dad's good pal Michael at Northern Insight on michael@northern-insight.co.uk

GFW on 'How to keep your house chain moving'

By Alison Kent,
Associate/Valuer, GFW.

Agreeing a house sale and finding a suitable new home can be exciting and stressful all at the same time.

However, when you find yourself in a chain, it really is just the start of the process.

In an ideal world house buyers and sellers would avoid entering into a chain, but often it's an inevitable outcome, particularly if you are not a first-time buyer or selling an empty home.

Buyers and sellers often find the process of being involved in a chain frustrating. There are so many external elements that can have a huge impact on whether you make it through to moving day. To name but a few examples, mortgage approvals, surveys, title anomalies and conflicting timeframes can all create delays. To make matters even more complicated, one delay within the process can have a knock-on effect for the rest of the chain.

Our advice to anyone in a chain is that flexibility and good communication are key to the overall process running smoothly. It is important to remember that everyone in the chain wants to move and has spent a significant amount of money in doing so.

If you are a buyer or a seller, try to be proactive in the process. Respond to emails and deal with requests from your solicitors,

including legal documentation, as quickly as possible.

Try not to think too far ahead in the process. When there are so many different parties involved, putting unachievable timeframes on a chain only causes unnecessary stress. For example, only look to book removals when your solicitor has started discussing signing contract papers and is requesting dates from you.

Your chosen agent is the absolute linchpin of the process. Their job is to keep everyone informed and to manage appropriate timeframes not just for the client but for everyone involved. A good estate agent will not only market your property effectively but also help manage the selling process, communicating with all parties involved.

Everyone involved has the same goal, to make sure you move house! Things don't always run smoothly, there may well be bumps along the road, but transparency, communication and flexibility are the key to handing those keys over on completion day.

For advice on buying or selling your home, call GFW's team of experts on 0333 920 2220 or visit gfwllp.co.uk



Alison Kent





L-R: Billy Smith, trainee health & safety consultant, Margaret Kent, accounts manager, Claire Wadds, administrator, Kieran Barnes, ISO internal auditor and Angela Carney, managing director at Carney Consultancy

New appointments to support ambitious five-year growth strategy

Carney Consultancy, a leading provider of health, safety and ISO accreditation services, has announced four new appointments as part of its continued expansion across the North of England.

Billy Smith, joins as trainee health and safety consultant, Margaret Kent, as accounts manager, Kieran Barnes, takes on the role of ISO internal auditor / document controller and Claire Wadds will provide administrative support.

Carney Consultancy assists construction and engineering businesses across the North of England navigate complex regulations and maintain compliance.

The firm's five-year business plan includes increasing its retained customer base from 200 to 250, growing turnover by 75% and expanding operations further into the North West and Yorkshire. The company is nearing a milestone of 200 clients, fuelled by a 64% surge in turnover and a 22% increase in retained clients over the past two years.

The company's expansion is further evidenced by its recent move to new premises in North Shields.

Kieran Barnes, who joins as an ISO auditor/document controller, will shadow director, Martin Crammond. As the company's primary expert in ISO accreditations, Martin will provide Kieran with the training needed to manage Integrated Management System Audits (ISM), ensuring clients are compliant with ISO standards. Kieran, formerly a property manager in an estate agency, is undergoing in-house and external training and working closely with Martin to help audit businesses and meet client requirements.

Kieran, said: "I was drawn to Carney Consultancy because of the strong progression routes and the chance to work alongside a team that's highly skilled and incredibly supportive. I'm looking forward to learning from Martin and will be listening carefully to his advice and guidance so I can offer our clients the best service possible."

Margaret Kent, from North Tyneside, a highly experienced finance professional with over 30 years in the industry, has been appointed as the company's new accounts manager. Margaret brings extensive experience in bookkeeping and overseeing day-to-day accounts. Her role will ensure seamless communication between Carney Consultancy and its accountants, providing immediate answers to any financial queries.

Billy Smith, a trainee health and safety consultant, will be assisting in the implementation and monitoring of health and safety standards within client organisations.

Claire Wadds joins the team as an administrator, playing a key role in supporting daily operations and ensuring the smooth functioning of the office.

Angela Carney, managing director of Carney Consultancy, said: "As we move further into 2025 with a strong order book and continued expansion, the appointments of Billy, Margaret, Kieran and Claire will help us to maintain the high level of service that our clients expect. We are committed to nurturing talent within our team and will look to invest in further training for our new appointments, ensuring we continue to grow and provide high-quality services to our clients across the North of England."

www.carneyconsultancy.co.uk



Durham Cricket players Lizzie Scott and Brydon Carse with Russ Hall, managing director of Banks Homes and Banks Property

Banks Group goes into bat with Durham Cricket

Durham Cricket has signed up County Durham-based property and mining firm the Banks Group as its new principal partner in an agreement which also includes the naming rights to the Riverside ground.



The Chester-le-Street venue is now called the Banks Homes Riverside Stadium as part of a multi-year sponsorship deal that forms part of Banks' celebrations of its 50th anniversary in 2026.

The agreement will also see the company's branding featuring on the Durham Cricket men's, women's and junior Pathway teams' kits, as well as around the stadium.

Launched in 2023, Banks Homes is developing a growing number of high quality residential sites across the North East and Yorkshire, with properties now on sale at developments in Yarm, West Rainton and Durham City.

Russ Hall, managing director at Banks Homes, said: "Banks Homes is already making its mark on the residential property market and this new relationship with Durham Cricket gives us the ideal platform for further increasing brand recognition across our target markets.

"We pride ourselves in our residential developments always being placed for perfection and we couldn't be in a more perfect location than the iconic Riverside ground."

The Banks Group is already a longstanding supporter of Durham Cricket, having worked alongside the Club for over 30 years, and has made a significant long-term investment over several decades in grassroots cricket right across the North East through the sponsorship of a number of local league and cup competitions and dozens of grants being awarded to individual clubs.

Banks' partnership with Durham Cricket began before Durham became a First-Class county, with its sponsorship enabling the Club to set up and run the County under 19 team in 1989, and helping the senior club to become the first county to be granted first class status for 70 years three years later.

Banks has also supported Durham Cricket's junior player pathway courses since 2006, contributed to the development of the nursery ground at the Banks Homes Riverside and sponsored the County's boys' and girls' age group sides for many years.

Harry Banks OBE DL, chairman and chief executive at the Banks Group, who also served as President of Durham County Cricket Club in 1998 and 1999, adds: "We've been part of the Durham Cricket story for

many years and it's a real landmark for us, as a family business that was founded in County Durham almost 50 years ago, to now be starting a new chapter in this very successful relationship.

"Our home county has been the breeding ground for so many outstanding players and teams over the years, and we're excited to see what all the club's teams can achieve this season as we extend our support for the home of Durham cricket."

Durham Cricket Chief Executive, Tim Bostock said: "We are thrilled to further expand our relationship with Banks Group in what is a significant moment for Durham Cricket.

"Banks Group is a progressive, community-minded partner that aligns with our Northern culture, sharing our passion for community spirit and cricket."

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

No sales. No distractions. Just rentals

Why Wright Residential is changing the game for North East Landlords.

In a property market flooded with high street agencies juggling sales, lettings, and auctions, landlords are often left as an afterthought. That's where Wright Residential stands apart. This forward-thinking agency has one simple, yet powerful USP: they only do rentals.

Wright Residential was created with a clear mission – to put landlords first. No sideline sales targets. No chasing commissions. Just focused, professional lettings management designed to protect and grow your rental investment.

“When lettings are just a ‘department’ in a sales agency, landlords often fall to the bottom of the priority list,” says a spokesperson for Wright Residential. “We saw the need for a specialist service where rental properties – and the people who own them – get the attention they truly deserve.”

Their unique approach is built on three pillars: 100% rental focus, trust and



security, and long-term partnership. Wright Residential operates more like a private bank than a traditional agency – safeguarding properties with precision, care, and proactive oversight.

The benefits of this dedicated model are clear. With no competing priorities, the team is fully committed to finding and retaining quality tenants, managing maintenance efficiently, and ensuring steady, secure income for landlords.

Whether you're an experienced portfolio landlord or just letting out your first property, Wright Residential offers peace of mind through expert service, honest advice, and clear communication – without

the usual sales fluff.

In a climate where agents often overpromise and underdeliver, Wright Residential's no-nonsense, rentals-only approach is a breath of fresh air.

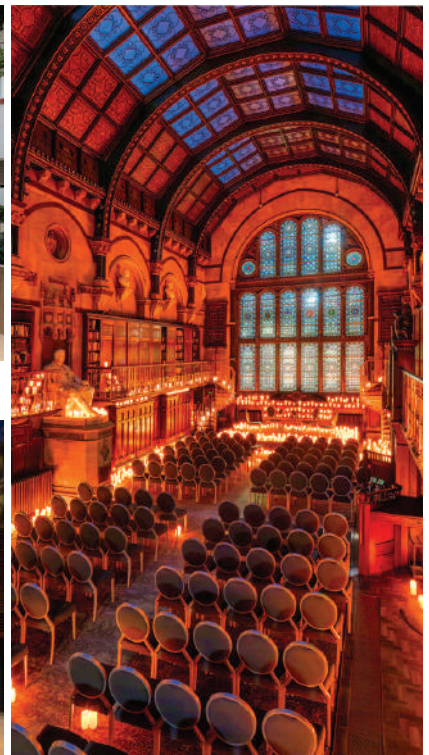
So, if you're tired of being pushed down the list by agents more focused on house sales than your rental income, it might be time to switch to a team that treats your property like an investment – not an afterthought.

To find out more or to speak with a letting's expert, visit:

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Esh Construction's land-led solution to deliver £65 million of new affordable homes



The Seaside Lane development saw 96 new affordable homes built in Easington Village on the site of a long-demolished working men's club



With support from Homes England funding, Esh delivered 25 new affordable homes on brownfield land at Roman Avenue in Byker, Newcastle

North of England contractor completes land purchase on four sites across North East and Yorkshire.

Esh Construction's affordable housing division is set to deliver almost 300 homes across the North East and Yorkshire after completing land purchases on four sites through its land-led solution.

The County Durham headquartered contractor launched its land-led development solution in 2019 to provide an improved offer to clients, not only sourcing developable land and conducting technical, design and construction assessments, but taking greater control of land acquisition, planning and construction processes. As an Investment Partner with Homes England, Esh also unlocks access to grant funding on behalf of registered housing provider clients.

Four new schemes have come to fruition at the same time, with two North East schemes and two Yorkshire projects all completing land purchases.

In the North East, Esh has secured land for a £20 million project which will deliver a 55-home extra care development. The Sunderland Road, Gateshead scheme will replace a derelict library with 43 one and

two-bedroom apartments, 12 detached and semi-detached bungalows, and a warden's dormer bungalow. In Jarrow, Esh has purchased land directly from South Tyneside Council to deliver a mix of two, three and four-bedroom houses and two-bedroom flats as part of a £9 million affordable housing scheme.

Meanwhile in Yorkshire, Esh's team has completed land purchases in Bridlington and Hull which will pave the way for developments worth £36 million. A mix of affordable homes and a 68-apartment extra care scheme will be delivered just two miles from Bridlington town centre, while work is due to commence on 65 two, three and four-bedroom homes for affordable rent in Hull.

Laura Devaney, Land and Partnerships Director at Esh Construction, said: "Improving the affordable housing offer has been a key driver for the growth of our land-led solution. We have forged important relationships with Homes England, local authorities and registered housing providers and the culmination of these four projects is testament to the work going on behind the scenes to carry out surveys and investigations into site viability.

"With the UK Government outlining targets for 1.5 million new build homes within the next five years, local authorities have been urged to grant planning permission

for approximately 462,500 homes each year. The demand is high for quality developments to be brought forward, and we have another wave of sites across the North East and Yorkshire that are already progressing towards planning submission."

Working alongside land agents, landowners, local authorities and registered social housing providers, Esh's land-led solution is centred around collaboration and transparency, lending itself to partners playing to their strengths and alleviating workloads for providers.

Since its launch, the solution has flourished, with completed projects including 32 new affordable homes in Leeds, a scheme in Askern, Doncaster which delivered 124 new affordable homes and retirement living apartments, as well as the development of 96 new affordable homes in Easington Village on the site of a long-demolished working men's club.

Devaney added: "Across all of our sites, we have worked closely with partners to ensure the local area needs have been fully considered. By securing funding on behalf of our clients through our status as a Homes England Investment Partner, we have also aided scheme viability when bringing the projects to market."

To find out more about Esh Construction, visit www.eshgroup.co.uk



A scheme in Askern, Doncaster, delivered 124 new affordable homes and retirement living apartments



The £7.6m Barnsdale Road development was delivered on behalf of Yorkshire Housing



Esh's affordable housing division transformed 4.6 acres of land at Barnsdale Road at Allerton Bywater into 12 two-bedroom, 38 three-bedroom and 5 four-bedroom homes

Property development announces £9million investment to boost local economic growth



Team from Merchant Park Developments, FW Capital and Hall Construction Services on site at Merchant Park

Merchant Park Developments have announced plans to invest up to £9million in the first phase of a new commercial development located at Merchant Park, Newton Aycliffe. Phase One will bring 198 jobs to the area, with plans to create a total of 1014 jobs when all three phases of the site are completed.

Merchant Park is a 65-acre development at Aycliffe Business Park on J59 of the A1(M) and home to the 30-acre Hitachi Rail Europe train manufacturing facility, one of the largest inward investment manufacturing developments in recent years.

This latest addition to the site on Millennium Way, is a 17-acre (6.88ha) development adjacent to the Hitachi train facility. It will comprise of three warehouse units with construction now commenced on Phase One of the development. Phase One will occupy 52,500 sq ft, with planning consent for the remainder of the scheme for 89,000 sq ft and 126,000 sq ft premises.

Funding to support the development has been provided using a seven-figure senior debt package provided by FW Capital under the North East Commercial Property Investment Fund which is managed by FW Capital and backed by the North East Combined Authority (NECA). An incentive has also been provided by NECA to support the immediate financial viability gap for the first phase which includes infrastructure costs for the following two phases.

Construction has started with local firm Hall Construction Services and the development is being marketed by letting agents Jonathan Simpson at Connect Property and Dave Cato at CBRE. Chris Dixon and Lesley Telford represented FW Capital.

Geoff Hulton, Director Merchant Park Developments said: "We are delighted with

the support we have received from all parties in moving this phase of our development of Merchant Park forward. As well as driving growth in the local economy through the creation of new jobs, we are meeting our aspirations for the Park following the completion of the Hitachi Project in 2015."

Adrian Goodall, Merchant Park Developments said: "Following the successful completion of the starter unit scheme Station Place, we're pleased to now launch the first phase at Millennium Way. The initial funding from FW Capital and the North East Combined Authority is supporting the building and infrastructure requirements. It's given us the confidence to kick start the development and regenerate a previously barren site. We're also meeting the demands for quality commercial warehouse and office space, something that is in short supply in the area. Reaching the BREEM Very Good* standard is also important to us as we take our ESG and net zero commitments very seriously."

Roof placement on Phase One



Chris Dixon, Senior Investment Executive at FW Capital added: "Merchant Park Developments have a fantastic track record led by a highly experienced team of directors. This latest development is championing the potential of the local area, giving businesses access to quality premises and encouraging growth. It's also the first time we've been able to combine funds from the North East Commercial Property Investment Fund with the benefits of the incentive provided by the North East Combined Authority. Being a speculative development, we're also showcasing how the North East Commercial Property Investment Fund can help these types of schemes get started and come to fruition. It's a great project to be a part of and we're pleased to help them."

The North East Commercial Property Investment Fund is a £35million fund which provides loans of up to £7 million to support both non speculative and speculative developments for new build or refurbished commercial projects. This includes industrial units, distribution facilities or office schemes located in the seven authority areas: Northumberland, County Durham, Gateshead, Newcastle upon Tyne, North Tyneside, South Tyneside and Sunderland. Repayments will be reinvested in new schemes, creating a total investment of £119 million into commercial property in 15 years. It aims to create 5,600 jobs and develop 140,000 sq m of commercial space.

*BREEAM supports solutions to reduce carbon emissions to net zero, improve whole life performance, manage health and social impacts, boost circularity, resilience and biodiversity, and support disclosures and reporting.

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



James Carss

Castle Peak Group - Driving business forward

Diversity and equality in the workplace is driven from the top.

Welcome to Northern Insight's third article about diversity and why it's not only the right thing to do when it comes to business...it also the right thing to do for driving your business forward.

North East based Executive Search company Castle Peak Group, led by CEO James Carss, has one major aim when it comes to finding candidates to fill a senior vacancy. They try to ensure that a company's board of directors and senior executives are as diverse as possible. James also has a keen eye to ensure equality and inclusivity. This is not some sort of ideological mission that James has undertaken...he's doing what he knows works best for a business...and he's been doing it for 20 years.

"Diversity and equality at senior levels makes a massive difference to how a

company performs", said James. "Get it right and that company can flourish. A diverse board or team of executives from different backgrounds brings a wealth of experiences together which can lead to better decision making."

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.

However, even though directors and executives are seen as being the company leaders and are the people that a workforce can look up to as setting a good example, there needs to be a trickle-down effect.

"The culture of change within any company is always driven from the top," adds James, "but there is no point in senior people sitting in a boardroom, patting themselves on the back and saying how diverse and equal they are. Our research showed that these principles need to be reflected further down the company structure. For example, operational managers are fundamental to delivering equality, diversity and inclusion within any business because they're the ones who are the bridgehead between the strategic and the corporate, and the very operational frontline stuff.

"And it doesn't end within the four walls of a company. The workforce and customers are often influenced by the sort of people that the company associates with elsewhere, into the supply chain and external consultants. Many contributors to

our research spoke of the value of working with trusted partners to ensure diversity and inclusion efforts were strong and kept on track for the long term. Many were very honest about their EDI assessment, feeling that they were doing well on gender and ethnicity, but less well on disability or socio-economic background. One positive note to take from that response is how the business realises more work needs to be done."

Nobody promises that this is easy...but Castle Peake Group can help. They work closely with their trusted partner, Positive About Inclusion. The Tyneside-based company's work includes training for board and exec teams, culture diagnostics which can help organisations understand topics like authenticity and equality impact in their work, and work with stakeholders to help them be actively involved in diversity and inclusion efforts. There are further details on their website www.positiveaboutinclusion.com

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

Growing workload leads to new appointment at Newcastle consultancy



The SRCPM team at Newcastle
L-R: Gary Marshall, Adam Robinson,
Ben Tremewan and Cameron Mackenzie

A consultancy which established a Newcastle office in Hoult's Yard just one year ago, has announced the appointment of Adam Robinson to its cost management team, following a steady influx of new work during 2024.

Steel River Consultants (SRC), which specialises in cost and project management, HSE and lifting compliance services, operates from four UK offices with its head office in Stockton on Tees and other offices in Edinburgh and the Midlands.

Employing thirty staff, SRC's expertise spans multiple industries, including education, residential, commercial, health and renewables projects.

The Newcastle office is pursuing an ambitious three-year strategy to significantly grow the business and take on bigger projects. Building on its current success, Adam is the first to bolster the team after firstly benefiting from a work experience opportunity with SRC while he was studying at Northumbria University. Commenting on his role, he said: "I really

enjoyed the range and variety of projects I had the chance to work on while I was studying so I jumped at the chance of employment when it was offered.

"It's a great work environment at SRC, being part of an ambitious and professional team. While I recognise that I still have much to learn, I am excited about my future career with SRC because the company is committed to training and professional development to help staff achieve their goals."

Senior cost manager and Newcastle office lead, Ben Tremewan, added: "The last year has seen a lot of hard work since we opened our doors at Hoult's Yard, but it has also been immensely rewarding. As we embark on our second year, we are really starting to gain traction within the local market - our head office in Stockton has set the bar high but we're up for the challenge. "As a company we're keen to create jobs for suitably qualified and talented local people to keep pace with business growth, so with several successful projects already under our belt, we are delighted to welcome Adam.

"From his work experience with us, he has shown that he has the capacity to become a valued member of the team and with a Masters in Quantity Surveying, he looks set to swiftly make a significant contribution to our success."

