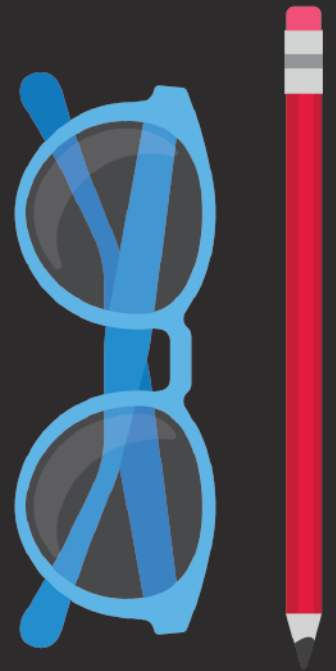
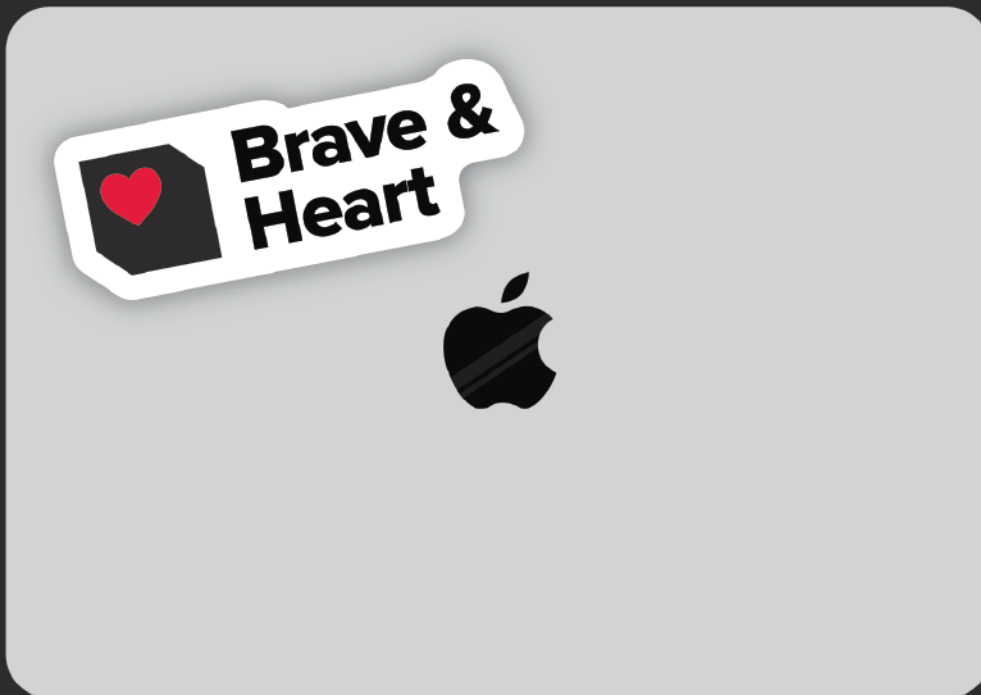
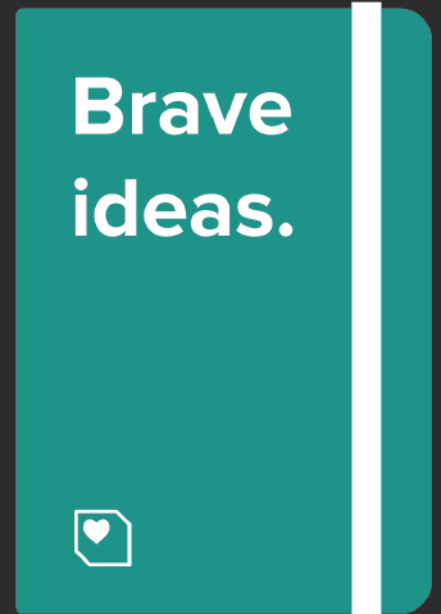
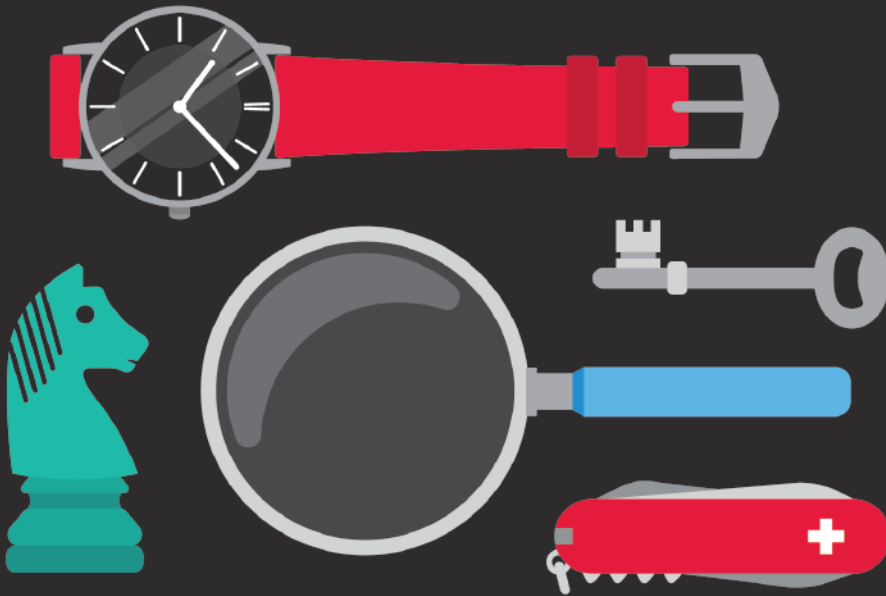


NORTHERN

INSIGHT

August 2025

Issue 115



Your toolkit for Digital Transformation

business | community | technology | media | built environment | education | arts | leisure | health

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Foreword

FOREWORD

Welcome to the August issue of Northern Insight

We continue to shine a spotlight on the people, businesses, and ideas shaping the North East's vibrant landscape.

As always, our pages are filled with the passion, innovation, and entrepreneurial spirit that define our region. From inspiring business leaders and cultural pioneers to the unsung heroes of our communities, we are proud to bring you stories that both inform and inspire.

In these dynamic and often unpredictable times, Northern Insight remains committed to showcasing the resilience and creativity that thrive here in the North. Whether you're a long-time reader or turning our pages for the first time, we hope this issue offers you fresh perspectives, valuable insights, and a renewed sense of connection to this remarkable region.

*Thank you for being part of our story.
Till next month...*

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



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From insurance to inspiration: How Alan Green turned a lifelong passion into a photography business

After 34 years in a career that never felt quite right, Alan Green, 62, from Sunnyside, Gateshead, took the bold step to transform his lifelong passion for photography into a thriving business.

Alan, who spent over three decades as a commercial insurance broker, admits he never truly wanted to be in that world.

The turning point came after a series of profound personal losses. Between 2014 and 2016, Alan and his wife lost their parents. Then came job redundancy, more work-related stress, and finally, heart surgery in 2019.

"That was the moment of clarity," says Alan. "I'd always loved photography since I was a kid – the magic of capturing a moment in time – and I knew I had to do something that made me feel alive again."

In late 2017, he officially registered Alan Green Photography, a name chosen for its personal touch. With the help of a business mentor and a renewed sense of purpose, Alan began building a brand photography business designed to help others show the human side of their own companies.

Today, Alan has worked with a wide range of clients across the North East – from sole traders and SMEs to larger organisations like Northumbrian Water and international construction firms. His niche? Helping businesses tell their story through honest, authentic imagery.

Luggage industry stalwarts make multi-million pound HQ investment



A long standing luggage and travel accessory specialist has made a multi-million pound investment into new and expanded headquarters.

Modrec International remains headquartered in North Tyneside, having moved to a dedicated 25,000 sq ft floor area, incorporating in excess of 60,000 cubic metres of nine-metre high warehouse space in Benton, which brings together warehousing and operational staff under one roof.

The space offers vast opportunity for Modrec to serve existing and new clients as well as help develop building operations to support

and develop its own consumer brands and D2C commerce.

The new space includes an expansive showroom for its products, which range from leather wallets, purses and travel bags up to cabin bags, holdalls and large suitcases, as well as a dedicated photography studio and office space for expanded sales, marketing and back office teams.

Together with a phenomenal amount of floor standing space, the new warehouse holds up to 3,000 pallets at any one time and will also result in a far more efficient and streamlined service to all customers, whether they're in licensed products or direct-to-consumer.



Stage Fright CIC steps into the spotlight

A Northumberland-based social enterprise that uses the creative arts to empower adults with learning difficulties is celebrating a major milestone – a move to its own premises that will help secure its long-term future.

Stage Fright CIC, founded by Linda Ferris, has gone from a grassroots drama group to a fully-fledged creative learning space in just two years.

With support from the Business with Purpose Service delivered by the North East BIC and her dedicated Business Adviser Judith Falla, Linda has transformed her vision for inclusion through the arts into a growing, sustainable business.

"We started off in a small room at Hexham Community Centre which was lovely but as it could only hold four people we outgrew it quickly," Linda says.

"Now we've moved into a former shop on Battle Hill, right in the heart of Hexham. It's doubled our capacity and the location is incredible. The footfall and visibility are a real asset to the business."

The new space not only allows for more creative sessions but also opens up new income streams. One of the shop's windows is being turned into a mini creative market, showcasing work from local makers in return for a small commission.

And with plans to hire out the venue for pop-up shops, workshops, and community groups, Linda is building a model that blends social impact with financial stability.

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FW Capital raise £25K for bigmoose

FW Capital, alongside the Development Bank of Wales, have announced bigmoose as their Charity Partner for 2025/26.

Set up by father and daughter team Jeff and Chloe Smith, bigmoose provides therapy and counselling for those going through difficulties with their mental health, while also providing mental health first aid training for those looking to help others.

bigmoose is a charity that prides itself on providing fast and effective therapy for those that are struggling, helping people to access therapists within a week. Their core aims are to help people with their mental health, prevent suicide and reduce homelessness.

The team at FW Capital kickstarted fundraising efforts at their annual Newcastle charity ball, held at St James' Park and attended by 280 guests. The evening's activities raised a record £25,000!

This follows a successful year of support for the British Heart Foundation, during which a total of £57,870 was raised to help the charity in its goal of supporting the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of cardiovascular disease.



Newcastle High School for Girls GDST Wins Prestigious Debrett's Education Award

Newcastle High School for Girls (NHSG) is thrilled to announce that it has been named the winner of the Debrett's Education Award for Outstanding Pastoral Care, as part of the Muddy Stiletto's National School Awards 2025.

This prestigious national award honours schools that demonstrate an exceptional commitment to pupil wellbeing, recognising those who go above and beyond to create inclusive, nurturing, and empowering environments.

Standing out from among the 500 schools who were considered for these national awards, NHSG was selected as the winner of the Outstanding Pastoral Care Award by the Debrett's Education judges, who praised the outstanding impact of NHSG's pastoral care strategy.

Reacting to the announcement, Head, Mrs Amanda Hardie, said: "We are absolutely overjoyed to have won the Debrett's Education Award for Outstanding Pastoral Care. This is a wonderful acknowledgment for the care, compassion and deep expertise our staff bring to school life every single day.

"As an all-girl school, our pastoral programme is rooted in our deep understanding of how girls thrive and flourish. Our approach not only supports our pupils, but it also empowers each and every one of them — from our youngest girls in Junior School through to Sixth Form — giving them the space to develop their voice, grow in confidence and embrace their full potential both academically and as a person."

This award adds to what has been an exceptional year of national recognition, which saw NHSG shortlisted in the TES Independent Senior School of the Year Awards and celebrated in The Independent School of the Year Awards for Best Prep School and Best Marketing Approach.



Leading Tyneside firm turns 20 – and announces record £15m turnover

A leading North East business has celebrated its 20th anniversary – and recorded a record multi-million-pound turnover.

From humble origins, Quora Group has grown over the past two decades into one of Britain's leading providers of mechanical, electrical, and plumbing (MEP) services.

Launched in 2005 as a small operation focused on general installations, services, and repairs, the North Shields-based company now employs over 120 staff.

And Quora Group's constant growth resulted in staff moving into an impressive 5,000sqft HQ on the Tyne Tunnel Trading Estate 18 months ago.

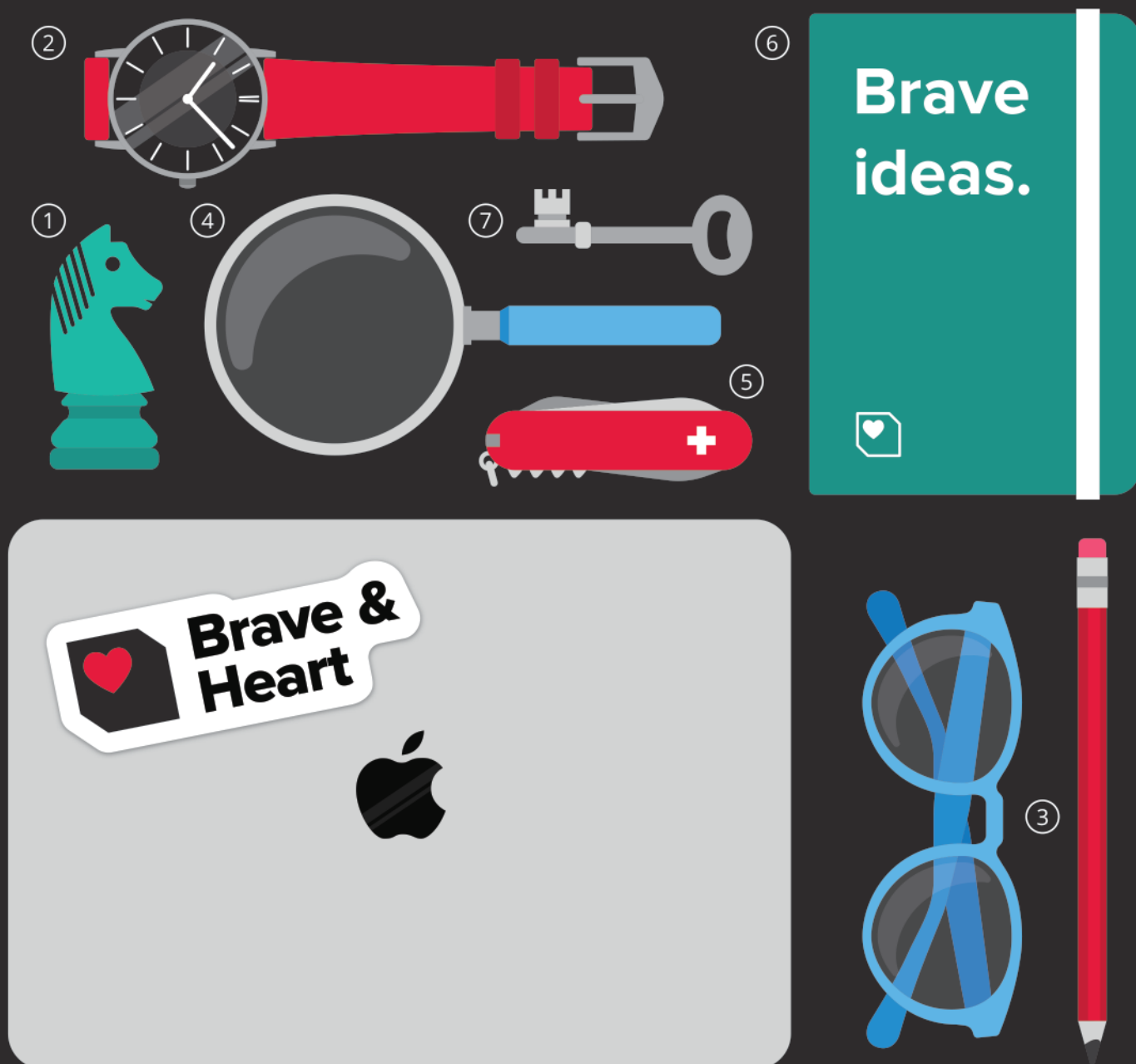
Now as it celebrates its 20th anniversary, the Tyne Tunnel Trading Estate-based firm has posted a £15m turnover – with eyes firmly focussed on shattering that record over the coming year.

"Over the past 20 years, Quora Group has mirrored the resilience and resurgence of the North East business landscape, and the whole team is thrilled that everyone's hard work has resulted in a record year," said Craig Firth, Managing Director of Quora Group.

"Reaching 20 years is worth celebrating, and it is testament to the commitment of our team and the trust our clients put in us to deliver for them."

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Your Toolkit for Digital Transformation

At Brave & Heart, we're a digital agency that values partnerships with a difference.

Through our three key pillars of Strategy, People & Digital, we use transformation to drive growth, resilience and business success.

This year, we continue to work with public and private sector companies to ensure they can fully leverage the current AI digital revolution.

How can we do this for you? Introducing our B&H toolkit...

① Strategy Focus

It all starts with strategy.

Strategy is at the heart of what we do and should always be a key business focus. From designing launch strategies for start-ups to advising larger companies needing to perfect their HR and IT roadmaps, our expertise ensures that you have the building blocks for future success.

We recently provided a strategic foundation for a top North-East law firm, which allowed them to complete a successful merger earlier this year, and our cloud strategy expertise has proven its worth across multiple sectors.

② Rapid Turnaround

Brave & Heart began as an antidote to agencies that promise the world without delivering, and we understand the critical nature of your challenges.

As the way we work began to radically change during the pandemic, we delivered a cutting-edge intranet to a global multinational company serving 120,000 employees in a matter of months, meeting the challenge of remote work head-on.

We also provided a comprehensive IT and HR strategy for a public sector company during a period of rapid growth, ensuring they had a three-year blueprint, a roadmap for future strategy, and a tactical delivery plan for the first year. We delivered this in just three months, allowing them to continue expanding at pace with a strong strategic foundation.

③ Bespoke Design

While we offer specific digital services, what makes our delivery truly work for you is that we craft tailored solutions around your unique challenges.

Faced with a public sector client that had a significant problem in extracting data for government reporting, we delivered a system entirely tailored to their needs, working closely with their team to exceed expectations.

We created a state-of-the-art, bespoke application to capture strategic data, along with a highly effective reporting tool that allows them to easily extract invaluable data from a single source of truth, turning what was once a months-long process into a single click.

④ Cutting-Edge Technology

Our Digital Development Group are focused on utilising AI technologies that help not just our multinational clients, but also SMEs and startups. We do all of this to help you keep up with the incredible pace of change that AI has driven within the workplace.

Currently, our bespoke AI engine is being used with a client to enable them to create chatbots, automated podcasting, intelligent project management systems, and more. All in-house and secure.

It has revolutionised our processes and the way we work together at Brave & Heart, and it will do the same for you.

⑤ Adaptability

Our multi-faceted approach to your challenges ensures that our teams adapt to your day-to-day reality.

Our Digital Development Group work on revolutionising the processes that create bottlenecks in your business. We do all of this with the single-minded focus to elevate your digital capability.

Meanwhile, our People Development Group implement tailored employee-focused strategies and tools that bring your people together.

Our teams collaborate to create "pods", which are designed around your specific challenge, allowing us to bring together expertise and experience to ensure your solution is fully tailored to your needs.

Pulling this all together is our strategic superpower.

⑥ Partnership With a Difference

Our "Be Brave" ethos is not just a tagline; it's a north star on how we work with you.

We are a trusted partner, which means we do the right thing for your success, not just for the sake of billing hours.

We bring clarity, strategic thinking and brave ideas to your projects, ensuring you get the right solution for your business, every time.



⑦ The Key to Success

**Are you ready to supercharge and accelerate your digital transformation?
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For our public sector clients, we're also available directly through G-Cloud 14, where we offer the following services:

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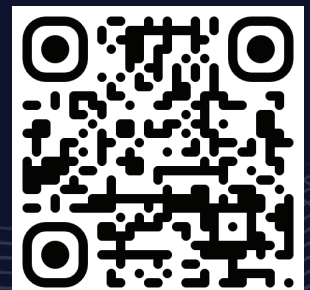


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ALNWICK'S MARKET MOMENTUM



The charming market town of Alnwick and its pretty surrounding villages continue to draw attention nationally, on TV and in the broadsheets, with buyers still seeking their special coastal or rural retreat. Alnwick has much to offer with its historic Castle & Gardens, good range of shops including national chains and 75 independent retailers, food and music festivals, the Playhouse theatre/cinema, leisure centre and lovely walks in Hulne Park.

Whilst there has been renewed growth in activity in the second home market, there has also been an increase in the number of purchasers looking for their main home in beautiful North Northumberland with many of the family homes and downsizer properties we have instructed resulting in multiple interested parties.

Chains have become more common in this market, with buyers often actively viewing before putting their own home up for sale, which is a change from the many proceedable/cash buyers there appeared to be in the heated post-Covid market of 2021/22, and this is where Sanderson Young's dedicated Sales Progression team can assist in getting the

sales through smoothly.

Selling a variety of homes throughout the region from our town centre branch in Alnwick, our team all have a wide range of experience covering many locations, house types and prices, meaning they can help in all aspects of selling your home to make the process as easy as possible. The well connected and enthusiastic team is led by Valuation Manager, Penny Wright, and Branch Manager, Gillian Greaves, who have worked together for over 20 years and are both local advocates for the beauty of this part of the North East. Penny and Gillian are supported by Lizzie Beattie, Lauren Black and Alison Oxley, all passionate about property and the stunning area they call home.

2025 is proving to be a fantastic year for Sanderson Young and we look forward to further success!

Penny Wright
01665 600 170

penny.wright@sandersonyoung.co.uk



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Belvedere Terrace *Alnwick*

This handsome, three storey, period townhouse offers superb family accommodation with many original features retained including period fireplaces, full height sash windows and shutters, and cast iron external balusters. The excellent early 19th century home has been improved over recent years and has attractive private gardens to the front and an enclosed rear courtyard with a separate versatile studio/home office. Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax Band: F.



4 2 2 D

Price Guide:
Offers over £499,950



Lizzie Beattie
01665 600 170
lizzie.beattie@sandersonyoung.co.uk



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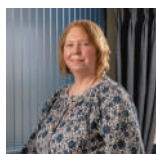
Clayport Street *Alnwick*

A stunning, Grade II* listed townhouse, located in the centre of Alnwick close to the historic Market Square and Alnwick Castle. This handsome property, dating back to 1760, has circa 3850 sq ft of fully refurbished and reconfigured accommodation over four floors, with many original features and period features reinstated whilst providing contemporary family living. Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax Band: Currently Business Rates or potentially Band D.



5 3 5 D

Price Guide:
£795,000



Gillian Greaves
01665 600 170
gillian.greaves@sandersonyoung.co.uk





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High Barn *Harehope Farm, Eglington*

High Barn is a fabulous country home with a beautiful south facing walled garden, a converted guest annexe/cottage and fantastic open views over surrounding fields and countryside. Located 1.2 miles west of Eglington village, this charming property has been thoughtfully converted with lovely traditional features retained including exposed beams and vaulted ceilings, as well as quality bespoke fittings throughout. Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax Band: E.



4 3 5 C

Price Guide:
£745,000



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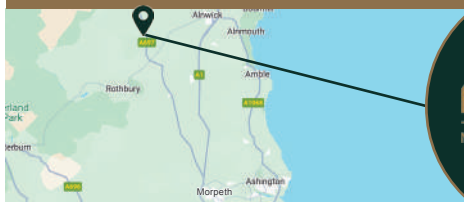
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Real Talent

By Teresa Peters, Accelerator Coaching Ltd

Why knowing what makes you tick is just the start.

Stephen Covey once said, “Seek first to understand, then to be understood.” That phrase has stuck with me ever since I first heard it — and not just because it’s wise advice in any team meeting or family gathering. It gets to the heart of something I believe deeply as a coach: if we don’t first understand ourselves, how can we possibly connect well with others?

This is where Gallup’s CliftonStrengths (formerly StrengthsFinder) model comes in. It’s one of the tools I return to again and again — whether I’m working 1:1 with a senior leader or running a team development day in a muddy car park. It helps us name what we’re naturally wired to do — our talents. But here’s the clincher: talent is not the same as strength.

A talent is a natural pattern of thought, feeling or behaviour — like Relator, Strategic, Empathy, or Positivity. But it only becomes a strength when we apply it consistently, with skill and intention. Just like a seed only grows if we plant and nurture it, talents only flourish if we invest in them.

And often, we don’t even notice them.

Recently, I was coaching someone and we looked at their top five Gallup talents. One of them was Positivity — and they practically rolled their eyes. “Oh, I don’t think I’m that positive,” they said. Yet five minutes later, they were lighting up the room, reframing setbacks and spotting potential in everyone around them. The room could see it — they just hadn’t fully owned it.

That’s the gift of this work. It helps us notice what we notice. To catch ourselves in the act of being who we are — and to decide how we want to dial things up or down.

In our team coaching at Accelerator Coaching, we start by helping people get curious about their own patterns. We ask:

- When does this talent help you shine?
- When does it trip you up?
- How can you flex it in a team setting?

Because no talent is ‘good’ or ‘bad’.

Empathy, for example, can be a superpower — attuning to others, building



Teresa Peters

trust, and reading a room in seconds. But if left unchecked, it can lead to emotional overload or decision-paralysis. Likewise, Competition can spark ambition — or cause unhealthy comparison. It all depends on awareness and use.

So what makes a great team? Is it better to have everyone with the same strengths, or a blend?

In short: it depends. A finance team might benefit from more Analytical and Deliberative talents, while a creative or innovation team might fly with Ideation, Futuristic, or Woo (Winning Others Over). But the real magic happens when teams understand not just their own styles — but each other’s. It builds psychological safety and gives permission to communicate more openly.

At Accelerator Coaching, we don’t just hand over reports and tick a box. We explore.

We reflect. And we connect dots. We talk about strengths in action, under pressure, or at play. We use visuals, questions, walk-and-talks, and even the odd campervan metaphor. Because growth isn’t linear. It’s layered.

We’ve been doing this work for over 10 years now. And we’ve seen time and time again: when people truly understand what drives them — and what drives their teammates — they work smarter, faster, and with far more joy.

So the next time you brush off a compliment or downplay what feels easy, pause for a moment. That might just be your talent whispering.

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Barclays refinancing deal unlocks future growth for healthcare company

Newcastle-based law firm Sintons' real estate team has managed the refinancing of eight North East residential care homes, in a deal of significant value from Barclays UK Corporate Bank.

Aspire Healthcare, which provides a range of residential care, supported living and specialist support services, has 17 sites across the North East and is investing in future growth. Led by managing director Anoop Puri, Aspire Healthcare has expanded significantly since its formation in 2007 and recently acquired two new pharmacy businesses.

