

NORTHERN

INSIGHT

June 2025

Issue 113

**4 years of Bonded Digital & Media:
Creativity, Connection and the Road Ahead**

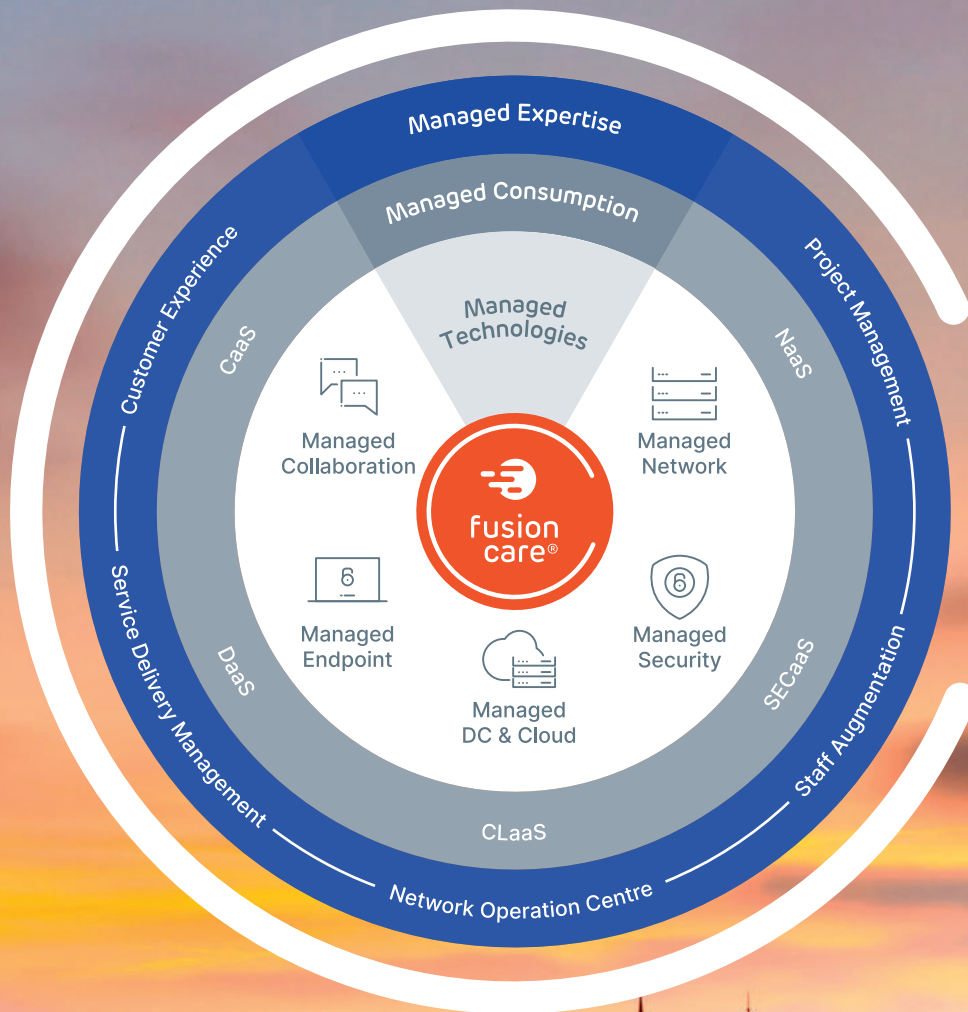
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FOREWORD

Welcome to the June issue of Northern Insight

We are delighted to bring you another vibrant showcase of the people, business and ideas that continue to shape and energise the North East.

Our cover stars are Bonded Digital and Media who are celebrating their 4th birthday.

Within a plethora of weighty business features look out for our "Big Interview" which shows how Williams Ali became FRP's Corporate Finance Powerhouse in Newcastle.

In our Charity of the Month slot we showcase the outstanding Teesside Hospice who have provided specialist care to people with life limiting illness for over 40 years.

On our travels we visit the new Dakota Hotel which is a wonderful addition to the regions hospitality sector.

We do hope this issue leaves you with a fresh perspective, renewed enthusiasm and a deep connection to the people and the possibilities around you.

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

MTG

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



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Jerry J Clothing presents “Born to Elevate” Fashion Show

Jerry J Clothing, founded by creative visionary Lamin Gibba, proudly announces its debut runway show, “Born to Elevate”, taking place on June 11th at The Boiler Shop as part of Graduate Fashion Week in Newcastle.

This bold, culturally rich collection is a fusion of Lamin's Gambian heritage and British contemporary fashion, offering a unique and vibrant perspective on identity, tradition, and innovation.

“This show is about more than clothes—it's about where I come from, where I'm going, and who I want to bring with me,” says Lamin Gibba.

“Through fashion, I'm telling a story of identity, pride, and possibility. I want people to see what's possible when you honour your roots and dream big.”

With three years of experience as a dresser at London Fashion Week, Lamin is now bringing high-fashion energy to Newcastle with a debut show that reflects both his roots and his future.

The “Born to Elevate” collection is entirely made in The Gambia, a tribute to Lamin's homeland and commitment to ethical fashion. Each garment embodies Jerry J Clothing's ethos—Life of Elevated People—celebrating personal growth, cultural connection, and bold creativity. Co-founded with his son Jackson, the brand is a symbol of their shared journey and legacy.

Beyond the runway, Lamin is using fashion as a tool for positive change—supporting local artisans in The Gambia, encouraging international collaboration, and promoting sustainable garment production to uplift communities.



BIPC North East Celebrates a Year of Outstanding Impact for Local Businesses

The Business & Intellectual Property Centre (BIPC) has had a phenomenal year supporting businesses across the North East, offering expert advice, training, and fully funded support that has made a real difference to hundreds of entrepreneurs and small businesses.

Sarah Turnbull, Economic Development Officer at Newcastle City Council, praised the programme's transformative impact: “The BIPC offers a free service for anyone at any stage of their business journey— from idea to growth or diversification. Based across main libraries in the North East we provide access to expert advice, market intelligence, and research databases to help businesses find grants, analyse competitors, and identify opportunities.”

Throughout the year, BIPC North East has helped around 1,000 businesses access vital support, with over 400 businesses receiving 12 hours of expert advice through the Citylife Business Support Grant. Additionally, nearly 500 potential entrepreneurs were helped to become enterprise-ready through partner organisations like The Millin Charity and Reviving the Heart of the West End.

From networking events to one-to-one mentoring, the BIPC's support is completely free, thanks to funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

‘Pivotal’ business coach praised as GeoAccess set to post record £13.6m turnover

The co-founders of a fast-growing business have praised the “pivotal” role an award-winning coach has played in helping drive forward their success.

A flurry of new contracts has helped GeoAccess' senior management team expand from five people to 25 – with the company on track to post a record turnover of £13.6m.

That figure has almost trebled since the Staffordshire-based company started working with scaling-up coach Ian Kinnery, a previous European Business Coach of the Year who has helped grow hundreds of businesses over the past two decades.

Managing Director Mark Coleman first contacted Ian via LinkedIn around three years ago and said both he and the business have “grown beyond belief” due to the coach's help.

“From the moment we first spoke we just hit it off, and there was something about Ian that just clicked,” said Mark.

“He has helped us grow exponentially, while as a person, I've grown beyond belief and that's transpired into the business also growing beyond belief.

“He's played an enormous part in scaling this business, which now has 25 people within the core team and 175 people in the wider team.

“Before we worked with Ian, we were turning over between £3.5 and £4m and now we are set to hit £13.6m – and a massive factor has been Ian's help and input.”

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New HQ to enable cost comparison business' growth

Procure Smart has taken over a 5,000 sq ft space at Doxford International Business Park in Sunderland as it seeks to increase its workforce.

The move coincides with the appointment of industry specialist Victoria Walton, who has joined as Head of People to help the business scale.

The company was launched two years ago, having previously been based in Sunderland city centre. It opened an office in Manchester city centre in January 2025.

With Procure Smart's latest annual report showing a 220% increase in revenue, and headcount more than doubling, the leadership team

decided it was the right to move its headquarters to larger premises to allow it to meet its future ambitions and Doxford Works proved the ideal location.

Craig Shields, Managing Director of Procure Smart, said: "This is a really exciting time for everyone in the business as we move into our next phase of growth. The move to the new HQ gives us a top-spec office with excellent facilities and room to continue growing the team."

Victoria brings more than 25 years of leadership experience in people, recruitment, and management across the private sector, including fintech, B2B, and consultancy environments.

"It's a hugely exciting time to be joining the business," she said. "Procure Smart has had an impressive first two years, with really significant growth."

Procure Smart helps businesses find the most cost-effective energy and utility suppliers, allowing customers to save time and money.

The firm made waves in 2024 by launching its pioneering Switch Savvi platform which can provide businesses with a quote in seconds, making procuring utilities more transparent and helping businesses streamline and improve the procurement process.



Pure Bliss introduces head spa experience to Sunderland salon

Award-winning beauty salon Pure Bliss is thrilled to announce the official launch of its new Head Spa service. Combining advanced techniques with luxurious treatments, the Head Spa @ Pure Bliss promises to rejuvenate both the body and mind, offering a moment of tranquillity and rejuvenation.

Pure Bliss is an indulgent haven nestled just a stone's throw from Seaburn beach. With an ethos embedded in the salon to offer exceptional and high-end service in a relaxed and non-pretentious environment, the new service promises an unparalleled experience that blends relaxation with outstanding hair and scalp care expertise.

The sought after viral TikTok trend is proving a hit with clients and promises the ultimate MOT for the scalp.

Bidding to bring businesses together...

A Sunderland initiative has turned matchmaker – boosting business by bringing companies together.

Sunderland BID's affiliate scheme gives non-levy paying companies the opportunity to enjoy some of the services it provides for its city centre and Seafront businesses and, most importantly, encourages collaboration.

These include unique networking opportunities and invitations to a range of events, meetings and training sessions.

And it was through the scheme that owners at city centre restaurant Rumour Has It met the team at digital marketing agency Phonetic Digital.

Now, not only has Phonetic Digital provided a new website for the restaurant at Green Terrace, but it is about to start work on a second, for the venue's upstairs bar, The Terrace.

"Being a member of the affiliate scheme has absolutely made sense for us," said Steven Parker, managing director of Phonetic Digital, which is based at the Collective at Mackie's Corner.

"We're actually too small to be a levy payer, but, as a city centre business, we clearly benefit from everything Sunderland BID does for the city."

"So, the affiliate scheme – which we pay a fee to join – enables us to still support the BID and contribute to what they're doing."

"Since we became an affiliate in August 2024, we have enjoyed numerous benefits and been invited to networking lunches and so forth that we might not have been part of before."

"It's enabled us to feel plugged in to the city centre – and that's been a real benefit to us."

Lynsay Foster, who owns Rumour Has It



with husband David, said: "We'd been needing a website for a while. And now, not only do we have an absolutely fantastic site in place – and another on the way – but we've built an ongoing relationship with the team at Phonetic Digital."

More than 30 businesses from a diverse range of industries have already joined the BID's affiliate scheme and numbers are steadily rising.

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4 YEARS OF BONDED DIGITAL & MEDIA

Somewhere Along the Way, Connection Got Lost. We Don't Accept That.

Running and growing a business for four years doesn't leave much time to pause. But in the lead-up to our fourth birthday, we've taken a moment to reflect on how far we've come, and on what still drives us. From a wide-eyed, ambitious startup to an award-winning digital and media agency, one thing has never changed: our belief in the power of connection.

In recent years, we've grown alongside a wave of technological change, with AI at the forefront. We've embraced it using AI to boost performance, strengthen strategy, and enhance creativity. It's opened doors, helped us move faster, and brought new levels of precision to our work.



But with that growth comes new questions. Where does creativity really come from? What's lost when content is generated instead of lived? And what happens when speed overtakes substance?

At Bonded, we've always believed that creativity begins with what's real. For us, connection isn't a buzzword it's the foundation of everything we do. And if the past year has taught us anything, it's how important that foundation really is.

In the fast pace of agency life (pitches, meetings, deliverables flying out the door) it's easy to miss the quiet moments. But it's in those moments that the most meaningful work begins. It's the spark of an idea in a Friday wrap-up. It's listening to a client and providing them with the space to feel heard. It's the collaboration that happens not because it's scheduled, but because people genuinely care.

You won't find those moments in a performance dashboard. But they shape our thinking. They guide our work. And they've reminded us that the best content, the kind that resonates, isn't just well-made. It's honest and it's human.





So instead of waiting for some grand “reconnection renaissance,” we decided to start building it ourselves, and help our clients do the same. We want to help brands reconnect with what matters most: their people, their purpose, and their truth. Because connection isn’t a sales tactic. It’s a human need. And when it’s built with honesty, emotion, and intent, it creates more than results. It builds trust. It builds loyalty. It builds brands that last.

That’s why we launched Content & Create earlier this year.

It’s our full-service, storytelling-first content solution. A single strategic offer that brings together branded documentaries, photography, short-form edits, and organic phone content, blending creativity and performance without compromising on connection. It’s designed to help brands speak more clearly, more honestly, and more meaningfully to the people that matter most.

Because somewhere along the way, content became louder, faster, more polished, but less personal. And we don’t accept that.

“BECAUSE IF THE LAST FOUR YEARS HAVE TAUGHT US ANYTHING, IT’S THAT STORYTELLING THAT MATTERS DOESN’T CHASE TRENDS. IT TELLS THE TRUTH.”

We do use AI. But not as a replacement for creativity, only as a tool to enhance it. It helps us move faster, edit smarter, and refine our output. But it doesn’t create ideas for us. Our inspiration still comes from lived experience, culture, conversation, and relationships. The things that make content feel real and relevant.

Used well, AI can enhance the human touch. Used poorly, it risks replacing it. And we all know, it’s easier to lose an audience than to build one. So, as you think about your next piece of content, ask yourself: is it built on something real? Is it grounded in human insight, or shaped by a shortcut? Connection doesn’t come from convenience. It comes from care.

That’s the mindset we’re taking into our next four years. So where are we heading?



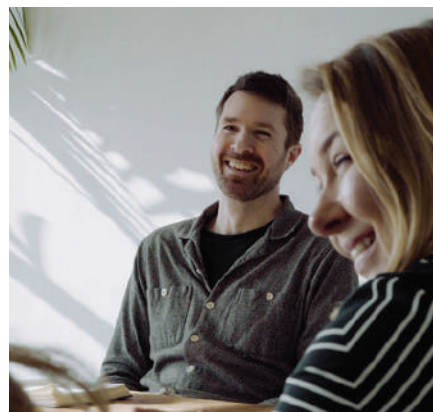
The truth is, we don’t know and not even AI can tell us. But what we do know is that our focus won’t shift. People, and our belief in meaningful connection, will remain our constant. And with Content & Create now leading our visual output, we’re more committed than ever to helping our clients build work that resonates, not just for reach, but for real connection.

Because if the last four years have taught us anything, it’s that storytelling that matters doesn’t chase trends. It tells the truth.

And as creatives, we have a responsibility to protect that truth. To keep storytelling grounded in reality. To use AI with purpose, not passively. And to pass that mindset on to the next generation.

Connection is still the most powerful tool we have.

Let’s not lose it.



www.bondedagency.com

“

*...I'm
incredibly
excited about
the future for
Sunderland...*

Sharon Appleby

Sunderland BID leads city's transformation

Seafront and Sheepfolds areas join city centre's growth vision.



There are currently over 330 Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) across the UK...and Sunderland is one of them.

But Sunderland doesn't want to just follow a sort of template which is used by other towns and cities. They want to lead from the front...be innovative.

And it's working. In fact, Sunderland's BID has been so successful that the team are often asked by other BID schemes if they can visit Sunderland to see what they're up to and how the city is doing so well.

Just in case you don't know what a BID scheme is, they are business led partnerships, working to improve specific areas by offering additional services or initiatives that enhance the business environment. The schemes are funded by a levy on businesses within the BID area and aim to increase footfall, improve business performance, and enhance the overall area.

Chief Executive, Sharon Appleby, is leading the Sunderland BID vision for the future.

"We have one overriding aim, and that is to make Sunderland a thriving city with a vision for future growth," said Sharon who's worked in Sunderland for over 20 years and knows what makes the city tick. "Since our inception in 2014, we have injected over £6 million into enhancing the city centre. Through the backing of our levy payers, business stakeholders, and essential partners, we have formulated a pragmatic and attainable blueprint for the future which includes expanding the BID area to include Sheepfolds and the Seafront.

"With the addition of those two areas to the original Sunderland BID scheme which covers the city centre, it means we can promote more of the assets that the city has to offer, ensure that as many parts of Sunderland are connected and allow us to push forward with new initiatives such as tourism. The Seafront area and its wonderful beaches is an obvious attraction for the leisure and hospitality sectors. Sheepfolds is a popular venue offering a mix of independent bars, restaurants, events, live entertainment and leisure operators, all coming together to create a wonderful venue on the banks of the River Wear. By including these two new areas in the BID it allows businesses from more of Sunderland to get involved."

Sharon not only exudes real passion as leader of the Sunderland BID, but she is also a member of the nationwide British BID's Advisory Board and can promote Sunderland to a national audience.

"It's staggering to see what's happened to Sunderland over the last decade, but the next decade is going to be equally exciting, creating opportunities for everyone. A Premiership Football Club, and Crown Works Studios which is going to be a major film and TV studio complex. The £450m project will revitalise the area around the Northern Spire Bridge, create up to 8000 jobs, and boost the North East's creative industries.

"Sunderland University is thriving. It's great to see people born here, educated here, and have a great career here. Sunderland College is also leading the way with several new initiatives including the Housing Innovation & Construction Skills Academy which will train people to work in the region's housing industry. I really do see a bright future for young people coming through.

British E-sports also is headquartered in Sunderland and this hugely exciting and growing career is another reason that the future is bright for our young people.

"The most encouraging thing is that we are seeing a steady increase in the level of interest in Sunderland from businesses nationally and internationally. We are constantly talking to businesses...and the fascinating thing is that they come from every sector imaginable. I'm incredibly excited about the future for Sunderland."

Sunderland BID: Transforming Sunderland for a vibrant future.

If you'd like more information about the Sunderland BID, what it does and how it operates, check their website www.sunderlandbid.co.uk You can also contact Sharon Appleby directly on 0191 722 1002/07740 175230 or email sharon.appleby@sunderlandbid.co.uk





Gillespie Recruitment celebrate their 4th birthday!

The event was superbly kicked off by Paul Cheetham on how, in our future world of Artificial Intelligence, human empathy will be crucial in building lasting business relationships.

A great time was had by our clients, colleagues and friends who showed warmth, empathy, and real human connection.

Thank you to everyone who came along and who helped create such a meaningful experience!





In conversation with...

Teresa Peters

Accelerator Coaching Ltd

What were your career ambitions growing up?

I had a few big dreams! I wanted to be a GP — I've always felt called to help people feel better and be happy. I also sang and performed throughout my teenage years and assumed I'd follow that path. My mum had schizophrenia, and I spent a lot of time visiting her in hospital, often singing with the patients to lift their spirits. Those early experiences sparked my desire to connect with people.

Tell us about your current role.

I'm the founder of Accelerator Coaching Ltd and a senior EMCC-accredited executive and team coach. I work across sectors — from the NHS and Yorkshire County Cricket Club to hospitality, and local businesses. I deliver Emotional Capital Reports (ECRs), which assess 10 key leadership competencies, 360's, alongside DISC profiling. I'm known for my "yellow brand" energy — bringing clarity, resilience, and positivity to every space I step into.

What is your proudest business achievement?

We paused our publishing company (we printed 32 recipe books over 10 years) to focus on Accelerator Coaching — and I haven't looked back. Delivering a live workshop at the Northeast Expo with my son in the audience was incredibly special. Overall, I'm proud to have built something true to who I am, that gives me financial freedom, while being present for my kids and keeping active.

How has your industry changed in the last decade?

Coaching is more human than ever. Emotional awareness and self-management are now essential, especially with the rise of AI. Leaders don't just need strategies — they need space to think and tools to adapt. Team coaching has become increasingly important too, particularly in hybrid work settings. My work focuses on creating safe, open spaces where people can connect, grow, and lead authentically.



Teresa Peters

What are you currently working on?

I'm coaching across the UK CDFI network and co-delivering a leadership programme for over 200 oil and gas leaders with Teesside University International Business School. I continue to support the team at Headlam Hall, a family-run hotel, and have recently started working with Yorkshire County Cricket Club. With new contracts in the pipeline, I'll soon be expanding my team of associates to meet demand.

Tell us about the clients you work with.

One day I'm coaching a spa manager stepping into leadership, another I'm supporting a CEO through complex board-level decisions. I also work with entrepreneurs energising new leadership teams.

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

"Find out who you are and do it on purpose." Thanks Dolly Parton!

What has been your biggest challenge?

Holding space for others means I have to be intentional about creating space for myself. I absorb a lot emotionally and show up fully

for my clients, so protecting my energy is essential.

Who are your heroes?

Annie Lee, my coach, helped me believe in myself during lockdown when I launched this next chapter. Tina Turner inspires me with her strength and authenticity. And my husband Duncy keeps me grounded — he's calm, kind, and reminds me not to worry what others think. He's my anchor when life gets noisy.

How do you unwind?

I run (currently training for Kilimanjaro!), sing around the piano with my teens, and walk with Duncy and our Border Collie. One of my "50 things before I'm 50" is to travel for work in my campervan — it's my version of freedom, nature, and space to decompress. I love it.

Favourite book or boxset?

I'm not into fiction — I'm drawn to real stories and personal development. If it helps people grow, I'm all in.

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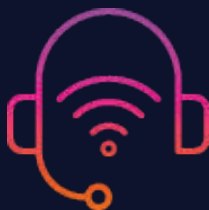
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Commercial Litigation and Dispute Resolution expert joins Hay & Kilner

Full service law firm Hay & Kilner has appointed Leigh Ferguson as a Partner in their growing commercial litigation and dispute resolution team. Based at The Lumen in Newcastle's Helix, Leigh will focus on growing the firm's intellectual property and fraud offering along with insolvency and restructuring as these services often interlink.

Leigh has a broad range of experience across all aspects of commercial litigation and dispute resolution as well as insolvency claims.

With one of the largest teams in the North East and a wealth of experience across a wide range of disputes and sectors, Leigh and the team get involved at the onset to help resolve matters at an early stage saving clients valuable time and money, helping them mitigate risk to reputation and maintaining valuable relationships. The team works with all sizes of business from start-ups to SMEs across all business sectors ranging from manufacturing to hospitality.

Leigh joins Hay & Kilner from the Newcastle office of a national legal firm. She's spent her career working in the North East for both Newcastle and Teesside firms and has strong links across the region.



Coleman James appoints Paul Metcalfe as Non-Executive Director

Coleman James, a leading specialist recruiter in Construction, Rail, and Facilities Management, has appointed experienced business consultant Paul Metcalfe as Non-Executive Director. This strategic addition comes as the company continues to scale.

Paul Metcalfe joins the board alongside Managing Director Andrew Mackay, Operations Director Sandra Kennedy, and Outsourced Finance Director Dan Cooper of Ryecroft Glenton.

Director Beth Cullen has also recently joined the Coleman James board, reflecting her deep knowledge of both the business and key sectors, as well as her responsibility for the consultancy's Construction, Civil Engineering, Facilities Management and Rail teams.

Paul has extensive experience in scaling and selling recruitment businesses, having previously led AndersElite to a £100m turnover and founded Fusion People, which achieved a global turnover of £150m. Since 2017, Paul has helped the growth of several other recruitment businesses in a consultancy capacity.

At Coleman James, he will leverage his expertise to help the company target a £20m turnover within the next five years.



Swinburne Maddison Appoints new Head of Family

Swinburne Maddison LLP, one of the North East's leading law firms, is delighted to announce the promotion of Catherine Lowther to Head of its Family Department.

Managing Associate, Catherine has been a key member of the firm since joining as a Trainee Solicitor in 2014. Qualifying in 2016, she has progressed rapidly and was appointed as Managing Associate in 2022. Swinburne Maddison is delighted to announce her appointment as Head of the Family Department—marking over a decade of exceptional service and commitment to the firm.

Catherine is widely recognised for her technical excellence and client-first approach in complex family law matters, including divorce, financial remedy cases, and child arrangements—often acting for high-net-worth individuals with diverse asset portfolios. Her focus on bespoke solutions and empathetic, honest guidance has earned her a trusted reputation among clients and peers alike.

Committed to resolving family disputes amicably, Catherine obtained an additional qualification in Collaborative Law in 2024, enhancing the firm's offering in alternative dispute resolution.



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SANDERSON
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A VERY FINE SELECTION OF PROPERTIES



The Rare division of Sanderson Young was established many years ago to highlight the marketing and sale of beautiful homes, which offer unique accommodation in fabulous settings. One such property is the Ghyllheugh Estate which I am delighted to launch to the open market. This prestigious country estate, north of Morpeth, has over 153 acres of impressive gardens and grounds, including woodland and pastureland, as well as 1.5 miles of salmon fishing on the River Coquet. The magnificent principal residence is supported by 6 ancillary properties, each with their own investment income. Estates of this kind are very rarely available within the North of England and it is our pleasure and privilege to be able to launch Ghyllheugh.

Elsewhere in the region, we have seen an increasing number of investments in private houses of a significant nature and value. I am aware of at least a dozen houses in, and close to, Newcastle where investment of between £5 Million and over £10 Million is taking place and this is something to be

incredibly proud of within the region.

The search for high value, quality and impeccable living standards often requires extensive knowledge, not just of the region where you live but of individual and private homes secretly hidden in a variety of locations. Our private office and search facility is available for such buyers, who wish to keep their exclusive homes quiet and low profile with their move.

2025 is proving to be very busy for us with significant levels of increased business being transacted at all price levels. I do very much hope that we can help you with your move in 2025 and look forward to hearing from you by email duncan.young@sandersonyoung.co.uk or by contacting our central rare office on **0191 223 3500**.

rare!
From Sanderson Young

Duncan Young
Chairman
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The Ghyllheugh Estate

Longhorsley, Morpeth

Located in magnificent grounds of 153 acres with 1½ miles of salmon fishing on the river Coquet, is this superb country estate, comprising of the principal, seven bedroom Ghyllheugh house with a beautiful array of outbuildings and stunning formal gardens. The estate also includes Ghyllfoot, a four bedroom detached house in its own grounds, two bedroom Gardener's Cottage, the Clocktower with outbuildings and a two bedroom flat above, a two bedroom studio annex, and two semi detached lodge cottages with three bedrooms and outbuildings. The formal grounds include 63 acres of woodland and 63 acres of pasture land. Ghyllheugh is an impressive estate in mid Northumberland with good accessibility to Newcastle International Airport and rail links to Edinburgh and London Kings Cross. Council Tax: G.



All confidential enquiries to Duncan Young:
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Whitehill House

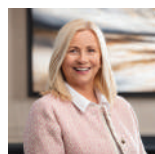
Beal Farm, Beal, Northumberland

A fabulous, stone built detached house, occupying a magnificent elevated site at Beal, with fantastic uninterrupted views to Holy Island, Bamburgh Castle and the stunning coastline. This excellent family home, converted from a former farm steading around 35 years ago, has gardens of circa 0.7 acres with generous parking, a detached double garage and an independent office/studio which could be incorporated into the main house. Council Tax Band: E.



5 3 3 D

Price Guide:
Offers over £950,000



Ashleigh Sundin
0191 223 3500
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SANDERSON
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High Gardens

Front Street, Whitburn

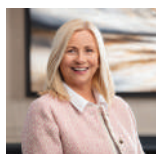
High Gardens is an outstanding family home occupying a delightful garden site of circa 1.25 acres in the heart of Whitburn Village, within walking distance of the beach. This special, very private property, architect designed and built in 1999 in an 'Arts & Crafts' style and into a delightful late 1700s/early 1800s walled garden, offers impressive, stylish accommodation including a fabulous leisure wing.

Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax Band: H.



5 5 4 D

Price Guide:
£2.5 Million



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NEL Fund Managers reports record quarter, while completing largest NPIF II deal

North East based investment company NEL Fund Managers has achieved a record-breaking quarter, securing its largest deal to date alongside a series of strategic investments across diverse sectors and locations.

Spanning from Northumberland to Tees Valley, the fund manager has delivered key investments through NPIF II - NEL Smaller Loans Fund and NPIF II - NEL Debt Finance Fund which are both managed by the recently expanded team at NEL, as part of the Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund II (NPIF II), reinforcing its commitment to driving regional business growth.

Paul Scott CEO of NEL commented: "It's been a fabulous performance by the team in what can only be described as a volatile business environment. With the support of British Business Bank as an investor, it's great to see NEL's value proposition resonating with SME's, intermediaries and see the results coming through as we execute at pace against our long term strategy."



Develop North backs £3.5m South Tyneside retail scheme

North East investment company Develop North PLC (Develop North), managed by Newcastle-based fund management specialists Tier One Capital (Tier One), has provided £2.4 million in funding to support the development of a new £3.5 million retail scheme on a brownfield site in South Shields, South Tyneside.

The scheme, which is being delivered by Newcastle-based developer Modo Bloc, has secured planning permission and is now underway on land off Claypath Lane and the A194. It will include four roadside retail units, featuring a drive-through Starbucks, Greggs, Indigo Sun Retail, and eight EV charging stations. The

development is expected to create up to 40 new jobs once fully operational.

Contractor Castle House Projects is delivering the construction phase, which is expected to take around nine months to complete. The scheme is the latest in a series of successful developments to receive backing from Develop North, which has a strong track record of supporting commercial and mixed-use regeneration across the region.

Develop North, which is listed on the main market of the London Stock Exchange, provides finance solutions of between £0.5 million and £5 million to credible professionals and businesses across the North of England and Scotland.

Since its inception in 2017, the fund has deployed almost £100 million in capital to support over 40 projects, creating more than 3,200 jobs and helping deliver a gross development value of nearly £250 million.

George Jenkins, Managing Director at Modo Bloc, said: "We're pleased to bring a neglected site back into productive use and to support the regeneration of this part of South Tyneside with a high-quality roadside retail offer. Developments like this provide long-term economic and consumer value by creating jobs, enhancing local amenities and encouraging further investment in the area.

"This scheme shows what can be achieved with a strong local development team and the right funding partner. We're delighted to be working with Develop North and Castle House Projects to bring it forward."

Brendan O'Grady, Fund Manager at Tier One, the investment adviser to Develop North, said: "This is another example of how Develop North funding is helping unlock well-planned developments that deliver real community and commercial value across the North East.

"It's exactly the kind of project we aim to support, one that regenerates brownfield land, creates jobs, and delivers long-term economic benefit. Our role is to provide the financial support that allows credible developers like Modo Bloc to move quickly and confidently through the development process."



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INTERESTING TIMES

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

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

ONE SUBJECT | THREE TIPS



You shouldn't have to choose between running a business and taking a break. If everything falls apart when you're not around, the problem isn't time off - it's how things are set up. Here's how to start creating a business that works even when you're not in the room.

1. Share your numbers

Most businesses rely too heavily on the owner to interpret the numbers. Start by sharing monthly summaries with your team. Show them what matters: sales targets, margins, debtor days, or whatever drives performance. The more people understand the numbers, the more they help improve them. It also helps remove the mystery from finance, so your team feels more confident making decisions.

2. Systemise repeatable tasks

Anything you do more than once should have a system. Not a 47-page manual just a repeatable, sensible process. Start with the basics: how invoices are raised, how credit control is handled, how you track overdue tasks. Even simple checklists can save time and reduce errors. Over time, this creates more consistency and helps the business feel more professional.

3. Make reporting a regular habit

Good reporting creates consistency. Weekly sales numbers, monthly project updates, quarterly financial reviews, these schedules mean progress doesn't stall just because you're no there. Everyone knows what to expect and when to deliver it. It also gives you peace of mind, knowing that key areas are being tracked and nothing important is slipping through the cracks.

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.

WIN

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INTERESTING QUOTE



You can have everything you love in life as long as you give up what you hate.
Dan Sullivan.

JUST ONE THING

"Here. Mark. If you had to suggest **Just One Thing** to help my business financially (and my life!) – what would it be?"

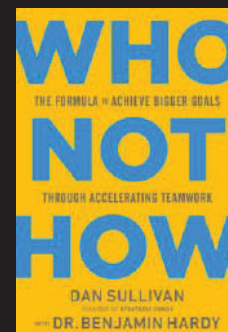
If you disappeared for a month, what would nobody else know how to do? Fixing that one thing could change how your business operates and give you your first proper holiday in years. It's often a small task, but removing it from your plate can free up headspace and help others step up."

HAVE A READ

Who Not How. Dan Sullivan.

This is a quick read with a powerful message: stop asking "How do I do this?" and start asking "Who can do this for me?" It's about creating freedom in your business by building the right support around you. Simple, practical, and ideal for business owners who are too involved in everything.

£10(ish) online. **Mark Melville**



INTERESTED?

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On Tyne urges businesses to embrace AI-powered bookkeeping ahead of major tax changes on time

Juliet McKenna, founder of On Tyne Consultancy Ltd, is calling on businesses and accountants to get up to speed with the latest AI-driven bookkeeping technology before a significant tax transformation takes effect.

With Making Tax Digital for Income Tax (MTD IT) set to roll out in 2026, many sole traders and landlords will soon be required to submit tax returns digitally multiple times a year. Juliet, an experienced bookkeeper and early adopter of AI bookkeeping systems, is helping businesses and accountants streamline their financial processes through automation.

Operating from Gateshead, On Tyne Consultancy specialises in integrating accounting software, and utilising advanced AI applications, making bookkeeping faster, more efficient, and more accurate. Juliet has been instrumental in helping develop and demonstrate Jack AI, an intelligent bookkeeping assistant created by Jenesys AI. This technology learns from transactions, recognises patterns, and automates processes, significantly reducing manual input for bookkeepers and business owners alike.

"AI bookkeeping is transforming the industry," says Juliet. "With tools like Jack AI, businesses can automate purchase invoice and receipt processing, reconcile bank transactions, and streamline their accounting systems—saving time and significantly reducing costly errors. But it's crucial to start automating now before MTD IT makes digital tax filing mandatory for many small businesses."

Gourmet sandwich shop plans summer opening with big plans for versatile venue

The co-founder of one of the North East's best loved pizzerias has turned her hand to artisan sandwiches as her new business prepares to launch in Jesmond this summer, thanks to legal support from Mincoffs Solicitors.

Work is currently underway to transform the former Richard Granger Wines unit at West Jesmond Metro into Awesome Franks, the brainchild of Scream for Pizza co-founder Alex Walker.

The venue, which is named after Alex's son and his love for superheroes, will initially open as a gourmet sandwich shop showcasing locally sourced ingredients and products, with further plans to launch Frank's Imaginarium in 2026 – an immersive play café and learning zone for families on the other side of the building.

Following her departure from Scream for Pizza in 2024, Alex studied bread making with celebrity baker Richard Bertinet



at The Bertinet Kitchen Cookery School to prepare for the new venture, which will also stock a selection of bread from North East small batch bakery Northern Rye.

Mincoffs' licensing and gaming partner Matt Foster supported Alex in acquiring the licence for Awesome Franks, which will also sell a range of deli and general grocery items, along with its own branded flour.



Johnston Carmichael boosts Newcastle Team

Leading UK accountancy and business advisory firm Johnston Carmichael has strengthened its offering in the North East with a series of new appointments across tax and audit.

Will Hamilton joins as a Senior Manager, bringing 24 years' experience in corporate tax compliance and strategic planning. Rebecca McColl, also a Senior Manager, brings strong expertise in R&D and innovation tax reliefs, while Zita Duggan, appointed as Manager, specialises in employee share schemes and tax-efficient remuneration

structures. Joining alongside them is Alex Atkinson, a new trainee embarking on his professional journey with the firm as part of Johnston Carmichael's commitment to nurturing future talent.

Since launching its Newcastle office in 2023, Johnston Carmichael has experienced rapid growth, expanding to a team of 18 people and relocating to larger office spaces in both August 2024 and April 2025 to support its future ambitions.

The firm now advises a wide range of entrepreneurial businesses, scale-ups and established companies across the North East.

Paul Shields, Partner and Head of the Newcastle office, said: "We're proud to be growing a team that brings together both experienced specialists and the next generation of talent. While the expertise that Will, Rebecca and Zita bring will play a vital role in our continued expansion, it's equally exciting to welcome new trainees at the start of their careers. Supporting and developing rising talent is a key part of our long-term commitment to the region."

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HAS THE PENNY DROPPED YET?

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Inside the Deal

*Keith Newman interviews
Phil Williams and Abu Ali, Partners
at FRP Corporate Finance.*

How WilliamsAli became FRP's Corporate Finance Powerhouse in Newcastle.

It's a bright, crisp afternoon in Newcastle as I sit down in a stunning historical building nestled within the city walls—a place that now houses one of the North East's most dynamic and respected corporate finance teams. I'm here with Phil Williams and Abu Ali, co-founders of WilliamsAli, and now Partners at FRP Corporate Finance, following FRP's acquisition of their business in 2024.

We're seated in their iconic city centre home, a modern workspace layered within a beautiful, centuries-old building—a fitting metaphor for their transition: rooted in experience, focused on the future.

A career built on transactions

Phil reflects on his career: "I qualified as a chartered accountant early, but corporate finance was where I found my passion—the pace, the complexity, the strategic thinking. Over the years, I've advised clients across various sectors and industries—mainly as an external professional adviser, but also as an in-house specialist."

After two decades in the field, he joined forces with Abu to launch WilliamsAli in 2019, with a shared mission: to provide specialist, relationship-led advice to business owners navigating significant strategic financial events.

"Corporate finance is about those pivotal moments," says Abu. "Raising capital, acquiring a business, preparing for a sale—those high-stakes decisions where experience and judgement matter most."

Building a team, growing a brand

In just over six years, WilliamsAli grew from a two-person start-up into an award-winning advisory team. In 2024, they joined FRP Advisory, bringing their expertise into a wider national platform.

"The move to FRP was a natural next step," says Phil. "It enables us to maintain our personal approach while offering clients enhanced resources and a broader range of services, capabilities and deeper resources behind us."



Today, their Newcastle-based team consists of nine corporate finance specialists, supported by a wider regional FRP team of 30–40 professionals across service lines such as restructuring, forensics, debt advisory, and financial due diligence. Nationally, the FRP business continues to grow and has a market-leading reputation for excellence, with over 30 offices and over 800 people.

"What makes our team special," Abu adds, "is that everyone is here not just for their technical skills, but because they align with our values. We're sincere, collaborative, and constantly learning. Those values drive better outcomes for our clients."

What they do, and who they do it for

So, what exactly does FRP Corporate

Finance do? Phil breaks it down: "Most of our work involves helping business owners—typically owner-managers—sell their companies. Sometimes that means a full exit to a trade buyer. Sometimes it's a private equity investment, where the founders can take some cash out now and grow further with support."

"But it's not just about exits. We advise on acquisitions, fundraising, and strategic planning—whenever a business is ready for change or growth," Abu explains. "If you've got a business and you're ready for the next chapter—whether that's expansion or succession—we're the people you call."

And now, from within the FRP framework, they can support even more. "We're able to bring specialist, market-leading debt



Phil Williams and Abu Ali

advisory, forensics, and other capabilities to the North East that previously you would struggle to find within the local marketplace,” says Phil. “That’s a real game-changer for larger businesses in this region.”

A personal connection

One of the most compelling things about the team is their personal experience. They haven’t just advised on deals—they’ve done a deal themselves.

“We’ve built and sold a business” says Abu. “We’ve sat on the other side of the table. That experience gives us a unique level of empathy and understanding.”

Phil agrees: “When clients talk about the emotional weight of a deal, we get it. That insight helps us guide them with confidence and care.”

What’s next?

With their integration into FRP complete, the Newcastle

team is focused on expanding their presence in the region.

“We’re doing what we’ve always done—just with greater scale and reach,” says Abu.

“And we’re already seeing the benefits,” Phil adds. “The network, the expertise, the scale—it’s helping us deliver even more for our clients.”

When asked to summarise what they do, Phil puts it plainly: “We’re corporate finance advisers. We help business owners turn the value they’ve built into real, tangible outcomes—whether that’s through a sale, an investment, or strategic growth. At the end of the day, we help people make the most of their life’s work.”

And in doing so, they’re shaping the North East’s business landscape—one deal at a time.

FRP Corporate Finance
www.frpcorporatefinance.com

RMT Accountants increasing Hexham investment with new town centre office



L-R: Peter McCowie and Stephen Slater of RMT Accountants & Business Advisors

RMT Accountants & Business Advisors is increasing its investment in West Northumberland with a move into Hexham town centre.

The Newcastle-headquartered firm is set to open a new office on Gilesgate as it looks to further increase its local client base.

RMT will be retaining its existing offices at Hexham Mart, and as part of its local investment, it is also expecting to create a number of new jobs in Hexham in the coming months.

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 is part of the Sumer Group, the UK's leading SME-focused accountancy practice.

It moved into the Tyne Valley in 2023 with the acquisition of rural and agricultural sector specialist McCowie & Co, and already acts for a wide range of agricultural, farming and contracting businesses in the North East, Scotland and North Yorkshire, as well as local SMEs across a range of other business sectors.

Stephen Slater, managing director at RMT Accountants, who lives in the Tyne Valley, says: "We believe it's important for us to be part of the community that we're serving and to have a first-hand understanding of the opportunities, challenges and issues facing local business owners and managers.

"With one well-known national accountancy firm recently choosing to close its Hexham office, we're now taking the opposite approach and opening in a second location to ensure we have the extra office space available that we believe we're going to need.

"Our existing Hexham team is highly skilled and extremely knowledgeable, and we're expecting to see it grow in the coming

months to support our local development plans.

"The specific SME focus that being part of the Sumer Group provides adds an extra dimension to the full range of services we can offer to local businesses and we're excited about the impact that this investment will have on both their and our operations."

Peter McCowie, who joined RMT after its acquisition of McCowie & Co, adds: "Our Tynedale team has been part of the local community for more than 50 years and the access to significant new resources and expertise that becoming part of RMT gave us is already delivering tangible benefits to our local clients."

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.

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Accountant of the month

In the latest of this popular series, Northern Insight spoke to...

Brian Logan

Owner, Bamco Sixtyone.

What inspired you to become an Accountant, and what path did you take to get here?

Monty Python. (Google the sketch) I never wanted to go to University (Nor be a Lumberjack), as I was set in my local football and cricket teams. I got a job at a private practice in Sunderland as an audit clerk, and then at a new practice up in Jesmond, where the work was more focused. Originally on accounts, but as it grew, more on football. Our 5-a-side team played in the Eldon Square Leagues and rose quickly up to the first division. We entered the Student Accountants competitions, and we won them too, and I became the Sports Secretary for the Northern Society, and I ran many sports events there. I suppose it was the first form of networking I got involved in, but it wasn't called that back then. We kicked lumps out of each other on the courts and had a pint after.

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

They focus on profit rather than cashflow. The pair go hand in hand. A very large contract, with a healthy profit is all well and good, but how will you fund it before you get paid?

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

Given that I when I started, an abacus was becoming old hat, and calculators were all the rage, computers and the internet changed everything. They've got small and faster, with bigger memory, and access to software via the Cloud. Now we can directly access our clients' records, downloading their records onto our software, and producing accounts and tax returns quite literally at a click. If only. But in a paperless office, the most important tool is the shredder.

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

That would be to prepare a budget for the year and look at it regularly, to compare your progress to your actual results.

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

I encourage clients to keep in touch throughout the year. Especially if something different is happening to the business, such as expansion, or new contracts etc. That way we can discuss the possible effects on the business, its profitability and tax liability.

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

In the short term, the tariffs issue have made the markets uneasy, imports and exports are hard to forecast, and

added to this, we are about to see the effects of the changes to the National Insurance rates. I think this will hit SME's the hardest.

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

I'll let you know when I meet one. I encourage clients to keep in touch with me throughout the year, and I have been a mentor for the Prince's (now King's) Trust for over 27 years, and I treat the young mentees the same. Also, it is not just strong client relationships. You need to build them up with your fellow professionals too. In 2013 I arranged a meeting one lunchtime to find out if others felt the same, which proved to be a success. I get speakers relevant to Sunderland, and a sponsor to pay for the costs. They are bi-monthly meetings and are becoming very popular. We meet on the second Wednesday of a month over lunch at various locations across Sunderland. The next is on 11th June at The Fire Station. Find out more on LinkedIn.

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

Blind panic, nudity and a Greggs stottie, but not necessarily in that order.

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

That would be to get an accountant and solicitor you can rely upon, that are approachable and trustworthy. You may not need them every day or week or month, but when you do, they are there for you.

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

Being such a quiet, shy lad at heart I do enjoy going out meeting people. And what keeps me motivated? The fear of retirement, daytime TV, and Tena pants. Seriously, for once, over the years I have met some amazing, wonderful people from various professions. Been there for me when things didn't go to plan and when they did too. Those I call my true friends, and they know they can call on me. Mine are brilliant. They know who they are. Friends of many decades and those of only a few years, but they are the ones I share a laugh, hug, tear and a beer with.

Bamco61@outlook.com

0191 716 0186

**Bamco 61, 4, Douro Terrace,
Sunderland SR2 7DX**



“

*...I never
wanted to go
to University
(Nor be a
Lumberjack)...*

Brian Logan

Business owners...let's talk Profit, Tax & Legacy

"As business owners you pour everything into building your businesses, but what happens when they reach the point of success? What's the best exit strategy? Can it thrive without you? These unanswered questions could unlock the rewards of your hard work. Taking time to reflect and seek advice can be invaluable."

"Understanding profit extraction, tax efficiency, & legacy planning can help build long-term financial security"

"Extracting profits from a business in a tax-efficient way is crucial for maximising an owners income while minimising unnecessary tax burdens. Here are a few strategies I talk most often about:

Salary vs. Dividends: A combination of a modest salary and dividends can be an effective way to reduce National Insurance contributions while maintaining tax efficiency.

Pension Contributions: Contributions to a pension scheme directly from your business can be tax-efficient, reducing your corporation tax liability while helping to secure your future retirement income.

Directors' Loans: If structured correctly, borrowing money from your business can be a useful short-term strategy, but it must be managed carefully to avoid tax pitfalls.

"Effective tax planning is essential for maximising profitability while ensuring your business remains fully compliant with regulations. By leveraging strategic tax-saving opportunities, you can reduce liabilities and keep more of your hard-earned profits. There are a number of ways to optimise your tax strategy:

Utilise Allowances & Reliefs – Take advantage of available tax-free allowances, including:

- Dividend Allowance – The first £500 of dividend income is tax-free.
- Personal Allowance – You can earn up to £12,570 tax-free, though this begins to phase out if your income exceeds £100,000.
- Capital Gains Tax Exemption – Individuals can realise up to £3,000 in capital gains before incurring tax.

Claim R&D Tax Credits – If your business invests in innovation, you may be eligible for Research & Development (R&D) tax credits, which can significantly reduce your corporation tax liability.

Leverage Capital Allowances – Claiming capital allowances on business assets, such as equipment and machinery, helps reduce taxable profits and lower your overall tax bill.

By implementing these strategies, you can enhance your financial efficiency, protect your profits, and position your business for sustainable growth."

"Thinking ahead about what happens to your wealth after you step away from the business is vital"

"Legacy planning helps to secure financial security for your family and a smooth succession for your business.

Writing a Will*: Ensuring your wealth is distributed according to your wishes prevents legal disputes and unnecessary inheritance tax liabilities.

Trusts for Wealth Protection: Setting up trusts can help manage family wealth tax-efficiently, ensuring assets are passed down in a structured manner.

Business Succession Planning: If you plan to pass your business to the next generation, creating a structured succession plan will ensure a seamless transition while minimising tax implications.