Meanwhile, several projects with a collective value of £20m are due to start on



L-R: Ben Tremewan with Adam Robinson

site imminently with SRC providing cost and project management support.

Some of these include a project for Beyond Housing in Middlesbrough, for which SRC is also acting as principal designer, together with a further £1.8m depot scheme for Beyond Housing in Redcar; the installation of retaining walls at a North Yorkshire tennis club; cost management for a school extension in Sunderland; and on the back of an earlier successful project for Breckenbrough School, which is a day and residential school for boys with a range of learning and behavioural difficulties, SRC is providing cost management services on a £1.4m outdoor activity centre in Thirsk.

SRC employs a team of eight professionals to deliver its cost and project management consultancy services - three in Newcastle, three in Stockton, plus two project managers who are permanently seconded to work on site at solar farms and renewable projects.

srconsultants.co.uk

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***...Energy saving
technology is at
the forefront of
the industry...***

In conversation with

Northern Insight talks to...

Steve Rhodes

Engineering Director, Ideal Extraction Ltd

Ideal Extraction Ltd is a specialist engineering company providing bespoke dust and fume extraction systems, primarily to the woodworking sector. The company also supports businesses with maintenance and testing of systems, helping clients to keep on top of health & safety requirements.

They work with companies of all sizes; from supplying cost-effective solutions to small independent businesses to installing multi-million pound contracts for blue-chip companies.

Steve, tell us about your role.

Industrial production is a massive enterprise, but however grand the manufacturing facility, it can be undone by one tiny thing: dust!

A reliable and long-lasting extraction system is absolutely necessary for machinery to function and to create a safe and dust-free working environment for its employees.

That's where Ideal Extraction comes in as we design and install bespoke dust extraction solutions throughout the UK.

I've been in the air movement industry ever since I left school, which means over 40 years of industry experience, more than 30 of those dedicated to dust & fume extraction installations.

I set up a dust extraction business, Cades Ltd, with my wife, Helen, in 1996 which we then sold to a competitor in 2015. I stayed in the industry and enjoyed several years with the new owners, but following a further sale and restructure, Helen and I decided the time was right to be company owners once again, and we set up Ideal Extraction in 2020.

We've had a very successful five years with the company and enjoy working with a wide variety of companies, including some very well-known high street names.

We're also incredibly proud to be the only UK agent for Moldow A/S, a multinational industrial filter and fan manufacturing company based in Denmark. This formal agreement with Ideal Extraction has been in place since 2020, but I've been their UK agent since 1996 with Moldow moving with me during the years I worked for other companies.

We enjoy an excellent working relationship and I know they value my expertise and the fact that I'm good at getting stuff done and can sort out extraction problems where other companies may have failed!

Tell us about the team.

It's very much a family business. My wife, Helen, is Co-Director and our daughter Felicity has just joined the team as a Junior Contracts Engineer.

We've got two experienced and highly talented Contract Engineers, and are about to take on a third, plus the necessary support staff. Our business is growing, which is why we've recently just taken on an additional large office space in Ilkley.

How does the industry differ now from when you first started out?

When I first started out four decades ago, there wasn't the same focus on occupational health and employees' wellbeing. Thankfully, the industry is a lot more regulated now and there are robust laws to help protect the ongoing health and safety of employees.

For example, it became mandatory in 2002 for a company's local exhaust ventilation (LEV) fume and dust extraction equipment to be thoroughly examined and tested at least every 14 months by an experienced engineer to keep the workforce safe.

Also, there are stricter regulations now to mitigate noise pollution. It's not unusual for modern industrial estates to be located close to housing developments so it's important that neighbouring houses and businesses are not affected by any noise disturbance. To help companies adhere to these regulations, if deemed necessary by the local authority for the site, acoustic enclosures can be included as part of our dust extraction installations.

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

There will be an even greater focus on the health and wellbeing of the workforce over the coming decade and higher punitive sanctions placed on companies which fail to comply with Health & Safety regulations.

Energy saving technology is at the forefront of the industry and is now regarded as being one of the most crucial elements when it comes to putting together a good quality dust extraction system.

Not only is this better for the environment, but using less energy more efficiently means smaller energy bills for our clients.

A Moldow Dust Collection System in combination with their energy-saving ENSACO® system and highly efficient fans guarantees an energy-optimised, reliable and durable dust extraction system that uses up to 80% less energy than traditional and competing systems.

How do you like to unwind?

Because of the nature of the work and the fact that manufacturing facilities operate 24/7, I do feel like I'm 'on call' a lot of the time. However, we own a holiday lodge near the coast which we visit most weekends and I use this time to enjoy a spot of fishing whilst enjoying the peace and quiet of the surroundings.

www.ideal extraction.co.uk

Newcastle is on the rise

Investment, Regeneration & a city full of buzz

With years of experience advising clients across multiple sectors, Paul Fairlamb—Senior Associate Director at youngsRPS, commercial property expert, and lifelong NUFC fan—shares insights from the latest Commercial data from the likes of Rightmove and CBRE.

He explores how leasing and investment demand is shifting positively as the economy stabilises and interest rates begin to fall.

A city poised for growth

From ambitious regeneration schemes transforming the city skyline to a thriving commercial property sector and the unstoppable momentum of Newcastle United, the city is undergoing a remarkable revival. It's an exciting time to be part of the North East's evolving story, and attention is firmly fixed on what's next.

While there have been some recent price dips, overall investor confidence is returning—particularly within the commercial property sector.

Key city centre projects—from the transformation of Northumberland Street and Grey Street to the revival of Grainger Market and the recent opening of the Dakota Hotel on Newcastle's Quayside (the former Womble Bond Dickinson (UK) LLP office and marketed by youngsRPS—are breathing new life into historic areas. Major developments like Pilgrim's Quarter, Quayside West and Founders Place are unlocking opportunities across business, housing and innovation.

Investment is also flowing into cultural venues, university-led research hubs, and regeneration zones like Forth Yards and Ouseburn. Newcastle is fast emerging as a modern, connected and vibrant place to live, work and invest.

Toon Toon: A catalyst for pride

You can't talk about Newcastle's current buzz without mentioning the impact of Newcastle United. The team's recent success and standout performances at



Paul Fairlamb

St James' Park have boosted the city's collective spirit.

Regardless of individual interest in football, the wider effects are clear—improving morale, increasing tourism, and driving footfall to local businesses. It's a win for the club, but also a major boost for the city's economy and identity.

Regional highlights: A snapshot of the North

Industrial leasing demand rose significantly in the North East (+29%), driven by the region's growing logistics and e-commerce sectors.

Retail leasing increased sharply in the North East (+35%) thanks to renewed investment in high streets and retail parks.

Investment demand across the North also rose, with the North East (+23%) and Yorkshire (+31%) leading the way—showing a clear resurgence in confidence.

Looking ahead to 2025: Opportunities for growth

The North of England's commercial property market looks set for further growth in 2025. Industrial and logistics demand is expected to remain strong, particularly in the North East, as

businesses continue expanding to meet e-commerce needs.

Modern, energy-efficient office spaces will be increasingly sought after, as companies look for high-quality, well-located workplaces. The leisure and hospitality sectors will also benefit from regeneration schemes that attract both consumers and investors.

With sustainability taking centre stage, developers and investors have a clear opportunity to upgrade outdated stock—ensuring properties meet modern efficiency standards and remain competitive in the long term.

With a resilient commercial property market, ambitious redevelopment plans, and a football club reigniting civic pride, Newcastle is well-positioned for continued success. The city's mix of historical character and forward-looking innovation makes it a compelling destination for investors, businesses and residents alike.

For expert advice on leasing and investment opportunities, contact the youngsRPS Commercial Property Team today.

www.youngsrps.com

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A DAB of Dulux Adds Life to Northumberland's Airwaves

Community radio stations across Northumberland are celebrating broadcasting to even more people after switching on a brand-new DAB transmitter.

A partnership of local community stations including Koast Radio, Lionheart Radio and Radio Northumberland have been helped by the AkzoNobel facility in Ashington. Their support has enabled the installation of DAB radio transmitters which have opened the airways to allow multiple radio stations to broadcast via the DAB network.

Now AkzoNobel, with Dulux Let's Colour are supporting the launch and transition of local DAB radio stations and are truly helping to paint a brighter future for the community.

Small-scale DAB is an innovative, cost-effective technology that enables local commercial, community, and specialist radio stations to broadcast on digital radio. Each Ofcom-licensed small-scale multiplex provides a platform for grassroots community services, niche music stations, and broadcasts tailored to minority groups and other under-served audiences, bringing greater diversity to the digital airwaves.

Richard Finch of Northumberland Community Digital, the organisation that manages the Northumberland network said: "The support from AkzoNobel has been amazing. This will allow more people in Northumberland to connect with their local and national radio stations with better clarity and quality."

Kaleidoscope's Charity Film Competition

Kaleidoscope, the North East's leading video, animation and photography agency are launching a charity competition which offers local charities and third sector organisations the chance to win short film or animation made by their team which will help to deliver their vital messages.

The power of video and animation in telling stories & explaining who and what you are is very strong. It can amplify voices, making it an invaluable tool for raising awareness and gathering support. Supporting local causes who are making a daily difference is something Kaleidoscope hold close to their hearts, and they thrilled to launch this competition which they hopefully become an annual occurrence.

To enter all you need to do is write a short brief telling them why your organisation would love to win, adding a little bit of background about who you are and what you do!. (you can nominate a charity too) You can be as creative, funny, serious as you like!



North East marketing agency launches rebrand

North East creative marketing agency Creo Comms has unveiled a brand refresh after strong recent growth.

The Sunderland based firm has revamped its website and set out a new look after a successful 12 months for the full-service agency which has seen turnover increase by more than 30 per cent and six new members of staff join the team, further expanding its capabilities.

Chris Pescod, Senior Brand Manager at Creo Comms, said: "When we began thinking about the rebrand, we explored brand personas, colours and fonts to create something that is accessible, fun, recognisable, professional and, most importantly, us. Yellow became our primary colour, reflecting feedback from our clients of our friendly, positive and optimistic approach, complemented by a wider softer palette to add warmth while retaining our strong black logo.

"To allow more versatility, we introduced the 'O' in Creo as a flexible design element, allowing us to frame, insert images and showcase illustrations inside the O.

Louise Bradford, Managing Director of Creo Comms, said: "There have been a couple of moments, throughout Creo's development over the last 11 years, when it has felt like the right time to take another look at our own brand presentation and to make sure we are representing the company we are.

As a full-service agency, Creo works with clients in sectors from manufacturing to real estate, and hospitality to professional services.



Closing date is 13th June 2025 and the winner will be announced mid July. This is the next part of Kaleidoscope pro bono series. They believe it's not always about making money, its about making good films and content which can be shared, which can change minds and engage people into new ways of looking at the world. For more information their website: www.kaleidoscopecfa.com

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Web Development: *Web design & build, SEO optimisation*



Content Marketing: *Blogs, advertising, Google ads, email marketing*



PR: *Good news stories, profile building, award entries, thought leadership*



@freshdigitaltd

O kicks off 20th year

Newcastle-based O agency has started its 20th year with several new client wins and projects, supporting its impact strategy to support scale-up entrepreneurial business, community and regional growth.

Its corporate comms team is working with fast-growth infosec SAAS platform HiComply, developing its brand positioning and growing its market share with PR and marketing campaigns. HiComply is the brainchild of serial entrepreneurs Nick Graham and Ed Bartlett, with the business on a mission to be a global market leader in information security technology.

O also supported the young entrepreneurs Zara Paul and Aaron Morris of Ai-powered video editing technology Choppity with PR for their appearance on BBC's Dragon's Den, where they were successful in securing £100,000 growth investment from Peter Jones.

The creative comms agency has also recently been appointed by Newcastle Racecourse to create marketing campaigns to attract new audiences to enjoy horseracing as a fun day



out for all in this year's social calendar.

Newcastle Pride has also reappointed O for the second year, after a successful festival of events across Newcastle city centre in 2024.

Managing Director of O, Kirsty Ostell, said: "We've kicked off our 20th year at a cracking pace, welcoming several exciting new clients and returning clients to our roster in this first quarter.

"We love to support our region, and the mix of new clients reflects that – from our most exciting new entrepreneurial talent to investment into our communities and the best lifestyle our region has to offer."



Award-winning PR agency follows up popular podcast with new show

A North East PR agency behind a popular business podcast has launched a follow-up show aimed at giving professionals a 'PR guru on the go'

The Pocket-size PR podcast is produced by Harvey & Hugo, an award-winning PR agency founded by Darlington entrepreneur Charlotte Nichols.

The agency also produces the popular PRsonal podcast, and the new follow-up aims to help marketing professionals access free tips and hacks into how PR can help build brands.

Guests have so far included the current Tees Businesswoman of the Year, Danielle Croce and the North East podcasting queen, Ashleigh King.

"Every business and brand have a unique voice that needs an individual strategy to be heard," said Charlotte, who has almost 20 years of PR and communications experience.

"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."



All Media to merge with Who's Listening

Newcastle-based marketing agency Who's Listening is expanding its services through the integration of long-standing media and print production business, All Media. This development builds on a successful working relationship between the two businesses and ensures continuity for All Media clients as its founder, Jeff Jamison, steps back from running his own company and begins a new consultancy role.

Jeff will continue to support clients under the Who's Listening brand, bringing decades of media buying, planning, and print expertise to the team. This move ensures that clients retain access to trusted support while benefiting from Who's Listening's wider marketing capabilities.

Jeff said: "After losing my wife Wendy to cancer last year, I've taken some time to reflect and reshape how I want to work moving forward. I still love what I do, but I want to create more space to focus on life outside of work too.

"Partnering with Shane and the team at Who's Listening feels like the right step. We've worked together on countless projects over the last couple of years, and they've always impressed me. I know my clients will be in great hands, and I'm excited to continue supporting them - just in a more flexible way."

Known for its highly targeted, data-led campaigns, Who's Listening combines a people-first culture with a commitment to results. The integration of All Media's services enhances the agency's offer, adding specialist capabilities in printed materials and media buying across TV, radio, and press—services traditionally sourced from separate agencies.

Managing Director, Shane Gammage, commented: "Jeff has been a huge support to me and my business over the last couple of years, and we've worked together on many successful projects. When the opportunity came up to bring his experience and client relationships into Who's Listening, it felt like a natural step. I'm really pleased we can support him in this new chapter and bring even more value to our clients."



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“

*...I'd love to
build a team
that shares
our values...*

Jordan Marston

Marketing and Media Matters

In the latest of this popular series of features Northern Insight talks to...

Jordan Marston

Digital Marketing Manager, Jam Marketing.

Did you always envisage a career in the Marketing and Media Industry?

Honestly? No! Like many people, I sort of stumbled into marketing. I've always been creative and curious — the type to ask “Why does that work?” when seeing an ad or campaign — but I didn't grow up thinking I'd be running a marketing agency. What I did know, though, was that I loved solving problems and making things better, and that naturally led me down this path.

What has been your career path so far?

I started off with a background in computer systems and website building, which gave me a really solid technical foundation. From there, I worked within financial services — a completely different beast, but it taught me the importance of structure, compliance, and data-driven thinking. It was only when I started helping JAM with their digital presence “on the side” that I realised how much I loved the creative side of things.

What have been the biggest challenges you've faced so far?

Like many small businesses, COVID hit us hard. Everything felt uncertain — clients paused projects, budgets disappeared, and we had to quickly rethink how we operated. But it also taught us a lot. We learned how to be adaptable, how to communicate better, and how to build stronger relationships. Rebuilding after that time wasn't easy, but it made us sharper, leaner, and more appreciative of every win — no matter how small.

Who do you respect most in your industry?

Without sounding too clichéd, it has to be my mam, Jackie Marston. From a young age, I've watched her pour everything into the business — navigating the highs and lows with unwavering determination and always conducting herself with integrity. Her work ethic, resilience, and passion for the industry have been a constant source of inspiration to me. Jackie is well known and highly respected across the region, and that reputation has been earned through years of dedication, commitment, and genuine love for what she does.

Which fictional media character can you most relate to?

Probably Chandler Bing from Friends. Bit of sarcasm, bit of chaos, but also secretly trying to keep everything together behind the scenes! Plus, no one really knows what he does — and that sums up marketing sometimes, doesn't it?

What is your greatest strength?

I'd say it's being able to see both the creative and the commercial side of things. I love the big ideas, but I also love the data and the “why.” That helps us create marketing that doesn't just look good — it works.

And your biggest weakness?

I'm a perfectionist. I find it hard to switch off and not keep tweaking things until they're “just right.” But I'm learning to let go a little more — done is better than perfect, as they say!

What has been your proudest achievement?

My proudest achievement has to be taking over the family business. It was never the career path I originally envisioned, but as the saying goes, everything happens for a reason — and I truly wouldn't have it any other way. Stepping into a role with so much history and meaning, and making my parents proud in the process, is something I hold incredibly close. Carrying the legacy forward and building on what they started gives me even more drive and determination for the future.

What are your future career aspirations?

I want to grow JAM into one of the most trusted small marketing agencies in the North. Not the biggest — but the one that people recommend without hesitation. I'd love to build a team that shares our values and genuinely enjoys the work we do. It's not about chasing awards — it's about doing good work for good people.

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

“Don't try to be everything to everyone.” It's tempting to say yes to every opportunity when you're starting out, but the real growth comes when you understand your strengths and lean into them. That's when you start attracting the right kind of clients — the ones you can really help.

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

Marketing will continue to become even more digital — no surprises there. AI will play a huge role in automation, content generation, and analytics. But I don't think it'll ever replace the human touch. People still buy from people, and they want to connect with stories, not just strategies. The key will be learning how to use the tech to enhance creativity, not replace it.

How do you like to unwind?

Spending time with family, a good Netflix binge, and walking the dog (even when it's freezing outside!). I also love switching off from screens now and again — a phone-free Sunday is bliss!

www.jamprintsmarketing.co.uk



Focusing on photography

Michael Rickwood empowers visually impaired people through photography lessons.

Professional photographer Michael Rickwood is focusing on breaking down barriers and developing a passion for photography among the visually impaired community in Northumberland.

Through a remarkable initiative led by Michael and Joanne Money, Activities Coordinator at Morpeth's Vision Northumberland, Michael is providing photography lessons that enable participants to explore the world of visual artistry despite their visual impairments.

The unique photography club called "Beyond Vision", comprises of individuals who are visually impaired but share an unwavering interest in photography.

The club's primary goal is to rekindle their passion for photography and empower

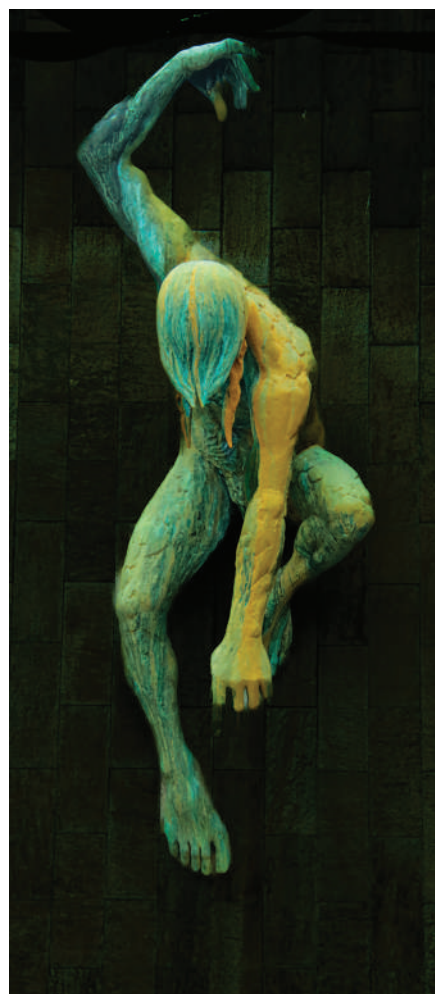
them to express their creativity through this visual medium. The club venture out to different locations to capture diverse subjects. In the coming weeks, they have plans to visit Alnwick Gardens for a unique photo shoot of the Cherry Blossom. Another favourite location is the small village of Bothal.