Anoop Puri explains more: "Aspire is growing both in terms of our physical sites and also in relation to the range of specialist services we offer our clients.

"We're about to launch a new app which will enable customers to quickly and easily order repeat prescriptions for delivery, and are looking to further expand our work with NHS and social services commissioners."

Aspire Healthcare is a longstanding client of Sintons and the firm has previously advised the team on acquiring new sites, managing leases and corporate restructuring. The latest refinancing deal was managed by partners Alok Loomba, Jane Meikle and solicitor Nathan Johnson.

Sally-Ann Cain, Relationship Director at Barclays UK Corporate Bank, said: "We are delighted to have worked with Aspire in delivering this refinancing deal to support their future growth plans. Our new relationship has been built on a shared understanding of and commitment to this important sector, and we look forward to continuing to work together in the months and years ahead."

Mark Nixon at Finance 55 brokered and advised Aspire on the funding deal. Mark said: "Finance 55 is proud to have acted on behalf of Aspire Healthcare in securing a substantial funding package to support the company's ongoing growth and commitment to delivering high-quality care. As one of the region's leading healthcare providers, this financing marks an important milestone in Aspire's continued expansion."



NEL Fund Managers back Pablo Eggsgobao with six-figure NPIF II investment

A six-figure investment is fuelling the next stage of growth for one of the North East's most recognisable independent food brands. The funding comes from NPIF II – NEL Debt Finance Fund, which is managed by NEL Fund Managers as part of the Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund II (NPIF II).

Pablo Eggsgobao Ltd (Pablos) – the popular breakfast and brunch concept founded by entrepreneur Emma Dent has existing locations in Newcastle, Sunderland and Whitley Bay. The brand has earned a devoted following for its creative bao buns and vibrant brunch dishes, gaining momentum through word-of-mouth, social media, and consistently strong customer reviews.

The investment will support the opening of Pablo's seventh store, located on Newcastle's Pilgrim Street. The new site will serve as the brand's flagship location and mark its first franchised outlet, setting the foundation for a new phase of franchise-led growth.

The new store will not only strengthen Pablo's presence in one of Newcastle's busiest food and retail corridors but also act as a prototype for future franchised locations. The site is expected to create six new jobs, with more to follow as expansion continues.

The deal was led by NEL Investment Executive Michael Williams, with legal support provided by Ben Jackson, Corporate Senior Associate, James Houghton, Associate Solicitor, and John Morgan, Commercial Property Partner at Hay & Kilner Law Firm. This transaction marks a milestone investment for Pablo Eggsgobao and underscores the continued growth of the North East's dynamic food and beverage sector.

Emma Dent, founder of Pablo Eggsgobao, said: "We're incredibly excited about the opportunity this investment brings. It's a huge moment for our team, our customers, and our journey as a brand. The support from NEL allows us to bring Pablo's to even more people, starting with our flagship site on Pilgrim Street. It also enables us to test and refine our franchise model, which is a key part of our long-term vision. We started with one grill and a lot of graft, and with this support we're ready to scale while staying true to our values of creativity, quality, and community"



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INTERESTING TIMES

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

ONE SUBJECT | THREE TIPS



STEP BACK TO GROW

It is easy to assume your job is to keep things running. Answer the emails. Handle the clients. Sign off the quotes. But when you are involved in everything, you end up limiting the very thing you are trying to grow.

At some point, every business owner has to shift from being the engine to being the architect. That means stepping away from the day-to-day and focusing on building something that works without you.

1. Make time to think, not just do

If your week is packed with delivery and admin, there is no space to lead. Your most valuable input is not your time, but your thinking. Create space for reviewing numbers, setting direction, and asking better questions. It is the only way to make decisions that move the business forward.

2. Build systems, not bottlenecks

If everything relies on you, growth will always hit a ceiling. The real goal is to make yourself operationally irrelevant. That means building systems, documenting processes, and trusting others to take ownership. When you stop being the bottleneck, the business can breathe.

3. Protect your energy, not just your calendar

Time management is not enough if you are constantly drained. Great leadership needs headspace. Focus on the parts of the business that energise you and delegate what does not. When you are working in your zone, you think better, lead better, and grow faster.

Redefining your role is not a luxury. It is essential if you want to grow a business that runs smoothly, scales sustainably, and gives you your life back

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INTERESTING QUOTE



If your business depends on you, you don't own a business, you have a job.

Michael E. Gerber.

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?"

Ask yourself: What decisions am I still making that someone else could handle confidently?

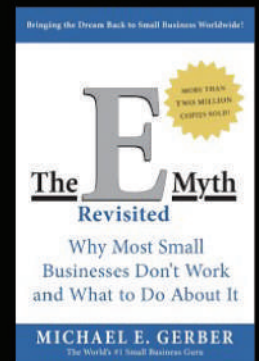
Choose one. Hand it over. That's how scale starts.

HAVE A READ

The E-Myth Revisited. Michael E Gerber.

This classic challenges the idea that being good at your trade means you are ready to run a business. Gerber explains why so many small businesses stay small, and how to fix it by building systems that work without constant owner involvement.

£10(ish) online. **Mark Melville**



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New appointment in senior role at Cartmell Shepherd

Cartmell Shepherd is proud to announce the promotion of Robert Hudson to the role of Senior Associate Solicitor within the Wills, Probate and Inheritance team.

The promotion comes less than twelve months after Robert joined the firm in September 2024 which is one of the leading private client teams in the region.

Robert qualified as a solicitor in 2009 after studying law at Cambridge University. He then went on to work for large law firms in London and Leeds, before returning to his home county of Cumbria 12 years ago. Since then, he has worked in the area of wills, trusts and probate with a significant agricultural client base.

Speaking about his promotion, Robert said: "I'm happy to be taking on the role of senior associate and looking forward to helping our team continue to serve our clients."

Flower Café Sunderland ready to blossom

A hotly anticipated new leisure venue, The Flower Café has officially opened in Sunderland's Keel Square.

The Flower Café has already proved popular at its sites in Newcastle's Grainger Street which opened in 2021 and Alnwick and Whitley Bay and a fifth Flower Café is also in the making on Jesmond's Osborne Road which is due to open later this summer.

The colourful new addition to Sunderland's hospitality scene looks out onto the new Culture House which is closing in on completion and has 113 covers inside and a pavement cafe with a further 46 seats running along High Street West. The venue complements The Botanist and Keel Tavern, and The Muddler, which is expected to open later this year, all operating out of units beneath the Holiday Inn, creating a leisure destination.

Sayturk Group is a high-growth property development, hospitality and leisure operator based in the North East and manages several individually designed sites, including concept



bars, late-night venues, pubs, cafes and luxury holiday apartments.

The latest offering comes hot on the heels of several other high-profile deals in the North East hospitality sector by the Sayturk Group, secured by Sweeney Miller Law's specialist hospitality and leisure and licensing teams.

Armstrong Watson ranked among UK's top apprenticeship employers



Armstrong Watson is proud to announce its inclusion in The Sunday Times Top 100 Apprenticeship Employers for 2025.

This year, 43 new graduate trainees have joined the business to complete their level 7 apprenticeship qualifications, up from 37 in 2024, and in September, the next intake of up to 34 apprentices will embark on their AAT and ATT level 4 qualifications (up from 21 last year).

The Sunday Times Top 100 Apprenticeship Employers 2025, compiled by High Fliers Research, celebrates the UK's outstanding apprenticeship employers – recognising their commitment to

creating new apprenticeships, the diversity of their apprentices, and the number who successfully complete their apprenticeships. Armstrong Watson has been ranked 29th in the national league.

The firm has previously featured in the Department of Education's Top 100 Apprenticeship Employers for the past three years, ranking at 37 in 2024, up from 46 in 2023 and 64 in 2022.

Paul Dickson, Armstrong Watson's CEO and Managing Partner, said: "We are thrilled that we continue to receive recognition for the quality of our apprenticeships. We continue to invest in our training programmes year after year and are incredibly proud of our apprentices and the positive impact they have on our business.

"This accolade is a testament to our unwavering commitment to providing high-quality apprenticeship programs that equip our apprentices with the skills and experience they need to succeed in their careers.

"We're also pleased to welcome our new trainees to the business. There are many opportunities ahead of them for a successful career and we wish them all the best in their qualifications."

Most of the new students, who are based at the firm's offices across the north of England and Scotland – including 9 in Newcastle -, will be working towards their ACA qualifications to become Chartered Accountants, while others are undertaking the ATT and CTA graduates schemes. They will embark on a three-year programme, which combines study with valuable hands-on experience, support, coaching and mentoring from the business.

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Tier One Capital tee-off support for Sport Newcastle's annual golf day

Newcastle based wealth and fund management specialists, Tier One Capital has again sponsored Sport Newcastle's annual Golf Day, helping to raise vital funds for the charity and continue their support for grassroots sport in the region.

The fundraising event which took place on Thursday, 3rd July 2025 at Ponteland Golf Club helped to raise over £6,500 to support local athletes, sports organisations and wider participation in grassroots sport across the region.

The annual golf day was a sell-out and attended by 32 teams covering a wide range of local like-minded businesses and was again supported by SOS Group, which is also a long-time supporter of Sport Newcastle fundraising events.

Tier One Capital's sponsorship of the golf day is part of an ongoing partnership with Sport Newcastle, underlining the company's commitment to contributing to the local community and encouraging involvement in sport at all levels.

Ian McElroy said: "As a business deeply rooted in the North East, and with a team of active sports enthusiasts, we are thrilled to support Sport Newcastle. The golf day is always a highlight of the year and we all enjoyed a great day's golf which was well organised, well attended and at the same time raised vital funds for grassroots sport.

Mike Booth, Vice Chair of Sport Newcastle, said: "We are delighted to have raised over £6,500 our highest figure to date and we



Tier One Capital's Chief Executive, Ian McElroy with guests at Sport Newcastle Golf day

are eternally grateful to the businesses and golfers who attended. The day was a tremendous success and was played in great spirit at one of the North East's finest golf courses.

"The support we receive from businesses is crucial to our long-standing charity's efforts in promoting and nurturing young sporting talent in the region. We are immensely grateful for the continued support from Tier One Capital, a generous sponsor who shares our values and enables emerging sports talents to realise their full potential.

Other sponsors on the day were Bon Fruit, who provided fruit bowls and iPro who supplied energy drinks for all the golfers.

The winning team on the day were Hoof Hearted Enquiry which included Alan Dickinson, Ray Dryden, Tony Howard and Stephen Pegg.



Tier One Capital's Fund Manager, Brendan O'Grady with guests at Sport Newcastle Golf Day

Tier One Capital entered two teams captained by TOC Chief Executive, Ian McElroy and Fund Manager, Brendan O'Grady.

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RMT Technology launches recruitment drive after major office investment



RMT Technology's commercial director Stephen McNickle and managing director Mike Hayes with members of the RMT Technology team in their new office

The specialist technology arm of RMT Accountants & Business Advisors is aiming to double the size of its team over the next two years after completing a major premises investment.

RMT Technology has moved into a new, purpose-built 1,800 sq ft office at RMT's Gosforth headquarters that contains both additional desk space and a dedicated build area in which the customer solutions developed by its team of engineers can be created, tested and refined.

And it is now looking to create 15 new technical and project management jobs over the next two years as part of its growth strategy for increasing its client base across the north of England, with its first new recruits set to come on board over the summer.

RMT Technology works in partnership with a wide range of SMEs to identify and implement security first IT solutions which meet their specific business and operational needs around IT strategy, network infrastructure, information security and data management services.

Alongside managed service provision in these areas, the firm also provides a consultancy service which helps clients of all sizes identify and address issues within their technology infrastructure, information management and cyber security systems and procedures.

It also holds the high level Cyber Essentials PLUS accreditation, which involves an independent assessment of participants' online security provisions across five different areas, as well as simulated hacking and 'phishing' attacks, and offers training and guidance to help SMEs achieve their own Cyber Essentials accreditations.

Stephen McNickle, commercial director at RMT Technology, says: "The investment that's been made in creating a dedicated, purpose-built facility for our growing team has given us a base from which the business can make huge strides in the future.

"Our focus is always on creating a lasting positive impact on our clients' operations by delivering customised solutions which not only address and resolve immediate issues, but which also help them to achieve their long-term commercial objectives.

"Building a bigger team that can meet the increasing client demand that we're expecting to see is an essential part of our own continuing evolution and we're already set to welcome some new recruits through the summer, with more to follow over the next two years and beyond.

"With continuing rapid advancements in technology, businesses need a trusted service provider that can recommend the right products and services for their success.

"The unique proposition that RMT Technology offers to the North East market and beyond which will provide them with certainty, clarity and assurance around their technology needs."

Stephen Slater, managing director at RMT Accountants & Business Advisors, adds: "RMT Technology has proven to be a real success story as the need for remote, secure access to technology services has grown and we're only just beginning to start realising its full potential.

"We have a strong senior team in place which is driving the business's expansion, with this investment in a dedicated, purpose-built space being a central part of its growth strategy."

RMT Accountants and RMT Technology are part of Sumer, the UK and Ireland's leading mid-market accountancy practice, which delivers 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.

For more information on RMT Technology, please visit rmttechnology.co.uk, call 0191 256 9550 or email hello@rmttechnology.co.uk

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



ROBSON / LAIDLER



Chris Dixon

Senior promotion for FW Capital's Chris Dixon

Fund manager FW Capital is celebrating the promotion of Chris Dixon who has been appointed Fund Manager of the North East Property team.

This follows the retirement of Tony Cullen who steps down from the role after over eight years at FW Capital and over 32 years in financial services.

Chris' promotion comes at a key point in the firm's support for local developers following the success of the North East Property Fund, North East Commercial Property Investment Fund and the Teesside Flexible Investment Fund in delivering funding across the region. It signals FW Capital's commitment to investing in its team and encouraging career progression.

Chris has worked at FW Capital for three years after joining from Allied Irish Bank (GB). He has 28 years' financial

services experience specialising in property development and will continue to support developers seeking finance for residential and commercial projects across Northumberland, Tyne & Wear, County Durham and Teesside.

Chris Dixon, Property Fund Manager at FW Capital said: "It has been an absolute pleasure working alongside Tony and I'm looking forward to continuing his legacy supporting property developers across the North East. Stepping into his shoes is a big task, but I've got the support of my fantastic colleagues at FW Capital. Our appetite remains strong to plug the funding gap for residential and commercial property across the North East. We're helping developers navigate and overcome challenges and through our investments we are achieving what the funds are designed to do. This is illustrated by the diverse range of developments we have supported, from small residential sites to large commercial sites."

Joanne Whitfield Fund Director FW Capital, added: "This is a fantastic step forward for Chris, who is the perfect fit to take over the Property Fund Manager role. His vision for the Funds we manage will be instrumental as we see continued strong demand for investment from local property developers. Tony did a fantastic job of building FW Capital's brand in property development finance in the North East and I am very grateful to him for all his hard work to determination. His departure marks the end of an era, but his legacy will continue

to support North East developers and influence FW Capital's future trajectory for many more years to come. Tony has been a leader whose vision has been instrumental to the success of the North East Property team and we wish him all the best in his retirement."

The £35million North East Commercial Investment Property Fund, offers loans with a maximum loan facility of £7million Grade A commercial developments in Tyne & Wear, Northumberland, and County Durham. The North East Property Fund provides loans from £250,000 up to £2million for residential and non-speculative commercial developments in Tyne & Wear, Northumberland, and County Durham. Both are managed by FW Capital and backed by the North East Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP).

The Teesside Flexible Investment Fund is a £20million fund to support economic development in Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland and Stockton-on-Tees through a mix of finance to support buying a business, property funding and bond finance. It is backed by investment from FW Capital and The Teesside Pension Fund and delivers loans of £100,000 to £3million to enterprises making an economic impact in Teesside.

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...Being trusted to represent Cascade on the international stage was a huge honour...

Cascade Cash Management explores global growth opportunities at Dubai Fintech Summit 2025

Cascade Cash Management, a leading UK-based savings fintech, recently attended the prestigious Dubai Fintech Summit 2025, marking a significant step in the company's international growth strategy.

Represented by Savings Executive Louis Gleeson, the visit underscored Cascade's growing commitment to expanding its offshore proposition and deepening its impact on financial education and cash optimisation beyond the UK.

The Summit, held in May, brought together global fintech leaders, regulators, investors and innovators to explore the future of finance in one of the world's most dynamic economic hubs. For Cascade, the event served as a launchpad for expanding conversations with prospective partners, international advisers and expat communities seeking smarter solutions for managing savings with transparency, security and return in mind.

Louis Gleeson, who joined Cascade as a Savings Executive, represented the company during the two-day event. His attendance signalled Cascade's belief in cultivating emerging talent while giving team members the opportunity to shape the future of the business. "Being trusted to represent Cascade on the international stage was a huge honour," said Louis. "I'm proud to be part of a company that empowers its team to actively participate in its growth. The conversations in Dubai were energising - there is clearly a need and appetite for better savings solutions, especially among expats and internationally mobile clients."

Expanding offshore: A strategic move

Cascade's mission has always been to provide savers with better returns, transparency and FSCS protection by simplifying access to the full savings market. With the offshore proposition now a growing pillar of the business, the company is responding to increasing demand from international clients - especially those living or working in the UAE and neighbouring regions - who face limited choice and lower visibility when managing their cash across borders.

"We've long known that cash is a neglected asset class in wealth management," said Co-Founder and CEO Dr Emma Black. "As financial awareness grows and interest rate environments shift globally, more individuals - especially expats - are recognising the value of having their savings actively managed. The Dubai Fintech Summit made it clear that this market is not only growing, but hungry for innovation, transparency and financial education. We're thrilled to be building a proposition that meets those needs."

Emma also praised Louis' role in advancing the company's international ambitions: "Louis is a great example of the talent we're proud to nurture at Cascade. His professionalism and ability to represent our values internationally reflects the strength of our team and the clarity of our mission."

A region poised for innovation

The UAE continues to position itself as a global fintech leader, with Dubai becoming a hub for financial innovation, regulatory collaboration and cross-border investment. With a fast-growing population of professionals, a strong expat base and government-led initiatives to boost financial literacy, the region represents an exciting frontier for companies like Cascade that are purpose-led and technology-enabled.



During the Summit, Louis connected with advisory firms, family offices, banks and platform providers, gaining valuable insight into how Cascade's services could be adapted to better support clients outside the UK. This includes tailored support for cross-border clients, enhanced onboarding solutions and smart optimisation tools to maximise savings in multiple currencies.

"Expats often have complex financial lives," said Louis. "They want safe, flexible and effective ways to manage their savings, but the options can feel fragmented or opaque. Cascade has an opportunity to bring the clarity and structure we offer UK clients to an international audience. That's something I'm really excited to be part of."

Looking ahead

Following the Dubai Fintech Summit, Cascade has committed to expanding its offshore offering in 2025 and beyond. This includes the development of partnerships with international advisory firms, the addition of offshore banking partners to the platform and enhancements to Cascade's digital infrastructure to support global clients with the same high standards of compliance, clarity and care as domestic users.

The company is also investing in education-led engagement, with plans to launch content and tools designed to improve financial literacy for expats and international savers. By demystifying cash management and offering proactive solutions, Cascade aims to play a meaningful role in strengthening financial wellbeing globally.

"As we continue to scale, we're staying true to our mission," said Emma. "Helping people make the most of their money shouldn't stop at the UK border. There's a real opportunity to use our technology, expertise and people to support clients no matter where they are in the world. The Dubai Fintech Summit was the beginning of what we know will be a transformational journey."

Cascade's international outlook reflects its wider growth ambition - combining human insight with digital tools to serve clients better, wherever they may be. With talent like Louis leading the charge and a clear strategy for offshore expansion, the future for Cascade Cash Management looks bright.

cascade.co.uk



Dr Emma Black with Andrew Marsh

Cascade Chair hands over reins for next stage of growth

After four years of guiding the board of the leading cash management company of the region, Andrew Marsh is handing the reins to two new additions who will support the company in its next stage of growth.

Paul Rippon, co-founder of Monzo, and Christian Balshen, Director of Agent Partnerships at Rightmove, are joining Cascade Cash Management to continue the work started by Andrew and take the company to the next level of its strategic growth plan.

Dr Emma Black, who met Andrew through Vistage, took a moment to thank Andrew and recognise everything accomplished under his stewardship.

She said: "When Andrew joined Cascade we were facing so many challenges including a severe drop in interest rate and then a rebound which meant demand was above anticipated.

"During his term as chair he helped take us through a transformation to profitability, ensuring we have operations efficiency, faultless governance, and he leaving us

in a position where our business is set to scale in every aspect. He has also been instrumental of the maturing of our management team having supported us all via Vistage with coaching, mentoring and events to increase our knowledge and our network."

Cascade can boast a portfolio that currently stands at £250 million, having administered over £2bn since inception. The planned growth aims to secure £1bn of assets under current administration with Cascade, and Andrew's foundations will allow our team to facilitate this growth in the coming year.

Andrew said: "Moving forward, Cascade is looking to scale up increasing distribution channels and routes into the market. Paul and Christian are perfectly placed to assist with this. The team are also focussed on integrating more with their advisory

audience and the leadership team is confident that further investment in the fintech with enhanced functionality for customers will make them an even more attractive option for many more savers. It has been a rewarding role, and as I move into other Non-Executive roles, I will continue to watch them with interest as I am sure their next growth will be impressive."

Emma concluded by saying: "Thank you to Andrew for his own input and as a board chair – we will be keeping in touch and recommend him as a chair if you want your business to build to profitability.

"Our thanks don't seem enough, and we all have a sense of sadness that his term is coming to an end. It is, however, very exciting that Paul and Christian will be sharing their knowledge and journey with us to help us navigate our scale-up stage and bring our goals to life.

"Andrew was exactly the right chair for the stressful but enjoyable part of Cascade's journey – he challenged us without conflict in a non-critical, collaborative way to assist us to get to better solutions. His involvement in and encouragement of us all to learn via Vistage has been so impactful for myself as CEO, and for our whole team. We feel ready to take on the next exciting stage, armed with knowledge and confident of our vision."



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...Despite rapid growth in recent years, the firm retains a genuine family feeling...

Lydia McCaslin

Solicitor of the month...

Lydia McCaslin

Partner and head of wills, probate and trusts at Mincoffs Solicitors.

What were your career ambitions growing up?

I have always been ambitious, but I never even considered a career as a solicitor as a child. I was fascinated by science and, despite advice to the contrary, I obtained a degree in Medical Microbiology from Newcastle University.

However, midway through my degree, I realised that a career in science was not for me. Having always been certain of my goal, I floundered in finding an alternative. I was interested by my flatmate's law degree and found out I could do a post-graduate conversion course to lead into a career in law.

I sometimes reflect on the circuitous route I took and wonder how things would have worked out had I followed a different path. Ultimately, I think that I would have reached the same destination. However, my experience has taught me a few lessons on the way, not least that I can be stubborn and should listen to the advice of others.

Tell us about your current role.

As well as client work, I have lots of other responsibilities related to the firm's strategic planning. I enjoy both aspects, especially really getting to know clients to understand their needs and helping them find practical solutions, which drew me to this area of law in the first place.

What is your proudest business achievement?

I'd have to say being promoted to head of department and then to partner. I joined the firm almost seven years ago when my children were at primary school and working around caring for them was difficult, but it was worth the effort.

How has your industry changed in the last decade?

Wills and probate is very traditional, but technology has improved practice hugely. Thanks to the online availability of resources such as statutes, case law and precedents, we can work more efficiently than ever before.

The Covid-19 pandemic required us to implement video calling and other technology that we were not making the most of beforehand, which allows more flexibility for clients and solicitors alike.

There's further change ahead, as the Law Commission reviews the Wills Act 1837, with a view to reforming the legislation. No changes have been implemented yet but there is hope of modernisation ahead, so it's an exciting time.

What are you currently working on?

I have a varied caseload. It includes advising on tax efficient wills for couples wanting to pass their wealth to the next generation, administering trusts, managing a contentious estate with our dispute resolution team, and handling an estate which requires submitting a hugely detailed account to HM Revenue & Customs.

I'm also involved in firmwide projects relating to the future of the business, and I enjoy the chance to use different skills and work with various teams.

Tell us about the team you work with.

Whilst I've been fortunate to work with some wonderful individuals in my career, I know from experience that the team at Mincoffs is something special. Despite rapid growth in recent years, the firm retains a genuine family feeling, which I think stems from us all having the same core values.

What has been your biggest challenge?

Probably keeping my chin up and continuing to do my job to the best of my ability whilst working with a very difficult person at a previous law firm. Support from friends and family got me through and, although it was a tough time, the experience taught me a lot and has contributed to the way I now lead my own team.

How do you unwind outside of work?

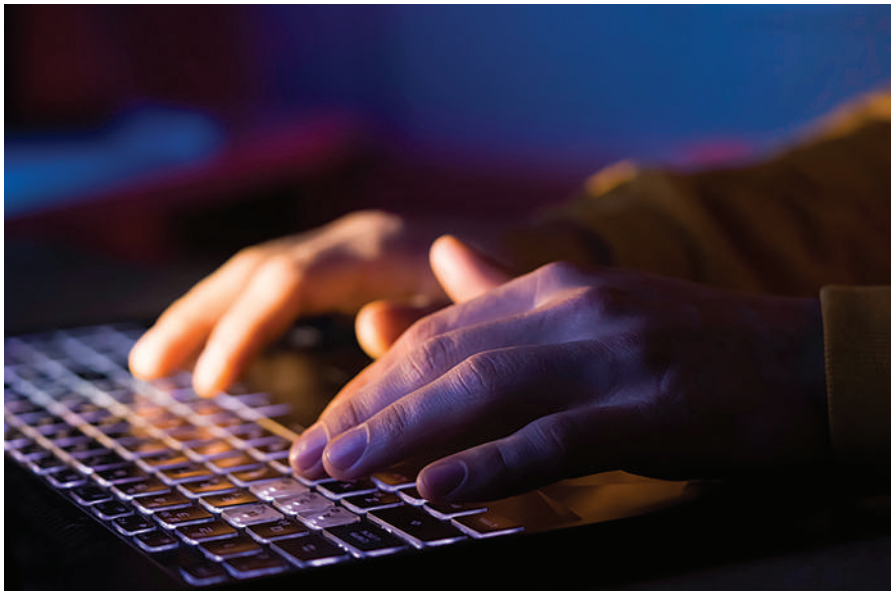
I like to keep active and am a keen runner. I have organised a team from Mincoffs to take part in this year's Great North Run to raise funds for St Oswald's Hospice.

I love nothing more than spending time with my husband and two teenage sons. We enjoy travelling to new places together and trying new foods. I'm looking forward to travelling in Italy with them this summer.

Favourite book and boxset?