Inheritance Tax (IHT) Mitigation: Strategies such as gifting assets, using Business Relief (BR) for qualifying business assets, and structuring family investment companies can help reduce IHT liabilities."

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16th September - Boosting growth & profits
16th December - High-performing cultures

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

ROBSON / LAIDLER

Develop North PLC appoints international investment leader Dr Sameer Al-Ansari as Deputy Chairman



Dr Sameer Al-Ansari

North East investment company Develop North PLC, managed by Newcastle-based fund management specialists, Tier One Capital, has added to its board with the appointment of Dr Sameer Al-Ansari as Non-Executive Director and Deputy Chairman.

Dr Al-Ansari, an internationally respected figure in finance, investment and corporate governance, will play a key role in shaping Develop North's future investment and wider fund strategy.

His appointment will also significantly support the fund's ambitions to raise its international profile, drive new investment into the company and promote economic growth across the North East region.

With more than 30 years' experience, Dr Al-Ansari has held senior leadership roles across a range of sectors including financial services, private equity, healthcare, real estate and digital assets.

His career highlights include founding Dubai International Capital (DIC), where he served as Executive Chairman and CEO, overseeing \$13 billion in assets, and leading Dubai based investment banking group SHUAA Capital through a successful post-financial crisis recovery as its CEO.

Most recently CEO of RAK Digital Assets

Oasis, Dr Al-Ansari also holds a number of prominent board positions with organisations including Dubai listed Al Ramz Corporation, TVM Healthcare Partners and Marjan, the leading developer of Ras Al Khaimah in the United Arab Emirates. He has previously served on the boards of the Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC), Dubai Holding and the Hawkamah Institute of Corporate Governance.

Develop North, which is listed on the main market of the London Stock Exchange, provides finance solutions to credible professionals and businesses across the North of England and Scotland. Since its inception in 2017, the fund has deployed almost £100 million in capital to support over 40 projects, creating more than 3,200 jobs and helping deliver a gross development value of nearly £250 million.

Dr Sameer Al-Ansari said: "I am delighted to join the board of Develop North at such an exciting time in its evolution. The fund

has a clear ambition to support high-quality investment opportunities and drive positive economic impact across the North of England. I look forward to bringing my expertise and network to support its continued growth and to help further raise its profile nationally and internationally."

John Newlands, Chairman of Develop North, said: "It's a pleasure to welcome Sameer to the board. His exceptional track record and global perspective will bring valuable depth to our strategic thinking. This appointment marks another important step in elevating Develop North's position as a catalyst for investment and growth across the North East region."

Ian McElroy, CEO of Tier One Capital, said: "Dr Al-Ansari's appointment represents a significant strengthening of Develop North's leadership and direction. His undoubted experience, proven track record and international reputation will help to enhance the fund's strategic vision and capability.

"Sameer's involvement will not only support the long-term growth of Develop North, but will also help attract greater investment into the North East, creating new opportunities and supporting the region's future prosperity."

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L-R: Alex Gent FW Capital, David Wilson and Helena Lorimer Armstrong Watson, Neil Coaker and Martin Arkle Prudhoe Rosettes and Trophies

Prudhoe Rosettes focused on growth thanks to six-figure NPIF II funding

Darlington-based Prudhoe Rosettes and Trophies is driving forward its expansion strategy after receiving a six figure investment from NPIF II – FW Capital Debt Finance, which is managed by FW Capital as part of the Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund II (NPIF II).

Prudhoe Rosettes and Trophies is a long established North East business that was launched in 1901 by George Prudhoe as stationers G. Prudhoe & Co. Ltd. Prudhoe Rosettes and Trophies has manufactured high quality trophies and rosettes since 1977 for use in shows and events as well as expanding into commercial printing.

In 1999 the business acquired Alden Arts, a specialist range of canine jewellery and giftware. In 2024 the previous owners, David and Bridget Emerson, retired from the business which had been in their family for 123 years. It was acquired by the current owner and Managing Director Neil Coaker.

The investment, secured by business advisors and accountants Armstrong Watson, has supported the initial and on-going growth of the business post-acquisition, which includes a refresh of the company branding and marketing. It is also assisting plans to expand the manufacturing capabilities of the business. This includes plans to invest in improvements at its premises and create new jobs in the future to meet increased product demand.

Neil Coaker, Managing Director at Prudhoe Rosettes and Trophies said: “We’re focused on investing in growth and taking the business to the next level. It’s very much business as usual for all our staff and customers but we’re seeking to enhance the service and products we currently provide. This includes an updated website and new branding provided by local business Maitland Web Designers.

“I’m working with Martin Arkle, our General Manager, who brings considerable experience having worked for Prudhoe Rosettes and Trophies since 1981 when he joined the business aged 16. Martin has been pivotal during the takeover of Prudhoe Rosettes and Trophies, and his unwavering support for the growth of the business both past and present can be seen in the early shoots of growth in a small space of time since the takeover. The funding support from Alex at FW Capital has been invaluable. Everything has been efficient and with their assistance we are well positioned to grow the business and invest in the future.”

Alex Gent, Senior Investment Executive

at FW Capital said: “Every so often I am amazed by the variety of businesses we have in the North East that you have no idea were there. Prudhoe Rosettes and Trophies is one of those businesses. Visiting the site and seeing the care and attention with which awards for various shows and events were being put together was a treat, and being able to support the company with its continued growth plans under new ownership has been a pleasure. David Wilson and Helena Lorimer at Armstrong Watson provided invaluable support to Neil and made my job easier through their responsiveness and attention to detail – always a bonus! So, a big thank you to them.”

The Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund II will increase the supply and diversity of early-stage finance for the North’s smaller businesses, providing funds to firms that might otherwise not receive investment and help to break down barriers in access to finance. FW Capital provide debt finance options from £100,000 to £2million to businesses based in the North West of England, with some flexibility to lend across the North.

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

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*...unwinding
is a
challenge...*

Simon Darby

In conversation with

This month Northern Insight talks to...

Simon Darby

Founder and Managing Director of SD Legal Services.

What were your career ambitions growing up?

I kept changing my mind, I went from Accountant to Journalist but ended up in Banking straight from school at 16 years old, I was a Police Constable in Cleveland Police before entering the private enforcement industry which then lead to setting up SD Legal Services. I always wanted to end up running my own company.

Tell us about your current role?

I am the founder and managing director of SD Legal Services, we provide a nationwide Process Serving and Tracing service to hundreds of clients across the country and my main role is keeping track of all the cases and liaising with clients. I work from home which allows me to spend more time around my family.

What is your proudest business achievement?

I think managing to smash through the £1/2 million pound mark in turnover last year was the best achievement.

How has your industry changed in the last decade?

A huge amount, mainly brought about by the Covid pandemic, it forced law firms into the 21st century, before Covid, most instructions for process serves were received in the post causing big delays in service. Now everything is digital which not only means we can serve documents incredibly fast, sometimes within minutes but it also means that I can run the company from anywhere and still offer the same level of service to clients.

What are you currently working on?

I am currently working on new website with Stacey Nottingham from Bombshell Design and also looking at what other services I can provide to my clients.

Tell us about the clients you work with?

We work for a very large number of law firms clients plus Housing Associations, Local Authorities, Debt Recovery Companies and Property Management companies.

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

A friend in London once told me that you should never wait until you have a quiet time in work before looking at carrying out marketing, this should be done all the time even when you are busy.

What has been your biggest challenge?

The biggest challenge I have faced is managing cashflow, I pay my agents within a few days of receipt of their invoice but often have to wait months, sometimes years to be paid by clients, when you are dealing with 400-500 cases a week then this can be a challenge but a challenge that I have managed very successfully.

Who are your heroes inside and outside of business?

I have too many to mention, I admire anyone who, through sheer hard work has managed to make a success of themselves in whatever area they choose.

What family do you have around you?

I have been with my wife Sharon, a fellow director at SD Legal Services for 35 years and have been married for 28 years. I have three sons, my eldest son achieved a first in his Masters degree in Pharmacy and along with his fiancé he is a Pharmacist at James Cook University Hospital and is getting married in November. My middle son is about to graduate from Teesside University in Criminology he works as a Mixologist at weekends and is starting a Masters degree in September. My youngest son has just finished his 2nd year of a degree in Paramedic Practice at Teesside University and works at Cipher Medical in his spare time.

How do you unwind outside of work?

I tend to be working 12-14 hours a day so unwinding is a challenge but I like to spend quality time with my family, go on long walks with my dog and spend as much time as possible going on weekend breaks in York and spend a lot of the summer in Cyprus.

Favourite Book and Boxset?

I don't tend to read books to be honest, I am very interested in supercars and property so spend time reading articles etc with regards to these topics.

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Sharon and Simon

Solicitor of the month

This month Northern Insight talks to...

Dan Flounders

Jacksons

Tell us about your current role.

I head up the corporate and commercial team at Jacksons, with the bulk of my workload focused on dealing with mergers, acquisitions, general corporate advice and advice to shareholders and owner managers. We provide this support predominantly to businesses across the North East, most of which sits within the Tees Valley area, but covering the wider North East region from time to time. There are currently six of us in the team and we are focusing on some aggressive recruitment to grow the team further in order to have sufficient resource to deal with a busy deal pipeline.

What is your proudest business achievement?

I only qualified in 2015 and was made partner in 2019, so rising through the ranks quite quickly, and holding a strong reputation in and around the business community across the North East as a highly recommended corporate lawyer, has been a particularly proud achievement of mine.

How has your industry changed in the last decade?

I think the perception of the industry and of lawyers has changed significantly. Growing up, my assumption of a firm of lawyers would be led by the older generation dressed in suits and ties, whose longevity at a firm dictated their status. What we are now seeing in a much more dynamic workplace is that there are a lot of younger people at the top. The profession as a whole is more accessible to the younger generation and progression is based on skillset, reputation and delivery rather than just length of service. The profile of business owners is also a lot younger nowadays. Particularly on Teesside and the North East generally we have witnessed a lot of startups in the creative, digital and tech sectors, led by young entrepreneurs and, when looking for legal support and representation, they want to maintain a rapport with professional advisers of a similar age profile, interests and mindset. Technology has also changed – we have moved to paperless systems, electronic data rooms and digital signatures.

What are you currently working on?

We've got a variety of owner managed businesses seeking succession planning support. It has been a really busy 12-month period for people locally getting their succession arrangements in place or seeking an exit strategy from their business, with main driver being the ever changing tax system. There is a lot of investment in the North East and we are currently dealing with various mergers and acquisitions, with bigger organisations seeing the North East as a key focus to their own internal growth plans.

There are also some large funding opportunities in the area, with people looking to acquire successful businesses in tech, manufacturing and engineering. We are working with some large investor-backed private equity deals worth millions of pounds. I enjoy supporting clients through the life cycle of their business, from starting up to selling out and hopefully getting rewarded for their hard work.

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

For me personally, I think it's that connections, visibility and reputation that are key. I have been successful personally through the business connections I have made, being visible in the local business community and forming relationships with people, with hope of delivering services to them which leads to enhancing both my and the firm's reputation. It's important to get to know people's interests and connect with them on a personal level.

What has been your biggest challenge?

I think being a young lawyer has had its challenges. In the early stages of your career age can sometimes have an impact and create a challenge when it comes to getting in front of bigger clients. If you can show you're good enough, age becomes irrelevant. It's not about time served, it's about your performance, ability and how to deliver success.

Who is your hero outside of business?

I like Lord Alan Sugar because of his impressive business acumen and the fact he started out with nothing and has built an impressive empire.

How do you unwind out of work?

I am a keen footballer still playing in the local Northern league - having just completed my 20th season. I hope to play until I'm 40. I also enjoy family time and holidays. Going to the gym and keeping fit and healthy is also an important focus for me.

What are you currently reading?

I used to be a keen reader when I was younger, but now with a three-year-old in tow I don't often have the chance – with the exception of Paw Patrol and Peppa Pig books and magazines! TV is my go-to, with Football (and any sport) being a common theme.

jacksons.law



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*...being a
young lawyer
has had its
challenges...*



Nathan May-O'Brien

Taking “all reasonable steps” to combat discrimination

Nathan May-O'Brien is a Solicitor at specialist employment law firm, Collingwood Legal. Nathan considers how an employer can establish that it took “all reasonable steps” to prevent discrimination.

Background

Employers can be held liable for the discriminatory actions of their employees. However, employers will have a defence from liability if they can establish that they took “all reasonable steps” to prevent the discriminatory action in question.

Historically, it has been very difficult for employers to succeed in running this

defence, however, the recent decision of the Employment Appeal Tribunal in *Campbell v Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust & Another* is an example of an employer being able to evidence that it took “all reasonable steps.” The case concerned an employee of the Trust making a racist comment to another employee (a union official) during an argument over union membership subscriptions. The employee subjected to this comment brought claims against both the Trust and the employee that made the racist comment.

After consideration, it was found that the argument did not take place “in the course of employment” (as it related to a personal dispute with the union). Importantly, in the alternative, it was also found that the Trust had taken “all reasonable steps” to prevent this harassment from taking place. These steps included an induction on the Trust’s “core values” and annual performance reviews assessed against those values. Moreover, the employee who had made the comment had attended mandatory equality and diversity training two weeks prior to the incident.

Comment

Whether or not an employer has taken “all reasonable steps” will depend on the facts and, particularly, whether a claimant

can make a persuasive argument that additional steps should have been taken. In particular, this case highlights that an employer will be more likely to successfully argue that it took “all reasonable steps” if it ensures that its staff are trained on equality and discrimination issues, if its policies are robust and if staff are regularly reminded of the ethos of a company in terms of combating discrimination and harassment in the workplace.

Changes expected to come into force by 2026 at the latest will mean that employers could be found liable for harassment of their employees by third parties (such as clients) unless they take “all reasonable steps” to prevent the harassment from taking place. In addition, the existing duty to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace generally will be strengthened so that the duty is to take “all reasonable steps”. One would expect that the question of whether “all reasonable steps” were taken will differ depending on the type of harassment in question and whether the alleged conduct is perpetrated by an employee or a third party, but these changes illustrate that employers will need to consider what steps they currently take to prevent discrimination and harassment in the workplace and whether there are risks of employees being subject to such treatment.

How we can help – Essential Manager Training

Discrimination, harassment and bullying is one of two remaining modules that Collingwood Legal are covering in their Essential Manager Training in June and July 2025.

Each module is 90 minutes long and takes place remotely.

1. Discrimination, harassment and bullying – 19 June 2025
2. Ending the employment relationship – 3 July 2025

Please email: sue.graham@collingwoodlegal.com or view the Events section of our website www.collingwoodlegal.com for further information. 10% Group discounts are available for organisations wishing to book 2 places or more.

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

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Liam Payne left behind a £24 million fortune after his death last October but without a will in place, the late singer's estate is now being handled under UK intestacy laws.

In the absence of a will, the rules of intestacy mean Payne's wealth is likely to go to his son, rather than his girlfriend Kate Cassidy, despite the fact that the couple had planned to marry and his former partner Cheryl Tweedy has been granted the power to administer his estate.

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 should they die.

A will is one of the most important documents you will ever sign as it ensures that 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, property and possessions and any children or dependents you have. Your will sets out who you would like to leave certain assets to, known as beneficiaries.

What happens to my assets without a Will?

It is a common misconception that a 'common law wife or husband' would automatically inherit in the event of their partner dying. If you die without a valid Will, you are 'intestate', and your assets are distributed by intestacy rules, which benefit only married persons, civil partners and close relatives. Cohabiting partners do not inherit automatically, they must be included in a will. If your estate exceeds £322,000 with surviving children or grandchildren, your spouse or civil partner will inherit your personal belongings, the first £322,000 and half of the remaining estate. Without descendants, your spouse inherits everything. Jointly owned property passes automatically to the surviving partner if owned as Joint Tenants but not as Tenants in Common. Joint bank accounts transfer to the surviving holder.



*Sarah McColl,
Wills, Probate and Trusts Solicitor at Sweeney Miller Law*

What are Executors?

Executors are the individuals or professionals responsible for dealing with the estate and carrying out your wishes on your behalf when you are no longer here and they will be detailed in your Will. They can be family members, friends, or professionals. It is important to carefully consider who you choose as it can be difficult and time consuming for those involved, particularly if they are still grieving. A way of avoiding emotional distress or difficulties for executors is to consider appointing a professional executor such as a solicitor who can ensure that your estate is administered impartially and fairly without the emotional involvement of a friend or family member. This option can also avoid the issues that may arise if your executors die before you, leaving you without one, as the law firm is the executor rather than one individual.

What is a Lasting Power of Attorney (LPA)?

A power of attorney is a way of giving someone you trust the legal authority to make decisions on your behalf if you're no longer able to make them yourself.

There are two types of Lasting Power of Attorney. One for making financial decisions and another for making health and care decisions and you can set up LPAs

for both types of decisions. An LPA for health and care decisions can only be used if you lose mental capacity.

Some people believe they should have either a will or a Lasting Power of Attorney, but they really go hand in hand and it might be more appropriate for your circumstances to have both, as they each play different but equally important roles. Your will ensures that your wishes are adhered to after you die but a Lasting Power of Attorney is an important document that outlines your wishes if you lose capacity while you're alive, for example if you suffer a severe brain injury or develop dementia. Without Lasting Powers of Attorney in place, no one has the legal authority to make decisions for someone else, even if they are married.

It costs so little to prepare a Will and it can save so much heartache and inconvenience when you are no longer here. Don't put it off any longer. Our friendly solicitors can help you get your personal affairs in order with minimum fuss. Instructing a legal professional specialising in estate planning and wills is particularly important if you have complicated finances or a more complex family structure.

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What do I need to know about lasting powers of attorney?

Alicia Speed, wills, probate and trusts solicitor at Mincoffs Solicitors, answers common questions and misconceptions about lasting powers of attorney.

What is a lasting power of attorney (LPA)?

An LPA is a document which allows you to choose trusted individuals to make decisions for you. There are two different types of LPA, one for health and welfare decisions and one for property and financial decisions. Your attorneys would only step in to make health decisions for you if you could no longer make such decisions yourself due to a lack of mental capacity. However, you can choose when your attorneys can make decisions to help you to deal with your financial affairs.

How long does it take to make an LPA?

If a solicitor is advising you in relation to your LPAs then we usually estimate that it takes a couple of weeks for us to obtain your instructions and draft the relevant documentation. Once signed by you and your attorneys, it then needs to be registered with the Office of the Public Guardian (OPG), which currently takes around three to four months.

When should I make an LPA?

Ultimately, as soon as possible. LPAs can often be thought of as something to do much later in life, however no one really knows what is around the corner. LPAs do not need to be used as soon as they have been registered, however it is recommended to register them straight away so that the LPA is ready should it be needed in the future.

What happens if I do not make an LPA and lose capacity?

If you lose capacity and do not already have LPAs in place, then your loved ones, or the local authority, would need to make an application to the Court of Protection for a deputyship order, which can be onerous and lengthy. Presently, there are significant delays to this process, which could leave your loved ones in a difficult position as they would otherwise be unable to assist you with managing your affairs.

How many attorneys can you appoint?

You can appoint as many attorneys as you wish, however we would usually recommend appointing more than one, to ensure that your LPA can continue if your sole attorney can no longer act.

Can my spouse make decisions for me without an LPA?

No. Although your spouse may be able to assist with a joint account for example, they could not manage all of your affairs as if they were you. Your spouse does not have automatic access to all of your financial affairs, nor could they make decisions in respect of your health and welfare

automatically. Further, if your bank become aware that you lack capacity, they can freeze your accounts, in which case without an attorney to make decisions on your behalf, your family would need to make an application for a deputyship order to gain access and help manage your affairs.

What decisions can my attorneys make?

Your attorneys can make most decisions as if they were you. Financial decisions may include managing bank accounts and investments, ensuring bills are paid on time, dealing with government organisations for benefits or pensions, and handling any future care requirements. In relation to your health, your attorneys would only step in if you can no longer make decisions due to a lack of capacity, and therefore they can decide how you are treated if you require life sustaining treatment, or even normal health decisions to include liaising with the local authority if you required additional care.

What if I change my mind about my attorneys?

You can revoke or partially revoke your LPA at any time so long as you have mental capacity to do so. We would recommend that you do not make any amendments to such documents without seeking legal advice as incorrectly amending or attempting to revoke your LPA can cause the whole LPA to become invalid.

Should I use a solicitor?

A solicitor will ensure that you are provided with all of the information required to allow you to consider how an LPA will best suit your requirements. The wills, probate and trusts team at Mincoffs Solicitors is highly experienced and can advise on any potential issues which may arise, so you can have peace of mind your wishes will be followed. We will handle the process from initial instructions to registration of the documents and will provide you with all relevant advice throughout the process. We will also ensure that you have the requisite capacity to make the LPA, that there are no concerns of duress and advise on how best to include your wishes by way of drafting preferences and instructions into your documents.

For friendly, sensitive advice on lasting powers of attorney, contact Mincoffs' wills, probate and trusts on probate@mincoffs.co.uk or call the office on 0191 281 6151.

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Alicia Speed



The lowdown on soft opt-ins

Ensuring your business gets it right.

The 'soft opt-in' exemption for direct marketing consent will soon extend to charities, creating a huge opportunity for the sector. But how can both charities and commercial businesses use the soft opt-in to their advantage? And is there a need to tread carefully?

Alex Craig, partner and head of Muckle LLP's commercial team, outlines how to use the soft opt-in, stay compliant and avoid hefty regulatory fines.

What is a soft opt-in?

The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) defines a soft opt-in as "when an organisation sends marketing emails or texts using customer data they gathered when that customer bought or expressed interest in their products or services".

But it's not as simple as it might sound. While it's reasonable to assume that someone who has purchased from your online shop may be happy to hear from you again, strict conditions must always be followed when using the soft opt-in exemption.

How to stay compliant

The rules for the soft opt-in exemption under Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations (PECR) only apply to 'individual subscribers' for business-to-business (B2B) marketing, rather than an organisation that has subscribed to an email or text service.

To stay compliant when using the soft opt-in exemption, you must always check the following:

- 1. Customers must always be given the chance to opt out:** The soft opt-in can only be used if they were given the chance to opt out of communications when their contact details were provided. Every marketing message thereafter should also provide a clear, free opportunity to opt out.
- 2. You can only contact your own customers:** Soft opt-ins don't apply to prospective customers or new contacts from bought-in lists; they must only be used to reach existing customers (anyone who enquires about a product or service with intent to buy).
- 3. It doesn't apply to non-commercial promotions:** The soft opt-in can only be used when you're selling something or negotiating to sell something. When the new Data (Use and Access) Bill comes into force, charities will also be able to use the soft opt-in to support the charity's charitable purposes where they have an existing relationship with an individual for example, through interest being shown in or offered to support that charity previously.

4. The content must be relevant for the customer: Existing customers can be marketed to if the content is relevant to them. For example, if a customer bought a car from you and gave you their contact details, you'd only be able to promote things that relate to the car, for instance services or MOTs.

Avoiding serious fines

Disregarding the rules when dealing with soft opt-ins can have severe consequences.

Royal Mail was fined £20,000 for sending marketing emails to 215,202 individuals. The ICO stated that although the campaign was aimed at people who had previously bought stamps online, the individuals had explicitly opted out. Therefore, the soft opt-in exemption didn't apply.

Another household name, Papa Johns, was fined £10,000 by the ICO for sending 'nuisance marketing messages' to consumers. Papa Johns claimed it used the soft opt-in exemption for consent, but had not met the requirements by targeting telephone customers (who had not been provided with the opportunity to opt out).

While these examples are of well-known companies, SMEs are subject to the same stringent rules and therefore at risk of serious financial consequences if hit with fines from the ICO.

Legal support with direct marketing

Whilst there are limitations on how it can be used, the soft opt-in creates a huge opportunity for charities, potentially leading to increased engagement with donors and supporters. For commercial businesses, the soft opt-in can help boost sales and connect with existing customers.

However, it's key to proceed with caution. Currently, only commercial businesses can rely on the soft opt-in, but this is expected to change under the Data (Use and Access) Bill, which will extend the soft opt-in exemption to charities.

The Bill is also set to increase the maximum penalties for breaches under PECR from £500,000 to £17.5m or 4% of global annual turnover, bringing the enforcement regime in line with the UK GDPR. Therefore, it's vital to seek legal advice to ensure your direct marketing is fully compliant, as you could be at risk of fines under both PECR and the UK GDPR.

For specialist legal advice on soft opt-ins or other areas of data protection, contact Alex Craig today on 01912117911 or email alex.craig@muckle-llp.com



What the Renters' Rights Bill means for the private rented sector

By Lewis Brown,
Managing Associate

Both England and Wales' rental market is poised for one of the most sweeping overhauls in decades.

The Renters' Rights Bill, introduced by the previous Government, is set to redefine the legal framework for private landlords and tenants alike.

While the Bill continues its path through Parliament, one thing is clear: change is coming. And for landlords, particularly those managing significant portfolios or relying on rental income as a business investment, early preparation is key.

At Swinburne Maddison, we act for landlords across the North East and beyond. With the legal landscape shifting, now is the time to get ahead of what may become the new normal.

The end of 'No-Fault' evictions

Perhaps the most talked-about proposal is the abolition of Section 21, the mechanism that allows landlords to end tenancies without giving a reason. If passed, this change will mean all future evictions must be based on specific, legally defined grounds.

These include persistent rent arrears, anti-social behaviour, or circumstances where the landlord needs to sell the property or house a close family member. Even these grounds will carry stricter notice requirements and evidential burdens. For instance, eviction for rent arrears will only be mandatory if a tenant is three months behind, not two.

In practice, this will demand a more cautious and structured approach to tenant management. Referencing, documentation, and communication will take centre stage in safeguarding a landlord's position.



Lewis Brown

Goodbye to fixed-term tenancies

Under the proposed changes, assured shorthold tenancies will become periodic by default, doing away with the traditional six or twelve month fixed term. Tenants will be able to leave with just two months' notice from the outset.

While this offers renters greater flexibility, it introduces uncertainty for landlords. Financial forecasting becomes more complex, and greater tenant turnover may bring increased void periods, re-letting costs, and agency fees.

Landlords will need to adjust their business models to reflect shorter average tenancy lengths, and be agile in their budgeting.

Controlling rent increases

The Bill also sets its sights on rent regulation. Rent increases will be limited to once every 12 months, must reflect market value, and require at least two months' written notice. Crucially, tenants will have the right to challenge increases via the First-tier Tribunal.

Although this aims to ensure fairness and prevent backdoor evictions, it will curtail a landlord's flexibility. Strategic rent planning, factoring in inflation, maintenance costs, and tax implications, will become a crucial part of property management.

What's next?

The Bill is expected to pass in mid-2025, with new rules applying to all new tenancies shortly thereafter. Existing tenancies will likely transition by late 2026, giving landlords time to review and realign their agreements.

But don't wait. Those who act now, by reviewing tenancy agreements, updating internal policies, and seeking specialist legal advice, will be in a stronger position to adapt and thrive under the new regime.

The bottom line

The Renters' Rights Bill is more than just legal reform—it marks a cultural shift in how landlords operate. For some, it will require a complete rethink of their approach to tenant relationships and portfolio management.

At Swinburne Maddison LLP, we're already working with landlords to help them navigate these changes. Whether you own a single buy-to-let or manage a large property portfolio, our team is here to support you with pragmatic, commercially-minded advice.

To discuss how the Renters' Rights Bill may affect your business, contact Lewis Brown at lewis.brown@swinburnemaddison.co.uk, or call 0191 384 2441.

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Dominic Elsworth

Opinions at the UK Intellectual Property Office

The UK Intellectual Property Office launched its Patent Opinions Service some twenty years ago with the aim of providing businesses with a quick and affordable assessment of patent validity or infringement.

Whilst these Patent Opinions are non-binding, they have proven to provide a low cost route to resolving patent disputes quickly (Opinions are issued within three months of a request).

For SME's the cost of patent litigation can be daunting, often begging the question, what is the point of a patent if it costs so much to enforce? The Patent Opinions Service allows the strength of an infringement or validity case to be tested quickly and at modest cost. Whilst Patent Opinions are non-binding, they can be very useful in focusing the minds of parties to a potential patent dispute.

One way the Patent Opinions Service can really assist SMEs is in revocation actions. Where the UK IPO issues a Patent Opinion which finds that a patent is invalid, the IPO may then decide to revoke the patent on its own initiative, thereby saving the SME the time, trouble and expense of bringing a revocation action.

A feature of the Patent Opinion Service, which can be very useful to businesses contemplating entering a market where third parties own patents, is that the party requesting the Opinion can remain anonymous. In many cases the party named as the requester for an Opinion is a patent attorney firm.

We have written in this publication previously about the Unitary Patent Court (UPC), the EU's court where European patents may be challenged. The Patent Opinion Service of the UK Intellectual Property Office can form a useful pre-cursor to action at the UPC. Whilst the UK is not party to the Unitary Patent Convention, the Patent Opinion Service can be used to test the strength of a case involving a European patent where the United Kingdom is designated.

In summary, the UK Intellectual Property Office's Patent Opinions Service can be very useful, cost effective and timely in dispute resolution.

www.heip.co.uk

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Blooming beautiful gardens to open as Stokesley event returns

For one weekend only, take a peek into Stokesley's best-kept gardens as the biennial Open Gardens event returns for 2025.

On 14th and 15th June, 12:30pm – 5:30pm, visitors will be welcomed into 20 of Stokesley's most beautiful gardens, as keen green thumbs showcase their stunning blooms and share tips and tricks, all in aid of Teesside Hospice.

"The Stokesley Open Gardens event has been going for over 20 years now; it started from Teesside Hospice's support group, which was a group of people who were passionate about supporting the hospice," explained organiser Julia Haigh. "There are 20 gardens planned to be open in total and it's a great family trip out. If you haven't been before, this is your opportunity for an absolutely fantastic weekend out."

As well as the varied gardens to explore, there will be refreshments such as homemade cakes, Pimms and ice creams on offer, family games, treasure hunts, beekeepers, scarecrows and more. Each of the expert gardeners will also be on hand to share ideas for your own green space, as well as offering advice on growing your own vegetables and the opportunity to purchase plants to get your garden started.

The event will once again raise money for Teesside Hospice, which supports over 3,000 Teessiders and their families each year, helping them make the most of every day and receive the best possible care at the end of their lives.

Murtek announced as official charity sponsor for Newcastle 10K 2026

The Children's Foundation was chosen as the charity partner of the 2025 Newcastle 10k which saw over 2,000 runners take on the scenic quayside route. Planning is already underway for the 2026 race and Murtek's £5000 donation to sponsor the event will ensure the charity is able to fundraise more on the day and ultimately make 'serious stuff fun' for even more children, young people and families across the North East.

Sean Soulsby, chief executive of The Children's Foundation, said: "We're thrilled to welcome Murtek on board as our sponsor for the 2026 Newcastle 10k. This sponsorship will significantly increase the impact we are able to have through the event and gives us a platform to raise even more funds for young people facing challenges across the region. Every step, every runner, and every donation helps



us to tackle physical and mental health inequalities and support early years development for the children and families right on our doorstep.

"After speaking to the team at Murtek about the projects we deliver, I'm pleased to confirm that this donation will allow us to bring our Baby Box project to families in Stockton-upon-Tees for the very first time. This has been made possible by the generosity of the team at Murtek alongside everyone who runs for us on the day. Thank you!"



Hexham's new eco dry cleaner is pressing for a better planet

The Tyne Valley has a new addition to its business community, as Launder and Press Hexham opens its doors, bringing over 20 years of experience in the laundry industry. The new venture is led by Jeanette Groom, originally from Liverpool, who has successfully managed laundries across the North East, including a thriving location in Heaton, Newcastle.

Nestled within a parade of shops on St Luke's Road in the town, Launder and Press Hexham has a strong focus on serving local businesses, catering primarily to Airbnb hosts, hotels, restaurants, as well as domestic customers for the cleaning of suits, trousers, and dresses.

Launder and Press Hexham is dedicated to eco-conscious practices. The laundry has installed energy-saving equipment and operates professional dry-cleaning services powered by the eco-friendly Electrolux Lagoon system, which uses water-based cleaning instead of traditional solvents like perchloroethylene (PERC), a chemical known for its harmful effects on the environment.

This system not only reduces carbon emissions but also ensures that clothes are cleaned without the use of toxic substances, making it safer for both customers and staff.

The shop also offers specialised services for wedding dress preservation, duvet cleaning, clothing alterations, and a fast turnaround system that's hard to find in national chain High Street dry cleaners.



Cash for Kids is the official grant-giving charity of Hits Radio and Greatest Hits Radio, supporting young lives across the North East







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Blyth Community Centre gets clear view of a warmer future

A busy South East Northumberland community centre is warmer and weatherproof thanks to a four-figure grant from the Banks Community Fund.

The Buffalo Community Centre in Blyth provides a wide variety of services and projects to help improve the lives of local people of all ages, and works in partnership with other local providers from both the voluntary and statutory sector.

The charity is based in a converted pub in Regent Street which has eight large windows, all of which had become bent out of shape over time and were letting in both cold draughts and rain.

But after receiving a £2,000 grant from North East employer the Banks Group, Cowpen Quay Community Association, which manages the Centre, commissioned RLM Windows, Doors & Conservatories to make and fit new energy efficient windows, which will not only keep out the wet weather and help reduce



its energy bills, but will also support the Association's plans to introduce a Warm Hub within the building in the future.

The Buffalo Community Centre works with all members of the local community, welcoming around 10,000 visitors through its doors every year, and is especially focused working with people and groups that are the hardest to reach.



Hitachi Construction Machinery UK supports healthy living in South Tyneside

At Hitachi Construction Machinery UK, charity embodies their core values of integrity and people, reflecting their belief in supporting communities and enabling their team to

make a positive impact in the lives of others in line with their social commitments. In support of the South Tyneside Pledge goal to reduce health inequalities, HCMUK sponsored ten primary schools in South Tyneside, local to their headquarters in Hebburn, to receive The Newcastle Eagles Foundation, Hoops4Health programme.

Councillor Margaret Melling from South Tyneside Council commented, "We are very lucky to have a global firm Hitachi in the borough, this is just one of the many ways in which they continue to give back to the communities from which they draw their workforce."

Margaret continued, "This generous donation will provide a fun and inspiring programme to ten local primary schools, encouraging lots of our young people to take part in physical activity. The use of Eagles players really helps to send such important messages about the importance of keeping physically active and leading a healthy lifestyle. Thank you, Hitachi!"

Exhibition planned For North Tyneside artists young and old after successful schools project

North Tyneside Living, which offers high quality rented accommodation for tenants aged 60 and over, approached the North Tyneside Learning Trust education charity about getting local schools involved with creating new artworks for the communal areas of its portfolio of retirement schemes as part of their refurbishment.

A pilot project was organised where students from Burnside College and Percy Main Primary School met with residents of the Rosebank Hall and Percy Lodge independent living facility in Wallsend to find out more about each other before all going to create new artworks based on the things they'd talked about.

The outcome was so successful that sessions involving two high schools and three primary schools were held during the first two terms of the academic year, with a further three schools set to get involved during the summer term.



And now, after the North Tyneside Learning Trust secured a £1,966 grant from North East employer The Banks Group, an exhibition of the work that the young and older artists have created is set to be staged at Wallsend Library & Customer First Centre during the second half of July to give the artists' parents, families and other residents the chance to see what they've been creating.

<p>£250 FOR A TEAM OF FOUR</p>	<p>11TH JULY • CHARITY GOLF DAY ARRIVAL FROM 8:00AM. TEA/COFFEE & BACON ROLL. SHOTGUN START 10:00AM. LUNCH ON RETURN. CONTACT SUSAN.CARR@CHANGING-LIVES.ORG.UK TO RESERVE YOUR TEAM TODAY. HOBSON GOLF CLUB, BURNOPFIELD, NEWCASTLE-UPON-TYNE, NE16 6BZ</p>	<p>CHANGING LIVES www.changing-lives.org.uk</p>
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NE YOUTH BIG SUMMER

£9 FUEL A SESSION

Covers one hour of support for a young person at a summer session – including food or a cooking activity.

£90 FUND A FULL DAY OUT

Gives one young person a day to remember – covering a full-day trip including transport, food, and activity costs.

£900 SPONSOR A SUMMER

Pays for the full summer programme for five young people – including regular sessions, trips, food, and vital support throughout the holidays.

NE Youth Big Summer Campaign focuses on fun, freedom, and a future full of possibility

This summer, something exciting is on the horizon – and everyone is invited to be part of it.

Big Summer is NE Youth's bold new campaign designed to transform the school holidays for young people across the region. Six weeks filled with fun, friendship, food, and freedom – a world away from isolation, boredom, or missed opportunities.

For too many kids, summer can be a tough time. But NE Youth are hoping to flip the script. They are calling on all local businesses to get involved.

NE Youth are a universal youth service, open to all young people – no matter their background, postcode, or income. And they've got one big goal: raise £30,000 in just two months to create a summer they'll never forget.

But they can't do it alone – they need your help!

When local businesses and individuals support Big Summer,

they're not just donating – they're investing in the next generation. The money raised will go towards:

- Hot, healthy meals for every young person who takes part.
- Exciting activities that build confidence, skills, and lasting friendships.
- Safe spaces where they can simply be themselves.

Youth work is about more than filling time – it's about unlocking potential. From leadership to emotional wellbeing, it lays the foundation for strong, resilient, and successful futures.

Local support says something powerful. It says North East businesses care about their community & believe in opportunity for all.

Here's how you can help

Make a corporate donation or sponsor a full week of Big Summer. Offer in-kind support – think venues, volunteers, or supplies. Spread the word by sharing the campaign with your networks...Because when everyone shows up for young people – BIG things happen.

To get involved visit: neyouth.org.uk/big-summer



Charity of the month

This month Northern Insight talks to...

Sophie Dawson

Senior Communications Officer, Teesside Hospice.

Why was the charity formed?

Since it was formed in 1982, Teesside Hospice has been providing specialist care to people across the region who are faced with life limiting illness, as well as their families. Our services also cover bereavement support, wellbeing services and a lymphoedema clinic. Teesside Hospice also has 14 retail stores which provide support through the sale of inexpensive goods to the public.

We support around 3,000 people in Tees Valley each year, working towards our mission of being there for everyone who needs us, and changing the way society and healthcare systems care for people with terminal illness.

Which area do you cover?

We're here for everyone across the whole of Teesside, parts of North Yorkshire, Redcar and Cleveland providing care and support to thousands each year.

What type of fundraising events do you have?

We hold a wide range of events throughout the year, so there really is something for everyone.

Supporters light up the streets to remember their loved ones as part of our Midnight Walk; get on their dancing shoes for our annual ball; explore the hidden gems of Stokesley at our open gardens event; and take on challenges such as the Great North Run and Middlesbrough 10k.





We also hold an annual Golf Day, which takes place on July 3rd 2025.

One of our largest upcoming events is Tea for Teesside, which runs throughout the Summer. Every cuppa counts as we encourage the community to hold their own 'coffee morning' fundraiser in aid of Teesside Hospice.

Who are your trustees and patrons?

We're supported by a board of dedicated trustees, who provide expert advice and oversight to ensure Teesside Hospice is operating at the highest standard. These trustees come from all walks of life and have wide-ranging successes, meaning they're best placed to guide the hospice.

What have been your proudest moments so far?

The amazing people that support the hospice make us proud every day. Staff, volunteers, donors – their commitment to providing the best possible support to the community is simply outstanding.

Just one example of this is a lady called Anne, whose story you can read on our website. Anne came to Teesside Hospice when she was no longer able to manage her illness at home and despite being uncertain of what hospice care would involve, she couldn't

have praised our team any higher, saying: "I'm so grateful I found Teesside Hospice to help me make the most out of my time here". Hearing stories like this from patients makes us beyond proud of the whole Teesside Hospice support system.

What are you currently working on?

We're launching our new strategy, which has been developed in consultation with staff, volunteers and stakeholders and lays out four key goals for the hospice: Everyone matters – people are at our core; Provide more support to more people; Excellence in all we do; and charity of choice across our community.

We've always been working towards these goals in many ways, but they've been refined so that we can all work better as one, to provide the highest standard of care and continue to grow.

What does the future hold?

As part of our new strategy and commitment to growth, we're expanding the high-quality services we offer to allow us to reach more people, closer to where they live. We also aspire to develop new services that will meet currently unmet needs.

With this growth in mind, we're diversifying our income streams to find more ways to fund these future goals. One of these streams includes potentially opening a retail superstore in the future.

People in the region need us: we're going to be here for everyone, in more ways than ever before, delivering excellence in all we do.

How do you get involved?

There are so many ways to get involved with Teesside Hospice, and however you choose to support, you'll be making a huge difference to the local community.

This could be:

- **Volunteering** your time working in our retail shops, café, or other areas of the hospice
- **Fundraising** on our behalf, or taking part in a fundraising event
- **Simply sharing** the message of Teesside Hospice and our services to raise awareness.

Any kind of support allows us to continue to help people of Teesside live as well as possible, for as long as possible.

For more information, visit www.teessidehospice.org



From Advice to Action

Society Matters Foundation launched with a mission to change the system

When Alison Dunn stood at the podium at St James' Park recently, she wasn't just launching another organisation, she was introducing a movement. The Society Matters Foundation is the culmination of decades of frontline experience and a growing realisation; it's time to move from helping people one by one to changing the very systems that shape their lives.

The Foundation is the next chapter for Alison Dunn, CEO of the Society Matters Group and the voice behind the influential *This is the North* podcast. After conversations with guests across episodes exploring inequality, exclusion, and opportunity, Dunn recognised the urgent need to move from words to action. The Society Matters Foundation aims to do just that, bridging the gap between lived experience and policy-making, with the North's people and potential at its heart.

Rooted in the work of Citizens Advice Gateshead, which supports tens of thousands every year with everything from housing to debt and employment issues, the Foundation represents a step change from service delivery to systemic impact.

"We can continue to help people one by one through service delivery, and we do, but policy is where we can truly scale our impact," said Dunn. "If we can help change the systems people live within, they won't need to rely on us as much in the first place."

Alison's vision is clear. By gathering data, insight, and real-life stories, the Foundation aims to inform and influence policy that is not only effective but also kind, inclusive, and rooted in lived experience.

Reframing the narrative on work and poverty

A key part of the Foundation's mission is to shift the public narrative around poverty. Alison is keen to debunk long-standing myths, particularly the belief that poverty stems from laziness or a lack of ambition.

"The idea that you're only poor because you don't work hard enough is simply not true," she says. "Almost 60% of the people we see



now are in paid work, a figure that was just 35% before COVID. Poverty is increasingly something people are working through, not out of."

A Northern engine of change

The Foundation is also rooted in a belief that the North East holds untapped power - social, economic, and human. While the region is often cited in terms of its challenges, Alison wants to pivot the focus to opportunity.

"We're great at highlighting problems, and that's important," she says. "But the Foundation is about completing the puzzle - convening good-quality conversations that help us find and act on the opportunities too."

She stresses that inclusive growth must be at the heart of any future strategy. "Growth that benefits only the top is not success," she says. "We need growth that lifts everyone, and that means designing systems that include the people currently left out."

Education: the next chapter

The next major focus for the Foundation will be education, and how geography continues to dictate opportunity. Alison shares stark statistics: children in the North East are less likely to attend university, more likely to be excluded from school, and face worse long-

term health outcomes, despite often having the same starting ability as their peers elsewhere.

"It's not about intelligence," she explains. "It's about aspiration and opportunity. In London, even poor children grow up surrounded by ambition, by cultural and career possibilities. That's what we need to bring here."

The Foundation's autumn event will spotlight this challenge, using the principle that "talent is everywhere, opportunity isn't" to shape practical solutions.

A call to collaborate

For Alison, the Foundation is as much about collaboration as it is about leadership. She sees community groups, voluntary organisations, and public bodies as key partners in the journey ahead.

As the Foundation looks to its next phase, Alison's message is simple and full of hope:

"The North East has the talent, the resilience, and the drive. We just need to write our own story - one of possibility, not limitation. And we need everyone who cares about that future to be part of it."

To learn more or get involved, visit:
societymattersfoundation.org.uk
alisondunn.co.uk/this-is-the-north-podcast



A launch grounded in lived experience

The Society Matters Foundation recently launched at St James' Park.

Mayor Kim McGuinness opened the day with a passionate address highlighting child poverty, local transport challenges, and her newly unveiled Local Growth Plan, calling for investment in people as well as infrastructure.

Powerful contributions followed from Professor Greta Defeyter OBE (Northumbria University), Dr Nicola Headlam (Independent Economic Advisor), Praful Nargund (Good Growth Foundation), and Alice Wiseman (Director of Public Health for Gateshead and Newcastle). The speakers were also joined in a panel discussion by Peter Bell, CEO and Founder of Purpose Made.



People Doing Good...

Blyth Town Council signs Armed Forces Covenant at VE Day Commemoration

Blyth Town Council has formally pledged its support for the Armed Forces community by signing the Armed Forces Covenant during its VE Day commemorations on Blyth Quayside.

The Covenant was signed by the Town Mayor, Cllr Aileen Barrass, and Commander David King of the Royal Navy, in a moving ceremony attended by Dr Caroline Pryer, Lord Lieutenant of Northumberland, and Deputy Civic Head of Northumberland County Council, Cllr Daniel Carr.

The Armed Forces Covenant is a promise from the nation that those who serve or have served in the armed forces, and their

families, are treated with fairness and respect in the communities they serve. By signing the Covenant, Blyth Town Council has committed to recognising the value that serving personnel, veterans, and military families bring to the town, and to supporting them in practical and meaningful ways.

The signing reflects Blyth's long-standing military connections, both historic and contemporary. During both World Wars, Blyth played a significant role as a coastal town with a strategic port. It was a key embarkation point for troops and a base for naval operations, including submarine deployment during World War I. Many Blyth residents have served in the armed



forces, and the town continues to have strong ties with the Royal Navy, British Army, and Royal Air Force through veterans' groups and commemorative organisations.

Northumberland Freemasons Tritlington School Donation

Tritlington CofE First School, a small rural church school near Morpeth, has received a generous £5,000 donation from Northumberland Freemasons to help complete a new Peace Garden—a quiet, calming space for children and the local community to enjoy.

Joint Headteachers Jill O'Dell and Katherine Stephenson lead the school, which prides itself on small class sizes and a holistic approach to education that fosters both academic progress and wellbeing. The Peace Garden will support this vision by offering children aged three to 10, and community groups such as Rainbows, Brownies, and other local clubs, a sanctuary for reflection and calm.

"As joint headteachers of Tritlington School, we feel strongly that while we are charged with ensuring academic success, we also take a holistic approach ensuring we support and nurture pupils' wellbeing



too," said Jill O'Dell. "This garden will offer children a sensory-rich, inclusive space to reflect, regulate and restore."

The Peace Garden is fully accessible and inclusive, designed to support those with physical and sensory impairments. It will feature plants that stimulate the five senses—touch, sight, smell, sound, and taste—making it not only a peaceful retreat but also a learning resource.

Ian Craigs, representing Northumberland Freemasons, attended the ceremony and spoke warmly about the organisation's support for community causes.

"It's been a fantastic morning seeing the Peace Garden come to life," he said. "Whether it's individual lodges—like Lodge Temperance, which donated £100 for plants—or larger contributions like this one, Freemasons are committed to supporting young people and nurturing wonderful good causes such as this one."

The £5,000 donation came through the Richard Henry Holmes Masonic Benevolent Fund, which donates around £160,000 annually to local causes across Northumberland, Newcastle, and North Tyneside.

To learn more about Freemasonry or to explore membership opportunities, visit www.northumberlandmasons.org.uk

Former Police Officer Runs Final Great North Run for Pancreatic Cancer UK



Claire Bradbury, a former police officer based in Blyth and now living in Newbiggin-by-the-Sea, is preparing to run her 14th and final Great North Run to raise funds for Pancreatic Cancer UK.