Wallsend based Michael Rickwood, the award-winning landscape photographer behind this initiative, described the picturesque village of Bothal in Northumberland as an ideal setting for their creative endeavours.

The serene churchyard offers a beautiful backdrop for outdoor photography, while the church's interior provides opportunities for indoor shots. "Through this photography club, supported by Joanne and I, visually impaired individuals are finding renewed inspiration and creativity, proving that passion and artistry have no bounds," he said.

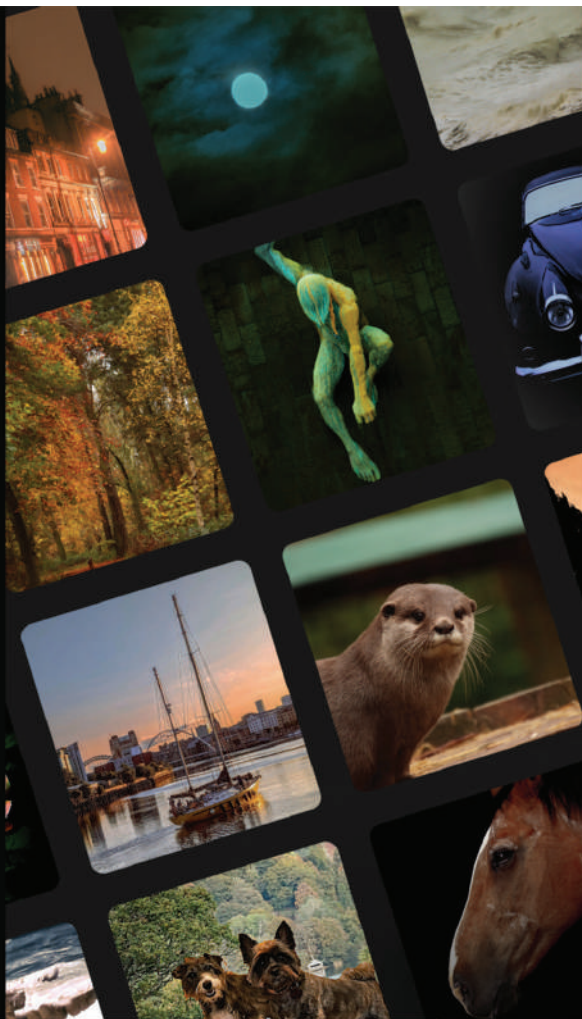
Beyond Vision are holding their latest exhibition at the Republic Gallery in Blyth between 26th April and 17th May, all prints from this unique exhibition are for sale and all proceeds support the club to evolve.

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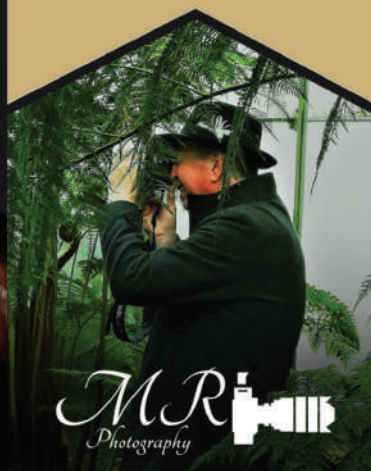


NORTHERN ENTERPRISE AWARDS 2024



Michael Rickwood

Best Landscape Photographer
SE Northumberland
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NORTHERN ENTERPRISE AWARDS 2024



Michael Rickwood

Best Landscape Photographer
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Get noticed for all the right reasons with our award-winning PR firm

At SASS Media Ltd, we're not just available for a one-off press release when your business has something to shout about, although we can offer this service if required.

For as little as £400 per month, we will act as an extension of your marketing team, to provide one article per month*, with the aim of getting coverage in local, national and trade press.

If you require more than this, whether it's additional press releases, blogs or news content for your website or social media, a crisis management strategy to use in case things go wrong, or a regular newsletter for your team or customers, having us on board also provides you with access to preferential rates for all of these things.

We also write award nominations if you think your business has something special that gives it a good chance of winning an award, but you don't have the time to dedicate to writing the entry yourself – or simply don't know where to start.

We have had a good deal of success when it comes to businesses who we have written nominations for being shortlisted and even winning in their categories.

For our regular clients, we act as an extension of their marketing team for a set number of hours each month, meaning we can handle media enquiries and write proactive press releases around things like awards, contract wins, new appointments and promotions - or anything else we identify as newsworthy.

Because both directors have a journalism background, while we can never guarantee media coverage, we will never put a press release out that we don't think stands a good chance of being picked up.

We're great at spotting stories in your business you may never have thought would be newsworthy and turning these into press ready content for our journalist contacts.

We can even take care of the accompanying photographs.

Sarah Dale and Sarah Walker



Our background in journalism means our style suits most news outlets, but we are happy to re-write press releases in a particular style to gain coverage from certain media or to make them appealing as online content at no extra cost to our clients.

This is because we thrive on getting our clients noticed for all the right reasons and get a buzz out of seeing our press releases deemed worthy of coverage by fellow journalists.

We also support clients where our press releases lead to requests for broadcast interviews, taking the stress out of the nerve-racking prospect of being interviewed for radio or television by preparing you as much as we can in advance. As qualified senior journalists and public relations professionals, we can also upskill you and your senior leadership team with media training.

A good way to start working with us is signing up to a Discovery Day. This provides new clients with a full day meeting with both directors and up to four people from your organisation to take a deep dive into your company, your business story, what you want to achieve, and how we can help you to do so. They are held at our office based in Teesside – lunch and refreshments provided – and following the Discovery Day, we will send you a six-month PR strategy.

Whenever we take on new clients, we also always go the extra mile, researching trade publications we can get coverage in and topical issues in our clients' sectors.

This enables us to put our clients forward as thought leaders in their field, with their permission.

Essentially, if you work with us, we consistently come to you with story ideas that will increase the visibility and credibility of your organisation.

Currently, we have capacity to take on more new clients – and as we never take on our clients' competitors in the same sector, having us on board means you are putting your business at an advantage when it comes to having professional PR services taken care of.

We also enjoy working with charities and CICs in the North East and we offer a generous 10% discount to these organisations in our region.

If you would like to know more about how we can help you with your organisation's publicity requirements and internal and external communications, why not drop us a line and arrange a no obligation cuppa on us?

Call 07896 894538 and find out how we can help you get noticed for all the right reasons!

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*Offer subject to signing up to £400 per month contract for a minimum of six months. This equates to eight hours of work for us per month and we can also provide preferential rates for any additional days or jobs required if you sign up to a six-month contract. A one-off press release is £480. Discovery Days are priced £500.

A fresh look for a trusted name

Swinburne Maddison unveils bold rebrand reflecting growth, innovation, and tradition.

Swinburne Maddison, one of the North East's most respected full-service law firms, has unveiled a striking new brand identity—ushering in a new era for the firm while remaining firmly anchored in its values and heritage.

Following a period of rapid growth and transformation since the firm developed its current look in 2016—including more than doubling its headcount and significantly increasing turnover—the firm has taken the bold step of rebranding to better reflect the progressive, dynamic practice it is today.

Led by Caroline Smith, Marketing Director, with the support of Sara Stammers, Marketing Executive, and overseen by Partner Victoria Walton, the rebrand marks a pivotal moment in the firm's history.

“We wanted our new brand to be authentic, with real depth, ensuring that it truly represents who we are today and where we are headed,” said Caroline Smith.

“When people engage with us, whether online or in our office, they should instantly recognise our expertise, professionalism, and modern approach to law.”

The rebrand process began over a year ago in collaboration with North East-based creative agencies. Through a series of in-depth workshops and interviews, key insights emerged about what makes Swinburne Maddison unique—not just as a law firm, but as a team of dedicated professionals passionate about helping people through often complex and sensitive legal journeys.

“Caroline and Sara have shown incredible commitment and creativity throughout this process,” said Victoria Walton.

“They worked hand-in-hand with some fantastic agencies here in the North East, ensuring that local talent played a key role in helping us evolve the brand into something that feels fresh, modern, and



L-R: Sara Stammers, Victoria Walton, Caroline Smith

unmistakably Swinburne Maddison.”

The result is a sleek new identity that blends contemporary design with a timeless message: “A contemporary law firm rooted in tradition.” At its core is the new theme, that it is “Reassuring to know,” a powerful reminder of the firm's promise to be there for its clients with clarity, confidence, and care.

From updated photography and a newly launched website to reimagined office spaces and a regional advertising campaign rolling out this summer, every element has been carefully designed to deliver a consistent, client-focused experience.

“The feedback from our internal launch has been fantastic,” said Jonathan Moreland, Managing Partner.



“The marketing team has done a brilliant job with the rebrand and new website – it reflects our history, incorporates our culture and values, and positions us for the future. This is more than just a marketing project. It’s something the whole team is proud of, and we’re excited to finally share it with the wider community.”

The new Swinburne Maddison is confident,

modern, and welcoming—qualities that not only reflect where the firm is today but also where it’s heading.

With a renewed focus and a refreshed identity, the firm remains committed to delivering the same high standards of legal excellence that clients across the North East and beyond have come to rely on.

“

...a
**contemporary
law firm rooted
in tradition...**

To explore the rebrand and learn more about the firm’s services, visit the new website at swinburnemaddison.co.uk



Veronica Swindale

Future-proofing your marketing team's skills

When LinkedIn announced the most in-demand marketing skills for 2025, it wasn't surprising that nesma's training solutions align closely with them!

As marketing evolves, professionals must keep pace with new technologies, strategies, and industry demands. LinkedIn's latest insights highlight the top marketing skills for 2025, emphasising AI literacy, data analysis, SEO, content strategy, social media marketing, and revenue-driven strategies. These align closely with the Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM) new syllabus and the CIPR qualifications, which equip marketers with the expertise necessary to thrive.

CIM qualifications provide a solid foundation in traditional marketing principles and emerging digital trends. In an era of rapid technological advancements, they ensure that marketers are up to date with industry best practices and equipped to adapt to future innovations. Whether navigating AI-driven strategies, mastering performance analytics, or refining communication skills, they ensure that you can keep your team prepared to meet the evolving demands of businesses and consumers. The structured learning pathways offer theoretical knowledge and practical application, making CIM qualifications the gold standard for marketers worldwide.

"Investing in your team's learning and development is not merely an advantage; it is essential. Staying ahead requires more than technical knowledge; it demands strategic thinking, adaptability, and a commitment to continuous learning. As a specialist training company, we are dedicated to providing learning opportunities that equip marketing teams with the skills and confidence to navigate industry changes and create real business impact. By integrating learning into your team's workflow, you are not only equipping them with the skills they need today; you are building a resilient, future-ready organisation that can adapt and thrive amid change.

nesma's SkillsPartner™ scheme helps organisations unlock their teams' full potential cost-effectively by providing flexible learning solutions and skills profiling. This ensures that everyone engages in the right learning journey for them. CIM Awards can be studied independently (5 weeks at 2 hours per week with an online assessment) or accumulated (4 awards are equivalent to 1 full qualification). This approach offers agile and flexible learning opportunities, enabling individuals to add CIM to their CVs within six weeks. It supports their journey toward becoming Chartered, allowing employees to upskill at their own pace and enabling organisations to integrate learning seamlessly into the daily workflow."

Veronica Swindale, Managing Director, Nesma

The New Frontier: AI & Data-Driven Marketing

AI literacy is no longer optional; it's essential. Marketers must grasp how to utilise AI tools for content creation, campaign optimisation, and predictive analytics. This directly aligns with CIM's emphasis on digital strategy, where professionals learn to incorporate AI-driven insights into their decision-making processes.

Data analytics and performance tracking are equally essential as businesses aim to maximise ROI. CIM courses highlight the significance of measuring marketing effectiveness using data visualisation, customer segmentation, and performance metrics to enhance strategies.

The Backbone of Digital Marketing: SEO, Paid Search & Content Strategy

SEO continues dominating digital marketing, with organic and paid search strategies influencing brand visibility. The CIM syllabus offers a solid foundation in search engine marketing, enabling professionals to master keyword strategies, technical SEO, and conversion optimisation.

Content strategy, a key skill for 2025, aligns perfectly with CIM's marketing planning modules. Creating engaging, valuable content that resonates with target audiences is a fundamental principle of marketing education.

Driving Customer Loyalty: Social media, Branding & Engagement:

Social media marketing and community management are vital for brands aiming to connect with their audiences. CIM's digital marketing programs encompass social engagement strategies, influencer collaborations, and audience insights—ensuring marketers remain ahead in a competitive digital landscape.

Branding and storytelling play a crucial role in shaping customer perception. CIM's brand management modules teach marketers to create compelling narratives that forge emotional connections with consumers.

Efficiency Meets Customer Experience: Marketing Automation & Personalisation

Marketing automation tools streamline processes, enhance personalisation, and improve the customer experience. CIM's emphasis on digital integration enables marketers to master automation platforms such as HubSpot, Mailchimp, and AI-driven customer engagement tools.

Email marketing, a skill that remains in high demand, is also a key component of CIM's syllabus. It instructs professionals on how to create high-converting email campaigns.

The Soft Skills That Distinguish Marketers

Beyond technical expertise, soft skills are essential for success. Communication, strategic thinking, adaptability, problem-solving, and leadership are all emphasised in the CIM syllabus. These competencies enable marketers to navigate challenges, lead teams, and implement effective strategies.

Empathy in communication, crisis management, and global inclusion is a priority in today's interconnected world. CIM's marketing programs reinforce these aspects, preparing professionals to develop culturally sensitive and inclusive campaigns.

Whether mastering AI, refining SEO strategies, or enhancing leadership skills, the CIM syllabus aligns with the most sought-after skills for 2025—ensuring marketers are prepared to drive business growth and innovation.

As marketing continues to evolve, CIM qualifications remain an essential investment for professionals seeking to stay ahead.

For those looking to enhance their own or team's capabilities, consult Jen about nesma's transformative learning opportunities available for your entire marketing and communications team at 07734 222 254 or jen.lorimer@nesma.co.uk

nesma

MAKE LEARNING A PRIORITY

nesma's SkillsPartner™ scheme offers agile and flexible learning opportunities for everyone in your marketing and communications team. Helping you to build a resilient, future-ready team that can adapt and thrive in the face of change.

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...What's your inspiration?...

*Highlights PR's Keith Newman asked some of his RADAR members
"What inspired you to start your business, and how has it developed?"*

Now celebrating its 40th anniversary, The People's Kitchen was formed in 1985 and has transformed thousands of disadvantaged people's lives for the better by creating a culture of mutual trust and respect. It provides much needed friendship and food and fills a gap in the evenings when many people are at their most vulnerable.

From humble beginnings, the charity's late founder Alison Kay laid the foundations for today's thriving, efficiently run charity which operates from a former place of worship on Bath Lane. Alison's pioneering spirit is still very much in evidence as volunteers serve up to 250 meals every day, cooking everything from scratch. The charity relies on donations as no government funding is received, and no one is paid for their kind hearted work. You can help!...

www.peopleskitchen.co.uk/donate



The inspiration to start my business was initially a continuation of the career that developed when I was signed up by Washington Green who is one of the biggest art publishers in the UK.

After leaving them and going solo I ended up doing an exhibition in New York for the FDNY Museum which led to me opening a gallery on 5th Ave which I had for a couple of years but unfortunately Covid put an end to, so I turned my attention to opening two other galleries in Newcastle and Glasgow.

Both of these galleries have been a joy to see develop as my work has changed and gone in various directions of the years from my "Gadgies" to Peaky Blinder inspired scenes and Landscapes too both industrial and the countryside of Scotland and Northumberland.

Alexander Millar
www.alexandermillar.com



I've been involved in technology one way or another since 1980 and data protection compliance since the mid 80's when the first Data Protection Act in the UK to address the protection of personal data (1984) came into force.

What draws me to technology is not that I'm a nerd (although some people who know me might dispute that) but the freedom it offers and the time it saves. As a single mother in the 90's, technology enabled me to run a business from home and work around my two young daughters and again as a carer for my mother and father.

Thanks to the evolution of technology including the Internet and more recently AI, learning about technology and keeping your data and the data of others safe, is no longer the preserve of those who have a large budget to pay for it. The AskMrsWatson.com membership community was created to provide corporate support for digital literacy and data protection on an SME budget. I don't come at technology or regulations from a technical viewpoint. I use technology to help save me time and money and make my life easier and my compliance knowledge to show that people can trust me with their personal data and I'm lucky that what I do for a living involves working with individuals and organisations to share what I know to help them do the same.

Kate Watson
www.askmrswatson.com



I set up Creative Heritage Studios CiC during lockdown and ever since then it's been about refining its purpose. Five years later I realise that the value I bring is through my lived experience as a neurodivergent creative, parent of an autistic child, and a small business owner. Through my CiC I provide training, mentoring, public engagement, purpose led design solutions and support for the next generation of neurodivergent creatives.

This image is a selfie of me having just finished my talk about Creative Heritage Studios CiC at the Platform event at the Foundation of Light in Sunderland.

Corinne Lewis-Ward
www.powderbutterfly.com



I spent my entire working life in employed positions, though I had always wanted to be self-employed. The perceived security of employment kept me from taking the plunge, until I was made redundant.

This event, however, revealed the illusion of security in employment, making the decision to set up my own business much easier. I took the opportunity to retrain as a psychosexual therapist and have had a thriving private practice for the last fifteen years. Seven years ago, I embarked on a PhD exploring shame and have also launched my own training company. It's clear that all my professional achievement has stemmed from being placed in a difficult position, which ultimately taught me that taking risks is often worthwhile.

Lisa Etherson Psychosexual Therapist – PhD Researcher
www.lisaetherson.com, www.shamettraining.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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Digital work that actually works (and is accredited too)



Any agency can say they're clear, approachable, and well-informed, but saying it and demonstrating it are two very different things.

Our values are important to us, and living out these values daily matters to us. Over the last year, we've worked hard to achieve several accreditations that align with our company's voice, to show we do what we say. By getting accredited, we're making a commitment and being held accountable to the standards of others.

Certified with purpose

Far more than merely being a badge to show off, we take our commitment to our social and environmental impact seriously. That's why we've undergone rigorous testing by outside bodies to make sure we meet specific external standards and requirements. There's a purpose behind these accreditations; they challenge us to adapt and grow.

Becoming a certified B Corp was a huge milestone for us! It means we're legally committed to balancing profit with purpose, and we're held accountable to the highest standards of social and environmental performance. The certification, overseen by the B Lab, assesses companies across five key pillars: governance, workers, community, environment, and customers. It holds us

accountable to these areas and pushes us to keep doing better. It means our principles are built into our business and something we work by every day.

In line with those principles, we also became an accredited Living Wage Employer. An accredited Living Wage employer is a business that has voluntarily committed to paying all of its staff and suppliers, at least, the real Living Wage rate. We've joined the growing community of local living wage employers specifically in the North East. The number of living wage employers in Sunderland is growing too! We're pushing for this number to grow further, encouraging other businesses we work with to explore this option and push for a better future for everyone.

As the saying goes, do unto others as you would have them do unto you! We're also a Fair Payment Code Gold Standard business, the highest recognition under the new Fair Payment Code, requiring 95% of all invoices to be paid within 30 days. For us, treating suppliers with fairness and respect is a no-brainer.

Alongside these accreditations, we're actively working to be an inclusive and accessible employer for everyone and have signed up to the Government's Disability Confident employer scheme. We're committed to help break down barriers for disabled people, not just in our team, but across our work.

We've created space for real opportunities. Recently, we completed a 3-month long weekly work placement for a local young man with autism. This placement

helped give him real life experience in a supportive environment that he could apply to future work environments. Having this accreditation pushes us to challenge how we see the workplace and strive to make the idea of a traditional office a much more inclusive space.

Certified by experience

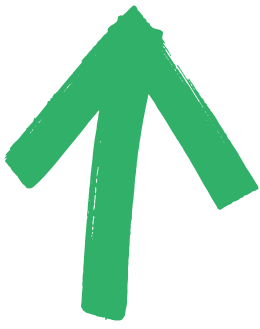
While values are everything, results still matter. We don't ever forget that. Our team brings decades of collective digital experience. We've completed more than 200 projects with innovation, clarity, and accountability at their core.