I do watch TV, but I'd rather watch a film or read a book. I read every day and have been a member of the same book club for over 15 years, although that's much more about the company than the literature. There are too many good books out there to have a favourite, but I think *Demon Copperhead* by Barbara Kingsolver is the best I've ever read.

www.mincoffs.co.uk



It will cost you: penalties for breaking UK consumer law

Under the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Act 2024 (DMCCA), businesses can face severe penalties from the UK's Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) for non-compliance with UK consumer law.

Earlier this year, the CMA launched investigations into major tech companies under the DMCCA. Two of the investigations involve Apple and Google's mobile ecosystems, namely how their control over mobile operating systems, app stores, and web browsers may impact competition and consumer choice in the UK.

These investigations highlight the stringent regulatory environment in which businesses now operate under UK consumer law.

The consequences

1. Financial penalties on companies

The CMA has the power to directly impose financial penalties on businesses for consumer law breaches without having to issue proceedings through the courts. This represents one of the most significant changes in consumer law introduced by the DMCCA.

2. Fines for unfair commercial practices

For "unfair commercial practices" such as drip pricing (showing the consumer an initial headline price for a product and then adding further mandatory charges during the purchasing process) and other misleading practices, businesses can be fined up to £300,000 or 10% of their global annual turnover (whichever is higher).

Fines for SMEs may amount to hundreds of thousands of pounds, while large corporations could face penalties in the millions or even billions. The 10% global

annual turnover penalty limit under UK consumer law mirrors the maximum fine businesses can face for substantive breaches of UK competition law.

In certain circumstances, the DMCCA also grants the CMA the power to hold parent companies liable for consumer law breaches committed by their subsidiaries.

3. Daily fines

If a business provides materially false or misleading information (e.g. selling a premium service which is said to contain certain benefits which are then only available at an additional cost) or fails to comply with an information request from the CMA, the CMA has the power to fine the business up to £30,000 or £150,000, or up to 1% or 5% of global annual turnover (whichever is higher).

The £150,000 maximum fixed penalty or 5% global annual turnover cap (whichever is greater) applies to more serious breaches involving undertakings made to the CMA, CMA enforcement directions or orders.

The CMA can also impose daily fines of up to 5% of global daily turnover for continued non-compliance.

4. Penalties for individuals, including criminal prosecutions

The CMA can hold executives and other individuals personally liable for consumer law infringements by their company.

Directors and senior executives may face personal fines of up to £300,000 or even

criminal prosecution, including custodial sentences for serious breaches (where they have provided false or misleading information during a CMA investigation).

5. Compensation for consumers

The CMA can impose fines on businesses and require them to compensate individual consumers (via redress orders).

Consumers affected by anti-competitive or misleading practices can also file claims against non-compliant businesses. Legal battles can drain financial resources and damage investor confidence.

6. Directors' disqualification orders

Directors of companies face disqualification orders where they have been convicted of an indictable offence under the DMCCA.

7. Reputational damage

Non-compliance can also lead to reputational damage to businesses and loss of trust and confidence by consumers.

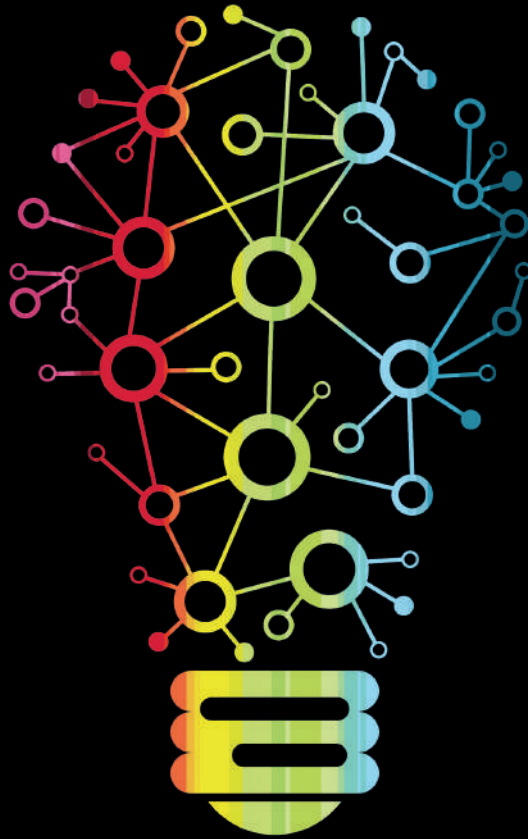
How can businesses prepare for the DMCCA?

Businesses can prepare for the changes introduced by the DMCCA by reviewing their current processes from a legal and compliance perspective. You may also need to consider providing additional training on the DMCCA within your organisation. If any part of the DMCCA or the CMA guidance is unclear, you should raise this with the CMA and any industry groups.

For more information, please contact david.wozniak@muckle-llp.com or 0191 211 7831.



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Employment tribunal pressures on employers set to continue

Roland Fairlamb is an Associate Solicitor at specialist employment law firm, Collingwood Legal. Roland considers the pressures already facing the Employment Tribunal (“ET”) service and the impact that the Labour Government’s Employment Rights Bill (“Bill”) may have on the service and on businesses faced with defending ET claims.

Increase in “open” cases in the ET service

Recent quarterly statistics released by the Ministry of Justice for the period of January – March 2025 show that the number of claims brought by employees (or ex-employees) of employer organisations in the ET are continuing to rise. Of particular concern, the receipt of claims is continuing to outpace the “disposal” of claims.

At the end of March 2025, there were 45,000 “open” single-claims (i.e. claims brought by one person) in the ET service. This is an increase of “live” single-claims of 32% compared to the same point in 2024.

The increase in open claims will be no surprise to users of the ET service, as significant delays in claims being heard and late postponements of hearings are commonplace. However, the current pressures on the ET service and on employers once the changes proposed in the Bill come into effect could further impact service levels and experiences.

The Bill’s proposals

With the backdrop of an ET service already creaking, the Bill signals a significant shift in the employment law landscape. Key proposals include the introduction of restrictions on the use of casual worker or “zero hour” contracts as well as new statutory limitations on the practice of “fire and re-hire”. The Bill also proposes to extend the time limits to bring a claim in the ET from three months (which is the case for most claims currently) to six months.



Roland Fairlamb

Arguably the most notable shift in the landscape that the Bill proposes is the removal of the requirement for an employee to have “qualifying service” of two continuous years in order to bring an “ordinary” unfair dismissal claim. In its place would be the introduction of “day one” employment rights and protection from unfair dismissal. This is particularly significant given unfair dismissal claims constituted the highest number of any “head of claim” received by the ET service over the 2024/2025 period, totalling 22% of claims received.

All of these changes stand to broaden the pool of employees who have employment protections with the potential of a further increase to claims being brought by employees through the ET.

What does this mean in practice?

We will have to wait and see where the finer details land following consultation of the proposed changes to the Bill (with the final changes likely to come into force in 2026 or later), but it is likely that the changes proposed will result in an increase in the number of claims brought in the ET.

Without further investment in the ET service, the practical impact of suggested changes in employment protections for employers is likely to be twofold: increased costs and further delays. Employers who have recently defended claims will likely be familiar with preliminary hearings being listed months in advance, postponements of hearings being announced on short-notice and delays in receiving responses to correspondence with the ET. This is likely to persist (and potentially deteriorate) once the changes are implemented, resulting in further frustration for employers given the time, effort and investment required to defend a claim.

About us

Collingwood Legal is a specialist employment law firm. We are highly skilled and experienced in managing ET claims on behalf of employers including how best to navigate pressures on the ET system. Please therefore do not hesitate to get in touch if this article is of interest and relevance to your business.

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Festival vibes take centre stage at Hay & Kilner's summer bash

Hay & Kilner welcomed nearly 200 clients, supporters and friends to its annual summer celebration – this year transformed into the vibrant “Hay Days Festival.”

Held at the firm's office on Newcastle Helix, the event featured street food, cocktails, glorious sunshine, signature festival cups and bucket hats aplenty! “Hay Days was a brilliant opportunity to reconnect and celebrate with the people who make our work so rewarding,” said Jonathan Waters, Managing Partner. “The energy and atmosphere made it a truly memorable evening for all.”







The future of wills – reform of the Wills Act 1837

Alicia Speed, a solicitor in the wills, probate and trusts team at Mincoffs Solicitors, details how the legislation governing wills may change in the near future.

The Law Commission recently completed a long-anticipated review of the Wills Act 1837, aiming to modernise the 187-year-old legislation. While no changes have been implemented yet, the proposals seek to modernise the law, better protect vulnerable individuals, and promote greater testamentary freedom.

Enabling electronic wills

The Law Commission is seeking to bring wills into the 21st century by allowing for the validity of electronically signed wills. Given the risks involved, especially in relation to witnessing, the Commission recommends specific requirements to ensure such wills are reliable. Protections would also be included for testators who may be vulnerable to duress or pressure when making an electronic will.

Abolishing revocation of wills after marriage or civil partnership

Currently, a will is revoked by marriage or civil partnership unless it is made in contemplation of the same. The Commission suggests this be reviewed, as revocation in these cases can be exploited in predatory marriages – a growing form of financial abuse. In such cases, intestacy rules could result in an entire estate passing to a new spouse or civil partner. The proposal aims to protect individuals from coercion and ensure wills cannot be invalidated in such circumstances.

Giving effect to wills that don't meet formal requirements

If a will is not executed properly then it is not valid, even if the testator's wishes are clear. The Law Commission recommends allowing courts the discretion to uphold such wills in exceptional cases, where the testator's intentions are evident. This would include safeguards requiring court approval and would be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Lowering the minimum age to 16

At present, a person must be aged 18 or over to make a will, unless they are serving in the armed forces. The Law Commission notes that some individuals under 18, such as terminally ill children or wealthy young people, may need to make a will. Without this ability, estranged parents could inherit under intestacy rules. Many other countries allow those aged over 16 to make wills, and this change would reflect the capacity of those aged between 16 and 18 to make other significant decisions.

Clarifying the requirement for mental capacity

There are currently two tests for mental capacity, depending on whether it's assessed directly when the will is made, or by a court using the Mental Capacity Act 2005. The Commission proposes adopting a single test: the modern approach in the 2005 Act. The older testamentary capacity standard is outdated, and using one clear legal standard would reduce confusion and modernise the law.

Further protection from undue influence

It is currently very difficult to challenge a will made under pressure, as the burden of proof lies with the person contesting the will. The Law Commission proposes giving courts the power to presume undue influence where there are clear and reasonable grounds for suspicion. This would make it easier to challenge suspicious wills and better protect vulnerable individuals from financial abuse.

Next steps

The Law Commission's report has now been submitted to Parliament, along with a draft bill. It is now for the Government to decide whether the proposals should be implemented.

For friendly, sensitive advice on any area of wills, probate and trusts, contact the department on probate@mincoffs.co.uk, or speak to one of the team on 0191 281 6151. www.mincoffs.co.uk



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The risks - and opportunities - of AI and intellectual property

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is transforming the way companies operate, from streamlining supply chains to generating marketing content. It's no surprise that businesses are also exploring how AI can support intellectual property (IP) management. Indeed, AI offers valuable tools such as automated prior art searches, portfolio tracking, deadline monitoring, and data analysis that can uncover potential IP opportunities.

AI's capabilities in intellectual property extend beyond basic administrative tasks. Machine learning algorithms can process vast patent databases in minutes, identifying potential conflicts or opportunities that might take human researchers days to uncover. Natural language processing can help translate complex technical descriptions into searchable terms, while predictive analytics can forecast patent landscape trends in emerging technologies.

For companies managing large IP portfolios, AI can provide real-time monitoring of competitor filings, track regulatory changes across multiple jurisdictions, and even suggest optimal filing strategies based on historical data. These capabilities represent genuine value for businesses seeking to maximise their IP investments while minimising administrative overhead.

However, relying on AI for critical IP decisions comes with significant risks. Intellectual property law is a complex field shaped by precedent, jurisdictional differences, and strategic considerations. While AI might flag similar patents or trademarks, it cannot assess legal validity, enforceability, or the broader impact on your business's long-term objectives.

When considering patent claims, the interpretation of claim wording is key. Seemingly minor differences in language can determine whether a patent is infringed or invalid. AI systems lack the contextual understanding to navigate these subtleties or to anticipate



Dominic Elsworth

how courts might interpret specific claim elements based on prosecution history or expert testimony.

Data security also matters. Sharing sensitive innovations or strategic plans with AI platforms, particularly third-party or cloud-based systems, can introduce confidentiality risks, potentially making proprietary information vulnerable.

Effective IP management requires alignment with a company's long-term vision. Is this a task for AI? This strategic dimension of IP management requires human insight that goes far beyond pattern recognition or data analysis which AI is capable of.

The best practice for companies looking to protect their innovations is to combine human expertise with careful, purposeful use of technology. AI excels as a research and administrative tool, but the critical decisions about what to protect, how to protect it, and when to act will be better with input from qualified professionals who understand both the technical landscape and business objectives.

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New partner appointment strengthens Wills, Trusts and Estates Team at a time of legislative change

A new partner with specialist expertise in succession planning and inheritance tax mitigation has joined Sintons' award winning and nationally recognised Team.

Anna Stephenson, a leading private client lawyer, has recently joined Sintons' Wills, Trusts and Estates Team. Anna previously headed up a Private Client Department at a firm in Durham and has been continuously recognised by legal directories for her technical ability and first-class client service.

Anna explained "I am absolutely delighted to join the Wills, Trusts and Estates Team at Sintons. I have a great deal of experience in providing inheritance tax advice and acting for clients whose estates include farms and family owned businesses. I thoroughly enjoy building relationships with clients allowing me to understand their goals and objectives and to find solutions that provide peace of mind to their estate planning. In joining the team I feel extremely confident that providing the highest possible level of client care is at the forefront of everything they do. It is exciting to be here, working alongside extremely talented lawyers.

Paul Collingwood, a partner in the team, welcomes Anna.

"Anna's arrival further strengthens the technical capabilities of our team. Anna is an incredibly well thought of solicitor and is a great addition to the team. Anna's arrival comes at a time of proposed significant amendments to the inheritance tax rules and the Wills Bill 2025 reforms" said Paul.

"The announcement by the Chancellor in the Autumn Budget of changes to inheritance tax reliefs are prompting the need for farmers and business owners to seek legal advice over their succession planning" said Paul. "The reforms proposed by the Wills Bill 2025 will also have an impact on a client's planning. It is essential that we have the capability to continue to provide clients with first-class legal advice in light of the proposed changes".

Reforms which have been recommended in the Wills Bill 2025 will modernise the law governing wills to ensure it is fit for purpose in the modern age. The reforms include enabling electronic wills to be formally valid, abolishing the law that a person's will is revoked on marriage or when they enter into a civil partnership, reducing the minimum age at which a person can make a will from 18 years to 16 years, and updating the capacity test to make a will so that it is aligned with the Mental Capacity Act 2005.

Sintons' Wills, Trusts and Estates Team, which is one of the largest such teams in the region, is highly ranked by independent guides such as the Legal 500 and Chambers & Partners, with senior members of the team regularly being named as leaders in their field.

Alongside this recognition, members of the team hold accreditation from the Society of Trust and Estate Practitioners (STEP), the Association of Lifetime Lawyers, and many are also Dementia Friends.

You can find out more at [sintons.co.uk](https://www.sintons.co.uk)





L-R: Anna Stephenson, Paul Nickalls and Paul Collingwood



Mincoffs raises a glass to 10 years of Fizz in the City

Mincoffs Solicitors recently celebrated the 10 year anniversary of its popular women's networking event, Fizz in the City.

More than 100 attendees gathered for the special event at As You Like It, Jesmond, which featured entertainment from talented North East string quartet Aurora Strings.

Spotlighting a chosen charity at each event, Mincoffs' Fizz in the City has raised thousands of pounds for worthwhile causes over the last decade, with the latest event raising money for The Millin Charity.

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On target for tomorrow's youth

NE Youth's annual clay pigeon shoot raises an incredible £91,000!

NE Youth hosted their annual Clay Pigeon shoot days, sponsored by Story Homes and Northumberland Estates at the end of last month and raised a incredible £91k

The charity are celebrating 90 years of supporting young people so the shoot this year was a very special event. Once again it took place at Hulne Priory in Alnwick, a record 41 teams took part in the corporate shoot on the Friday and the winners, by just a couple of shots was Widdrington Game, who scored 364/375!!

Sunday 29th NE Youth hosted the John Shallcross Memorial Shoot, with 27 teams competing. John has a great patron and friend of the charity who raised over £1 million during his 40 years of support. Swinburne Armed – were the winners

and proudly lifted the John Shallcross OBE Memorial Trophy.

John Niblo, CEO of NE Youth said: "WOW! £91K to celebrate our 90th anniversary!! We cant believe it!! A heartfelt thank you to our incredible sponsors and supporters who helped make the weekend an outstanding success—your generosity made it all possible. Special thanks to our headline sponsors, Story Homes and Northumberland Estates, whose backing and enthusiasm were vital to bringing the event to life. We're also grateful for the support of The Inn Collection Group, Bradley Hall, GFW, Ward Hadaway, Bywell Shooting Ground, R. Thornton & Co. Ltd., and Lindisfarne Homes. The shoot is one of my favourite events, we have people coming along and supporting NE Youth who've attended for over 30 years! The money raised over the weekend will change the lives of so many young people across the region and everyone involved should feel so proud. Thank you to everyone for supporting us and believing in the power of youth."

The 2026 shoot will take place on 26th and 28th June next year.

For more information about NE Youth visit: www.neyouth.org.uk





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People *Doing* Good...

Freemen of Newcastle upon Tyne welcome global heritage – and celebrate new inductions

The Freemen of Newcastle, whose lineage stretches back to the medieval trade companies of the 13th century, remain a living bridge between the city's rich past and its present-day cultural and civic life. Their custodianship of traditions like the Hoppings – Europe's largest travelling funfair – is matched by their commitment to honouring family heritage and community involvement.

One of this year's especially memorable moments was the swearing-in of Mike Carter, who made a remarkable journey from Manila, Philippines, to join the ranks of the Freemen – a dream several years in the making.

"It's something I've been working towards for the last two or three years, but the timing has always been difficult with my work in the United States and home life in the Philippines," said Mike. "But this year I made it – and the biggest reason was my son, Sam, who lives here in Newcastle. He's passionate about becoming a Freeman too, and this step makes it possible for him to continue the family



tradition." Mike's connection to the city is rooted in its maritime past. "My great-grandfather and grandfather were both Shipwrights here in Newcastle," he said. "Although my father wasn't involved in the trade, that legacy was passed on. My father would've loved to be here today, but at 85, the long journey was just too much."

Now based in Manila with his wife, Mike works internationally and has built a life far from Tyneside – but his heart clearly remains tied to the city. His son, Sam Carter, is preparing to follow in his father's footsteps as a Freeman later this year. "I've lived in Newcastle for over a decade and always felt proud of our family's roots here," said Sam. "From a young age I was fascinated by the Freemen and the sense of history they carry. Getting to be a part of that means a lot."



GITC raises £16,600 for North East charities in third annual golf day

Golf in the City (GITC) is proud to announce that its third annual Charity Golf Day, held in May 2025 at Ramside Hall and various local golf clubs, raised an impressive £16,600. The funds have been split equally between two outstanding regional charities: The Teesside Charity and the Newcastle Eagles Foundation.

With a network of over 90 corporate-led members, GITC has established itself as a powerful force for local good—bringing together businesses, golf enthusiasts, and community leaders to make a lasting impact. Alongside the flagship charity event, GITC hosts monthly golf days throughout the year, supporting regional causes while encouraging business collaboration.

Marc Millar, Chair of GITC and a Financial Adviser with North Wealth, based in Cleadon, said: "This year's event once again showed the power of the North East business community to come together and give back. We're thrilled to support two incredible charities that make such a difference to people's lives in our region. Thank you to everyone who took part, sponsored, donated, or supported us—you are the reason this is possible."

Sam Blake, Chief Executive of the Newcastle Eagles Foundation, commented: "We are so grateful to GITC for this generous donation. It will directly support our outreach and development programmes, using sport as a tool to inspire and uplift young people across the North East."

Voice Over Star volunteers with Radio Northumberland

Voice Over Artist Chris Kendall from Morpeth, Northumberland, grew up in Whitley Bay with an early and unshakable passion for radio. While other children were playing outside, Chris was wiring together old electronics, studying books on radio transmission, and broadcasting makeshift shows from his bedroom. By age nine, he had already built his own pirate radio station using walkie-talkies and cassette decks.

"I used to record fake weather reports and play songs off my mum's stereo, just to feel like I had an audience," Chris says. "I had no idea it would one day become my career."

By his teenage years, Chris was designing fully planned radio studios on paper and lobbying his school to support a student-run station. Eventually, he brought that vision to life outside of the classroom. After teaching 15 friends everything he knew about radio, Chris successfully led a team that won the prestigious Prince's Trust Millennium Award in 2003. With the funding, he launched HitMix 49, a legally licensed 30-day FM station run by young people, for their community in Whitley Bay—receiving over 60,000 listeners and even outperforming local commercial stations.



Today, Chris Kendall is one of Europe's most in-demand voiceover artists. His voice can be heard across major advertising campaigns, TV and radio commercials, corporate training content, and national broadcasters. He's lent his voice to projects for brands such as Google, Amazon, BBC, NHS, Dulux, and Dr.Pepper bringing messages to life with clarity and credibility.

Chris also mentors young talent entering the voiceover world and supports grassroots media projects in the North East, reflecting his belief in giving back to the community that shaped him. He's currently donating time to help community radio station Radio Northumberland.



Facing the crisis

By Stephen Bell, Chief Executive,
Changing Lives

How Changing Lives is
adapting to a new era of
homelessness.

The homelessness landscape in the UK has changed dramatically in recent years. We're witnessing a sharp rise in the number of people experiencing homelessness across the country, with youth homelessness now at an all-time high. The growing cost of living, welfare reforms, and widespread cuts to vital services have all contributed to a crisis that is pushing more and more people into vulnerable and unsafe situations.

At Changing Lives, this rise in homelessness has had a significant impact on our frontline services. Delivering support has become markedly more expensive than it was just five years ago. National Insurance contribution changes, rising living costs, and increasing overheads like rent and utilities have stretched our resources to the limit. As demand grows, our teams are under increasing strain—not just in terms of service delivery, but also personally, as they too feel the impact of today's economic pressures.

One of the most pressing issues we see daily is housing affordability. This challenge hits young people especially hard. Many are only eligible for £81.77 per month through Universal Credit—significantly less than those over 25—leaving them unable to access even social housing, let alone private rental options. It's a heartbreaking and unjust gap that too often locks young people out of safe, stable futures.

In response to these pressures, we've adapted quickly. We're constantly reviewing our service provision to maintain the

highest possible quality under tough conditions. The wellbeing of our staff remains a top priority, which is why we've strengthened our welfare package and created new roles—like Financial Inclusion Workers—to support both our clients and staff in maximising income. We're working closely with local authorities and partners to ensure every pound we spend delivers value, and we've revised our policies to reflect the changing needs of the people we support.

Demand is growing across all our service areas—from housing and recovery to domestic abuse, exploitation, and young people's support. Alongside rising demand, we're seeing increasing complexity in the challenges people face. This brings higher risks, requiring close engagement with safeguarding teams and other stakeholders to ensure people are protected and empowered.

The need for fundraising has never been more urgent. Last year alone, we supported more than 14,000 people. But rising homelessness, the cost-of-living crisis, and growing mental health needs are stretching our teams and resources to the edge. Without increased and sustained funding, we face the real risk of not being able to support people at the critical moment they reach out.

That's why regular, consistent community support is so vital. Monthly donations, no matter how small, give us the stability to plan ahead and act fast in a crisis. It's not just about money—it's about creating a deeper connection with our mission. Fundraisers and local businesses that support us, particularly those who make us their Charity of the Year, bring far more than funds. They bring networks, skills, and opportunities that help the people we work with build brighter, more independent futures.

Every donation we receive makes a tangible difference. It might pay for a warm bed for a young person sleeping rough, counselling for a woman escaping abuse, support to overcome addiction, or coaching to help someone find work again. It's about more



Stephen Bell

than services—it's about restoring dignity, creating opportunity, and giving people hope. Donations help people move from crisis to confidence.

Changing Lives is here to break the cycles that keep people trapped in crisis. We offer tailored support—from financial inclusion and budgeting advice to employability programmes through our Changing Lives Academy. We know that for many of the people we work with, employment might feel like a distant reality. That's why we focus on building people's strengths and helping them move forward at their own pace, toward safety, purpose, and independence.

If you're reading this and wondering how you can help, start today. Whether it's a one-off gift or, even better, a regular monthly donation, every act of generosity counts. You can take part in a fundraiser, volunteer your time, or nominate us as your workplace Charity of the Year.

It all makes a difference.

When you give to Changing Lives, you're helping someone move from the margins toward hope, dignity, and possibility. You're helping shape a future where no one is left behind.

Visit www.changing-lives.org.uk to find out how you can become a life-changer today.

Succession planning for a Charity's Board and Senior Leadership Team



Peter Neal

Succession planning is a vital yet often overlooked component of long-term sustainability in the charitable sector.

While many not-for-profit organisations focus heavily on delivering services and landing grants, donations and funds, planning for leadership transitions—both at the board and senior management levels—is essential to safeguard many things within an organisation.

The Experience Bank Group, often get charities coming to them with an urgent need to replace someone that is leaving, but by having a simple policy and procedure this urgency and associated stress can be significantly minimised. Here, founder Peter Neal, talks to us about his top tips:

Executive leaders (like the CEO or Charity Director) and volunteer leaders (like Trustees or Chairs) play a critical role in the stability and strategic running of the charity, so why would you not have a pre-prepared and carefully thought-through backup plan in place to ensure that the organisation can continue to function effectively despite unexpected (or even planned) leadership changes?

The loss of the right person in the right role can be very disruptive, leading to issues with mission continuity, governance and accountability (indeed sometime the Charities Commission will demand that a particular role is always filled), stakeholder

confidence, management of risk, and retention of other staff members.

My top tips for key components of succession planning for charities...

1. Assess current leadership and governance structure

Review the roles and responsibilities of both the senior staff and board members. In many charities, individuals may take on multiple responsibilities—understanding these dependencies is crucial for planning transitions effectively.

2. Identify critical roles

Focus on roles whose vacancy would significantly impact operations or governance. This typically includes:

- Charity Director or CEO
- Chief Operating Officer and key senior staff
- Board Chair
- Treasurer
- Committee Chairs

3. Embed succession planning in governance

The board of trustees should take responsibility for overseeing succession planning. This includes:

- Having a documented succession plan
- Reviewing the plan regularly (e.g., annually or at strategic planning intervals)
- Ensuring leadership development is a standing item in board discussions

For executive leadership succession, the board plays a central role in recruitment

and transition planning. For board succession, ensure clear terms of service, staggered rotations, and a trustee recruitment plan are in place.