Claire, 56, originally planned to complete the race when she turned 50, marking her retirement from the police force.

However, just seven weeks after retiring, she was diagnosed with breast cancer—a devastating blow that put her running dreams on hold. After undergoing chemotherapy and radiotherapy during the COVID-19 pandemic, she has now fought her way back to health and is determined to cross the finish line for this vital cause.

"I always intended to run the Great North Run as part of my 50th birthday celebrations, but life had other plans. After my own cancer battle, I want to give back—and pancreatic cancer is so underfunded and under-researched," said Claire.

Pancreatic cancer is one of the deadliest forms of cancer, with a five-year survival rate of less than 8%—one of the lowest of all common cancers. Unlike other cancers,

there is no simple test to detect it early, and symptoms are often vague, leading to late-stage diagnoses when treatment options are limited.

Common early symptoms—back pain, unexplained weight loss, jaundice, and digestive issues—are often mistaken for other minor conditions, delaying diagnosis. By the time pancreatic cancer is identified, more than 80% of cases are already too advanced for surgery, which is currently the only potential cure.

Claire has set up a JustGiving page where people can donate directly to Pancreatic Cancer UK to support research and support services for patients and their families.

ajbellgreatnorthrun2025.enthuse.com



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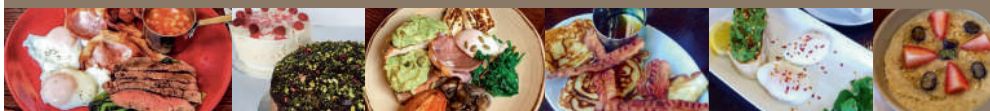


This April, we're inviting you to make a bold statement and raise much needed funds by participating in Wear Blue for Charlie and Carter. There are so many ways to get involved but the main thing to remember is to have fun and support The Charlie and Carter Foundation!

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



"To eat well in England, you should have breakfast three times a day." Somerset Maugham



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Success for Employability Intervention Scheme with over 100 North East young people supported



An initiative tackling barriers to employment and skills gaps in the North East has helped over a hundred young people since its launch.

CONNECT: Future Ready, led by award-winning theatre, drama and creative learning charity **Mortal Fools**, supported by North East Combined Authority, and funded by the UK government through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, helped over a hundred young people during its pilot project, which ran from April 2024 to April 2025.

Following the success of the pilot, **CONNECT: Future Ready** is now available as a commissionable employability intervention within Mortal Fools' young people's programme, with the organisation currently fundraising to enable it to continue.

Designed as a person-centric needs-based programme, **CONNECT: Future Ready** is a targeted response to the impact the COVID 19 pandemic and mental health crisis has had on young people's lives, particularly those who are socially isolated or not in employment.

The initiative provides intensive and intentional employability enhancing interventions for young people aged 14-30 years old, using creative practice and social sciences to unlock young people's potential and support their employability skills development.



Unlike other employability interventions - which often focus on getting people 'CV ready' and take a uniform approach to encourage them into employment - CONNECT: Future Ready harnesses the power of creativity to boost confidence, capabilities and competencies essential for the workplace in a way that works for each individual.

Over the course of the pilot, the project supported 111 young people in total, with 53 taking part across five intensive employability interventions. In addition, 31 young people completed three week-long interventions, achieving 26 Bronze Arts Awards - a Nationally recognised qualification demonstrating the development of a wide range of transferable skills.

Multiple masterclass workshops were held for young people interested in artform skills development, including specialist classes on animation, music making, set and costume design.

As part of the initiative, Mortal Fools developed effective partnerships with local schools Dukes High School and Northumberland College, and created referral partnerships with DWP, Groundwork North East, Kings Trust, Newcastle United Foundation, Northumberland Employability Network and Pride Action North East.

The project also held three consultation sessions, inviting young people from education and community settings to share their insights and perspectives of experiencing barriers to entering employment.

Ziarlotte Gray-Johnson, Skills Development Coach (Work Placements) at Northumberland College, explained: "Mortal Fools treat each and every young person as an individual and they really take the time to listen to them."

"Many of my students felt out of their comfort zone, but with the support of the wonderful staff they really came out of their shell and built their confidence. A great week was had by all!"

The scheme is just one of the projects led by Mortal Fools to boost employability among young people.

CONNECT: Creative Futures is a one-day commissionable session for young people aged 14-18 years old, while Young CONNECT is a version of Mortal Fools' training and professional development programme for organisations and teams, adapted specifically for young people.

Mortal Fools also delivers Creative Careers Talks and takes part in Career Fairs, as well as offering a wide variety of free online employability content and learning materials.

Kiz Crosbie, CEO & Artistic Director at Mortal Fools, commented: "Our dynamic, high impact employability programmes empower young people with the skills, confidence, and knowledge to progress on their professional development journey."

"This work supports regional and hyperlocal economic strategies by moving individuals closer to workforce readiness."

"We are excited for the next stages of our fruitful partnership with Northumberland College, expanding our portfolio of partners working in employability contexts and to securing vital funds to support the expansion of this work."

To find out more about Mortal Fools' employability initiatives, go to www.mortalfools.org.uk/ employability or contact: connect@mortalfools.org.uk



L-R: Emma McDonald, Chloe Taylor, Luke Lane and Jessica Williams

Bridging the gap between Sales and Marketing

In today's evolving economic climate, it's no surprise that many organisations are re-evaluating how they resource their core functions.

Conversations with business leaders across the country suggest a growing openness to outsourcing—and for good reason. Looking back, it's something I wish I'd embraced earlier in the journey of Just Williams.

When I first started the business, I fell into the all-too-common trap of trying to do everything myself. Whether out of necessity or a sense of obligation, I wore every hat—from sales to marketing, finance to operations. But this approach came at a cost: it slowed our growth and pulled focus away from what really mattered. It also stretched our small team far too thin.

Fast forward to today, and I now fully appreciate the value of outsourcing. As a business that specialises in sales, marketing, and events, we understand first-hand the power of working with the right partners. By outsourcing the areas outside our expertise, we've been able to concentrate on what we do best—delivering results for our clients. Tapping into external expertise not only accelerates progress but also minimises risk and enhances overall efficiency.

Of course, changing long-held mindsets

takes time. Many businesses still default to in-house recruitment for roles that could be more effectively delivered externally. And while outsourcing may not be the right fit for every organisation, it's certainly worth considering before making long-term internal hires—especially in complex, fast-paced disciplines like sales and marketing.

At Just Williams, we're proud to be a certified B Corporation, committed to rigorous standards of performance, accountability, and continuous improvement. That ethos underpins our belief in doing things differently—always exploring new approaches that bring greater value to the businesses we support. Outsourcing isn't just a cost-saving measure. Done well, it's a strategic choice that can unlock growth, increase agility, and ultimately build stronger, more focused teams.

The UK Outsourcing Landscape in 2025

Recent data underscores the growing reliance on outsourcing among UK businesses:

- Approximately 48% of UK companies are now outsourcing business operations, with

a skills shortage cited as a primary driver (Talent partners, 24)

- Digital marketing is a significant area of focus, with 34% of small businesses outsourcing this function to leverage external expertise (DigitalMinds, 24)

- The UK marketing technology outsourcing market is projected to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 8.2% from 2025 to 2030, indicating a robust and expanding sector (Grand View Research, 25)

- The UK business process outsourcing market is expected to reach a projected revenue of US\$ 32.9 billion by 2030, growing at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 11.1% from 2025 to 2030. (Grand View Research, 25)

- The global B2B sales outsourcing services market is expected to reach USD 216.27 billion by 2033, indicating a robust and expanding sector.

These statistics highlight a broader trend: businesses are increasingly turning to outsourcing not just for cost savings, but to access specialised skills and drive strategic growth.

Considering Outsourcing?

If you're exploring ways to enhance your sales and marketing efforts through outsourcing, it's essential to choose a partner that aligns with your business values and objectives. At Just Williams, we focus on building collaborative relationships that deliver measurable results.

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10

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Strong Operations need Strong Operational Leaders

By Helen Butler, Operations Columnist

Operations Managers are often the glue holding small and growing businesses together. They coordinate projects, resolve issues, manage team performance, and keep delivery on track. They're relied on heavily – yet often operate in isolation.

In many small businesses, the Operations Manager is the only person in a formal operational role. They're brought in to help things run more smoothly, often promoted from within or hired during growth. But they're rarely given a clear remit or a reference point for what good operational leadership looks like.

An emerging trend

At Simplified Operations, we've spent the last couple of years working with founder-led businesses – typically with teams of 10 to 50 people – and found a consistent pattern emerge. Operations Managers are critical to supporting the performance and growth of SME businesses but are often left to figure things out on their own.

They're not lacking ability or commitment. Most are capable, resourceful individuals working in complex environments. But with no one around them to define the scope of the role or set expectations from a true operational excellence perspective, they often default to managing the busyness – solving problems, reacting to issues, and keeping things moving – rather than building the structures that prevent those problems in the first place.

Why it matters

Operational leadership requires a broad and practical skillset: establishing clear roles and responsibilities, building consistent ways of working, improving processes, using data to drive performance, and ensuring the right tools and systems are in place to support delivery. It's not just about getting things done – it's about enabling others to deliver well, consistently and at scale.

In larger businesses, people in these roles typically have access to mentoring, frameworks, and structured development. In smaller businesses, that support is limited, if available at all. Operations Managers often carry high responsibility without access to the tools or training they need to truly lead.

Addressing the gap

This isn't just a skills issue – it's a business issue. When operational leads are confident and well-equipped, the difference is clear: delivery improves, team ownership increases, issues are resolved earlier, and the business becomes far less reliant on the founder.

To address this, at Simplified Operations we've developed the **Operations Academy** – a learning and support environment specifically for those leading operations in small businesses. It focuses on three core outcomes:

- **Clarity** – helping operational leads understand what's expected of them.
- **Capability** – building the skills to lead teams, processes and performance.
- **Confidence** – through practical tools, expert guidance and peer learning.

It's a professional development space that reflects the realities of the role – and recognises its importance in building scalable, self-managing businesses.

Is your Operations Manager getting what they need to succeed – and is your business truly seeing the full value of the role?

Strong operations rely on strong operational leadership. Investing in that role isn't just good practice. It's essential infrastructure for sustainable growth.

If you'd like more details on how the Operations Academy can support your business, get in touch:
helen@simplifiedoperations.co.uk
 0191 694 1349

The Future of Work: Creating Space to Lead

Nearly every conversation I have with leaders includes:

“I’ve no time to think”,

“I’m in back-to-back meetings”, or “I need to be better at time management.”

Sound familiar?

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) England reported in 2023 that 61% of workers feel exhausted at the end of most working days. Deloitte also found 64% of managers have considered quitting for roles that better support their wellbeing.

Since the pandemic, busyness has become a badge of honour in many organisations. But this culture isn't serving us well - either from a mental health perspective, or a strategic perspective which I explored last month.

Our diary is our fault. We fail to plan ahead, set boundaries, or say no. This affects not only our wellbeing, but also our relationships and decision-making. As business moves faster, is more complex and leadership decision making becomes more critical, we must carve out space to think clearly, consult others, and make better decisions. Being buried in meetings, buried in emails, with no time for lunch or the loo isn't sustainable.

We need to lead smarter. That starts with making space.

A few years ago, I chose “space” as my word of the year. I wanted to slow down, be more considered, and create room for other things. Creating that space was surprisingly uncomfortable. It took me 2-3 months to reorganise my diary. After 30 years of 50-60 hour weeks, the habit of being busy was ingrained.

But that's the thing: it was just a habit. One I had to break — without guilt — to get comfortable thinking, planning, and even wasting time to gain time. After six months, I finally found my rhythm. With guardrails in place, I now focus on the right things and avoid getting bogged down.

So how can you create space?

1. Define what you want space for.

This could be within the work environment, at home or for hobbies. Ask yourself:

- What would you like freedom from?
 - What would you like freedom for?
- Your answers will guide what kind of space you need and when.

2. Choose your focus & be deliberate.

Greg McKeown, in *Essentialism*, urges us to “discern the trivial many from the vital few.” Review your work and life:

- What truly supports your wellbeing, effectiveness, and responsibilities?
- What's trivial, not yours to do, or just doesn't matter?
- Never book more than 80% of your diary. Things always take longer than we think.
- Choose when you're available and when you're not. When someone asks for your time, you don't have to say yes. Equally, don't become the rebel who resists everything. Instead, negotiate. Ask: “Do you need me for the whole meeting?” or “When's the deadline?” Or simply say, “I can't do that then — but here's when I can.” Most people respect that.

This is about disciplined choices — what you will do, delegate, or ditch. You can't do it all, so decide what to compromise.

3. Make sure you're playing in position

Where are you doing things outside your role? Try this exercise:

- Take a sheet of paper and divide it into four: my role, my team's role, my manager's role, others' roles.
- Map your tasks and meetings. What do you notice? How much of what you're doing actually is someone else's responsibility.

If things don't belong to you, politely return them or renegotiate, what, when, or how it will happen, by whom.

Remember - creating space isn't lazy — it's leadership. The right space enables you to lead with clarity, make better decisions, and make an impact where it truly matters.

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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In conversation with...

Robert Chambers

Training Manager,
Hadrian Safety Management

What inspired you to start this business, and what was the journey like from idea to execution?

I have been involved in training since 1984 but always for training organisations until 2011 when I was made redundant and after thinking long and hard, I decided that one option was to form my own training business. I started to look at the pros and cons, the main pro I could take advantage of my experiences in training and use the redundancy money to buy the equipment and resources I would need.

What challenges did you face in the early stages, and how did you overcome them?

My biggest challenge was I had never run my own business before; I contacted the Business Factory in North Shields, and they put me on training events and were able to source professional help such as marketing, using social media and how to promote myself. The advice was invaluable and still is. The other challenge was financial. At the start, until I got my name promoted it was hard going. I was lucky in that I had a lot of contacts and within a couple of months work started coming in.

What sets your business apart from competitors in your industry?

Now that is a hard question. I can't really answer that. There are a lot of good first aid businesses in the Northeast. I have been told I'm friendly, approachable and I am very knowledgeable, but I think I'm just being me.

How do you define success, and how has that definition evolved over time?

I have been awarded twice. Northern Enterprise Awards 2023 Best First Aid Training Organisation - North East and VODA Awards 2024, David Bavaird Award for Community Minded Business. Awards not only define success but shows how much an organization is respected.



Robert Chambers

What strategies have you found most effective for growing your business?

I have two strategies. The first is being flexible. Not all clients work 9 till 5 Monday to Friday so working weekends and evenings are necessary. The second strategy is not looking at a particular line of training and always looking at what is needed whenever it's in the private, public sector or local authority. Strategies cannot be static and over 14 years my strategies have changed.

How do you stay ahead of industry trends and adapt to market changes?

I stay ahead by being flexible and listening to changes in trends. This is where social media helps. Joining industry groups on Facebook and taking note of other people in my line of work.

What role does company culture play in your success, and how do you foster a positive work environment?

As I am self-employed and have no staff, so my company culture is how I project myself to potential customers. Open and honest is best.

Can you share a defining moment that changed the course of your business?

When I started early on getting big clients

like Tynemet College and North Tyneside council children's services were the biggest defining moment. Potential clients like to know your background and what you can do. I have also been very lucky that my name has been passed to other potential clients resulting that I have been booked to run courses around the country. I have also conducted training for clients from Canada and Ireland.

What advice would you give to aspiring entrepreneurs looking to start their own ventures?

Make sure you have the knowledge and skills and never wing it. Never be afraid to ask for help and advice. No one knows everything and what skills you don't have, someone will. As I once said to a colleague "walk don't run." Never rush without checking. And most of all get involved with likeminded people and join groups like North Tyneside Business Forum.

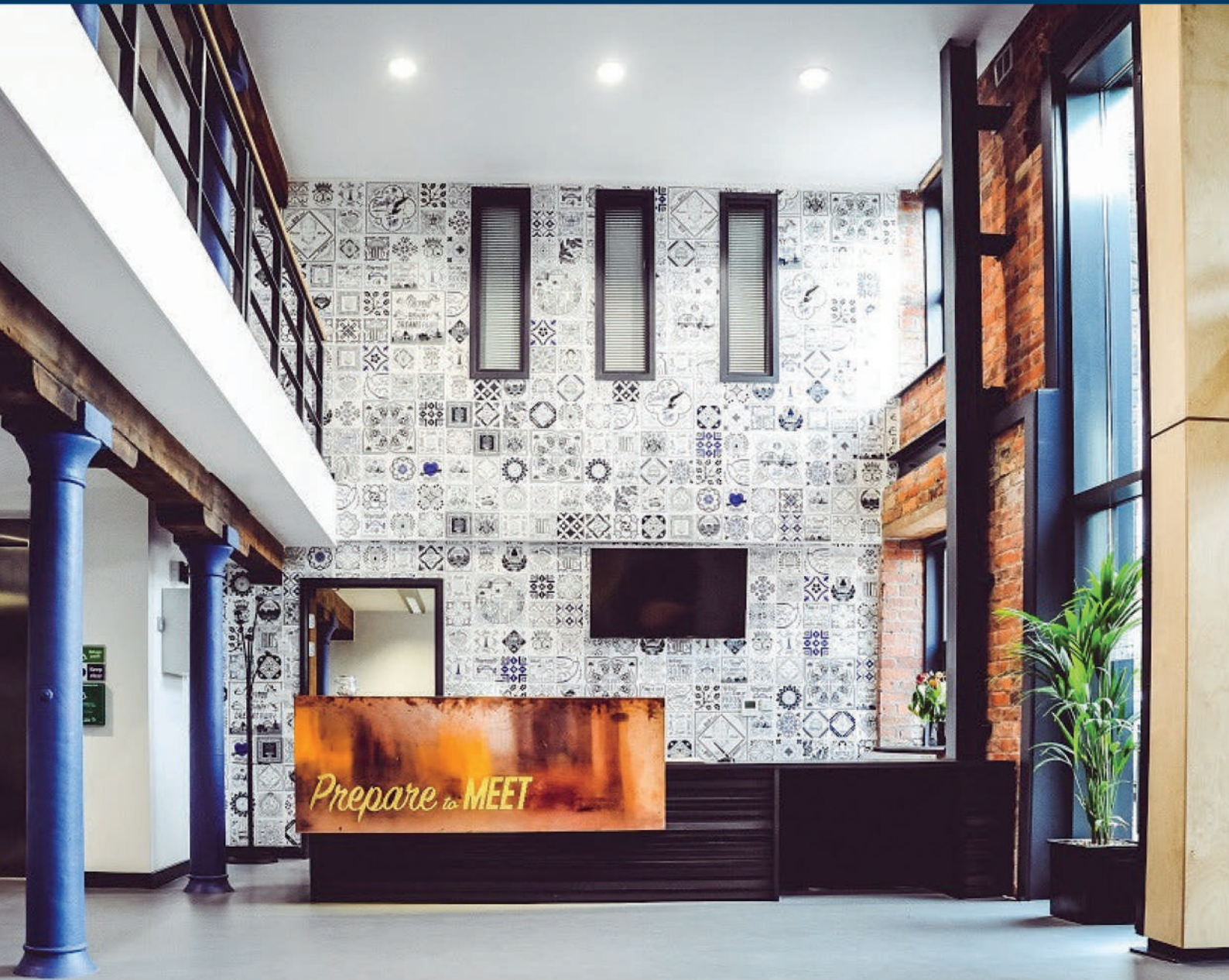
What's next for your business? Any exciting projects or future plans on the horizon?

Sadly, nothing like that. I am close to retirement age so I will be slowing down but won't be stopping.

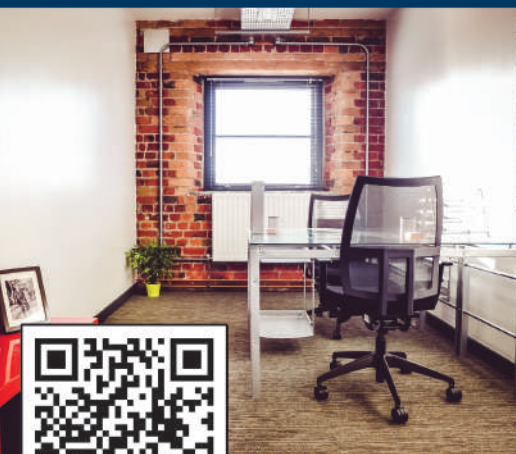
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Join the North Tyneside Business Forum – Your free business support network



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

Established in 2020 and led by a team of dedicated business owners, this unique community exists to connect, support, and empower local businesses across the borough.

Whether you're a start-up, a growing enterprise, or an established business, we're here to help—and the best part? Membership is completely free!

Why join the North Tyneside Business Forum?

As one of the largest peer-to-peer business networks in the North East, our forum brings together a mix of local entrepreneurs, offering valuable opportunities for networking, mentorship,

and collaboration. We understand that running a business can sometimes feel like a solitary journey, but at the Forum, you're never alone. Every member is welcomed with a friendly face and an open door to expert advice, business support, and community-driven initiatives.

What you'll gain as a member

Peer Support & Networking – Connect with like-minded business owners who understand the challenges you face. Build relationships, exchange ideas, and forge valuable partnerships.

Expert Guidance & Resources – Gain access to industry experts and local advisors who can provide tailored support to help your business thrive.

Events & Workshops – Attend our free events and workshops designed to equip you with the latest insights, strategies, and skills for business success.

A Voice in Your Community – Influence local business policies and be part of a network that works collaboratively with North Tyneside Council to support and promote businesses in the borough.

Keeping business local & thriving

The North Tyneside Business Forum isn't just about networking—it's about building a stronger, more resilient local economy. By joining, you're contributing to a movement that encourages businesses to support each other, share knowledge, and drive collective success. Our events and initiatives nurture a culture of collaboration, ensuring that local businesses stay connected, stay supported, and stay local.

No cost, just opportunity

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

Join today!

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

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The Eye of Sauron

Dr David Cliff explores the impact of oversight in organisations.

Oversight is a vital component of organisational support and accountability. Done well, it ensures leaders remain connected with operational realities, enabling timely intervention, effective support, risk mitigation, and the identification of emerging opportunities.

However, oversight can easily become distorted. All too often, it slips into selective perception—an over-focus on specific incidents, individuals, or processes. This narrowing of attention is often driven by psychological biases such as confirmation bias, which can disproportionately allocate organisational energy and resources toward areas placed under the metaphorical spotlight. Meanwhile, other parts of the organisation are cast into shadow—unseen, unsupported, and potentially vulnerable.

To avoid this, oversight must be recognised and developed as a discipline of leadership. It should not be reactive, nor rooted in fear or control, but integrated as a routine practice that respects both people and systems. This requires consistent supervision structures, systemic awareness, and an attunement to staff as individuals. It also involves clarity around roles and responsibilities, so that correction is not something applied only after failure is made visible, or issues escalate to the desk of a micro-managing leader.

Clients sometimes describe this distorted form of oversight as “the Eye of Sauron”—a wry, metaphorical nod to The Lord of the Rings. In the film, the Dark Lord Sauron's flaming eye obsessively scans for threats. Yet its intense focus on the decoy army at the gates of Mordor blinds it to the true danger: two inconspicuous hobbits carrying the ring of power to its destruction.

The parallel to organisational life is striking. Leaders, in their attempts to prioritise, can inadvertently create blind spots. By fixating too narrowly on certain issues or individuals, they may miss the deeper currents—structural vulnerabilities, cultural signals, or innovative efforts quietly unfolding in the margins.

Effective oversight requires an internal discipline. It involves reflective planning,



a commitment to proportionate response, and the design of mechanisms that are fit for purpose—neither too lax nor burdened by micromanagement. When aligned with strategy, oversight becomes a tool not of suspicion, but of shared learning and progress.

As I explored in my previous article on encouraging agency, the goal is not to relinquish oversight but to evolve it. Good oversight supports autonomy. It provides a light touch presence—sensitive to signs of concern, yet mature enough not to flinch or overreact at the first signal of trouble.

When misapplied, however, oversight becomes corrosive. I have seen environments where relentless scrutiny of individuals, policies, or processes leads to a culture of fear. People become hyper-vigilant, creativity is stifled, and blame replaces dialogue. Sometimes the pathology of the organisation is projected onto individuals, who become scapegoats for deeper, systemic issues. At other times, obsessive adherence to policy blinds leaders to what those policies are actually producing on the ground.

In either case, the result is the same: a loss of trust, diminished morale, and a breakdown in collective confidence.

What's needed is a more sophisticated leadership eye—one that is alert but not oppressive, responsive but not reactive, present but not invasive. Leaders must build channels for regular, structured reporting, and cultivate cultures where feedback flows both upward and downward. Oversight must

be twinned with support. Accountability must walk hand-in-hand with development.

When this balance is struck, organisations thrive. People feel safe enough to take initiative, honest enough to speak up, and supported enough to stretch into their potential. In such cultures, growth is not merely financial or strategic—it is human. And with that comes resilience, innovation, and the quiet confidence that the real threats—and the real opportunities—are not being missed.

www.gedanken.co.uk



Dr David Cliff



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.

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No more empty energy promises

How a North East Firm is saving UK industry thousands, with proof Quantum Controls is restoring trust in industrial energy efficiency, one drive at a time.

Tired of energy-saving schemes that overpromise and underdeliver? So were many UK engineers, until Quantum Controls flipped the script.

This North East innovator is cutting through the hype with a data-driven approach to industrial efficiency, offering businesses real savings they can see before they buy. Here's how they're restoring trust, slashing costs, and leading a quiet revolution in sustainable manufacturing.

Quantum Controls, based in Prudhoe, Northumberland, has grown into the UK's leading supplier of Variable Speed Drives (VSDs). Their nationwide success is rooted in a local ethos: do the job right, back it up with data, and never overpromise.

Rewriting the Rules of Energy Efficiency

Across manufacturing and utilities,

engineers have been sold sweeping savings based on overly simplistic models. A commonly misused concept is the "cube law", which holds that reducing motor speed can drastically cut energy use, true in specific scenarios like pumps and fans, but dangerously misleading if applied universally.

"Many engineers are promised 50% energy savings from a 20% speed cut," explains a Kevin Brown, Owner of Quantum Controls. "But real applications are more complex you can't apply textbook formulas to an entire factory floor."

This disconnect has left many businesses with underwhelming results and overwhelmed engineering teams. With trust eroding, Quantum Controls saw an opportunity to change the game.

The 'Try Before You Buy' Breakthrough

Quantum's answer is refreshingly straightforward: let the customer see the results first. Their 'Try Before You Buy' programme allows businesses to trial a VSD installation, measure its real-world impact, and only then decide on a purchase.

Here's how it works:

- Two weeks of baseline energy monitoring on the existing system.
- Two weeks of trial VSD installation to measure new consumption.
- A detailed report showing exact savings, carbon reductions, and return on investment — all backed by Quantum's commitment to underwrite the figures.

It's an approach that resonates with

Northern values of fairness, transparency, and straight-talking.

Real Savings, Real Impact

One North East glass manufacturer recently participated in the trial and uncovered annual savings of over £114,000 — with a payback in under two months. "That's the kind of result that gets engineers excited again," says Kevin. "We're not making bold claims. We're delivering outcomes."

Leading from the North East

Quantum Controls isn't just innovating it's growing. From its roots in Prudhoe, the company now operates nationally, with 24/7 engineering support and partnerships with major drive manufacturers.

But its mission remains personal. "We're proud to lead the way from the North East," says Kevin. "This region has always been about practical ingenuity. We just applied that mindset to industrial energy savings."

Restoring Confidence, One Drive at a Time

As businesses across the UK look to cut costs and meet carbon targets, Quantum Controls is proving that energy savings don't need to be speculative. With engineering integrity, real-world trials, and customer-first thinking, they're bringing trust and measurable results back to the table.

**Speak to the team today:
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energy@quantum-controls.co.uk**



Ex-crime scene investigators launch true crime podcast

The Crime Scene Insiders is a brand-new True Crime Podcast, recorded here in the North East.

The project is the latest release from Teesside University graduates and Managing Directors of CSI Training and Events Ltd, Angela Davies, and Dionne Watson, who are also responsible for 'The Original Forensic Awareness App' – Crime Scene Assistant.

The podcast launched with a bang on the 30th of May, with the release of 3 episodes. Two introductory episodes getting to know the pair and the aims of the podcast, and a third true crime episode, which sees Angela and Dionne interviewing Alison Madgin and Carly Barret from Samantha's legacy, a charity set up to raise awareness of knife crime, after the brutal murder of Samantha Madgin in 2007.

The podcast is something that has been in the pipeline for a few years, but Angela and Dionne have been so busy with other projects, it kept getting put on the back burner. However, this is something they are passionate about and thoroughly enjoy.

The pair describe The Crime Scene Insiders as a True Crime Podcast with a CSI twist and feel that they are bringing something different to the true crime podcast world.

Angela said "People love True Crime and are fascinated by it, but not a lot of people get to see the realities, and a lot of podcasts in this genre are delivered by lay people who enjoy telling the story. What we bring is our experience as Crime Scene Investigators and Disaster Response consultants".

Dionne said "Our aim is to take people under the barrier tape. We will be covering historic cases, cases we have worked on, and current cases, looking at them from a practitioner's perspective. In addition to episodes with the two of us, we are also inviting guests onto the podcast from a large range of forensic disciplines, bringing so much experience to one place, as well as talking to victims and families, letting them tell their own stories".

Both Angela and Dionne are really excited for the growth and future development of the podcast and are hoping it will be a hit with true crime fanatics and practitioners alike. They have already recorded with: other ex-crime scene investigators, a US death investigator, ex-covert forensics expert and of course, as mentioned above the family of Samantha Madgin. And their guest list is long, due to their extensive network after 20 years working in the field of forensics.

Angela said "We are both nervous and excited because a lot of people know us however, not a lot of people know us like this. We decided from the off that we would be authentically ourselves, be brutally honest and hard hitting. We're also not shying away from some of the more difficult topics of conversation, and who knows how we, and that, will be received. We are also very new to this, so we hope people stick with us whilst we hone our craft".

Dionne said "It's always nerve wracking when you put yourself out there. We are



Dionne Watson



Angela Davies

making ourselves vulnerable and being entirely ourselves. And of course, you want people to listen and for it to succeed, but who knows where this will take us. What we can say is regardless, we are having a lot of fun, as we have since we started the business 13 years ago, and hopefully that shines through!

Episodes of The Crime Scene Insiders will be released fortnightly, on a Friday morning, across all of the usual podcasting platforms such as Spotify, YouTube, Apple Podcasts, Podbean etc.

In addition, you can find out more from our website www.thecrimesceneinsiders.com

Or follow us on our socials: Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube and TikTok

Last word from the pair... "People's support would be much appreciated and what we are learning is that the best way to get that is by engaging with social content, liking, sharing, subscribing etc, so we would be eternally grateful if people who think this is the podcast for them, could do that".

Also, "If people want to write in, to ask questions or request specific case coverage/podcast topics etc., they can write to info@thecrimesceneinsiders.com"



Collaborative Search: Redefining recruitment through partnership and purpose

At Collaborative Search, we believe that recruitment is far more than a transactional process—it's a strategic partnership built on trust, expertise, and a deep understanding of people.

We exist to help our clients access a level of talent typically beyond their reach, and to offer a level of service rarely found in the traditional recruitment landscape.

Our approach is simple but powerful: we place long-term relationships at the core of everything we do. By investing time and energy into truly understanding the organisations we work with, we are able to align ourselves with their missions, cultures, and growth goals. This means we're not just filling roles—we're helping shape the future of their businesses by delivering exceptional, transformative talent.

This commitment to quality and partnership is why we're proud to work with many of the world's most impressive organisations. These partnerships span industries and geographies, united by a shared belief in the value of strategic talent acquisition. We don't settle for surface-level matches; we dig deeper, ensuring the people we place are not only qualified but aligned—culturally, strategically, and professionally.

As we continue to grow, we're focused on expanding our reach while staying true to the principles that define us. We are scaling our presence in key markets, investing in technology and research capabilities, and building a world-class team to support our clients' evolving needs.



L. R: Michael Ward, Scott McGowan and Adam Pringle

To support this growth, we're actively seeking consultants and managers who are ready to take their recruitment careers to the next level. If you're a driven professional tired of the routine, numbers-driven world of traditional recruitment agencies, Collaborative Search offers a refreshing alternative. Here, your work will matter. You'll have the autonomy to build meaningful client relationships, the support to develop your career, and the opportunity to make a genuine impact. We foster a culture of collaboration, excellence, and integrity. Whether you're an experienced consultant or a rising leader, you'll find a home here that encourages long-term thinking, rewards quality over quantity, and values the people behind every placement.

To prospective clients and hiring managers:

if you are looking for more than a vendor—if you are seeking a true partner in talent acquisition—then we would love to speak with you. At Collaborative Search, we take the time to understand your business at a strategic level. We tailor our search processes to your specific goals, and we work tirelessly to bring you the very best talent your industry has to offer.

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Sustainability and the Shifting Priorities of the workforce in 2025

Genee Consulting Ltd, North East based sustainability specialists who deliver Investors in the Environment (iE), in collaboration with Talentheads, an award-winning Talent business, building high performing teams for growing businesses.

If you're looking to recruit, it's becoming increasingly important to examine your sustainability credentials as an employer. Increasingly, candidates are making career decisions based not only on salary or benefits, but on whether a company aligns with their personal values, and sustainability features on that list.

With climate change no longer seen as a distant threat but a pressing global emergency, today's workforce is more climate-conscious than ever. From record-breaking weather events to the impact of environmental degradation on daily life, the realities of a warming planet are shaping how people live, consume, and work. For many, this means actively seeking out employers who are part of the solution, not the problem.

This shift is especially noticeable among younger generations entering or advancing within the workforce. These employees are digitally savvy, socially aware, and have access to information about a company's environmental practices, supply chain ethics, and sustainability targets. They're not just asking if an employer has a sustainability policy, they're also examining whether it's meaningful, measurable, and embedded into the culture of the organisation.

In conversations across industries, many report challenges in attracting talent to roles where the company's values feel out of step with the times. Job seekers are increasingly filtering out employers who lack ambition on issues like net-zero commitments. As a result, businesses with weak or performative sustainability efforts risk not just reputational damage, but long-term difficulties attracting and retaining talent.



L-R: Sam Spoors and Jo Holmes

In this context, sustainability becomes a critical part of an organisation's employer brand. Employees want to work somewhere that reflects their own sense of purpose, and to feel their work contributes to something greater than profits. Ultimately, they are choosing jobs that reflect the future they want to live in.

Sam Spoors, Founder and Managing Director of Talentheads, said: "Having worked in recruitment across UK businesses for over 20 years, I've seen firsthand how candidate expectations have evolved - and sustainability is now front and centre. Recent data shows that 85% of graduates consider it important that an employer has sustainable practices. That's not a trend, it's a signal: if businesses want to attract and retain the next generation of talent, their environmental credentials must be credible, transparent, and embedded into the company culture".

For businesses that want to take meaningful action, support is available. Investors in the Environment (iE) is one such organisation that helps companies build sustainability into their operations in a practical, structured, and approachable way. Rather than overwhelming businesses with complexity, iE provides a clear framework for establishing an environmental management system (EMS)

that is both action-focused and achievable.

Through a suite of easy-to-use templates, resources, and step-by-step guidance, iE empowers businesses to assess their environmental impact and set realistic, impactful goals, whether it's cutting waste, reducing carbon emissions, or embedding sustainability into procurement and daily operations. The focus is on making environmental responsibility a benefit, helping your business improve efficiency, engage staff, and enhance their reputation, without slowing down progress or productivity.

Organisations that want to stay competitive in the 2025 talent market must take a clear, credible, and proactive stance on sustainability. Greenwashing is easily spotted, which means not only setting ambitious goals but also demonstrating progress transparently and engaging employees in the journey.

For more information on growing your business with a recruitment approach that is strategic and sustainable, contact hello@talentheads.co.uk or visit their website www.talentheads.co.uk

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



Ben Whitfield

Events bring the magic

By Ben Whitfield, Director of Communications, NE1 Ltd

As we move into June, anticipation is building for the months ahead. Newcastle is gearing up for a spectacular summer packed with a calendar of unmissable events that will bring extra vibrancy to the city and money into the economy.

The record-breaking return of Magic Weekend in May set the bar high. Tens of thousands of fans flocked to Newcastle from all over the country. It was the eighth time we had hosted the event, and the first over a bank holiday.

Sunday saw a record-breaking attendance of 32,862, contributing to the highest overall gate since 2018. Over two action-packed days, 64,000 fans enjoyed six hotly contested rugby league games at St. James' Park.

Magic always brings a carnival atmosphere to the city, putting on a great show and providing a multi-million-pound boost to Newcastle's economy.

This year, it also acted as a starter's pistol for the summer's events, with 14 weeks of entertainment lined up and ready to go.

First up are three nights of Sam Fender's homecoming concerts at St. James' Park, followed by Fontaines D.C. and their much anticipated concert in Exhibition Park in July.

Another summer favourite, NE1's much-loved Screen on the Green makes its welcome return at the end of June. The free, open-air cinema, named among the top ten things to do in the UK in the summer by the Sunday Times, starts with two weeks of sporting action from Wimbledon, followed by over 100 films screened free throughout the summer.

NE1's Newcastle Restaurant Week lands for a week in August, a culinary highlight in the summer calendar. With over 100 restaurants taking part, the event delivers a significant boost to participating businesses with over 55,000 diners over the week. The event creates a real buzz across the whole city with celebrations extending into pubs, bars, and cultural venues too.

As well as NE1's curated programme of events, we are also proud supporters of other city-wide events, including Northern Pride, which we have sponsored for more than 10 years, and Mela in the City, which celebrates South Asian cultures over the August Bank Holiday weekend.

That same month, we will also welcome back the adrenaline-fuelled Red Bull Tyne Ride for the second year in the city, an event which has to be seen to be believed, with a motorcycle dirt track built along the river, putting spectators strikingly close to the action. The Quayside is the perfect backdrop for this amazing spectacle, nestled between its famous bridges.

In July, the city hosts the Great North 10k which crosses the Tyne Bridge, and the world's most popular half marathon, the Great North Run, returns at the end of the Summer, showcasing Newcastle to the world, live on the BBC.

Together, all these events will attract more than 550,000 attendees, enlivening the city, and boosting business throughout the summer months.

It is not by chance that these events have chosen and continue to choose Newcastle.

NE1 works closely with Newcastle City Council and with other partners all year round to attract and support events of regional, national, and international significance. Successful events are like magnets, which attract others in their wake, and it is a hugely exciting time for the city as our reputation for hosting top-class, fan-friendly events continues to grow.

Newcastle has all the key ingredients for staging world-class events, from Magic to music. A walkable city, a host of venues and facilities, with new venues in the pipeline, and iconic, instantly recognisable backdrops. Add to this the city itself, the world-famous Geordie charm, the city's bars, restaurants, leisure and cultural venues, and retail scene, all add to its allure and create the perfect place to host.

The spectacular Carabao Cup celebrations showcased the city in a tremendous light, wowing potential visitors and event organisers. The city's unrivalled energy, passion, enthusiasm, and vibrancy combine with its open and welcoming spirit to create a heady mix which must be experienced to be believed.

The good news continues with Newcastle City Council's recent announcement that the city will be staging the prestigious Mercury Music Prize in October, lured from London for the first time in its history. This comes hot on the heels of the MOBO Awards, which Newcastle successfully hosted in February.

In challenging times for many, the impact of an ambitious, diverse, and well-curated events calendar cannot be underestimated. Events play a vital role in boosting the city's economy, attracting visitors, and increasing footfall and spend, while raising Newcastle's visibility on both a national and international stage.

As we prepare for a stellar summer ahead, we look forward to welcoming hundreds of thousands of visitors for what we know will be an incredible time in our wonderful city.

www.newcastlene1ltd.com

A new beginning!

Five years of enabling kind action as a valuable currency to create maximum Social Impact in society, and we are only just getting started!

I'm excited to share that five years later, we are evolving, to make delivering Social Value easier, simpler and more supportive.

Five years ago, in the height of the first pandemic, I wrote on a piece of paper 'What if Kindness was Currency'.

Over four decades I had been using my valuable currencies of my personal time, skills, knowledge, resources, and finance, to deliver social impact and social justice. I've chaired a charity, been an active volunteer for local and national charities and social organisations, I'd led social justice campaigns, been involved with international change-making movements, been an activist for grassroot needs, actively sat in several governance roles and delivered multiple fundraising projects; the very first project I delivered in 1988, I was eight years old.

During this time, I became frustrated with the complexity of a system that made it difficult for the needs to be met in society. When we were plunged into the global pandemic, the desperation of the problems in society intensified. One evening as I clapped, as we all did, for our wonderful frontline people, news broke of the first of these kind souls to die because of protecting us all, one of the nurses was very close to home. My frustration, turned to anger and a determination to create much needed change.

What if kindness was currency?

Over the last five years our mission has been to enable social impact; reduce the number of people living in poverty, help social organisations struggling to survive, and support communities and economies that are failing to thrive. With each year, whether it be in our work, as a critical friend, or through discussion, I've shared the increase of crisis problems, poverty figures rising, VCSEs closing their doors, more deprived communities and businesses struggling. It hasn't got better, it's got worse.



Michelle Jones

And not through the lack of people and businesses trying or caring, but due to significant barriers making it difficult for all.

We've researched, developed, conceptualised, tested, listened, dug deep, repeated to get to the heart of the problems, to understand, to deliver a solution that supports the social value eco-system, that enables maximum impact where it matters, for the betterment of all. In doing so we also supported 378 frontline worker families living in deprivation, 300 charities, social organisations and ethical businesses, and engaged over 1000 individuals and organisations to take kind action.

To mark five years or nearly 40 in reality, I'm excited to share that Kind Currency has evolved and whilst we say thank you to everyone that has come on this journey with us so far, we are proud to announce the development of Keepl Social.

Keepl Social is an end to end, user friendly,

community driven platform enabling the delivery of outcomes that are meaningful, impactful, measurable, auditable and lasting!

A solution enabled by a team of individuals who care, good people who want to make a difference and create change, who want to support you. A team with expertise across social value, social justice and social impact, innovation, digitisation, tech, AI, data, fraud detection, security and business. A team with the lived experience of problems in society.

Supporting public, private and social sector organisations to Simplify Social Value to Deliver Maximum Impact.

Bringing everyone together in one inclusive and accessible digital place, where we genuinely believe, that together, we can all make Social Value a Driving Force for Change!

www.keeplsocial.com

Are you ready to scale, internationally?

Take your North East Business to the global stage and scale up by 10x with our 3IP model.

△ INTERNATIONALISATION

Whether it's Riyadh, Bengaluru or Stockholm, ISS Airview offers structured market entry, in-country representation, and regulatory navigation. Our hubs provide a soft landing and trusted connections to help businesses expand internationally with confidence.

△ INVESTMENT

ISS Airview connects high-growth businesses with curated funding pathways — from venture capital and angel networks to family offices and strategic co-investment platforms. We remove the barriers to capital so scaleups can land smarter and grow faster.

△ INNOVATION

We embed tailored innovation into every layer of business support — from business model innovation labs and AI-driven growth tools to founder wellbeing and IP commercialisation. Innovation isn't just what we do — it's how we think, act, and scale.

Scale your business globally with ISS Airview



The ultimate launchpad for Scale-Ups.

▽ PEOPLE

Join a curated community of growth-focused founders, global mentors, and industry experts. Through deep peer learning, strategic networking, and investor introductions, ISS Airview becomes your boardroom, classroom, and launchpad.

▽ PLACE

Headquartered at Newcastle International Airport with initial hubs in Teesside, Riyadh, and Bengaluru — our 10,000 sq ft state-of-the-art centres combine premium workspace with world-class support. You don't just work here — you grow from here.

▽ PROGRAMMES

We tailor support to your growth stage — from a one-day strategic review and bespoke Growth Report to a 12-week accelerator, investor readiness bootcamps, and cultural immersion training. Every programme is built for scale, and to deliver practical results.

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LEARN MORE

www.issairview.com

CONTACT US

grow.global@issairview.com



Inclusion by Default

One year on – from conversation to consequence.

A year ago, we planted a seed. Not just any seed – one rooted in courage, conviction, and a willingness to ask the uncomfortable question: what if inclusion wasn't an afterthought, but the starting point?

The first Inclusion by Default conference lit the spark. This year, we turned that spark into a fire.

Over 100 changemakers joined us – from employers and educators to entrepreneurs and community champions. Not to tick boxes. Not to hear themselves speak. But to get stuck into the real work of creating a North East where everyone can thrive.

The data that can't be ignored

We started with the facts – not to depress, but to drive action:

- Almost 1 in 2 people report being discriminated against at work in our region.
- Women still earn just 73p for every £1 a man earns – and get fewer leadership opportunities.
- Ethnic minorities face higher unemployment and underemployment, despite being qualified and ready to contribute.
- Disabled people in the North East are half as likely to be employed – not due to lack of skill, but lack of opportunity.

These aren't abstract stats. They're real lives, real barriers, and real missed chances.

From insight to action: the Inclusive Innovation Sprint

This wasn't a day of PowerPoints. It was a 90-minute hands-on Inclusive Innovation Framework Sprint, where participants tackled real-world scenarios using design thinking, data, and service design.

Ten tables, ten themes – from how we communicate in diverse workplaces, to how we collaborate across systems, and how we celebrate untold stories.

The solutions were practical, powerful and people-centred. Reframing job ads to support neurodiverse applicants. Rethinking promotion pipelines for working-class women. Building trust in communities where institutions have failed.

It wasn't just theory – it was designing change in real-time.



Ammar Mirza CBE

Stories with soul

What really moved us weren't just the solutions. It was the stories.

We heard from:

- A single mum navigating three jobs and still being told she's not "committed enough".
- A wheelchair user rejected for five interviews before anyone saw past her chair.
- A young refugee finding her feet – and her voice – in a new land.

Raw, powerful, and humbling.

This is what inclusion really looks like – listening, learning, and doing better.

What's next?

This wasn't a one-off. It was a commitment. We're now:

Publishing a regional inclusion roadmap, shaped by the ideas and lived experience from the conference.

Rolling out the IIF Sprint across public, private and third sectors to spark culture change from within.

Launching a Regional Inclusion Index, because if we can't measure it, we can't move it.

But most of all, we're staying accountable.

Inclusion by default means more than posters or pledges. It means systems change, led by those most affected.

A North East worth fighting for

We're a region of world-firsts and record-breakers. A place with heart, humour and hustle. But for all our grit and graft, there are still too many left behind.

Inclusion by default is our way of saying: not anymore.

It's time we made this region not just the most beautiful and resilient – but the most inclusive in the UK. A place where no one's potential is wasted because of what they look like, where they were born, or how they move through the world.

That's our North East. And we're building it – together.

So... are you in?

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.

Despite the launch of our campaign in 2024 to help make the Northeast the most inclusive region in the UK by the end of 2025, and our resilience, the North East continues to face entrenched inequalities that can no longer be ignored.

The data — and the stories behind it — are clear:



Nearly 1 in 2 people

report being discriminated against at work — for their age, gender, ethnicity, or disability.



Northeast women

earn around 73p for every £1 earned by men



1 in 4

believe their ethnicity directly harms job prospects.



People with disabilities in our region are half as likely to be employed



Senior leaders often rate their organisation's inclusion efforts highly — but staff on the ground don't agree. There's a disconnect, and it's damaging trust.

THE DATA TELLS US...

Over the last year, we've engaged with more than 50,000 people through one of the largest regional inclusion surveys ever undertaken.



White working-class boys in pit villages who feel they've been forgotten.ries, insights and truths are raw and real.



Young men struggling with mental health, searching for purpose and belonging.