To reaffirm our digital experience, we're now officially Google Partners and Shopify Partners, meaning we've got the resources to build smart, high-performing websites that deliver real results. These results still need to be inclusive, that's why we partnered with local Gateshead-based business Recite Me to help us complement our accessible websites. Our partnership with Recite Me helps us make websites that are accessible and inclusive to everyone, as digital spaces should be welcoming for all.

We've talked a lot about our accreditations. For us, they aren't just tick-box exercises or a wall full of shiny badges. They're evidence that we do what we say, hold ourselves to account, and never stop pushing for better.

So next time you hear us talk about purpose, inclusivity, or digital brilliance, know that it's not only our opinion. It's verified.

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Elevate your organisation with Wadds Inc.

Expert guidance for in-house teams, agency leaders and executives

Are you ready to transform your corporate strategy and boost your team's performance? Wadds Inc. offers tailored solutions for:

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- Enhance your digital transformation
- Develop critical skills and competencies

Agency bosses

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- Access industry expertise and benchmarking
- Build high-performing teams

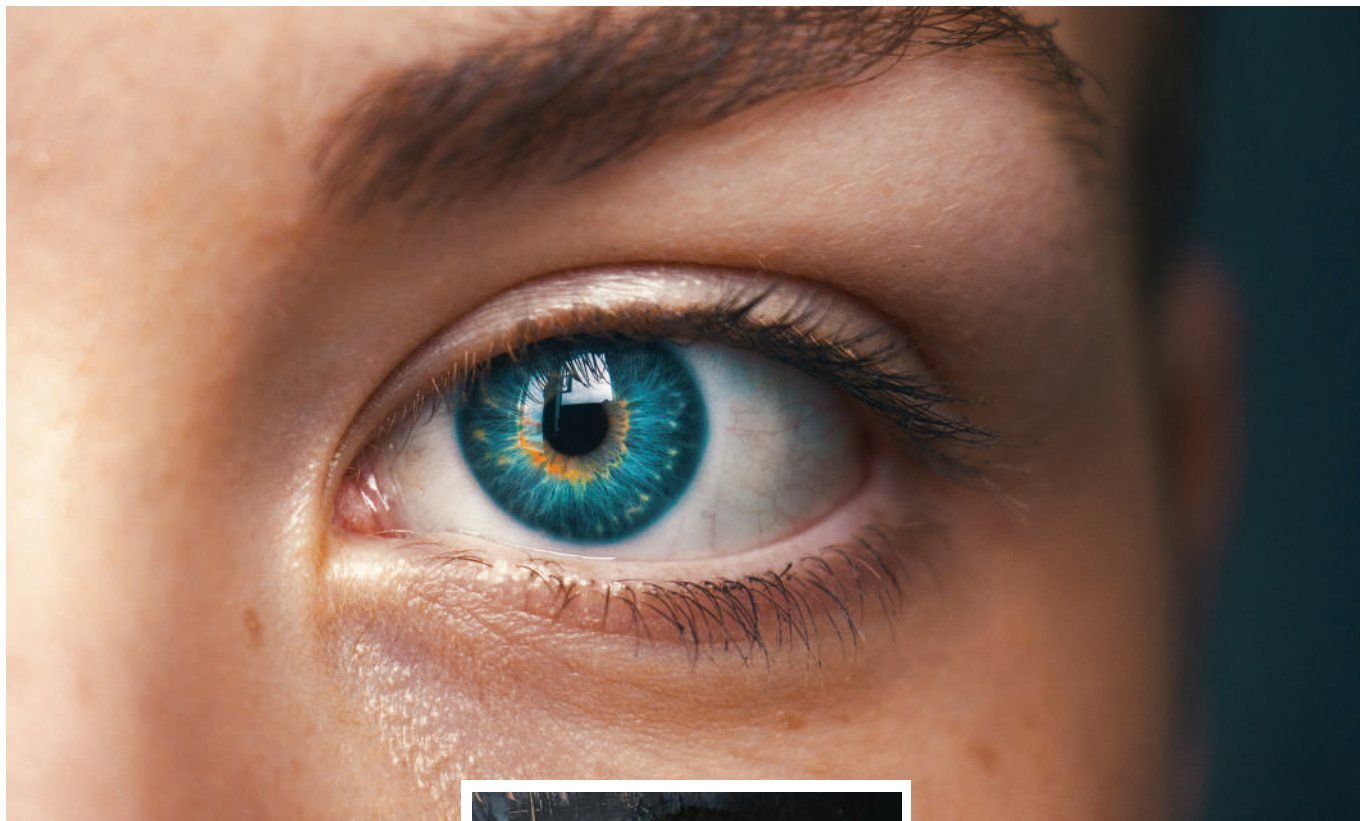
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A New Era: Marriott Communications launches Intelligence

This has been an incredibly exciting month for Marriott Communications as it marks the launch of our Intelligence services - a first for a North East agency.

Designed to empower our clients with actionable intelligence, sharper risk awareness, and a clearer view of the international market landscape; our Intelligence services are pushing the boundaries of Public Relations into art as we shape the future of businesses and organisations alike.

Our Insight & Analysis services are built to deliver clarity and transform how businesses and organisations consume and apply information. Marriott Communications provides clients with actionable intelligence that enables them to make informed decisions, align communications with strategic goals, and respond effectively to emerging threats in real-time.



Samuel Marriott-Dowding

From structured intelligence cycles and real-time reporting, to geopolitical risk and threat assessments, media monitoring, and specialised research; we offer the analysis businesses need to navigate complex environments with confidence. This is about transforming information into insight - so you can adapt to change rather than react to it.

In parallel, our Risk Management services are designed to help protect what matters most: reputation, national and international operations, and stakeholder trust. In an era of global uncertainty, geopolitical tensions, and digital vulnerability, we help organizations identify potential risks, assess their organisational impact, and implement strategies to both navigate and mitigate them.

Whether preparing for a potential crisis, managing sensitive reputational issues, or responding to unfolding events in real-time, our intelligence-led approach supports clients through even the most high-pressured scenarios.

Complementing these areas is our Market

Profiling capability, which provides a strategic foundation for growth and expansion. For businesses and organisations entering a new market, repositioning a brand, or launching a major initiative; success hinges on understanding the socio-political and economic environments on an intrinsic level.

Our Agency empowers our clients to gain deeper insight into their audiences, identify competitive advantages, and shape strategies that resonate with clients, partners, consumers and the wider business landscape. From audience profiling to competitor intelligence and new market analysis, Marriott Communications provides the nuance and context required to make strategic decisions to maintain a competitive edge.

What sets Marriott Communications apart is not just the services we offer, but the way we think. We understand that large businesses and organizations need more than communication support - they need a strategic partner who can provide clarity in uncertainty, simplicity in complexity, and insight at scale.

These new services reflect our commitment to helping clients not just respond to the world around them, but lead within it. Whilst you're managing global operations, entering new markets, or facing reputational challenges; Marriott Communications is here to provide the intelligence that drives foresight, efficiency, and adaptable decision-making to shape a future that's not only informed - but Intelligent.

marriottcommunications.com

Dan Rodger on What Really Converts

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.

Dan Rodger, Paid Social Manager at Bonded, shares his thoughts on why creative is the driving force behind paid social success, how AI is changing the game, and what connection means to him.



Dan Rodgers
Paid Social Manager

Q: Introduce your role, and what brought you to Bonded

Dan: Hi, I'm Dan, a Paid Social Manager here at Bonded. I manage paid social activity across a variety of accounts - from gym equipment brands to travel and holiday services - mainly on Meta, with some campaigns running on TikTok and LinkedIn too. No two days are the same, which is one of the things I love about the role.

I was drawn to Bonded for the chance to work on larger-scale accounts and develop my paid social skills alongside a really talented team. I knew Bonded had a strong reputation in the North East, and I've thoroughly enjoyed working and socialising with everyone since joining.

Q: In your opinion, what's the most misunderstood aspect of paid social?

Dan: It has to be the importance of creative. People often assume paid social is all about precise targeting - but with the rise of automation and broader audiences, it's really

the creative that makes the biggest difference. Regularly testing different formats and variations is key to finding what resonates.

“No two days are the same, which is one of the things I love about the role.”

Q: Are there any upcoming developments in paid social that you're excited about?

Dan: I'm really interested in the role AI is starting to play in the creative space - especially around dynamic content generation and catalog feeds. It's opening up new possibilities for personalisation at scale, which could be a game-changer for e-commerce brands in particular. We're starting to see tools that can tailor creative based on audience signals in real time, which means we can be more responsive and relevant than ever before.

It's early days, but I think the potential to optimise and streamline creative production while improving results is really exciting. I'm keen to explore how we can start bringing that into our clients' strategies in a meaningful way.

Q: And finally, what does connection mean to you?

Dan: For me, connection is about being on the same wavelength as the people around you - whether that's through a good laugh or a shared sense of purpose. Those little moments of understanding are what build great relationships, inside and outside of work.

For more information visit:
www.bondedagency.com





A peek behind Fenwick windows

O Agency has worked with Fenwick Newcastle for over a decade, promoting its in-store developments, events and of course its annual Christmas window reveal.

Starting its relationship back in 2015, O agency's team worked alongside the Fenwick team to support on the launch of its new multi-million pound Food Hall, which is still today a jewel in the flagship store's crown.

Not long afterwards, the team at O worked on its first Christmas Window reveal, managing the media for what is always the highlight in Newcastle's festive calendar. They have since worked with the Fenwick team every year to bring the Christmas window reveal to the region's media and influencers, and ultimately to the world, with PR, experiential moments, guest list and creator collaboration.

One of the biggest years was during Covid, when the waiting crowds were replaced by a Facebook live stream – making it one of the most globally watched Fenwick Christmas Window reveals ever. Geordie ex-pats from as far afield as Dubai and Australia were among the millions of people who received some festive cheer from home during the pandemic.

In 2022, Fenwick Newcastle celebrated its

140th anniversary with a circus themed year-long celebration of big events and announced a huge £40 million investment for the store to take it into the future. Its founder John James Fenwick's son Arthur Fenwick had a lifelong passion of circus, and his passion inspired the store's 140 celebrations, which included a big top themed café 140, a circus performance on Northumberland Street and an exhibition in partnership with Northumbria University fashion students.

In recent years Fenwick has teamed up with a host of local brands, bringing much hype and excitement to the city. O agency's founder Kari Owers, says:

"Our role is to work alongside the Fenwick team in Newcastle and London to ensure everything big happening in store is shared widely with the local community. We do this by inviting press and influencers along to our special events to experience it for themselves and spread the word.

"Greggs Bistro was probably the biggest and most popular press preview evening we've seen held in the store! We had around 100 media on the night itself tucking into



the fine dining sausage rolls – and for days after press from around the world came to experience it for themselves. It was a pleasure to work alongside the Fenwick and Greggs team and wider agencies on the collaboration."

To support Fenwick's continued collaboration with the iconic Greggs, following the success of Greggs Bistro, O helped Fenwick launch the Greggs Champagne Bar inside the famous Food Hall. Account Director, Rachel Jones said: "We sourced, secured and managed 80 guests for the press and influencer VIP preview day which gained widespread social coverage across Instagram and TikTok with a total reach of 590,000, plus widespread regional press coverage."

Today, Fenwick is still investing in its store and interesting partnerships, including recent collaborations with restaurants Hjem, Blacks Corner and Colmans opening pop-ups in store to much acclaim. "There is always something to promote at Fenwick, it's a delight to work with the store because it's such a central part of Newcastle life," said Kari.

"The new Beauty Hall has just launched and it's the UK's largest beauty hall outside of London spanning 26,000 square feet and featuring more than 160 brands, where we managed its launch event for the media and social media creators.

"The store does so much in the community too, from supporting NHS workers and their families during Covid to its new partnership with Newcastle United, there is always something exciting to share with the local public," she added.

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Chris Barker as a young boy

Click & Collect – A modern take on the classic newsagent experience

Picture this: you're a young lad accompanying your dad on a trip to the local newsagents. He's there to pick up his paper and a pack of cigarettes, while you're only interested in the mix-up. You walk in, the smell of print hits you like a wave, and you're greeted by the same man who's worked there every Sunday for as long as you can remember.

As always, he chats to your dad about the front-page news, the weather, and how work's going, while you keep your eyes fixed on the prize: a slightly torn paper bag filled with sugary delights and pure excitement.

For many millennials like our distribution manager Chris, this was the Saturday or Sunday morning ritual. It wasn't just about the paper or the sweets it was the routine, the familiar faces, and the community feel that made it special. But times have changed. Newsagents have transformed or, in some cases, disappeared entirely and for many, they now feel like a thing of the past. These days, magazines can be accessed digitally, and news pings to our phones before we've even brushed our teeth.

click+
collect



Now don't get us wrong, we're all for innovation and embracing the digital age. At Unique Magazines, we're proud to keep pace with modern times. But that traditional newsagent visit still holds a special place in our hearts. While we can't recreate exactly what it felt like to be a young Chris tagging along with his dad, we've created a version of that experience that blends old-school charm with modern convenience and yes—it still includes that beautiful smell of print.

Our journey to make magazines more accessible started with opening our store, which became the heart of what we do. But that was only the beginning. As we looked at our local community and our growing audience of magazine lovers, we realised that accessibility also meant meeting people where they are whether that's browsing in-store, shopping online, or a bit of both.

Magazines are an experience. They're tactile, visual, and deeply personal. In our Mag Room, you'll find people discovering titles they never knew existed, reconnecting with old favourites, or just taking time to flick through something new. It's a space that encourages curiosity and creativity. But what if you already know exactly what you want—and you want it fast?

That's where our Click and Collect service comes in. Designed with busy lives in mind, it's a streamlined way for print enthusiasts to secure their favourite titles without the wait or the postage costs. It's especially ideal for our local customers who want convenience without compromise.

With Click and Collect, your magazine is ready and waiting—no hunting required. Whether it's a last-minute gift, a niche title you can't find anywhere else, or just your usual weekend read, the service delivers that instant gratification we've all come to love. It's a modern version of that comforting moment when the man behind the counter at your local newsagent recognises your face and already knows exactly what you're there for.

But more than just a convenient option, Click and Collect is another way we're championing the joy of print. It's about keeping that traditional newsagent feeling alive—one where you can walk in, see a friendly face, and walk out with something you genuinely look forward to reading.

No fuss, just great service.

Click and Collect is a perfect example of how we're blending nostalgia with modernity—right here in the North East. It's magazine shopping, made personal, made easy, and made for today.

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How to build a brand that grows with you

As your business scales, everything accelerates. Projects stack up, teams grow and timelines tighten.

When things move quickly, it's easy for your brand to lag behind, no longer reflecting your current identity. When that happens, it's harder for people to connect with what you do and why it matters.

A strong brand evolves with your business. It helps people understand your value, trust your direction and recognise your place in the market.

Clear branding becomes more important as you grow

As your business grows, your brand needs to work harder. If it lacks consistency across platforms, messages or visuals, it has less impact overall. People might not notice you at all, simply because your presence isn't clear or coordinated enough to stick.

Strong branding makes your business easier to recognise and remember. It helps build a coherent presence that cuts through the noise.

Focusing on your ideal customers helps your brand attract more of them

When your audience evolves, your brand should evolve too. Trying to appeal to everyone usually ends up connecting with no one.

Focus on the people you most want to work with. Who are they? What matters to them?

What problems are they trying to solve? Make sure your brand speaks directly to that group, with clarity and relevance.

Real conversations with your team and customers will often reveal more than data alone. The more clearly you understand who you're for, the more likely you are to attract them.

A sharp value proposition helps the right people connect

If your pitch no longer fits, it's time to reassess. Many growing businesses keep using outdated messaging, even when it no longer reflects their value.

Make it clear what you do, who it's for and why it matters. Ditch buzzwords. Focus on impact. Ask yourself if someone new could describe your brand in one sentence.

When your message feels focused and relevant, the right people respond faster.

Review what you have before making changes

Before updating your brand, review what already exists. Gather your website, pitch decks, marketing assets and social content.

Ask whether this reflects who you are today. Consider whether it supports the kind of work you want to attract. Identify what still works and what doesn't.

This process highlights misalignments, shows where you're strong and guides your next move. Sometimes a few changes go a long way. Other times, a bigger shift makes more sense.

A strong brand starts with a clear strategy

Start with purpose, not aesthetics. A lasting brand needs a strategy behind it.

Define your values. Identify what drives you and what principles shape your decisions. From there, build out your tone of voice. Decide how you want to sound and how you don't.

Make those choices tangible. Create

simple guidelines your team can use in real conversations, campaigns and content.

Use the same thinking for your visual identity. Consider what your colours, typefaces and imagery say about you and whether they reflect where you're going. Every decision should support the emotional tone you want to set.

Brand guidelines should be easy to use

Brand guidelines should be part of everyday work, not a one-off document that gets ignored.

Give your team examples they can actually use. Include tone of voice in action, visual templates that speed up design and clear rules for anyone creating content or collateral. This helps everyone show up consistently and confidently.

The biggest impact comes from aligning with your brand strategy

When you're growing or preparing for investment, perception matters. Partners, investors and customers want to see clarity and direction.

Start by aligning your next steps with your strategy. That could include tightening your messaging, refining your visuals or giving your team the tools to represent your brand with confidence. Understanding your strategy will show you where to focus for the biggest impact.

Let your brand evolve as your business grows

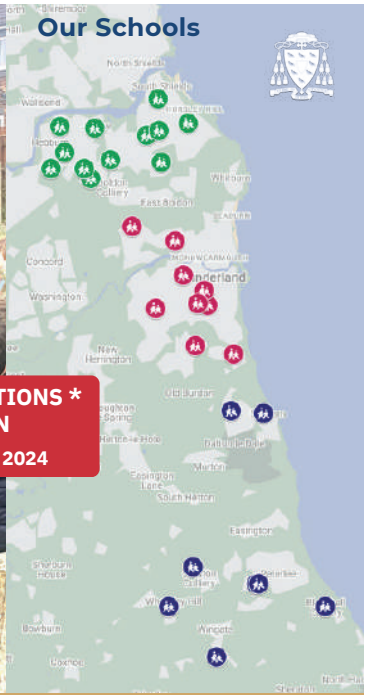
Your brand isn't a one-off project. It's a tool that helps you grow.

The best brands reflect where a business is going, not just where it's been. They tell a clear story, build trust and create space for new opportunities.

As your business evolves, let your brand move with you and use it to lead the way.

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Marketing consultancy celebrates fifth business anniversary

Washington based, Riverside Marketing Solutions, brought together clients and friends for a business birthday networking morning at the North East BIC in Sunderland last month.

The relaxed event was a great opportunity for owner, Nicola Halse, to thank everyone who has supported her throughout the last five years.

The business has provided flexible marketing support to over 50 businesses across the North East since its launch in April 2020.







Dynamo North East bolsters advisory board

Dynamo North East, the region's largest tech sector membership organisation, has bolstered its expert advisory board with the appointment of industry experts Taya Reynolds, Fay Cooper, and Lynsey Robinson.

Breakthrough in osteoporosis screening

Groundbreaking AI-driven technology developed in the North East could transform osteoporosis screening in the UK.

Developed by IBEX Innovations, a cutting-edge medtech company based at NETPark in County Durham, the software integrates seamlessly into radiology systems, enabling early detection of osteoporosis from routine X-rays—a game-changer for the 3.5 million people in the UK affected by the 'silent disease'.

Dr Sarah Jarvis MBE, renowned GP, medical broadcaster and Chief Medical Advisor at IBEX Innovations, is calling for an urgent overhaul in how osteoporosis is detected. She believes the new software, IBEX Bone Health (IBEX BH), offers the NHS a cost-effective, life-saving solution that can dramatically reduce preventable fractures.

"I've spent years warning my patients about the dangers of osteoporosis, yet the NHS's approach remains grossly inadequate," said Dr Jarvis, an ambassador for the Royal Osteoporosis Society.