4. Prepare for emergencies

Have an emergency succession plan in place, especially for the Charity Director or CEO. This plan should name an interim leader, define the authority of that individual, and outline communication protocols for staff, funders, and stakeholders.

5. External support

I work closely with many charities on an ongoing basis, helping with recruitment strategy, role descriptions, and succession planning. Having this relationship and having the collateral ready, with candidates already in mind, has helped many of my clients fill critical roles expediently. And, more importantly, with the right people.

It is important to remember that for charities, leadership transitions are not just personnel changes—they are mission-critical moments. A thoughtful, well-structured succession plan ensures that organisations continue to serve their communities effectively, so whether planning for board evolution, staff transitions, or emergency contingencies, succession planning is one of the most powerful tools a charity can use to protect its purpose and ensure long-term impact.

If you don't have your succession planning in hand and want to talk to me about how I can help, then please do get in touch on peter@theexperiencebank.co.uk

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

Whitley Bay



Gosforth



Wallsend



Our purpose-built Whitley Bay and Gosforth homes provide our happy residents with spacious, en-suite rooms, as well as gorgeous, landscaped gardens and a range of events and activities. Our kind and caring staff are there to help residents live fuller, more rewarding lives. Both homes are close to local transport links and shops.

"We laugh together, we comfort one another. It's absolutely amazing." A Whitley Bay resident.

Our Wallsend home has been specifically designed to enhance the lives of people living with dementia, with specially-trained staff seeing to our residents' specific needs. The home provides residents with lots of independence, features spacious grounds - including a special reminiscence area - and even has a hair salon, cafe, library and pub!

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Constructing Links

A Day of engagement, inspiration, and collaboration

In 2022, we joined forces with our long-standing clients, Lynas Engineers, to help bring to life a new kind of industry event, focused on sparking collaboration, strengthening regional supply chains, and connecting businesses across the Built Environment. That shared vision became Constructing Links, a conference that brings people together to inspire ideas, build relationships, and champion the power of working locally.

In June, we were proud to co-host the third edition of Constructing Links with Lynas Engineers, an impactful event designed to inspire future talent and promote meaningful collaboration across the construction and infrastructure sectors. Held at Middlesbrough Football Club, the day was split into two parts: an interactive, STEM-focused morning session with children from local schools, supported by the MFC Foundation, and an immersive exhibition event and thought-provoking panel discussion with industry leaders.

Morning: Inspiring young minds

The day began with an energetic and interactive morning session designed to engage local primary school children with the world of Engineering and the Built Environment. We welcomed two groups of primary school children and encouraged them to discover real-world Engineering concepts, in a fun, memorable way. Through hands on STEM challenges, from spaghetti and marshmallow structures to fizzy pop bottle rockets and drone demonstrations, students explored creativity, teamwork, and problem-solving.

It was amazing to see their curiosity in full swing. They learned through play, asked thoughtful questions, and witnessed first-hand the excitement of Engineering. Their experience was supported by local businesses, including ourselves, Tri-Tech, Lynas Engineers, Walker Morris, as well as Tees Valley Combined Authority and the MFC Foundation, helping deliver a morning full of energy, curiosity, and inspiration.



L-R: Michael Dixon (Wolviston Group), Joanne O'Brien (Tees Valley Combined Authority), Kirstie Rumis (NEPO), and Daniel Wade (Wade Construction Management Consultants), Rob Lynas (Lynas Engineers), Jessica Williams (Just Williams)



Afternoon: Collaboration in the Construction Industry

In the afternoon, we welcomed a panel of experienced professionals to explore the theme of collaboration across the sector. Speakers included Rob Lynas (Lynas Engineers), Joanne O'Brien (Tees Valley Combined Authority), Michael Dixon (Wolviston Group), Kirstie Rumis (NEPO), and Daniel Wade (Wade Construction Management Consultants).

The conversation touched on a range of timely issues. Rob Lynas discussed the benefits of the Preferred Partners initiative in fostering sector-wide collaboration, while Joanne O'Brien highlighted how local authorities are influencing national policy in this space. Michael Dixon reflected on the evolution of the sector and how businesses are adapting to new challenges.

Kirstie Rumis focused on Social Value in procurement, advocating for simpler assessment models and meaningful accountability. She also outlined NEPO's future approach to creating more inclusive opportunities for businesses of all sizes. Daniel Wade brought

a broader perspective, sharing common barriers to growth and collaboration and calling for changes to reduce project overruns and inefficiencies.

The panel wrapped up with a collective discussion on the strengths of the North East as a collaborative business environment, and how networks like this can support continued progress.

Preferred Partners: A catalyst for growth

Constructing Links once again showed the power of bringing together education, business, and public sector voices. The morning's energy from the students set a positive tone, while the afternoon's honest, solutions-focused panel gave real insight into the future of the sector. We're proud to support the Preferred Partners network, which continues to create tangible value for the region. So far, over £35 million worth of work has been channelled through local businesses in the network, fostering innovation, knowledge transfer, and inclusive supply chain access.

As we reflect on another successful edition of Constructing Links, we're already looking forward to what's next. Plans are underway for future Preferred Partners events that continue to connect, inform, and inspire our network. A big thank you to our panellists, exhibitors, and participating schools. We look forward to building on the conversations and connections sparked at the event and continuing to strengthen the links between our industries, communities, and future workforce.

www.justwilliams.co.uk

These events have been excellent for knowledge sharing, with a number of the key themes being shared across the organisations, this has allowed for engaging and informative discussions.

David Warwick, TGA Consulting Engineers

We're thrilled with the outstanding support from Lynas and the Preferred Partners this year. Collaborating with such a dedicated group has made a real difference at the grassroots level, highlighting the spirit of Teessiders coming together to create positive change.

Paul Shepherd, MFC Foundation



Operational calm in a chaotic world

There's a lot of noise in the world right now.

Economic volatility, global tensions, interest rate speculation, and supply chain issues — not to mention the school holidays creeping in and reshuffling how businesses function day to day.

It's no wonder so many business owners I speak to say the same thing: "It all feels a bit much."

When the outside world is unpredictable, the cracks inside a business start to show more quickly. Bottlenecks feel tighter. Team issues feel heavier. And small problems that were manageable when things were calm start to feel overwhelming.

That's where good operations come in - not as a silver bullet, but as a way to bring calm in the chaos.

What does "calm" really look like in business?

It's not about being polished or perfect. Calm looks like:

- **Everyone knowing what they're responsible for** – so decisions don't get stuck in limbo.
- **Having clear processes** – so things don't fall apart when one person is off.
- **Being able to look ahead** – rather than reacting to the same issues over and over.
- **Creating stability** – so your team feels grounded, even if the world doesn't.

None of that comes from buying a better system or adding more meetings. It comes from doing the quieter, behind-the-scenes work of building a business that runs well - not just sells well.



Helen Butler

Stress exposes structure

Periods of disruption (like summer holidays or economic shifts) are a real test of how well a business is built. If things start to wobble when one person takes time off or the external market shifts slightly, it's usually not the disruption that's the problem - it's the internal structure.

Many of the businesses I work with haven't done anything "wrong." They've grown quickly, adapted on the fly, and made it work. But over time, ways of working that were good enough at £1-2m turnover stop being sustainable - and stress brings those weaknesses to the surface.

That's not a failure. It's just a sign that the business has outgrown its current setup. And the good news? That can be fixed.

Calm is a leadership tool

Strong operations don't just help things run better - they create confidence. When the team knows what to expect, and the business isn't dependent on one or two people holding it all together, everything feels more manageable.

It becomes easier to make decisions. Easier to step back. Easier to weather the ups and downs - because you've built something that isn't fragile.

A good time to take stock

As we move into the summer holidays, many businesses naturally slow down a little. It's a perfect moment to pause, take stock, and ask:

- What feels harder than it should?
- Where are we reliant on one person?
- Do we have the capability in-house to keep things running well?

At Simplified Operations, we work with businesses to bring clarity, structure and calm to the way they run – whether that's through short-term support, or building internal capability that lasts.

If you'd like to explore opportunities to strengthen how your business operates – or you want to invest in the people running things day to day – we'd love to talk with you.

helen@simplifiedoperations.co.uk



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Annabel Graham

The future of work: Cultivating your leadership presence

Most mornings throughout the year, you can find me at Druridge Bay. I'll have one dog in tow, the other in the water acting part seal.

The beach shape-shifts daily thanks to the sea: Sometimes wild, sometimes resonant, sometimes windswept and a bit battered, and sometimes calm like glass. This moment of pause is crucial for me – a reset button.

How is this relevant to leadership presence? Remember – how we show up is how we lead!

Our daily lives are full of busy. Busy at home, at work; busy seems to be a badge of honour! I've lost count of the leaders I work with who turn up to a meeting stressed out, unprepared, as they simply have no space think.

We're not built well to cope with busy. In the mid 50s research by George Miller found we had a limited ability to process data – only between 5 and 9 pieces of information at any given moment, including sounds, images, experiences,

physical sensations, smell and taste. This was supported by psychologist Alan Baddeley who maintained executive function, our ability to process information in the moment was limited, leading to repeated research resulting in Sweller's theory of Cognitive Load in 1988.

Fast forward to present day, and the impact of smart phones is evident. Research for Nature Magazine in 2023 shows that our attention span has been negatively impacted by smart phones due to their notifications, distractions with short form content and our need to 'check in'. Add the distractions we have at work, emails, notifications, teams messages – is it any wonder our people are distracted, stressed out and struggle to process at work?

Pressing Pause

As leaders then, it's important to cultivate that pause for ourselves and for our people, otherwise our distraction adds to their distraction. Being conscious of how we present ourselves, how we show up is crucial.

We need to recognize that like beaches, humans aren't stuck in time. They change moment by moment, impacted by the sea of things that are buffeting them around, and this impacts their emotions. The person we talked to yesterday, won't be the same person today and we need to forget the version of them we had when we last left them.

Instead we need to meet them how and where they are now. And we do that through and by our presence.

How to cultivate presence

1. Consider your stance

You set the tone with your presence, how

you show up. Begin by checking your physical and mental posture—are you distracted, rushed, or disengaged? Presence starts with self-awareness. Calm your inner noise, slow your pace, and show up fully. The way you enter a room or virtual call speaks volumes so take those moments to prepare before you do.

2. Create the space to be present

Presence requires intention – how are you going to be? Turn meetings into moments of genuine connection by removing distractions and honouring the people in front of you. No lap tops, switch off your phone or put it away, turn off your notifications on every device (I'd say permanently) and focus. Presence isn't passive—it's a conscious choice and people value it.

3. Give people a good listening to

People are rarely asking for advice, they often just want to be heard. True listening is rare. Go beyond hearing words—notice tone, body language, and what's left unsaid. Validate their perspective without rushing to respond.

In our connected world, we forget the value of interpersonal connection. If we spend as much time on creating that as we do on our devices – what difference would we make?

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



Pascal Fintoni, AI & Digital Marketing Consultant

Photo credit: Lauren McWilliams

Happy Birthday ChatGPT, but where is the AI Revolution?

We will soon be marking the third anniversary of ChatGPT, released at the end of November 2022.

I must confess, I do like anniversaries, milestones and key events that have punctuated our collective technological history.

I thought we should pause to wonder, what role is artificial intelligence going to play in our business and personal lives, truthfully?

Looking Now: What should we focus on first?

Using Marketing and Sales as an example, here are a couple of suggestions which will help:

1. Rethink and Reset your AI Roadmap

This is an easy 8-step programme of activities and something that my clients have really enjoyed implementing:

1. Make a full list of all your essential business apps and tools, from admin to operations and marketing, etc.
2. Contact the software companies to ask about their AI features and book a demo.
3. Schedule AI training days for your upgraded tools, such as financial suite, CRM, website, social media dashboard.
4. Get more organised and use AI to help you create a 90-day content marketing plan for your chosen target customers.

Then move onto the 4 Rs of AI for digital marketing:

5. Rewrite sales messages and promotional content across all to better appeal to your prospects.
6. Repurpose all your content on your website, LinkedIn profiles and pages, and other directories, listings, etc. accessed customers.
7. Research your target customers' Trust Network (trade publications, trade show, membership organisations, etc.).
8. Reconnect with key contacts in that Trust Network to explore guest speaking, co-hosting webinars, thought pieces and advertising.

2. Rethink and reset your 'prompting' skills

I'm not a fan of the word prompt, I think it is misleading and uninspiring.

Here's a simple model to help you get better results from platforms like ChatGPT, Gemini, or Meta AI: A-B-C: Authority, Briefing, Complement.

Let's use the example of drafting a press release for an important trade publication.

Authority

Start by setting the assistant's expertise level by asking how it's done:

I need your help writing a press release announcing a new service.

Acting as my PR and marketing expert, can you outline the key structure and elements of a successful press release?

Briefing

Next, request the draft using an informative brief:

Acting as my expert copywriter and journalist, check the information below and using your suggested structure, please write a press release for [publication name].

- Info about your business, audience, products/services, features, and benefits.
- Details about the publication, its

readership, and your goals.

- Tone of voice (and words to avoid) and style.
- Additional facts, quotes, or supporting info.

Complement

Even the best draft can be refined. Try this: Thank you, this is a great first draft. As my PR and Marketing advisor, I have two follow-up questions:

- How can this be improved? Please provide suggestions in a table.
- What questions do you need answered to improve it further?

TOP TIP: Think of this as a one-hour expert consultation and get the most value by asking thoughtful, specific questions.

Looking Ahead: What is the next chapter in AI's story?

As we stand on the cusp of another leap forward, it's worth considering what the near future might bring.

And importantly, ask the question: Has the AI Revolution happened yet?

Well, almost, the next step appears to be the evolution of our current digital assistants into more sophisticated forms: Digital Agents, Digital Twins, and even Humanoid Robots.

We are all moments away from entering an era of unprecedented form of interaction with AI-powered solutions, a level of co-existence with technology that is turning science-fiction into science facts.

The potential of AI to improve our lives is immense, but so too is the need for thoughtful implementation and ethical considerations.

It is essential that we draw on the lessons from our past (both distant and recent) and aim to design AI solutions in ways that benefit all of humanity. The story of AI is still being written, and we all have a part to play in shaping its next chapters.

www.pascalfintoni.com



*Chris Major, Director of Care and Quality,
Abbeyfield Northumbria*

Chris Major promoted to Director of Care and Quality at Abbeyfield Northumbria

Not-for-profit residential care home provider, Abbeyfield Northumbria, has appointed Chris Major, as Director of Care and Quality.

Working for Abbeyfield in Newcastle for 20 years, Chris was previously registered manager for Castle Farm residential care home, close to Jesmond Dene.

As Chris takes on a wider regional role, Lisa Bunting, who has worked at Castle Farm for ten years, steps up from deputy manager to manager, as she takes on the role vacated by Chris.

Abbeyfield Northumbria has residential care homes in Alnwick, Gosforth and South Gosforth. It also has two supported living homes in Bamburgh and Berwick.

The homes are run on the principles established by the founder of the Abbeyfield Society, Richard Carr-Gomm in 1956.

Peter Standfield, chief executive of Abbeyfield Northumbria, said: "The Society is run to provide an enriched, caring and positive environment for our residents.

The retirement properties we run are there to offer elderly people an enjoyable and comfortable place to live in older age, and we are very proud of our organisation and the houses we run.

"Central to achieving this are the staff that we employ and their dedication to ensuring residents can enjoy a peaceful, relaxing and stimulating home. Over the 20-year period that Chris has been with Abbeyfield she has demonstrated her commitment to ensuring the highest standards of resident care, quality, management and leadership. We are delighted that she has taken up this new role, which is thoroughly deserved. At the same time, it is very reassuring that we have great continuity and seamless handover at Castle Farm, with Lisa Bunting, who now takes over the role as manager. The two have worked very closely together over many years and we are pleased to be

in a position to offer Chris and Lisa these two very significant promotions.

"These are exciting times for Abbeyfield Northumbria as we look to the future and plan investment in our properties, processes and people. As Director of Care and Quality, Chris will play a leading role in bringing our plans to life."

Chris, who is from Newcastle and began her career as a Youth Training Scheme care assistant, aged 16, has been a registered manager for 29 years. In her new role she will be responsible for over 100 staff and for care and quality across Abbeyfield Northumbria's five homes, working closely with the managers at each one.

Chris said: "It is a great honour to take up the position of Director of Care and Quality. It carries huge responsibility and I am reassured that I have the support and backing of a very experienced senior management team and staff across all our homes who are just as committed as myself to ensuring the highest standards of care, quality and safeguarding are in place all the time.

"Abbeyfield Northumbria is part of a vibrant network of care homes that operates across the UK and internationally, under the umbrella of the Abbeyfield Movement. While resident wellbeing is the absolute priority, as a registered charity it also provides a very caring and supportive environment for all those that work for it."

abbeyfieldnorthumbria.org.uk



Hypoint on the rise

Fresh investment elevates
Gateshead workspace.

At Hoult's Yard, we believe that businesses do their best work in spaces that are thoughtfully designed, well cared for, and full of potential. That's why we're continually reinvesting in our buildings, creating environments where businesses of all sizes can thrive.

Our Gateshead location, Hypoint, is the latest to benefit from this ongoing commitment.

Over the past year, we've been steadily upgrading the building, modernising interiors, enhancing energy performance, and refining the overall experience for the people who call Hypoint home. Now, we're entering a major new phase of refurbishment, one that will transform a full section of the building and bring 12 fully refurbished offices to the market.

This investment means much more than a lick of paint. We're delivering bright, professional spaces with improved lighting, energy-efficient heating, and contemporary finishes — offices that feel fresh, functional, and future-ready. Whether you're a growing startup or an established business looking for a new home, Hypoint offers the kind of quality you'd expect from a premium city workspace, with all the benefits of a Gateshead postcode.

We're not a landlord that waits for change — we make it happen. Our approach is proactive and considered, focused on long-term value for the businesses we support. From future-proofing through energy upgrades to creating spaces that are genuinely enjoyable to work in, our priority is ensuring our tenants have room to grow and space to succeed.

If you're searching for a well-connected, thoughtfully upgraded office space in the North East, Hypoint is ready to welcome you.

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L-R: Chris Wilson NTBF, Sangeeta Loomba NTBF, Kate Willits Direct Cars, Ingrid Johnson Awards Host, Ben Broadhead Turnbull's Funerals, Stuart Egan The Exchange, Angela Tuplin NTBF, Mark Renney Wubbleyou, Alice Lavery Keel Row Book, Michael James NTBF

Photo credit: The Bigger Picture Agency

North Tyneside Business Awards 2025: A celebration of local success and community impact

The North Tyneside Business Forum is proud to announce the return of the North Tyneside Business Awards, now in their 28th year, recognising the outstanding achievements, innovation, and community spirit of businesses across the borough.

This year's awards ceremony will take place on Thursday 20th November 2025 at the Village Hotel Cobalt Park, North Tyneside and will be hosted by popular broadcaster Ingrid Hagemann. The prestigious event will bring together businesses of all sizes and sectors to honour the hard work and excellence that define North Tyneside's thriving business landscape.

Businesses are invited to submit nominations in the following categories:

Technology Innovation – Celebrating businesses that embrace digital technologies and drive innovation in their industries.

Green Award – Doing My Bit for Climate Change – Recognising any steps, big or small, that a business is taking to be more sustainable or reduce its environmental impact.

New Business – Honouring a business that has made an impactful start since January 2024.

Heart of the Business – A category for employers to recognise a valued staff member who has become a true asset to the team.

Retail and Service Provider – Celebrating outstanding businesses that deliver exceptional customer service in the retail and service sectors.

All entries must be submitted by midnight on Friday 5th September 2025.

For 2025, the Heart of the Community Award has adopted a new format, with three nomination windows throughout the year and quarterly winners. This change ensures that businesses making a difference in their communities are recognised more consistently and meaningfully.

The award focuses on three key themes: Positive Impact, Collaboration, and Wellbeing. Quarterly winners will become finalists at the main awards ceremony in November.

Turnbull Funeral Directors have already been named the Positive Impact winner and first finalist of 2025.

The Collaboration winner will be announced in July, with more announcements to follow later in the year.

This refreshed approach celebrates the many ways North Tyneside businesses contribute to the community, spotlighting their efforts and inspiring others.

Michael James, Chair of the North Tyneside Business Forum, said: "The North Tyneside Business Awards have always been about more than trophies – they're a celebration of resilience, creativity, and community. This year, we're excited to be evolving the Heart of the Community Award to better reflect the year-round contributions our businesses make. We encourage every local business to get involved, share their stories, and help us highlight what makes North Tyneside such a vibrant place to live and work."

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

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

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

Smarter hiring, stronger teams

By Scott Smith,
Leader at People Spark Solutions

How psychometrics gives you the edge.

Hiring well is tough — especially for busy SMEs in tech, professional services and high growth businesses. Estimates suggest replacing a bad hire can cost 30–50% of their annual salary (or even more for specialist tech roles).

Beyond the direct costs, there's lost time, slower projects, and the hit to team morale. We help local organisations cut through the guesswork of hiring decisions using psychometrics.

That might sound a bit technical, maybe even intimidating - but stick with us. Psychometric tools can be some of the smartest, most practical ways to make better hiring decisions and build stronger, more productive teams. Whether you're hiring a new leader, developing your team, or trying to solve the mystery of why some teams click while others clash - psychometric assessments can help.

What are psychometrics (and why should you care)?

Psychometrics are simply tools that measure things like personality, behaviour, preferences, and ability. Think of them as an insight engine for your people. They help you understand what makes someone tick, how they like to work, and where they're likely to excel.

They're not about putting people in boxes. And they're certainly not a magic bullet. But when used well (and ethically), they're an invaluable extra layer of evidence alongside interviews and experience.

Why they matter for you

Hiring the right people is one of the hardest - and most important - challenges



for any growing business. A wrong hire at a senior level can be incredibly costly. Studies show bad hires also reduce morale, increase turnover, and slow down projects - costs that are even harder to measure, but potentially greater.

Psychometric assessments can help you:

- Understand how a candidate is likely to behave under pressure.
- See if their values align with your culture
- Spot potential challenge areas (or hidden strengths) early.
- Reduce unconscious bias in your selection process.

But it's not just about recruitment.

We also use psychometrics to support clients with:

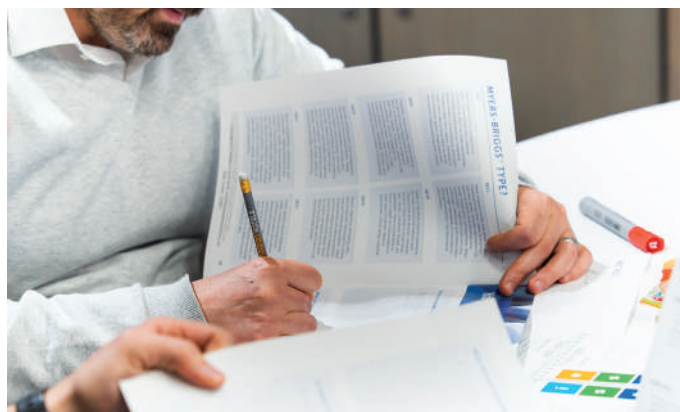
- **Leadership development** - helping managers and leaders understand their strengths and blind spots.
- **Team building** - boosting psychological safety, collaboration, and trust.
- **Succession planning** - identifying future leaders and supporting their growth.

We know what it's like to be short on time and budget, with a business to run. That's why we don't just hand over a psychometric report and wish you luck. We work with you through the entire process: choosing the right assessment for your needs, making sense of the results with clear feedback, turning insights into action.

For example, we've helped:

- North East SMEs making their first senior hire with formal assessments and 1:1 feedback for both the candidate and the hiring manager.
- Tech teams dealing with rapid growth to improve collaboration and communication through team personality workshops.
- Managers preparing for promotion to benchmark their skills and develop tailored growth plans with 1:1 coaching.

If you're curious about how psychometrics could support your business, we'd love to help – email: scott@peoplesparksolutions.co.uk



Reimagining the entrepreneur - reflective, responsible, realistic

Dr David Cliff continues from last month's exploration of what our entrepreneurs may look like in 20 years' time.

Part Two:

Part one highlighted the shifting public perception of entrepreneurs, the merging of business and political spheres, and the ethical void exposed by globalisation, environmental degradation, and rising inequality. The question posed was: what kind of entrepreneur does the future demand?

The entrepreneur of the future will not succeed on profit alone. They will need to be thinkers—reflective, systems-literate, and ethically grounded. Leadership without foresight is no longer leadership; it is a liability. Innovation without accountability is simply risk passed on to others.

It's not enough to sell a product if its packaging becomes oceanic debris. It's not enough to scale a platform if its data is exploited, its workforce underpaid, or its long-term impact unknown. The future entrepreneur must operate in a world where the cost of ignoring ethics is no longer reputational but existential.

Cryptocurrencies and digital finance have already revealed this fault line. What began as an attempt to decentralise power has also become a playground for grift and speculation. Scams are rife, protections are weak, and ordinary people are too often left holding the losses. We have seen what happens when systems innovate faster than ethics can follow.

But perhaps the greatest disruptor ahead is automation. AI, robotics, and machine learning are already reshaping the employment landscape. As industries streamline, millions will be displaced. By 2027, driverless vehicles alone could render



Dr David Cliff

entire sectors obsolete. These are not distant hypotheticals—they are imminent restructurings.

Already in Silicon Valley and beyond, voices are warning of a future where structural unemployment is permanent. Universal Basic Income (UBI) has been floated as a necessary response. But handing people a stipend to survive while they remain outside the economic system risks creating a new obligate proletariat—disconnected from production, ownership, and influence.

This raises deeper moral questions. Are we heading toward a technological caste system, where some are born into billionaire status and others into lifelong economic dependency? Without ownership, opportunity, or influence, entire swathes of the population may be consigned to a digitally managed underclass. What does it mean to be born into a world where your value is pre-determined by your relation—or lack thereof—to technology?

This is not hyperbole. It is a scaled-up continuation of trends we already see. Without ethical scrutiny, we risk hardwiring inequality into the very structure of society. And without systemic reform, this will not merely reflect a lack of social mobility—it will enforce it.

This is where ethics must return to the centre. Economic models must serve people, not the other way around. True

entrepreneurship must now include social design: the conscious development of systems that sustain dignity, autonomy, and inclusion.