Single mums juggling jobs, school runs, bills — and being judged all the while.



Ethnic minorities still battling systemic barriers and stereotypes.



Disabled individuals, neurodiverse people, carers — so often excluded from the mainstream economy.



Nearly 80% of respondents said they had felt excluded or "othered" at some point in their lives.

WHAT WE'VE ACHIEVED:

50,000
Voices captured



United unlikely allies locally

Frameworks delivering impact



Recognition of Excellence



Real stories, real progress



An inclusive narrative



Conversations that matter.

We've replaced divisive rhetoric with a narrative of hope and shared prosperity — grounded in health, wealth, and happiness for all.

WHAT WE NEED:

We don't just need new services, we need new ways of seeing, hearing, and including people.

Adopt our Inclusive Innovation Framework to:



Design better.



Deliver fairer.



Build a region where inclusion is by default.

We've proven that inclusive innovation works. Now we must scale it.

Don't just tick boxes – Transform systems.

Don't just listen to voices – Amplify them.

Don't just design for most – Design for those left out.

This is how we make inclusion the default, not the debate. Let's build a North East where every person, no matter their background, postcode or story, can thrive.

INCLUSIVE INNOVATION FRAMEWORK (IIF)

CONTACT US

Through our Inclusive Innovation Framework (IIF) — developed in partnership with Yohlar — we've turned insight into action. Guided by Design Thinking, Data Analytics, and Service Design, our structured approach follows four overarching principles and a four stage innovation process.

Drive inclusive innovation within your organisation using the IIF to tackle real issues:



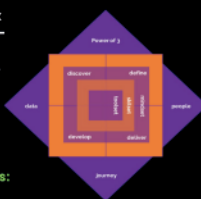
By using data to diagnose, design to reimagine, and service pathways to deliver.



Centres lived experience and disaggregated data to challenge myths and assumptions with evidence.



Reconnects people through participatory design, purpose-driven collaboration, and shared outcomes.



yohlar

Tel: 01661 823234
Email: inclusion@abconnexions.org
www.abconnexions.org
A not for profit social enterprise



Bridging the Gap

By Kathryn Rodgers,
face2faceHR Newcastle

Managing multigenerational teams in the modern workplace.

Walk into any workplace today, and you're likely to find Baby Boomers working alongside Millennials, Gen Zs collaborating with Gen Xs, and a whole spectrum of life experience and expectations sharing the same space. This rich mix of generations is a gift — but it can also present significant challenges for business owners and managers.

One of the most common issues I'm currently helping clients with is navigating the wide gap in expectations between generations, particularly between Gen X and Gen Z. It often comes down to one core theme: what we expect from our employees.

Whereas older generations might view work and personal life as separate, many younger employees expect a more holistic approach — one where their employer supports not just their career development, but their wellbeing, financial literacy, and even mental health and relationships.

A shift in expectations

Gen Z, in particular, want to work for companies whose values align with their own. They expect inclusive cultures, genuine flexibility, and real support — not just posters about wellbeing, but actual policies that reflect it. They're open about mental health, passionate about purpose, and far more likely to expect their employer to care about them as whole people.

By contrast, Gen X — now in many senior management roles — may find this approach unfamiliar or even uncomfortable. Many have built careers in workplaces that expected discretion, emotional resilience, and leaving personal matters at the door. The result? Misunderstandings, mismatched expectations, and sometimes even disengagement.

What's the Solution? Communication, Communication, Communication.

If there's one thing that cuts across every HR challenge I see — it's the need for better communication. Managing a multigenerational team isn't about favouring one group over another. It's about



Kathryn Rodgers

creating a culture where all voices are heard, respected, and valued.

Start with open dialogue. Are your managers equipped to have conversations that go beyond performance? Do you know what your younger employees are really looking for? Are your policies reflecting your workforce today — or the one you had 10 years ago?

Flexibility isn't just a buzzword

Offering flexibility doesn't mean everyone wants to work from their sofa. For some, it's about compressed hours. For others, it's the ability to take time out for childcare, medical appointments or even financial wellbeing workshops. One size does not fit all — and it never has.

Managers need to be open to listening and adapting. If Gen Z want more support with financial planning or mental health, and Gen X prefer in-person meetings and stable routines, how can you offer options that respect both?

Training across the generations

Another key area I often highlight with clients is the value of reverse mentoring.

This isn't just about younger workers learning from older ones — it's about everyone learning from each other. Pairing a tech-savvy Gen Z employee with a seasoned Gen X leader can benefit both parties in unexpected ways.

At the same time, ensuring managers understand the different communication styles and values of each generation is vital. This might mean additional training or workshops to help shift perspectives and create more empathy.

Final thoughts

Managing a multigenerational workforce is no longer a niche HR issue — it's the reality for most organisations. The key isn't to treat everyone the same, but to understand what makes each generation tick and create a culture that reflects and respects those differences.

If you're not sure where to start, start with a conversation. Ask your people what they need. You might be surprised by what you hear — and how much of it is possible with just a few small changes.

face2faceHR.com, 07946 330 025.

Executive Coach? Give me a break

Coaching has a branding problem.

Somewhere along the way, the word got sliced and diced. Now, everyone's an executive coach, a leadership coach, a performance coach - or worse, a transformational catalyst. What even is that?

Let's get one thing straight: you're either coaching, or you're not. Adding "executive" doesn't make your questions deeper, your sessions more elite, or your impact more powerful. It just adds ego - and coaching is the last place that needs it.

Coaching, in its purest form, is about creating space - space to think, reflect, feel, and act. Whether you're the CEO of a £300m business or a newly-promoted manager juggling Slack messages and school runs, the purpose is the same: slow down, take a breath, and gather your thoughts.

And that kind of space? It's rare. Burnout isn't a buzzword anymore - it's a baseline. Leaders are stretched thin. Their calendars are jammed, their decisions are rushed, and their resilience is under constant pressure. And still, we tell them to "be more resilient," like it's an app you can just download.

Coaching doesn't fix burnout with time management tips or productivity hacks. It works because it interrupts the noise. It gives leaders time to hear the things they've been too busy - or too afraid - to face:

"This isn't working."

"I'm exhausted."

"I'm faking it."

It's not always easy. But it's honest. And that's where resilience begins. Not



Scott Smith

with another motivational seminar or a LinkedIn masterclass - but with silence, space, and someone skilled enough to sit with you in it. Not to fix you, not to judge - but to help you hear yourself.

So, let's stop pretending coaching is only valuable the closer you get to the C-suite. The need for clarity, courage, and reflection is universal. We coach people, not job titles.

At People Spark, we see this every day. We work with clients from fast-scaling tech firms to public sector leaders navigating complexity and constraint. Some come to us with burnout. Others are facing high-

stakes transitions or leading teams who've never had meaningful development. What connects them isn't their rank - it's their reality. The need for space.

If coaching is going to survive the noise and nonsense, it needs to get back to what made it powerful in the first place: trust, insight, and the kind of conversation that changes how you see yourself - and what you do next. Let's stop overcomplicating it. Let's make it accessible, grounded, and human again.

peoplesparkolutions.co.uk



Diane Mactavish

Is now the time to outsource your HR?

The stage has been set, managing HR in your business is about to get tougher. The first few months of the Labour administration have seen them present their Employment Rights Bill, and it is packed full of measures which will make life more complicated for you as a typical SME business owner.

It will not be an impossible landscape to navigate though, once the Bill is enacted. With the right knowledge and insight, you will be able to steer clear of the pitfalls and focus on running your business. Bringing in outsourced HR could be the perfect solution for you.

What are the benefits of outsourced HR?

If you employ people, HR is not an option but a necessity. It will be easier than ever to find yourself in front of an employment tribunal and losing, with many of the norms of the past decade thrown out of the window. You either try and make do yourself, hire someone in-house or outsource.

Trying to save money with a DIY approach will likely be counterproductive. And hiring in-house will be too expensive for many, and not without its other downsides, too. There are numerous ways, however, in which outsourced HR can meet your needs:

- **A cost-effective solution** – For a relatively low retained fee (far lower than

hiring in-house), you can get unlimited access telephone and email HR support. It's there for you to sense check your instincts, get advice where you are stuck, receive bespoke policies essential for managing staff correctly and provide templates of key documents you may need from time to time.

- **Broad expertise** – Rather than having a single person advising on HR, you get access to a wider team, who will have collectively encountered far more scenarios and hold higher professional qualifications. We also make it our business to stay up to date with all the rule changes, not just legislation that happens from year to year, but up to the minute case law that can turn things on their head.

- **An uninterrupted service** – An outsourced service is there for you every day, never suffering from sickness or needing to take annual leave.

- **Operational improvements** – Good HR is not just about legal compliance. By integrating the good practices which are

recommended into your business, you can make gains on absence, performance, recruitment and retention – in fact anything people-related which can drive your business forwards.

- **Freeing up time** – Whether it is saving you hours trying to Google search the answers, streamlining regular admin like annual leave management or being available to run a one-off project such as a disciplinary process, having an outsourced HR service will free you up to spend more time on your core role.

- **Tribunal indemnity insurance** – If you follow our advice from the outset of an issue, you are also insured for the outcome of any tribunal should a case make it that far, giving you further peace of mind that you won't be caught out by an HR issue.

What if I already have an HR lead in my business?

Many employers actually use us alongside some limited HR resource within their business, helping them with special projects, or being available when they go on holiday or are off sick. Outsourcing is scalable, making it easier to grow, or downsize if times are tough.

Find out more

If you would like to find out more about outsourcing HR to get you prepared for the challenging years ahead, please contact us and we can talk you through the attractive options we can offer.

**Diane Mactavish, Director
HR Dept Newcastle North, North Tyneside
and Northumberland. Tel: 0191 2838732**



James Carss

Castle Peak Group - Driving business forward

Diversity and equality in the workplace - the right thing to do for driving your business forward.

There's been a terrific response by readers of Northern Insight magazine to the articles by North East based Executive Search company Castle Peak Group regarding diversity in the workplace.

The research, led by the company's CEO James Carss, focussed on the housing sector for the simple reason that Castle Peak Group are experts when it comes to filling executive positions within that industry...but...much of the research applies to other fields such as technology, manufacturing, finance, law, HR, sales, transportation etc.

In other words, if you have a business which employs people, this research will apply to you.

"It's been hugely gratifying to hear from businesses of all shapes and sizes and

read about their response to the research," says James. "One comment was why the research had concentrated on executive and board level personnel? Simple...those people will be the decision-makers within that particular business. They will be the leaders that everyone will look up to in terms of guidance but also for setting an example of what's right.

"But I fully understand why that comment was made by a reader because they're also right to suggest that everyone should be aware of diversity to ensure equality and inclusivity in the workplace. It's become something of a catchphrase here at Castle Peak Group...diversity isn't just the right thing to do, it's good for business."

And the research backs that up because a diverse 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. Link that to a trickle-down effect within the workforce and you will find that your business becomes recognised as being wholly inclusive which is something many clients and suppliers will be looking for when they decide who they want to work and be associated with.

"Something which our research uncovered was that, although progress is being made in certain areas of inclusivity, other areas are proving more difficult to improve.

Take disability for example. It is significantly under-represented, with just 9% of the housing sector's workforce

having a disability, compared to 24% of the UK population and 29% of housing sector residents. Of course, these figures won't be replicated in other industries, but it is something that business leaders need to consider.

"It's a similar story when it comes to class within the workplace. The role of class is an under-appreciated one, and different socio-economic backgrounds can

provide the diversity of thought which improves performance. I heard a phrase recently that the opposite of poverty is community. There is power in bringing a community together. It's a smaller world than it ever has been and the diversity is greater than ever."

Equality and inclusivity in the workplace is something every business should consider. Yes, you may need to make alterations to how your business operates but, in the long run, it will be hugely beneficial in both how your business is viewed and by encouraging a workplace environment where everyone feels valued.

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



Ian Kinnery

Good timely useful numbers

For many entrepreneurs, the relationship with numbers and accountants are generally difficult. Accountants are viewed as people who come around after the battle to count the dead and auditors bayonet the bodies to make sure they are actually dead!

However, to run a consistently successful business entrepreneurs

must have a better relationship with the numbers in their business - and a better relationship with the people producing those numbers.

In the same way as a sportsman must know the rules, intimately and in detail, so the entrepreneur must possess a good level of financial literacy or risk leaving a lot on the table.

As a business grows the one fact no one can afford to lose sight of is that nothing sucks cash out of a business faster than growth.

If your business is truly a scale up (>20% growth per annum over a minimum of three years) cash will inevitably be a challenge.

Most financial indicators are backward looking. They will tell you how you performed last month. Which is a bit like driving your car by only looking in the rear-view mirror.

The faster you are going, the more essential good forward visibility becomes. The most essential document is, I believe, an accurate cashflow statement.

I recommend that this is produced and examined every week and casts forward at least 90 days. Otherwise, you are in danger of literally flying blind.

The successful entrepreneur does not need to be an accountant, but they do need a financial cornerstone.

They do not need a sea of numbers and financial reports but the data they receive does need to be useful, i.e. it must enable them to make better decisions as a consequence and for that to be the case, they need to be timely.

I would insist that the businesses I ran had detailed and accurate management accounts by the seventh day of the month following, so that we could learn what was working and what wasn't.

As a boss of mine once explained, "if you shake the numbers hard enough the answer will drop out".

For that to be true we need good timely useful numbers.

Kinnery.co.uk

The impact of business coaching with Ian Kinnery

Q&A with Andrew Clarke, Managing Director at Micro Weighing Solutions

How did your coaching journey with Ian begin?

I actually came across Ian through a video he'd posted on LinkedIn. It piqued my interest, and after a couple of conversations, I realised he really understood where I was both as a leader and in terms of what the business needed. His ideas and insights resonated immediately.

What challenges were you facing at the time?

I felt I'd reached the limits of my capability. There were a lot of moving parts in the business and in my head—lots of cogs spinning, but none of them aligned. I didn't have clarity on what to tackle first each day. It was overwhelming.

What difference has coaching with Ian made to your leadership?

Working with Ian has helped me find clarity and focus. I've moved from firefighting to setting weekly goals that lead toward long-term outcomes. I'm calmer, more confident, and no longer stuck in the fog. Each day now has a clear purpose.

How would you describe Ian's style as a coach?

He's like a multi-tool—finance, marketing, leadership, people—he brings everything. But more than that, he really cares. I've worked with other coaches who just try to fix problems for you. Ian empowers you to fix them yourself.



Andrew Clarke

Would you recommend working with Ian?

Absolutely. He's not just a coach—he's a friend, a guide, and someone in your corner. In a short time, he's made a huge difference to my life and my business.

To find out more visit www.kinnery.co.uk



Peter Darrant

Out North East – Creating a legacy

For three months this summer major cities and towns across the North East will be celebrating Pride.

From dog shows to fun runs, from concerts to movie screenings – they are all designed to turn the spotlight on the LGBTQ+ community and unite them with each other and their allies.

It's down to regional charity Out North East that Pride In Sunderland which runs throughout June, followed by the month-long Pride In South Tyneside in July and culminating in Pride in Gateshead in August are taking place.

But behind all of the light hearted fun and frolics are a number of other more serious enterprises, which will hopefully make a real and lasting impact on the region.

It is Peter Darrant, who heads up Out North East, who has been a driving force not only in programming these three events but in also ensuring that there are some really meaningful and long lasting outcomes.

One of the most important of these is a piece of work taking place in conjunction with Northumbria's Crime Commissioner, Susan Dungworth, to investigate the extent of hate crime in the region.

The charity successfully applied to the Commissioner's community fund for money to carry out a Pride In Safety initiative, which will include a community survey on hate crime awareness.

This will be carried out via Out North East's website but also at its events throughout the summer, where people will be asked to share their experience of LGBTQ phobia so an accurate picture can be created on what this looks like across the region.

"We're very grateful for the support which is enabling us to carry out this survey at what is a really crucial time," said Peter.

"The LGBTQ+ community is facing a number of challenges at present and so it's important to have an accurate picture of what this looks like in the North East, to help inform future decision making on how to deal with discrimination."

The need to address these issues is something that Out North East is only too aware of, having faced a torrent of hate speech and abuse via social media while promoting last year's events.

"It is very evident that there is still a great deal of work to do and that is why initiatives like this survey are so vital," said Peter.

One of the key events will be the appearance of Carl Austin-Behan OBE DL, who will be sharing his story at all three Prides.

An RAF aircraftsman who was recognised for his bravery after rescuing a colleague from a burning plane, he was then dismissed when it became common knowledge that he was gay.

From that point he has dedicated his life to fighting for the rights of veterans and the LGBTQ+ community at large,



Carl Austin-Behan OBE DL

was the first openly homosexual Lord Mayor of Manchester and was the former LGBT Advisor to the Mayor of Greater Manchester, Andy Burnham.

He was awarded an OBE in the 2020 Queen's New Year's Honours List for services to charity and the LGBTQ+ community, as well as being a founder member of Fighting with Pride; an LGBT veterans charity run by veterans.

His inspirational story will be shared at Pride In Sunderland on Thursday 12 June. Pride in South Tyneside on 17 July and at Pride In Gateshead on Thursday 21 August.

The events are free to attend but people need to register for a free ticket at www.outnortheast.org.uk, which also has details of all of the other events taking place.

The Motherhood Penalty

Bryony Gibson, director of Bryony Gibson Consulting, explains why flexibility in business is imperative to support the working mum.

In today's dynamic workplace, the value of diverse perspectives is unquestionable. Yet, many employers overlook a vital and plentiful talent pool: mothers.

Despite their skills and experience, systemic barriers are often put in place to hinder women's career progression post-maternity. Recent research by charity Pregnant Then Screwed reveals alarming trends:

- 74,000 women lose their jobs annually in the UK due to pregnancy or maternity leave - a 37% increase since 2016.
- 41% of single mothers request flexible working when returning to work, yet 2 in every 5 have their request denied.
- Mothers working full-time are 2½ times more likely than fathers to seek flexible arrangements after having a baby.
- The gender pay gap between mothers and fathers in the UK has widened since 2020, with mothers earning £4.44 less per hour in 2023.

These findings highlight a major problem in the modern workplace. The "motherhood penalty" not only affects women's earnings and career trajectories, but it also leads to a loss of valuable talent for businesses and creates apprehension among women returning to work.

As a mother, returning to work after maternity leave was a positive step for me. Whether it was about rediscovering my professional self, enjoying a bit of grown-up conversation, or simply doing something for myself, wanting a career and

being a good parent can (and do) go hand in hand.

The reality is that mothers often return to work with enhanced skills that are crucial in today's fast-paced workplace. From off-the-chart time management and multitasking to emotional intelligence and problem solving under pressure, their capabilities add depth and strength to any team, and that is before you even consider their previous experience.

The good news is that there is a path forward. Companies that embrace flexible working arrangements - such as part-time roles, job sharing, and remote work - report higher employee retention, increased productivity, and a broader talent pool.

Take insurance giant Zurich, for example. After advertising all jobs as flexible by default, they saw a 16% rise in female hires and a significant boost in employee satisfaction.

Initiatives like the Family Friendly Workplaces program, founded in 2021, set out to embed supportive practices and policies in the workplace, encouraging environments where mothers can thrive professionally.

And the business case is clear. McKinsey research shows that companies in the top quartile for gender diversity on executive teams are 25% more likely to outperform on profitability. Inclusivity isn't just a moral imperative, it's a smart investment. Just like flexibility doesn't lower standards, it raises them.

From a recruiter's perspective, I believe that it is essential that we shift the narrative. Supporting working mothers isn't merely a moral obligation, it's a strategic business decision. By recognising and accommodating the challenges women face, businesses can harness a wealth of experience, dedication, and insight that is currently going relatively untapped.

In a job market where professional talent and experience are scarce, I don't think businesses can afford to marginalise such a significant and highly skilled section of the workforce.

So my challenge is to employers. It's time to move from good intentions to meaningful action. In a market where talent is everything, are you prepared to adapt or willing to risk falling behind?



Bryony Gibson

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



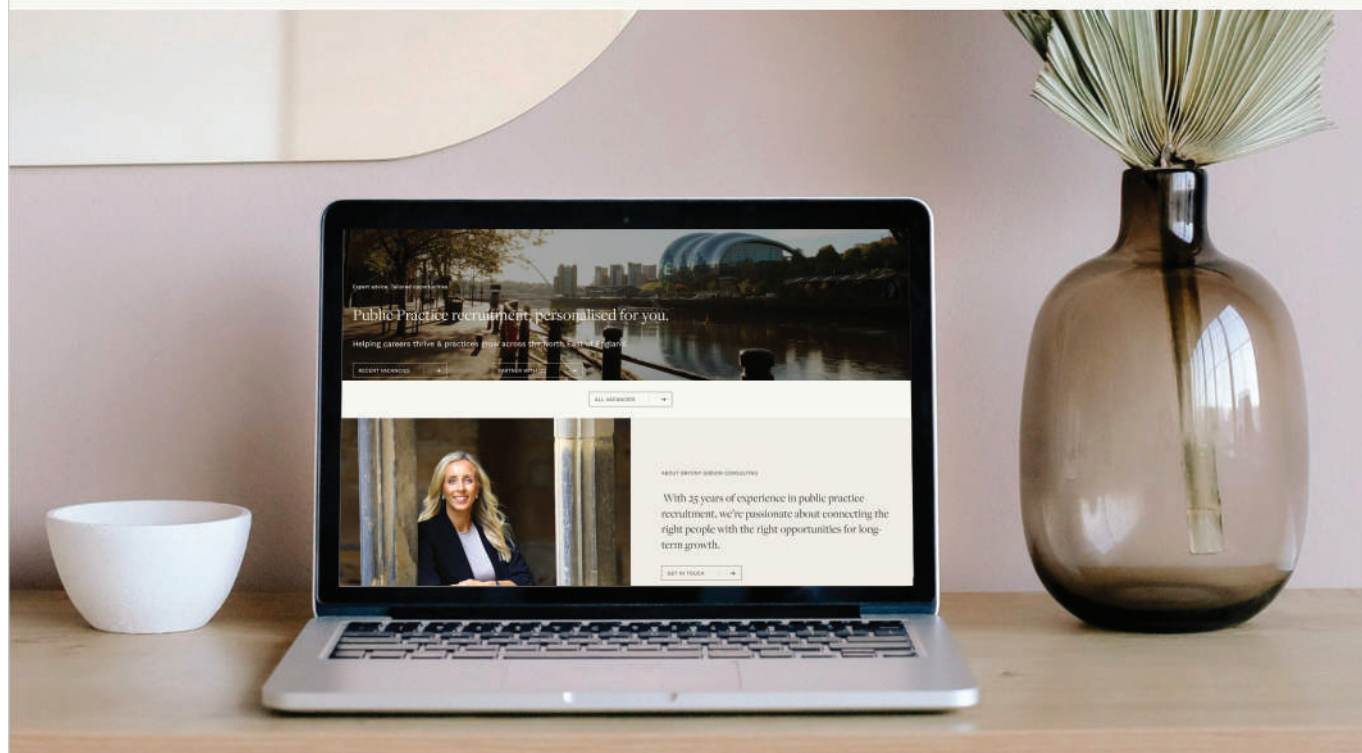
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THE ULTRAMAPGLOBAL SERIES

Travel sounds great from the outside. But it can be challenging. Not just practically, but from an environmental perspective. Travel is particularly interesting to global business, UltramapGlobal. In a digitally connected world, do we really need to move around so much these days?

This issue: TRAVEL

"In the early days, a dozen years ago, international conversation was clunky." Explains Martin.

"Skype and Webex were unpredictable. Not everybody had cameras. Screen sharing and demo sharing was possible, but without seeing the person it was difficult to build rapport."

The World's Most Used.

Martin Connelly is Co-Founder of UltramapGlobal, whose job it is to protect some of the world's most important subsea cables. UltramapGlobal monitor 100 million vessel movements around the world, every single day. If a client cable is threatened, one of Martin's Global Monitoring Teams intervene. Nobody has monitored more, for longer. That's why UltramapGlobal's AssetMonitor software is the world's most used.

Responsible Travel.

"This bit sounds great. Over the years, we've travelled to Canada, Faroe Islands, Singapore, Boston, Baltimore, Thailand, Uruguay, Mauritius, Spain, Hawaii – and more.

"Mostly for exhibitions. Sometimes to see customers.

But always responsibly. Balancing environmental impact with what's best for client relationships.

Sometimes – you just have to be there."

Important Work.

Cables that UltramapGlobal protect transmit power, telecommunications and fuel around the world. And UltramapGlobal protect vulnerable cable installers too.

The consequence of cable strikes can be catastrophic for business continuity, and human life.

"It's harder understanding emphasis and nuance when setting up projects remotely. Things might get missed. UltramapGlobal wants to reduce the world's cable strikes to zero. Over half our customers have no cable strikes at all. And all customers, every single one, has fewer cable strikes once they appoint us.

"I'm convinced that one of the reasons we protect so well is because we meet and plan face-to-face."

Worth The Risk.

One of UltramapGlobal's first customers was the result of a face-to-face meeting in The Channel Islands. The investment, and risk, was high because Martin travelled to the client incurring all costs.

"The journey must be worth the risk. But as a young and inexperienced company, such decisions are hard to make and hard to pay for too."

And Martin's experience of exotic sounding locations is not as glamorous as it sounds.

"I travel abroad about six times each year. I experience taxis, planes, reception desks, elevators, hotel rooms, strange beds, hotel restaurants and conference buildings. Most times – that's it. Then I experience it all in reverse to get home. Tiring!

"But making the effort is important. People buy people at the end of the day. And if we don't set projects up properly, we can't deliver on the promise we make. UltramapGlobal really does want to reduce the world's subsea cable strikes – to zero."

www.ultramapglobal.com

PATIENCE | RESILIENCE | STORYTELLING | TRAVEL | TEAM | CONSISTENCY | NUMBERS

The Do's and Don'ts of L&OD Business Partnering

With the rise of digital transformation, shifting employee expectations, and evolving business needs, Learning and Organisational Development (L&OD) has never been more critical. No longer simply a provider of training courses or leadership programs, L&OD has become a key enabler of strategic change. Here, Jen Tait, Founder of Rise Learning Group, explains how Business Partnering can truly drive organisational performance.

This is easier said than done. L&OD business partnering requires a unique blend of strategic insight, emotional intelligence, and operational acumen. So, what separates effective partners from order-takers? Here are the most important do's and don'ts that can help L&OD professionals add real value in their organisations.

DO: Align with business strategy

Every L&OD initiative should start with the question: How does this support our business goals?

This strategic alignment means understanding not just what the business does, but where it's heading. Is the company trying to scale? Introduce new technology? Adopt more agile ways of working? Your learning interventions must support these changes.

One emerging L&OD trend is to move away from generic training days and instead, co-create learning sprints with operational leads. We've noticed huge improvements in engagement and productivity.

Tip: Stay connected to strategy through regular attendance at leadership meetings and ongoing communication with senior stakeholders. This ensures you remain aligned and influential.

DON'T: Lead with pre-packaged solutions

It's tempting to prescribe a familiar solution to a familiar-sounding problem. Rolling out a resilience course to tackle low morale. Booking a team building day to address a decline in team performance. But effective partners don't jump to conclusions.

Instead: Begin with a discovery mindset. Ask probing questions. Take a look at the data. Co-create with the business and target audience.

DO: Speak the language of the business

The best L&OD partners are bilingual. They translate learning outcomes into business value. It's not about "developing a growth mindset", it's about increasing sales, reducing onboarding time, or improving employee retention.

Tip: Learn the financial and operational metrics your stakeholders care about. This helps you connect L&OD initiatives to tangible results.

DON'T: Be an order-taker

It's not uncommon for business leaders to approach L&OD teams with requests that sound like orders: "Can you run a course on time management?" While well-intentioned, these requests often stem from symptoms, not root causes.

Instead: Positively and respectfully challenge assumptions. **Ask:** What's the outcome you're hoping for? Often, what's really needed is better prioritisation, clearer KPIs, or resource adjustments, not just another course.

True business partners are not afraid to challenge whether training is the answer. This is how you move from transactional to transformational.

DO: Build credibility and trust

We all know that trust is earned. It's built through consistency, transparency, and results. Business leaders are more likely to listen to your ideas if you've demonstrated reliability and competence.

Make a point of circling back on L&OD initiatives. Share results, ask for feedback, and adjust as needed.

Tip: Don't just deliver solutions, follow up. Report on impact. Ask for feedback. Show that you care about results as much as your stakeholders do.

DON'T: Ignore organisational culture

L&OD interventions don't work miracles. If your leadership programme promotes empowerment but the culture punishes mistakes, no amount of learning will stick.

Instead: Understand the real culture, what people say and what they actually do. Then, design interventions that either work with the culture or actively help to move it in the right direction.

Collaborate with HR, internal comms and change teams to embed new behaviours through multiple channels.

DO: Stay future-focused

The world of work is changing fast, from AI and automation to hybrid working and multi-generational teams. L&OD must help organisations anticipate and prepare for what's next.

This could mean scenario planning, future skills mapping, or agile leadership programmes. You're not just supporting existing employees, you're enabling future talent.

Tip: Keep your radar on the future. Build your external network, follow emerging trends, and bring those insights back into the business.

DON'T: Go it alone

True business partnering means collaboration across functions. Siloed L&OD teams can only go so far.

Instead: Build cross-functional teams around big initiatives. Co-create solutions with stakeholders. When people feel ownership, they're more likely to support, and sustain, change.

The takeaway? Be curious. Be courageous. And above all, connect learning to business impact. That's the path to becoming a truly indispensable L&OD business partner.

For support with L&OD business partnering in your organisation, contact Jen.tait@riselearninggroup.com



Jen Tait

Tips for a Summer Recruitment Campaign



Peter Neal

Peter Neal, founder of The Experience Bank Group, specialises in recruiting exceptional people to crucial leadership roles within charities in the North East. As we hit the start of summer, Peter gives hints and tips on how to best recruit at this time of year and what the benefits are.

“Recruiting to a charity’s leadership team during the summer can present unique opportunities and challenges. Many think that this isn’t the right time of year to advertise or start a search, due to holidays and family commitments when the schools are closed. But actually, in my career experience, it is exactly opposite to that and I am happy to share my thoughts why.

“Lighter nights and warmer weather generally lead to people feeling happier. With end of year financials concluded, new budgets and KPI’s set and no pressure as the festive season or end of year approaches, people tend to feel lighter, have more breathing and thinking space; and be more aware of their own personal needs. What can be a more perfect time to get their attention with a potential new and exciting role?

“With that all making sense, how do you get the most out of the search then? Start early! Campaigns to find the right people to start in the roles in September generally should start in June. Timing is everything, especially as responses at leadership levels

tend to be lower and slower than say, mid management appointments. People at this level will also have longer notice periods, so that should all be factored into your timeline.

“Messaging is also key. This is a great time to drive home the impact of your charity and the difference that the role will make to your goals and mission. It is impactful to include statistics, goals and purpose in the job description as well as what you think someone of the right standing could bring to the organisation.

“A good recruiter will ensure that your messaging will resonate with the right audience as well as being seen in the right places. They will not just rely on their own pool of contacts, they will also have ways of diversifying their outreach to find you the best possible candidates. As well as professional platforms and their own LinkedIn, they will be well enough connected to make sure other leaders and charity experts share the role opportunity or make recommendations.

“A good recruiter will also take the time

to get to know your organisation and make recommendations on exactly what you need from your new post from qualifications, to personality to lived-in experience. This will also include thinking about whether this recruit is a chance for you to tap into underrepresented groups to broaden the diversity in your leadership team.

“I always recommend that as well as a formal interview process, there should be an informal meet in a relaxed setting too, perhaps with the Chair, and the summer is a perfect time for this. A coffee shop is the ideal place and many have outdoor settings in the summer, which allows for privacy as well as getting to know someone better.

“I always recommend that clients keep the application and onboarding process as simple as possible being clear and focused in your search. This is particularly relevant in summer months as family time, sports and other hobbies are important at this time of year, so to attract the best candidates you need ooze professionalism but with little bureaucracy.

“Hopefully this has you thinking that you won’t wait until September to start your search and has you fired up to get going as soon as possible. If so, do give me a call and we can get the ball rolling!”

Contact Peter on peter@theexperiencebank.co.uk for all your senior level recruitment needs from CEOs, CIOs, CFOs, Chairs, Trustees and more.

Why you need both property & finance and health & welfare lasting powers of attorney



Let's have a chat about something that often gets overlooked but is absolutely crucial: Lasting Powers of Attorney (LPAs).

At Brenda Beveridge Wills & Trusts, we often find that clients are aware of LPAs but aren't entirely sure why having both types is so important. So, let's break it down together.

Understanding the Two Types of LPA

In England and Wales, there are two distinct types of LPA:

1. Property and Financial Affairs LPA

This allows your chosen Attorneys to manage your financial matters—like paying bills, managing bank accounts, or even selling your home—As well as being in place for if you lose capacity, these can be used with your permission while you still have capacity, and can be very useful if you're ill, or abroad, or in other situations where you need someone to act on your behalf.

2. Health and Welfare LPA

This grants your Attorneys the authority to make decisions about your personal health and care, including medical treatment and living arrangements, but only when you're unable to make those decisions yourself.



Why Having Both Matters

Imagine this scenario: you've set up a Property and Financial Affairs LPA, and didn't think that the Health and Welfare LPA was very important. Then, an unexpected health issue arises, and decisions about your medical care need to be made. Without a Health and Welfare LPA, your loved ones might not be able to make those critical decisions on your behalf. Also, when someone goes into care usually one of the first questions asked, is 'are there Health and Welfare LPAs in place?'

Having both LPAs ensures that, no matter what happens, people you trust are empowered to make decisions in your best interest—be it financial or health-related.

Common misconceptions

A frequent misunderstanding is that a spouse or close family member can automatically make decisions for you if you're incapacitated. Unfortunately,

without the appropriate LPAs in place, this isn't the case. The absence of an LPA would mean that applications for Deputyship would have to be made via the Court of Protection, which is expensive, time-consuming and stressful for your loved ones.

Peace of mind for you and your loved ones

Setting up both types of LPA isn't just about being prepared legally; it's about peace of mind. It's about knowing that your affairs—both financial and personal—are in trusted hands, and that your loved ones won't face unnecessary obstacles during challenging times.

How we can help

At Brenda Beveridge Wills & Trusts, we understand that these topics can be daunting. That's why we offer a free, no-obligation initial meeting to discuss your individual needs and guide you through the process with clarity and compassion.

Get in touch

Ready to take the next step?
We're here to help...

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Businesses urged to pledge support for North East tech

Over a dozen businesses across the region have signed a pledge to support the North East's largest tech festival, TechNEXt, which returns next month.

By signing the pledge, Sage, Accenture, Opencast and Leighton have all agreed for at least 10 employees – or 10% of their workforce – to attend events taking place during the week-long festival.

The festival's organisers are now urging more businesses and organisations to pledge their support and give their employees a 'unique opportunity to learn new skills and grow their networks.'

Bringing together over 3,000 attendees, the festival will span 16 – 20 June, with events held across the region to spotlight the best tech businesses and talent the North East has to offer.

Last year, the event – hosted by a partnership of North East businesses and stakeholders working collaboratively and led by Dynamo North East CIC and Sunderland Software City working with BeaconHouse Events – attracted more than 3,000 people.

Dr David Dunn, Chief Executive of Dynamo North East CIC, said: "We are delighted that over a dozen organisations have already pledged their support to TechNEXt.

"By signing the pledge, they are demonstrating their commitment to supporting the growth and innovation of the region's tech ecosystem, while providing their employees with invaluable learning and development opportunities.

"It's a fantastic event so we'd encourage any business or organisation, no matter how large or small, to sign the pledge and get involved. Together, there's absolutely no reason why we can't make this the best TechNEXt yet."

Tech giant Sage is returning as a headline sponsor for this year's festival and is one of the companies to have signed the pledge.

Nikola McNicol-Kenney, VP at Sage, said: "We're proud to sponsor TechNEXt 2025 once again, right here in the North East – our home and the heart of Sage's global headquarters."



Compliance Challenger Platform expands into Manchester

Hicomply, a UK leader in information security management software, has announced its expansion into Manchester as part of ambitious growth plans.

Building on this success, Hicomply is now set to strengthen its UK footprint, investing in a new office in Manchester with a focus on sales, marketing and customer success. This expansion is being spearheaded by the board and Mark Edgeworth, who joined Hicomply as its Chief Revenue Officer in late 2024.

The expansion into the North West will support the company's aim to double in size by the end of 2025, helping meet rising demand from businesses looking to streamline their compliance processes and accelerate growth through certification.

The announcement follows significant client wins including ecommerce platform b2b.store, digital communication tool SymTerra and Microsoft Business Applications Solutions Partner FormusPro. The organisations have credited the platform with enabling them to access larger markets and secure new contracts thanks to its support in achieving industry-recognised standards.

This latest milestone is underpinned by the company's £3 million investment from leading UK growth capital investor BGF, which has fuelled product development and market expansion.

Ed Bartlett, CEO at Hicomply said: "Cybersecurity is no longer just something that sits with the IT team. Forward-thinking businesses are coming to realise that it is essential for businesses looking to reduce risk, protect their operations and unlock new opportunities.

"We have seen first hand how helping organisations achieve certification can open doors, whether that is winning new contracts and tenders, building customer trust or entering new markets. That is why we are investing in Manchester, to get closer to the growing number of businesses that recognise compliance as a strategic advantage.

Our goal is to simplify every process and every step so teams can meet framework standards faster and build on the work they have already done. Even for those just starting the journey, it does not have to feel daunting, and we are here to support them every step of the way."

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Durata bolsters senior leadership team to fuel continued growth



Managing Director John McGee and Director of Quality Alison McGee with Reece Ingham (Finance Director), Kate White (Marketing Director), Ashaan Ayoub (Commercial Director) and Project Director Omar Yousef. Picture: Tom Banks/Durata

Durata, the Teesside-based specialist in critical power and modular data centre solutions, has strengthened its senior leadership team to help drive its ambitious growth plans.

The critical infrastructure provider, who deliver global solutions from its Middlesbrough Head Office, has welcomed Reece Ingham as Finance Director and Kate White as Marketing Director, following Ashaan Ayoub's arrival as Commercial Director earlier this year.

The three additions join Managing Director John McGee, Director of Quality Alison McGee and Project Director Omar Yousef, effectively doubling the size of the leadership team.

This strategic move highlights Durata's impressive expansion plans as it continues to strengthen its global position within the rapidly evolving critical power and data centre industry, particularly driven by the incredible growth of Artificial Intelligence (AI).

These recent appointments ensure Durata has the expertise and resources in place to provide clients with the dependable and scalable solutions they need to keep their operations remain resilient, agile and optimised for future growth, a critical element in today's digital world.

Kate joins Durata with extensive leadership in marketing and cross-sector experience

from the automotive, commercial agriculture and finance industry.

Kate said: "I'm thrilled to be joining Durata at such a pivotal moment. The company's vision and commitment to growth present the perfect opportunity to elevate its market presence.

"I look forward to supporting its continued success by developing strategic marketing initiatives that drive growth, unlock new opportunities and showcase Durata as a leader in the global data centre and critical infrastructure space."

While Durata maintains its strong roots in critical power infrastructure, the Middlesbrough-based company is leading the evolution on the growing demand for modular data centres.

Reece's appointment as Finance Director means Durata has added his valuable expertise in scaling rapidly growing businesses.

His previous experience includes roles at Host & Stay, E Catering and Mercedes Benz franchise group, with a specialisation in financial accountancy and implementing business management solutions for rapid growth.

Reece said: "Durata's growth trajectory is impressive, and I'm excited to leverage my experience and build a financial framework to ensure the infrastructure is in place to support its continued rapid expansion.

"I'm looking forward to working with the team to build on the solid foundations already in place and implement new financial strategies that will support sustainable, global growth and ensure Durata is primed for future success."

Earlier this year, Ashaan's appointment

was another strategic move to support significant expansion throughout 2025 and beyond.

He brings over a decade of experience in the civil engineering and construction industries, with expertise in contract forms such as Joint Contracts Tribunal (JCT) and New Engineering Contract (NEC), and a proven track record in cost management and project delivery for major clients.

These appointments highlight Durata's commitment to investing in high-calibre local talent and building a robust team to support its ambitious expansion plans.

Durata has also made several other recent key appointments. Claire Allport joined as Compliance Assistant, Kieran Fawcett has taken on the role of Building Information Management Specialist, Karen Robinson has joined as Internal Sales Representative and Louise Pearson has strengthened the accounts department as Finance Assistant.

"This is an incredibly exciting time for Durata," said John, Managing Director. "The expansion of our leadership team and the addition of talented individuals across the business reflects our commitment to providing world-class solutions and exceptional service to our customers.

"This strengthened team is already enabling us to capitalise on the significant growth opportunities in the data centre industry and solidifying our position at the heart of the critical power and data centre ecosystem – leading the charge in innovation and expertise."

To learn more about Durata's modular data centre solutions and services, please visit duratauk.com



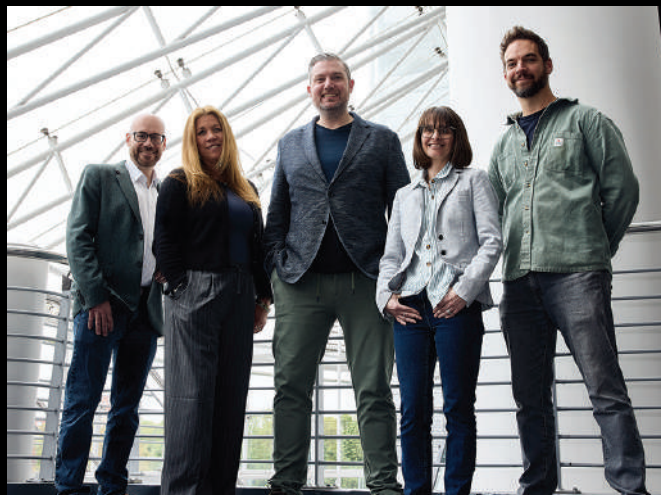
n-gage.io helps Tanfield Railway to transform the heritage railway experience

North East based global attraction experience software specialists n-gage.io has announced a new contract with Tanfield Railway, a heritage railway experience celebrating its 300th anniversary located in County Durham.

Dating back to 1725, Tanfield Railway is the world's oldest railway with an unrivalled history. The railway line was built to transport coal from the mining collieries in the Tanfield area of County Durham to the River Tyne for shipment using the latest technology and groundbreaking engineering of the time.

Tanfield Railway has just unveiled the new visitor experience mobile app to help visitors and railway enthusiasts, to make the most of their heritage railway experience. Given the volunteers team's reputation and passion for their restoration activity, the team at the heritage railway engaged attraction experience specialists n-gage.io to explore how mobile technology could play a wider part in their passenger experience strategy whilst also introducing a host of interactive features in a new mobile app to enhance the Tanfield Railway heritage experience.

The n-gage.io solution pairs the SaaS platform's highly customisable visitor mobile app with its powerful attraction management software to deliver the local team both the tools and data insights they need to enhance the visitor experience and deepen engagement with them in real-time.



Seriös Group reveals new executive leadership team

A leading data solutions consultancy has announced a new executive leadership team to deliver its ambitious growth strategy.

Seriös Group has appointed four new senior executives to strengthen leadership across operations, commercial, finance and technology. The move comes as the company celebrates its fifth anniversary and unveils a new five-year plan for growth focused on the huge potential of Seriös ONE, the company's AI data solution technology.

Lee Rorison, Founder and CEO at Seriös Group, explained: "Our first five years have been hugely successful, but we feel this is only the start. To take us to the next level and achieve the company's ambitious goals, we needed to strengthen our leadership team.

"We've been very targeted in building this team, bringing in people who can help us grow in the right way. These appointments strengthen our leadership and give us the experience and energy to take the business forward."

Seriös Group's new appointments are: Leanne Cullen, Chief Operating Officer (COO); Sam Condren, Chief Financial Officer (CFO); Robin Cordy, Chief Commercial Officer (CCO); and Alex Bookless, Chief Technology Officer (CTO).

Agilico simplifies procurement with new purchase order processing solution

Leading workplace technology solutions provider Agilico has launched a smarter, more integrated approach to procurement and cash flow management.

Crafted with user experience at its core, Agilico's new cloud-based purchase order processing solution enhances supplier management and ensures employees - regardless of their financial expertise - can effortlessly create, approve, and manage purchase orders.

The intuitive interface of the solution, Agilico POP, facilitates easy requisition placement and routing requests to appropriate approvers, effectively eliminating unauthorised invoices and rogue spends, helping businesses stay in control of purchases and keeping budgets on track. Elliot Thurley, Managing Director of Agilico's Agile Docs and Tech division, commented: "Our new purchase order processing solution, Agilico POP, empowers



businesses to streamline their procurement processes, maintain financial control, and reduce administrative burdens. The solution enables businesses to have comprehensive oversight of all purchases and real-time budget monitoring - promoting efficient spending practices.



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Eclipse Wholesale team and Guide Dogs volunteers

Walking the Wall: Eclipse Wholesale's Trek for Guide Dogs

This April, the team at Eclipse Wholesale undertook the challenge of trekking the full 84-mile length of Hadrian's Wall to raise money for Guide Dogs, their Charity of the Year.

Over six days, the team journeyed from Bowness-on-Solway to Wallsend, braving unpredictable weather and demanding terrain, all in support of their 'Name a Puppy' campaign.

The Eclipse Wholesale team walked this

historic trail, starting from the quiet countryside of Cumbria, trekking through the hills of Northumberland and finally finishing in busy Newcastle. It tested their endurance while offering heaps of history and incredible views of one of the UK's most iconic landmarks.

Hadrian's Wall is a UNESCO World Heritage Site that has stood for nearly 2,000 years, stretching across northern England. Its route winds through rolling farmland, rugged hills and ancient ruins, creating a perfect backdrop for this challenge.

The trek formed part of Eclipse Wholesale's 'Name a Puppy' campaign, an effort to raise £2,500 to name a guide dog puppy. Long-standing channel partners, Giacom and Zen Internet joined the journey along with the Eclipse Wholesale team, who each took their turn in walking the trail or fundraising from their desk. Making this a true team effort, highlighting one of Eclipse Wholesale's core values of teamwork.

The final steps into Wallsend were met with cheers and celebration, with a gathering at Pitcher and Piano on Newcastle's Quayside. Members of the Guide Dogs team, along with some very special four-legged guests, joined in to mark the occasion.

Eclipse Wholesale announced Guide Dogs

as their Charity of the Year in September 2024, during their 20th-anniversary celebrations. Since then, the team has been dedicated to supporting the charity's life-changing work. Guide Dogs is a UK-based organisation that provides vital services and support for people living with vision impairment, helping them lead confident, independent lives.

Reflecting on the trek, Eclipse Wholesale's Managing Director, James Drake, described the experience "Taking on Hadrian's Wall was physically demanding but an unforgettable experience. Seeing the support from our partners, colleagues, friends and family has been amazing. We're proud to have exceeded our fundraising target and can't wait to give a guide dog puppy their name"

Thanks to the generosity of supporters, Eclipse Wholesale raised over £6,000, well above their initial target. With the trek complete and the fundraising milestone surpassed, the team now looks ahead to the next step... choosing the name of their guide dog puppy.

To follow the journey or donate, visit: www.eclipsewholesale.co.uk/about-us/charity-of-the-year

Walking the Wall: Eclipse Wholesale's Trek for Guide Dogs

📞 0344 243 5555

✉ partner@eclipsenet.co.uk

🌐 Eclipse Wholesale



Why your business needs Cyber Essentials

By Stephen McNickle, commercial director at RMT Technology.

As the Marks & Spencer management team would no doubt tell you, cybersecurity is no longer just a technical consideration in our increasingly digital world, but a business-critical priority.