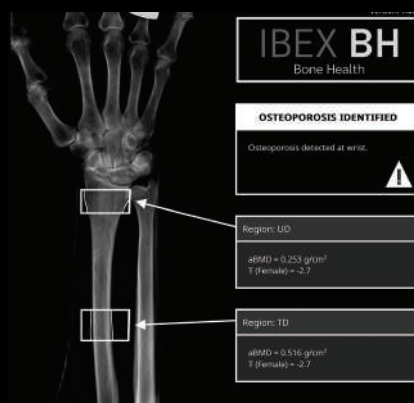
Newcastle University alumni, Taya, was recently appointed Chief Technology Officer (CTO) at Hays Travel and will bring a wealth of experience in digital transformation and change management.

Fay Cooper, Chief Product Officer at Scrumconnect Consulting and formerly Deputy Director at DWP Digital, will add expertise in the fields of customer experience and design.

Lynsey Robinson, Deputy Director of Economic Development and Operations at Teesside University, is responsible for driving the growth and development of the digital sector within Tees Valley and supporting the wider economy to adopt digital technologies.

She will bring significant expertise to the organisation in stakeholder engagement and her role will focus on providing a voice to industry for all five regional higher education institutions.

James Bunting, Chair of the Dynamo North East Advisory Board, said: "We are thrilled that Fay, Lynsey and Taya have been successful in joining our advisory board following our recent recruitment drive."



"Many people are diagnosed only after experiencing one or more fractures, and access to essential diagnostic tools like DEXA scans is hampered by long waiting times that vary by region.

"The ideal would be to identify people at high risk before they ever have a fracture – but at the very least, we should be assessing everyone who has had a low impact fracture for their risk of osteoporosis through a Fracture Liaison Service (FLS). Alarmingly, only half of NHS trusts offer this service. This fragmented system urgently needs reform to prevent unnecessary suffering and healthcare costs."



New tech conference for the North of England

A brand-new conference created to support the expanding technology sector in the North of England is set to launch in Newcastle later this year.

Powered by leading Amazon Web Services (AWS) software development company, Leighton, AWS North Community Conference will bring together the regional technology community to facilitate discussions and foster a community that can shape the future of cloud computing with AWS together.

The conference, which is first of its kind to run in the North East, will take place at The Catalyst on Thursday 16th October 2025 and is designed to give the North East AWS community a space to innovate together without having to travel outside the region.

Steve Morland, along with his Leighton colleagues AWS Practice Lead, Lee Gilmore and Solutions Architect, Dan Pudwell are some of the North East's biggest AWS advocates and will be responsible for shaping the conference.

Speaking on the new conference, Steve Morland, Chief Technology Officer at Leighton said: "We're delighted to be able to launch the AWS North Community Conference. There's a real gap in the region for a place where our professionals can come together and innovate so to be able to organise an event of this calibre, with the support of organisations such as Dynamo North East, is great."

The organisers have already secured an impressive line up of international speakers including, AWS Serverless Heroes, Sheen Brisals and Yan Cui, Principal Serverless Specialist Solutions Architect at AWS, Luca Mezzalana, Developer Advocate at Datadog, James Eastham and Principal Software Architect at CyberArk, Ran Isenberg with more to be announced in the coming months.



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Forfusion opens doors for veterans through civilian work attachment scheme



A North Tyneside-based tech firm is helping Armed Forces personnel take their first steps into civilian employment - and setting an example for how North East businesses can support the transition from military to commercial life.

Forfusion is a signatory of the Armed Forces Covenant, a national pledge to treat those who serve, or have served, in the armed forces fairly. But their commitment goes further than paper.

Their CWA scheme offers service leavers three days of immersive, hands-on experience across all areas of the business - from technical teams and project management to business operations. Participants receive tailored mentoring, career guidance, and practical support with CV writing, interview skills, and job hunting.

The initiative, relaunched in 2023 following a post-pandemic pause, has already seen 23 veterans come through its doors - with nearly one in three going on to secure a job with the company.

It's a programme led by someone who knows the journey firsthand.

Steve Long, Forfusion's Professional Services Director, spent 24 years in the British Army before moving into the private sector. He joined Forfusion in 2015 and has since been instrumental in shaping its project delivery model - and its inclusive culture.

"I'm passionate about helping others transition from the Armed Forces to Civvy Street, because I know how unsettling it

can be," says Steve. "This isn't just about work experience. It's about building confidence, finding a new purpose, and realising how transferable your skills really are."

Steve's advocacy helped the firm secure the Armed Forces Covenant Silver Award - and his leadership continues to inspire others across the business to get involved.

The response from attendees has been overwhelmingly positive. One service leaver described the experience as "hugely beneficial," adding that the opportunity to speak with different departments made the transition feel far less daunting.

Another praised the team culture, noting: "Everyone was enthusiastic, motivated, and proud to be part of Forfusion. The buzz in the office was infectious."

Forfusion's CEO, Steven Forrest, believes the scheme reflects the company's broader values.

"We've always been proud of our roots in the North East and our focus on delivering secure, high-quality IT services. But equally important is how we treat people - inside and outside the organisation. Supporting veterans through the CWA scheme is one way we live those values every day."

As the North East continues to position itself as a hub for digital innovation and secure technology, initiatives like Forfusion's CWA scheme show how regional businesses can drive both social value and economic growth.

By tapping into the experience, discipline, and adaptability of ex-forces personnel, companies can not only bridge skills gaps - they can build teams that are more resilient, diverse, and ready for the future.

Interested in learning more about the scheme or getting involved?

Visit www.forfusion.com or search 'Forfusion CWA scheme'.



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*...I do think
I was always
destined to
work in
technology...*

Maximilian Monkman

Talking Technology and Digital

This month Northern Insight talks to...

Maximilian Monkman

Senior Technical Manager, Brave and Heart

Did you always envisage a career in the world of technology?

From a young age I had access to a computer, and enjoyed tinkering with it, so I do think I was always destined to work in technology. It was really the business aspect of the industry that I was surprised to enjoy so much.

What tips would you give to someone looking to work in the industry?

There seems to be a societal assumption that entering the technology industry is any easy way to make a lot of money, and in 2025 this is not necessarily true. I would suggest that before considering tech, try out a coding course such as code academy to find out if you enjoy it first.

Tell us about the project you're currently working on.

My team and I are currently working on an interesting data visualisation and comprehension project for port building in Africa. Not only is the technical aspect interesting as we have a client who needs to be able to understand complex data with just a fleeting look, but the opportunity to work with people of such differing backgrounds has allowed me growth in my approach to creating solutions that aren't purely Anglo-centric.

Tell us about your team.

I'm part of the Digital Development Group here at Brave and Heart; we are an industry trend bucking diverse group of people with a 50/50 male to female split, and I believe it is this diversity that has driven our many successes.

What are your long-term plans for the business?

Our current long-term plan is to utilise AI technologies within our new cross department teams, so we can help not just our multinational sized clients but SMEs and startups to keep up with the incredible pace of change that AI has driven within workplaces that can afford the currently high barrier to entry.

Whats your favourite piece of technology?

Currently I love my foldable phone, not only does it improve the size of my memes when I endlessly scroll, but it allows my daughters to draw on a reasonably sized screen when we have some downtime. My dad also helped design the technologies that allow the screens to fold, so it provides an interesting conversation topic should I need one!

Do you have any heroes or mentors?

Not in the traditional sense. I've never really looked up to the typical tech icons—most of them are better at branding and business than truly advancing the field. That said, I've learned a lot from peers and collaborators along the way—

people who quietly build great things without the spotlight. I find inspiration in those who stay curious, humble, and focused on craft rather than clout. So while I don't have a single "hero," I do admire the everyday builders who are actually moving things forward.

When not working how do you like to relax?

With a nine month old in the house work is currently where I do my relaxing! When I can wrangle the TV remote away from the kids I have recently been enjoying *Severance* and *The White Lotus*. I don't think I would sever myself as I reckon my innie would try and take me down...

Whats your fondest career memory?

I ran a hackathon (the only time in the calendar when techies sit in the same room as one another and actually talk to each other) with Microsoft for Coca Cola to build an accessibility tool that allowed for people with ADHD, dyslexia, blindness, and hearing loss to more easily interact with the internet.

The team I put together was made up of people from over 10 countries, multiple types of careers, and crucially, of differing ability levels. Because of the diversity of opinion and visions we were able to build in two days a tool that Coca-Cola employees from around the world still use and benefit from to this day.

If I had to nail down a specific moment, it would be when my teammate Mohammed's eyes lit up, and a grin appeared on his face as he used an early version of the tool and found he could finally read the hackathon instructions himself.

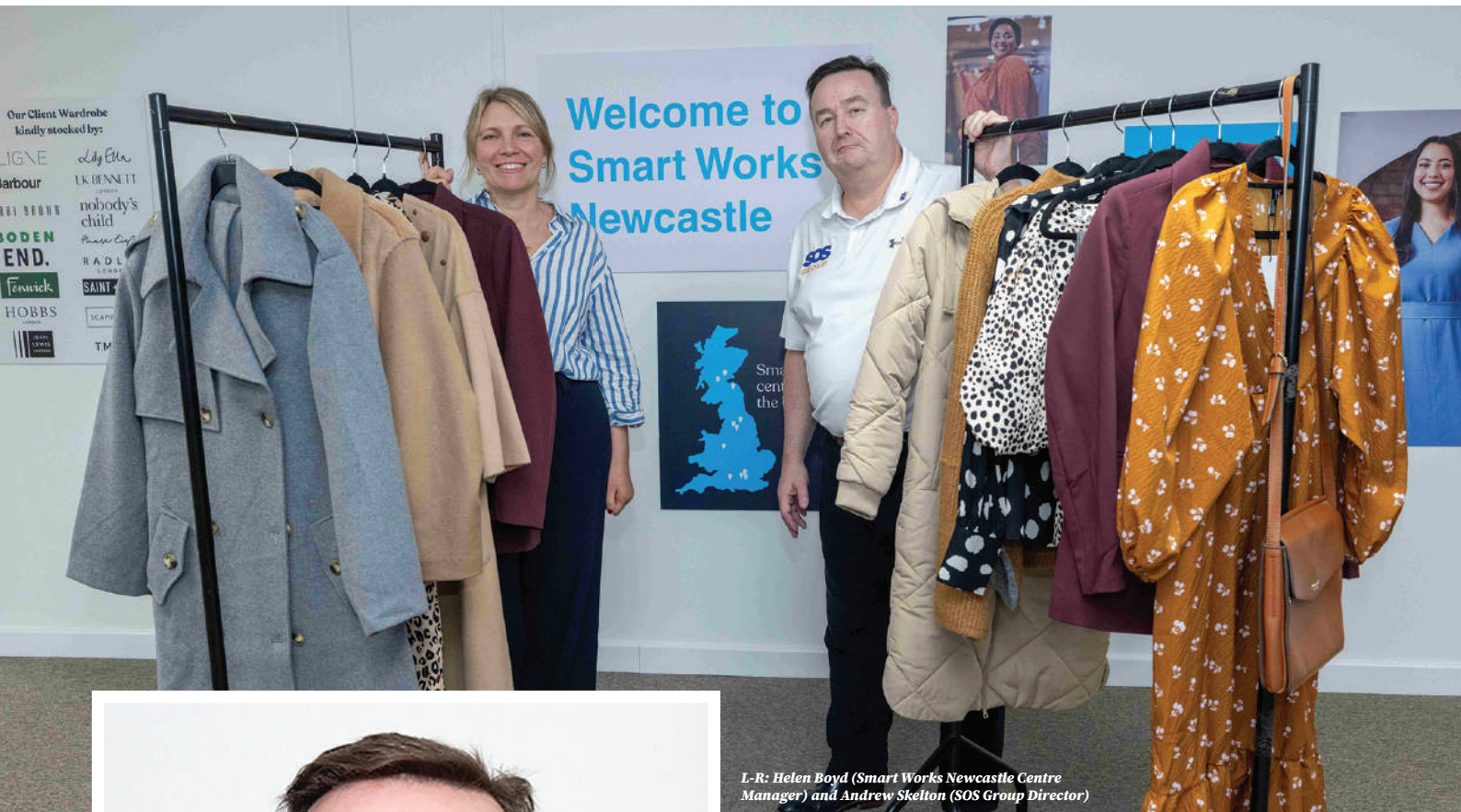
What's the best piece of business advice you've received?

"Fail fast" is a saying born in FAANG companies and it has really helped me in my career. Being unafraid to get something wrong and instantly try a different approach allows me to be bold and experimental, without getting stuck in analysis paralysis.

It encourages momentum over perfection and helps me learn at a much faster rate. Some of my best breakthroughs have come right after a misstep, simply because I moved quickly, took the lesson, and adjusted.

It's a mindset that turns failure into fuel—and that's been invaluable in both startups and corporate settings.

www.braveandheart.com



L-R: Helen Boyd (Smart Works Newcastle Centre Manager) and Andrew Skelton (SOS Group Director)



Andrew Skelton

Understanding small business needs

In any business, enhancing efficiency is a daily consideration. But for many smaller businesses, where margins can be very fine, print management is an often overlooked area for reducing operational costs.

SOS Group's Managed Print Services (MPS) offers a comprehensive solution to streamline printing processes that can save both time and money, leading to significant benefits for small enterprises.

Andrew Skelton, a director at SOS Group, explains: "MPS simply means outsourcing the management of a company's printing needs to an external provider and it's an approach many small businesses are now taking."

"Initially drawn by the potential cost and time savings, they're also discovering a host of additional advantages including predictable budgeting, improved cyber security and the many positives of leasing the latest technology."

Established in 2002, SOS Group is an award-winning office technology company facilitating business requirements across all sectors.

Based on the Team Valley and specialising in providing copy, print, scan solutions, the company has grown into an SME that counts multinationals within its established client base and the company helps deliver internationally significant sporting and political events.

Its own growth was achieved by creating successful, long-term client relationships and each of the company's directors has a passion to help others do the same, working closely with small businesses and supporting start-ups as they grow.

Andrew continues: "Small businesses face unique challenges that we can help them meet."

"For small business owners, the demands on their time are as varied as the sectors they work within. We work to identify and create a tailored solution to their every business need that can be as flexible as required."

"Some of our longest standing clients are smaller enterprises, including those with less than 10 staff, and we're proud to be part of their story."

"We work within the manufacturing, engineering, retail, hotel and leisure sectors, in schools of varying sizes and, for the last 20 years, we've supported the wonderful team at Hexham Abbey with their varied print needs."

"When possible, we also provide support for local charities, like Smart Works Newcastle, by donating multi-function devices and our MPS support. The difference it makes is huge."

“We know that dealing with printer-related issues can be time-consuming and frustrating for employees, as well as impacting on customers and clients.

“So, in addition to providing the most suitable technology for any given business activity, MPS offers proactive maintenance and support, including advising on up and coming technologies, freeing staff to focus on core business activities and thereby enhancing overall productivity.

“MPS also promotes eco-friendly practices by reducing paper waste, lowering energy consumption and implementing recycling programmes with no onus on the business owner.

“This not only helps the environment but also aligns with corporate social responsibility goals and reduces energy bills.”

As an MPS provider, SOS Group conducts a printing infrastructure analysis to identify inefficiencies and areas with potential for improvement. By consolidating devices, optimising printer usage, automating supply orders, and monitoring usage, MPS can significantly reduce unnecessary expenses.

SOS Group clients can lease, short or longer-term, or buy their own equipment and the service contract and standard of care remains exactly the same.

And the firm's high standard of service is reflected in SOS Group achieving both the ISO 9001 and ISO 27001 accreditations, demonstrating their commitment to quality management systems and their understanding of cybersecurity, data security and data management.

Andrew says: “By their very nature, small businesses have significant demands on their time and that makes it challenging to remain up-to-date with every element of cyber security.

“Printers can be a weak spot for cyber-attacks and data breaches, so MPS providers implement advanced security features such as user authentication, encryption and secure printing to safeguard confidential information and ensure compliance with regulatory requirements.”

Unexpected expenses are also something that can impact significantly on small businesses and this is where the predictable nature of MPS can aid with more accurate financial planning.

With MPS, businesses benefit from predictable monthly costs covering maintenance, supplies and support. In addition, leasing printer equipment offers several advantages over outright purchases, particularly for small businesses.



Andrew Skelton (SOS Group Director) with some of the dedicated Smart Works Newcastle Centre team

It eliminates the need for significant upfront investments, preserving capital for other critical business areas and allows businesses to upgrade to the latest technology without the burden of disposing of outdated equipment.

With SOS Group, there is also the reassurance that leasing agreements can be tailored to match business growth and changing needs, offering flexibility that outright purchases may not provide.

Andrew adds: “Partnering with SOS Group to provide MPS allows small businesses and organisations to transform their printing infrastructure into a streamlined, secure and cost-effective operation.

“That allows small business owners to focus on what truly matters, growing the business”.

“It's something we've seen happen time and again, and we would invite any small business or organisation to chat to us to see how we could help with their own very specific needs.”

For more information on Managed Print Services, please visit: www.sosgroup-ltd.co.uk



The Rev'd Canon David Glover with Andrew Skelton



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*...in today's
business
climate,
confidence is
everything...*

The Path to Quality: A career built on asking why

By Sunil Bagga, QA Manager and QA Community Lead at Leighton

The world of Quality Assurance (QA) wasn't just a career path for me; it was a calling. I've always had an analytical mindset—a natural curiosity that made me question why things work the way they do and, more importantly, why they sometimes don't. From the moment I stumbled upon QA, I knew it was the perfect blend of detective work and problem solving, and I was hooked.

At its core, Quality Assurance is the practice of making sure that the products we use every day work the way they should. It's about testing, yes, but also about preventing problems before they reach customers. QA blends detective work, problem solving and collaboration to ensure that businesses deliver reliable, secure and high-performing experiences.

That curiosity about why things break became the foundation for a career that's spanned everything from financial services and e-commerce to public sector transformation. But what's surprised me most isn't the complexity of the systems I've worked with; it's how often quality is treated as an afterthought.

QA is more than finding bugs

At its heart, QA isn't just about testing, it's about engineering confidence into the development process. And in today's business climate, confidence is everything. It's easy to fall into the trap of seeing QA as a cost centre, a process step, or worse, a blocker. But strong QA is a business enabler. Done well, it reduces risk, accelerates delivery, and ensures that the user experience doesn't become an afterthought.

During my time at organisations like British Airways, EDF Energy and AXA XL, I learned that the value of QA scales with the size of the system and the impact of failure. Testing becomes not just about whether something works, but whether it performs reliably under pressure, integrates seamlessly with other services, and can adapt to change quickly.

Lessons from the field

Across different industries, from financial services to retail, I've worked with global teams to establish test strategies, roll out automation frameworks, and integrate performance and security testing into the heart of delivery pipelines. But the technical toolkit is only half the story.

The real challenge is helping businesses see QA as a strategic partner. When I led QA efforts on cloud migration programmes or enterprise automation initiatives, success came down to collaboration. It wasn't about being the person who says, "this is broken." It was

about being the person who helps the team understand why it broke, how to fix it, and what we can do to stop it happening again.

It's this ability to make the complex simple, whether that's debugging a flaky test or translating risk into business language, that I believe defines modern QA leadership.

The evolving role of QA in business

We're in an era where automated testing, performance insights, and security validations aren't just technical nice-to-haves, they're essential for scaling digital services. At MotoNovo Finance and Animal Friends Insurance, for example, I helped architect solutions that removed third-party dependencies, drove data-driven API testing, and validated pricing algorithms under load.

Today, at Leighton, I'm not just leading QA efforts, I'm building a community. Through mentoring, knowledge sharing, and open dialogue, we're ensuring that QA isn't a silo, it's a mindset shared across the organisation. Quality doesn't belong to one team. It's a shared responsibility.

What's next for QA and for me

Looking ahead, I see QA and architecture becoming ever more connected. I'm passionate about evolving my role toward solution architecture, bringing the same rigour and critical thinking that defines QA to system design. After all, the earlier you embed quality, the fewer compromises you make down the line.

To anyone exploring a career in QA, my advice is this: stay curious, don't be afraid to ask difficult questions, and remember that your job isn't just to find faults, it's to help the business move forward with confidence.

Quality assurance isn't just about better software. It's about better business. And in a world where trust, speed, and user experience are everything, QA has never been more important.

leighton.com

Pupils are happy and thrive at schools at Multi-Academy Trust - Ofsted

It has been a fantastic Spring term so far for Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust with nine schools inspected by Ofsted and all receiving glowing reports.