This imperative is echoed in Vic Lessem's theory of the "metaphysical manager," articulated in *Global Management Principles*. Lessem envisioned leaders who understood not only their enterprise but its interconnection with wider human and ecological systems. The metaphysical manager sees the organisation as part of a greater whole, with responsibility not just to shareholders, but to communities and the planet. It is a model of leadership grounded in vision, stewardship, and the courage to act beyond self-interest.

If we fail to integrate such thinking, we may find ourselves facing a world split in two: a tech-enabled elite with limitless power, and a mass of economically warehoused citizens—subsidised, surveilled, and structurally excluded.

To prevent this, future entrepreneurs must do more than innovate—they must lead. And leading means grappling with values. Ethics must not be an accessory to business; they must be its foundation.

So, who will the entrepreneurs of 2045 be? That answer will depend not just on what they invent, but on what they believe—and how deeply they honour the future they are helping to create.

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Reservations

Strategic Acquisition positions Quantum for its next phase of Growth, backed by MARCH®

Leading engineering firm becomes part of national group to expand services, accelerate growth, and deliver sustainable asset care across the UK.

In a move that signals a major shift in the UK's industrial engineering landscape, Quantum Controls Limited and Q Electrical Industrial Services Limited together known as Quantum have been acquired by the national engineering group MARCH®.

This strategic acquisition positions Quantum for its next phase of growth, backed by MARCH's national reach and deep technical resources, while enabling MARCH to significantly expand its footprint in the maintenance of critical electrical assets. The deal reflects both companies' shared commitment to innovation, energy efficiency, and operational excellence.

North East roots, national impact

Founded in 1989, Quantum has grown into the UK's largest independent provider of turnkey solutions for variable

speed drives (VSDs), motors, and control panels. With over 100 employees and a strong customer base in utilities, manufacturing, and infrastructure, Quantum is widely regarded as a leader in energy-efficient engineering and preventative maintenance.

Their reputation for rapid response, technical excellence, and brand-agnostic support has made them a trusted partner for some of the country's most complex operational environments, from water treatment facilities to food processing lines.

Now, as part of MARCH®, Quantum's legacy as a North East success story is set to scale nationally.

"This marks an exciting new chapter," said Kevin Brown, founder of Quantum and now Executive Director within MARCH. "With MARCH's support, we're in a stronger position than ever to expand our services, enhance delivery, and drive innovation across the UK. I remain fully committed to the business and our customers as does our entire leadership team."

Complementary strengths, shared vision

MARCH®, formerly the Edwin James Group, is a national leader in critical engineering services with over 1,300 professionals across 24 UK sites. MARCH® specialises in managing complex, regulated environments, offering infrastructure support, systems integration, and digital automation to world-class organisations.

Adding Quantum to its portfolio enhances MARCH's already-strong offering in asset care, energy management, and decarbonisation, particularly within high-impact sectors such as utilities, life sciences, and manufacturing.

"Quantum brings specialist drive and motor expertise that aligns perfectly with our strategic direction," said Christopher Kehoe, CEO of MARCH. "Their experienced team, excellent customer relationships, and wide-ranging capabilities are an ideal fit as we continue to build a group that leads in asset performance and energy efficiency."

With over 350 active service partnerships and deep expertise across all major VSD and Motor brands, Quantum's value lies not just in its technical services but in its proactive approach to uptime, risk reduction, and sustainability.

The integration with MARCH ensures clients across both businesses benefit from expanded service offerings, 24/7 national support, and access to next-generation technology platforms, all while maintaining the personal service and local knowledge that customers rely on.





Importantly, the acquisition also strengthens MARCH's position under AMP8 frameworks, supporting water utility companies with specialist engineering services in one of the UK's most regulated sectors.

A shared commitment to growth

Quantum's entire team, including Managing Director Dan Fitzsimons and founder Kevin Brown, remains in place to ensure continuity and drive future growth. The company will continue to operate from its base in Prudhoe, Northumberland, reinforcing the region's status as a hub for industrial innovation.

"This partnership isn't about change for the sake of it," said Fitzsimons. "It's about building on what works and unlocking even greater value for our customers."

MARCH®, delivers critical engineering services to help the UK's most complex industries operate safely, efficiently, and sustainably. With over 1,300 employees, MARCH® supports customers in nuclear, food & beverage, aerospace, utilities, life sciences, and beyond, offering end-to-end lifecycle asset management and engineering solutions.

For more information:

www.march.co.uk

www.quantum-controls.co.uk



What the Willow Review Means for SMEs – and how Genee can help

Last month, The Willow Review was released, an independent, government-backed review, designed to help small business owners navigate sustainability and unlock its economic benefits.

The review delivered a clear message: businesses that embed sustainability into their core strategies will not only survive, but thrive.

The Willow Review found that 67% of SMEs who benefit from sustainability practices report reduced operational costs, and over half are attracting new customers. But turning this into action isn't always easy. That's where Genee and Investors in the Environment (iiE) step in, by providing an accessible accreditation scheme that supports organisations at every stage of their sustainability journey.

Genee: Making sustainability achievable for SMEs

Genee is a B Corp certified Environmental Consultancy, and the North East & North West Hub for Investors in the Environment, playing a critical role in helping businesses across the region take confident steps towards sustainability.

SMEs often face the greatest barriers, from time constraints to limited in-house expertise, but also have the most to gain. Through tailored support, training, and engagement, Genee helps organisations take their first steps, and keep going, on the path to sustainability. Our hands-on approach enables businesses to turn ambition into action, using the iiE framework as a structured and practical guide. Whether you're a start-up, charity, or a long-established SME, Genee provides a practical, affordable route into environmental management and certification.

What did the Willow Review find?

The Willow Review outlines five key areas for SMEs to focus on:

- **Start with Purpose:** the most resilient



Jo Holmes, Managing Director, Genee

businesses link sustainability to their values, strategy, and customer proposition.

- **Act on the Basics:** SMEs should begin with straightforward changes: reduce energy use, switch to sustainable materials, minimise waste, and review transport. These measures cut both costs and carbon.
- **Measure What Matters:** you can't manage what you don't measure. The review found that many SMEs struggle with data – yet tracking progress (even informally) is essential for accountability and improvement.
- **Get Support:** from green finance to peer mentoring, collaboration is key. The review calls for better access to advice, networks, and financial tools for SMEs.
- **Build Supply Chain Readiness:** more SMEs are now facing ESG expectations from clients, funders, and regulators. Futureproofing requires understanding and engaging your supply chain.

How iiE helps businesses respond

Investors in the Environment (iiE) is a nationally recognised environmental accreditation scheme that turns the Willow Review's recommendations into practical, measurable action:

- **Strategic Sustainability Support:** iiE helps organisations define a clear environmental policy, aligned with their purpose, brand, and community impact.
- **Practical Action Planning:** Using the iiE framework, organisations can create and

implement effective action plans across energy, transport, waste, biodiversity, and procurement.

- **Measurement and Baselines:** iiE provides tools and guidance to set baselines, monitor carbon footprints, and track progress – no matter your starting point.
- **External Recognition:** Achieving iiE certification demonstrates your commitment to sustainability, building trust with funders, clients, and your wider community.
- **Ongoing Support and Learning:** iiE members gain access to webinars, templates, coaching, and a peer network.

The opportunity ahead

The Willow Review confirms what many already know: the transition to a low-carbon, nature-positive economy is not just an environmental necessity, but a massive business opportunity.

With opportunities like Investors in the Environment, and access to existing templates and resources, as well as local consultants with Genee, sustainability is more achievable than ever.

Learn more about how Genee is helping North East businesses take the lead in sustainability by contacting us on jo@genee.org.uk, or visit www.genee.org.uk

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Collaborative Search are a Newcastle upon Tyne based Executive Search and Talent Management partner operating globally across all major industries.

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So, whether you are looking to hire exceptional people within your own team or an individual who may be interested in a career within the fast paced and rewarding world of Executive Search, please do not hesitate to reach out to Collaborative Search to arrange a confidential discussion today.

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Tariq Albassam

Restoring the Tyne to the heart of the action

By Tariq Albassam, Director of Operations at NE1 Ltd.

As we sail into August, we've just bid a fond farewell to the Nao Victoria, a stunning replica of a historic Spanish galleon.

A copy of the first ship to circumnavigate the world in the 16th century, the floating museum brought history to life and wowed the crowds during its two-week stay on the Quayside. The ship has now departed from NE1's Newcastle City Marina to complete its European voyage.

Seeing the vessel moored on the river in the shadow of the Tyne Bridge created a real buzz in the city and attracted visitors from near and far who boarded the ship to experience a historical adventure without ever leaving Newcastle's Quayside. Embarking on the boat from our famous riverside also evoked memories of Newcastle's own historic shipbuilding and maritime past.

Our relationship with the team at Nao Victoria began last year when we welcomed her sister ship, the Galeon Andalucia, to Spillers Wharf. That visit laid the foundations for this year's spectacular showcase in the very heart of the city. We were delighted to collaborate again, and although it took considerable effort to make it happen, the hard work was worthwhile and had the desired result, enlivening the river and attracting thousands of people to the Quayside.

At NE1, we've often said that bringing the River Tyne back to life with activity, events, and visitors will be a vital piece of the jigsaw for Newcastle city centre, and will help fulfil its potential as a European regional capital city.

It has been one of our consistent goals to make the Tyne and the Quayside a hub of activity, and it is one of the cornerstones of our Summer in the City events programme, which continues into September with more activity on the river.

We are fortunate to be a major European waterfront city boasting some of Newcastle's most iconic architectural assets in the buildings and bridges that line the Quayside.

But what is still distinctly lacking is activity on the water.

What other European waterfront city has so little activity on its river?

Across the globe, in other cities lucky enough to have a river at their heart, there's no end to the tours, trips, travel and activity options available to get people on or in the water. And that's exactly what we want for Newcastle, and we are working hard behind the scenes to make our vision a reality.

We've made real strides in bringing life back to the Tyne. Over the years, every time

we activate the river, whether through visiting ships, water sports, or major events, the response is overwhelming, proving just how much appetite there is for river-based experiences in Newcastle.

Building our Newcastle City Marina was a game-changer, allowing us to access the water from the heart of the city and enabling events to flourish and giving activities a home.

We are fortunate to work closely with CBK Adventures, a specialist water-based activity company that offers amazing kayaking tours on the Tyne. People can enjoy guided kayaking adventures on the river to see and experience the Quayside and its seven bridges from the water. These guided kayaking adventures use NE1's Newcastle City Marina as their starting point, with kayakers paddling under the bridges and along the river, whilst enjoying expert and knowledgeable guidance from the CBK team. These tours give locals and visitors a fresh perspective on the Quayside from the river itself, a rare view we don't get to enjoy often.

The marina is also home to one of our most popular annual events, NE1's Newcastle Dragon Boat race. Returning this year on 27th September, it is a lively, hotly contested event that has become an annual staple in the NE1 Summer in the City activity programme. Over 10,000 spectators enjoyed last year's event, together with a growing number of teams competing annually.

And, of course, the waterfront plays a crucial role over the weekend of the Great North Run. A series of races held on the Friday and Saturday attract tens of thousands of spectators to enjoy the festivities from the Quayside, the jewel in the city's crown.

At NE1 we are committed to making the river a year-round destination, not just as a backdrop but as the focus of the action.

We actively look for inspiration from other UK and European cities, and we are in talks with a number of potential partners, whether that's regarding river cruises, Lidos, a floating hotel, or luxury saunas. Ideas like this, and how other cities activate their waterfronts inspire us to think boldly and ambitiously about what is possible here in Newcastle.

It's high time that the Tyne became a hive of activity once again and took centre stage as one of the great rivers of the UK, Europe, and the world.

www.newcastlene1ltd.com

Not all Superheroes wear capes

When we think of superheroes, we often picture capes, masks, and impossible feats. But some of the greatest heroes among us wear combat boots, operate state-of-the-art artillery systems, and quietly go about serving their country—not for recognition, but out of sheer duty, discipline, and desire to make a difference.

I'm incredibly proud and humbled to serve as the Honorary Colonel of 101 Regiment Royal Artillery, part of the British Army Reserves—a role that's deeply personal to me and, I believe, one of the most meaningful titles I will ever hold.

A force that's always ready

The Army Reserves—often referred to as the “citizen soldiers”—are a critical part of the UK's defence capability. They make up approximately **one-sixth of our Armed Forces personnel**. These are everyday people with everyday jobs: teachers, engineers, nurses, business owners... who train on evenings and weekends and can be deployed anywhere in the world at a moment's notice.

In the North East, **101 Regiment** stands as a shining example of what dedication, community spirit, and professionalism look like. From operating cutting-edge MLRS (Multiple Launch Rocket Systems) to supporting civil authorities during floods or pandemics, our Reservists are integral to both national security and local resilience.

Two careers. One purpose

One of the greatest values of the Reserves is the dual-career model. You don't have to give up your civilian career to serve. In fact, the Reserve experience enhances your professional life. You gain **leadership, communication, resilience, and decision-making skills** that employers actively value.

You also get paid. Training is remunerated. There are tax-free annual bonuses, pension contributions, and access to Army-funded qualifications. But beyond the monetary rewards, it's the pride, purpose, and powerful sense of belonging that truly make it worthwhile.



Ammar Mirza CBE

A personal journey

My connection to the Armed Forces is lifelong. Generations of my family have served, and I've always admired their discipline and dignity.

As a teenager growing up in Newcastle, I joined the cadets. Every week, I'd get on the **Number 1 bus**, proudly wearing my uniform. Sitting at the back, I'd **often face abuse and mockery**—people didn't understand. But I held my head high. I wasn't just wearing fabric—I was wearing values.

Once that bus pulled into **Slatyford**, everything changed. It was like stepping into a different world. One where I was respected, accepted, and **part of something bigger than myself**. I learnt discipline, gained self-respect, and developed life-changing skills that have shaped who I am today. That sense of community and common purpose is something I carry with me in everything I do.

Our forces. Our family

Everyone knows someone connected to the Armed Forces. A friend, a neighbour, a relative. They are the ones who respond when storms hit, when pandemics strike, and when our freedoms need defending. They are there in the hardest moments and the humblest. During **COVID-19**, the floods, or even major public events, the Armed

Forces are always ready to serve. Yet they rarely ask for thanks.

So let this be that recognition. This is for every man and woman in uniform, and for those in civvies who train every week to step into uniform when the country needs them.

Be part of something bigger

If you've ever thought, “I want to do more”—the Army Reserves might be the answer. Whether you're 18 or 50, there are roles and routes to suit everyone. You'll build friendships, unlock potential, and gain a second family, all while still pursuing your own career.

So, here's my call to action: Reach out. Learn more. Support our Armed Forces. And if you're looking to give more back—consider joining the Reserves.

Because not all superheroes wear capes. Some wear berets, carry packs, and change lives. Starting with their own.

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



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Social Media Training

Really good workshop. Lots to think through. Personas is an excellent next step and dedicated marketing plan. Really great session - thank you.



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SME CofE were a huge help to me to get my business started. The branding work done was brilliant, guided me painlessly through the design process and the final outputs were fantastic.



Videography

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Recruitment with Pride

By Kathryn Rodgers, face2faceHR

How to build LGBTQ+ inclusion into your hiring process.

As Pride Month invites reflection on LGBTQ+ inclusion, it's also a powerful prompt for organisations to look closely at how inclusive their recruitment processes really are. It's not enough to say "everyone is welcome." A truly inclusive hiring approach actively reassures LGBTQ+ candidates that they'll be respected, valued, and safe.

So, how inclusive is your recruitment? Here are five key areas worth reviewing.

Job descriptions: The power of language

The words we use shape perceptions. Job ads full of gendered language or culture-specific clichés can unintentionally send the wrong message. Phrases like "must fit into a fast-paced, young team" may alienate candidates who don't see themselves represented.

Tips:

- Use gender-neutral pronouns (e.g. "they" instead of "he/she").
- Ditch stereotypical descriptors and corporate buzzwords that suggest a narrow fit.
- Include a clear statement on inclusion and belonging to reinforce your commitment to diversity.

Application forms: Built for everyone?

Application forms can be a clear indicator of how much thought has gone into genuine inclusivity.

Check for:

- **Gender options** beyond just 'male' or 'female', and consider adding a free-text field.
- **Title selections** that include inclusive options like 'Mx', or consider removing title fields altogether.
- **Preferred name fields** so candidates can indicate the name they use, which is essential for trans and non-binary applicants.

Your internal systems should also allow for name and gender changes during employment, signalling long-term inclusivity.

The interview process: Reducing bias, building trust

Interviews are high-pressure moments – even more so for LGBTQ+ candidates who

may have experienced discrimination in the past.

Inclusive practices include:

- Training hiring managers on unconscious bias and LGBTQ+ awareness.
- Avoid overly personal or identity-related questions unless relevant and handled sensitively.
- Ensuring interview panels are diverse, reinforcing your commitment to representation.

Even small gestures, such as stating pronouns at the start of an interview, can help set the tone for a more welcoming environment.

Representation: What do candidates see?

Before applying, candidates will explore your online presence. If your website, careers page, or social media show no visible commitment to LGBTQ+ inclusion, they may assume your workplace isn't safe for them.

Show you're serious by including:

- Stories or testimonials from LGBTQ+ employees.
- Evidence of inclusive policies and employee networks.
- Visible support for Pride Month and other moments of LGBTQ+ visibility.

Tracking progress: The role of data

You can't improve what you don't

measure. Inclusive recruitment requires accountability, but collecting data around sexual orientation and gender identity must be done with care.

Use anonymous surveys or voluntary self-ID processes and be transparent about:

- Why is the data being collected?
- How will it be used?
- How will it be protected?

This builds the trust needed for honest responses and long-term improvement.

Final Thoughts

Inclusive recruitment isn't a box-ticking exercise. It's a visible signal that your organisation sees, hears, and values every candidate for exactly who they are.

HR professionals play a vital role in shaping that message. By weaving LGBTQ+ inclusion through every stage of the hiring journey, we can lead the way in building workplaces that are not only diverse but truly equitable and empowering.

Pride Month is a time to celebrate – but it's also a time to act. Let's make our recruitment practices reflect the kind of workplaces we all want to be part of. If you'd like guidance on making your recruitment practices more inclusive, feel free to get in touch.

Kathryn Rodgers
face2faceHR Newcastle
www.face2faceHR.com | 07946 330 025



Kathryn Rodgers

Pic Credit: RIMPhotography

James Carss and Castle Peak Group – the right way to do recruitment



Bringing diversity to the workplace.

Are you a senior person who makes decisions for your company? Are you one of the directors or part of the senior management team? Do colleagues look to you for leadership? Bearing in mind that Northern Insight magazine is aimed at business people, we reckon you'll fit into one of those categories.

Okay, so if you answer yes to any of those questions, here's a suggestion.

Take a look around and make a careful note of the people you work closely with...other senior managers or directors...the makers and shakers within the business...and see whether you think those people reflect what should be a diverse and inclusive workforce.

Do those senior people reflect the rest of the workforce?

Do they reflect your customers or clients?

If they don't, you have a problem.

Not only are you and your business failing to do the right thing, you could be missing out on growing your business, increasing

profits and ensuring that you have a content workforce.

"Here at Castle Peak we are an executive search business who ensures that the right person is not only right for the job and is capable of doing it, but that they reflect the workforce and the people the company deals with," said James Carss, founder and MD of Castle Peak. "The majority of our clients are mainly from the third sector in housing, education and health, but we are working more and more frequently with businesses or all shapes and sizes from a whole raft of sectors who are keen to be inclusive. Those commercial organisations recognise that being inclusive from top to bottom is not only the best way to operate and certainly gives them a good image, but that research shows diversity within any business improves employee engagement and the potential for increased profits."

In other words, it's a win-win for any business.

Here's a tip. Go onto the Castle Peak Group website (castlepeak-group.com) and check out an extensive...and revealing... piece of research that was undertaken by the company to study inclusivity in the workplace and what sort of effects it can have, both positive and negative. It's

called 'Progress Under Pressure.' You'll find examples of what inclusivity is as well as being able to read comments from senior people who work for some of the region's leading housing sector firms. You'll recognise the names. The housing sector is naturally rooted in the communities it serves and recognises the need to reflect them in its leadership.

Yes, the research concentrates largely on the housing sector...but...those businesses are run using the same sort of principles that every business runs on and, let's face it, every business has one major aim. Make money.

Being diverse and inclusive is a great place to start.

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 email 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



“

*...Feedback
from the cohort
members
this year was
outstanding...*

Andrew Marsh

A Vistage Retreat

Every year Vistage members from the North East and Northumberland enjoy a two-day retreat in a country hotel focussing on themselves and their business.

A business retreat offers numerous benefits for both employees and leadership teams. These off-site gatherings allow people to step away from daily operations to focus on strategy and personal development.

This year, chair Andrew Marsh, held two retreats for his growing number of cohorts. Here he talks about the benefits and shares insights into the 2025 experience.

“The venue for this year’s retreats was Crathorne Hall. Chosen for its peaceful location, the venue is within an hour’s drive for most members and of course, it was attractive because of its great reputation for food!

“The retreats give attendees the chance to step away from their business, hear some fabulous keynote speakers and reflect on changes they can make to improve themselves and their businesses performance.

“The members who attended come from a range of industries and sectors, including marketing, software, health, hospitality, charitable, financial, motor, legal and more. But the beauty of the retreats is that everything we learn is adaptable, applicable to every situation.

“This year our speakers focused on a range of topics, and one had us laughing like never before as Kate The Great had us exploring the power of laughter, connection and business.

“Kate Hull Rodgers is an international leading authority on the strategic use of Humour in the Workplace. She has pioneered work in the fields of laughter therapy, stress management, communication and networking. For the past 18 years her advice has been sought by governments, health organizations and businesses in 29 countries on five continents.

“From lying on the floor with each other in hotel near Yarm, to telling each other the best stories and finding the funny in it, we focused on how to develop a GSOH which will have positive impact on stress prevention, team working, morale, communication, and work life balance. The feedback from all was that we all learnt a lot and agreed the sore sides were worth it!

“Another speaker had us Goal Mapping - genius life planner Brian Mayne had travelled all the way from the Isle of Whyte to be with us and delivered a session that had more takeaways than we could believe. Brian believes that Goal Mapping is the way to help change your dreams into reality.

“As well as goal mapping for our personal dreams, in these fast-moving times, if any organisation is to succeed, it must be dynamic, flexible and creative with a focus and a plan on how to get there. Every area of any organisation or group, needs to be goal orientated for success. Brian showed us how

Goal Mapping is the master skill for achievement in all areas of life and is undoubtedly the most powerful empowerment programme available to businesses today.

“So much so, we all left armed with our life maps and goals maps feeling ready to take on the world!

“As well as doing the hard work during the day time, engaging with sessions out of our comfort zone to learn new approaches, we also enjoyed some down time, culminating in a three-course black tie dinner. As part of relaxing, we debriefed on the day’s activities and ideas how we would all take them back to our teams. It was a very animated conversation!

“Feedback from the cohort members this year was outstanding and I look forward to seeing the impact resulting from the retreats!”

Members feedback included:

“What a few days! An amazing opportunity, thank you Andrew.”

“My brain is buzzing with a new found gusto.”

“An incredible few days that will definitely change my approach with my team.”

If this sounds like something that appeals to you, there are just a few spaces left in my three cohorts. Do get in touch to discuss further! Andrew.Marsh@vistage-chair.co.uk





Diane MacTavish

Employment Rights Bill

Implementation Timeline

The government have announced their roadmap for the implementation of the Employment Rights Bill. Below are the dates that the key changes will be enacted.

Immediately after the Bill is passed

Changes to trade union rules, making it simpler to organise action.

This will also increase protections for taking industrial action.

April 2026

- The protective award for collective redundancies will double, from 90 days to 180.
- Paternity Leave and Unpaid Parental Leave will be available from day one of employment.
- The Fair Work Agency - a new employment watchdog - will be established.
- Statutory Sick Pay will become available from first day of absence, with the Lower Earnings Limit removed.

- The trade union recognition process will be simplified, and electronic and workplace balloting will be introduced.

October 2026

- Changes to ban 'fire and rehire'.
- Further changes to trade union laws, strengthening their right of access, adding a duty to inform workers of their right to join, and added protections for trade union reps.
- A new obligation to not permit third-party harassment, as well as take 'all reasonable steps' to prevent sexual harassment.
- Employment tribunal claim limits will be extended from three months to six months.

In 2027

- Flexible working to become the 'default'.
- The threshold for collective consultation in collective redundancies will be changed.
- Changes to bereavement leave, making it available for a larger quantity of employees.
- Changes to zero-hour contracts (also applied to agency workers), giving them the right to guaranteed hours based on a reference period.

- Protection from unfair dismissal will become a day one right for employees.

These changes will undoubtedly have an impact on your business. But, with proper people planning, that starts from now, you can mitigate this.

Here at the HR Dept, we are seeking to ensure that SME's in the country have a voice in this and we are working hard behind the scenes to lobby and campaign, within the consultations that will be happening around a lot of these changes to inform how these changes are impact on micro, small and medium businesses.

In the meantime, whilst some things might seem like a way off, you do need to be planning for it all now in order to give your business the best chance with these changes and not be on the back foot.

At the HR Dept, we can help and support you with this, you are not alone. We can review your contract and handbooks, run a full HR audit for you, review your processes like recruitment, induction and probation, bullying and harassment, sickness management, training up your managers, to name but a few.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if we can help you at all, on 01912838732. The HR Dept is here to support you through it.



Ian Kinnery

Your ideal client

Someone once said they didn't know the secret to success, but they did know the secret to failure: trying to please everyone, all the time.

The reality is not all clients are created equal.

Identifying your ideal client isn't just helpful—it's a strategic necessity. In business, we often use the term Core Customer to describe this ideal client.

A Core Customer is both willing and able to buy your product, at your price, and in sufficient quantities.

Successful businesses go beyond simply identifying who their Core Customers are. They take the time to understand them in detail—their personalities, motivations, buying habits, timing and reason for purchasing.

With this insight, they can design their product or service to fit the customer like a perfectly tailored suit.

As the 'father of modern business management' Peter Drucker once put it: "The aim of marketing is to know and understand the customer so well the product or service fits him and sells itself."

When we truly understand our customers, we no longer need to force them to fit our offering.

Instead, we've crafted a solution that aligns naturally with their needs—then we reap the benefits that come from it

The challenge is that too many businesses fail to apply the level of rigour and disciplined thinking this process demands.

Even when insights are gathered, they're often not shared deeply or frequently enough throughout the organisation to drive meaningful change.

Kinnery.co.uk

Q&A with Nicola Myers, CEO of Saint Teresa's Hospice

How did your journey with Ian Kinnery begin?

I was introduced to Ian through a professional contact who spoke very highly of his work. When I transitioned overnight from Finance Director to CEO, I knew I needed someone who could challenge my thinking and support me in growing into that role. Ian stood out as confident, experienced and incredibly engaging – I felt inspired after our first conversation.