For organisations handling sensitive or personal information (which, let's face it, is most businesses these days), demonstrating that you take cyber threats seriously and have the right defences in place to address them is fundamental. That's where Cyber Essentials comes in.

What is Cyber Essentials?

Cyber Essentials is a UK government-backed certification scheme designed to help businesses protect themselves from common cyber threats.

It provides a clear framework for establishing basic security hygiene and offers a simple, affordable way to show your business takes its cybersecurity responsibilities seriously.

It's split into two levels:

- Cyber Essentials - basic self-assessed certification
- Cyber Essentials Plus - an externally audited, more robust standard

Both versions are grounded in five key security controls:

- Firewalls and Internet Gateways
- Secure Configuration
- User Access Control
- Malware Protection
- Security Updates (Patch Management)

Why it's relevant for every business

Cyber attacks are not just targeted to large corporations. In fact, small and medium-sized businesses are frequently attacked because they're often seen as easier to breach.

Industry estimates suggest that up to 60 per cent of SMEs that fall victim to a cyber

attack fail within six months due to the disruption caused and the cost of trying to put things right.

Having Cyber Essentials certification has, however, been proven to reduce your risk of being hit by a cyber attack by up to 80% when implemented effectively.

For regulated industries or businesses working with government contracts, certification can be a mandatory requirement - but for any business, it sends a clear message to clients, suppliers and stakeholders that you take this issue seriously.

Common misconceptions

Cyber Essentials has been designed to be clear, achievable and scalable, whether you're a sole trader or a company with hundreds of staff, and to not be too technical or time consuming.

It's also much more than just a box-ticking exercise, with the real value lying in what the process uncovers.

You could identify issues such as old user accounts that should've been closed, missed software updates and avoidable gaps in protection, all of which can increase your business's vulnerability to a cyber attack.

What happens if you don't prioritise it?

Without basic cyber defences in place, businesses are exposed to a range of threats including:

- Phishing emails that trick staff into handing over passwords
- Ransomware attacks that lock down systems and demand payment

- Data breaches that damage trust, reputation, and compliance standing

In the event of a breach, your responsibility doesn't end with damage control. Depending on the nature of the data involved, you may need to report the incident to the Information Commissioner's Office within 72 hours, notify affected clients and potentially face significant regulatory fines.

Cyber Essentials can't guarantee you'll never be targeted, but it can help show that you took reasonable steps to protect your data, and that counts for a lot.

How RMT Technology can help

Cyber Essentials isn't just a certificate - it's the first building block of a resilient business.

At RMT Technology, we believe in demystifying cybersecurity.

We're here to help you build a more secure foundation - today, not tomorrow - by working with you to understand your systems, identify gaps and put in place practical, people-focused solutions which will help to keep your business as robust as possible.

Whether you need guidance on applying for Cyber Essentials for the first time or you're looking to step up to Cyber Essentials Plus, we can support you every step of the way.

For more information on how to get started, contact RMT Technology on 0191 256 9550 or via hello@rmttechnology.co.uk



Susan Bell, Stephen McNickle and Mike Hayes of RMT Technology



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Ian Elcoat

Talking Technology and Digital

This month Northern Insight talks to...

Ian Elcoat

Managing Director, Elisian Software

Did you always envisage a career in the world of Technology?

During my younger days, I was very interested in being a lawyer and was sure that was going to be career for me, however, when my parents bought my first computer my interest in technology began, particularly for programming. Once I got through school, where computer science wasn't the subject it is now, I went to university to do an IT degree and it was during this time that I began to learn about the internet and software development, back then however no one expected it to become what it is today.

After graduation from university, I joined a semi-conductor manufacturer and took the opportunity to learn more about the hardware that drives technology and the extent to which creating microchips is undertaken in such a clean environment, even cleaner than an operating theatre!

My whole career has been around building software solutions and realising the value of those solutions as products that can be implemented across several industry sectors that I have worked in.

What tips would you give to someone looking to work in the industry?

The IT industry has grown significantly over the years and has many opportunities for those wanting to work with technology, so my advice would be to continue to learn and evolve your skills in line with the technology trends. Just look at how AI is at the fore of what all technology companies are either implementing or considering.

Tell us about the most exciting project you're currently working on.

Elisian is a software product company that supports assurance and compliance across multiple processes related to health and safety, governance and legislation, with prominence in the energy sector where we have been working for over 17 years in a highly regulated environment. As such, we continually evolve our product offering and at present have a project in offshore wind and chemical processing related to "permit to work", the purpose of which is to ensure that before work commences, the scope of the work has been defined and assessed from a risk perspective to ensure that the work is carried out safely and efficiently.

Tell us about your team.

At Elisian we have a team of software developers, quality assurance and business development, all of whom over the years have become specialised in the sectors in which our products are implemented. Given the nature of our product and its focus, the team have developed longstanding

relationships with our client base and the supply chains that we partner with, both of which highlight the importance of relationship building and supporting our reputation as a trusted provider with focus on quality and reliable products.

What are your long-term plans for the business?

As the energy sector transitions into renewables, we very much see the Elisian products evolving to support this transition across to wind and solar. Businesses are built on reputations, and this is something which we are continuing to leverage as we look to global markets and partnerships to help us realise those plans.

What's your favourite piece of technology?

I'm sure I'm not alone here in saying the iPhone, as technology and social media have grown, it is the one device that is always by my side from paying for things to checking emails.

Do you have any heroes or mentors?

I wouldn't say I have a specific person I look up to, more so that I have admiration for those who show commitment and dedication to their passion, be it in life or business.

What's your fondest career memory?

The fondest moment of my career, is probably when I first started and I was enthusiastic to learn more about microchips and was keen to tell my dad what my job was. This led to an opportunity to take him around the "clean room" of the plant where the microchips were manufactured. He absolutely loved the experience and I was really pleased to have shared it with him and something which I look back on as a thank you for helping me with programming and supporting my impatience when things didn't quite go to plan.

What's the best piece of business advice you've received?

Don't give up. I very much believe that if you want to achieve something and have the right attitude to trying, failing and then succeeding you will get there.

When not working, how do you like to relax?

Besides spending time with the family and walking the dog, I'm fortunate to play golf which works well socially for both work and pleasure and is one of those sports that you can play either as a team or individually which is a great way of powering down and relaxing.

www.elisian.co.uk



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...It marks a significant point in our journey and speaks to the standards we've maintained as we've grown... we remain focused on shaping what future-ready technology looks like....

Chris Fraser, CEO and Steve Laverick,
Technical Director at Aspire's North East HQ

Aspire achieves Royal Warrant: One of the UK's highest business honours

Aspire Technology Solutions, one of the UK's leading providers of managed IT, cyber security and modern workplace solutions, has been awarded a Royal Warrant in recognition of its services to the Royal Household.

The Royal Warrant is a rare and prestigious mark of excellence, granted to companies that have regularly supplied goods or services to the Royal Household over a period of several years and have consistently delivered to the highest standard. Very few technology companies in the UK have received this level of recognition, highlighting its significance within the sector.

Aspire is one of just 16 companies headquartered in the North East to hold a Royal Warrant. Fellow Warrant holder Barbour, one of Britain's most iconic brands, is also a long-standing Aspire customer.

Chris Fraser, CEO of Aspire Technology Solutions, said: "Being awarded a Royal Warrant by His Majesty is a very proud moment for Aspire. It marks a significant point in our journey and speaks to the standards we've maintained as we've grown. As organisations embrace modern, cloud-first infrastructure and face growing cyber security demands, we remain focused on shaping what future-ready technology looks like. This recognition reinforces the trust our customers place in us and reflects the innovation and ambition that continue to drive us forward."

The award follows a period of sustained growth and national expansion for Aspire. In the last 18 months, the company has completed the acquisitions of Cloud Cover IT in Glasgow and

CloudCoco Limited in Leeds, significantly strengthening its UK footprint and technical capabilities. Backed by private equity partner LDC, Aspire continues to invest in its managed service, cloud and cyber security portfolio to support customers nationwide.

Steve Laverick, Technical Director at Aspire and Warrant Grantee, added: "Delivering secure, high-performance technology solutions takes deep expertise and a relentless focus on quality. The Royal Warrant is a powerful validation of the standards our teams uphold every day. It's an honour and privilege to receive the Royal Warrant after personally working with The Royal Household for over 20 years, and equally, it's a real milestone for everyone at Aspire as it reflects the trust our customers place in us to deliver consistently at the highest level. I'd like to thank the entire team for their dedication and hard work. This recognition belongs to them."

Founded in 2006, Aspire supports over 2000 organisations across the UK with enterprise-grade technology services spanning managed IT, cyber security, modern workplace, cloud, connectivity and unified communications. The company is known for its technical expertise, customer focus and ability to innovate at pace.

www.aspirets.com



From vision to value: Accelerating impact in the age of high expectation

By Claire Cundill, Chief Revenue Officer, Leighton.

Across every sector, organisations are under pressure to deliver more with less.

Ambitious digital roadmaps remain firmly on the agenda, but with tighter budgets, leaner teams, and increasing scrutiny on ROI, the margin for error is shrinking. There's little room for drawn-out delivery cycles or initiatives that fail to show immediate business impact. It's no longer enough to talk about transformation; stakeholders want to see impact, and they want to see it now.

That's why "time to value" has become one of the most pressing themes in technology and business leadership circles. It's no longer just about deploying technology, it's about how quickly a product, service, or initiative can start generating real, measurable outcomes for the business and its customers.

As a team, we're exploring this theme throughout the year as we look to understand what truly accelerates value delivery and what still stands in the way.

Why time to value now?

Time to value isn't a new concept, but it's in higher demand than ever. The gap between planning and measurable impact is now under intense scrutiny, especially within larger organisations that are grappling with legacy systems, rigid governance structures, and rising customer expectations.

Across the board, digital and technology teams are being asked harder, more focused questions. Business leaders want to know how soon a new initiative will start making a meaningful difference, and whether it can be delivered without compromising quality, security, or resilience. They want clarity on which investments are actually moving the needle, and which are simply consuming time and resources.

Time to value puts outcomes ahead of outputs. It reframes the conversation, moving away from delivery milestones, feature sets, and backlogs, and toward business results, customer impact, and strategic relevance.

What gets in the way?

Despite the appetite for speed, many organisations still find themselves moving more slowly than they'd like. The barriers are rarely about technology. More often, it's the surrounding processes, structures, or mindsets that hold teams back.

Legacy infrastructure continues to be a major drag on agility. Changing or integrating with older systems can be expensive, time-consuming, and fraught with risk, making teams hesitant to move quickly or try new approaches. Siloed operating models limit collaboration and slow decision-making, particularly when ownership is unclear or communication breaks down between departments.

Overloaded delivery teams also struggle to deliver value at pace. When priorities are constantly shifting or when teams are asked to juggle too much, focus suffers and

momentum stalls. Add to this a lack of clarity around what "value" really means, and it becomes difficult to make confident, aligned decisions about where to invest time and energy.

What makes a difference?

Some organisations are finding ways to accelerate time to value by making intentional shifts in how they prioritise and deliver digital work. A common trait among them is a sharper focus, choosing to do fewer things, better. By concentrating on high-impact initiatives and being disciplined about deprioritising low-value work, they create space for faster delivery and more meaningful outcomes.

Modernising technical architecture is another critical enabler. Cloud-native services, serverless infrastructure, and event-driven architecture are helping teams reduce complexity, scale easily, and experiment with greater confidence. These approaches support agility and reduce the dependency on slow, centralised systems.

Teams that consistently deliver value, faster, tend to be cross-functional and empowered. With clear ownership and autonomy, they can make decisions quickly and stay aligned with customer needs. Supporting these teams with the right platforms, automation, and tooling also removes friction and allows them to focus on what matters most.

Finally, we're seeing a shift from project to product mindsets. Long-lived teams focused on outcomes, not just delivery, are better equipped to learn, adapt, and improve over time. When supported by clear leadership direction and a shared understanding of what "value" really means, these teams can move with greater speed and purpose.

Looking ahead

Over the next 12–18 months, the drive for faster value delivery will only increase. Technologies like AI and automation will help, but they're not silver bullets. Success will come down to how effectively organisations bring together the right tools, ways of working, and mindset shifts.

Time to value isn't just a delivery metric, it's a mindset. And as businesses navigate the next wave of digital ambition, those who can shorten the distance between vision and impact will be the ones who lead the way.

For some, improvement might mean halving the time it takes to go from idea to live. For others, it might mean finally removing a long-standing bottleneck. But for everyone, the north star is the same: delivering value early, often, and sustainably.

leighton.com



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*...do fewer
things,
better...*

Claire Cundill



It will never happen to us – Will it, IT team?

Whilst the title of this article may have made you smile, it is a typical approach to cyber security by too many companies and charities. Protecting against cyber-attacks is seen by lots of leaders as just a cost drain considering the investment in the software, monitoring and insurance. But is this the right mindset for leaders to have?...

Andrew Marsh

A leader's responsibility to cyber security

The news has recently been full of major cyber-attacks and here Andrew Marsh, Vistage Chair for the North East and Northumberland talks about why it so important that cyber security is an important and strategic topic for leaders of SME.

"There has been a spate of high-profile cases across the news lately which has brought the whole issue of cyber-attacks and security to life in a more serious and substantial way. What is even more alarming is that the reported attacks have been across sectors you would normally consider safe.

"Whilst the names dealing the fall out of their recent attacks are large – Marks and Spencer and The Co-op for example – they do act as good case studies for us all to learn from. You might think 'why would they bother with small SMEs when they are targeting such huge companies?'. But the reality is that SMEs and companies of all sizes are being targeted daily, with only the more impactful reaching the national news.

"A great takeaway from the Co-op situation is that they were prepared, and their software detected the malware threat, which alerted the relevant people leading to them making the decision to shut down the entire system, rather than allow the hack to continue – which meant no sales, goods on shelves, employees idle and frustrated customers. They viewed this as better than allowing the attack to gain momentum – as a leader are you prepared to do that? The Co-ops' strategically thought-out move paid off and even the hackers admit that they would have done much more damage than the temporary disruption ended up being.

"Typically target ransoms can demand up to 10% of a company turnover, so even when looking at a smaller SME hackers will find it worthwhile. For example, if hackers' trawling software /malware find a vulnerability online, the people behind it will look at publicly available information to understand your profit and loss, and so a £3m turnover will equate to anything up to £300k for them.

"Larger companies have bigger budgets to throw at recovery, so downtime and breaches cost less in the long run. But for an SME the damage can be costly and not just on a cash front – the cost to put it right or the lost revenue can be significant.

"Any cyber-attack won't just affect the company. It also affects customers, suppliers, partners, stakeholders, staff and consumers on a personal level. You can lose customers, have a damaged reputation, and in very severe cases suffer the loss of the entire company.

"Please don't dismiss this article as a scare tactic aiming to make you to go and buy some cyber protection or software. At Vistage we cover topics that make-or-break businesses and through that we realise what is important to have on our radar and give due consideration to as a leader.

"You may be receiving all the reassurances from your IT team, telling you that you are cyber secure with software, but ultimately it is the board and SLT's responsibility to make sure there are procedures in place for if that software doesn't work. It is also important to make sure that in your budgets (and budget forecast) security and recovery is considered for a worst-case scenario. My advice would be to allocate as much to this as you can – there is no upper cost for peace of mind, and when you look at the total impact, that budget could be small change when compared to the potential damage of that 10% ransom.

"I'm not suggesting that we all run out and throw unreasonable amounts of money around – it just has to



Rob Hankin

be appropriate for your business. And there is no need to panic. In fact Rob Hankin, Chief Technology Officer at Cybit and Vistage Alumni Member, is well placed to advise SMEs feeling a bit lost. He said: "Many SME leaders still believe they're too small to be targeted, but that's exactly what makes them attractive to cybercriminals – they follow the path of least resistance. The reality is that standard IT support rarely provides comprehensive security. What business owners need to understand is that cybersecurity isn't just an IT expense—it's a fundamental business investment comparable to locks on doors or fire alarms. The most effective approach combines appropriate technology, staff awareness training, clear policies, and external expertise when needed. Most importantly, it requires honest assessment of your current vulnerabilities and leadership attention from the top."

As larger enterprises invest heavily in cybersecurity, Rob reinforces the belief that cybercriminals follow the path of least resistance. The statistics tell a compelling story: according to the UK Government Cyber Security Breaches Survey of 2024, 50% of UK businesses reported a cyber-attack, with that percentage rising among those who actively look for breaches. For small businesses and charities, the impact is disproportionately devastating. Andrew concluded:

"In conclusion, it is very clear that boards and senior leaders should be shaking the tree to make sure they have looked at the risk properly. If you want to explore other risks and opportunities for your business, why not consider joining one of my Vistage cohorts?"

You can contact Andrew on
Andrew.Marsh@vistagechair.co.uk

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*...We're proud
to have been
chosen by
Epson...*

George Young, Director at SOS Group

Top marks for education contract win

Partnering with Epson, Gateshead-based SOS Group has now been appointed to the National Education Print Agreement (NEPA) Framework on a four-year contract.

Designed to maximise third party expenditure within the higher education sector, the NEPA agreement means SOS Group is compliant to provide print equipment and management solutions, primarily to universities and higher educational institutions, but also to publicly funded primary and secondary schools, further education, and the wider public sector.

It is an important step forward for the award-winning office technology company, which facilitates business requirements across all sectors and specialises in providing copy, print, scan solutions.

George Young, a Director at SOS Group, explains: "We're proud to have been chosen by Epson as their NEPA partner for the North East region.

"To achieve the NEPA approved supplier status has required the fulfilment of a very comprehensive set of service and quality criteria both for us and Epson.

"It recognises the range of print services required and the distinct needs of user groups within Higher Education, as well as the commitment to deliver efficiencies and value for money for students, government and the wider public."

The SOS Group team is fully Epson trained and accredited, giving all clients the opportunity to achieve significant environmental, productivity and financial benefits by replacing their printers and photocopiers with heat-free business inkjet devices.

Epson's heat-free technology offers significant cost-saving and environmental benefits by consuming dramatically less energy than equivalent laser printers, using fewer consumables, producing lower CO2 emissions and requiring less intervention from engineers.

George adds: "Working with Epson, we're looking forward to playing our part nationally and improving services within the education sector and wider Public Sector, helping to reduce costs and inefficiencies.

"Securing the contract is not only testament to the strength of our company credentials, but also our quality of service and our genuine understanding of our customers' business needs."

The NEPA contract is expected to run until 2029 and the new Framework has been designed with input from the University Print Managers Association, as well as experts from both members and consortia, to ensure that it fulfils member's print requirements and their strategic planning needs.

George adds: "It has been a hugely positive few months for all of us at SOS Group.

"In addition to the NEPA contract win, we successfully transitioned our ISO 27001 accreditation to 27001:2022, updating the highly prized IT security accreditation we first attained in 2020 and reflecting an increased focus on countering cyber threats.



L-R: George Young, John Behan and Andrew Skelton (Directors at SOS Group) with Paul Harland (Account Manager at Epson UK)



John Behan with the ISO 9001 and ISO 27001 reaccreditations

"In successfully achieving and maintaining this accreditation, we're clearly demonstrating how securely we treat client data and information, and our expertise to support clients to do the same.

"Cyber security is one of the biggest threats to every business in today's world, including the education sector, and the move to remote working and change in practice by many organisations has heightened risks still further."

Established in 2002 and based on the Team Valley, SOS Group counts multinationals within its established client base and the company helps deliver internationally significant sporting and political events.

It has a centralised office on the Team Valley and staff, including specialist engineers servicing accounts nationally from six regional hubs in London, Scotland, the North West, Midlands, South Yorkshire, South West and North East.

For more information, please visit: www.sosgroup-ltd.co.uk

Kevin Telford joins Mediaworks Executive Board

Mediaworks is pleased to announce the appointment of Kevin Telford to its Executive Board as a non-executive director. Kevin brings with him a wealth of global experience in artificial intelligence, data strategy and digital transformation, joining the agency at a pivotal moment as it looks to harness data, AI to drive greater performance for themselves and their clients.

A recognised authority in AI and data-led innovation, Kevin has held senior roles at Transunion (Callcredit), Thoughtworks, Acxiom and partnered with many global brands. His work includes leading AI strategy for a FTSE 100 firm, advising on data transformation across government and developing future skills, governance frameworks to support AI realisation. A published co-author and keynote speaker, he was also named among the DataIQ Top 100 for his leadership in responsible data.

In his role at Mediaworks, Kevin will focus on how the agency can lead in the strategic adoption and practical application of AI—ensuring clients benefit from smarter, faster and more effective, marketing performance. By leveraging AI technologies, data, tech across media, search, content and data intelligence, the agency aims to deliver both improved results and pass on commercial savings and deeper marketing impact to its clients.



Brett Jacobson, CEO of Mediaworks, said: “Kevin’s appointment marks a significant step forward in our AI-led strategy. His deep understanding of how AI can transform business performance will be invaluable in helping us stay ahead of client needs, while also guiding our partners on how to embed and maximise AI across their own operations.”

The appointment comes during a sustained period of growth for Mediaworks, including multiple new public and private sector wins and continued investment in talent across its UK hubs.

Newcastle Building Society partners with Drummond Central

Newcastle Building Society has partnered with strategic creative agency Drummond Central, to increase awareness and to reinforce its presence as the leading financial services institution in the North East, North Yorkshire and Cumbria.

Together, the two North East businesses will bring the Building Society’s purpose – ‘connecting communities to a better financial future’ – to life for its members and the wider region.

The partnership comes as Newcastle Building Society prepares to throw open the doors at its new flagship hub in Newcastle

this summer following the repurposing of an iconic city centre building. Located on the corner of Grainger Street and Monument and spanning five floors, the refurbishment will unlock a range of flexible event and collaboration spaces serving the whole community.

Drummond Central’s first campaign for Newcastle Building Society is already live, encouraging people in the region to open an ISA and promoting the importance of face to face service in a local branch. The campaign is centred around ‘making your money work as hard as you do’.

Digital Lighthouse powers expansion with business consultancy hire

A newly-launched Newcastle headquartered performance marketing agency has strengthened its growth plans with the recruitment of a specialist business development consultancy.

The Digital Lighthouse, which was launched by Tom Chandler in 2024, has brought in Scott Holland Consulting to assist with its strategic expansion. Despite being just 12 months old, The Digital Lighthouse, a specialist performance marketing agency, has won a raft of high-profile clients, including chartered wealth managers, Fairstone, skin care specialists Nursem and estate agents solutions provider, iamproperty.

They have also delivered dedicated digital and performance marketing training for The Financial Services Forum, who’s 3000-strong membership include some of the UK’s most senior financial industry leaders and marketers.

The Digital Lighthouse has recruited six new team members in the first year and is on target to double that number across 2025 and into next year, having already secured its own permanent base on Newcastle’s Quayside.

Scott Holland Consulting, also based in the North East, is a



specialist growth and business development consultancy, led and founded by seasoned business growth expert, Scott Holland. Tom says: “Scott’s an individual I’ve known and respected for some time, and I’m thrilled he’s now representing The Digital Lighthouse as we seek to continue our growth and add more clients keen to better understand the possibilities in performance marketing.

“It’s been a fantastic start, and our proposition of easy-to-understand paid marketing strategies across search and social platforms is being well received.”

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Marriott Communications selected for 2025 Global Aid & Development Directory

Marriott Communications is proud to announce its selection by the Department of Business and Trade for inclusion in the 2025 edition of the Global Aid & Development Directory.

This prestigious directory highlights the best of British suppliers and companies chosen to support the United Nations and other international aid organisations. In an era marked by complex global challenges - including health emergencies, conflict, climate change, and humanitarian crises - international organisations are working harder than ever to deliver development and relief assistance worldwide.

The private sector plays a critical role in offering innovative, effective solutions that save lives, foster sustainable development, and improve living conditions for vulnerable communities. Marriott Communications is honoured to contribute to these global efforts, providing vital communications expertise to support aid initiatives.

This recognition underscores the agency's commitment to building a more just, resilient, and equitable world through strategic communications and public relations support.



Agency owner calls for greater autism acceptance and support – all year round

As Autism Acceptance Month closed, agency owner Shane Gammage wants to make sure it remains top of the agenda and not left by the wayside until next year's awareness campaign, and encourages companies to sign the National Autistic Society 'pledge wall'.

As the father of a child with autism, Shane knows first hand how having a thorough understanding of the issues it can present to family and work life, is crucial to looking after people.

He explains: "My daughter, Piper was diagnosed with autism at a time when I was working full time in an agency that was 100 per cent office-based. When Covid hit, we spent six months at home together and built such a bond that when she was feeling down or frustrated, I was the person that she wanted.

"At that point, I said I wanted to have a completely flexible working environment - basically, if Piper needs me - any time, any day, I want to be able to be there. So I made the choice to leave my job and go freelance, which quickly became too busy for one person so I decided to set up Who's Listening but with the firm commitment that it will always be a flexible, work-from-home agency."

Known for straight-talking strategy, creative that connects and campaigns that actually convert, Who's Listening operates a people-centric business model, with remote working and flexible hours, - with the belief that happy people do better work.

Shane continues: "This business model isn't just about me and Piper though, we put a big emphasis on flexibility. Need to start a bit later or finish a bit earlier? Cool, you are trusted to make up the time when it works for you. Clients need you at that time? Don't worry, the rest of the team will handle it - even though we all work from home we work collaboratively for the good of the business (and each other's mental health!).

"This business model has meant that I have never had to miss anything - sports day, craft days, parent-teacher meetings, school pick ups etc. It's also allowed the team without these commitments to work from all over the world without having to take 'annual leave.'"

Shane is calling for workplaces to adapt their mindset of flexibility, understanding and proactive support when it comes to neurodiversity - and autism in particular; breaking away from a 'one size fits all' approach to working.

His experience when Piper was given her diagnosis changed how he perceived work, parenting and what support really is.

Shane adds: "If I didn't own Who's Listening and worked elsewhere, but was given the support I have put in place here it would make the journey with my child easier whilst also strengthening my commitment to the company I work for.



Elevating Businesses through Print

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Rethink, not Rebuild

For many businesses, the moment their shiny new website or app goes live is the end of an arduous journey.

However, for Chris Carroll, he believes it is merely the start.

As Managing Director of The Resolved Group, he's supported hundreds of projects globally whilst turning a business – launched in Hartlepool – into a multi-million-pound international success story, with a supporting office in India and further expansion on the horizon.

As part of The Resolved Group, he oversees Resolve Beyond.

Be it eCommerce platforms, mobile apps, software, CRM or websites, Chris and his expert team are highly-skilled at ensuring your digital platforms continue to run smoothly – without requiring costly rebuilds.

"We pride ourselves on tackling the projects others avoid," said Chris, who himself has almost a quarter-of-a-century of experience building apps and websites for major brands.

"Too often businesses create a platform



Chris Carroll

and think the work is done, but problems appear only for developers to suggest extortionate rebuilds.

"However, our strategy is 'rethink, not rebuild', and instead partner with businesses and digital agencies to enhance, support and maintain their existing platforms.

"By avoiding that rebuild, it can save help clients make substantial savings while they have the peace of mind in knowing they are supported by specialists who have their best interests at heart.

"And it means your platforms, work better, last longer – and don't let you down."

Yet Resolve Beyond is just one branch of The Resolved Group, officially founded last year following a rebrand two years in the making.

Additionally, the business has other strands including Resolve Changing Lives – which focusses on developing mobile solutions such as apps, and eCommerce platforms, for the third sector alongside Resolve Academy – a scheme that trains, develops and grows future talent with the skills needed to thrive within the sector.

Visit www.resolvedgroup.co.uk

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*...If you love
what you
are doing,
you will be
successful...*

Angela Tuplin and Riss Wilson

Marketing and Media Matters

In the latest of this popular series, Northern Insight talks to...

Angela Tuplin and Riss Wilson

Design and print solution specialists, NE Display.

Did you always envisage a career in the Marketing and Media Industry?

We began our careers in the industry over 20 years ago, at a time when routes to marketing were predominantly dominated by print. Today the marketing and media industry is vast in its services, with exciting little pockets of specialists. However we still approach from a print point of view, and it was clear when we entered the world of print that there was an exciting career path ahead for us.

What has been your career path so far?

Riss entered the workforce straight from school, starting in telesales before becoming an account handler at a photographic lab. Angela pursued education, earning an honours degree in Information Design. We met at the lab in 2001 and became friends. Angela learned print systems and processes while Riss managed client relations, quoting and winning orders.

The digital era was upon us, and chemical photographic labs were seeing its biggest change in 150 years. All of a sudden we were faced with job uncertainty, and in that we found the opportunity. Through strong support and transparency with lab management, we were able to launch our own company supporting businesses through print. Our initial business plan has evolved many times as we've grown.

What has been the biggest challenges you have faced so far?

In our first 15 years, we were fortunate to see consistent growth in turnover and profit. However, Covid presented our biggest challenge. The pandemic led to the cancellation of exhibitions and events. Point of sale, educational work, signage and vehicle wrapping all stopped. But our concerns extended beyond NE Display, as the survival of our clients were crucial for our road to recovery.

Who do you respect most in your industry?

The graphics industry is full of skilled individuals who work as a team. From designers, print finishers, to vinyl wrapping and signage installers. The unsung hero's are often the ones who are hands on within this demanding industry. At NE Display we have an amazing team, it's their skill set that leads our growth.

Which fictional media character can you most relate to?

Anna Maxwell Martin stars as Julia in the sitcom Motherland, it's a must watch if you haven't seen it. Julia represents an overwhelmed working mam who struggles with the responsibilities of raising children while maintaining her professional life. Julia is relatable to a lot of women juggling a work life balance. With her facial expressions and perfectly timed eye rolls enhancing the less glamorous side of parenting!

What is your greatest strength?

Our greatest strength lies in our genuine passion for what we do. Over the years, we've successfully navigated major industry

shifts, turning challenges into opportunities. We have a client focused mindset, always aiming to deliver solutions that are thoughtful, effective, and sustainable. But above all, it's our ability to build lasting relationships that sets us apart.

What is your biggest weakness?

We're committed to the success of our clients and their businesses, which often leads us to say "yes" to every opportunity. While this drive is a strength, we've learned the importance of prioritizing to ensure we maintain quality and balance.

What has been your proudest achievement?

In 2016, we achieved a significant milestone by acquiring a competitor whose owner was preparing for retirement. This strategic acquisition was a proud moment for us, as it not only strengthened our market position but enabled us to expand into new markets with the addition of exhibition hire equipment.

What are your future career aspirations?

We're passionate about inspiring the next generation in seeing the potential of a career in print. While many traditional training routes into the industry have disappeared, few new pathways have taken their place. We believe it's up to individuals like ourselves to step into educational settings, share our knowledge, and inspire interest in print. Ensuring the future of this creative and vital industry remains strong and full of opportunity.

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

Success is not the key to happiness. Happiness is the key to success. If you love what you are doing, you will be successful.

How do you see your industry evolving in 10 years?

The print industry has a powerful and positive sustainability story to tell. From carbon neutral print machinery to eco friendly materials, substrates, and water-based inks. We have become increasingly conscious of buying sustainable products, recycling materials, using energy efficiently, and have an awareness of the environmental impact of deliveries. The industry has a collective goal to achieve net zero in both the production and disposal of print materials and activities by 2050.

How do you like to unwind?

Spending time with family, going out for a walk, or sharing a meal with friends. Unwinding for us is simply enjoying the simpler things in life.

www.nedisdisplay.co.uk

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From Trauma to Triumph

The Pocket Sergeant Journey

Paul Cooper is an award-winning entrepreneur who swapped a policing career for technology development after he created Pocket Sergeant, a revolutionary app to support frontline policing. But in his new memoir, *From Trauma to Triumph: The Pocket Sergeant Journey*, he lifts the lid on the dark reality behind the public success story.

Ex-police officer Paul Cooper has broken his silence about a childhood marred by abuse, neglect and growing up in care in his new book, *From Trauma to Triumph: The Pocket Sergeant Journey*.

The 40-year-old dad-of-one grew up in Thornaby with his father, a violent alcoholic, and his beloved mother who tragically died from cancer when he was seven. Aged eight, Paul and his younger brother went into care and lived with foster families, the first no better than his early childhood home, but the second showered him with love. Recalling

those early years is raw for Paul, but he is keen to tell his story to others who have survived trauma to offer some hope.

"Writing this book wasn't easy," says Paul, who spent his policing career with Cleveland Police and Lincolnshire Police.

"It meant revisiting some of the darkest chapters of my life. But through it all came resilience, and ultimately, the creation of Pocket Sergeant – a tool that's now helping tens of thousands across frontline policing."

Against the odds, Paul became a frontline police officer. He developed his award-winning app, Pocket Sergeant, following a Eureka moment when he realised he could change frontline policing by saving officers' valuable time and empower them with all the facts they would need at their fingertips.

"Writing this book has been cathartic. I want people to know that it doesn't matter how dark your beginning is, there is always hope and there is always a way to rebuild your life," adds Paul, who lives in Wynyard with his wife Linda and their 13-year-old son.

***From Trauma to Triumph: The Pocket Sergeant Journey* has already achieved number one in the Amazon book charts upon release. Buy a copy at amzn.eu/d/9atBue7 or Waterstones.**

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Bringing a touch of SASS to business

SASS media directors Sarah Dale and Sarah Walker are journalists and PR consultants working with a variety of clients to bring their stories to life.

Bringing people's stories alive with colour, creativity and passion – and, of course, a touch of SASS – is our mission at SASS media.

As public relations consultants and journalists, we love to tell people's stories. Giving individuals and businesses a voice and amplifying it to a wider audience is what we love best. How do we do it? We work with clients to determine what is important to them, the brilliant work they do and importantly, why they do it. Then, we craft their stories and share them in a variety of ways, including press releases, magazine features, blogs, thought leaders, website content and social media. We also support clients with crisis communications to help them navigate stormy waters to ensure they control the narrative and maintain public confidence.

We support a range of sectors from law to education, tech to motoring, and Paul Cooper first came to us to publicise his second app, Misper, designed to help find missing people quicker.

"When I met Paul, I knew immediately that there was more to his story than first meets the eye," explains Sarah D.

"Every entrepreneur has a story. And his is so compelling, he has written a book about it! I was privileged to be one of the trusted few to read it before release and I can honestly say, once I turned that first page, I couldn't put it down. It is an incredible story of resilience and determination to succeed despite a traumatic childhood, despite growing up in care, despite a battle to get into the policing career he had always wanted and despite being told he wouldn't succeed with Pocket Sergeant."

Paul said: "The press coverage I've received through SASS has been unbelievable – from local radio and newspapers to national publications and even international interest in my Misper app. Their work has led to direct enquiries from overseas, including a documentary production company.

"The team at SASS know exactly what's worth shouting about. They are refreshingly honest. They won't push out a story unless it's got legs – and that's why they have gained so much coverage for me. I trust them completely to find the story in what I'm doing, shape it, and deliver it to the right people."

Find out more at www.sassmedialtd.co.uk/news or email: sarah.dale@sassmedialtd.co.uk to arrange a chat.

L-R: Sarah Walker, Paul Cooper and Sarah Dale

Marketing skills deficit: The hidden threat to the North East's economic future



Paul Sutherland

nesma sounds the alarm on region's marketing talent gap.

*By Paul Sutherland,
Commercial Director, nesma.*

nesma, a long-standing North East marketing community champion, is sounding the alarm: the region's marketing talent gap is undermining growth, costing jobs, and damaging the region's voice in the national conversation.

Launched initially as a regional training provider, nesma now delivers specialist marketing and communications training to organisations across the UK and internationally, with clients including BBC, Virgin Money, and HMRC. Despite this success, its leadership warns that the

North East's capacity is damaging economic performance.

"Marketing is how economies grow. It's how businesses reach and sell, shape identities, and secure futures," says Paul Sutherland, Commercial Director. "We have brilliant marketers here, but not enough, at least not relative to other regions — and certainly not enough to match the scale of our economic ambition."

Evidence supports this concern. Companies with professionally qualified marketers perform measurably better than those without, driving sales, investment, and business confidence. Yet, in the North East, the pool of skilled marketing professionals and managers is too small to meet demand.

In the six months to April 2025, there were 77 permanent marketing job listings in the North East — a jump from just 24 in the same period in 2024. However, there aren't enough skilled professionals to fill these positions.

Meanwhile, only around 30% of graduates from North East universities remain in the region, and those with marketing degrees are particularly likely to relocate to cities such as Manchester, Leeds, and London in search of better opportunities.

Pay gaps further exacerbate retention challenges: the average marketing salary in the North East is £32,500, which is well below the salaries in Manchester (£48,750) and London (£70,000). Moreover, according to CIM figures, fewer marketers in the region are pursuing accredited qualifications compared to those in other parts of the UK.

“In a region where over 90% of businesses are SMEs, this isn't just a talent issue — it's existential,” says Sutherland. “If we don't have the right marketing professionals, our businesses can't grow. Our investment pitches fall flat. Our start-ups don't scale. Even our world-class universities and tourist destinations struggle to attract attention.”

According to the North East Evidence Hub, marketing vacancies are among the “hardest to fill” in the region. Skill shortages account for over a third of hiring difficulties, especially in core marketing areas like digital PR, SEO, and data-driven campaign management.

While digital marketing training expands, much of it focuses on entry-level or trend-driven topics, which are insufficiently aligned with accredited career pathways.

“Vocational marketing training in the region is often misperceived or undervalued,” adds Sutherland. Programmes often focus on a current trending topic but fail to meet the need to develop more expert practitioners and managers—a real North East industry need.”

nesma is urging policymakers, including the new North East Mayoral Combined Authority, to work with the sector to ‘flip the script’.

That means:

- Placing effort into post-FE/HE skills in the sector to help retain talent, investing in innovative approaches and collaborations to embed accredited marketing career pathways and specialist marketing management training into organisational skills plans and the regional economy.
- Getting involved in developing flexible vocational training solutions that embed recognised qualifications (such as CIM, CIPR, PRCA, DMI, MRS) creating new flexible learning pathways.
- Recognising there are no silver bullets, funding more graduate placements, marketing learning hubs, and skills networks across the region's marketing and communications communities.
- Rebuilding the regional ‘marketing skills’ brand to celebrate our marketing talent as a strategic economic asset.

We've been proud to collaborate with public and private partners to expand our training portfolio. But this is an urgent moment. If we don't act now, the North East will fall further behind our regional counterparts where demand is rising,” says Sutherland. “We're ready to help lead the charge, having developed national partnerships in the space, but the region needs to recognise and support accredited vocational marketing training as the growth engine it is.

Now is the time for businesses, educators, and policymakers to come together and invest in the North East's marketing future — before the opportunity passes us by.

If you want to discuss this further, contact Paul Sutherland, Commercial Director, at 07738 284 310 or Paul.Sutherland@nesma.co.uk

Sources: • IT Jobs Watch, a platform that tracks job market trends across the UK.
• Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) • CIM membership and qualifications

nesma.

UNLOCK SUSTAINABLE GROWTH BY BACKING LOCAL MARKETING TALENT

Together, we can build
the vital professional
marketing skills
key to the North East's
economic growth.

We'd love to hear
from you if you're passionate
about driving impact through
strategic marketing.



Jen Lorimer



hello@nesma.co.uk



07734 222 254

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...Here comes the Summer...

Highlights PR's Keith Newman asked some of his RADAR members why they are looking forward to the Summer season.

Powder Butterfly is looking forward to its second summer on the Quayside in Newcastle.

I am sure you can appreciate that the weather is pretty cold from autumn right through to just before spring and I do have some tricks to keep warm. The warmer weather really helps over the summer to keep spirits high, and we get a lot more tourists too.

I always look forward to chatting to locals and people from all over the world. I am looking forward to seeing what our second summer on the Quayside brings us as a business.

Corinne Lewis-Ward
www.powderbutterfly.com



I'm looking forward to getting out in the sunshine to do some plain air painting so that I can capture the mood and atmosphere of a scene that's straight in front of me rather than down a photo. Since I'm semi retiring and closing my gallery on Grey Street, it'll give me some more time so that I can get more enjoyment out of painting.

I've been in the art business hamster wheel for the last 40 years and even though I've thoroughly enjoyed it, it has been non-stop so I think I deserve to be able to rest up a tad and take life a little easier.

It's funny that people ask me what I plan to do when I retire, and I half-jokingly say that I'm going to take up painting. It's going to be an interesting time to see what effect retiring will have on my work...let's see.

Alexander Millar
www.alexandermillar.com

**I've got A LOT to look forward to this Summer!
 Some of which I can share and some of which is 'watch this space!'**

Off the back of a recent request to start doing my digital skills magic shows again I've already got a half day performance to book in with a local ladies networking group, Women of Steel, run by Suzie Martin. The Microsoft 365 Magic Show is a chance to share quickfire tips, tricks and shortcuts across the many Microsoft 365 apps including Word, Outlook, Excel, PowerPoint and others such as SharePoint, OneDrive and Planner. I'm also looking forward to offering a Google Apps and Apple version of the Magic Show too! Summer will also involve ongoing work supporting members of AskMrsWatson.com helping them to save time and stress by not only getting more done in less time by using technology tools including AI, but protecting their personal data and that of their clients as well by making sure that they are Data Protection Compliance and Cyber Security match fit!

Find out how to join the membership at AskMrsWatson.com or drop Kate a line at kate@askmrswatson.com





One of the highlights of our year is organising the annual Blyth Carnival which this year is on Saturday 5 July. We have a wealth of experience in event coordination and a track record of consistent growth, and we're well-positioned to develop and expand the carnival to new heights.

Working closely with Blyth Town Council, we aim to enhance the overall experience of the carnival. Our community links with businesses, schools, community groups and residents' associations, together with our growing team of Young Leaders will all go towards ensuring the successful delivery and operation of the event. This year we have a circus theme which will be fun for all.

James Palmer
www.leadinglink.co.uk



North Shields is set to come alive once again as the Coast Festival returns for its third year, taking place from 27th-29th June 2025. Festival goers can look forward to an electrifying party night on Friday, featuring headline performances from DJ Laidback Luke and rising rap star Window Kid.

On Saturday, the stage will be graced by the incredible Liam Fender and the legendary Glasvegas, while Sunday will see the celebrated Lindisfarne Story Band take the spotlight, featuring local music icons Ray Laidlaw and Billy Mitchell and their five piece band.

Adding to the excitement, the festival's legend slots will welcome Nigel Clark from Dodgy on Saturday, and Tom Hingley, and his band from the Inspiral Carpets, performing on Sunday.

While Friday is all about high-energy partying, Saturday and Sunday are packed with family-friendly activities. Kids can enjoy the Rave Cave, take part in a budding DJ competition, and perform on a special stage dedicated to young talent.

John Milton Peacock
www.wegotickets.com/coastfest

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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Showcasing Sustainability

Our expo stand and carbon calculator in action.

Our first expo experience

Last week at the North East Expo we launched our website carbon calculator, a tool we built in-house to help people quickly test the CO₂ emissions of their website. Visitors scanned a QR code or popped in a URL, and within seconds they were presented with their carbon score. We scored sites on a scale of plant types, Snake Plants for top performance, Peace Lilys for a solid effort, Bonsai Trees if things needed attention, and Cacti if your site was a bit prickly on the planet.

Wait, websites use carbon?

Even within the first few opening minutes we had a lot of “Wait, websites use carbon?” and “I had no idea digital stuff produced carbon.” Which is exactly the kind of reaction we’d anticipated.

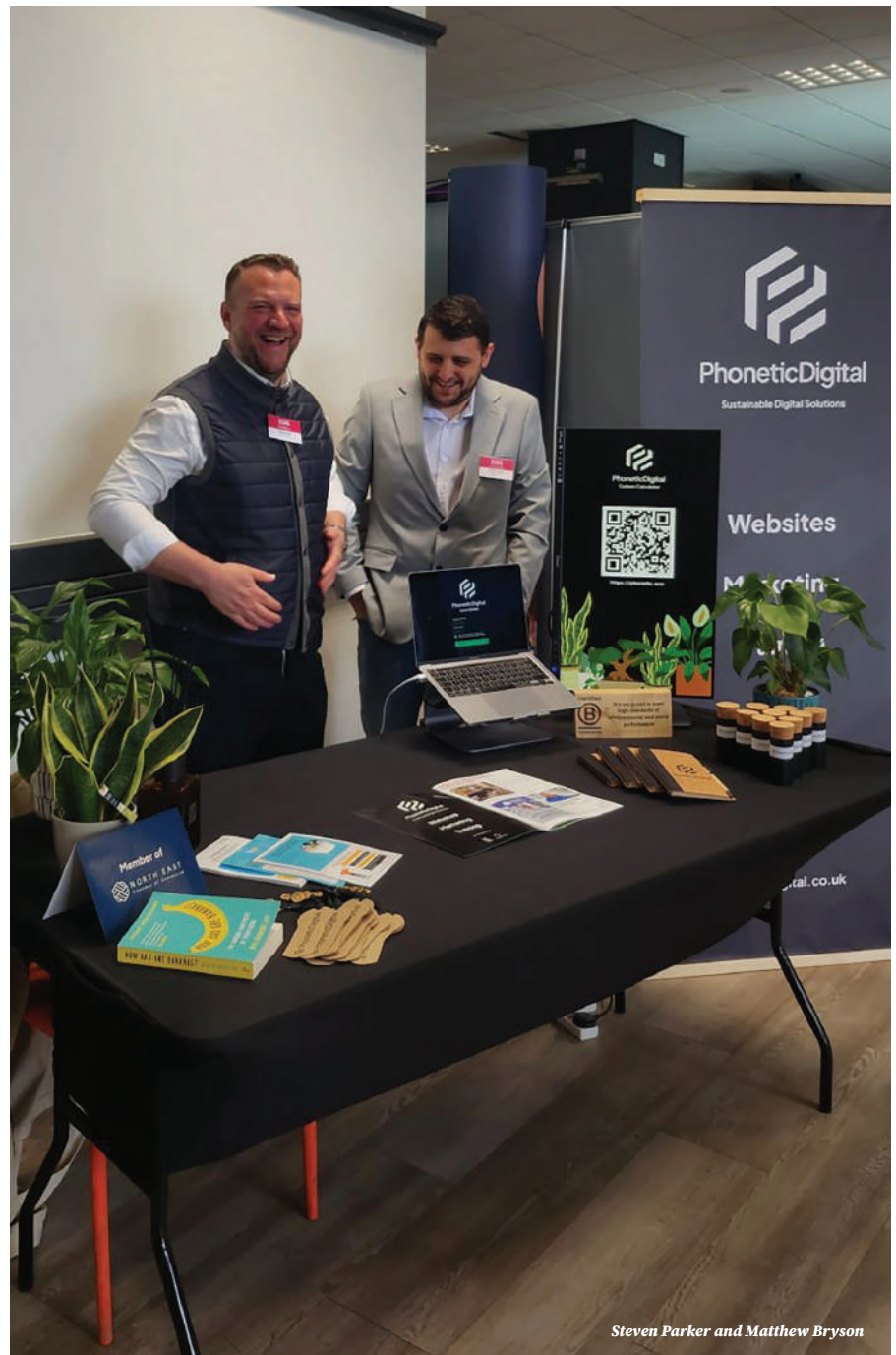
The carbon calculator became a proper talking point. Not just a stop and scan, but something that sparked real interest in how digital can be done differently. Conversations covered everything from image optimisation to green hosting. People didn’t just want to know their score, they wanted to actually understand it.

Why build a carbon calculator?

We know that the subject of sustainability can feel like a huge overwhelming topic. It can be hard to know where to start and what to do first.

The whole point of building the tool was to make something useful and easy to use but not boring. Something that gets people thinking and starts the conversation about all things digitally sustainable without hitting them over the head with dramatic ‘sustainable’ buzzwords. Visitors really got stuck into the whole concept, sharing their scores on social media, even taking photos standing next to the carbon calculator.