Families of pupils attending one of the 30 schools looked after by BCCET can rest assured that their children are receiving the high-quality education they would expect from the Multi-Academy Trust.

All 25 primary schools and five secondaries across East Durham, South Tyneside and Sunderland have previously been rated Good or Outstanding by the education watchdog and although Ofsted has now dropped the overall effectiveness grade from their inspection reports since last September, each of the nine schools inspected this year have received glowing reports.

It was an extra special report for St John Bosco Catholic Primary School, which was one of the schools across the UK that was forced to close due to the RAAC crisis before the 2023/24 academic year began. The Sunderland school was praised for its “steadfast leadership”, “kind, caring adults” and positive, proud pupils whose behaviour is described as exemplary.

Also in Sunderland, St Mary's Catholic Primary, St Joseph's Catholic Primary, English Martyrs' Catholic Primary and St Aidan's Catholic Academy also received visits from the education watchdog. St Aidan's, pictured centre, was described by the lead inspector as a “thriving and happy place” where students are “extremely proud” to attend and make “excellence a habit”. St Mary's pupils love learning the “exciting, engaging curriculum” at the school and have “warm, positive relationships” with the teaching staff. At St Joseph's, children have “first-class attitudes” and love to learn at the “loving and caring” primary, which achieves standards in reading, writing and maths that are well above the national average. Pupils “flourish because they are cared for deeply” at English Martyrs' and feel safe and happy and love to learn.

Children, who “shine like stars lighting up the sky” at the “nurturing and welcoming” St Godric's Catholic Primary in Thornley, pictured top, were praised for their exemplary behaviour and pride in everything they do.

Pupils at Jarrow's St Matthew's Catholic Primary, which recently celebrated its 70th anniversary, “thrive personally and



academically” at the “happy” school which aims to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to “let their light shine”.

Ofsted discovered that pupils at St Oswald's Catholic Primary in South Shields are “excellent ambassadors” with “exemplary attitudes” and feel valued by the staff, who provide “calm and purposeful” lessons.

And St Joseph's Catholic Primary in Blackhall Colliery provides a “nurturing and aspirational atmosphere” where no child is left behind.

For more information about BCCET and available places at the schools, visit www.bccet.org.uk



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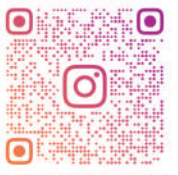
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Mowden expanding Nursery provision from September

We are delighted to be announcing the expansion of our highly regarded Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) provision to include a new nursery for two-year-olds.

for lifelong learning, social development, and emotional well-being. Early education fosters curiosity, confidence, and key skills that will set our children up for success into Pre-Prep and onto the rest of their Mowden school journey.”

The school is committed to ensuring a seamless integration of the new nursery within its existing provision and will share regular updates on progress and an opportunity to register leading up to the launch.

This initiative, launching in September 2025, builds on the success of our existing Pre-Prep nursery, which currently welcomes children in the term in which they turn three years old.

To accommodate this exciting expansion, the new nursery will be housed in a fully refurbished cottage located next to the current Pre-Prep playground. Unlike the current term-time-only nursery, the new provision will be available for 50 weeks of the year, offering greater flexibility and continuity of care for families until children transition into our Reception after they turn 4 years old.

Headteacher, Mr. Phil Sturt, expressed his enthusiasm for the development. He said, “We are thrilled to extend our outstanding EYFS offering to even younger children. Providing a nurturing and stimulating environment from the age of two will give our pupils the very best start to their Mowden educational journey. The new nursery will be a vibrant space where

children can explore, discover, and develop a lifelong love of learning.”

Kirsten Knight, Head of Pre-Prep, added: “Opening a nursery for 2-year-olds in a school will provide a strong foundation

For more information or to register your interest, please call 01661 842147 or email admissions@mowdenhallpst.org



Inspirational visit from award-winning author



We were delighted to welcome award-winning children's author Guy Bass for an exciting and inspiring visit with pupils from Years 3 to 6 before Easter.

Guy, best known for his *Stitch Head* and *Skeleton Keys* series, captivated the students as he shared his journey as a writer and the creative process behind his much-loved stories.

During his visit, Guy introduced the children to his newest book, *Teething Trouble*, a hilarious and slightly spooky adventure that had everyone eager to discover more. He entertained the audience with his signature humor, giving a lively and engaging presentation that brought his quirky characters and imaginative worlds to life.

Guy also talked about how he first became interested in writing and explained where he finds inspiration for his stories. He encouraged the pupils to embrace their creativity, reminding them that every idea, no matter how unusual, can spark an amazing story.

After his talk, Guy took time to answer questions from the children, who were



curious about his writing process, his favourite characters, and the funniest ideas he's had that never made it into a book. The session concluded with a book signing, where many students were thrilled to get their own copies of *Teething Trouble* signed by the author.

When asked about his visit, Guy replied "I had a fantastic morning at Mowden Hall. The children were confident, engaged and inventive. It's one of the most animated

responses I've had to a session, and I enjoyed every minute. Thanks for the warm welcome!"

In addition, here are a few words from the children; 'He was funny, enthusiastic, dramatic, silly and hilarious', 'I am keen to go and buy more of his books', 'He's got a good imagination' and 'He was like a big kid, in a good way!'.

www.mowdenhallpst.org

The Education Network celebrates award win in highly competitive category



L-R: Kevin Gill, CEO & Shaun Porter, MD & Dan Welsh, Associate Director at The Education Network

The Newcastle office of leading education recruitment specialists, The Education Network, has won the title of 'Best Recruitment Business' in the region at the **England's Business Awards 2025**.



L-R: Shaun Porter, MD & Dan Welsh, Associate Director at The Education Network collecting award

The accolade was a huge surprise to the team, who were nominated for the highly competitive category anonymously. In an industry that thrives on securing top placements and attracting quality talent, this recognition highlights The Education Network's commitment to going above and beyond to find the best candidates for each role.

The England's Business Awards programme is known for its rigorous process, combining public voting with mystery shopper visits to determine the winners. In The Education Network's case, the mystery shopper visits, along with public support, helped them secure the prestigious regional award.

The awards take place in regional heats across the North, Midlands, East of England, London, South East and South West, with each region divided into sub-regions. The North region stretches from Northumberland to Cheshire and Cumbria, covering a wide array of businesses. The Education Network's tremendous win

places them at the forefront of recruitment in the region.

The national finals will take place in Birmingham this November, where top businesses from across the country will compete for the overall title in categories such as New Business, Community, Independent Retailer, Licensed Trade and Consumer and Innovation.

Since its founding in 2011, the Newcastle office of The Education Network has built a reputation for providing essential support to primary, secondary and SEND schools across the UK. The team, made up of 12 highly experienced professionals, prides itself on its long-standing relationships with teaching, support and leadership staff, which have been forged through honesty, integrity and transparency.

Shaun Porter, managing director of The Education Network, expressed his gratitude for the award. "We're thrilled to be named 'Best Recruitment Business' in the region. Thank you to everyone who voted for us and our incredible team who work tirelessly to make a positive impact on schools and communities across the North East.

Porter added, "At The Education Network, we go above and beyond to find the best candidates for each role. We place the wellbeing and education of pupils at the heart of our decision-making because we understand the vital role that education plays in shaping the lives and futures of children. We expect that this focus contributed to the judges' decision."

The team's commitment to the wellbeing of both candidates and pupils has been central to their success, working tirelessly to fill urgent vacancies and ensuring schools receive seamless support in times of need. For Porter and his team, the award is a recognition of their ongoing efforts to find the best possible candidates and make a positive difference in the education sector:

"We still don't know who nominated us either, so we are very grateful to whoever you are! Now we are thinking, 'can we possibly go further and be crowned 'Best Recruitment Business' in the country at the Grand Final in Birmingham in November'? Watch this space!"

The Education Network is based in central Newcastle and has four additional offices in Durham, Middlesbrough, Leeds and Birmingham. Each office plays a vital role in the company's growing reputation for outstanding service. As The Education Network continues to lead in education recruitment, its unwavering commitment to placing the wellbeing and education of pupils at the heart of its work will keep the agency at the forefront of the competition.

www.theeducationnetwork.co.uk

Culture Club

Paul Lysaght

Director, Go The Distance

Go The Distance is a CIC empowering people of all ages and backgrounds to overcome their challenges, achieve their goals, and unlock their full potential.

With over 40 years in sport and leisure, Paul is a qualified, expert level official boxing coach at England Boxing.

Who is your favourite author and why?

Chris Ryan because it's intriguing and the storylines are about coming out fighting from a difficult situation.

The thrill, excitement and endurance all appeal to me.

He's also a local lad and that is important too.

What would be your three Desert Island Discs?

Eurythmics - *Sweet Dreams* because of Annie Lennox's vocals and the catchy synth backing.

Pat Benatar - *Love is a Battlefield* as a great driving rock song.

Marc Bolan - *Children of the Revolution* as a classic anthem.

Who is your favourite film star and why?

I think Robert DeNiro is a multitalented actor who can do everything without losing quality. Very professional and gives his all to everything he appears in.

What are your top three films? Tell me about them.

The Shawshank Redemption is one of the best told stories ever. It's an epic that leaves you wanting more from the very first scene.

Heat is my favourite crime/gangster movie and *Spartacus* is an all time classic.



Paul Lysaght

Which poem left a lasting impression on you?

As a sporty person myself, "*To an athlete dying young*" by AE Housman really resonated with me.

What box sets have you enjoyed?

As *Go the Distance* is based in a boxing gym, *Rocky* has to be there somewhere. *Taken* – You know the baddies will get what they deserve in the end and the ultimate action adventure story set at Christmas - *Die Hard*.

Who is your favourite performer?

Elvis – Thank you very much!

What is your favourite venue?

As a Chelsea fan...Stamford Bridge.

Which musical instrument do you particularly enjoy?

The Cello has a captivating sound that I can listen to no matter what mood I'm in.

From the world of Arts and Culture who would be your ideal dinner party guests?

John McEnroe to discuss whether he's being serious.

Robson Green to share stories of the beautiful North East where we live and to find out more about his acting, singing and presenting career.

The Stranglers to play a live set including *No More Heroes* and *Golden Brown*.

Then of course, a boxing discussion with two all-time greats, Sugar Ray Leonard and Mohammed Ali. These guys are my absolute heroes and have inspired me.

Through boxing, *Go the Distance* also inspires others and I get a great deal out of seeing the changes we've made in them.

Paul can be contacted at www.gothedistancecic.co.uk

Theatre to capture your heart – new season on sale now at Newcastle Theatre Royal



From heartwarming stories to breathtaking spectacles, the new season at Newcastle Theatre Royal promises unforgettable moments that will stay with you long after the curtain falls.

Featuring world-class productions, thrilling drama, and show-stopping musicals, this is theatre to capture your heart.

Now in its 10th anniversary year, Project A is Newcastle Theatre Royal's professional actor training programme. For their final production, this year's students present *The Skriker* (Tue 8 – Fri 11 Jul 2025), a story of love, loss, and transformation in the newly refurbished Studio theatre.

Adapted from Rick Riordan's best-selling Percy Jackson novel, *The Lightning Thief* (Wed 27 – Sun 31 Aug 2025) is the perfect school holiday treat for gods, half-bloods and mortals! Join Percy and his friends on an epic adventure, guaranteed to have you on the edge of your seat.

Opera North return to Newcastle Theatre Royal later this year with another stunning Winter season featuring Puccini's ever-popular *La bohème* (Wed 5 – Sat 8 Nov 2025), an exciting new collaboration between Opera North and Phoenix Dance



Theatre in Handel's *Susanna* (Fri 7 Nov) and a production for all the family, *The Big Opera Mystery* (Sat 8 Nov 2025). Opera North return in Spring 2026 with Mozart's unmissable opera, *The Marriage of Figaro* (Thu 19 – Sat 21 Mar 2026), and Britten's outstanding *Peter Grimes* (Fri 20 Mar 2026).

In the week the England team play their final first-round qualifier for the 2026 World Cup, National Theatre's *Dear England* (Tue 11 – Sat 15 Nov 2025) tells the uplifting, at times heartbreaking, and ultimately inspiring story of Gareth Southgate's revolutionary tenure as England manager in a gripping examination of the nation and game.

With 5,000 tickets to week-day performances being donated to local schools, Sat 31 Jan 2026 will be the first opportunity for the public to experience *Weird*, the electrifying pop-powered musical reimagining Shakespeare's *Macbeth* through the eyes of the fiercely fabulous and fun three witches, which is making its world premiere at Newcastle Theatre Royal.

Marking the first-ever stage adaptation of the iconic detective, *Inspector Morse* (Tue 3 – Sat 7 Feb 2026) is a must-see for fans of compelling detective stories and thrilling mysteries, and ABBA fans can enjoy the ultimate feel-good factor when *MAMMA MIA!* (Wed 11 – Sat 28 Feb 2026) brings the Greek sunshine to Newcastle next year.

In Spring, the Royal Shakespeare Company return to Newcastle with a spectacular new production of *Hamlet* (Tue 31 Mar – Sat 4 Apr 2026). Fresh from its run in Stratford-upon-Avon, this gripping production of Shakespeare's famous revenge drama visits Newcastle Theatre Royal as part of a major national tour.

A true celebration of the power of love, friendship and embracing others for who they are, grab your heels, pack the glitter and get ready to Shake Your Groove Thing when *Priscilla Queen of the Desert* (Mon 6 – Sat 11 Apr 2026) comes to Newcastle next year!

Set in 1934 Alabama, *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Tue 21 – Sat 25 Apr 2026) is the thrilling courtroom drama inspired by novelist Harper Lee's own childhood. Having sold more than 45 million copies worldwide, this award-winning stage adaptation is set to be popular with fans both old and new.

And finally, the intoxicating drama where life imitates art with fateful consequences, Matthew Bourne's spectacular production of *The Red Shoes* (Tue 28 Apr – Sat 9 May 2026) will dazzle your senses and break your heart when it is brought to life on stage for fans to enjoy once more in 2026.

Tickets for all performances can be purchased at www.theatreroyal.co.uk or from the Theatre Royal Box Office on 0191 232 7010





L-R: Paula Mitchell, Claire Pickersgill, Julie Turnbull

The Collective Ambassador Box sponsorship

Sunderland Empire's Ambassador Box Sponsorship has been given a fabulous new re-brand and now welcomes The Collective as this year's sponsor.

The Collective includes The Ladies Collective and The Men's Collective: a global networking community of business leaders with mindset and wellbeing at the core.

Having recently been nominated for the Rising Star Award at this year's UK Start Up Awards, the year ahead is shaping up to be incredibly exciting with some fantastic events lined up.

Their events are designed to help you grow personally, while connecting with like-minded individuals who'll help you grow professionally. By taking the time out of our busy schedules to work on ourselves all whilst in a special networking environment, you'll leave feeling empowered, uplifted and ready to elevate in all aspects of life.



L-R: Claire Pickersgill & Julie Turnbull

Julie Turnbull, Co-Founder, The Collective said: "At The Collective, we believe in keeping things simple and real. In a world where connections can feel endless but empty, we're choosing to slow down and focus on what really matters - trust, community, and genuine collaboration. Our sponsorship of Box D at Sunderland Empire is more than just a seat for us, it's a symbol of our commitment to supporting local spaces where real connection happens. And who doesn't love the theatre!"

The sponsorship not only includes seats in the luxurious Ambassador Box with each visit, but also great brand awareness with welcome notes and company information in all four boxes, logos on all 1907 Corporate Club print & more!

Claire Pickersgill, Co-Founder, The

Collective said: "We are delighted to continue and further build our relationship with Paula and the team at the Sunderland Empire. The magnificent venue holds a very special place in my heart, working there for many years and previously launching the 1907 Corporate Club it's a very poignant moment to go full circle and join as members and sponsors.

The core ethos of The Collective networking concept is community, connections and collaborations and this truly aligns with the corporate offerings at Sunderland Empire. The 1907 Corporate Club has gone from strength-to-strength under Paula's reign, and we look forward to exploring and building other opportunities that come with joining the wider business community."

With an exciting year ahead, welcoming hundreds of thousands of audience members through the doors with upcoming West-End shows such as **Hamilton**, **Mary Poppins** and **Matilda** it's the perfect time for businesses to align their brand with Sunderland Empire and increase their brand presence within the region.

Check out groupcollective.uk for more information or follow The Ladies Collective and The Mens Collective on LinkedIn for all the latest updates and news on upcoming events.

Looking to put your business in the spotlight? Please contact PaulaMitchell@atgentertainment.com for more information.

Meet the Artist...

John Todd

Did you always want to pursue a career in Art?

I'd always had an interest in the arts. I completed an art technician's qualification at Newcastle Polytechnic/Northumbria University way back when & things just progressed from there.

What do you most enjoy about your career?

It goes without saying that creating new pieces & watching them evolve plays an important role in any artistic process.

I'm always working on several studio projects at any given time. However, both the *Cover Story* & *Just Jacket Collection* have proven to be ongoing projects.

Both collections are influenced by the Penguin Book art genre however, these collections are specific to the North East with each collection exploring both the past & present 'Geordie Culture.'

What should people expect to see at your exhibitions?

There's always a concept behind my pieces & it's important that there's a connection between the artwork & the viewer.

Several of these fictitious book titles incorporate one essential additional element, this being my pseudonym, pen name or alternatively my fictional author or novelist whose name adorns several of the new titles. So for reference purposes only, this newly adopted fictional author & character goes under the pseudonym of 'James Park.' The collection benefits from the inclusion of my alter ego as the pen name suggests a familiar heritage whilst also gaining a further depth.

"The book titles are just the starting point. A vehicle which allows the viewer you bring their own memories & experiences to the table. For example if I say 'Tuxedo Princess,



Geordie Jeans or Sycamore Gap' what memories does that evoke? It's at this point that you the viewer become the author of each story contained within the collection."

The two ongoing collections to date share around 30 titles. They include titles such as 'Alnmouth & No Trousers, Whey-Aye-Five-0, Posh Geordies & a further 20 plus sardonic titles. They're a snapshot of Geordie Culture, both past & present.

Who have been the biggest influences on your career?

It's not so much as an individual artist influencing my work but more of a genre. It's a cliché to mention Warhol but he's up there with the likes of Roy Lichtenstein, Peter Blake, Richard Hamilton & Jasper Johns.

What advice would you give to someone looking to pursue a career in Art?

The arts encompasses such a broad range of disciplines. Far too many to discuss in general terms. However, if you're fortunate enough to identify a particular subject or path that you enjoy then doing what you love has to be a good thing.



Who are your heroes?

I feel like I should mention several intentional contemporary artists like Damien Hirst or Banksy as well as Bowie, Mandala, Bob Marley, Queen Elizabeth, Churchill & top it off Alan Shearer. However, I don't really think I have any heroes...apart from my close friends & family who all at some time or other have all set goals which they've successfully achieved or those closest to me who have faced their own personal battles.

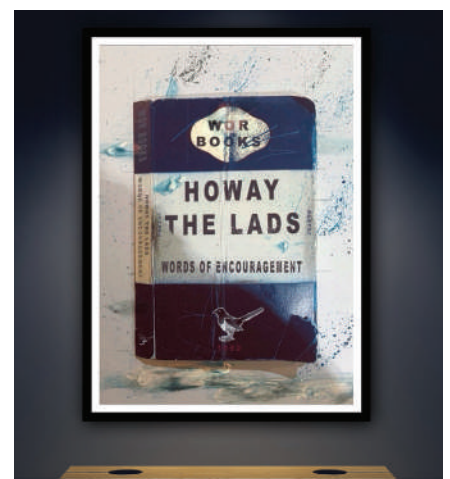
What are you currently working on?

Apart from the two ongoing collections discussed I'm working on an additional collection called the '*Sterling Work Collection*'. It's a collection of pieces created from shredded £50, £20, £10 & £5 Sterling notes.