What kind of impact has working with Ian had on your leadership?

It's been transformative. Ian has helped me develop clarity, self-awareness and resilience. I've become a more intentional, reflective leader. His support has been instrumental during key decisions as he offers a space to speak openly and provides the tools I need to succeed.

How has this impacted the hospice as a whole?

We've seen real results – stronger internal communication, a clear strategic plan, improved staff engagement, and better team alignment. The ripple effect of my own development as a leader has extended throughout the organisation, raising morale and performance.



Nicola Myers

What sets Ian apart as a coach?

He's a brilliant listener with a rare mix of empathy, wisdom and challenge. He never imposes, but he does hold a mirror up – gently and persistently – to help me see what I need to. I often find myself thinking, "What would Ian say?" before I head into meetings.

Would you recommend working with Ian?

Absolutely. His presence brings calm, clarity and honesty. It can be lonely at the top, but having someone objective and wholly focused on your growth is incredibly powerful. Ian's support has made a lasting difference to me – and to the hospice.

To find out more visit www.kinnery.co.uk

You might never feel ready, and that's Ok

Bryony Gibson, director of Bryony Gibson Consulting, reflects on the fear of change and why waiting to feel ready for a career move might be holding you back.

Over the years, I've lost count of the number of conversations I've had with accounting professionals who tell me they're thinking about moving jobs, but they're waiting until they feel ready.

It's such a common theme, and one I completely understand. Making a career change is a big decision. You want to feel certain it's the right move. Confident in your next step. And fully prepared for the disruption that comes with this kind of change.

But, what I've learned from more than 20 years of working in recruitment across the North East is that the feeling of being "ready" very rarely comes.

Fear of change is normal

Recent research backs me up. A study across the UK workforce found that nearly half of workers are too scared of change to leave their job, even when they're unhappy. The survey went on to describe us as a nation with a "growing culture of caution", with fear of change holding people back and, arguably, the wider economy.

I see this play out in public practice firms all the time. People tell themselves they'll think about moving after the next busy season, or once their children are older, or when the economy improves, or they've had their next bonus. There's always a reason to stay in your comfort zone if you look hard enough.

And while it often feels safer to stay where you are, that safety can come with a cost. Growing stress, frustration, stagnation, and



Bryony Gibson

the creeping sense that you're not fulfilling your potential can build up over time, leading to an unhappy working life.

Being ready isn't a feeling; it's a decision

One of the things I have noticed is that people who successfully make a career move don't do it because they suddenly feel brave. They do it because they decide to take action, whether they are scared or not.

And it's important to realise that taking action doesn't have to mean handing in your notice tomorrow. You might start with a simple moment of reflection, asking yourself:

- Am I still growing and learning here?
- Does this role support the life I want?
- If nothing changes in the next year, will I feel content?

If the answer to that last question is no, then maybe the question isn't "Am I ready to move?" but "Am I ready to stop feeling stuck?"

Why waiting rarely works

In my experience, saying you are waiting

to feel ready is a mechanism people use to protect themselves from the risks they associate with change. In reality, change rarely gets easier with time. It's a bit like standing on the edge of a cold swimming pool. You can spend ages dipping a toe in, telling yourself you'll jump when the water feels warmer, but the only way to get used to it is to take the plunge.

Of course, that doesn't mean rushing into a decision and doing something reckless. But it does mean recognising that clarity often comes from taking action, not from standing still.

You don't have to do it alone

In my experience, the best first step is a simple conversation with someone you trust, and some gentle exploration of what's out there. That can be enough to start building confidence.

It's a cliché, but nothing changes if nothing changes. So, if you've been waiting for the perfect moment to move your career forward, maybe it's time to stop waiting and start asking yourself what you really want. Then move towards it.

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Landlords: Why the Renters' Rights Bill demands urgent action

The Renters' Rights Bill, introduced by the Labour government, marks a major shake-up of England's private rented sector. Abolishing Section 21 "no-fault" evictions, the Bill moves all tenancies to a rolling monthly basis, eliminates fixed-term assured shorthold tenancies, and ensures landlords can only evict under specific legal grounds.

Landlords will now need to use Section 8 notices, backed by evidence, to regain possession. The list of possession grounds is expanding significantly, including new requirements such as extended notice periods when selling or moving into a property. Tenants will also benefit from enhanced protections: rent increases will be capped to once a year and must be in line with market value, with a fair appeal process in place.

Other key changes include a ban on rent bidding, restrictions on upfront rent demands, tighter health and safety regulations under Awaab's Law, and stricter property condition standards. Discrimination against tenants with children or on benefits will be outlawed, and tenants will have the right to request pets in rental properties.

For landlords, preparation is essential. All tenancy agreements must be reviewed and updated. Strong documentation will be crucial to support any future possession claims. With increased regulation, including compulsory membership of a new ombudsman and compliance with improved housing standards, it's more important than ever to seek expert support.

At Wright Residential, we specialise in helping landlords navigate



change. From updating legal documents to advising on compliance and tenant relations, our experienced team is here to support you every step of the way.

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Job titles are dead. Long live skills

For decades, careers were built around job titles. Employees advanced their career by climbing hierarchies defined by fixed roles, and learning was tailored to job-specific tasks.

But as technology evolves and industries transform, that model is breaking down. Here, Jen Tait explores the emergence of a more agile, future-ready approach: the skills-based organisation.

At its core, a skills-based organisation (SBO) focuses not on job roles, but on the skills people have, or need to develop, to deliver value. Instead of asking, “What is your job title?” companies are now asking, “What can you do, and what can you learn next?”

Why the Shift?

Several forces are driving this transformation:

- **Work is changing faster than jobs:** According to the World Economic Forum, half of all employees will need reskilling by 2025 due to automation and AI.
- **Talent shortages are growing:** Traditional recruitment methods often exclude capable individuals who don't

match narrow job criteria. A skills-first lens opens the door to broader talent pools.

- **Employees want mobility:** People no longer want to stay in a single role for years. Internal mobility, powered by skill transparency, is key to retention.

As a result, forward-thinking companies are reorganising around skills. Organisations like Unilever, IBM, and Schneider Electric are leading the charge, using AI-driven skills platforms, internal talent marketplaces, and learning pathways that prioritise potential.

What This Means for L&D

The rise of SBOs has profound implications for Learning & Development.

1. Learning is becoming more personalised: Instead of assigning the same compliance modules to everyone, L&D teams are now curating individual skill-building journeys. Adaptive learning platforms use skills data to recommend relevant content, helping people build exactly what they need, when they need it.

2. Learning is tied to business strategy:

As explained in the July edition of Northern Insight, L&D is no longer a support function—it's a strategic driver of transformation. If an organisation wants to enter a new market, adopt a new technology, or improve customer experience, it must build the required skills internally. This means L&D must understand business goals and translate them into agile learning programs.

3. Skill visibility becomes essential: Many companies still don't know what skills exist within their workforce. Skills-based organisations invest in platforms that map skills at scale, often using AI and self-

assessments. This data not only informs learning but supports smarter workforce planning and internal hiring.

4. Managers must become skill coaches:

Leaders need to shift from task delegators to capability builders. This requires training managers to have meaningful development conversations, give real-time feedback, and spot hidden talents on their teams.

Challenges on the Path

Transitioning to a skills-based model isn't without hurdles. There are concerns about data accuracy and employee privacy. And most significantly, it requires a cultural shift, from valuing titles and tenure to celebrating growth and adaptability.

But the risks of not changing are greater. Rigid job structures can limit innovation and leave organisations flat-footed in the face of disruption.

A More Equitable Model of Work?

One of the most powerful aspects of a skills-first approach is its potential to promote equity and inclusion. By decoupling opportunity from degrees, job titles, or networks, SBOs open the door to talented individuals who might otherwise be overlooked. Apprenticeships, bootcamps, and self-directed learning can carry as much weight as formal education, if skills are the currency.

As more companies make this shift, the role of L&D will only grow in importance. The challenge isn't just to deliver content, it's to help people grow, adapt, and thrive in a world where roles change but skills endure.

www.riselearninggroup.com



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- Weekly progress reports



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- Weekly networking event
- Door knocking (4x4)
- Expo attendance at your stand
- Sales & prospecting database
- 6 month LinkedIn content plan*
- 6 month sales strategy
- 6 month networking plan
- Cheryl's sales training course (free)
- Monthly check-in

NEW

Investment/ Cost

4-Week Month **£2,340** 5-Week Month **£2,925**

*Design not included

Spearheading Your Surge in Sales

SURGE

10 hours per week – includes a mix of below plus weekly report

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- LinkedIn outreach
- Door knocking (4x4 method)
- Monthly review meeting
- Sales database + 6 month LinkedIn content plan* included

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*Design not included

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“In the beginning there were two of us. We had plans to grow of course. But 30 people across several teams around the world? That was never the precise goal. We find ourselves this size, and this shape not because of what we wanted, but because of what our customers wanted.”

This issue: **TEAM**

When most businesses start, the founders do pretty much everything. And that's what happened at UltramapGlobal.



Jeff, Head of Sales (right)

“Des looked after product development.” Explains Martin. “I looked after growing the business and making sure things ran as they should.”

This steady approach, learning day-by-day worked well in the early years for Des and Martin.

But as business grew, client need changed, and the team changed with it.

“UltramapGlobal protect the world's most important subsea assets. Our software, AssetMonitor has tracked 100 million vessel movements every day for approaching 20 years.

“If a vessel is considered a threat to an asset, the software recognises and flags the problem.”

This ‘alarm flagging’ approach was fine at first. But the more effective UltramapGlobal became, the broader the client service requirement became, too.

“Clients began asking us to manage the threat to their asset as well. So, over the years, we've developed a number of 24/7/365 global monitoring teams. We're an end-to-end solution now.”

Jeff supports Martin with sourcing and onboarding new clients. Sam supports Des to develop AssetMonitor around whatever clients need. And Eddy is one of an expanding team of Report Writers, developing bespoke reporting approaches for the expanding client base.

These are just a few people inside UltramapGlobal, supporting AssetMonitor, now the world's most used subsea asset monitoring software.

www.ultramapglobal.com



Sam, Assistant Director of Operations

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Eddy, Report Writer

Martin Connelly
Co-Founder & Commercial Director



'Mr Cyber' Phil Jackman retires

After years of dedication to the Cyber Security sector, Phil Jackman 'Mr Cyber' has retired from his role as Founder and CEO of CyberNorth leaving a legacy of innovation and growth in his midsts.

Phil has been an integral part of the success of the North East Cyber Security Cluster organisation CyberNorth, and during his tenure has played a pivotal part in raising awareness and opportunities for the sector in the region and on a national and international scale, forging instrumental partnerships with major players.

After eight years with CyberNorth, Phil has fulfilled his ambition for the team to play a key role in promoting the North East region as an attractive destination for cyber security services, investment, and education. It was in 2018 when Phil's career took an unexpected turn which led to the formation of CyberNorth, a former Dynamo-backed organisation. This opportunity proved to be a perfect moment to combine his love for the region with his technological expertise gained over 30 years in IT management in both the public and private sectors.

With news recently announced of a pivotal new partnership with FTSE 100 company, Sage, the leader in accounting, financial, HR and payroll technology for small and mid-sized businesses (SMBs) to spearhead and leverage the capabilities of the North East cyber security community, Phil is confidently handing the reigns to Danielle Philips who is excellently placed to further elevate and drive CyberNorth forward as CEO.

Tech company praised

A North East tech firm has been praised for bringing a businessman "back from rock bottom" after salvaging an app he'd raided his savings to develop.

Mi-Box Live creator Christopher Withers invested thousands on a new app for his award-winning interactive maths game.

However, after being "let down" by the initial developer, the app was deemed so poor that the iOS store wouldn't even list it, jeopardising both the project - and Christopher's wellbeing.

"I was absolutely crushed. To sink so much of yourself and your savings into something, only to be told it wasn't up to scratch, was nothing short of devastating," said Christopher, 43.

"The amount of money I'd invested in the app had left me in an unbelievably precarious position. I'd been let down really badly, and I didn't know how it could be saved."

However, in stepped The Resolved Group, a Hartlepool-based company specialising in repairing existing digital platforms - be it an app, website, CRM or an e-commerce site - even if they haven't carried out the build themselves.

"So many times businesses are told if there's a problem, you'll need a rebuild. However, rebuilds cost a small fortune and as we've



Thousands turn out for NE tech festival

Guests from as far away as India were among the 3,000 people who descended on the North East last week as TechNEXT, the region's largest tech festival, returned for a third year.

Spanning venues from Northumberland to County Durham, the festival brought people from across the world of tech together for a jam-packed programme of events.

BBC Tech Editor, Zoe Kleinman, and Cherrypick CEO and founder, Tom Foster-Carter, opened up the festival in front of a sold-out Main Stage crowd at Crowne Plaza, Newcastle.

Representatives from the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology and The North East Combined Authority also spoke at the event, giving those in attendance a unique insight into everything from finance to devolution and industrial strategy.

Attendees then spilled out into dozens of themed hub and fringe events throughout the week, from the industry dinner to a festival party, school tech challenge and the region's largest ever digital and tech careers fair, Tech Talent Live, which took place at City Hall in Sunderland.

The annual festival is hosted by a partnership of North East businesses and stakeholders working collaboratively. It is led by Dynamo North East C.I.C and Sunderland Software City working alongside fellow North East events specialist, BeaconHouse Events.



demonstrated time after time - they usually aren't needed," said Chris Carroll, founder of The Resolved Group.

Having only launched last year, that approach has fuelled dramatic growth for a company that hasn't yet turned one.

Turnover is set to soar by 500 per cent this year, while the business - which was initially forecast to be valued at £5m by the end of the decade - is now on course to be worth £10m.

Additionally, it has already expanded internationally with an office in India that has allowed the company to move towards a 24/7 model in part to keep up with an increasingly global client base.



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Chris Carroll

When it rains, it pours

Just ask Christopher Withers.

Having created the educational maths game, Mi-Box Live, Christopher invested thousands on a new app.

Unfortunately, it was a disaster.

The app was so poor the iOS store wouldn't list it.

Having poured his heart, soul – and savings – into the project, Chris' worst nightmare became his reality.

Sadly, his story isn't unique.

Since launching The Resolved Group last year, we've helped scores of businesses whose systems simply haven't been up to scratch.

These are apps, CRMs and e-commerce sites that needed lots of TLC.

However, like Christopher, what they didn't need was a costly rebuild.

Yet when approached with a system they didn't build, most companies run a mile.

Their logic is understandable; They didn't build it, so how could they possibly fix it?

But that's The Resolved Group's niche – and why Christopher trusted us in one of his darkest hours.

We salvaged his app – and his wellbeing – because we know these aren't just platforms to help you do business online.

Behind every app or website is someone's life work.

We know the hours invested, the sacrifices made, and the risks taken by entrepreneurs to turn their dream into a reality.

Entrepreneurs like Christopher, who entrusted a developer only for them to seriously underdeliver.

The impact was substantial; Christopher himself admitted he was at “rock bottom”.

That's why he turned to us. Why? Because his resources were limited, and a complete rebuild was unfathomable.

But he also didn't want to work with bots. He wanted real, local experts who would work alongside him to deliver his dream.

The results? The app enjoyed a new lease of life and Chris is ecstatic at how our project transformed both himself and his business.

However, for those with existing platforms, these are my quick tips

- **Updates aren't optional – they're your first line of defence**

This isn't just about getting the latest features. Updates fix security holes, bugs, and compatibility issues. By ignoring them, you're leaving the door open – literally – to hackers, payment failures, plugin conflicts and downtime. One outdated plugin or unpatched CMS version can take your whole site offline or leak customer data.

And if your site or app hasn't been updated in months, you're on borrowed time.

- **Backups must be automatic, off-site and testable**

If you don't have a daily backup system, stored in at least two locations (not just

your server), you're one mistake or cyber-attack away from losing everything.

Backups should run in the background automatically and be tested regularly to ensure they can be restored.

We've had clients come to us after ransomware attacks, server failures or accidental deletions – usually it was the lack of proper backups that turned an inconvenience into a disaster.

- **Never test on your live site or app – ever**

Making changes live is like doing heart surgery during a marathon. It's risky, messy and often ends in chaos. You should always have a separate development environment – a mirror version of your platform to test updates and fixes safely.

If your developer is still pushing changes straight to your live site, you're asking for downtime – and potentially breaking things customers rely on.

- **Have someone responsible – not just reactive**

This is the biggest one. You need someone accountable for your platform. Not just someone you call when it breaks, but who checks it regularly, runs updates, flags risks early, and keeps it secure – like digital insurance.

Without that, your site or app becomes a ticking time bomb of outdated code, security risks and missed sales.

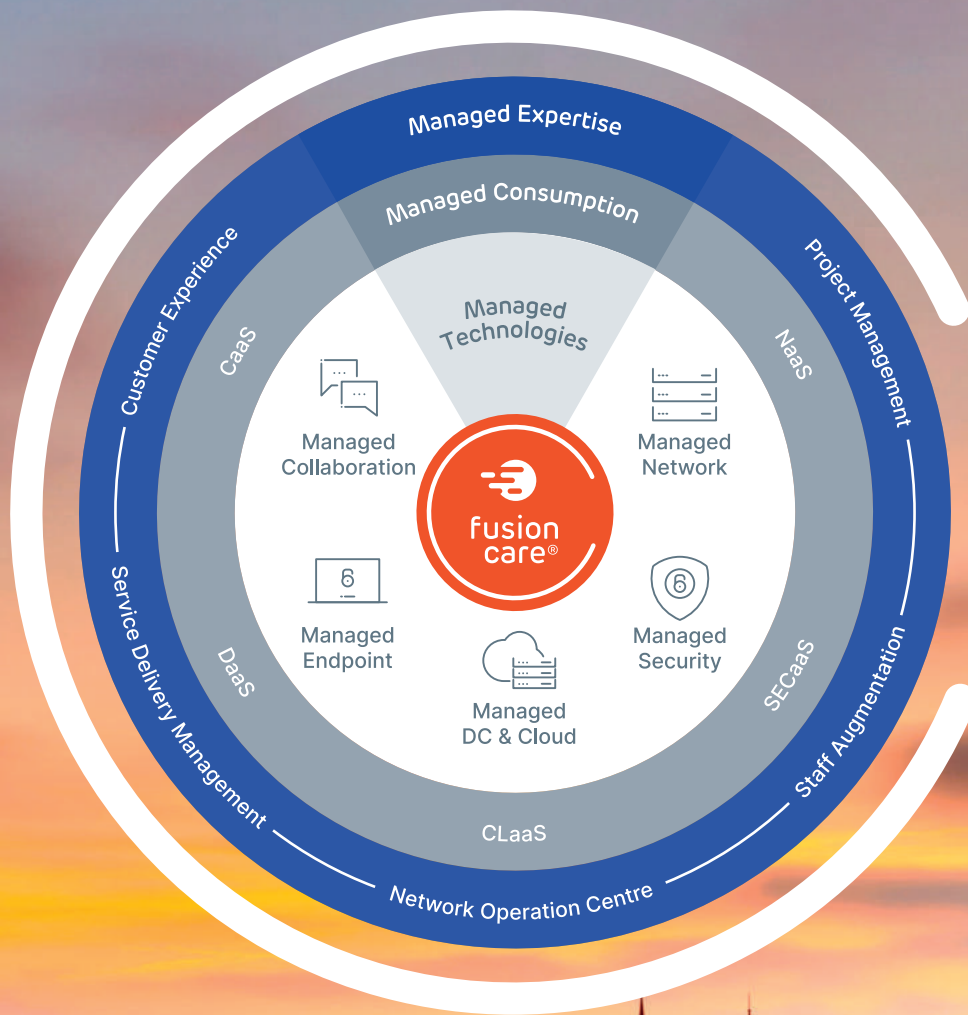
When it inevitably goes wrong, you'll wonder who's supposed to fix it – and how long it'll take.

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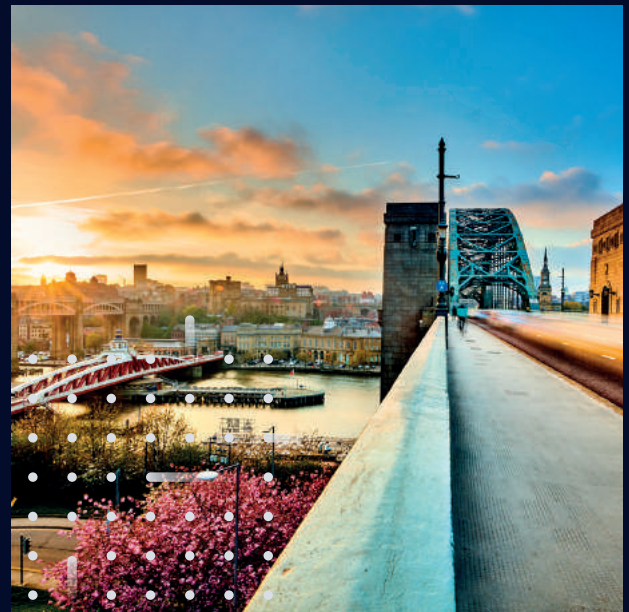
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A photograph of two men in formal tuxedos standing on a balcony or walkway. In the background, a large steel bridge with a prominent arch spans across the frame. The scene is set during sunset, with warm orange and yellow light illuminating the sky and the bridge's structure. The man on the left is bald with a beard and glasses, while the man on the right has short dark hair. Both are smiling at the camera.

Forfusion named SME Business of the Year at North East Chamber Awards

Forfusion, a leading North East-based technology consultancy, has been awarded SME Business of the Year at the prestigious North East Chamber of Commerce Business Awards 2025.

The ceremony, held at The Glasshouse International Centre for Music in June, brought together nearly 400 business leaders and innovators from across the region to celebrate exceptional achievements in innovation, sustainability, digital transformation and community impact.

The awards, handcrafted by the National Glass Centre in Sunderland, were presented across 12 categories, with finalists representing a broad spectrum of industries.

Forfusion's win recognises its remarkable growth, and progressive approach to workforce development and inclusion. Judges praised the company for its "people-first culture" and strong record on cyber-security and STEM.

"We're incredibly proud to be recognised as SME Business of the Year," said Forfusion's CEO, Steven Forrest. "This award is a reflection of the hard work and dedication of our entire team, and our shared commitment



L-R: Jon Shayler, CEO Erudus (Award Category Judge), David Griffin, COO, Forfusion, Steven Forrest, CEO, Forfusion, Joanne Thomas, Marketing Manager, Forfusion & Jorge Aguilera, Director, Forfusion

to innovation, collaboration, and continuous improvement. As a company born and bred in the North East, we're honoured to represent the region."

Forfusion has carved out a reputation as a trusted technology partner, specialising in mission-critical IT infrastructure and cybersecurity solutions for enterprise and public sector clients. As the only dual Cisco Gold Partner headquartered in northern England, the company continues to lead in a fast-evolving market through its focus on strategy-led transformation and sustainable, long-term partnerships.

The award also underscores Forfusion's commitment to delivering social impact as it grows. The company supports STEM initiatives and career pathways for young people, partners with veterans through the Armed Forces Covenant, and works with charities to enhance digital skills and opportunities in the region.

Looking ahead, Forfusion is poised for its strongest financial year to date, with a growing pipeline of contracts and investment in new headquarters, talent, and technology.

"This isn't just a win for Forfusion - it's a win for the region's growing digital sector," Steve added. "We're building something special here in the North East, and this award helps shine a light on the talent and potential that exists in our community."

www.forfusion.com

Tel: 0191 500 9100

Email: hello@forfusion.com



John Behan, a director at SOS Group

SOS Group provides seamless operations in all events

Gateshead-based office technology company, SOS Group, is on course for its busiest events year to date.

During 2025, the copy, print, scan specialists have already helped ensure the smooth running of 31 sporting and party political events at very different venues across the country, and each and every one has required detailed advance planning.

John Behan, a director at SOS Group, explains: "In the same way that an athlete can't turn up to the start line of a race without significant training, we can't arrive at what are often very challenging working environments without substantial preparation.

"While I couldn't possibly suggest any of the SOS team are in the kind of physical form the incredible sportsmen and women we work with are, the analogy does stand up!

"We need every bit of our experience, commitment and technical know-how to ensure that we can provide the exact service our

client requires for their event, no matter if that's by the side of a swimming pool, in a busy conference venue or a tent in a field."

Established in 2002, SOS Group is an award-winning office technology company facilitating business requirements across all sectors.

This year, the company is helping deliver at events including the Swim England Open Water National Championships, the Riding Disability Association's National Championships, the Aquatics GB Diving Championships and Novuna UK Athletics Championships.

John continues: "Some of our clients want a 'duplicate' office ready for them on arrival, others have different requirements, but ultimately they all want a seamless operation, no drama, no hassle.

"For every event, we need to test, clean and securely pack, wrap and deliver the devices, with spares and consumables. On site, we have to test thoroughly in advance of the event start time then deliver our services successfully before decommissioning ready to return to base.

"The decommissioning process includes data cleansing as well as the physical side of things, to ensure users haven't inadvertently stored information on the device memory.

"We recently transitioned our ISO 27001 accreditation to 27001:2022, updating the highly prized IT security accreditation we've held since 2020, and that reflects how seriously and securely we treat client data and information."

This summer, from June to September, SOS Group are covering 17 events at 10 different venues, ranging from one day to two weeks in duration. The largest event requires approximately 50 devices

spread over a venue covering 13,000 square metres and, in some cases, specialist transport will be required.

John adds: “The ‘to do’ list ahead of any event is significant and there is always a lot more to consider than transport, although that can sometimes be challenging in itself.

“The environments we work within are hugely varied but our devices need to operate seamlessly and, as a result of them being scrupulously serviced and maintained, they do.

“Our clients are under pressure to deliver their event and need to know they can rely on us 100%. And, if we can do that for clients in a marquee by a running track when it’s pouring with rain, we can certainly be relied upon within more standard work environments.”

SOS Group has grown into an SME that counts multinationals within its established client base and also works closely to support start-ups and community organisations.

It has a central 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



Swim England Water Polo National Age Group Championships

“

*...A thorough
implementation
and management
strategy should
be developed at
the outset...*

Getting the most out of AWS

By Dan Pudwell, Solutions Architect at Leighton

The most common mistakes businesses make with AWS - and how to avoid them.

Amazon Web Services (AWS) has become a go-to cloud provider for businesses of all shapes and sizes. Its wide range of services, scalability, and flexibility makes it an attractive option for organisations aiming to migrate to the cloud or optimise their existing cloud infrastructure.