Whilst everyone had fun and the content was kept light and breezy the calculator



Steven Parker and Matthew Bryson

still used some pretty advanced software. It analysed key metrics that affect a website's digital carbon output, like page size, speed, and the amount of energy it takes to load and serve your content.

It was important to us that we built something that gave useful advice, that showed people what their websites CO₂ omissions looked like for the planet.

Everything we took away from the Expo

We gave plenty away at the Expo, desktop gardens, notepads made from recyclable cork, even book marks that contain plantable pine seeds. But we also took things away ourselves, and we don't just mean other stands' swag, our first expo really was a valuable one for us.

We learned that people really do care about the impact their websites have, they just don't always have the tools or even

starting point to do something about it. Our website carbon calculator was able to give them the first nudge, and in return, they gave us a clear reminder that the need for sustainable digital solutions is very real.

Performance and planet can go hand in hand

We all have a role to play in making sure our websites don't come at too high a cost to the planet.

If you missed us at the Expo, you can still give the carbon calculator a go at phonetic.digital. It's quick, free, and built to be genuinely useful!

Small changes can really make a big difference, especially if we all work together to make a cleaner, more thoughtful web.

[phoneticdigital.co.uk](https://phonetic.digital)

Elevating the sports bar experience with Universal AV Services



Sound and vision are essential

In a modern sports bar, crystal-clear visuals and immersive audio aren't just features—they're the foundation of the experience. When the newest venue in Newcastle set out to create a vibrant, high-tech environment, their brief was clear:

- 4K resolution screens
- Unobstructed lines of sight
- Powerful, zone-based audio
- A system that's easy for staff to use

Thankfully, Universal AV Services was right on their doorstep—ready to guide them through every stage of the process and provide ongoing support after installation.

Visually striking setup with Sony 4K HDR screens

To achieve exceptional visual clarity and performance, Universal AV installed 32 Sony 4K HDR displays—comprising 20 x 65" and 12 x 75" models—across the venue. These screens were chosen for their superior brightness, resolution, and reliability, critical in a high-traffic, commercial environment with varying light conditions.

The screens were mounted using custom-designed brackets, providing a clean, minimalistic look that seamlessly integrates with the bar's interior design. This ensures both a visually striking setup and practical functionality—every screen is positioned for maximum visibility, providing customers with a perfect view,

regardless of where they are seated.

Effortless video control with Blustream IP50

Managing content across 32 screens might sound overwhelming—but not with Blustream's IP50 system. Universal AV simplified operations by providing an intuitive drag-and-drop interface that staff can access from tablets, smartphones, or desktop devices.

Immersive multi-zone audio with optimal control

To match the stunning visuals, Universal AV installed a multi-room audio system using Optimal Audio speakers, subwoofers, and amplifiers. The audio setup delivers powerful, clear sound across the entire venue, with the ability to fine-tune volume and source independently in each area.

User-friendly design and future-proof flexibility

A key priority for the venue was ease of use. With simple zone controllers and a user-friendly interface, staff can manage all AV elements without needing technical training. Adjusting volume, switching inputs, or customizing zones takes just seconds.

Important for the client the system can grow with them, and as the venue grows or evolves, so can the system—thanks to its scalable design that allows for additional zones or sources to be added with ease.

Why it worked: when a trusted integrator like Universal AV makes a difference

Simplicity

Everything was designed with the end user in mind. Despite the complexity behind the scenes, the interface remains intuitive and accessible for all staff.

Flexibility

Whether it's a packed sports night, a live DJ event, or quiet background music for dining, the AV system adapts effortlessly to suit the moment.

Reliability

Using trusted brands like Sony and Optimal Audio, the system is built for consistent, long-term performance in a high-traffic, high-energy environment.

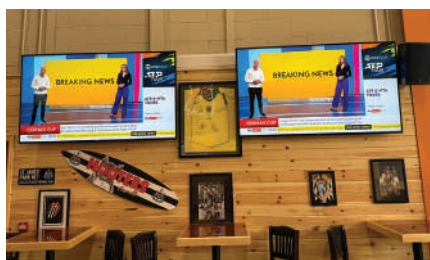
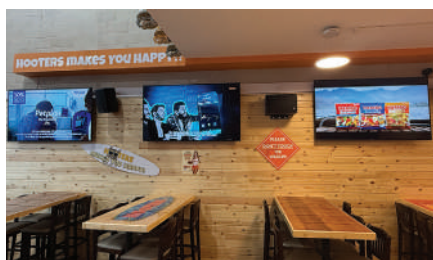
A seamless collaboration for success

This installation was more than just fitting tech—it was about crafting an experience. The venue now enjoys a high-performance, easy-to-manage AV system from trusted brands such as Sony and Optimal that enhances every guest visit and supports any event or occasion.

Julian Mill, UK Business Partner:

"Universal AV Services were absolutely fantastic to work with! The team were incredibly adaptable and ensured the entire process went as smooth as possible. They made everything so easy, and I highly recommend them."

www.uniav.com



Personal brand - the most powerful marketing tool you have

I've always been a big believer that people buy from people, in a crowded digital marketplace where attention spans are shrinking and trust is hard to earn, this is now more relevant than ever.

Your personal brand is no longer a luxury, it's a necessity. Whether you're a business owner, freelancer or executive, people are more interested in who they're doing business with than just what you're offering.

Put simply, it's the most authentic and enduring way to market both yourself and your business.

What Is a personal brand?

It's the perception people have of you based on your expertise, content, personality and presence. It's how you position yourself in your field and the way others describe you when you're not in the room.

Unlike company branding, a personal brand humanises your message, it makes your business relatable and trustworthy. A typical example is company social media channels, we all know that personal social email accounts generate better engagement than company pages which is for that very reason.

Why your personal brand matters more than ever

1. Trust and Authenticity

Audiences today are savvy, they want transparency, values and authenticity. A personal brand allows you to show your journey, your beliefs and your human side. This builds trust faster than any polished marketing campaign ever could.

2. Differentiation in a crowded market

No matter your industry, chances are you're facing intense competition. Your personal brand becomes your competitive edge, it reflects your unique perspective, style and mission, things that are impossible to replicate.



Nicola Halse

3. Magnet for opportunities

When your personal brand is visible and clear, opportunities find you. Speaking engagements, collaborations, clients and media features often come to those who have already established credibility and influence through their personal brand.

4. Loyal community building

A strong personal brand builds a loyal audience, not just one-time buyers. These are people who resonate with your message and become advocates for your business. They follow, share and refer because they believe in you.

How to build a powerful personal brand

1. Define your core message and values

Start by getting clear on what you stand for. What's your mission? What unique insight or experience do you bring? Make sure your message aligns with your business goals and personal passions.

2. Show up consistently

Whether it's on LinkedIn, Instagram, YouTube or podcasts — show up. Consistency is key to staying top of mind and building credibility. Share valuable content, tell stories and engage with your audience regularly.

3. Be yourself

Your personal brand should reflect you. That may sound obvious but don't try to be

everything to everyone, instead, make the most of your quirks, your voice and your style.

4. Offer value first

Always focus on how you can help others, when you lead with value, trust follows naturally and conversions become easier.

5. Leverage your story

People connect with stories, not sales pitches therefore share your journey and both your wins, your failures and your lessons. When your audience sees the human behind the brand, they're more likely to stick around.

Aligning your brand with your business

Your personal brand shouldn't compete with your business brand, it should amplify it. When people buy into you, they're more inclined to buy from your business. If you're a service provider, your expertise becomes the product.

Final thoughts

In a world where algorithms change daily and ads get ignored, your personal brand remains the most sustainable way to market yourself and your business. It's not about vanity, it's about visibility, trust and long-term connection. The more authentically and consistently you show up, the more magnetic your brand becomes.

www.riversidemarketingsolutions.co.uk

Have you outgrown your marketing strategy?



As your business grows, things change fast. If your marketing strategy hasn't kept up, it won't take long for the cracks to show.

A strong strategy should support where you're heading, not reflect where you were 18 months ago. It should act as the foundation for all your marketing activity, helping you make confident decisions instead of relying on guesswork.

So how do you know when it's time to revisit it? And what should a good marketing strategy actually look like?

A strategy that grows with you

A marketing strategy isn't just a content calendar or campaign plan. It's the framework for how your business shows up and connects with the people who matter.

It should define who you're trying to reach and what they care about, clarify what success looks like and how you'll measure it, and align your messaging and channels with the goals you're trying to achieve.

Importantly, your strategy should evolve with your business. It's not a document to write up and forget about, but something that should be reviewed regularly and adapted when your audience shifts, your offer changes, or you enter a new phase of growth.

Why strategy matters when your business is growing

Growth brings a lot of change, and your

marketing strategy should keep pace. When it doesn't, it can quickly become something that holds you back.

If your marketing strategy hasn't been reviewed since before a major growth phase, it probably isn't reflecting your current goals. This can lead to inconsistent messaging, scattered campaigns and internal confusion. It also makes it harder for new team members to get up to speed or for external stakeholders to understand your business.

If you're preparing for investment, an outdated strategy can make your business feel less cohesive or underprepared. In contrast, a sharp strategy shows clarity and control, things investors are looking for.

Strategy supports better decision making

One of the most practical benefits of having a clear strategy is that it helps you say "no."

When time and budget constraints are tight, a well-defined strategy gives you a clear filter to assess what's worth doing and what isn't. It makes it easier to decide what actions align with your goals and will resonate with your audience.

Instead of reacting to every trend or suggestion, you can focus on the work that makes a difference.

It sharpens your message

Messaging tends to blur over time, especially as your offering evolves. Value propositions become overloaded and campaigns start to sound vague or familiar, which limits your impact.

Revisiting your marketing strategy helps you reset. It's a chance to come back to the core questions: what do we want to be known for? What problems are we solving?

And how do we talk about that clearly and consistently?

Consistency is what makes marketing memorable and helps your audience connect with what you do.

How to refresh your strategy

If your marketing strategy isn't where it should be, don't worry, you don't need to start from scratch. Often, all it takes is a quick refresh.

Review what you have and ask yourself if it still reflects where your business is heading. Think current plans, recent campaigns, messaging and customer personas. Make sure your wider team is involved, especially those closest to your customers.

From there, you can start to rebuild. Update your customer personas, refocus your goals and sharpen your messaging. Keep your team updated and make it clear how your new direction applies in their day-to-day work.

Don't let your strategy hold you back

Your marketing strategy should be a tool for growth, not something that slows you down. If it no longer reflects the direction you're heading, it's time to realign.

If you need help getting started, we've put together an actionable, no-fluff guide to crafting your B2B marketing strategy. It features activities to get your team involved, advice to get stakeholders on board, and ways you can apply your strategy from day one. Head to our website to find out more.

vidacreative.co.uk/insights

Navigating Digital Marketing: The Ever-Changing Landscape of Social Media

By Angela Goggins,
MD of Redu Group

After more than a decade in digital marketing, I can confidently say one thing: change is the only constant.

As Managing Director of Redu Group, I've watched the landscape shift dramatically, from the days when social platforms offered massive organic reach and minimal competition, to today's highly saturated and algorithm-driven environment. Our business has evolved with it, and there's not a corner of digital we haven't explored.

The most challenging and exciting part? Staying adaptable. That's especially true when it comes to social media, which is where I'm focusing today's column. Let's talk Meta, specifically Facebook.

If your business relies heavily on social-first strategies to drive traffic and revenue, then keeping up with platform changes is critical. At Redu Group, our Ashleigh Money Saver brand depends on Facebook for both affiliate commissions and engagement bonuses. The algorithm is constantly evolving, and what performs well one month might fall flat the next. That's why staying ahead of trends and creating meaningful, engaging content is non-negotiable.

Gone are the days when you could just push



Angela Goggins

out product posts and expect conversions. Today's audiences are savvy — they don't want to be sold to; they want to be entertained, informed, and valued. With so much noise on social, standing out means offering something more.

We recommend a 70/30 content strategy:

- 70% value-driven, engaging content
- 30% sales or product-led posts

This balance helps build trust and keeps your audience coming back.

One of the most effective tools we've embraced is UGC (User-Generated Content). It builds purchase confidence and feels more authentic than brand-produced ads. During Q4, we ran a performance comparison between static product posts and UGC — the results were staggering:

- 152% increase in sales
- 214% increase in clicks
- 58% increase in reach
- 119% increase in orders

If you make just one change to your social strategy this month, let it be integrating UGC into your content mix.

Lastly, never underestimate the power of community. Don't just post, engage. Ask questions, reply to comments, and encourage conversation. The algorithm rewards this kind of interaction, and so will your audience.

Next month, I'll dive into what it takes to run a TikTok-first business. Until then, stay curious, stay flexible, and keep testing what works.

redu.co.uk

SALES SUMMIT

July 9th 2025 - Hardwick Hall Hotel - 10am - 4pm

TEES VALLEYS SALES CONFERENCE OF THE YEAR

Key Notes - Panels - Workshops

6 hours of purposeful learning & networking
Real sales strategies you can use.
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MERCHANDISE SPONSORS - £800 ^{+VAT}

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EXHIBITION STANDS

HEADLINE SPONSOR - £200 ^{+VAT}

Includes entry for 2 staff with full access to the summit

PROGRAMME AD'S

DOUBLE PAGE - £100 ^{+VAT}

SINGLE PAGE - £75 ^{+VAT}

½ PAGE - £50 ^{+VAT}



TICKETS £90

#SPEARSUMMIT





Celebrating 20 Years of O Agency

The O agency team were joined by clients past and present to celebrate two decades of impact in the region.

The dinner was hosted at the iconic Secret Tower, overlooking the quayside and some of Newcastle's most iconic landmarks.





Celebrating print, people and progress: How The Mag Room came to life

From print delivered to your door, to print proudly stocked in-store...



Being the largest print store in the North East is a milestone we could have only dreamt of achieving, where we are able to provide printed magazines to local print lovers in a physical store. We think print should be an experience, one where you can sit and immerse yourself in a different world undistracted, something our seclusion in the heart of the North East provides.

Our mission is simple: to put printed magazines into the hands of every passionate enthusiast, encouraging us all to embrace something real, tangible, and much loved. In a world where technology is more present than ever, we miss that deep longing for something you can hold, display, feel, and even smell. That's why we created our stand-alone shop: a haven from the outside world, filled with resources for every lover of printed magazines.

Our shop transformed quickly after a simple conversation amongst staff and repeated questions from local print lovers: "Do you have a store where I can come in and browse?" It was in those consistent questions that we answered with action and The Mag Room was born, our store and exploration of printed magazines, in the heart of the North East.

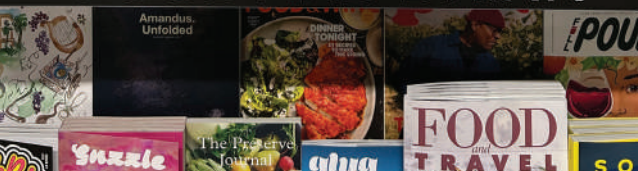
In April 2024, we opened our in-store experience, and just one year later, the transformation since has been incredible. As word spread on social media, things began to shift. Publishers wanted their magazines stocked on our shelves, customers travelled to see our inventory, colleges and schools recognised the value in our resources, and passersby discovered our hidden gem.



TRAVEL



FOOD AND DRINK



As our store gets its final finishing touches, we'll be revealing the transformed space during our Grand Opening on Saturday, 5th July. Expect hundreds of mainstream and indie titles, many never seen before. Creatives will gather for passionate conversations, local customers will show their support for the Northern print community, and there'll be local publishers as well as some interactive games to win our merch or some print—and of course, some really good coffee. Essentially: Mags, Coffee, and Vibes—something we're known for here in our cosy corner of Swalwell.

Our store now stocks over 300 independent titles and 400 more in our mainstream category, not to mention an overflow of stock in our warehouse, available upon request. We began with a focus solely on independent titles but quickly saw demand for mainstream favourites. This blend allows people to discover something new while still finding what they love and know. It's a space for growth and discovery, as well as comfort and familiarity.

The room's evolution has brought many changes. From separating our attached office to create a true shop experience, to relocating our kitchen to make space for overflowing stock, and even installing a new counter for smoother transactions, this space has grown so much from where it began just over a year ago.

We're proud of how we're evolving here at Unique Magazines, always with a focus on customer experience, satisfaction, and the love of print. The world of print is changing, and we're changing with it—embracing new directions, new spaces, and new opportunities. Our grand opening is not just a celebration of a new space, but a celebration of change, community, and the vibrant world of print and creatives here in the North East.

www.uniquemagazines.co.uk

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Our Blog: www.themagazineclub.co.uk

My Weekend...

Siobhan Sargeant

CEO, Blyth Tall Ship.

Here she shares what she does at a weekend...

Do you ever have to work weekends?

Yes but that's the norm in the charity sector, you tend to have community or fundraising events at the weekend or in the evening. Last weekend I was on board our heritage vessel, the Williams II, taking part in our first shakedown of the season. It was my first time out on the boat having just joined Blyth Tall Ship as CEO in January. I'm not from a sailing background so I wasn't sure what to expect but I had a wonderful time with a very well established and skilful crew which made my experience really special.

Are most weekends the same?

No two weekends are the same for me but I love that. If I'm not at work, or not on the side of a football pitch I try to make time for the things I like to do like catching up with friends and family, shopping, reading or just chilling out in front of Netflix but it's rare to have a lot of free time.

Do you find it hard to switch off?

I do but I think most charity leaders would answer the same. The working week is very intense, particularly in a small charity where you wear many hats, and there's no such thing as a 9-5 as a CEO. Raising the profile of the charity and reaching new audiences is always paramount in my mind so I'm always looking for opportunities to do so.

What do you do at a weekend which you can't fit in through the week?

Cleaning and laundry usually! We have two boys so the laundry basket hasn't been empty since 2004.



Siobhan Sargeant

Morning exercise or a recovery lie in?

Recovery lie in, always! I need my sleep and I'm a bit of a nightmare when I haven't had enough. A lie in is rare but when I get the chance I do take full advantage. I don't tend to think of it as exercise really, but my husband and I love a long weekend walk so we will head to the coast or the Quayside, grab a coffee or an ice cream and have a wander. It's a good chance for us to spend time together when the work week is so busy.

Big night out or a night in the house?

I spend a lot of time at charity or business events so I now appreciate a night in the house more than ever.

Do you watch or play sport at a weekend?

I live in a house where football is life; both of our sons have spent years in grassroots playing all over the country for local teams and at county level and my husband coached for eight years so it's always been a regular part of our routine.

Where do you like to eat out at a weekend?

We like to eat out for Sunday lunch somewhere like the Woodman's Arms or the South Causey. If it's a family event or a birthday we love Branches in Jesmond.

How important is the weekend to you?

Being in the charity sector, the weekend can blur into the working week and before you know it it's Monday again. It can be difficult to set and maintain boundaries around your time and how you use it. The weekend for me is important because its predominantly family time and family always come first.

Of a weekend, you'll usually find me most happy...?

When I'm with my boys and the sun is shining.

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L-R: Alan Sawyers, Nathan Cockburn and Josh Cockburn



From DIY to Damn Impressive: The Power of Elevation

In their latest Design Insights feature, Alan Sawyers and Nathan Cockburn are joined by Nathan's younger brother - and the youngest member of the AS Design team - Josh.

Not all projects we work on start from scratch. Clients often come to us with a logo made in Canva, a site built on a free template, or branding put together before an idea was fully formed. They're not starting from square one — but they know it's time to level up.

This is what we refer to as design elevation. We've had so much feedback from clients this year who have looked at what we've done for other clients — based on something they'd started or that already existed — and instantly saw the value in what we do.

Seeing the potential

We don't dismiss DIY work. In fact, we respect the effort and the use of available tools.

Alan said: "I started building websites in raw HTML and whilst it's useful to understand core coding languages to a certain degree, there are tools that negate the need."

But we also know when something needs structure, strategy, and polish. Elevation is about taking the spark of an idea and giving it the professional treatment it deserves.

Canva doesn't make you a designer

Tools like Canva have empowered more people to design, but using templates isn't the same as design thinking.

Alan said: "A good design tool doesn't replace talent or experience. Canva is great for quick and easy, but it doesn't give you strategy, hierarchy, or originality."

Nathan added: "We often see Canva designs where everything looks 'okay' but nothing feels cohesive. We turn those visuals into something people will actually remember."

Automation can't replace insight

AI tools are powerful, and we use them ourselves for ideas and automation. But they don't replace taste, judgment, or experience.

Alan said: "We recently rebranded a client's business based on what we'd seen happening over three years. The business was no longer the same, and the brand didn't reflect the change. The rebrand was based on real insight."

Nathan added: "Some of the web projects we've been working on lately are the most complex we've ever done. One in particular - for a client whose new site is going to completely reflect her personality and approach to business - is not something that can be automated or templated just yet."

Elevation, even when you're learning

Even the youngest member of the AS Design team is learning the difference between getting something done and making it exceptional.

Josh, who works part-time while at university, said: "I'm still learning the design side, but even I can see the difference it makes. I recently took a Word document used for training that looked plain but was functional and did its job. I gave it a proper layout, added the brand colours, fonts, and iconography — and suddenly it looked like it was part of the client's brand."

Elevated can still be simple

Sometimes, designs are over-complicated and busy. Elevation can be about simplifying that.

Alan said: "Another client recently told me that an ad we designed for an event brochure was the best one in there. Biased, maybe, but the reasoning was that most of the others were packed with so much information, there was no room left for branding."

Nathan added: "What people don't see is the amount of thinking that goes into making something look simple. With every project, we're balancing design, audience, functionality, and the emotional response it needs to trigger."

Josh said: "I've learned quickly that there's a huge difference between something that works and something that wows. We don't just fix things that are broken, we take things that already function well enough and find ways to make them stand out, feel aligned with the client's brand, and actually leave an impression."

asdne.co.uk



Professor partners with Top Trumps® to change how we learn

A Durham University Professor of Psychology, who is on a mission to transform the way people engage, communicate and drive action, has secured an exciting partnership that will transform the way students learn.

Professor Richard Crisp, The Influence Doctor, has taught the psychology of social influence for over 30 years and written multiple books on the subject. He has now teamed up with Top Trumps to create a social science version of the world's leading card game.

The game aims to get people learning in a refreshing, interactive - and human - way, in a bold move away from the seemingly ubiquitous use of AI and online learning that has been increasingly employed in higher education.

The Top Trumps Social Psychology card game can be bought by individuals on Amazon or via the It's Academic website, but where the game really shines is as a brand new learning resource for universities and colleges looking to buy them for students to use in interactive lectures, classes and workshops.

To help instructors, there is a free instructor's guide that details lesson plans, learning outcomes and game variants that all utilise the cards. Prof Crisp also delivers a 2-hour seminar via zoom that uses the cards to illustrate some of the most interesting and useful concepts and theories in social psychology (free to those who purchase classroom or workshop bundles).

He said: "I created The Influence Doctor as a new, skills-based approach to enhancing persuasive communications using insights from psychological science. It's a mission to help organisations communicate with clarity, influence with integrity, and drive lasting change.

"As part of this, I have partnered with Top Trumps to provide lecturers with an exciting new way to teach social psychology – an educational and entertaining version of the classic card game. The cards provide



Richard Crisp

a short, accessible summary of important theories and concepts along with key information points. QR codes on each card also link to a more detailed description and further resources meaning that every time you play you can delve deeper in to this fascinating field of study!

"I believe, as educators, there's a real risk of us moving too far down the path of AI, or on-line, isolated learning. While undoubtedly new technologies are helping students learn, it's also so important to bring them together in engaging, interactive learning. That's what I hope Top Trumps Social Psychology can achieve – the perfect balance of in-person, fun-focused interaction, combined with a judicious use of technology (via the QR codes on each card and the associated web resources). It's in-person learning that uses technology to magnify its benefits (not as a replacement for human interaction). There is just no better way to learn - by having fun with each other while we're doing it!"

As well as a classroom resource, the cards are also gaining interest from schools and colleges, as well as proving to be a hit with avid collectors of the brand. The cards have even been adopted as promotional merchandise and they make a unique gift for prospective students on open days.

Beyond the education sector, a business-focused seminar is also available in which Prof Crisp uses the cards to show how

social psychology can help address a range of contemporary business challenges (such as building confidence, enhancing communication, team-working and productivity).

Claire Simon, Marketing Manager at Top Trumps, commented: "At Top Trumps, we're always looking for new and meaningful ways to engage people with learning, so we couldn't be happier to partner on this exciting project. Social Psychology is such an important and relevant subject and seeing it come to life through Top Trumps is incredibly exciting. We're proud to help make learning more interactive, memorable and fun - whether that's in a classroom, lecture hall, or at home with friends."

Prof Crisp concluded: "I am delighted to see how much interest there is in this totally new version of the Top Trumps game – I really believe it can help more students engage with the subject, learn with their peers, and gain critical skills along the way. Understanding the science of social influence is the key to good communication and in a world going predominantly digital it is so important that we all harness these skills and celebrate human to human interaction. Top Trumps Social Psychology is my way of taking a stand."

You can find more information at www.itsacademic.co.uk

MARKETING WITHOUT STRATEGY?

MAY AS WELL CHUCK YOUR MONEY IN THE NORTH SEA.

MARKETING CAN'T JUST LOOK GOOD. IT'S GOT TO DO THE GRAFT!

Let's not sugar-coat it. Loads of North East businesses are stuck in the same loop. They've paid for a flashy website, tried their hand at a bit of social media, maybe even chucked some money at SEO or Google Ads. And still, the leads aren't coming in.

It's not their fault. They've been sold the sizzle, but not the steak!

At NORTHERN Design & Digital Marketing, we help businesses that are done with guesswork. They want clear advice, proper data, and creative that doesn't just look the part, but actually drives results.

"I JUST NEED MORE LEADS."

Aye, but where from?

We've worked with companies spending thousands on marketing that doesn't convert. Sites that look mint but aren't showing up in search. Campaigns that sound clever but lack any real strategy.

They weren't doing nowt wrong. They just didn't know what wasn't working. That's the killer.

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- Clear design that guides people to take action

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This isn't guesswork. It's marketing with a plan.

That's why we always start with strategy. Every part of your site and campaign should have a purpose. From colours to calls-to-action, from blog posts to PPC spend. It's all got to work together.

With years of experience across web design, SEO, content and branding, we know how to make your marketing do what it's meant to do.

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We've helped North East businesses fix broken funnels, tighten up their targeting, and turn their marketing from "it looks nice" into "it actually works." Here's what happened when they stopped winging it and started using strategy:

- Organic traffic increased by up to 145%
- Bounce rates dropped by over 60%
- Conversion rates more than doubled
- Page views per user rose by 58%
- Engagement time increased by as much as 85%
- Paid ad conversions jumped by 187%
- Email open rates reached 60%,

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Jobs on the horizon as MGM Construction posts record £15m turnover

A number of major contracts has helped a leading North East construction firm triple its turnover in just four years.

MGM Construction recorded a record £15m turnover this year – up from £5m in 2021 – with current projections forecasting further growth in the year ahead.

Founded in 1986, consistent growth has turned it into one of the

leading specialist property refurbishment companies in Northern England, while in 2007 it became part of the Northern Bear PLC group.

And the company's post-pandemic boom has largely been fuelled by securing contracts on notable projects in both the public and private sectors, including councils across the region and the Wearside housing association, Gentoo.

And with several key appointments as part of MGM Construction's expansion strategy, it has resulted in a hugely successful 12 months for the Gateshead-based company.

"These really are exciting times for MGM," said Managing Director, Phil Burridge.

"With strong support from the Northern Bear PLC board, we have been able to change the structure, ethos and direction of MGM.

"By adding key people to our management team and with internal development, we are in a strong position for our targeted growth."

And MGM Construction's success is even more impressive given the recent struggles faced by some construction companies.

MGM Construction has defied the industry trend, in part to its robust business model and strategic insight that has given a solid platform for further expansion.

Recent projects have included specialist structural works to high-rise residential units in Sunderland for Gentoo, as well as first-of-its-kind repairs to structural steelwork in Times Square car park at the Centre for Life.

The company also secured the contract to deliver the stunning £1.5 revamp of Beamish Football Club.

Additionally, valued public sector clients include North Tyneside Council, Newcastle City Council and South Tyneside Council.

mgmconstruction.co.uk

Wright Residential: 100% rentals. No distractions

In a crowded property market where lettings often play second fiddle to sales, Wright Residential stands proudly apart.

This is not your average estate agent. There are no 'for sale' signs, no last-minute viewing scrambles—just a clear and unwavering focus on residential lettings and property management.

Wright Residential is sending a powerful message: rentals deserve full attention—and that's exactly what clients get.

At Wright Residential, there's no being pushed down the priority list. Landlords can expect a proactive, responsive service that's fully tailored to the needs of the rental market. Tenants benefit too, with clear communication, well-maintained homes, and a team that truly understands the lettings landscape.



This singular focus is backed by years of experience and a strong presence across the region. From first-time landlords to experienced portfolio holders, Wright Residential offers expert advice, efficient management, and a genuine commitment to doing things the right way.

In an industry where multitasking often means cutting corners, Wright Residential's

rentals-only model is a breath of fresh air. No distractions. No split priorities. Just exceptional service—every time.

Looking to let your property or find your next home to rent? Visit: www.wrightresidential.co.uk, email: catherine@wrightresidential.co.uk or call: 0191 240 1818

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Ashbrookes secures planning approval for £4.2m Sunderland student accommodation development

Ashbrookes Inspired, part of Ashbrookes Group, has secured planning permission for the transformation of a former office building in Sunderland city centre into a high-quality, purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA) scheme.

The £4.2 million development, located on John Street in the Sunnyside area of the city, will see the conversion of the 1,700 sq m building into 84 self-contained student studio apartments alongside a gym, modern communal spaces and a ground floor commercial unit.

The retail space will be occupied by Ashbrookes Inspired's sister company, Ashbrookes Estate Agents, bringing new employment to the area.

Formerly home to the Department for Work and Pensions, the building has been vacant since the Job Centre's relocation. Ashbrookes Inspired has worked closely with Sunderland City Council to ensure the design complements the wider Sunnyside Masterplan, which aims to conserve and regenerate the historic area through sensitive development.

Esh Construction completes retrofit works to more than 80 properties across Tees Valley

Esh Construction has completed a £2.1 million retrofitting project which has seen home improvements actioned in 81 properties across the Tees Valley.

The Bowburn-headquartered contractor was appointed to retrofit the homes after Darlington Borough Council in partnership with Hartlepool, Redcar and Cleveland, and Stockton-on-Tees Borough Councils, secured Home Upgrade Grant Phase 2 (HUG 2) funding from the Department for Energy, Security and Net Zero.

Energy efficiency upgrades and low carbon heating were installed in owner-occupied and private rented properties off the gas grid, with residents across the Tees Valley taking up the opportunity to futureproof their homes.

Lisa Stafford, Head of Retrofit Solutions at Esh Construction, said: "Our main driver in launching the retrofit division was to support local authorities and social housing providers in decarbonising homes while helping residents to live in a more environmentally-friendly manner.

"We have worked closely with each local authority to identify the properties that met the threshold for home improvements through HUG 2, and seeing the changes made to these homes has been a moment of pride for the Esh team. We hope to continue working with the Councils involved on future schemes."

Throughout the project, properties received bespoke upgrades depending on requirements, which included improved ventilation, loft insulation, cavity wall insulation, air source heat pumps, smart heating controls and photovoltaic panels.



Up to £10K of upgrades for one lucky buyer!

One lucky house buyer could step into a ready-made home, with thousands of pounds worth of free upgrades, after a County Durham show home went on sale.

The five-bedroom Thetford property at Trinity Green, Pelton, Chester-le-Street, is not only one of the largest on the Miller Homes development but it has been fully fitted and decorated by an interior designer.

Which means that whoever buys it will benefit with around £10k of upgrades – from high quality AEG appliances and a landscaped garden to a superior quality kitchen and carpets and flooring throughout.

The property features Miller Homes signature open plan kitchen, dining and family room with patio doors to the rear garden, with a separate laundry room and downstairs lavatory and a generously sized, bay windowed lounge.

Not only has the show home kitchen been upgraded but it also has been fitted with expensive tiling and LED lighting.

Upstairs, the master bedroom has both an en-suite bathroom and dressing room, bedroom two also has an en-suite and there are three further bedrooms with a master bathroom.

Fitted wardrobes are all included in the purchase price and the home – which has been fitted with high quality chrome light fittings and plug sockets throughout – also has a fully working security alarm.

Window dressings, such as curtains and blinds – all specially chosen for the property – are also included in the price.

Close to both Chester-le-Street and Durham city and within easy access of the A1 the Trinity Green development is proving hugely popular with buyers of all ages, but Miller Homes sales director Lauren Angus said the Thetford show home takes luxury living to the next level.

"And whoever buys it can literally just move in," she said, "because it's been beautifully designed and decorated with high quality fittings and flooring, so pretty much all they would need to do is unpack.

The Thetford show home is priced at £440,000.

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Consuming the market

I've been around for a while and have been "eating out" on a fairly regular basis for over 40 years. In that time I've seen some major changes in the restaurant/ cafe/pub market.

Nationally I would say that the market has gone from polarisation to an even line back towards polarisation.

When I was younger, most people ate out in pubs and cheap eateries on what was considered a "regular" basis, and infrequently went to a higher class restaurant for a special occasion and ate what was at the time something quite exotic - in my 1962 edition of "Goldfinger" James Bond sat for a "*spaghetti a la bolognese*" - note the italics for what is now standard student fare of "spag bol"! In the later 1960s and through the 1970s and 1980s a new style of restaurant emerged - the first Wimpys were considered to be restaurants, as were Pizzalands, Pizza Expresses and others, which gradually appeared on all our High Streets. Who recalls the days of Rupali, Don Vitos, Mekhani, Godfather, Koh-i-Noor, La Stalla and others vying for trade and around £4 for a lunch or £7 for an evening meal, together with the "posh" restaurants such as Terry Laybourne's 21 Queen Street and the "greasy spoons" - most tastes and budgets were well catered for. And restaurants were scattered.

But I have noticed two trends recently. Pubs have always had "circuits" (Joe Robertson made the Bigg Market/Cloth Market/Groat Market an area of predominantly pubs; one could have a drink in each bar and walk no more than a couple of hundred yards before one wouldn't be able to walk - at least in a straight line!)

But now it seems that polarity is returning



Philip Bowe

together with "restaurant avenues" in Newcastle. Two of these that I would identify are the East Quayside - Luis, Victors, St Vincent and Dood among others, and Grey Street where there are pubs with a substantial dry trade such as Bar Luga and Pleased To Meet You, leading into Dean Street where both Marco Polo and Prima have moved substantially up market, to be joined by Kaltur and Doyles.

Lots of restaurants in a city centre is only to be expected - I could add the food court at Eldon Square. But there are two other "avenues" that maybe weren't quite down at heel, but which have become the centres of restaurant trade - West Road heading out to Fenham and Chillingham Road in Heaton. Have you seen the bright lights in the evening on either? West Road buzzes at night, mainly with lower end menus, and Chillingham Road now boasts numerous restaurants including Nest, where a 8 course taster meal with wine pairing could set you back £124 a head.

Which brings me back round to polarity. As much as few would have considered either of these roads a place for a night out only 15 years ago, few would have thought that Terry Laybourne would open more £50-plus a head restaurants, or that such venues as Kenny Atkinson's Solistice and House of Tides would be viable on limited opening hours and menus running off £180 a head (including wine) - but they are.

I think this is in one regard encouraging (that there are sufficient people in the area with money to keep these in business) - there is a concerning return to polarisation, and with a trend upwards. I am concerned that those restaurants at the lower end, who work on higher volumes and lower margins, are suffering. My firm acts for a number of these and I am getting more cries for help now than I can recall in my 45 years as a property advisor and nearly 34 years on my own. Politicians don't seem to realise that increased costs to suppliers won't help consumers - they'll be just as hurt.

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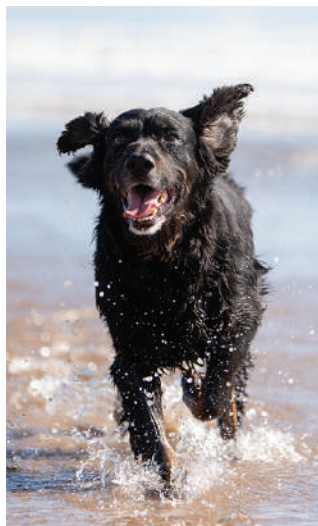
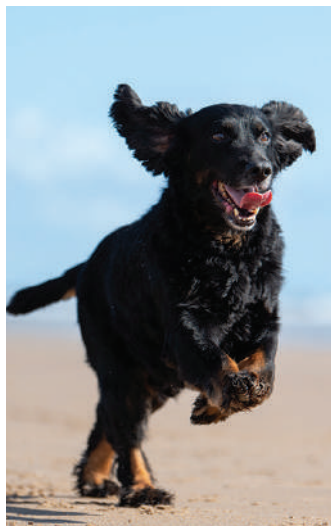
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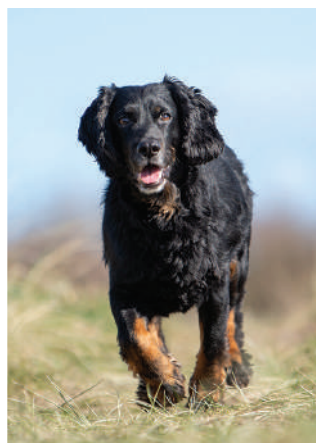
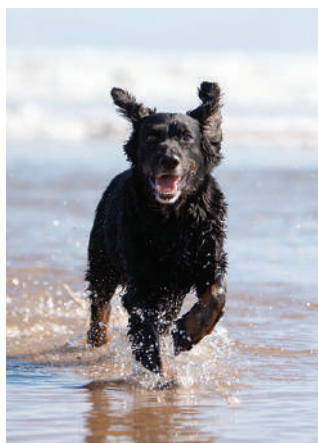
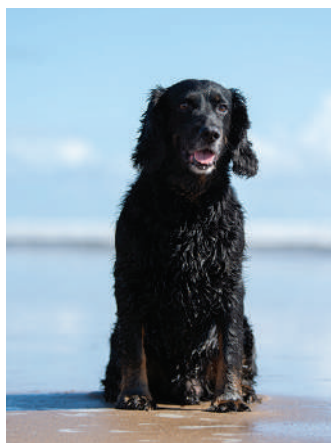
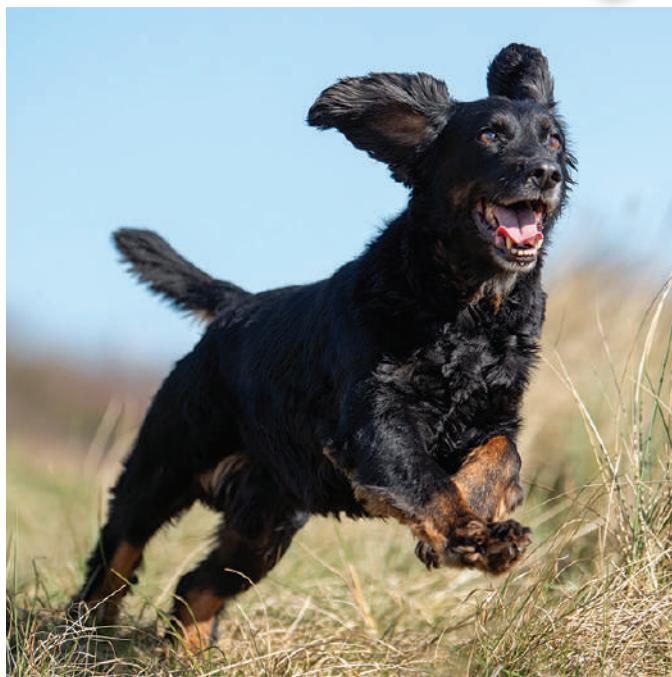


Hi everyone,

Sadly, Ziggy passed away two weeks ago just after his 15th birthday.

As a mark of respect, there won't be a column this month – just some of our favourite photographs of my big brother.

Cally x





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Neil Turner

How to start designing a new house

How do you design a new build house and where do you start?

It's a brave and adventurous step and not for the faint hearted. We all watch the various TV shows chuckling at the list of seemingly endless errors and cock ups, so here's a guide of how to get started.

First is deciding to do it and join the 14,000 self builds per year (which have declined in recent years, I think due to the increase in building costs).

The next task is finding a plot of land, which is not straight forward in this country, with a huge number of planning restrictions, ranging from housing land to green belt and conservation areas. Finding a virgin plot is the holy grail for many people – but finding a plot in the best area is easier said than done. Many people look to find tired old houses in better areas and either redevelop or build from new, which is often a more successful route and one I'd advocate.

Completely redeveloping an old house is usually the same process as building a new house, but can arguably be a more environmental choice.

Once you've found a plot to develop - I know from my own experience that this can take years - what is next?

Creating a budget before you approach architects and builders is important. Budgets affect everything from size, complexity, scale and quality. Work out your plot cost and then a build cost, add a contingency (rainy day pot of money for unknowns) and allow for fit it out and furniture. Even this basic list is a great start for the professional team.

Now to find the right professional team. Start with the architect. I make no apology for not saying architectural designer or surveyor. An architect is best placed to design, having trained for the role. If you are investing so much in creating a new house then use the best skillset – for example you would not use a plumber to rewire your house!

Many plots may have planning issues, so the architect can advise on a planning consultant to assist in the initial stages to assess if it is the right plot. Their skill can save you buying the wrong plot or help to gain the permission you desperately crave.

Finding the right architect is vital, so before approaching anyone have an idea of your style, budget and timescales. The right architect should ideally match your likes: for example there's no point using a modernist if you like classical or vice versa.

Ask to meet them and chat through ideas and approaches. Like a good marriage you need to get along, as its going to be a relationship lasting a long period of time. Don't expect them to produce a design before they are appointed. The design comes later.

Once you have your architect (and planner) you are nearly ready to commence. Get an appointment document and be clear what you expect from your professional team.

The final stage is creating the brief – what do you want to have in your new house? The brief can include room names, size, shapes, colour, aspirational words. It's worth spending time thinking about this as you are about to start building the biggest investment of your life, so take the time to write a clear brief. An architect will work with you to develop it but remember, it's your house so write the first brief yourself. There is no such thing as a bad idea!

You are now ready to move forward. Exciting times! Stay tuned as I cover the next steps in future articles.

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



Award-winning architect continues its conservation work at Durham University



Neil Turner, Director and Conservation Architect, Howarth Litchfield & Carrie Thompson, Project Manager, Durham University Estates in the centre, with the rest of the project team from Durham University, Historic Property Restoration, Colour and TGA

The award-winning architectural practice, Durham-based Howarth Litchfield, has secured a further conservation project on a key site within Durham University's estate.

Its latest appointment to the Fellows' Garden project is one of several in recent years at Durham University involving Howarth Litchfield's conservation team.

With this latest appointment to the Fellows' Garden Outdoor Performance Space as lead consultant, Howarth Litchfield is responsible for reimagining the space as a purpose-built performance venue for plays and concerts, with student enrichment at its heart. Located within a hidden area at the heart of the castle grounds, the Fellows' Garden will allow for around 100 audience members.

Howarth Litchfield's role includes responsibility for project management, design, conservation architecture and health and safety advice (often referred to as principal designer).

The firm's acknowledged flair for design, combined with a strict adherence to and understanding of conservation requirements made its appointment the perfect choice to undertake this project. Commenting on the scope of Howarth Litchfield's role, conservation architect

and director, Neil Turner, said: "There have been many purposes for the Fellows' Garden over the years involving both bishops and scholars in its early days, whilst more recently, it has been used as an orchard, tennis and croquet courts, a place to hold balls and a quiet space for general relaxation.

"When considering a redesign fit for the 21st century, we have given careful thought to utilising the space so that both students and the local community can enjoy it.

"The stage has been designed with a backdrop of the castle, allowing a good view of performances and ensuring optimal lighting conditions for ceremonies or plays.

"The new design also ensures that the Fellows' Garden will benefit from vastly improved disability access with a lift down to the garden from the existing entrance on the Barbican which can accommodate pushchairs and wheelchairs together with a new accessible WC added to the garden itself to provide enhanced facilities.

"The design will have minimal impact on the garden, ensuring the existing trees remain undisturbed while paved walkways, hardwood bench seats, modest retaining walls, complemented by outdoor sculpture/artwork and interpretation features combine to create a tranquil, beautiful and enjoyable space for visitors and performers alike."

Prof Wendy Powers, principal, University College, explains how the idea for reinventing the Fellows' Garden began almost six years ago. She said: "Since 2018/19, we have consulted with a

particularly wide range of stakeholders – including students and staff through to theatre and music professionals, stone specialists and more.

"Given that the Fellows' Garden is located within a UNESCO World Heritage site, any redevelopment work requires skill and innovation. The work is not just about restoration, but accessibility. We have a solid relationship with the Howarth Litchfield team who are both talented and well-qualified to undertake this kind of work."

Speaking about the funding for the project, she added: "It also gives me great pleasure to announce that the garden refurbishment programme has been fully funded by our alumni. The total cost of the project is estimated at around £800,000."

In its role of lead consultant Howarth Litchfield undertook the procurement process to secure a specialist building contractor for the project with the result that Historic Property Restoration of North Tyneside won the work and have recently started on site.

Additionally, Emma Fletcher from the Newcastle office of urban design and landscape architecture practice, Colour, has worked hard to interpret the landscape design brief - a key element of the overall concept.

The seven-month construction programme will enable the Fellow's Garden project to be completed for the end of October 2025.

howarthlitchfield.com



GFW's guide to residential valuations

By Aaron Dodd, Valuer, GFW.

When you invite an estate agent to value your property, you're taking the first step towards selling your home. But what actually happens during a valuation appointment?

Firstly, a Valuer will look to gain an understanding of your onward plans and motivation to sell. They will ask you as a seller, what you're hoping to achieve and whether you're looking to work towards a specific time frame for selling.

As well as this, to gain a full picture, they will ask about any works that have been

carried out to the property during your ownership, such as upgrades or extensions.

Next, they'll request a tour of your property, room by room, looking at size, layout, condition, and features that add value, like modern kitchens, additional bathrooms, garden space and parking. Location, local amenities, and recent sales in your area will also influence the valuation.

After assessing the property and understanding your requirements, the Valuer will give you a suggested marketing price, talking you through the current market conditions and strategies that best suit your requirements. They will explain how your chosen Agency would market your property, what kind of buyers you may expect to attract, and how long similar homes have taken to sell.

The valuation is free of charge and there's no obligation to proceed. It's a great way to get professional insight into your home's value, the selling process and the market in your area.

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the valuation appointment, right through to completion, you will find our team of experts transparent, friendly, helpful and dedicated; so, you can rest assured that you are in safe hands to help you make your next move.

To arrange your free market appraisal, or for advice on buying or selling your home, call GFW's team of experts on 0333 920 2220 or visit gfwllp.co.uk



L-R: Melanie Robson, Matthew McCarrick and James Brown

McCarrick Construction appoints two former apprentices as directors

In a milestone moment for Chester-le-Street-based McCarrick Construction, Melanie Robson and James Brown MCIOB MAPM, both of whom began their careers at the company as apprentices, have been appointed to its board of directors.

The move means 60% of the company's leadership team is now made up of former apprentices, reflecting a long-standing culture of homegrown talent and a deep-rooted, people-first ethos at the heart of the family-run business.

Melanie and James join fellow directors, Tim Bishop, Tony Pearce and Matthew McCarrick on the company's executive leadership team.

Melanie, who joined the business in 1999 as a 17-year-old administrative apprentice and was previously the company secretary, has been named accounts and HR director. James, who started as a joinery apprentice in 2004, becomes operations director.