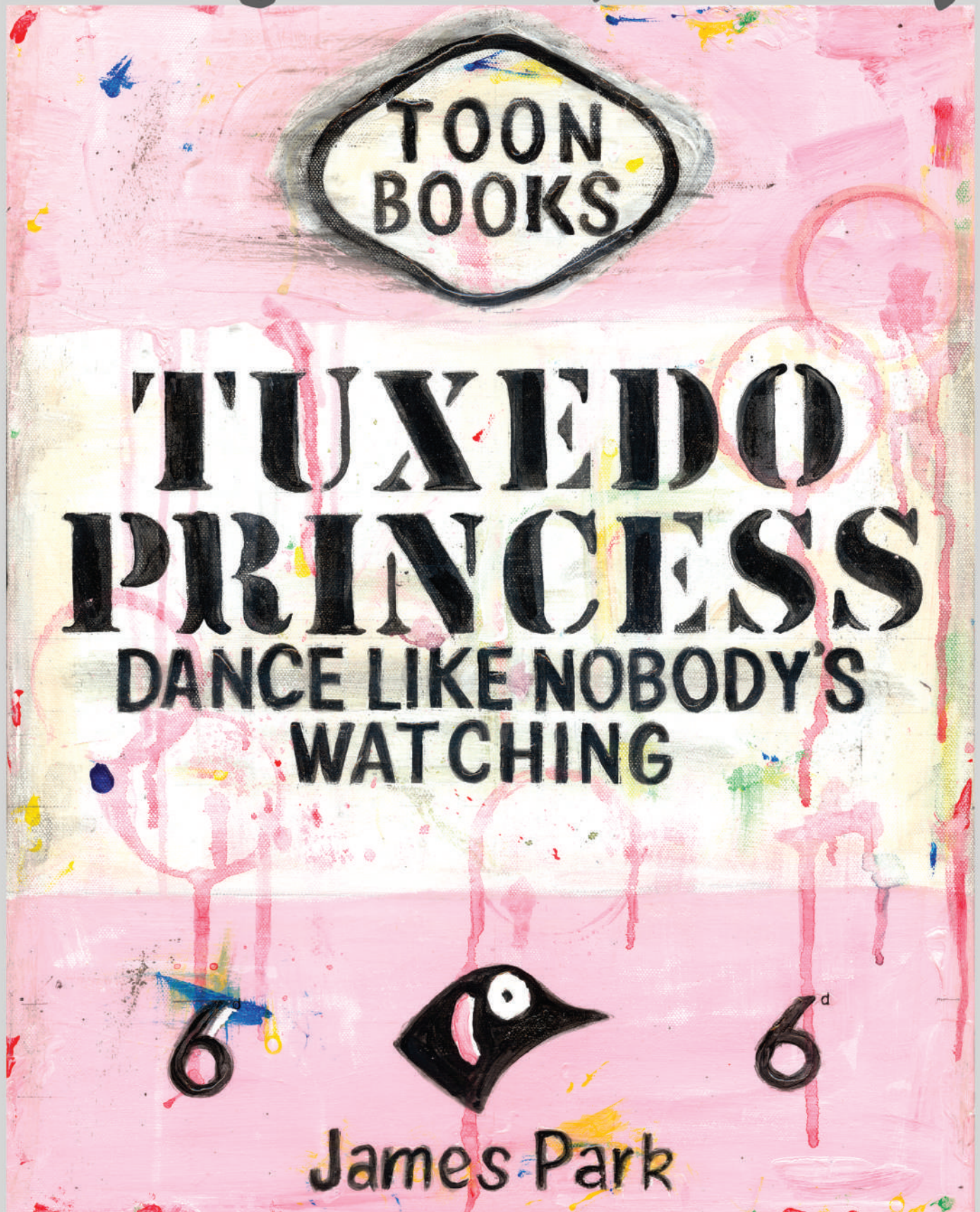
How do you like to unwind?

Simple...Hanging around with my heroes!

w: Toddatthebiscuittinstudio39.co.uk
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the arts interview



In the latest of this popular series of features, Keith Newman spoke to...

Rob Huggins

CEO, Gosforth Civic Theatre

Rob Huggins' journey to leading one of the UK's most unique community theatres is both inspiring and unconventional.

Originally from northwest London, Rob moved to the North East nearly 30 years ago for university. Over time, he built a life, a career, and a charity that has transformed countless lives. His passion for supporting individuals with learning disabilities has been the driving force behind his work for over two decades.

A passion for empowerment

"I've always specialised in working with people with learning disabilities. In 2003, I founded the organisation that now runs Gosforth Civic Theatre – Liberdade. The core idea then, as it remains today, was about giving people with learning disabilities choice—offering them power and opportunities that they otherwise might not have had."

Initially, the organisation started as an apprenticeship scheme to train young people with learning disabilities in running an organisation. As Rob admits, he was learning alongside them, given that his background was in drama, not business management. Over the years, the initiative has grown significantly. Today, Gosforth Civic Theatre employs adults with learning disabilities, runs multiple training programs, and reaches around 150 individuals annually through outreach in SEND schools and colleges.



Rob Huggins

A theatre like no other

The story of Gosforth Civic Theatre is unique. The idea for the venue itself came from the people it serves. “We asked our company members what they wanted, and they said they wanted a building of their own, a space where they could invite the community in and provide job opportunities to others like them.”

Though running a theatre wasn’t originally in Rob’s plans, he embraced the challenge. The theatre is now a vibrant community hub, offering high-quality food and coffee, hosting live music, theatre, and dance performances, and serving as a venue for weddings and events. Most importantly, it stands as a testament to the contributions of people with learning disabilities.

“There’s no other theatre like us in the country. If people recognise that this space exists because a group of people with learning disabilities had the vision to create it, they might value those individuals more than they otherwise would.”

Renovating for the future

The theatre, initially acquired through a community asset transfer from the council in 2016, faced serious structural issues. By 2019, the building needed major investment to remain viable. Then COVID hit, making an already difficult situation even tougher.

“We had to raise money to renovate the building. What started as a £1 million project quickly doubled in cost due to rising material prices following the Ukraine invasion. We were incredibly fortunate to receive support from the Youth Investment Fund, which helped us bridge the funding gap.”

The renovation included a new heating system, solar panels, an extension for additional community space, improved theatrical infrastructure, and an upgraded bar. “We took it back to the brick walls and started again. It was a tough project that nearly broke me, but looking at the finished result, it was worth it.”



Financial challenges and innovative solutions

Despite its success, running the theatre remains financially challenging. “We turn over just over £1 million a year, and we aim to earn about 65% of that ourselves. The rest comes from grants and trusts, but these funds are dwindling.”

Brexit has further exacerbated funding shortfalls, with major European funding streams disappearing. Coupled with rising wages and operational costs, the financial strain is immense. “We’ve seen our wage bill increase by £100,000 annually for the past three years, and we can’t rely solely on grants anymore.”

To counteract this, the theatre is building partnerships with local businesses through the Gosforth Business Network and launching a paid membership scheme to encourage community support. “If charities can’t get help from traditional sources, we have to work together to find new solutions.”

Life beyond the theatre

Outside of work, Rob enjoys golf and fishing in the Tyne Valley. Recently, he’s taken up fixing his own car—his self-proclaimed “mid-life crisis.”

For those looking to support Gosforth Civic Theatre, Rob encourages visiting their website: www.gosforthcivictheatre.co.uk. There, visitors can book tickets, donate, and learn more about the organisation. The theatre can seat 200 and for music gigs, it has a standing capacity of around 300.



Roaming in the Italian capital

By Stuart Forster

With direct flights from Newcastle, a wealth of visitor attractions and a reputation for good food and drink, Rome is an attractive destination for a city break.

Gazing towards the Colosseum while sipping an Aperol Spritz in the afternoon sunshine felt like vindication for selecting the Italian capital for a four-night getaway.

The rooftop terrace of the Caffetteria Italia al Vittoriano offers fine views of the Roman Forum. The café is part of the Monument to Vittorio Emanuele II, which rises like a stepped wedding cake to dominate the heart of Rome. Built to honour the country's first king and the Risorgimento movement, which spurred the unification of Italy in 1861, the monument provides vantage points ideal for orientating. Sipping in the views was just as enjoyable as slowly downing one of Italy's signature cocktails.

City breaks are all about sampling local flavours and seeing top attractions while enjoying moments of reflection and appreciation of the destination. Pausing for a gelato, an espresso or a glass of something stronger represents an opportunity to observe people and soak up the rhythm and buzz of surroundings.

In a city such as Rome, it is easy to remain constantly on the go. It has so much to see and do. Typically, people want to pack in as much as possible. Contrarily, travellers' desires to work through lists of major sights and museums can be detrimental to enjoying a destination, as the compulsion to 'make the most of a trip' can create pressure that results in failing to take time to embrace a place's essence. With that in mind, pre-booking tickets for just one major attraction a day provides a framework for experiencing highlights and helps combat the risk of sightseeing fatigue.

It's easy to lose track of time rambling around the ruins of the world's largest-ever amphitheatre and then on to the Roman Forum, where 1,900 years ago citizens may have chuntered about the ramifications of the emperor Hadrian constructing a wall in distant Britannia. Surely it would be too much to combine that with a visit to the Vatican in a single day?

Prebooking a visit to the Vatican Museums helps minimise time spent queuing to enter. Choosing a slot early in the day provides a reason to head to the Vatican ahead of the crowds and opportunities to snap selfies on the still-deserted piazza in front of St Peter's Basilica.

The variety and breadth of artefacts

and artworks in the Vatican Museums is mindboggling. With Ancient Egyptian mummies, rooms painted by the Renaissance master Raphael and gems such as Vincent van Gogh's *Pietà*, even a half-day visit can feel a tad rushed. Be prepared to crane your neck at spectacular ceilings, the most celebrated being the Sistine Chapel – where photography is not permitted.

Yet another of Michelangelo's works, the Porta Pia, an ornate gate next to the British Embassy, is one of multiple landmarks in Rome that people might photograph unaware of their provenance and heritage. In many cities, the Fountain of the Four Rivers by Gian Lorenzo Bernini and the Art Nouveau Galleria Sciarra would be virtuoso attractions but they are simply part of the orchestra in Rome.

The Borghese Gallery displays paintings by the likes of Caravaggio and sculptures by Bernini. Hiring a buggy and pedalling around the vast park surrounding the world-famous art museum is an enjoyable way of exploring before dropping into the city and strolling to the Piazza di Spagna, the location of the Spanish Steps, and on towards the Trevi Fountain.

Chucking a coin into the fountain reputedly means that you'll return. There are certainly plenty of reasons to plan a trip to Rome.

...Travel information...

Jet2.com operates twice-weekly flights between Newcastle and Rome Fiumicino Airport (a.k.a. Leonardo da Vinci International Airport) with a pause from mid-June until 5 September 2025.

The Leonardo Express runs every 15 minutes, directly between Fiumicino Airport and Roma Termini railway station. The journey takes 32 minutes, costing €14 per person.

The Hotel NH Collection Roma Palazzo Cinquecento, by Roma Termini, is a Jet2CityBreaks accommodation option.

Rome Tourism (turismoroma.it/en) has information about the city. Book tickets to the Vatican Museums via the official website (museivaticani.va).



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Tony Hadley to headline this year's Oyster Festival

One of the UK's most iconic voices is set to headline this year's Oyster Festival at Hardwick Hall Hotel as organisers promise another unforgettable day of food, entertainment and fundraising.

Tony Hadley, former frontman of 80s supergroup Spandau Ballet, will take centre stage at the annual event at the Sedgefield hotel on Friday 26 September, performing a set packed with hits including Gold, True and Through the Barricades.

The festival, now in its 22nd year, has become one of the region's most anticipated social events, attracting hundreds of guests for a full day of live entertainment, seafood and celebration.

Alongside Tony Hadley, the line-up includes a performance from comedian Joe Pasquale, The Dolly Show, Irish music favourites Emerald Thieves, JJ Galway Band and DJ Brandon Block, with Steve Walls hosting the day.

The event will once again support a chosen charity and this year the beneficiary will be Heel & Toe Children's Charity, which provides free and reduced-cost therapy to children with physical disabilities and complex needs across the North East.

Guests will enjoy a Champagne reception, a three-course fruits de mer lunch, fresh oyster stalls and complimentary lager, beer and wine throughout the day, which runs from 11.30am to 6pm.

John Adamson, owner of Hardwick Hall and Ramside Estates, said the return of a major name to headline the festival marks a milestone for the event.

Wine lounge expands Jesmond's hospitality offering

A new concept wine lounge is the latest business to make a popular suburb of Newcastle its home, thanks to legal support from Mincoffs Solicitors.

Angel's Share, whose name refers to the liquid lost that evaporates as a wine matures in a barrel, is due to open in the former Boots building on Jesmond's St George's Terrace in early June 2025.

Operated by husband and wife team and directors of Angels Share Holdings Ltd, Daren (formerly managing director of Blackrose Pubs) and Kate Knipe (HR consultant), the venue will serve a range of wines, beers and spirits, non-alcoholic refreshments, small plates and sharing boards.

The bar will feature a number of self-dispense machines, allowing wine enthusiasts the opportunity to try wines which are not usually available by the glass, and promote exploration of different wines, including brands from new and traditional regions not often found in local supermarkets or wine merchants.

Mincoffs' licensing and gaming partner



Matt Foster and real estate associate solicitor Keith Ravenhill advised the couple from the outset.

This involved developing and communicating the concept to successfully obtain a premises licence after local opposition, and working with the landlord and solicitors to agree a lease for the space.

"The team at Mincoffs were at hand to help at every stage of the process and were paramount to the success of us obtaining the lease and change of use," said Daren and Kate Knipe.

Dancing, Disco and home just after 9pm at Ramside Hall Hotel, Golf and Spa

The opportunity to have a fun night out with great food, entertainment and dancing yet be home at a respectable hour is the latest innovation at a top North East hotel.

Events like daytime discos or events with early finishes have become hugely popular in recent times, and now Ramside Hall Hotel, Golf and Spa near Durham is offering its own unique twist on the trend.

Lights Out by 9pm will offer a club night with a difference – non-stop club classics, disco ball dancers and even a special appearance from The Glowbot but without the late finish.

The event – which is being held on Saturday 24 May – will kick off at 4pm where guests will get straight into the party spirit with a meet and greet with the Ramside showgirls.

Then for the next five hours there's the opportunity to dance the early evening away with iconic club anthems.

The additional good news is there's no need to queue at the end of the night in the takeaway either, as everyone's post night out favourite food – a kebab – will be dished up at 8pm.

The evening will end at 9pm, ensuring that everyone can get home at a decent hour, but have had the full night out experience.

Tickets for the event are just £18.95 a person, available via the website at www.ramsidehallhotel.co.uk






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Running a hotel is more than a desk job

Managing a hotel requires active engagement at every level of operations.

It means being present at the front desk when a guest arrives early, and their room is not yet ready. It means stepping in to support the restaurant team during an unexpectedly busy breakfast service.

It involves inspecting rooms after housekeeping, ensuring every detail contributes to an exceptional guest



experience. It is about noticing a misplated dish leaving the kitchen while simultaneously resolving a POS issue.

True hospitality is not managed from a distance. It thrives on direct interaction, attention to detail, and a commitment to transforming a simple stay into a memorable experience.

Anyone in this industry understands that each day brings new challenges—an unhappy guest who can be won over with outstanding service, a team that requires motivation to uphold high standards, and an operation that demands quick, effective solutions.

This dynamic and demanding environment is what makes hospitality both challenging and rewarding. Excellence in this industry is not merely about metrics, online reviews, or performance indicators. It is about striking the right balance between strategy and action, implementing well-structured processes while remaining adaptable to the unexpected.

Effective hotel leadership requires presence—listening, problem-solving, and anticipating needs. It means leading by example, not from behind a desk, but from the heart of the operation, working alongside the team and engaging with guests.

Ultimately, hospitality is about details, proactive decision-making, and, above all, people. We certainly embrace these methods here at Lumley Castle.

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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Down at the Dene

By Michael Grahamslaw

John Dobson designed Jesmond Dene House in the early 19th Century for the then Mayor of Newcastle Upon Tyne. While the house has been refurbished at various points throughout its history, its status as a Grade II Listed Building stands as a symbol of its prestige.

The great architect Dobson's influence in the emergence of the city cannot be overstated: Newcastle Central Railway Station, The Grainger Market, Old Eldon Square. Iconic locations in a bustling metropolis.

On arrival at Jesmond Dene House, then, it is hard, if not impossible, to believe that we are situated so close to the bustling city that Dobson was so instrumental in creating.

Here there are no frantic shoppers, no rushing metros, and no match day footfall. This is a slither of peace in a frantic world. Jesmond Dene House is tranquil, soothing,

quiescent. Birds sang and bees buzzed as me and my wife Lisa were warmly welcomed in the gentle breeze of early summer.

Friendly staff showed us to the exquisite Noble Suite, with super king size bed, spacious seating area, walk-in shower and bath. The room is stylishly furnished with a slick, modern feel (although well-informed staff did advise us that each room is uniquely decorated).

Despite this comfort, luxury and modernity, the sense of heritage in this historic building remains. We were left in no doubt about this as we stepped up to the hidden, turreted roof terrace, complete with iconic views of the dene.

After a quick change and a gentle livener in the well-appointed bar, we made our way through to the restaurant for a late Sunday lunch.

We were shown to a table overlooking The Secret Garden, a stunning scene resembling a Katherine Mansfield short story.

The waiter, seemingly reading my mind, informed me that the place is available for private hire – the perfect setting for a future Northern Insight soiree? Seriously though, this was a beautiful location for a Sunday dinner. Romantic enough, even, to earn the approval of my lovely wife Lisa.

The Sunday lunch menu is exceptional value at £39 for 2 courses and £45 for 3.

Prior to ordering, we were served Focaccia with cultured butter, a continental twist in a quintessentially British setting.

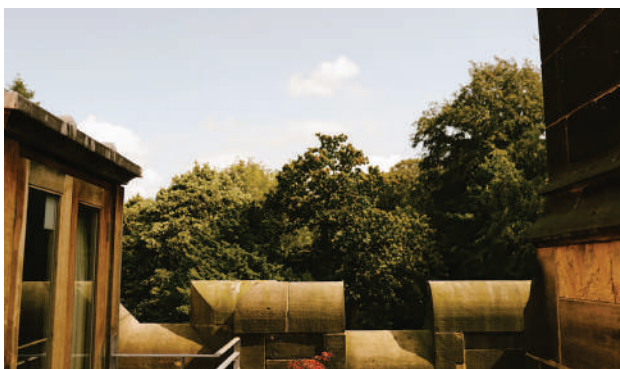
Starters arrived: smoked haddock fishcake for me, squash and carrot velouté for Lisa, followed by Aged Beef Rump and Thyme Roasted Half Chicken for each of us respectively. All roasts are accompanied with seasonal vegetables, roast and mashed potatoes and huge Yorkshire puddings with red wine gravy.

Despite all this, we bravely soldiered on and managed to devour vanilla cheesecake with cherry sorbet. The culmination of a Pan-European menu with thoroughly English-sized portions. This superb fayre was produced by the newly appointed Head Chef Gareth Rayner and his excellent team.

In such a setting and with such full stomachs a sense of tranquillity fell upon us, which seemed to be felt by fellow guests. The conservatory hummed with languid conversation as we whiled away the hours drinking delicious coffee liqueurs and admiring the scenery.

We woke next morning feeling like we had slept for two nights (the king-size may have had something to do with this) and made our way down for a lovely breakfast which topped off what was an unbeatable weekend in a truly special location.

For more information, visit jesmonddenehouse.co.uk



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Heaton on my mind

By Michael Gramslaw

Northern Insight's resident cowboys open the barn doors on Chillingham Road's latest country and western venue.

Anyone walking through Heaton on a recent balmy Spring evening can't have missed there's a palpable buzz about the place.

Throngs of new independent eateries line the streets, with, in some cases, diners queueing round the block to get a table.

One of the best restaurants to arrive on the scene is the wonderfully named, The Barn Door, a rustic, Northumbrian-inspired eatery with a country music vibe.

The all-new bar and kitchen is fresh from the imagination of Tracy Tunn, who grew up in rural Northumberland and captures the laid-back feel of country living within this little pocket of the suburbs.