However, having carried out dozens of Well-Architected Framework Reviews (WAFR) Dan Pudwell, Solutions Architect at Leighton, has seen companies make the same critical mistakes time and time again, leading to security vulnerabilities, inflated costs, and inefficiencies that hinder the overall success of cloud adoption.

So how can companies get the most out of AWS? By being aware of the most common pitfalls organisations can be confident they're maximising on the plethora of opportunities offered by AWS and ensure their cloud infrastructure is working in the right way for their business.

Spotting the red flags: what should you be looking for?

Security

When it comes to AWS one of the most critical aspects you should be considering is your security and access management. Failure to ensure robust security is in place can lead to accidental misconfiguration, security breaches and the exposure of sensitive resources. Despite this many organisations neglect implementing strong security measures from day one leaving their cloud environments vulnerable.

This can be easily factored into AWS migration projects and by taking a few simple steps companies can help to ensure their cloud environments are protected. For example, the AWS root account should only be used for creation and critical administrative functions. By ensuring identity and access management (IAM) roles reflect the principle of least privilege – meaning only granting the permissions that are required to perform a specific task – companies can maintain control over their environments and minimise risk.

Organisations should also be looking to ensure that they enable multi-factor authentication (MFA) for all users, not just root account users and access keys should be rotated regularly to minimise the risk of compromised credentials. Ideally Single Sign On (SSO) with IAM Identity Centre should be used in place of users.

In addition, turning on services like CloudTrail and GuardDuty, whilst there is a small cost and some configuration, is essential for monitoring your accounts.

Cost optimisation

Another common mistake we often see is companies not considering the full costs associated with cloud platforms. A thorough implementation and management strategy should be developed at the outset to not only avoid incurring unexpected charges but also missing out on potential opportunities to make cost savings.

An essential part of this is a clear and robust tagging strategy, without consistent tagging of resources it becomes almost impossible to track usage and allocate costs accurately. There are several other ways that AWS users can achieve cost efficiencies including reserved instances and saving plans and these should

be explored in mature projects. You can also set up cost alerts and budgets to monitor expenditure to avoid any surprises at the end of a billing cycle.

Reliability

One of the biggest, most costly mistakes companies can make is not considering scalability and future performance from the outset of their project. Architecting AWS environments without proper planning can often mean you run into issues later down the line. By following AWS best practice, automating infrastructure provisioning with Infrastructure as Code (IaC) and pipelines, and ensuring consistent, repeatable environments companies can not only meet their needs now but also consider the future. If it's a new project or future performance needs are difficult to assess consider using serverless architectures as they can work really well with scalability designed into the components.

It is also important to design, implement, and test disaster recovery and backup strategies tailored to organisational needs.

Operational excellence

Another key consideration should be compliance. Maintaining compliance in the cloud is challenging but critical, especially for industries like finance and healthcare. One of the best ways to manage governance across multiple accounts is to use AWS Organisations, this allows you to centralise control, governance and policy enforcement. Companies should also be looking to ensure proper audit trails that track changes – AWS CloudTrail is a good way to do this.

Other key mistakes that can trip organisations up include ensuring the use of effective monitoring and operations. These are key to maintaining a stable AWS environment. Without the right tools and processes in place, issues can go unnoticed until they escalate into larger problems. Likewise, not giving due time and attention to performance and resource optimisation, neglecting to use autoscaling to ensure applications can handle traffic spikes, not implementing proper caching and not optimising databases can all have a negative impact on performance.

So, what's the solution?

AWS is a powerful platform, but to leverage its full potential, organisations need to ensure the proper planning, scoping and expertise is in place to ensure successful delivery, performance and scalability. By focusing on proper security management, cost control, architectural design, and operational best practices, businesses can maximise the benefits of their cloud environments. Following frameworks like the AWS Well-Architected Framework, implementing Infrastructure as Code, and adhering to best practices will help ensure that your AWS environment is efficient, secure, and cost-effective.

By being aware and avoiding these common mistakes, organisations can reduce the risks across their AWS projects and build a robust, scalable cloud infrastructure that supports their business goals.

leighton.com



Creo Comms welcomes apprentice

Growing North East marketing agency Creo Comms has added an apprentice to its team, as it continues to welcome new clients and projects.

Sunderland based Creo, which now employs a team of 18 people, has appointed Emma Thompson as a Digital Marketing Apprentice, who will work alongside the digital and creative team to support clients including Nissan, Sunderland City Council and Sheepfolds Stables.

A recent graduate with a background

in Film and Media Studies, Emma brings a fresh perspective and a strong creative spark to the agency. She has hands-on experience of running social media campaigns, managing teams and events, and delivering engaging content, skills that will support her development and add value across Creo's wide-ranging client portfolio.

Emma's appointment reflects Creo's ongoing commitment to investing in emerging talent and staying at the forefront of the evolving digital landscape. The company has a keen focus on future talent development, and works in partnership with the University of Sunderland to manage Sunderland Creatives Agency, a student-led agency providing services that align to those offered by Creo Comms.

Louise Bradford, managing director of Creo Comms, said: "We're really pleased to have added Emma to the team, and really look forward to seeing her build new skills, as well as bringing her talent, enthusiasm and creativity to the business."



Leading North East PR experts help 'bubble-wrap brands' with unique new service

An award-winning public relations company has launched a unique new product to help businesses "bubble-wrap" their brand's reputation.

Darlington-based Harvey & Hugo launched the service to help companies combat the growing numbers of threats capable of leaving a brand's reputation in tatters.

"From deepfakes and cyberattacks, to negative reviews and social media backlash, there have never been more potential risks to a business's reputation, and the cost of not acting quickly can be crippling," said Harvey & Hugo founder, Charlotte Nichols.

"Additionally, the rise of AI – and the increased potential and proliferation of fake news- has made the role of brand guardian more vital than ever.

"However, many businesses can't afford to bring in expert help when disaster strikes. That's why we've created a new service that makes expert help available – and affordable – to almost every business."

Starting at just £50-a-month, the unique package provides businesses with fast access to Harvey & Hugo's PR, social media and crisis comms experts in a brand emergency.

And that team has recently been strengthened with the appointment of Ian Johnson as the company's PR Director.

An award-winning former journalist, Ian was previously Chief Reporter for Teesside Live and the Evening Gazette, and has worked for titles across Yorkshire and the North East including both The Journal and ChonicleLive.

The service has been launched to help mark Harvey & Hugo's 16th anniversary, with the PR firm even creating their own condoms to mark the milestone – emblazoned with the cheeky message 'Protecting more than just reputations'.

The service is the latest innovative concept created by Harvey & Hugo, which has long aimed to make PR services more accessible for SMEs – be it press releases and videography to social media and even podcasting.



Lights, camera, impact!

Kaleidoscope, the North East's leading film, photography, and animation agency, has announced the winners of its first-ever charity film competition.

Back on the Map, a community regeneration charity based in Hendon, took the top prize. Their hands-on approach to transforming their neighbourhood and empowering over 11,000 residents through housing and grassroots action impressed the judges.

Barnability, an inclusive fitness

centre for people with learning and/or physical disabilities, was named runner-up. They'll receive a professional brand photography package to help raise their profile.

Craig Hawkes, CEO of Kaleidoscope, said: "I'm really chuffed that we've run this competition – thank you to everyone who submitted an entry. It's been incredibly uplifting to learn about the amazing work being done by so many inspiring organisations across our region. All the stories highlighted to me and the team how resilience, creativity, and compassion drives meaningful change in our communities."



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ESPA College student Elliott and Phonetic Digital's MD Steven Parker

A social strategy built together

Phonetic Digital collaborates with ESPA College on student-led social media strategy

A recent partnership between Phonetic Digital and ESPA College has shown just how impactful student placements can be. This placement saw student Elliott design and present a full social media strategy tailored specifically for the college's needs.

Elliott, who is currently studying at ESPA College, joined Phonetic Digital earlier this year on a weekly basis to gain hands-on, real life experience in the digital marketing world. What started as a placement quickly became a purposeful project, with Elliott really engaging and getting to explore everything digital marketing entails.

Elliott helped shape the focus of each session, working on topics that genuinely interested him. As a team, Elliott and the team at Phonetic Digital landed on creating a full social media strategy tailored to ESPA's platforms and audience.

To give Elliott the true experience of a digital agency, every session really focussed on the impact of what we were creating

together, using knowledge to inform the creation of an actionable social media strategy.

To develop a detailed social media campaign for ESPA college, we used the SOSTAC® planning framework (Situation, Objectives, Strategy, Tactics, Action, and Control). The focus was on growing ESPA's audience across their social media platforms, encouraging greater engagement by showcasing all the amazing work and societal impact the college has daily.

Throughout the project the Phonetic Digital team supported Elliott giving him skills, confidence and experience across multiple areas of digital marketing, before handing over the reins over to Elliott to present the final presentation himself.

The final presentation took place at ESPA's head office in Sunderland where he got to present the final strategy to the CEO of ESPA gaining invaluable experience of a real-world meeting with a key business leader in a head office environment.

Phonetic Digital's MD Steven Parker spoke on the partnership: "It's been brilliant to work with ESPA and get to know Elliott whilst helping him along on his journey to living a full independent life. We were able to give him an experience of what it's like to work in an office, work to a schedule, complete tasks, and develop his critical thinking skills further.

Partnerships like this are invaluable to helping people gain first-hand experience

in the workplace. This prepares them for the transition from school and college life, into the workplace.

We all enjoyed having Elliott here with us and wish him all the best for his future... even if he did delight in wearing his black and white colours to the office!"

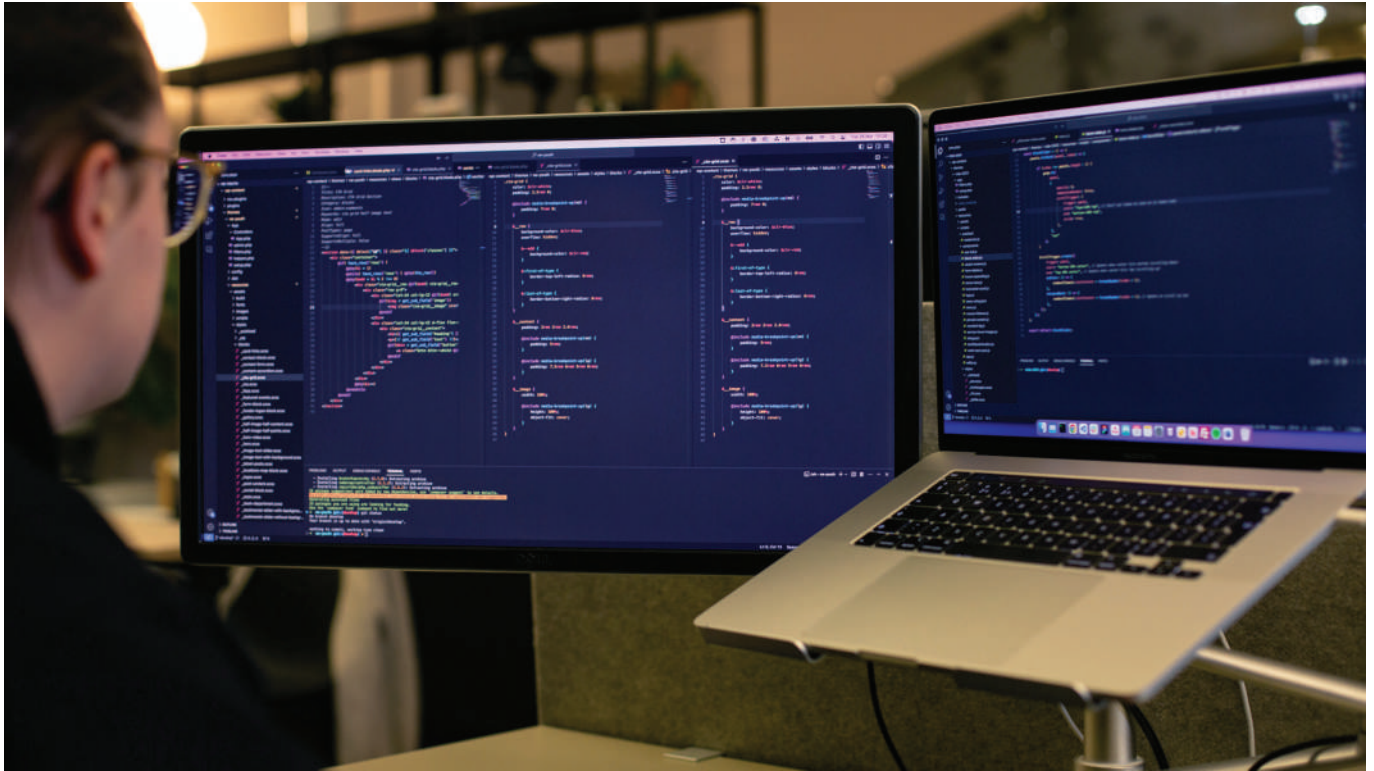
Speaking about the partnership Deputy CEO Patrick Cahill said: "It's been a privilege to witness Elliott thrive in a real commercial environment, ably supported by Steve, his team and ESPA staff. We're looking forward to implementing the social media strategy and watching that good work flourish. Good luck to Elliott on his journey and many thanks to Phonetic Digital for your encouragement and unswerving commitment to providing opportunities for autistic people."

This collaboration is an example of a work placement with actual value. Not only did Elliott gain real life experience in the workplace that will help him in the future, but he also left with newly developed skills that he can use in daily life.

The end result also provided ESPA College with a useful, actionable social media strategy. Elliott brought with him a deep understanding of digital platforms, offering fresh perspectives on recent updates, reminding Phonetic Digital that learning does in fact go both ways. It was a genuine collaboration where everyone involved took something meaningful away.

phoneticdigital.co.uk

The website briefing cheat sheet: How to plan a bespoke build



A practical guide for businesses ready to move beyond templated websites and invest in a site that reflects their value, vision and scale.

1. Start where you are

There's nothing wrong with using a template site to get off the ground. For many startups, it's the right move. Quick, affordable, and good enough to prove early traction. But as your business scales, what got you here won't get you there.

Template sites come with trade-offs. They can slow your site down, constrain your messaging and leave you looking like everyone else. If they're tied to page builders or platforms that go out of support, they can leave you exposed and force you into another website rebuild sooner than you'd like.

As your audience, product and ambitions evolve, so should your website. It needs to tell a sharper story, work harder for your users and reflect the quality of what you deliver.

2. Why going bespoke makes sense now

For scaleups, a bespoke website is a strategic tool, one that can increase the impact of your existing marketing activity.

A bespoke website gives you:

- **Improved performance:** Faster load times, cleaner code and better accessibility.
- **Credibility:** A site that aligns with your brand maturity and builds trust with investors, partners and customers.
- **Flexibility:** Built to support complex user journeys and sector-specific content.
- **Longevity:** Designed with growth in mind, not short-term fixes.

This is your opportunity to build a site that sets your company apart in the market and supports your next phase of growth.

3. The briefing cheat sheet

To get the best from your agency, the brief should go beyond "we want a new website." The more clarity you bring, the better the outcome.

Start with why. What's driving the need for a new site? Then, get clear on who it's for and what you want different audiences to think, feel or do when they land there. Be honest about current pain points, whether it's outdated messaging, unclear journeys or clunky user experience.

Think about content: who's creating it, who needs to sign it off, and plans for future content creation. Put together a list of tech must-haves, like CRM integrations, portals or marketing tools that need to be considered.

And finally, think about the big picture.

How do you want the site to serve you in two to three years? Will it need to evolve as your business does? By being clear on budget and timelines, you'll help your agency be realistic and strategic from the outset.

4. Questions to ask before you sign

Not all website partners are created equal. Asking the right questions will save you headaches later.

- What CMS will you build in and why?
- Will we be able to manage the site and update the content ourselves?
- What happens post-launch? Do you offer ongoing support?
- How do you approach UX and content strategy?
- Will the site be built for performance and SEO from day one?

5. The payoff: A site built to grow with you

A well-briefed, well-built bespoke site is a powerful asset. It helps sharpen your message, win trust, convert leads and make life easier for your team. More than that, it sets you up for sustainable, strategic growth.

When you're ready to move beyond first-stage solutions, make sure your next step sets you up for the long haul.

Ready to give your website the attention it deserves? Talk to us about building it right, from the start. Email us: hello@vidacreative.co.uk

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A major milestone for dodio

dodio recently marked a major milestone with a brilliant night at The Sheepfolds, celebrating 10 years in business.

The room was packed with clients, collaborators and friends from across the region's business community. It was a fantastic event filled with laughs, memories and a proper celebration of helping brands grow through creativity, strategy and a good bit of humour. Big shout out to Kay from St Cuthbert's Hospice for sharing the amazing work they do – and how to get involved.





From dream to doors open: Unique Magazines' grand opening celebration

Our adventure into the physical retail world started over a year ago, back in April 2024. Since then, it has been a whirlwind of trials and errors, new ideas, new walls, new mags and plenty of chopping and changing to get it all just right.

As we approached the final touches, we decided to share it with the local print community in the form of a Grand Opening. Of course, as always, print was at the heart of our plans — but we wanted it to be more than that. We wanted a day of real connection and community.

It was still early, well before 10am, and we watched as people stopped by to see David at the coffee cart. Clutching cups stamped with “mags, coffee, and vibes,” they stepped through our doors with wide eyes and warm smiles, taking in the completely transformed space — more creative, more inspiring, more of us than ever before.

Before long, the place was packed with family, friends, regulars, and even brand-new faces all here to celebrate with us. As we gathered the crowd outside, it was time for the moment we'd been building towards- the ribbon cutting and the official opening of our store. And who better to do the honours than a local customer who has supported us through it all?

Jim started shopping with us during the pandemic, when local stores were closed and the world was full of uncertainty. Back then, all many of us craved was something familiar — and for Jim, that comfort came in the form of his weekly magazines. When life returned to normal, he could have easily gone back to grabbing them with his weekly shop. But he didn't. He chose to keep supporting a local, independent, friendly team and to say thank you, we invited Jim to cut the ribbon and officially open our store.

After that emotional and meaningful milestone in our journey, we invited everyone back inside to browse, smell, and feel the print. We encouraged people to grab a free hot drink, spin the prize wheel for goodies, chat to our print specialists, and enjoy some colouring fun with the kids.





From start to finish, the day was alive — conversations flowed, new connections were made, and people left inspired by our vibrant hub built for the Northeast community. For those who had visited before, there was a real sense of “wow” at how far we’d come. And for newcomers, it was disbelief that we’d been quietly tucked away in this little corner of Swalwell all along. But what struck us most was the overwhelming sense of community and warmth. Strangers struck up conversations like old friends, new faces were welcomed with open arms, families beamed with pride at what we’d built, and our supporters took to social media to share their experiences — helping spread the word about our little hidden gem in Swalwell.

We ended the day feeling emotional, full-hearted, and honestly a bit overwhelmed — in the most beautiful way. Our space had been brought to life not just by the print, but by the people who filled it.

This was the first of many moments we hope to share. With exciting things already in the works, we can’t wait to welcome you back — whether it’s for another event, a quiet browse, or just a good coffee and conversation.

From the bottom of our hearts, thank you. To everyone who showed up, who cheered us on, who brought a friend, shared a post, bought a mag, or simply smiled as they walked through the door — you made it unforgettable.

This space is ours, but it only becomes something special when it’s shared with you.

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Our Blog: www.themagazineclub.co.uk



Pic: The Bigger Picture Agency

Marketing and Media matters...

End of an era

Iconic floating office sets sail for pastures new – but a new adventure begins.

After a decade of stories, interviews, and unforgettable riverside meetings, one of the North East's most distinctive office spaces is up for sale. Morpeth based Keith Newman, founder of Highlights PR, is parting ways with Highlights — his unique Viking 24 cabin cruiser that has doubled as a floating PR office since 2014.

A familiar sight on the River Tyne, Highlights has hosted more than 500 guests over ten years, providing a creative and relaxed space for media interviews, client meetings, and content creation. "This has been the best office ever and I will miss her," said Keith. "But the time has come for someone else to enjoy her."

The vessel, which comfortably sleeps four, features a fully equipped galley and has recently had its engine serviced, hull anti-fouled, and new accessories fitted. "She'll make a great working boat for someone, or even a unique holiday home on a canal or lake," Keith added.

Keith's business, Highlights PR, has built a strong reputation across the region for helping individuals, organisations, and charities share their stories with the media. His client list includes long-standing names like The People's Kitchen, Sunday For Sammy, Healthwatch Newcastle, many businesses and festivals including The Mela, Blyth Live and Coast Festival. His work spans press releases, feature writing, and media training — all driven by a personal passion for storytelling.

But the story doesn't end with the sale of Highlights. Keith has already welcomed a new floating office — Adventure — a larger, wider, and faster vessel equipped with everything needed to continue delivering PR services afloat.

"I was toying calling the boat Highlights 2 but sailors are very superstitious when it comes to renaming vessels. I also realised that Adventure was a perfect name for my clients going on a PR adventure with me.

"Adventure will open up new opportunities, allowing me to travel further afield and offer even more memorable experiences for my clients," said

Keith. "It's the start of a new chapter — one that will bring fresh ideas, new collaborations, and exciting destinations.

"My clients love coming onboard," said Keith. "There's something about the calm of the river and the novelty of a floating meeting room that makes conversations more open, ideas flow more freely, and connections stronger."

Adventure is berthed at Royal Quays Marina in North Shields.

PR and media keith@highlightspr.co.uk





L-R: Sarah Dale and Sarah Walker

SASS media's commitment to being a force for good

Despite being a micro business, SASS media is committed to providing social value hours where possible to support clients, charities and local good causes.

The PR, journalism and communication company's co-founders and directors Sarah Dale and Sarah Walker recently started working with Teesside-based charity MAIN on a campaign to raise £25,000 for a vital safe space at its Middlesbrough base for children and young people in crisis.

MAIN urgently needs £25,000 to create a safe quiet space for children and young people in heightened emotional states.

The charity, which supports children and young people who are autistic, neurodivergent, have a learning disability or complex needs, is calling on the north-east business community to be a "force for good" and pledge its support.

"Our Quiet Room will be a calm, safe and low-stimulation space designed to support the emotional regulation of the children and young people we work with at MAIN," says CEO Heather Whyman.

"This space will offer an environment where individuals can withdraw when feeling overwhelmed, allowing them time and space to re-regulate, manage emotions, and reduce stress in a supportive setting."

The Quiet Room will play a crucial role in helping to reduce incidents of behaviours that challenge.

"Many of the children we support experience sensory overload that can lead to high levels of distress, sometimes resulting in aggression towards themselves or others," adds Heather.



Heather Whyman

“By having access to a dedicated space where they can de-escalate safely and in their own time, we can help prevent crisis situations and better support their continued participation at MAIN.

“At present, we have several children whose placements are at risk due to the lack of such a space. Without this provision, there is a real danger of breakdown in placements, which places additional stress on families, siblings, and the wider support network. The Quiet Room is not just a physical space, it is a vital part of creating a stable, inclusive and therapeutic environment for our young people to thrive.”

The new space, which will be located within the MAIN site in Middlesbrough, has been designed by Pete Stead, director of P+HS Architects, who is also the trustee chair of MAIN. Using his design, the new space will be transformed from an empty storeroom to a peaceful haven by JPS Ltd.

Features of the room will include padded walls, door and floor made from Duratex, which is bite-proof, nail-proof and guaranteed for 15 years, and a digital skylight which can be changed at the push of a button to reflect a blue sky or relaxing hues.

“The quicker we raise the money, the quicker our children and young people will be safer – it is as simple as that,” says Heather.

“This space will keep all our children safe and ensures that we can continue with our mission of never turning any child or young person away.”

MAIN provides a range of services including one-to-one support, opportunities to experience new activities with trained team members, club activities divided into different age groups, a parent forum group, and advice and guidance.

Heather adds: “Everyone who is helping us, from the architect to the builders to public relations, is doing it for free simply because they strongly believe it is the right thing to do. The funds we need are for materials to complete the project.”

Pete Stead, director of P+HS Architects and MAIN trustee chair, said: “This facility will be absolutely amazing for the children and young adults that MAIN support and it’s a continued privilege to be involved from both my trusteeship and also as a director at P+HS Architects.”



Grant Glendinning, chief executive and group principal of Education Training Collective and MAIN trustee, said: “Creating a quiet, safe space for children and adults who may be in crisis is more than a project – it could represent a lifeline for someone at a particular time. Any donation, no matter the size, will be helping us reach our goal to build a sanctuary where those in need can find calm and comfort.”

A huge thank you to everyone who has already pledged their support: P+HS Architects, JPS Ltd, Wolviston Management Group, ATF Supplies, SW Decorators NE, Castle Construction, Tarkett UK, Teesside Family Foundation, Tees Foundation, Care Base, OOK and SASS media.

To join the force for good, visit www.iammain.org.uk

Find out more about SASS media at www.sassmedialtd.co.uk or email: sarah.dale@sassmedialtd.co.uk to enquire about PR and communications strategy support.



Pete Stead with Heather Whyman



L-R: Jay George with Samuel Marriott-Dowding

Uncut: Why raw conversation still matters

I have always believed that the best stories aren't the most polished - they're the most honest.

This was the idea behind Uncut, my new podcast that puts real people and real conversations at the heart of the mic. No scripts. No spin. Just space for the stuff that usually gets left out of polished soundbites and media-trained interviews; and, in all honesty, we're all a bit tired of the gloss.

Even more so after years of working in PR and communications and not only witnessing, but also participating in a world where messaging is often manicured and every word weighed. That world has its place. What I craved, and what I believe audiences crave too, is something more human. Messier. More alive.

With Uncut, I wanted to create something that felt like sitting in the back room of your favourite bar with someone you admire - not for their title, their value,

their connections; but for their insight. The guests are thinkers, founders, artists, and everyday change-makers. Some are household names, others are completely under the radar. All of them have something unfiltered to share.

Our first episode, recorded here in the North East, touched on identity, resilience, ambition, strength - all in under 45 minutes. It was raw. At times, confronting. However, the best art encourages us to think, to feel, to challenge, to push. Not only boundaries, but also ourselves as creatives, as human beings.

The North East has a long tradition of storytelling. Though too often, stories from this region are told about us - not by us. That's something I want to change. Uncut isn't about performance, it's about presence, and giving people the mic to say what they actually mean, not just what they think they should say.

There's also something about hearing a voice - truly hearing it, flaws and all - that reminds us of our shared humanity. Podcasts allow us to slow down, listen in, and connect beyond the scroll.

So why Uncut? Because I want these conversations to feel like they've been lifted straight from the cutting room floor - untouched, unrefined, but unmistakably real.