Founded in 1953, McCarrick Construction is a family-run building contractor operating across the North East, delivering high-quality construction and refurbishment for a wide range of sectors including education, commercial, defence, healthcare and bespoke residential.

Its diverse project portfolio includes recent work for clients such as Tyne Coast College, St. Oswald's Hospice, Middlesbrough College, Shotton Community Youth Hub, Lumley Community Centre, Smulders Projects UK, Newcastle Blood Donation

Services, Peterlee Fire Station and a large number of primary and secondary schools from Northumberland to Redcar as well as numerous Territorial Army training centres for the Ministry of Defence.

Managing director, Matthew McCarrick, said: "Melanie and James have been operating at director level for some time now, so it's fantastic to be able to formally recognise the impact they have been making.

"What makes this especially meaningful is that their journeys from apprenticeships to the Board truly reflect what we stand for as a company – growing talent from within and supporting people to build lasting careers, here. With Tony Pearce, who started as a bricklaying apprentice, already on the board, it means three out of five of our directors came up through apprenticeships. That's something I'm very proud of. It gives our leadership team a grounded perspective and reinforces the family feel that has always defined the company."

Now in its 73rd year since incorporation, the company continues to thrive under the leadership of the McCarrick family, with Matthew representing the third generation. The business credits its longevity not just

to construction expertise but to its values of loyalty, mentorship and investing in its people for the long term.

Melanie, age 42, from Stanley, who has spent her entire career with the company, said: "Becoming a director feels like the culmination of a journey that began the day I walked through the doors as a teenager, fresh out of school. So much has changed in the company and in the industry since then but what's remained constant is the supportive culture.

"McCarrick Construction has always felt like a second family to me. I've grown professionally here, taken on new challenges and been encouraged every step of the way. When I started, Matthew's dad, Michael, gave me that first opportunity and I'll always be grateful for the belief the company placed in me. That belief has fuelled my commitment to driving the business forward."

James, age 39, from Chester-le-Street, said: "From my first days on site to managing major projects and eventually becoming chartered, every stage of my career has been backed by support and opportunity.

"I've never stopped learning and that's what sets the company apart. We encourage our employees not just to do the job but to grow as individuals. It's exciting to now be part of shaping the future of the business I've grown up in."

Both directors continue to be supported by the company in their career development, with James currently studying on a senior leadership programme at Durham University. Melanie is completing her CIPD Level 5 Associate Diploma in People Management, which will qualify her as a Chartered HR professional.

www.mccarrickconstruction.co.uk

Leading the Commercial Charge

We speak to Paul Fairlamb, Senior Associate Director at youngsRPS, about his role in shaping the commercial offering at youngsRPS.

With over 20 years' experience in commercial property, Paul Fairlamb plays a central role in shaping the commercial offering at youngsRPS. Based in Newcastle and working across the North of England, Paul leads a growing team known for its practical expertise, regional insight, and client-first approach.

In this Q&A, he shares his thoughts on the market, the team's strengths, and what's next for this evolving part of the business.

How would you describe the commercial property offering at youngsRPS today?

We're a dynamic, regionally active team based in Newcastle, with reach across the North of England and further afield. We support a broad client base - from investors and developers to occupiers and institutions - with services spanning agency, valuation, asset management, landlord and tenant matters, and strategic consultancy. Our strength lies in both depth and flexibility. Clients trust us for honest, informed advice backed by strong market knowledge.

What makes youngsRPS uniquely placed to support commercial clients?

Our broad expertise across the wider business is what truly sets us apart. While our core focus is the North East and Yorkshire, we work with commercial property clients across the UK. We take pride in delivering tailored advice that meets each client's specific needs, combining professionalism with a friendly, approachable style.

By regularly collaborating with our development, residential, and rural teams, we draw on a deep pool of insight to deliver meaningful value. Whether it's unlocking the potential of mixed-use sites or managing complex land assets, our



Paul Fairlamb

integrated approach ensures clients benefit from a comprehensive, seamless service.

Tell us about your role leading the commercial team?

I've been part of youngsRPS for over a decade, and supporting the commercial team's growth feels like a natural step. My focus is on staying ahead of market trends while delivering the client-first service we're known for. Building relationships and achieving strong results go hand in hand - that's the foundation we continue to build on.

What are the main forces shaping the commercial property market right now?

The market is shifting. Economic pressures, changing workplace habits,

and rising sustainability expectations are all shaping decisions. There's renewed confidence in city centre regeneration and a clear move towards long-term resilience. Clients want tailored advice and strategic thinking - and that's exactly what we offer.

What does the future look like for commercial property at youngsRPS?

It's a positive outlook. Our presence is growing, the team is evolving, and we're continuing to invest in our people and services. With our regional insight, cross-sector expertise, and collaborative culture, we're well placed to support clients through whatever comes next.

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Banks Homes opens the doors to new Yarm Development

Dozens of guests have been taking a first look at housebuilder Banks Homes' plans for its first ever Tees Valley development.

The County Durham-headquartered firm held the formal launch event at the Crathorne Hall Hotel for its new Cornfields development, which will see up to 109 high quality family homes being built on the southern edge of Yarm.

And with the first properties expected to be ready for buyers to move into early next year, Banks is now working with a number of event guests on how they can complete the purchase of their new Cornfields homes.





The Cornfields will feature 11 different property designs, which will range in size from three to five bedrooms and which will all be fitted with Hive smart heating systems, air source heat pumps and electric vehicle car charging points.

The properties will also all include spacious gardens, three-quarter height windows, bi-fold doors, Porcelanosa bathrooms and Omega kitchens, while a number of the house types will come with underfloor heating.

Aisling Ramshaw, head of sales and marketing at Banks Homes, says: "We couldn't be more thrilled with the reaction of our guests to everything that The Cornfields will offer and with the number of people who're already working towards buying one of our first houses there."

"This fantastic development is just a ten-minute walk from the centre of Yarm, one of the region's most beautiful and sought-after places to live, and will live up to our promise of creating sustainable, contemporary living spaces in desirable locations that enrich our customers' lives."

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

The Cornfields is the third development site that Banks Homes has brought forward since its launch by the Banks Group two years ago.

Construction work is nearing completion at the luxury Symeon Court development on the Mount Oswald development in Durham City, while the first residents are about to move into their new homes at the Cathedral Meadows development in West Rainton.

Aisling Ramshaw continues: "We believe our design specifications are the very best among our peers, with the role and function of every room being carefully considered to ensure they provide everything homeowners need for a healthier, happier life."

"Our mission is to bring together striking design, future-proof sustainability and desirable locations to create a new blueprint for modern living, with this being our guiding principle as we now work towards bringing our plans for The Cornfields to life."

For more information on The Cornfields at Yarm, and on any of Banks Homes' growing portfolio of residential developments, please visit www.bankshomes.co.uk or email info@bankshomes.co.uk





Catherine Sinclair, third from right, front row, with other G4C Award winners 2025

Catherine Sinclair crowned G4C Future Leader

Catherine Sinclair, of Space Architects, was named Future Leader at the prestigious Generation4Change (G4C) North East Awards 2025, which recognise outstanding leadership.

Receiving the award from headline sponsor, Caddick Construction, Catherine, will represent the region in the Constructing Excellence national final later this year.

Judges praised Catherine's commitment to inclusive leadership and her determination to inspire the next generation of construction professionals. Her work championing equality and innovation across the industry, delivering lectures at Northumbria University, combined with her efforts to create opportunities for young people through mentoring and outreach, stood out as exceptional. The panel recognised her as a standout future leader with the drive and vision to shape a more progressive and collaborative future for the sector.

Catherine, said: "Winning this award is incredibly meaningful. I'm passionate about leading with purpose and creating spaces that positively impact people and communities. I've had the privilege of learning from inspiring mentors and working with a forward-thinking team and I aim to pass on the knowledge that I have

been so fortunate to receive. It's an honour to represent the region on the national stage and I'm excited for what lies ahead."

G4C is part of Constructing Excellence, harnessing the young professional voice and helping to drive continuous improvement in the UK built environment industry.

Harvey Futter, of John N Dunn Group, was named Trade Apprentice of the Year, sponsored by Northern Counties Builders Federation (NCBF). Technical Apprentice of the Year, also sponsored by NCBF, went to Alex Philpott of AtkinsRealis.

Amelia Bewick, a rising talent at Turner & Townsend, was named Student of the Year, with the award sponsored by Bowmer+Kirkland. Lewis Johnson, SES Engineering Services, was recognised as Trainee of the Year. Matthew Huxtable, Bowmer & Kirkland, was highly commended in the same category. The sponsor was Tilbury Douglas.

New Professional of the Year, sponsored by RED Engineering, was awarded to Tom Smith from Turner & Townsend. The

Mentor of the Year accolade, sponsored by Sir Robert McAlpine, went to Tanja Smith of Bowmer+Kirkland.

The Commitment to Employee and Training Development Award went to DPP Planning in the small organisation category, while Turner & Townsend took the honour in the large organisation category. Both awards were sponsored by Northumbrian Water Group.

Drinks reception sponsor for the night was Kier Construction.

Paul Dodsworth, Construction Group Managing Director at Caddick Construction, said: "We were very proud to sponsor the G4C Awards for a second year running and to join everyone in the industry at another fantastic event that celebrates the exceptional talent we have coming through the ranks. The energy, ambition and passion we saw from this year's candidates was inspiring. I'd like to congratulate Catherine on becoming a very deserving winner of the G4C Future Leader Award amongst a group of very strong runners up."

Catriona Lingwood, Chief Executive of Constructing Excellence North East, said: "I want to thank all of our sponsors who make this event possible and support the development of emerging talent year after year. The turnout on the night was fantastic and it was a pleasure to be surrounded by so many incredible people from across the industry."

www.spacearchitects.co.uk



Schoolchildren join Bishop for 200km Big Lent Walk

Schools across a Multi-Academy Trust in the North East have embarked on a 200km walk to raise funds for CAFOD.

Pupils and staff from Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust, which has 30 schools in East Durham, South Tyneside, and Sunderland, joined CAFOD Big Lent Walk.

One of the Trust's schools which took part in the challenge was St. Bede's Catholic Primary School, South Shields. Staff and pupils were delighted to welcome Bishop Stephen, who is Chair of the Board of Trustees for CAFOD, as well as Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle, to join their Big Lent Walk.

Headteacher Carol Devine said: "We were absolutely delighted to have Bishop Stephen join us for the CAFOD Big Lent Walk on such a beautiful, sunny day!"

Bishop Stephen said: "It was wonderful to have such a warm welcome from the staff and children at St. Bede's. I thoroughly enjoyed taking part in the afternoon celebrations and it was fantastic to join everyone for the Big Lent Walk for CAFOD."

Connor, a Year 6 pupil at St. Cuthbert's Catholic Primary, another Trust school which took part in the charity walk, added: "It's important to raise money because it helps families living in poverty around the world get the essentials they need, especially the families we learned about in Kenya."

The CAFOD Big Lent Walk Jubilee is a 40-day challenge where participants walk, run, or stroll 200km to raise money and awareness for CAFOD's work in fighting global poverty.



Highly acclaimed children's author returns to roots

Multi-award-winning children's author David Almond OBE visited his alma mater, St Joseph's Catholic Academy in Hebburn to give an inspirational celebration assembly and workshops to Year 9 pupils.

David talked about his life, career and inspiration as a writer. He shared his background of being an ordinary working-class boy from Felling who had a dream, and didn't give up on it, despite receiving many setbacks along the way. He encouraged them to think about their amazing brains and how they have so many stories and experiences which are very much worth sharing.

He also hosted a writing workshop to encourage the students' creativity. Students were given simple stimuli such as an apple, a padlock and key and even a tin of sardines, to use to come up with stories. They also created a character and a world for them, before sharing their stories.

Jessica, a Year 9 pupil, said: "The workshop showed me that writing should be a fun experience where you let your ideas flow, rather than stressing about getting something down on paper. It's a creative process so just enjoy it!"

Liz McEwen, English teacher at St Joseph's, which is part of Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust, said: "David was a truly inspirational and entertaining speaker, who engaged both students and staff with his childhood stories and made writing fiction seem both accessible and possible for everyone."

David said: "The students were brilliant – attentive, responsive, relaxed. It was wonderful to work with them all."

Seaham pupil proves the adage 'Shy bairns get nowt' with his menu request!

School dinners may conjure up a nostalgic memory of a scoop of mash and sponge cake and custard, however nowadays, pupils are treated to a wide selection of healthy and tasty dishes from around the world on the menu every day.

Sushi fan William Youll, from St Mary Magdalen's Catholic Primary School, part of BCCET, decided it would be a good new option for the school cook to add to the menu.

Nine-year-old William was thrilled when he received a reply from Lesley Parkin, assistant catering manager at BCCET, expressing how impressed she was with his letter and his ideas for the school menu.

She said: "Your idea about including Japanese food into school is an amazing

idea and I especially agree with you when you say everyone should try foods from other countries. We love doing Theme Day menus in the schools and we hope you and all your friends in school love them too, as this is a great way of trying different foods."

Lesley suggested a special sushi-making and tasting session with his classmates, which the children loved. The catering team worked with the Trust's suppliers Turner Price to source ingredients so the school cook could make sushi with William.

William said: "I was super excited because over the years I've thought I'd never be able to make sushi in school but I did!"

Headteacher Andrea Goodwin said: "William wrote a fantastic letter as part of his persuasive writing work in class. We are



always keen to hear pupil feedback to help shape our school offer and this seemed a lovely way to promote healthy options for the children."



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Specialist education recruitment consultancy expands SEND division with new appointment



L-R: Genna Sinclair SEND recruitment manager and Rachael Chapman, SEND recruitment consultant

Specialist recruitment agency, The Education Network, has announced the appointment of Rachael Chapman as SEND recruitment consultant, bolstering its specialist division in the North East.

Rachael joins the Newcastle office with four years' experience in education recruitment and will focus on sourcing SEND professionals for schools in Gateshead, Newcastle and across the North East.

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.

Genna Sinclair, SEND recruitment manager and Rachael's line manager, said: "I've known Rachael since 2021 and watched her go from strength to strength in a previous role. She brings passion, drive and a genuine commitment to finding the right fit of candidates for schools. These are all qualities that align perfectly with

The Education Network's values and we are looking forward to strengthening our SEND division with Rachael's expertise.

The Education Network's Newcastle office has experienced significant momentum in recent months and Rachael's appointment comes at a pivotal time. She brings valuable capacity to help meet the needs of schools and to support the company's continued expansion.

Genna continued: "At The Education Network, we pride ourselves on the quality of our SEND division. It's an area of real strength for us and one we are committed to developing in ways that bring value to schools and pupils.

"As demand for specialist support and teaching staff continues to grow in the region, Rachael's appointment is a natural step forward."

Rachael has quickly made her mark, already securing meetings and placing candidates with schools across her new

patch. She commented: "Joining The Education Network felt like the right next step for me; I am ready for a new challenge with enhanced opportunities and a team that truly understands the impact of getting SEND recruitment right.

"I'm excited to build strong partnerships and make a real difference for the schools and students that The Education Network supports."

The Education Network's specialist SEND division continues to grow in reach and impact, with the team aiming to further broaden its support for schools by forming partnerships with local organisations that focus on autism and disability inclusion.

The consultancy is also sponsoring this year's Virtual Schools Conference in June as part of its ongoing commitment to placing the wellbeing and education of pupils at the centre of its decision making.

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.

To find out more about The Education Network's current vacancies, or to fill your vacancies before the summer holidays, visit www.theeducationnetwork.co.uk



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Leading Ed-Tech provider announces new name and expands product portfolio for UK schools



Ian Fitzpatrick, managing director of the newly named Daisy Education

North East based educational technology provider

Reading Solutions UK has officially rebranded as Daisy Education, as the team brings a world-class programme to support maths attainment to the UK for the first time.

The name change reflects the company's expanding mission to equip teachers with innovative solutions, including the launch of DreamBox Maths, a groundbreaking adaptive maths programme, into UK classrooms for the first time this September.

For over a decade, schools across the UK have trusted Reading Solutions UK to provide the award-winning reading development programme DreamBox Reading Plus, and under the new name Daisy Education, the company remains committed to its core purpose - helping every learner thrive, while expanding their offering to include maths alongside literacy.

According to 2024 data, 27% of children are below target levels in maths at the end of primary school (Department for Education, 2024), with 54% of girls and 43% of boys

lacking confidence in learning maths (Teach First, 2024).

Ian Fitzpatrick, Managing Director of Daisy Education said, "For over a decade, we've been dedicated to supporting schools and students with DreamBox Reading Plus, helping to improve reading skills and boost confidence. Now we're growing our offering with DreamBox Maths, an incredible programme designed to develop foundational mathematical skills through an engaging and adaptive approach. We have ambitious plans for the coming years and we want to use our experience in increasing reading confidence to empower UK pupils with maths too - and that meant it was time for a refresh of our name.

"Our new name, Daisy Education, is inspired by the belief that every child is unique and has the ability to flourish when given the right tools and support. As ever, children and the realities facing education providers stays at the heart of everything that we do.

"There are already over 6 million pupils using DreamBox Maths across North America, and we are proud to be the team behind bringing the platform to the UK for the first time. DreamBox Maths combines real-time data with engaging content, offering a personalised learning experience, which supports a deep conceptual understanding and independent thinking from pupils. It's a programme that doesn't just improve attainment, it builds

confidence, nurtures problem-solving and supports teachers with real-time insights. We knew we needed a new identity that matched our ambition, and Daisy Education reflects the positivity, growth and fresh thinking we bring to classrooms through this programme and our popular Reading Plus programme."

While its name has changed, the company's values and commitment has not.

Ian continued, "DreamBox Reading Plus remains a core part of the Daisy Education portfolio, and our dedicated team continues to work closely with schools to drive reading success. We are the same passionate people, just with a broader purpose and an ambitious outlook. Our new name marks our evolution - but our relationships with schools, our evidence-based programmes and our market-leading support remain as strong as ever."

To celebrate the launch of Daisy Education, the company is giving Reading Plus users the opportunity to design a new mascot for the brand. From reading explorers to a maths genius and a fun adventurer, children from across the UK have been submitting their ideas with the winning design being unveiled on social media as part of the launch celebrations in the coming weeks.

www.daisyeducationuk.com

Mowden plays its part in historic independent schools merger



Pupils and families from a rural Northumberland school are set to benefit from the creation of a groundbreaking new education group as Radley College and Prep Schools Trust, which includes Mowden Hall School in Stocksfield, announce they are merging today in one of the most significant mergers in the charitable independent school sector.

Prep Schools Trust currently educates 1,600 pupils from age two to 13 across the UK in its seven schools: Barfield School; Beeston Hall School; Chandlings Prep School; Cothill House; Kitebrook Preparatory School; Mowden Hall School and West Hill Park School. Radley College – one of three remaining all boys, all boarding schools – is situated just outside the city of Oxford and numbers 770 boys from age 13 to 18.

This merger presents both charities with the opportunity to be part of something groundbreaking in the independent schools' sector: greater security and access to resource and expertise, and a louder voice and wider influence in helping to shape the future of independent charitable education for children of all ages.

Warden (Headmaster) of Radley College, John Moule, said: "Radley College and Prep Schools Trust believe in the timeless and authentic values of high quality charitable independent education. That is why we are coming together to create Radley Schools Group. Through the strength and stability of a wider group, we are committed to providing exceptional educational opportunities for all our pupils throughout

their childhood and to each school retaining its strong identity in its local context. Blending the very best of tradition and innovation, we seek to develop young people of outstanding character and purpose."

Head of Mowden Hall School, Phil Sturt, said: "This is a truly exciting chapter for the history of our school. We are excited about what lies ahead and proud of the strong foundations that make it possible. At Mowden, pupils already benefit from

outstanding teaching and learning, both inside and outside of the classroom. By combining our strengths and experience with the rest of the Radley Schools Group, we will be able to continue to offer outstanding opportunities for our current and future pupils for years to come."

Following the merger, each school will continue to retain their independent identities and markets. Over time, Radley Schools Group will ensure its schools become known for providing an innovative and successful education in each setting, with a sensitivity to local context and need.

In a changing educational landscape, Radley Schools Group will work together to meet all the societal, economic and political challenges faced by the charitable independent school sector – and, together, be a force for good.

www.mowdenhallpst.org





Students mark VE Day with 1940's celebration

The community at Mowden Hall School came together to mark the 80th anniversary of Victory in Europe (VE) Day.

The whole school, from Nursery to Year 8, came together to mark VE Day with an afternoon of activities and remembrance.

Victory in Europe Day, or VE Day, commemorates the formal acceptance by the Allies of Nazi Germany's unconditional surrender on 8 May 1945, marking the end of World War II in Europe. It remains a powerful moment in history that reminds us of the courage,

resilience and unity shown by those who lived through the war.

At Mowden, pupils arrived dressed in red, white and blue and enjoyed a vibrant street party lunch in the Head's Garden, where bunting fluttered and wartime tunes played.

This was followed by an afternoon filled with traditional 1940s-themed fun, including singing wartime classics such as Vera Lynn's *We'll Meet Again*, *Make Do and Mend* sewing practice, *Dig for Victory* gardening activities, *Army Drills*, and traditional garden games.

The celebration culminated in a joyful Tea Dance in the Dining Room, with pupils and staff alike embracing the spirit of the era.

Reflecting on the day, Gareth Townley, Assistant Head (Pastoral) at Mowden Hall School, said: "VE Day is not just a commemoration of history; it is an opportunity to pause and reflect on the values of perseverance, community, and hope. It was wonderful to see our pupils engaging so enthusiastically with the past, and connecting with its relevance today."

www.mowdenhallpst.org





RGS Newcastle: Shaping the Next 500 Years

By Geoffrey Stanford, Headmaster, RGS Newcastle

As the Royal Grammar School (RGS) Newcastle celebrates its quincentenary, not only have our academic results been recognised in the top one per cent of schools nationally for value added relative to cohorts of equivalent ability (including our SEND students) but our latest inspection report also recognises our approach to inclusion as a “significant strength.”

For 500 years, RGS Newcastle has welcomed young people from all backgrounds, nurturing generations of learners who go on to make their mark on the world.

From Vice Admiral Cuthbert Collingwood to Nobel Laureate Sir Gregory Winter, our legacy is one of excellence, opportunity, and impact. However, our story is about more than our achievements — it is our ethos and values that are at the heart of everything we do:

- **A Sense of Belonging** – Rooted in our history and place in the city, we are building a future fuelled by ambition and a deep connection to our community.
 - **Love for Learning** – We are a vibrant, inclusive environment where curiosity thrives and ideas flourish.
 - **Belief in Each Other** – We care deeply, support one another, and act with integrity, within and beyond the school gates.
 - **Ambition to Succeed** – We challenge, inspire and empower every individual to explore, dream, and be their truest self.
- As we envision the next 500 years and

the journey ahead, we have prepared a strategic document that seeks to articulate how we intend to progress and evolve. Our forward-looking strategy was deliberately published on 1/5/25 to reflect the date of Thomas Horsley’s will back in 1525, within which he pledged his estate to fund a grammar school. It is a statement of purpose, shaped by conversations across our whole school community, and a call to work together to build a bold and inclusive future for RGS and the wider North East.

Indeed, while RGS is an independent day school we are also a charity that exists for the advancement of education of children and young persons across the region. Therefore, while we promote excellence, we are also strongly committed to improving opportunities, raising aspirations and attainment across the region. We believe in inspiring young people and equipping them to make a positive contribution to society.

All RGS students – in our Junior School through to our Sixth Formers - benefit from this sense of purpose but we are

particularly proud of the impact that we are able to have through our bursary programme. In turn, our very talented bursary students substantially add to the experience of every child at the school. We are extremely grateful to the philanthropy that has allowed us to increase our transformational bursary holders from 90 in 2024/5 to 100 from September 2025. In doing so we will have supported over 500 students since the inception of our Bursary Campaign just over twenty years ago. In parallel, we seek to have a positive impact more broadly across the region, with more than 70 projects now running in over 100 state schools. This work is made possible by the generosity of funding partners who support a team of partnership teachers, which continues to grow year on year. So far, our team of partnership teachers supports students across Maths, Physics, Robotics and Computer Science. This is an ever-evolving programme as we recently welcomed a new Rugby Partnerships Coach to work across our partner schools thanks to funding from the Rugby Football Union (RFU).

Our Partnership programme has already received national recognition, and we have always believed that this work is scalable. It is therefore very exciting for the RGS to be taking the operational lead on a nationwide STEM Horizons project, funded by the Hg Foundation. In the first instance this project will be placing Computer Science teachers in five cities across the UK, each working across five partner schools for the next three years. This project is accompanied by robust external impact measurement with a view to rolling it out more widely. Who knows what we can achieve over the next 500 years!

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



Photo credit Manuel Harlan

HELLOOO Newcastle!

Beloved Scottish nanny Euphemia Doubtfire will be packing up her suitcase and hitting the road next year as her West End and Broadway musical Mrs. Doubtfire tours the UK and Ireland for the first time. The hit comedy musical will visit Newcastle Theatre Royal Wed 23 Sep – Sun 11 Oct 2026.

A hilarious and heartfelt story about holding onto your loved ones against all odds, Mrs. Doubtfire is the musical comedy for all ages. Out-of-work actor Daniel will do anything for his kids. After losing custody in a messy divorce, he creates the alter ego of Scottish nanny Euphemia Doubtfire in a desperate attempt to stay in their lives. As his new character takes on a life of its own, Mrs. Doubtfire teaches Daniel more than he bargained for about how to be a father.

The UK and Ireland tour of Mrs. Doubtfire will star Gabriel Vick as Daniel Hillard who is delighted to be bringing the beloved character to life on tour, following his acclaimed performances in the West End.

He said: "I am delighted to be bringing the beloved Mrs Doubtfire direct from London to audiences throughout the UK and Ireland. The musical is full of the moments you know and love from the film and also packed with brilliant new songs. It is heartwarming, hilarious and going to be so much fun for the whole family. See you there, Poppets!"

Knockout performance promised for Carrying David

Actor, musician, and personal trainer Micky Cochrane is set to take the stage once again in Carrying David, an emotionally charged and inspiring one-man show based on the life of world champion boxer Glenn McCrory and his remarkable relationship with his adopted brother, David. The show will run at the Theatre Royal Newcastle on June 21st and 22nd, promising audiences a powerful blend of sport, heart, and humanity.

Carrying David is inspired by Glenn McCrory's autobiography of the same name. It tells the gripping true story of McCrory's rise to become the North East's first world boxing champion while navigating the struggles of his younger brother David, who lived with the debilitating condition Friedreich's Ataxia. The title comes from Glenn's childhood memories of literally carrying David to school on his back.

"This isn't just a boxing story," Cochrane explains. "It's a deeply human story about resilience, family, and the



unbreakable bond between two brothers."

Cochrane brings the story to life in a physically and emotionally demanding performance, seamlessly switching between characters, narrating intense fight sequences, and capturing the raw emotion at the heart of McCrory's life.

Carrying David will be performed on June 21st and 22nd, with two shows on Saturday and one on Sunday. The Saturday evening performance will include a special post-show Q&A featuring Cochrane, Glenn McCrory, and mental health experts.



Dance City launches £4m '40 Million Minutes' campaign

Dance City marked its 40th anniversary with a powerful celebration and the launch of its 40 Million Minutes campaign—a £4m appeal pledging to deliver 40 million minutes of dance experiences across the North East over the next decade.

Hosted at Dance City's landmark venue in Newcastle on Tuesday, the event brought together artists, alumni, supporters and visionaries from across the region for an evening that both honoured Dance City's remarkable legacy and looked towards its future.

At the heart of the evening was a call to action: to safeguard the future of dance in the North East by supporting Dance City's new campaign. The 40 Million Minutes appeal invites support from individuals, businesses and communities, with opportunities to contribute via donations, by becoming a Dance City Champion or through corporate and patron partnerships.

"This is more than a fundraiser—it's a commitment to the future of dance in our region," said Anand Bhatt, Artistic Director and CEO of Dance City. "By pledging 40 million minutes of dance by 2035, we want to see more classes, more creativity and greater access for all. To achieve this, we need our community to stand with us as custodians of that future and help shape the next chapter of Dance City."

Newly appointed Chair of Dance City, Lyndsey Turner Swift, added: "The North East deserves a vibrant dance offer delivered by expert practitioners and we pledge to deliver dance in line with our cornerstones of arts, learning and health.

"Creating and experiencing dance together is transformational—for individuals and for communities. In a region with some of the highest rates of poverty and lowest health outcomes in the UK, dance has a proven role to play in changing lives."

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Meet the Artist...



Siobhan Murray



Siobhan Murray

Artist & Illustrator, Art by Shiv

Did you always want to pursue a career in Art?

I've always had a love for art since I was little. My dad was a big influence. He painted a lot when I was growing up and I was always keen to join in (though I'm pretty sure I got told off for using his fancy paints more than once!).

That said, I didn't initially plan on turning art into a career. I actually trained professionally as an actor and singer, and that's the path I was following until 2020 when lockdown hit. That's when everything shifted, and I found myself slowly gravitating back to art. I was definitely always going to do something creative.

What do you most enjoy about your career?

I love how varied and flexible it is. One day I might be designing new prints or cards for my shop, the next I'm working on a custom commission, or heading to a wedding to create live guest illustrations.

There's a really nice balance between the creative side and the business side of things. It keeps me on my toes in the best way. Being able to call the shots and work on projects I genuinely care about is something I'm really grateful for.

What should people expect to see with your work?

I love bold designs, patterns and colours in my work. I also create custom illustrations in what I call my 'speedy illustration style', which is the same style I use for my wedding illustrations.

I like to keep a good mix between creating my own designs and working on custom pieces. It can be a challenge to stay true to your style when working to a brief, but it's something I'm always developing.

Who have been the biggest influences on your career?

Oh gosh, there are honestly so many people I could mention. I trained in dance and musical theatre from a young age, and I was lucky enough to have some incredible mentors and teachers along the way. They taught me so much—not just about performance, but about discipline, resilience, and believing in myself.

They definitely know who they are, and I'm endlessly grateful to each of them for helping shape who I am, both creatively and personally.

What advice would you give to someone looking to pursue a career in Art?

Be patient with yourself - it really does take time to develop your own style and find your rhythm. It can be frustrating in the early stages when nothing feels quite right, but that's just part of the process.

The learning never really stops, and that's definitely a good thing.



Who are your heroes?

I've never really had big celebrity heroes, to be honest! I'd say my heroes are the people closest to me. My family and friends, the ones who are always there in the background cheering me on, even when I'm doubting myself.

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

"Don't compare your beginning to someone else's middle."

It's something I have to remind myself of often. When you're starting out, it's so easy to scroll through social media and feel like everyone else is miles ahead - but you have to remember that you're only seeing a tiny part of their journey.

What are you currently working on?

I've just launched my wedding services and have been busy putting together my live guest illustration packages, which I'm honestly so excited about!

Alongside that, I've got a few lovely custom commissions in the works and I'm planning some new print designs for my shop. It's a bit of a juggling act, but I love having different projects on the go.

How do you like to unwind?

For me, nothing beats being outdoors with my partner Adam and our dog, Ziggy. We're big fans of a countryside escape - ideally a cosy little cabin, no phone signal, book in hand, and endless cups of tea. That kind of slow, quiet time really helps me reset.

Favourite Book and Boxset?

I'm a big fan of Sally Rooney. *Normal People* is a favourite, both the book and the series. I also love Dolly Alderton's writing - *Good Material* is one I read recently and would definitely recommend.

Apple TV has had some gems lately. I've really enjoyed *Shrinking*, *Severance*, and *Silo*. They're all very different, but equally brilliant.

hello@artbyshiv.uk www.artbyshiv.uk @artbyshiv.uk





Mary Ann Rogers

The rhythm of the seasons

By Mary Ann Rogers.

The rhythm of the seasons has somehow sped up this year, accelerating the pace of rebirth and growth both in the garden and surrounding countryside.

A remarkably warm, sunny spell in April coincided with a trip north to deliver paintings to the House of Bruar gallery in Perthshire. We booked an Airbnb, squeezed the e-bikes into the car and found ourselves enjoying Mediterranean weather for some wonderful bike rides far up remote glens, swimming in clear, warm lochs and rivers. Usually we could have depended upon a very cold few days, braving a few chilly walks, avoiding snow showers!

The dry, warm weather has continued through May and now the farmers are concerned about grass and crop shortage which are all in desperate need of rain. Oh the joys of living on an island!

Unusually, I have found the spring landscape thrilling. A combination of the colours and light, with still bare trees have inspired a series of new paintings, focusing on the contrasts between the near elements and the far horizon. The 'stands' of forestry which epitomize this part of Northumberland appear like hairy caterpillars crawling along the hills far away, then closer to home, long abandoned hawthorn hedges create ragged silhouettes, leaning against the harsh wind from the west.



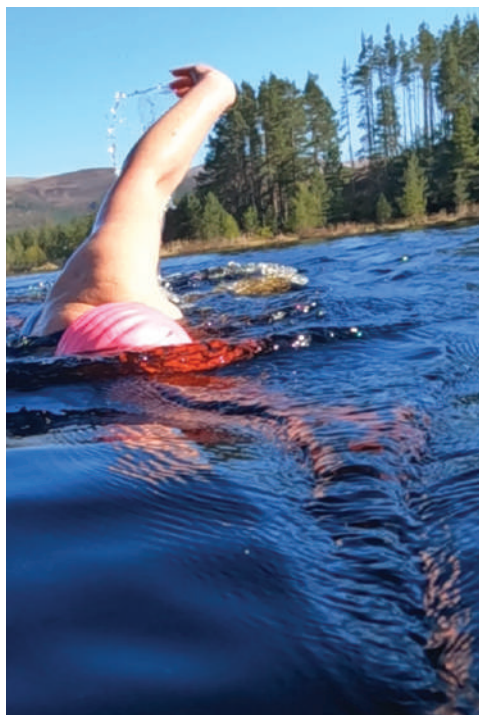
This year has seen a few more hares about the place. Easter Sunday morning brought a real treat – not a chocolate egg, but the very first hare for a couple of years appeared in the garden as I opened the shutters. We have spotted several close by lately, which has coincided with the disappearance of rabbits, who plagued our vegetable garden in recent years. A resurgence of that awful disease, myxomatosis, killed off most of the rabbits around here last year. It doesn't seem to affect hares, which may be why we are seeing them now.

An extremely rare wildlife experience occurred this month, not one I'd ever wish to repeat. After a swim in the river nearby, frolicking in the small waterfall, I felt what I thought was the water current 'riffing' the fabric of my swimming costume. This sensation continued, even after I'd got out of the water and I realized there was something down the back of my costume. I ripped it off and threw it to the ground, and there was a small eel, or elver, wriggling on the ground. I quickly grabbed my GoPro to video it, proving it really happened, hoping nobody would arrive as I stood wearing only my cap and goggles. The poor little thing had a sad face so I flicked him back into the river with a stick, and he swam off.

After taking a year off holding a summer exhibition here at the gallery, due to my mother's illness and death, we are now in full swing preparing for a weekend of welcoming friends old and new to come and enjoy all the new paintings, with a glass of bubbly, followed by afternoon tea in the marquee or on the lawn. This is the time of year when I don my apron and show off my prowess in the kitchen - producing cakes, scones, meringues and other culinary treats, throwing our healthy eating principles to the wind!

Dates for the summer exhibition preview are 28 & 29 June, 3-6pm. All welcome. The exhibition continues daily until Sunday 13th July, then normal opening hours resume.

Mary Ann Rogers Gallery
West Woodburn, Hexham NE48 2SE
Open Tues, Thurs, Fri 10-4 • Sundays 2-5
07967 550772 • www.marogers.com





Stafford Accountancy joins Sunderland Empire's 1907 Corporate Club

Stafford Accountancy join a well-established group of businesses already in partnership with the local theatre, receiving brand awareness along with theatre tickets for client entertainment.

Stafford Accountancy is a family business with an aim of providing owner-managed businesses and individuals with the knowledge, care and attention they deserve. All while understanding the demands of running a business and consider themselves well placed to provide meaningful advice to their clients.

Neighbouring the Sunderland Empire gives the firm the opportunity to treat both staff and clients to fantastic hospitality to the best live entertainment in the region – all within walking distance from their offices.

Lyndsey Everett, Partner, Stafford Accountancy said: "The Empire is at the heart of Sunderland and the wider region's arts and cultural scene and we're really excited to develop

our relationship with the theatre. As a business based in Sunderland city centre, we're proud to be involved and look forward to showcasing the theatre to those we work with."

With an expected audience of 430k for the year ahead, it's the perfect time to align your business with the theatre as they welcome shows like Hamilton, Inside No. 9, Mary Poppins, Fiddler on the Roof, Matilda & more!

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Get in touch with Sales and Development Manager for more information, on PaulaMitchell@atgentertainment.com

Blagdon Gallery

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WATCHING

6



6^d

James Park



Barry Speker OBE

Comment

By Barry Speker OBE

The long-standing encouragement from governments of all colours for us to be prudent, to save for the future and to invest in pensions may rebound on us.

That encouragement was fortified by tax allowances and the need to control one's pension and investments based upon expert professional financial and investment advice.

It now seems that Rachel Reeves and Angela Rayner, not seeming to have much in common, do agree about getting their hands on our savings.

With public finances being stretched to breaking point, Labour has eyes on the ISAs (Individual Savings Accounts) and the pension pots of millions of Britons.

Ms Reeves initial tactic is to 'persuade' investors to free up some of the £3trillion locked in British pension funds to be invested in start-ups - in sexy 'private equity', rather than in boring but risk-free bonds.

This is of concern as Ms Reeves is not the nation's wealth manager. She is also eyeing jealously the £300billion residing in cash ISAs. Like bonds, ISAs are dull and safe

(and the first £20,000 pa is tax-free) which is why novice investors favour them. The tax allowance may be targeted in the autumn budget.

The Deputy PM's more red-blooded approach as the authentic voice of traditional Labour, favours reintroduction of winter fuel allowances and the abolition of the two-child cap on child benefit. In a leaked memo, Ms Rayner suggested up to £4billion in tax increases. In addition to freezing thresholds, she wants to scrap tax-free allowances on dividends, another blow to private portfolios and possibly reintroduce the lifetime allowance on pension contributions.

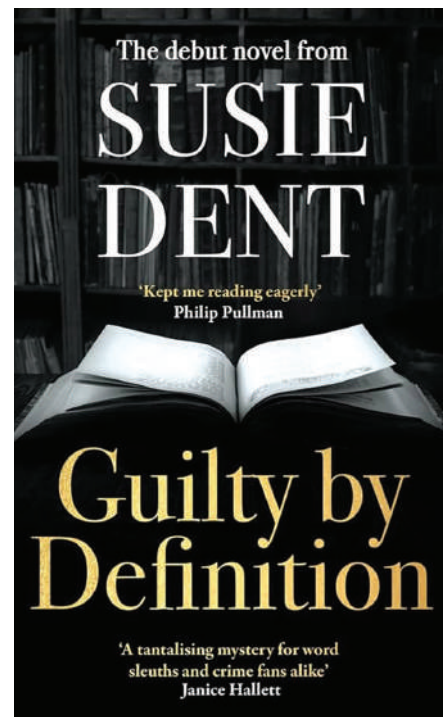
Will this be a clash between these two most powerful women in the cabinet? Cuts from Reeves, taxes by Rayner - or attacks by both on the nation's savings?

The fact that Gary Lineker's 25 year stint as host of Match of the Day (and the BBC's highest paid Presenter) came to an end for the reasons it did, raised concerns about the intention that his departure should be marked by a nostalgic and celebratory valedictory. Despite his presentational skills and style, polished over the years, it is clear that his BBC career ended following a number of incidents where he posted controversial statements on social media causing considerable offence. He has been in conflict with the BBC about the principles to be followed by all who work for or on behalf of the BBC to maintain its independence and high standards.

It had already been announced that he would be leaving at the end of the current season but returning to present the coverage of the 2026 World Cup.

Then in May he reposted a rat emoji alongside a video attacking Zionism, historically an anti-Semitic insult, central to Nazi propaganda and used for decades to dehumanise Jews. He subsequently issued an apology stating he would not consciously publish anything antisemitic. However there is a clear history of offensive statements, including minimising the October 7th massacres.

He is leaving under a cloud and will not now be used for the World Cup. His 'The



Rest is Football' podcast will no longer appear on the BBC Sounds app.

Contrast has been drawn with others found to be in breach of BBC standards - when Danny Baker tweeted about Meghan he was out the same day.

In Lineker's case his final edition of Match of the Day ended with what some regarded as a hero's farewell, video messages from a multitude of footballers, managers and personalities including Andre Bocelli in words and in song. If Gary Lineker had upset any other minority would he have been accorded such a glowing valedictory swan song?

Even non-football fans may have been impressed by the dramatic climax to the season for our two teams. Sunderland, though underdogs, managed an injury time winner in the Championship Play-off final at Wembley thus securing promotion to the Premier League next season. This brings to an end their 'languishing' for years in the lower leagues. As for their more successful neighbours Newcastle United, entry to the European Champions League was achieved by finishing in 5th place in the Premier League, despite losing to Everton in the last game of the season - a real nail-biter. The return of the derby matches will be a treat or, as the Newcastle fans say - '6 easy points'.

For summer reading my recommendation is 'Guilty by Deception', the first novel by Susie Dent, who for 30 years has been co-presenter and resident word expert on Channel 4's 'Countdown'. Set in the world of lexicographers, Dent produces an enthralling murder mystery with no shortage of linguistic contrivances and hints of 'Fakespeare'. But no more spoilers from me. Enjoy it!

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Ladies lunch raises around £14,000 for St Cuthbert's Hospice

A fund raising lunch which was in danger of folding has now been resurrected, raising almost £14,000 for one of the North East's leading hospices.

Durham's St Cuthbert's Hospice had a long relationship with Ramside Hall Hotel, Golf and Spa and has held many events there over the years, to enable them to provide vital services.

Those events have included golf days and the popular ladies' lunch, which has successfully run for the past eight years.

Financial pressures meant the hospice had to announce redundancies last year as well as a reduction in patient services, with the

fear that these special events would also go to the wall.

But then hotel owner John Adamson and St Cuthbert's development manager, Kay Carrick, joined forces to ensure that the lunch went ahead.

The revived lunch attracted more than 320 guests. Ramside Hall's sales team also stepped in to help ensure the event was a success.

John Adamson said: "We have been long-time supporters of St Cuthbert's Hospice and hosted events at Ramside Hall for a lot of years and when we heard about the financial difficulties we wanted to do even more to help to ensure these important fundraising events can still go ahead.

"Our sales team acted as The Box Office for the ladies lunch and it was fantastic to see

so many people turn out and raise such a brilliant sum."

Bookings are already being taken for the 2026 ladies lunch which will take place Friday April 24, while the St Cuthbert's Hospice golf day will be held on September 5 this year.



Ramside Hall Hotel, Golf and Spa opens The Barn Door

A summer events space at one of the North East's top hotels has been given a stylish upgrade.

Every year Ramside Hall Hotel, Golf and Spa near Durham erects a marquee which is used from May to September for weddings.

The Barn Marquee will be in place until early October, with space for 160 people sitting at round tables or 200 people at a less formal event.



The impressive space has a canvas roof and roll up sides which lead on to landscaped gardens, complete with festoon lighting.

The hotel is holding a showcase evening for the new Barn Marquee on 17 June, where visitors are welcome to drop in between

4.30pm and 6.30pm to see what it has to offer.

John Adamson, owner of Ramside Hall Hotel, Golf and Spa believes there is nothing else like the Barn Marquee in the region.

"Our summer marquee is always really popular and we always have scores of events," he said.

"The Barn Marquee is a really versatile space so it's not just suitable for weddings but for events of all kinds and we look forward to being able to show visitors just what a great option it is."

Anyone wanting to find out more can email events@ramsidehallhotel.co.uk

Babucho expands with the opening of Gosforth venue

Babucho Gosforth recently opened in the converted United Reformed Church, a listed building which was previously home to Barluga.

Keith Ravenhill, associate solicitor in Mincoffs' real estate team, assisted with the lease of the building, while licensing and gaming partner Matt Foster liaised with Robby Scott, managing director at Babucho, and Peter Hodgson, managing director at Dakota House of Design.

Mincoffs' support involved submitting a variation to change the layout of the premises and the successful result allowed the team to deliver a more food-oriented style concept than the space had previously, with booth seating downstairs and the



addition of private dining rooms.

"We have worked with Mincoffs since our inception and they not only have a deep understanding of the leisure sector, but also of our individual business," said Robby.

Mincoffs Solicitors has worked with the operators of Babucho for over 10 years, assisting with the continuous development of the Quayside site.

"The former church is an amazing venue with plenty of character and we were delighted to work with Robby to help bring Babucho in Gosforth to realisation," said Matt.

"We have been involved in this project since the start and it is fantastic to see the team's hard work pay off with the restaurant open and busy with customers."



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Dakota: You make me feel like the one

By Michael Grahamslaw

Those of you unfamiliar with Welsh rock band Stereophonics' hit 'Dakota' and unaware that the sixth property of the Dakota Hotels portfolio has recently opened on the quayside will perhaps be perplexed by the headline of this piece.

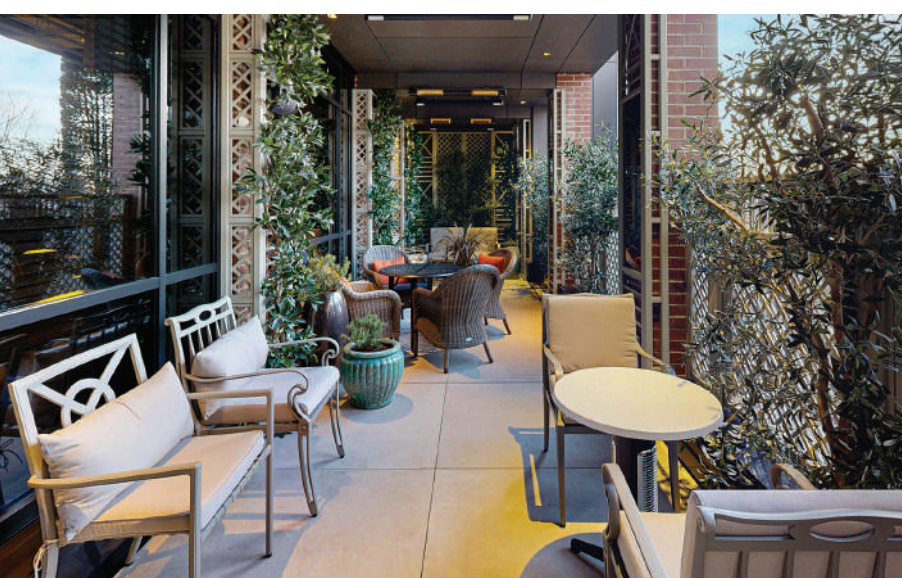
However, lovers of noughties rock and those lucky enough to have had the pleasure of visiting the newly opened luxury hotel, will know it to be an apt reference. A song about being made to feel special, looked after, adored.

This establishment, standing proudly on the banks of the River Tyne, certainly does that.

On the 33rd anniversary of my wife Lisa's 21st Birthday, we checked in after a lovely stroll along the river and were immediately impressed.

The contemporary, stylish feel of the lobby underpins the whole hotel, which boasts an impressive 118 rooms. On entering our own, we were met with a slick, modern interior, a soothing ambience and, given the prime location, inevitably stunning views.





Rooms are equipped with all the utilities that you could want and more: Apple TV streaming services, iron & ironing board, luxury toiletries. Meanwhile, soft double beds, black out blinds and crisp cotton sheets ensure a quality night of sleep.