Open six days a week, it offers a selection of southern classics from burgers to chicken wings, as well as a selection of draught and bottled beers, wines, cocktails and soft drinks.

Walking past, I was impressed to find a real good-time feel (the old country twang in full swing), so vowed to return the following Sunday with my son, Jack.

I'm so glad we did.

Inside, the Barn Door really looks the part; resplendent with floor-to-ceiling hay bales, faux cow hides and various farmyard bric-a-brac. Most impressively, a flat screen TV sits atop the action, streaming a winning mix of new country hits and golden oldies. This certainly wasn't our first rodeo, so we decided to drink in the atmosphere with a couple of icy cool beers, while learning more about the Sunday Lunch menu. This isn't a venue which overcomplicates

things with endless choice, but, instead, cooks a small number of dishes very well: from the heart, and using freshly sourced local ingredients.

For Jack and I, it would be two of the traditional roast beef served with all the trimmings. This included: thick slices of beef to the perfect pink, roast and mashed potatoes, parsnips, honey glazed carrots and al dente broccoli. This was crowned by a fluffy Yorkshire pudding completing the pretty picture.

The beef was wonderfully tender, boasting a telling depth of flavour and clearly cooked with respect for the cut. Suffice to say, this was set off exquisitely by an excellent bottle of Malbec.

With one eye on the resumption of our Monday fitness plans, we swerved dessert (sticky toffee pudding) but lingered a while over wine to soak up some of the atmosphere.

Throughout our meal, we were looked after superbly well by Tracy and her team who really made us feel at home.

We weren't the only ones; a larger group had even booked out a corner in 'Cowhide Window', a long-tabled space (with option of country wood or white table linen) which is perfect for special occasions or group dining.

It appears the Barn Door is already a success and it's easy to see why. This place is a rootin', tootin' hit.

For more information, follow @thebarndoornewcastle on Instagram



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Down the Rabbit Hole

By Michael Grahamslaw

If Lewis Carroll had dreamt up a culinary adventure instead of a literary one, it might have looked something like The Rabbit Hole in Durham.

Tucked away on the city's Hallgarth Street, this vintage-chic restaurant offers an Asian fusion experience that is as whimsical and fulfilling as its name might suggest.

I first visited The Rabbit Hole eight years ago with my daughter Holly who at that time was a student at Durham University. We had the most marvellous meal and I vowed to return in the future.

In true Carrollian style, we've lost track of time since then, but on a beautiful spring day with my Wife Lisa, an octennial visit proved too much to resist.

Walking into The Rabbit Hole feels like stepping into a different era—one where velvet drapes, dim lighting, and jazz-infused elegance provide the backdrop to an evening of food which really stirs the senses.

The Rabbit Hole is part of a distinguished group of restaurants that includes the fabulous Thai eatery Zen, the award winning burger joint Tango and Whitechurch, which I reviewed on these pages early in 2024.

Despite dining early on a Saturday night, lively chatter and glass clinking pervaded the air, as the dining area exuded a real warm glow: bettered only by the friendliest

of welcomes. We were promptly shown to a lovely, spacious table, setting the tone for what would be an evening eight years in the making.

The restaurant specialises in Asian fusion cuisine, with an emphasis on dim sum and Cantonese-inspired dishes. The menu is a carefully curated with that transport diners across the culinary outposts of China, Japan and Korea.

Under starter's orders, I kicked off with crispy prawn toasties with a soy dipping sauce while Lisa enjoyed spring rolls: crisp golden parcels packed with fresh vegetables and served with plum ketchup.

Following on, Lisa picked out a real pearler with the sizzling Cantonese-style beef: tender chunky sliced fillet steak with wok glazed sliced sweet onions.

Across the table, I enjoyed the classic Chinese curry with turmeric, Chinese five spice, chopped onion and green pea. This was served with a choice of slow poached chicken fillets or jumbo king prawns – the latter of which proving a real oriental treat. Of course, this was accompanied by Tiger beer for me (when in Rome) and a couple of very good glasses of Pinot Grigio for Lisa.

With a lively ambience, expertly crafted dishes and top notch service, The Rabbit Hole is a real destination venue. Whether you're an Asian food fanatic or simply looking for a night out with a bit of a difference, this culinary wonderland is well worth a visit.

For more information, visit www.therabbitholedurham.co.uk





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Giant Queues for Giant Fish

Hundreds of hungry Good Friday customers queued for up to an hour to have their traditional Easter lunch or tea.

The annual Good Friday fish and chips takeaway event at The Harbour View in Seaton Sluice is now in its seventh year and delivers not only delicious food but also entertainment and camaraderie for all who joined the queue.

This year, County Durham acoustic covers artist Stephen Wilson serenaded the queues with his extensive setlist.

"It's our busiest day of the year, and my staff managed the queues as efficiently as possible," said restaurant manager Sharron Carr. "We increased our stock of prime Icelandic Cod and potatoes threefold to meet the demand."

the-harbour-view.com





“

*...I grow by
learning from
the people and
experiences I
encounter...*

Natalie Cabby

In conversation with

Northern Insight meets...

Natalie Cabby

Operations Manager, Staybridge Suites, Newcastle

What were your career ambitions growing up?

Growing up, I wanted to be cabin crew, traveling the world and meeting new people, so I studied Travel and Tourism. However, I realised the constant travel and time away from home wasn't the right fit for me. I valued a better work-life balance and stability, which led me to explore service-oriented roles. Working in hotels allows me to interact with a wide variety of people every day, hear their stories, and ensure they feel welcome and well cared for during their stay.

Tell us about your current role.

I oversee the hotel's day-to-day operations, focusing on efficiency, an inclusive team environment, and most importantly, happy guests. While guests are our priority, my focus is on supporting the team—creating a workplace where people feel valued, enjoy their work, and see their ideas and efforts recognised. To me it's important to work collaboratively with all departments on innovative ideas, sustainability goals, resolving issues, and implementing growth strategies. A big part of my role is problem-solving and making quick decisions to keep everything running smoothly.

What is your proudest business achievement and your biggest challenge?

One of my proudest achievements has been the career progression I've made at the hotel, I started my journey at Staybridge Suites Newcastle as a Receptionist 15 years ago and have since progressed through various roles, from Reception to Reservations, and now Operations Manager, it's something I've worked hard for over the years. The most defining/challenging moment came during the Covid-19 pandemic, when, along with the team, we had to manage not only the hotel's operations but also the safety and wellbeing of our guests, while navigating the rapidly changing health regulations on the daily government briefings. It was an intense period that helped all of us grow and strengthen as a team. We were one of the few hotels that stayed open during covid, listening to stories from our guests who were key workers, being a part of keeping the world open and moving.

How has your industry changed in the last decade?

In recent years, hospitality has shifted significantly to meet changing guest expectations, with a focus on seamless, tech-friendly experiences that still feel personal. Guests now seek memorable, social-media-worthy stays. Companies also prioritise sustainability and employee wellbeing. Staybridge Suites Newcastle is the ideal solution for these changes, our suites are an ideal size, with fully fitted kitchens in all our suites, guests can even join us for our complimentary evening social, with alcoholic, soft drinks and nibbles.

Tell us about the team you work with.

I'm fortunate to work with an incredible team. The managers I work alongside are supportive, driven, and always willing to collaborate on new ideas. The wider team plays a huge role—everyone brings something unique, and the mix of strengths across all departments helps us succeed together. Over the years, we've built a strong sense of trust and respect, which makes even the busiest days feel manageable—and even fun!

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

The best business advice I've found comes from a simple motto, courtesy of *Dory (Finding Nemo)* "Just keep swimming." In the fast-paced hospitality industry, changing guest expectations, new tech, and unexpected challenges are constant. It can be tough, but staying adaptable and moving forward is key. This mindset has helped me navigate challenges and stay focused on what matters.

Who are your heroes inside and outside of business?

I wouldn't say I have any specific heroes. I tend to draw inspiration from the people around me—colleagues, friends, and even everyday interactions. I really admire qualities like resilience, kindness, and inclusive leadership, I find those traits in lots of different people in different ways. Rather than looking up to one individual, I grow by learning from the people and experiences I encounter.

How do you unwind outside of work?

Outside of work, I love spending time with my dog, Bella. There's honestly nothing better than popping her in the car and heading to the beach. Watching her run around, in her element, is the perfect way to let the cobwebs wash away. It's simple, but it brings me a real sense of calm and joy—especially after a busy week. It's my little escape and a great way to recharge.

Favourite Book and Boxset?

I'll be honest—I'm not a big reader, so I don't really have a favourite book. But when it comes to boxsets, I've always loved a good classic, and for me, that has to be *Friends*. I always envied the kind of close-knit relationships they had on the show and hoped I'd have something like that in my own life one day. I can honestly say that the friendships I have now mean the world to me—I'd be lost without them. In a way, I guess *Friends* gave me a little glimpse of what I wanted, and I'm grateful to have found that in real life.

www.ihg.com

Places to go...Isle of Arran



Arran is a kidney-shaped island off the west coast of Scotland, south-west of Glasgow, with a population around 4,600 and is the seventh largest in Scotland. It is accessed at present via Troon, but traditionally the embarkation point for the ferry is Ardrossan. A new ship entered service this year, the Glen Sannox.

By the magic of rail ticketing, it was no problem to arrange a journey out via Carlisle and Kilmarnock, and back via Glasgow and Edinburgh. That gave me the opportunity to have a trip on the new trains on the Glasgow subway, and a cheap Seatfrog upgrade to first class from Edinburgh to Chester-le-Street.

I walked from the station at Troon to the port off the Kilmarnock train, having lunch on the way in a coffee shop, and was given a lift by coach along the long quay to board the MV Alfred as a foot passenger, single fare bookable at the port at £5.10. MV stands for Merchant Vessel, and this one was on loan from Pentland Ferries, so all the maps and posters on board were of the Orkneys which was a bit disorientating. We passed the MV Glen Sannox during the crossing to the village of Brodick.

My stay on Arran was two nights at the Burlington guest house in Whiting Bay. The advantage of staying there was that it is on the only bus route, the 323A, that runs hourly in the evening, from Brodick through Lamlash Bay to Whiting Bay. Both nights I had my evening meal in Lamlash Bay at the Drift Inn and Pierhead restaurant, the latter even offering a tasty real ale which is rarely found in Scotland, by the name of Loch Lomond Brewery. The Pierhead restaurant also offered 10% off for residents of the Burlington!

Arran has no railways nor towns, and staying at Whiting Bay I relied on the seven bus fleet of Stagecoach to get me round. The route structure is simple with three routes from Brodick: the 323 goes round to the south (via Lagg distillery), the 324 goes round to the north (via Lochranza distillery) and the 322 goes through the middle along the String Road and all three routes end up in the village of Blackwaterfoot. The three routes are infrequent but allow two or three hours at each attraction. A day ticket is available for adults at £7.50. Unfortunately, neither Stagecoach nor the tourist office issue paper bus timetables, but I just jotted down my itinerary for the day from my mobile using the Stagecoach website.

My middle day was the Thursday and I had an early breakfast (normally 0815 or 0915 sittings) to catch the 0827 bus round the southern loop to Lagg, to be there for distillery opening at 1000.

Scottish whisky tours used to be free, but now virtually all are charged for, but I explored the shop, had a tasting, and chatted to the staff until my next bus at 1146, with a swift change of vehicle at Blackwaterfoot to arrive at the Lochranza distillery in time for lunch. I strolled back through the village to see the Castle and small ferry terminal on the route to Claonaig. The bus trip round the whole island is about 51 miles.

On the final day I found Brodick Castle, on the north side of the village, closed, but explored the gardens and had a pleasant two mile walk back along the beach on the "Fishermans Walk" to the port. I collected my luggage, left earlier at Copperwheats coffee shop, before boarding the new Glen Sannox back to Troon.

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An aerial photograph of the Berlin skyline at dusk. The Fernsehturm (TV Tower) is the central focus, with its illuminated sphere and red-and-white striped spire. To its left is the green-domed St. Nikolaikirche, and to its right is the modern glass skyscraper Sony Center. The city's dense urban landscape, with various buildings and rooftops, is visible in the foreground and background under a soft, pinkish-purple sky.

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HOTELS

£1m investment for hip and knee replacement at Nuffield Health



Newcastle hospital begins operations using robotic assisted surgery.

The Nuffield Hospital in Newcastle has made a huge investment in robotic assisted surgery for hip and knee replacements.

The Mako robotic arm system assists the orthopaedic surgeons and helps them to perform precision-assisted hip and knee joint replacement surgeries on-site, becoming the first private hospital in the region to employ and use Mako technology in this way.

The Mako robotic arm system aims to improve the accuracy and precision of total and partial knee and hip replacements, from the pre-surgery planning stage to assisting in the surgery itself.

"It doesn't replace the surgeon, but it means that everything can be more accurate and less invasive," said Nuffield Health Newcastle Hospital Director, Phil Middleton. "The patient gets a 3D scan of their joint and the computer software then programmes the robot to check for where incisions should be made. Once surgery is underway, the robot ensures complete accuracy which, once the implant is in place, means everything will fit precisely. This means there is less chance of any collateral damage to any tissue or muscles,

there is less swelling, reduced levels of pain and much faster healing. After an overnight stay in hospital for observation, the patient will then be allowed home to recuperate."

In other words, the introduction of a robot into the surgery means the whole procedure is more accurate and the healing process should be more rapid and successful.

"It must be stressed that the robotic arm will not replace the skill of a surgeon," adds Phil. "Even though the technology itself is impressive, it will always require a highly skilled surgeon to operate it, ensuring that patients are in experienced and knowledgeable hands. Professor David Deehan and Mr David Weir are two of the leading consultant surgeons who are already using the machine. The £1million investment also shows that Nuffield Health wants to continue at the forefront of offering patients the best healthcare in the region."

The Nuffield Health Newcastle Hospital, situated in the heart of Newcastle on Clayton Road in Jesmond, has also invested in the latest laser technology to help patients who are suffering with prostate problems. The Holmium laser removes blockages that prevent urine from flowing freely without the need for surgical incisions being made. Mr Toby Page leads the team which operates the laser to break down the enlarged prostate to reduce symptoms. It's quick and painless and everything is completed within a day.



As for prices, the robotic hip and knee replacement cost just under £20,000. The prostate HoLEP laser treatment is around £9,000

It should also be remembered that Nuffield Health is the UK's largest healthcare charity. As well as its hospitals, it also operates gyms and wellbeing centres.

One of its most popular...and free...services is offered by the Nuffield Health gyms, including the Nuffield gym in Gosforth. The joint pain programme is designed to help you self-manage your chronic joint pain and lead a more independent life.

It's a 6-month programme, which begins with 12 weeks of lifestyle advice and exercise sessions led by a rehabilitation specialist. This will equip you with the tools to better manage your pain.

If you are interested in discussing any of the medical procedures on offer at Nuffield Health, the best idea is to check their website...www.nuffieldhealth.com or call them on 0191 2816 131. If you are interested in the joint care programme, you can apply online or call the Gosforth gym on 0191 213 0070



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Success doesn't happen by chance

Watching Newcastle United dismantle Liverpool with such an inspiring and dominant performance was truly incredible.

I love seeing teams and individuals, at any level, push their limits, achieve their goals, and prove that extraordinary things are possible with the right mindset and effort.

Just like Newcastle United, success in any way requires patience, commitment, and an unwavering heart. Playing in a cup final with a 70-year trophy drought hanging over them, Newcastle carried the weight of the city's hopes and expectations. Yet, they delivered with incredible control and will to win.

Since Newcastle's victory, the energy and positivity have been amazing. I've used it as

motivation to refocus many of my clients, showing them that change and progress are always within reach.

If you're looking to improve your life, whether through better health, weight loss, increased self-esteem, or overall well-being, take inspiration from Newcastle's journey under Eddie Howe. Success doesn't happen by chance; it requires relentless hard work, just as this team has shown through discipline, vision, and dedication.

Here are key lessons from Newcastle's success that you can apply to your own life:

- Set a plan.
- Define short and long-term goals.
- Build step by step.
- Make small adjustments when things aren't working.
- Be patient.
- Give full commitment.
- Never give up.
- Seek help when needed.



- Focus on your journey, not others' progress.
- Stay consistent with what works for you.
- Maintain a positive mindset—there's always a way forward.
- Never lose sight of your goals.
- Keep going until you reach your ultimate objective.

For the past 30 years, I've been passionate about helping ordinary people achieve extraordinary things. That's what keeps me motivated!

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...David's summing up...
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Barry Speker OBE

Comment

By Barry Speker OBE

The crew of the Blue Origin's Shepard rocket was the first all female space flight since 1963. On that earlier flight, Valentina Tereshkova orbited the earth 48 times in a mission lasting three days.

This time the Blue Origin founder and multi-billionaire Jeff Bezos launched his fiancée Lauren Sanchez, and five other fashionably outfitted and coiffed influencers including Katie Perry, on a flight lasting a total of 11 minutes.

Sufficient time to experience weightlessness and for Katie Perry to see the moon and sing 'What a wonderful world'. Who can begrudge them the title of 'astronauts', and of being pioneers in making space travel affordable - estimated cost \$450,000 a seat?

Elon Musk's Space X flights can cost as much as \$220m, but lasting more than 11 minutes. A case of holiday bragging rights?

This latest trip may have been a good advertisement for 'Wicked' and perhaps Katie should have sung 'Defying Gravity'.

The unanimous decision of the Supreme Court has been heralded as 'Sanity Restored' and a return of common sense. After ten years of determined litigation, mainly by the group 'For Woman of Scotland' supported by J K Rowling, the Supreme Court has proclaimed that the a woman is an adult female, and that references in the Equality Act 2010 to 'sex'

and 'woman' relate to biological sex and biological women.

All five of the senior judges agreed what millions knew instinctively to be true, namely that biological sex, and not the expression of subjective gender identity, is the only meaningful qualification to womanhood.

That such a matter should have needed this judgment is the result of the political and cultural establishment, the SNP, much of the Labour Party, and countless public bodies and universities and the likes of Stonewall insisting that men could simply speak themselves into female-only spaces, female sports and prisons.

What now of women who lost their livelihoods and reputations for pointing out the scientific certainty; Kathleen Stock, the academic hounded out of Sussex University or Maya Forstater, sacked from a think tank for her gender critical views? Where were the defenders of free speech in their cases?

The trans activists immediately criticised the Supreme Court decision suggesting it was anti-trans and that the senior white judges were out of touch and could not be trusted to decide this issue. That is preposterous. But if the critics take the trouble to read the 65 page judgment, they will see how soundly argued and unassailable it is. Important it is also to note the emphasis on the obvious fact that 'gender reassignment' is itself a specific protected characteristic under the Equality Act, and remains so, guaranteeing the right of trans people to be treated with respect and compassion and to live peacefully and free from discrimination.

It is to be hoped that political leaders, nationally and locally, institutions and universities will respect the judgment and make changes to policies and services to enable women to live safely in female only spaces and places.

The recent unlawful demonstrations, hooliganism and criminal damage by trans supporters need firm control and respect for the rule of law.

Let us hope that we are not heading for a 'summer of discontent'. The bin strikes in Birmingham, proving difficult to resolve, are said by the unions to raise the prospect of walk-outs by teachers, civil servants



and junior doctors. Similarities are drawn with the winter of discontent in 1978-79 characterised by crippling strikes under James Callaghan, then Labour Prime Minister.

The Government's proposed employment rights legislation may make it easier for unions to succeed with ballots to strike. What will be the cost of more high priced pay settlements?

I was honoured to be invited by Maria-Cristina Falzon, (Romanian consul) President of the The Consular Corps of Newcastle upon Tyne to propose the toast to the Corps at their recent glittering Annual Dinner held at the Grand Hotel Gosforth.

The Corps was founded in 1909 as the Association of Consuls in Newcastle upon Tyne. The Consuls represent and protect their citizens and promote trade, economic relations and cultural exchange. Member consuls include Belgium, France, Germany, Iceland, Latvia and Romania.

It was interesting to note that back in 1938 there were 32 consuls in Newcastle and the countries represented included Ottoman Empire, Persia and Austria-Hungary. With NUCF being back in Europe, maybe a few more consuls are needed to protect hordes of visiting football supporters experiencing cultural exchange.

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