There is a wide variety of rooms on offer (see website for the full range) but special mention must go to the Grand Deluxe Suites. These come equipped with open plan dining and lounge areas, outdoor balconies, walk in wardrobes as well as a plethora of other luxuries.

With sunken baths and steam showers, this experience is more like a luxury spa than a hotel room: the perfect place for a romantic getaway or a special occasion.

Although tempted to continue enjoying the opulence of the room, we made our way downstairs for a bite to eat and a sharpener.

In-house eatery, 'The Grill' is reminiscent of a set from the slick TV show 'Mad Men'. Modern art adorns the walls alongside carefully curated combinations of leather seats, dense wooden floors and low hanging lamp shades that cast that perfect, conversation-stimulating shades of light.

The sort of place that it feels right to order a freshly prepared cocktail, because you know you'll look cool doing it.

We were joined by my son Jack for a celebratory birthday drink, who appeared to have heard rumours of the only Wagyu steak experience in Newcastle. Staff were more than happy to accommodate another for dinner, so we indulged in an array of show-stopping dishes.

We started with king scallop, pork salad and chicken ravioli, before moving on to 340g rib eye and corn-fed chicken with sides of creamed spinach, petit pois and chunky chips. All selected from a seasonal à la carte menu which, as you can tell, provides something for everyone.

If this wasn't enough, though, we were delighted to then receive a personalised birthday dessert for Lisa. A nice touch... did I mention that they make you feel like the one?

Suitably satiated, we repaired to the bar, which was predictably à la mode, for a few glasses of vino. Like 'The Grill', the bar oozes style and seems to invite the kind of conversation that could have kept us down there all night. Similarly tempting was the vast array of cocktails on offer and staff all-knowing in the field of bartending.

After staying perhaps a little longer than we should have on a school night, we said goodnight to our son and retired up to the room.

As predicted, we enjoyed a wonderful night of sleep on pristine cotton sheets, so we were up sharp the next morning, breakfasting regally on a mix of cooked and continental classics.

Some of us even opted for an early morning run across the millennium bridge – with scenery this good, it would have been rude not to. As my legs pounded the pavement I reflected on the stay: the prime location, the elegant rooms, the polished yet personable staff.

From check-in to check-out we were impressed, charmed, courted by the Dakota, a hotel which feels a cut above and certainly made us feel like the one.

dakotahotels.co.uk



Party in the Park

Fair Play

Two of the biggest events to hit the North East are taking place this month (June) and they both have one thing in common...

It's a tradition that's lasted more than 140 years – the coming together of all the very best rides, sideshows and attractions from across the UK and beyond.

The Hoppings – the annual gathering at Newcastle's Town Moor – has earned its name as the biggest travelling fair in Europe and is one of the longest-standing – and most exciting – events on the regional calendar.

At the other side of the region – Middlesbrough to be exact – this month also marks its own very special family-friendly celebration, as **Party in the Park** brings a packed programme to Stewart Park over the weekend of 6-8 June.

They may be geographically opposed (although the good news is that there's no time conflict so it's easy to visit both) but what they have in common is years of experience and tradition in staging large scale funfairs – courtesy of Crow Events.

The name Crow is a familiar one in fairground circles, with Ryan



Crow taking over the running of The Hoppings a handful of years ago.

The fair – which this year runs from 20 to 29 June – has continued to bring all of the popular elements that has made it a must-visit across the generations, but under Ryan has introduced a number of new elements.

This year for the first time visitors can enjoy Hoppings Village – an over-arching name for Feast Street – a collection of top street food vendors – Live Lounge, which features musical talent from across the region and Kids' Club, with daily entertainment for youngsters. That, coupled with around 400 other rides and attractions, is why The Hoppings remains an iconic event.

"We want people to think of The Hoppings as playing a massive part in the local community," said Ryan Crow.

"So many people have amazing memories of visiting it and we want them to continue to be surprised and thrilled with what we have to offer."

As part of that link with the community, The Hoppings will be repeating its successful art competition which it ran last year for the first time, allowing youngsters to share their favourite memories of visiting the fair.

This year will also see the event engaging with regional charities once again, throwing open the doors before the official opening to allow youngsters to ride for free.

It's all about highlighting how much The Hoppings is part of the fabric of the region – not just for one week or so a year but throughout.

Once the event is done and dusted there'll be hardly time to draw breath – before it's on to Middlesbrough.

It's the expertise which Crow Events offers which is now being used to fine effect at Party In The Park, where along with all of the favourite fairground rides and food outlets there will be death-defying motorbike displays, performances by leading tribute acts, dogs shows and visits by favourite character mascots.

The pièce de résistance however will definitely be the dazzling displays of tethered hot air balloons which be in place all weekend, culminating in a special hot air balloon glow night on Saturday 7 June.

Over the weekend of Friday 6 to Sunday 8 June, Stewart Park will be transformed and become a family friendly festival, with a whole host of spectacular entertainment on offer.

"This is another opportunity for the North East to enjoy an amazing weekend with something for everyone," said Ryan.

On Friday 6 Party in the Park will take place between 4pm and 10pm, with the event running from 11am until 11pm on Saturday and 11am until 7pm on Sunday. Entry costs £2 on the Friday and £5 on Saturday and Sunday and visitors can pay on the door. Rides carry an additional cost but everyone will also receive £10 worth of discount ride vouchers. Children under 80cm in height can attend free of charge.

The Hoppings opens at Newcastle Town Moor on Friday 20 June.

The Hoppings



Party in the Park



The Hoppings



Meet the GM

In the return of this popular feature Michael Grahamslaw talks to...

John Lambourne-Richardson FIH

General Manager at the Award-Winning Hampton by Hilton Stockton on Tees.



Describe your career path so far?

I originally wanted to be a chef as I loved cooking and started a course at Bath Technical College in September 1979. However, by November I realised I wanted to work out front after a spell as waiter at the Pump Rooms in Bath it transformed me. I enrolled as a Trainee Innkeeper with Trusthouse Forte, then the world's largest hotel chain, where I spent 25 years. Here I worked in various departments working in a variety of Hotels in Dorset, East Anglia, Cotswolds, South Wales, Lincolnshire and Wiltshire.

After a period as Deputy Manager I took my first GM position in Keswick in 1989. I then moved on to numerous other GM roles in multiple locations before leaving to run my own business, a luxury Belgian chocolate & patisserie shop, near Salisbury Cathedral which I ran for nine years.

What brought you to the Hampton Hotel Stockton?

After my business closed, I moved back into Hotels with a management company in Folkestone. Wanting a change after a few years, I was asked if I'd be interested in running a new Hotel in Stockton. Despite early reservations I met Richard McGuckin from Stockton on Tees Borough Council who impressed me with his passion and drive and once I took a look at the site I realised its enormous potential. After three interviews and a full presentation I started the role on August 1st 2018 and we opened on time and on budget on February 12th 2019. The Council were tremendously supportive during the whole process. Pre-Covid we hit 100% occupancy quite quickly after opening and were delighted to stay open for key workers throughout the pandemic.

Tell us about your team?

We have a team of 28 which is a mix of full and part time members of staff. Some have over five years service and our Operations Manager, Jill Yeoman, was in post just three months after me and before we opened. We have consistently been in the top 10% of Hilton Hotels in the country for the annual Hilton Quality Audit which measures the Hotels condition, cleanliness and brand standards.

We were also delighted to receive a Civic Award for our work in helping people living with dementia. The initiative to make Stockton a dementia friendly town started pre-Covid and to this day we host an afternoon tea on the first Wednesday of the month to help those living with the condition.

What are the best features of the Hampton Hotel Stockton?

As a modern hotel we have all the facilities you need for a business or leisure location. Our prime location means we are fantastically accessible for Teesside Airport as well as the fantastic developments at Billingham, Teesworks and the greater Tees Valley.

What are you currently working on?

Looking for new business opportunities as well as maintaining high standards in order to receive great guest feedback.

How does the Hotel engage with the local community and support local business?

As a Director of Stockton BID we are always looking at ways of promoting the town for new business as well as encouraging the local community to use the town and of course the hotel.

What is your biggest challenge currently?

Undoubtedly managing the expectations of customers which in today's world are ever more demanding and exacting.

Who are your Heroes and Mentors?

Many of the GM's I have worked with have been fantastic professional mentors but my late Mum was my biggest inspiration. She lived with a form of cancer for decades but made the most of what she had and lived life to the full and with such positivity.

What advice would you give to anyone looking to work in the industry?

Be prepared to work hard and have a bit of fun. This really is a career where you can go from being a kitchen porter right up to becoming a General Manager. You have great opportunity to develop and grow. It is a profession I love.

How do you like to unwind?

Walking the dog, eating out and going to the theatre.

www.hilton.com





“

*...Be prepared
to work hard
and have a
bit of fun...*

John Lambourne-Richardson FIH



Lui's Bar and Kitchen: Where modern flavours meet timeless hospitality

By Michael Grahmslaw

There's nothing quite like the arrival of the warmer weather for reigniting your love affair with Italian food, which made Lui's the perfect pick on a balmy Summer's evening.

Nestled away on King Street, just a stone's throw from the Tyne Bridge, Lui's offers a modern take on Italian cuisine, blending traditional Sardinian flavours with contemporary culinary flair.

It's little surprise then, the restaurant has become a firm favourite for bottomless brunch, Sunday roast, or a classic all-out Italian feast. The Grahmslaw Clan pitched up to sample all the restaurant had to offer. Being prime time on a Friday evening, the dining area packed a buoyant atmosphere with an upbeat playlist bringing the good times.

The meal got off to a promising start with the old classic *gamberoni all aglio* – succulent prawns sauteed in a garlic butter and set off exquisitely by a very agreeable glass of pinot grigio.

Next up was the mussels *arrabiata*, an Italian classic that showcased the chef's expertise in handling seafood. The mussels were perfectly cooked in a rich tomato, chilli and garlic broth, which added a touch of sophistication to the dish. The broth was delicious and really lent itself to a good dunking of some Italian sourdough.

The girls meanwhile enjoyed a grand sharing plank of *Antipasto Sardo* - filled with an assortment of Sardinian delicacies, including cured meats, olives, cheeses, and grilled vegetables.

It was a perfect dish for sharing with each element carefully chosen to capture the flavours of modern Italy. The combination of salty cured meats, tangy cheese and smoky grilled vegetables was a winning mix and transported us to the island's sun-kissed shores.



This certainly set expectations high for our main courses. Following on, I picked out an excellent fillet steak, from the menu's dedicated grill section, supplemented by onion rings and truffle and parmesan fries.

Pasta lovers will rejoice at the traditional *penne romana* - a real must-try, lapped up with gusto by my wife Lisa and daughter, Holly. The penne pasta was cooked *al dente* and tossed in a rich tomato and cream-based sauce with white wine, garlic and mushrooms.

My son Jack meanwhile enjoyed the classic *veal saltimbocca* – a dish of Roman origin, featuring pan-fried veal cutlets, wrapped in prosciutto and finished by a white wine and sage sauce.

Totally replete, we swerved desserts in favour of some bracing espressos and a round of obligatory limoncellos.

We certainly had something to drink to. The Lui's site has a longstanding association with good quality Italian food, and based on this visit, the local Tyneside icon remains in very good hands.

Much like the restaurant's previous incarnations, Sabatini and Sabas, Lui's remains a firmly family affair. Throughout our meal, we were looked after superbly well by Mark and his team.

May the Italian sun continue to shine on Tyneside.

To make a reservation, call 0191 261 4415 or visit luisbarandkitchen.co.uk





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In conversation with

Michael Grahamslaw talks to...

Paul Elliott

Executive Director, Newcastle Racecourse and Conference Centre.



What were your career ambitions growing up?

From an early age, I aspired to become a professional sportsman, with cricket being a particular passion. However, I soon recognised that I might not be good enough, which led me to explore combining sport with business.

From the age of 16 I helped with the events team here at the Racecourse and subsequently spent eight years working in operations. I then served three years as General Manager before being appointed as Executive Director four years ago.

Tell us about your current role?

I am responsible for managing the High Gosforth Park Estate, which has undergone significant transformation in recent years. My duties include overseeing approximately 85 race days annually, managing the commercial and operational aspects of the racecourse, the nature reserve, the adjacent Border Minstrel pub, and our golf course. It is an all-consuming job meaning no two days are the same, and there is great satisfaction when objectives are achieved.

How has the Racecourse evolved in recent years?

The introduction of the country's premier all-weather course has allowed us to increase the number of race meetings from 30 to 85 annually. Additionally, the All-weather Finals are now hosted at Newcastle on Good Friday, featuring a prize fund of £1 million across a seven-race card. These developments have significantly expanded opportunities for corporate entertainment.

What are you currently working on?

We are currently busy with the popular Northumberland Plate Festival and Ladies Day weekends. Initiatives include enhancing the race day experience with events such as an Abba Revival concert after Plate Day and Bongo Bingo Party after Ladies Day, along with launching new hospitality packages and increasing public attendance. We are also preparing to host the Northumbrian Water Innovation Festival.

Tell us about your team?

We have a team of 45 permanent staff who all work tremendously hard. Recently, we appointed Jane Hedley as the new Clerk of the Course, bringing experience from Leopardstown, and Neil Peters, who has a background in football, as our new General Manager.

What has been your biggest challenge and proudest achievement?

Rebuilding the team following the COVID-19 pandemic was particularly challenging. We were also the first course in the country to hold a meeting during that period. On a personal level, progressing through the ranks has been a rewarding journey.

What is the best advice you have been given?

The quote, "If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always got," often attributed to Henry Ford, serves as a powerful reminder to innovate and adapt in pursuit of different results.

Who are your Heroes and Mentors?

I admire Tiger Woods and Sir Bobby Robson for their exceptional professionalism and integrity in their respective fields.

How do you like to unwind?

With two children aged nine and five, finding free time can be challenging, but whenever possible, I enjoy watching sports and playing golf. I currently have a handicap of 12 and I'm working to improve it.

Favourite Book and Boxset?

I'm not an avid reader, but I enjoy listening to the "This is Football" podcast. As for television, the series "24" was amazing.

www.newcastle-racecourse.co.uk





L-R: Rob Higgins – the lord mayor of Newcastle and Paul Elliott

On track for an exciting future

There's a bright future ahead for the Tyne and Wear Metro as the roll out of its new train fleet continues.

We speak to Cathy Massarella, the Managing Director of Nexus, about the £362m project, and her commitment to creating an inclusive and diverse workplace culture in the traditionally male dominated transport sector.

Nexus is the public body that runs the Tyne and Wear Metro.

Cathy Massarella became its Managing Director in 2024, the first woman to hold the role. She has previously managed the operational and project delivery of bus and ferry services, heavy and light rail operations, transport infrastructure, ICT and information provision in both the private and public sectors - only airlines are missing from her portfolio. As a qualified and practicing project manager, she became Nexus' first Major Projects Director in 2020 and is now Managing Director, overseeing a multi-million pound budget, and all of the transport services that Nexus delivers, not least the Metro system.

For more than 40 years Metro has been at the heart of local public transport, carrying millions of people to places of work, leisure and education. It's a key driver of social mobility and connectivity.

"I'm proud to be managing director of Nexus, and excited to lead the organisation into a very bright future," said Cathy. "We have a vital role to play in the transformation of public transport networks. I'm working closely with the North East Combined Authority, our key stakeholders, local authority partners and the wider transport industry to deliver more for the people who rely on our services.

"Good public transport is the key to our region's success. This is an exciting time as we press ahead with the introduction of the new Metro trains, which are going to be transformative for customers in terms of comfort and reliability. Bringing this historic project to fruition is a key aim over the next two years.

On track

The new Metro train fleet is the biggest project Nexus has undertaken since the system was first opened in 1980. Forty-six new Metro trains are being built by the



Cathy Massarella

Swiss train manufacturer, Stadler. "I'm pleased to say the introduction of the fleet is well underway. We expect to see all of the new trains in service by the end of 2026," says Cathy. "They're a game changer. They will revolutionise the customer experience and we're already starting to see that happening."

Bright future

Cathy highlights that it's the people behind Nexus that are key to its success and she is currently focused on creating an engaged, inclusive and agile workplace culture that welcomes and retains the best talent. She said: "Our focus is shifting, from talking about transport and networks, to prioritising people, both the people who use our transport and the people whose skill and dedication keeps them running. Engaged and involved colleagues offer a better service and experience to our customers and that's ultimately what it's all about.



"Our approach is defined by our People and Culture Strategy and our Diversity and Inclusion Strategy, developed with colleagues, these drive our approach. Despite being a very male dominated industry, since 2020, female senior leadership has increased at Nexus from 0 to 50%, that's a stat I'm particularly proud of.

"A new approach to employer branding, resourcing and onboarding has also been positively felt across Nexus. We have been able to attract and hire employees from a diverse range of industries. Our apprentices are performing incredibly well and there has been more career pathways developed through secondments, promotions and project work. Our future certainly is bright."

www.nexus.org.uk



Exploring Louisville

Louisville is a fascinating place for sports fans to spend time, especially those partial to a drop of bourbon whiskey – a local speciality. Yet the city's most famous sporting son did not drink alcohol.

The Muhammad Ali Center, in the city's downtown, conveys the life story and legacy of arguably the greatest sportsman of all time. Ali didn't merely overcome opponents in the boxing ring on the way to becoming the three-time heavyweight champion of the world, he became a civil rights icon.

Racial segregation was still a factor in local life when, known as Cassius Clay, he won gold at the Rome Olympics in 1960. After refusing to be drafted to fight in the Vietnam War, in 1967, he was stripped of his world title and boxing licence.

Those stories are engagingly told at the six-storey centre, where visitors can also test their boxing skills on interactive displays and watch flight footage. It is one of those attractions where it's easy to lose track of time and spend the best part of a day.

A five-minute walk away, the world's biggest baseball bat towers over the Louisville Slugger Museum and Factory on West Main Street, which is also known as Whiskey Row because of premises associated with the bourbon trade. The huge bat looks like it's been casually left leaning against the wall by some departed giant. It's a scaled-up replica of the 34-inch bat favoured by 'Babe' Ruth, one of the sport's all-time greats. Tours provide demonstrations of how bats are made, allow visitors to discover which players have swung them

and try them in an indoor batting cage.

On the opposite side of the street stands the Frazier History Museum. Named after the philanthropist Owsley Brown Frazier, not the boxer who defeated Muhammad Ali in 'The Fight of the Century', it holds the Kentucky Bourbon Trail Welcome Center and provides a comprehensive overview of the spirit's history and culture. Maps are available, pointing out the locations of distilleries along the trail, the closest being Michter's Fort Nelson Distillery on the same block, in an Italianate building with arched windows.

Tours are also offered in the Kentucky Peerless Distilling Co. premises, under five minutes' walk from the museum. Meanwhile, the Evan Williams Bourbon Experience tells the story of the Welshman and entrepreneur, who settled in what is today Louisville more than 200 years ago and established a commercial distillery. The attraction holds a recreation of a speakeasy where the impact of Prohibition on the spirits industry is discussed, and whiskey and chocolate tastings are an option.

Louisville's best-known sporting venue is a 10-minute taxi ride from downtown. On the first Saturday of May, Churchill Downs racetrack is the venue for America's most prestigious horse race, the Kentucky Derby. The winner of the race known as 'The Run for the Roses', due to the blanket of red roses draped over the winning horse, receives \$3.1 million (£2.33m) in prize money.

The heritage of the race is explained at the onsite Kentucky Derby Museum. Fittingly, visitors pass through stalls and can sit astride 'horses' to participate in a video game running of the race. In addition to



artefacts, the bourbon-laced recipe for Mint Julep, a popular Derby Day cocktail, is displayed.

Dinner in the opulent lobby of The Brown Hotel brings an opportunity to experience one of Louisville's delicacies where it originated. The open-faced Hot Brown sandwich became popular in the 1920s, satisfying the hunger of Prohibition-era partygoers. Laced with Mornay sauce, turkey and bacon, it's ideal with an Ali Smash or a glass of The Louisville Lip – cocktails referencing the city's famed champion boxer.

Travel information

Visit the gotolouisville.com and kentuckytourism.com websites for information on things to do and see in Louisville and elsewhere in the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

Louisville Muhammad Ali International Airport is a 10-minute drive south of the city centre.

The 21c Museum Hotel Louisville (21cmuseumhotels.com; 700 W Main Street; Tel: +1-502-217-6300) is a chic downtown property that doubles as an art gallery.

In conversation with...

Graham Townsley

Personal Travel Advisor

What makes me different?

I am a Personal Travel Advisor, I source, research your holiday needs and create special memories. To me that's what travel is all about, creating memories with special people and those close to us.

My experience, nearly 25 years in travel industry, along with my passion for travel is providing a very personal service. That to me is understanding your reason to travel, your why? Then working with my amazing suppliers delivering that dream or experience. In a world where personal service is become less with contact centres and large wait times or the dreaded chat box. I am here by your side, a click or call away, no need to explain, understanding what your trips about and ready to help. I call it stress free travel!

What Travel do I provide?

The world does seem to be shrinking or at least more accessible leaving us with great options. Whether it's Cruise, Rail Travel, Group Tours or you've been influenced by the latest Box Set or maybe your hobby. I work with amazing suppliers, who are more likely to work with local hotels and suppliers, seeking out gems and activities to suit your needs and creating lasting memories.

Handcrafted Journeys

These journeys are what I am most proud of. We all have that bucket list, places we've always dreamt of going or as I said earlier influenced by Netflix and Box Sets, Yellowstone a great example. Suddenly we all want to be ranchers and cowboys! How



Graham Townsley

do you do this? that to me is the magic of suppliers I work with, I am always looking for value and as example for a typical family holiday in the Mediterranean I've a family holiday in Montana followed by beach life in California. Also it's what makes me different from travel available on the internet or high street.

Personal Service in a Digital World

Technology with the internet and now AI are great tools for research, we can't escape technology. Not everyone wants the digital world, I like to think I offer both with my amazing App. A place from receiving your first quote, to making secure and flexible payments, documents stored with boarding cards uploaded.

For those who enjoy having everything in a single place ideal. Also instant contact available with myself and support teams.

What do I love about what I do?

Variation and putting together such

different trips. Everyone has different reasons to travel, could be visiting family or long lost friends, family holiday, maybe a special occasion such as Honeymoons, Anniversaries, Special Birthdays and treating yourself or partner to a 'Bucket List' moment. Sporting event like F1, Cricket or Red Lions Tour, next year World Cup.

Everyone has different reasons, lifetime dreams and moments where you may have been dreaming since you were a child to go on Safari.

To play a small part in creating these trips, understanding your Why? making seamless, smooth experience is very important. Special requests or needs, I'll contact airlines or hotels to let them know. Checking you in and having conversations regarding seats, how to book and when. Finally living your Why!

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Not your average day job!

by Jeff Hodgson, General Manager, Lumley Castle Hotel.

Running a castle isn't your average day job — it's a dynamic, often demanding role, but one I'm proud to lead thanks to the fantastic team

I work alongside. At Lumley Castle, it's all about the team. Their passion, commitment, and service are what truly set us apart in a competitive market.

Like many in hospitality, we've faced significant challenges in recent months — from rising food and beverage costs to the impact of increased minimum wages, business rates, and national insurance contributions following the recent budget. It's a constant balancing act, but we continue to push forward with creativity, resilience, and an unwavering focus on delivering an exceptional guest experience.





Our goal is simple

We want to create unforgettable moments for every visitor, whether they're here for a family getaway, an elegant wedding, or a corporate away day. Speaking of which — we're thrilled to announce the opening of our brand-new **Tipi** on **Sunday 6th July!**

This stunning space will be home to a series of exciting events throughout the summer and beyond. It's also available for weddings, private events, and corporate hire — our beautiful grounds make it the perfect setting.

There's a lot happening behind the scenes, but with the team's dedication and a shared vision for excellence, we're embracing the challenges and celebrating the wins.

Stay tuned — there's much more to come!

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Trade your Tips in the Tipi at the Castle

Wednesday 16th July



What's it all about?

It's an easy going, informal drop in style gathering of like minded business people from the local area.

What time does it start & finish?

Come along from 6pm. Stay for the full event or just swing by for a short while. The event will close by 8.30pm.

Benefits of attending?

Don't believe the hype? See the Tipi at the Castle for yourself!

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Enjoy canapes courtesy of the Castle, served with tea/coffee/soft drinks.

How much is it to attend?

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Do I need to register?

Yes please, register your attendance so we know to expect you.

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Tango Durham: Possibly the best smash burger around

If you're in Durham and haven't eaten at Tango you are missing out!

Half way up Saddler Street, just steps from the historic cathedral, Tango is where food dreams come true—especially if your dreams involve next-level burgers, unreal cocktails, and good vibes.

Forget your average cheeseburger- who eats them anymore?... Tango's menu is stacked with mouthwatering, Instagram-worthy creations that assault your senses from all directions.

The menu includes:

The Gravy Train Roux – Smothered in beef bacon gravy, topped with crispy matchstick potatoes and roast garlic mayo. It's messy. It's glorious. It's everything.

The Gaucho – A wild ride of chorizo, caramelized onions, and tangy chimichurri. Smoky, spicy, unforgettable.

Uncle Sam – An American classic with a Tango twist. Smashed patty, gooey cheese, homemade pickles... simple, but next level.

The Parmo – Breaded chicken steak, cheesy béchamel topping, proper chips, slaw & garlic sauce. Unreal!

If you are vegetarian or Vegan? No stress. The halloumi and falafel options are absolute spot on—and not an afterthought like at some places.

Tango prides itself on using high-quality, locally sourced ingredients. From the prime cuts of meat to the fresh produce, every dish is crafted with care and attention to detail. The commitment to quality is evident in every bite, making each meal not just a treat but a testament to the region's rich offerings.

Whether you're enjoying a quick lunch, a celebratory dinner, or a night out with friends, the restaurant's friendly staff create a welcoming environment. The riverside terrace offers a picturesque setting, perfect for al fresco dining during the summer months.



Tango is a bit of an Instagram sensation with many sharing photos and their thoughts about the place:

"Tango on Saddler Street has become my favourite burger joint. They nail it from all angles. The burgers are pure epic."

"As a burger lover, I'm a big critic on any burgers I have. The burgers at Tango are a good portion size, and the burgers were actually soft which is uncommon in most burger restaurants."

"Absolutely love Tango! The food, coffee and drinks are amazing! The staff members are all very nice and welcoming."

"My fave burger place in the North East"

No meal at Tango is complete without sampling their expertly crafted cocktails. Made fresh by trained mixologists, these drinks perfectly complement the bold,

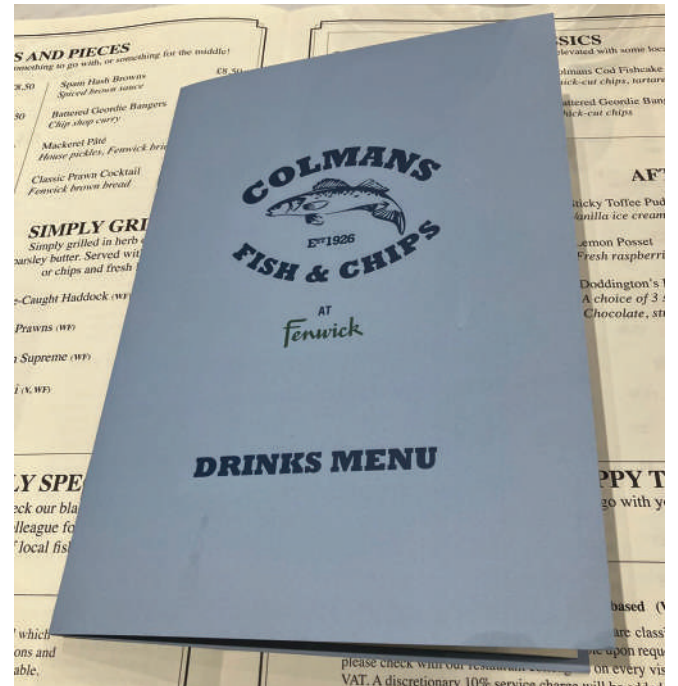


extensive menu. If you have a sweet tooth the desserts are a must!

Tango was named one of Britain's best burger brands recently which has led to a whole new legion of smash fans flocking to Saddler Street.

Whether you're a local or a visitor, Tango Durham offers a culinary adventure that's hard to beat. Food trends change quickly but the love for a good burger remains.

Tango, 39 Saddle St, Durham
www.tangodurham.co.uk
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The chance of a lunchtime

By Michael Gramshaw

As an avowed fan of the wonderfully-named 'Colmans Seafood Temple' in South Shields, I was enormously excited to learn of their latest venture.

The iconic seafood restaurant has now partnered with Fenwick Newcastle, the latest in a string of food hall collaborations, which also comes hot on the heels of their 100th anniversary celebrations, last year.

Inkeeping with this, its menu is primarily a paean to the nation's favourite dish (with many modern inflections), bringing nostalgic seafood memories to the city's best-loved department store.

I had the pleasure of visiting mid-week lunchtime and was left hugely impressed. It's remarkable to think that just six weeks after owner Richard Colman Ord's first meeting with Fenwick, this new outpost was up and running.

Inside, this buzzy bistro is at once, elegant and atmospheric, with various maritime bric-a-brac setting the scene. Wafts of freshly caught seafood pervade the air and really get the digestive juices flowing.

The memory wall, showcasing famous visitors to Colmans' Seafood Temple, is a fascinating highlight featuring famous faces like Sting, James Corden and Steve Cram.

Keen on eking out the final drops of Lisa's birthday weekend celebrations, we kicked off with a lovely bottle of Picpoul de Pinet which complemented the food to follow perfectly.

As expected, it was to be a masterclass in seafood. I opted for the classic fish and chips, a dish that has defined Colmans for generations. The batter was crisp, golden, and perfectly light, encasing flaky, fresh fish that melted in the mouth from first to final forkful.

Paired with chunky, hand-cut chips, it was everything you'd want from a traditional British chippy—elevated to true restaurant quality.

To begin, I also tried the king prawn taco, a neat fusion of seafood and spicing. The prawns were succulent and well-seasoned, complemented by a fresh slaw and a tangy sauce that added just the right amount of kick for this unabashed chilli fiend.

Across the table, Lisa kicked off with the

prawn cocktail, a timeless classic that Colmans does flawlessly. The juicy prawns, crisp lettuce, and creamy Marie Rose sauce made for a refreshing and nostalgic appetiser, which was artfully presented on a grand seashell.

For her main, Lisa chose the grilled salmon supreme, beautifully cooked in a lemon and garlic butter with a delicate balance of flavours that highlighted the fish's natural richness.

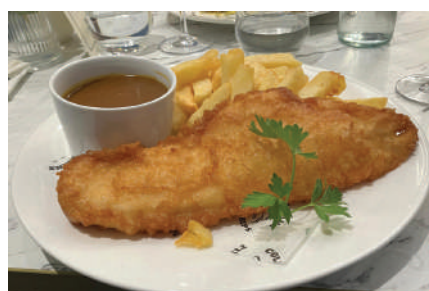
Of course, with food this hearty and homespun, it wouldn't be the same without some famous Northern hospitality. One of Colmans' greatest strengths is its service. The staff are knowledgeable, friendly and genuinely passionate about the food they serve.

The atmosphere is lively yet relaxed, making it an ideal spot for a casual lunch, a celebratory meal, or a quick bite between shopping trips.

Whether you're craving classic fish and chips or something a little more adventurous, Colmans delivers an experience that is both nostalgic and exciting.

A real catch.

For more information, visit www.fenwick.co.uk/pages/colmans-at-fenwick-newcastle



Spice up your working lunch with a Dabbabox from Dabbawal



Lunchtimes just got interesting. Dabbawal, the original pioneers of Indian street food in Newcastle, are serving up a deliciously different way to tackle the midday slump - the Dabbabox.

Whether you're treating your team or fancy something exciting at your desk, the Dabbabox delivers bold flavour, convenience, and a welcome break from the ordinary.

From their High Bridge restaurant in the heart of the city to their vibrant Jesmond spot, Dabbawal has been reimagining Indian food since 2008. With the Dabbabox, their signature street food flair meets office-friendly ease.

Owner Jaf Ali explains: "We know how uninspiring weekday lunches can be. That's why we created the Dabbabox which is tasty, compact, and neat. Takeaway food doesn't have to be messy or chaotic and we wanted it to feel as close to the dine-in experience as possible. With cutlery and a wipe included, it's a little bit of luxury made for wherever your lunch break takes you."

There are three tempting options, all inspired by the signature flavours and cooking techniques Dabbawal is famous for:

WRAPS

Roomali roti rolled around either Punjabi Chicken Tikka or Paneer Tikka (V), with seasonal salad, gunpowder chips and homemade chutneys.

BURGERS

A hand-made patty in a soft brioche bun with salad, chutneys and gunpowder chips. Choose between a Smashed Lamb Burger (N) or Indian Vegan Burger.

CURRIES

Fragrant, slow-cooked curry served with pulao rice, salad and chutney. Take your pick from Old-Delhi Style Butter Chicken (GF, N) or a fiery Vegetable JhalFREZI (N).

Perfect for team meetings, working lunches or just treating yourself midweek, Dabbaboxes are freshly prepared, packed with punch, and ready to collect for just £10-£12. It's all part of Dabbawal's Collection Revolution - encouraging you to step away from your screen, grab some fresh air, and pick up something genuinely exciting for lunch.

Fancy a change of scene? Book a table at one of Dabbawal's restaurants and enjoy a team lunch or business meeting



with a difference. Or, make it a regular thing - many local businesses already do, scheduling monthly or quarterly Dabbabox collections as an office treat their teams actually look forward to.

And it's not just for the 9 to 5 crowd. Whether you're catching up with friends or just craving something bold and satisfying, the Dabbabox is your go-to for lunch that delivers on flavour, not just convenience.

Lunchtime, levelled up.

To order, contact your nearest Dabbawal branch:
High Bridge: 0191 232 5133
Jesmond: 0191 281 3434



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HOTELS

Places to go...Royal Tunbridge Wells



Last summer my stage performance “The Great Railway Ticket Show” was featured on the Tunbridge Wells fringe and I had to make several visits to the town.

It gained its epithet “Royal” in 1909 by decree of King Edward VII as a result of many royal visits to take the waters at the Spa, one of only three towns in the UK so named, the other two being Royal Leamington Spa and, more recently, Royal Wootton Bassett. I performed my one-man show in one of the local bars on the less fashionable side of town, and it was well received, and it is something I am quite prepared to do again in the north east to any open-minded audience interested in being entertained about rail fares.

The railway reached Tunbridge Wells in 1845, as the major stop on the route from London to Hastings now run by the South Eastern Railway. The town had already become a fashionable resort from 1606 when the iron-rich chalybeate spa was discovered, which still bubbles on to the pavement in an enclosed area at the top of the famous Pantiles. You can't actually drink it at source but there is a useful range of bottled waters available from an automatic machine at all hours which can be seen in the photograph. The Pantiles is, like the town centre, a mix of chain and independent shops with plenty of options to eat and many coffee shops to choose from.

There is a variety of places to stay, but I found the consistently impressive Premier Inn close to the town centre and walkable from the station comfortable and good value. Across the town at Tunbridge Wells West station there is a heritage railway which runs to Eridge via High Rocks and Groombridge. It took over the route of a normal line that closed as late as 1985. Walking around the town's many parks is a pleasure. For lovers of green spaces, Tunbridge Wells offers some of the most beautiful parks in Kent.

Calverley Grounds—A stunning park just minutes from the town centre, boasting ornamental gardens, vibrant flower displays, and a charming café to rest in.

Dunorlan Park—With its expansive lake, rolling hills, and picturesque walking trails, Dunorlan is perfect for an afternoon of relaxation or even boat hire on a sunny day.

Grosvenor & Hilbert Park—This local gem features wooded areas, a community orchard, and excellent facilities for families.

Each park has its own distinct beauty and charm, making Tunbridge Wells a paradise for nature lovers and those seeking tranquil escapes. At the entrance to Calverley Grounds is a monument to Air Chief Marshal, later Lord of Bentley Priory, Hugh “Stuff” Dowding. He was the architect and commander of

the Royal Air Force Fighter Command before and during the 1940 Battle of Britain, and was in command of “the Few”. They were the young men of whom Churchill said that “never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few”. Dowding retired to the town and died in 1970. It is salutary to stand by the stone in the park and consider the contribution of this one man to our present freedom.

Being the major town on the railway route (and A21) from London to Hastings, Tunbridge Wells is well placed for a day trip to Hastings, or Battle – as in 1066. There is also a regular bus service to Brighton. It's a town with lots of festivals and events which are worth researching, with plenty going on during the summer betwixt capital and coast.

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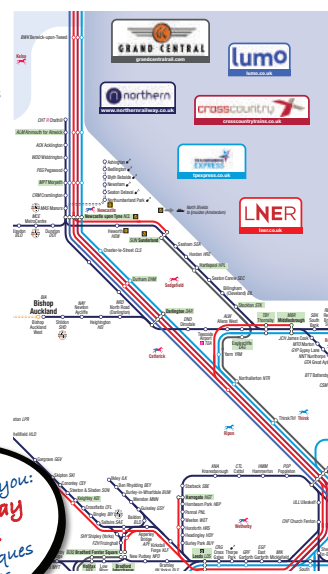
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Beyond the Cut with Kamo

In the vibrant heart of the North East, KAMO Barbers has established itself as more than just a place for a trim - it's a modern grooming destination built on precision, professionalism, and passion for the craft.

Located in Dunston, Durham, and Newcastle's Westgate Road, this stylish, high-energy barbershop is raising the bar for men's haircare and barbering.

KAMO offers a full range of barbering services, combining traditional techniques with modern trends to deliver results that suit each individual. Whether you're after a fresh fade, a beard reshape, or a full pampering session, KAMO's expert barbers approach every appointment with meticulous care.

Their motto, 'No ego's. No pretence. No nonsense,' encapsulates who they are and the inclusive, supportive community they are building. This isn't just a tagline - it's a way of working, a cultural blueprint that shapes everything from customer service to staff training. It reflects KAMO's mission to foster a welcoming, inclusive environment, where everyone who walks through the door feels seen, heard, and cared for.

KAMO's owner, Amy Hutchinson, said: "We're not just building a business - we're building a community.

KAMO was never just about haircuts - it's about people. We've built a space where everyone feels welcome, respected, and included; whether they're sitting in the chair or standing behind it. Community is at the heart of everything we do.

We're here to support, to teach, and to grow together."

Beyond the cut, what truly sets KAMO apart is its commitment to education and industry development through the KAMO Barber Academy. Recognising the growing demand for skilled barbers and the need for comprehensive training, KAMO launched the academy to bridge the gap between ambition and expertise.

Offering accredited training programmes for both beginners and experienced

barbers looking to upskill, the academy boasts an impressive 97% employment success rate among its graduates. Students don't just learn how to trim - they gain a full-spectrum understanding of the barbering industry, including client care, hygiene standards, and business fundamentals.

Training is hands-on and immersive, taking place right alongside KAMO's seasoned professionals at their Westgate Road location. This real-world exposure ensures that graduates step into the workforce not only with technical skills, but with the confidence, speed, and customer service finesse that define top-tier barbers.

KAMO's impact extends beyond haircuts. It's a space that empowers men and women - whether they're clients transforming their look or students transforming their future. With its unique blend of traditional craftsmanship, forward-thinking education, and community-driven values, KAMO is redefining what a barbershop can be.

So, if you're looking for a fresh fade, a career in barbering, or simply a space that lives up to its values, KAMO Barbers is more than worth a visit.

Learn more or book your appointment at kamobarbers.co.uk

In conversation with...

Cheryl Tanner

Menopause Fitness

What were your career ambitions growing up?

Growing up I always knew I wanted to work with people or animals and make a difference in their lives. I was drawn to anything involving health, movement, and helping others feel empowered. I wasn't the most academic, but I had grit, drive, and a deep passion for wellbeing.

Tell us about your current role.

I'm the founder of a private studio dedicated to coaching women, particularly those navigating menopause through strength training, lifestyle shifts, and mindset support. I run in-person and online sessions, corporate wellness talks, and longer coaching programs that cover everything from resistance training to nutrition and hormone balance. It's about more than just fitness, it's about helping women feel strong, confident, and capable.

What is your proudest business achievement?

Honestly, seeing the transformation in my clients, physically, mentally, emotionally is what I'm most proud of. I've had clients walk into the studio feeling lost or disconnected from their bodies, and 12 weeks later they're lifting confidently, smiling, and telling me they feel like themselves again. That, to me, is priceless. I'm also proud to have delivered menopause and wellbeing workshops for organisations such as the NHS and NatWest, and to have been interviewed on ITV News to raise awareness around the importance of supporting women's health, especially during menopause, in both life and the workplace.

How has your industry changed in the last decade?

Massively. The conversation around women's health, especially menopause has really opened up. When I first started, there was barely a whisper about resistance training for menopausal women. Now, there's growing awareness about the importance of strength, bone density, and hormone health. We've moved past the outdated "cardio and diet" narrative and I'm here for it.



What are you currently working on?

Right now, I'm developing an online, habit-based coaching program designed to help women create sustainable lifestyle changes around movement, nutrition, stress, sleep management and mindset. It's all about building long-term strength, energy, and confidence, without overwhelm. I'm also continuing to grow my online and in-person coaching, helping more women take control of their health during menopause and beyond.

Tell us about the clients you work with.

I mainly work with women aged 40+, many of whom are going through menopause. Some are managing symptoms like poor sleep, joint pain, weight gain or brain fog. Others just want to feel stronger, improve their posture, or take charge of their health. They're busy professionals, mums, carers, often juggling a lot.

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

"You are the product of the product." This stuck with me. I'm not selling a workout or meal plan, I'm showing what's possible through consistency and the right approach. Living and breathing the message I share has been the most powerful marketing tool. I often say, "What does practice make?... Progress," because there's no such thing as perfect and that mindset is at the heart of everything I do.

What has been your biggest challenge?

Navigating the business during the pandemic was tough because I had just

given birth to my son. I had to pivot fast, move online, and support clients through uncertainty while figuring everything out myself. But I genuinely believe tough times build strong foundations, in business and in life.

Who are your heroes inside and outside of business?

Inside business, it's the women I work with, my clients inspire me every day. Outside of business, it's my family & friends. Their support, resilience, and grounding influence have shaped who I am and keep me going when things get tough.

How do you unwind outside of work?

The great outdoors is my happy place, I love walking, paddleboarding, and hiking, especially by the sea. Spending time with my kids and getting cuddles from my dog is always grounding. Movement really helps clear my head, but I also love switching off completely, just being still and watching a film or series with my husband is the perfect way to relax.

Favourite book and boxset?

The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse really grounds me, it's simple, gentle, and full of truth. I enjoy reading it to my kids. I don't really have a favourite boxset I enjoy most genres and love switching off with a good series, whatever the mood.

07547 288273

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HEAT UP SUMMER

A woman with curly hair, wearing a red sports top and leggings, is performing a handstand. She is positioned in the center of the frame, with her legs raised high and arms extended upwards. The background is a solid yellow color.

HEAT UP SUMMER

A woman with dark hair, wearing a black sports top, is performing a handstand. She is positioned in the center of the frame, with her legs raised high and arms extended upwards. The background is a blue color with white water splashes.

SUMMER'S HERE, SO DITCH THE EXCUSES + TURN UP THE HEAT

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Giving a boost!

With the holiday season nearly upon us, it's the perfect time to kickstart your metabolism and shed any extra weight to feel and look your best. Boosting your metabolism not only enhances your physical appearance but also improves your confidence and overall well-being.

What is Metabolism?

Metabolism refers to all the chemical processes that continuously occur within your body to keep you alive and functioning. This includes essential functions like breathing, repairing cells, and digesting food.

Men vs. Women

Men generally have a faster metabolism due to having more muscle mass, denser bones, and less body fat compared to women. As a result, men often require more daily calories to maintain their weight.

Tips to Naturally Boost Your Metabolism Increase Workout Intensity

Shorter, more intense workouts can be more effective than long sessions. High-intensity exercise boosts calorie burn even after you're done, keeping your metabolism elevated throughout the day.

Add Spices to Your Meals

Hot spices like chili peppers, cayenne, and spicy mustard have been shown to increase metabolism by up to 15% temporarily. Try incorporating a variety of spices into your meals for an added metabolic boost.

Drink Green Tea

Studies suggest that green tea may enhance metabolic rate and support fat oxidation, making it a helpful addition to your weight loss routine.

Use Inclines or Stairs

Add hills, inclines, or stairs to your walks or runs to activate more muscles. This not only improves strength but also elevates your heart rate and metabolism.



David Fairlamb

Prioritise Protein

Protein requires more energy to digest, which can aid in fat burning. It also helps you feel fuller for longer, reducing the likelihood of overeating.

Move More

Take advantage of the longer, lighter days. Get outside, stay active, and enjoy the fresh air. More movement means more calories burned, which contributes to a higher metabolic rate.

Relax and Breathe

Practices like meditation and deep breathing increase oxygen flow and help balance stress, which can support metabolic health. Doing this outdoors in the summer makes it even more beneficial.

www.davidfairlambfitness.co.uk

...David's summing up...

*Whether you're planning for the day, week, or month,
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David Fairlamb Fitness

Bespoke beats boilerplate: How one North East cultural venue is leading the way on corporate events



New entrance to GCT

Images: Rhiannon Banks Photography

North East arts venue leads the way with bespoke event planning and management.

Gosforth Civic Theatre (GCT) hosts a wide variety of personal and corporate events alongside its regular theatre programme.

Founder and CEO Rob Huggins shares how GCT is bringing people-first events to the region.

In a landscape often dominated by cookie-cutter corporate settings, one North East arts venue is setting a new standard by putting empathy at the forefront of events for businesses and communities alike.

As well as being an acclaimed theatre and established charitable organisation, Gosforth Civic Theatre is a multifunctional venue that is equipped to host a wide range of events.

"GCT has a bit of everything. We have a really strong social message and charitable mission - but at the same time, we're a really professional place," says Gosforth Civic Theatre founder and CEO Rob Huggins. "We've got professional-level facilities, spaces that can cater to a vast range of requirements."

With many organisations embracing remote and hybrid working following the pandemic, in-person meetings and events are a crucial opportunity to foster connection and spark collaboration between teams, networks and communities.

The venue was founded by disability arts charity Liberdade Community Development Trust. Founded in 2003, Liberdade began as an apprenticeship scheme to support and enable a group of young people with learning disabilities to set up and run their own theatre company.

In 2012, the company members wanted to open a theatre where everyone was welcome, they wanted to have jobs in their theatre and to provide the opportunities they'd had for other young people, so Gosforth Civic Theatre became a reality.

Due to their natural adaptability and the creativity that is a fundamental part of their DNA, cultural and charitable venues like Gosforth Civic Theatre are able to offer a level of agility and customer experience which can sometimes be lacking in traditional corporate spaces.

"We approach all relationships, whether that be with a couple that wants to get married, or an organisation that wants to have a conference here, or even if



Rob Huggins

someone just wants to have a meeting in our studio, from a bespoke point of view," Rob explains.

"It's about hearing about someone's needs or someone's wishes, and endeavouring to make the time and the relationship that they have with us as great as possible.

"We don't want everybody's experience to be the same, we want everybody's experience to be right for them - that's why we spend an awful lot of time working with our clients to get events right."

To learn more about how Gosforth Civic Theatre can support your event, go to www.gosforthcivictheatre.co.uk/venue-hire.

Gosforth Civic Theatre

High quality conference and meeting space with a social conscience.

As a disability arts charity we work hard to raise expectations of what people with learning disabilities can achieve. You can support us by booking your meeting or conference at our venue.

Our spaces offer excellent physical accessibility and give you access to state-of-the-art theatrical AV and lighting facilities in newly refurbished and modernised spaces.



Hire us.

For more information, or to make a booking contact our Events Manager at venue@gosforthcivictheatre.co.uk.



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