We've got episodes coming up with a culinary entrepreneur reimagining experiential dining, a creative on the rise



L-R: Jay George with Samuel Marriott-Dowding

who's navigating building a brand, and a former corporate leader who left it all behind to build something slower.

Each voice brings something different - but what connects them all is their honesty.

Uncut isn't about being perfect. It's about being real, and in a business full of noise, this feels like an act of rebellion.

You can find Uncut on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and everywhere you get your audio fix. If it resonates, share it - or better yet, start your own conversations.

The most powerful stories are often the ones we haven't heard yet.

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...It's all business and pleasure...

Highlights PR's Keith Newman asked some of his RADAR members to tell us "How do you balance the demands of running a business with your personal life?"



I gave up alcohol 18 months ago, so my social life has changed pretty dramatically. I am finding that my work is extremely social at the moment which I love. The most social part of my week is trading on Newcastle Quayside every weekend. I get to chat to people from all over the world which really allows me to feel connected on a global level.

Balancing my personal and work life now is focussed on my physical health and well being. So when I am not working you will find me going for a swim and a sauna or doing some strength training in the gym or going for a walk in Saltwell Park. I am planning to join some clubs to learn some new skills and archery is at the top of my list. Living a sober lifestyle means that I need to find new ways of creating connections and having a joyful and fulfilling life. This approach is opening me up to being more adventurous and excited about learning new things. And when you have multiple businesses the connections you make outside of work become so much more meaningful. I do feel blessed to have made some friends through my work too which I am very grateful for.

Corinne Lewis Ward, www.powderbutterfly.com

Running a business is demanding. It often means long hours at a desk or in meetings, and it rarely sticks to the typical Monday to Friday, 9-to-5 schedule.

To balance this sedentary lifestyle and the unpredictable demands of work, I make the most of my personal time outdoors. I take on running challenges and volunteer as an open water lifeguard. These activities help me stay active and remind me to prioritise my personal life alongside my professional responsibilities.

To make it all work, I manage my time carefully. I set clear boundaries, prioritise self-care, and create a supportive environment both at home and at work.

Yvonne Probert, www.healthwatchnewcastle.org.uk





My business is all about giving people the best holiday they can have. We take great pride in our family business. So, when we need to take a break, we try to go somewhere as a family.

This has the advantage of giving is valuable time together and allows us to pass on tips and hints to other families looking for a great holiday. Pop in and see us in Whitley Bay town centre – *Destinations by John*.

John Dixon, www.dbyg.co.uk



Balancing business and personal life is a game of plate spinning haha! Running a software how-to and data compliance advisory membership keeps me on my toes.

I do my best to set clear boundaries - everything professional and personal goes in the diary including a category called 'not at work', as with two grown-up kids (and their lovely partners), three dogs (my two and the 'Grand-dog') as well as radio/community charity roles, it's all about planning, flexibility, and lots of cups of tea!

I use tech to streamline wherever possible and make space for what matters. I make sure I take regular breaks and loving what I do also helps me keep going. I get a lot of professional and personal satisfaction for being lucky enough to help others. Like anyone else I never get the work/life balance spot on but I do my best!!

Kate Watson, www.askmrsatson.com

Last month our RADAR members appeared on BBC TV, BBC Radio, Local TV and many magazines and newspapers. To find out more about the benefits of becoming a RADAR member, contact keith@highlightspr.co.uk or call Keith on 07814 397951.

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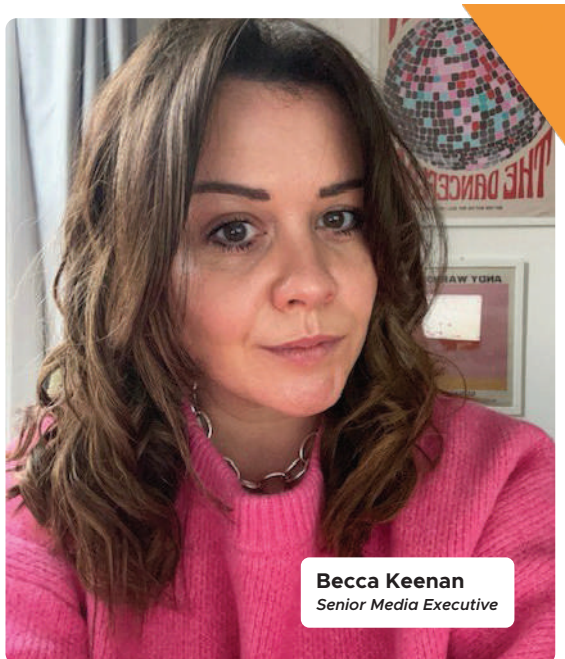
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Becca Keenan on Her Media Mindset

Bonded is the digital and media agency that prioritises connection. Join us as we connect with a different member of the team each month to get their take on all things digital media.

Becca Keenan, Senior Media Executive at Bonded, talks about her journey into media planning and why creativity and connection go hand in hand - especially when it comes to out-of-home.



Q: Introduce yourself, your role and what brought you to Bonded

Becca: I'm Becca, and I joined Bonded in May 2023. I work on the media planning and buying side of things. After graduating from Leeds Trinity in 2017, I started out at a creative agency in Harrogate, before moving to another agency in Leeds.

Then Covid hit and I ended up working night shifts on click & collect at Asda. About a year later, I got a call about a role at a media agency - I'd never thought about that side of the industry before, but I jumped at the chance to learn something new. 18 months later, I moved to Bonded, and it's been great ever since.

Q: What are some key areas of media planning that people wouldn't expect?

Becca: I think people don't realise how much maths is involved in planning some campaigns - I certainly didn't before I started in the industry.

For example, there's lots of maths involved in planning a TV campaign, as there's lots of different factors to consider. It's not as simple as just ringing up the TV sales house as I naively used to think.

Q: Are there any upcoming innovations in the media space that you're excited for?

Becca: The Out of Home space is changing fast. We're moving away from paper-and-paste formats and towards digital, which opens up so much creative potential. Think 3D billboards or immersive outdoor experiences — there's loads of room for innovation, it's a really exciting time for media.

“There's loads of room for innovation, it's a really exciting time for media.”

Q: And finally, what does connection mean to you?

Becca: Connection to me is all about working as one and understanding more about people on a deeper level. At Bonded, whilst there is structure in terms of managers, I feel like I could go to any person in our team for help.

I think it's also important that we bond as a team outside of the work environment to deepen those relationships and connections with each other - we're very good at hosting a social event here!

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Naylors Gavin Black finds new Newcastle office for growing law firm

Commercial property consultancy, Naylors Gavin Black, has secured a new office on Newcastle's Quayside for an expanding law firm.

Aberdein Considine, which has offices in Aberdeen, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Manchester and Newcastle, appointed Naylors Gavin Black to provide an office acquisition service when their workspace in Newcastle's Cloth Market was nearing the end of its lease.

Associate partner at Naylors, Jessica Ross, undertook a full market review and compared all available office options based on lease terms, commercial viability, location, and workplace suitability.

A 5,000 sq. ft. Grade A, refurbished office at West One, on Forth Banks, was selected as the optimal relocation choice and will be home to around 70 Aberdein Considine employees.

Aberdein Considine managing partner, Jacqueline Law, said the relocation was fuelled by the firm's continued expansion in the city, along with a desire to boost staff wellbeing and amenities.

She adds: "Our new office in Newcastle is a breath of fresh air for colleagues, providing light, attractive and inspiring working and collaboration spaces.

"We are grateful to Naylors Gavin Black for their support in facilitating this relocation and look forward to continuing to deliver excellent services to our clients from our well-appointed new base."

BDN developing the next generation of young architects

Award-winning architectural, engineering and project management firm, Building Design Northern (BDN) is helping to develop the industry's next generation of young architects after appointing two new recruits.

Emilie Hakner has joined the multi-disciplined practice as Chartered Project Architect while recent graduate, Erin Moore, has been appointed as Architectural Assistant (Part II). They will now work on a host of nationwide client projects from major new industrial schemes and commercial developments to heritage-rich regeneration projects, social-impact community builds and private residential homes.



Sanderson Weatherall Bolsters North East Team

Sanderson Weatherall is delighted to announce five new appointments across its North East offices, further strengthening its teams in response to continued business growth in the region.

The new starters bring a wealth of talent and expertise to Sanderson Weatherall's North East operations:

Graham Blenkarne re-joins the firm as Partner in the Valuation team. Graham brings extensive experience and a proven track record, significantly enhancing the team's capabilities.

Phil Close has been appointed as Senior Surveyor in the Building Surveying team, adding valuable experience and technical ability to the department.

Ocean Atkinson has joined the firm as Graduate Surveyor in the Valuation team and is working toward achieving MRICS status, representing Sanderson Weatherall's commitment to nurturing new talent within the industry.

Ellie McNicholas has re-joined the firm as Graduate Surveyor in the Rating and Regeneration team, following a placement year in 2023/24 as part of her degree at Northumbria University.

Archie Bain is joining to start his career as a Trainee Surveyor, and will be working across the Valuation, Agency and Rating & Regeneration teams.

Kevin McGorie, Head of Sanderson Weatherall's North East operations, commented: "We are thrilled to welcome Graham, Ocean, Phil, Ellie and Archie to our growing North East team. Their appointments are a direct reflection of the significant increase in demand for our services across the region and our ongoing commitment to providing exceptional client support. The North East continues to be a vital hub for our business, and these new hires will undoubtedly contribute to our continued success."

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How to start developing a brief for a building

By Neil Turner, Director, Howarth Litchfield.

I wrote an article a couple of months ago on how to start designing a house, and the rules are true across all building development.

The next step after appointing an Architect is creating the brief: what do you want to have in your building? The brief can be room names, sizes, shapes, colours, aspirational words. It's worth spending time, thinking about this key early stage of the project, so take the time to write a proper brief.

An architect will work with your brief to develop it but remember it's your house so write the first brief yourself. I am amazed how often this stage is skipped over or neglected by both the client / developer and worse still, the designer.

The RIBA created an updated plan of work in 2020 and this provides a very useful understanding of the different work stages in all development. I always refer to this. Some of us use the old version with letters, before the use of the current numbering system.

The first stages of any development, be it a house or a factory, should record the client requirements. Now they may be vague at the beginning - or very detailed - but it defines what is clearly known at the start. So, when people look back there is a beginning and an audit trail. That audit trail is now so important considering the building safety act legislation.



Neil Turner



What are the budgets at the start? Many clients will say they don't know, which I understand, but invariably there is a budget and it's worth declaring that to the designer. It's rare if there is a limitless budget – in fact, everyone and every business has a budget.

In the preparation and briefing stage (RIBA stage 1) I like to get to know the client and more about their lifestyle or business operation. Once a client has written or illustrated their brief, the architect can start to advise by building upon this to create a more detailed series of questions. From this I can define what the outcomes are and what constitutes a successful project.

The temptation on all jobs is immediately to start drawing – or in fact, clients asking for visualisations of the finished buildings. I think this is where experience and knowledge comes in, to ask the right and pertinent questions.

If the project involves an existing building, then an assessment of the existing asset or building is vital. Are there accurate record drawings from previous works that can be relied upon or will the building need to be measured to get a fresh and reliable set of information? It's always worth investing in accurate information. I was taught how to measure up a building as a young architect – now it's sadly becoming a lost skill – because you learnt about the building you were working on. The new 3D surveys are, however, mighty impressive in their detail.

Are there building manuals in place? Buildings are more complex than ever, so finding out more about them is worth it. Defining the sustainability aspirations of the client, the building or process will also help inform the brief, the design and ultimately, your project costs.

I haven't even mentioned programme yet, one of the biggest impacts on all development.

All this is not designed to scare you but gently point out that the initial stages should involve the time to think, plan and discuss. Then hopefully, your project gets underway, heading in the right direction from the outset.

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

Q&A with Stephen Bilclough, chairman, John N Dunn Group



Stephen Bilclough

Established in 1893, John N Dunn Group is a prominent UK-based construction firm with offices in Newcastle, Edinburgh and Leeds.

Specialising in a wide range of services, including plumbing, electrical work and renewable energy solutions, the company has built a solid reputation for delivering high-quality projects and developing its workforce of the future via apprenticeships.

What projects is the company currently undertaking?

We're currently managing over 100 live projects, many with blue-chip clients. What's exciting is that we're seeing more contracts that tap into multiple areas of expertise, such as plumbing, electrical and renewables, including solar PV and EV charging infrastructure.

Our offices in Newcastle, Edinburgh and Leeds give us a strong presence across the UK and our order book is buoyant, reflecting steady growth and repeat business.

What are the biggest challenges and opportunities facing the construction sector?

The skills gap remains the primary challenge. It's tough to find and retain skilled operatives, especially with so many businesses competing for the same talent. It's crucial to invest in your people, look after them and provide clear pathways for progression.

On the opportunities side, renewables are a massive growth area. We've made them a core part of our offering and demand for solar PV and EV charging points has risen sharply. At the same time, there's a great opportunity to develop young talent. Many of our senior leaders started as apprentices and that success is proof that there's real career progression available in construction.

What can be done to bridge the skills gap in the construction sector?

The industry needs to be more innovative in how it attracts talent. For years, university was seen as the default path but apprenticeships have always been the backbone of our industry. I'm glad to see a return to focusing on apprenticeships, especially as the costs of higher education become more prohibitive.

We also need to expand our talent pool to

include ex-military personnel and career changers. These groups offer transferable skills that can be invaluable in construction

What's your proudest business achievement?

I'm incredibly proud of how we weathered the 2008 recession. The downturn in housebuilding was extremely challenging and we had to streamline the business. There were tough decisions and sleepless nights but emerging from that period not only intact but stronger, is something I look back on with pride. I'm sure my grandfather, who acquired the business in 1951, and my father, who continued his work, would be proud of how we navigated through those tough times.

I'm also deeply proud of our apprenticeship programme. Last year, we celebrated our 500th apprentice and this year we won Trade Apprentice of the Year at the G4C Awards, part of Constructing Excellence North East. We've also recently brought on another seven apprentices - four in Edinburgh, two in Leeds and one in Newcastle. Continuing the legacy of my grandfather and father, who believed in developing young talent, is something that's still at the heart of our business today.

www.jndunn.co.uk

North East property market remains one to watch

By William Thornton, Head of Residential Agency at youngsRPS.

There's plenty to feel positive about when it comes to the North East housing market.

While national headlines often focus on uncertainty or price corrections, here in our region we're continuing to see encouraging signs of stability, growth, and opportunity—particularly for first-time buyers and those looking to make their next move.

Affordability continues to be a key strength. With an average asking price just over £195,000—compared to a national average closer to £379,000—the North East offers excellent value without compromising on lifestyle or location. That's something we at youngsRPS hear time and again from buyers relocating from elsewhere in the UK.

Local sold prices are holding their ground too. In Newcastle, the average sale price is now £237,760—matching levels last seen during the 2022 peak. Across Tyne & Wear, sold prices are up 3% year-on-year, while in Northumberland, well-presented semis and terraced homes remain particularly popular, averaging £205,000 and £177,000 respectively.

Recent figures from Rightmove show average asking prices across the North East have risen 3.2% in the past year, with standout performers including County Durham and Darlington—both posting annual growth of 8%. These aren't just numbers; they reflect renewed confidence and consistent buyer demand across the region.

It's also worth noting the strong performance of rural and higher-end properties. Demand for character homes,

smallholdings and village-based living continues to grow, particularly among buyers seeking space, privacy, and lifestyle flexibility. Well-located, quality homes in the upper price brackets are attracting strong interest—often from cash buyers or those moving north for a better quality of life.

With more stock coming to market and interest rates expected to fall later in the year, buyers are starting to feel empowered again. We're seeing confident, proceedable buyers ready to move, while sellers are

pricing sensibly—creating the kind of balanced, functional market that benefits everyone.

At youngsRPS, we remain optimistic. The North East has always had its own rhythm, and right now, it's a positive one. Whether you're buying, selling, or just starting to consider your next steps, it's a great time to explore what our market has to offer.

[youngsrps.com](https://www.youngsrps.com)

Info coming from the Rightmove House Price Index: June 2025.



William Thornton



Richard Ayre

Why every office needs PAT Testing

A vital safeguard for safety, compliance and business continuity

In today's busy office environments, it's easy for maintenance tasks to fall down the priority list. However, ensuring your electrical equipment is safe to use is not just good practice – it's a legal obligation. Portable Appliance Testing (PAT) is a key part of this responsibility, helping you protect staff, remain compliant with UK regulations, and avoid costly disruptions.

If you're an office manager or responsible for health and safety in the workplace, here's why PAT testing is something you simply can't afford to overlook.

What is PAT Testing?

PAT Testing involves the inspection and testing of portable electrical appliances to ensure they are safe to use. This typically covers items such as:

- Computers and monitors
- Printers and photocopiers
- Extension leads and chargers
- Kettles, microwaves, fans and other small office appliances

While PAT testing itself is not a legal requirement, the Electricity at Work Regulations 1989 make it clear that all

electrical systems and equipment must be maintained in a condition that prevents danger. PAT testing is the most recognised method of demonstrating compliance with this legislation.

The benefits of PAT Testing in an office environment

1. Protect your staff from harm

Electrical faults are a leading cause of workplace fires and accidents. Worn cables, faulty plugs, or damaged devices can pose serious safety risks. PAT testing identifies these issues early, preventing injuries and keeping your team safe.

2. Ensure legal compliance

Failing to maintain electrical equipment can lead to breaches of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, the Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998 (PUWER), and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999. PAT testing provides clear documentation and evidence that you're fulfilling your duties under UK law.

3. Reduce risk of downtime

A single faulty device can trigger power outages, damage other equipment, or even lead to evacuation. Routine PAT testing helps prevent unexpected breakdowns that interrupt daily operations and cause delays – especially crucial in fast-paced office environments.

4. Insurance protection

Many insurers expect proof that you've taken reasonable steps to maintain a safe environment. PAT testing reports can support insurance claims in the event of an incident and help demonstrate that you've acted responsibly.

5. Peace of mind for you and your team

Knowing that all electrical equipment has been professionally checked gives both management and staff reassurance. It fosters a safety-first culture and reduces anxiety around potential hazards.

How often should PAT Testing be carried out?

The frequency of PAT testing should be based on a risk assessment. In most offices, annual testing is appropriate for equipment that is regularly used and moved. Low-risk items like desktop computers may only need testing every two years, while high-risk appliances like kettles and extension leads may require more frequent checks.

A qualified PAT testing provider like DRA PAT Testing can assess your premises and advise on the right schedule.

Why choose DRA PAT Testing?

With years of experience across offices, schools, and commercial properties, DRA PAT Testing offers:

- Fully qualified, DBS-checked engineers
- Clear, itemised reports and certification
- Minimal disruption to your workplace
- Competitive pricing with no hidden fees

Their expert team understands the specific needs of office environments and delivers a fast, reliable service that keeps you compliant and your staff safe.

Don't wait until something goes wrong. Make PAT testing part of your office's safety routine.

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Michael Richardson
20 Questions for
20 Years

“ I had no choice. If I wanted to step up and upgrade support for engineers, I had to step out and start my own business.

Question 1 of 20

Each issue, founder Michael Richardson answers one of 20 questions, exploring 20 eventful years of ups, downs and more, at the Northeast of England headquartered ACT Group.

Why Did You Start ACT Group? What Drove You?

“I love engineering. I feel at home talking with and being with engineers. I want engineers and the businesses they work for, or run, to thrive. Particularly in the Northeast of England where it all started for me, where we’re headquartered to this day.

“In 2006 I was MD of a company that supported engineers and engineering. It was fine – but I wanted to do better. Better support. Faster support. Providing the ‘right’ cutting tool not just ‘a’ cutting tool. But as I didn’t own that business, not all my ideas got through.

“Eventually, I had no choice. If I wanted to step up and upgrade support for engineers, I had to step out and start my own business.

“I like challenges. I wanted to prove myself. I wanted to win. And I really did want to help engineers. I still do.

“I’m not big on business plans and strategy. I’m never quite sure how we’ve grown to 30 people and an almost eight-figure turnover. But one thing that has driven me since day one is the idea that the more successful our customers become, the more successful we can become too. It’s a simple thought that’s served us well.”

Next Time: What were 3 key turning points for ACT in the first 20 years?

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THE 24 MOST BEAUTIFUL BUILDINGS IN THE WORLD

In June 2025, Time Out Magazine listed what they think are the 24 most beautiful buildings in the world. Do you agree? Would you put first who they put first?

<https://www.my-act.co.uk/act-news/the-24-most-beautiful-buildings-in-the-world/>

FEMALE ENGINEERS IN F&B

Here’s how 3 female engineers are making their mark in the F&B (Food and Beverage) sector.

<https://www.my-act.co.uk/act-news/food-drink-engineering/>

IMPRESSIVE ENGINEERING FROM AROUND THE WORLD

BBC Bitesize recently looked at four impressive feats of engineering from around the world. It includes the Grand Canyon Skywalk, opened by Buzz Aldrin.

<https://www.my-act.co.uk/act-news/four-incredible-global-feats-of-engineering/>

WERE ‘TOMORROW’S WORLD’ RIGHT?

30 years ago in 1995, the BBC’s Tomorrow’s World predicted what 2025 would look like, how did it do?

<https://www.my-act.co.uk/act-news/tomorrows-world-predictions-30-years-ago/>

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Banks Homes' new Cathedral Meadows development in West Rainton

'Move Assist' scheme helping homeowners make their move to Cathedral Meadows

An innovative house-buying support scheme is helping a growing number of homeowners make their move to one of the North East's premier new residential developments - Cathedral Meadows in West Rainton, just a stone's throw from historic Durham City.

Housebuilder Banks Homes is building 150 high specification new homes at Cathedral Meadows, which will include a range of detached, three-to-five bedroomed family homes.

Banks recently hosted a special street opening event at Cathedral Meadows, which saw dozens of visitors viewing a selection of the beautiful new homes that are ready to move into over the summer.

The owners of the first four properties moved into Cathedral Meadows in July - and with more and more new homes becoming available, the County Durham-headquartered firm is now helping people complete their house purchase to West Rainton more easily through its bespoke Move Assist scheme.

Banks Homes has worked with the UK's leading assisted move provider, The New Homes Group, to set up its Move Assist scheme, which is designed to take the hassle out of selling an existing property and to help homebuyers move into their new home with ease.

Free, independent property valuations

from up to three trusted local estate agents are arranged, with up to two local estate agents being appointed to market your property once you're happy with the valuation.

When your home is on the market, Banks Homes will hold your selected Cathedral Meadows plot for up to six weeks - and if you go on to buy a Banks home, the housebuilder will help with your estate agency fees, saving you time, stress and a substantial amount of money.

Several of the initial buyers at Cathedral Meadows have successfully used the Move Assist scheme to complete their purchases, with work now ongoing to help more people use it to do the same.

Aisling Ramshaw, head of sales and marketing at Banks Homes, says: "Buying a new home is an exciting milestone, but we know it can also feel overwhelming, so we set up our Move Assist to make the process as smooth and stress-free as possible.

"We're already seeing how effective it has been in helping many of our first residents complete their purchase at Cathedral

Meadows and we're keen for as many people as possible to take advantage of everything it offers."

A bespoke range of seven different house types has been designed for Cathedral Meadows, with each property being created with modern family life in mind by combining style, space, and comfort in a setting that's both peaceful and well-connected.

The new homes all feature an advanced Hive heating system, an Omega kitchen with integrated appliances, Porcelanosa bathrooms, a Ring video doorbell, a full range of kitchen appliances, bi-fold doors and turfed gardens.

Aisling Ramshaw, head of sales and marketing at Banks Homes, says: "We are creating a high-quality new neighbourhood in a lovely part of County Durham and are thrilled with the responses we've been getting from people coming along to see what's on offer here.

"Banks Homes creates sustainable, contemporary living spaces in desirable locations, with style offered as standard, and we're seeing these principles being increasingly brought to life at Cathedral Meadows."

For full details of Banks Homes' Move Assist scheme, please visit www.bankshomes.co.uk/offers/move-assist

The Cathedral Meadows show homes and marketing suite are open from Thursday to Monday between 10am and 5pm. For further information, please call 0191 378 6200 or visit www.bankshomes.co.uk/developments/cathedral-meadows

This time of year

Well it's summertime and everybody's looking forward to getting away or at least most of us are, some poor surveyors are stuck with a mountain of work to get through first!

I'm going to go back to talking about property itself and in this example I'm actually looking at two residential properties, although they are designed to talk about property matters in general rather than be relating to Housing.

If you look at the first photo, the wall is clearly decaying. This may seem very obvious and it is but only if the entire property is inspected. One of the issues surveyors sometimes have is that it is not always possible to get a good view of every part of a property – sometimes this is due to physical constraints, and sometimes it has to be said due to a lack of access being offered by the property owners. Like all surveyors and other professionals, I am asked to do the most work for the least cost and whereas it may be tempting (particularly for some) to cut corners, missing something like this only results in a significant professional indemnity claim.

The second picture shows the top of the wall leaning out where it is not properly tied in to the front and rear walls of the main structure. The issue here is actually quite significant as I have advised that the wall should be taken down to a level where the ground floor ceiling and the first floor are 'as one', whilst supporting the main roof structure with a temporary frame, and then rebuilding the wall. This will not be a cheap or easy exercise.

But why am I talking about these and why bring them up now? Firstly because in each



Philip Bowe

case I was asked to look at the properties after they have been bought - when the buyers did not think the expense of few hundred pounds was worth it against the issues they are now facing. So the first lesson is that it is always worthwhile getting a survey, no matter how much the property costs.

The second lesson relates to the time of year. At this time of year, there is not much rain so we surveyors cannot comment fully on the operation of rainwater goods. However, there is a growing problem with rainfall and its distribution in the ground. In years gone by the amount of land that was covered by concrete, tarmac or block paving was fairly nominal compared to the amount of green land around. Now I'm not want to say we don't need new housing, because we clearly do, and we

also need new commercial units for all sorts of reasons. However, if we do not keep a certain amount of virgin land available for water to drain, it has to go somewhere. And that is where we are getting more and more floods from as water levels in rivers rise and have no open land to soak into. Whereas I wouldn't consider myself a "green", I do advise that some green policies are needed. We must maintain a level of open land for waters to drain away otherwise we will all end up underwater sooner than we expect.

And the third point – Artificial Intelligence is all very good. Even I've learned how to use it to an extent, but AI is limited to that old computer saying "GIGO" – Garbage in, Garbage out. There are numerous computer programs being offered to surveys now to aid them in their work, and many of these will be very useful. However, I still don't believe anything can beat the human eye in seeing the real state of a property on its own and in context. So we need to keep people in the field as surveyors, and we need to keep using them. Don't rely on technology for everything, and keep me in my colleagues doing what we do best – advising you before you buy or rent.



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Best ever summer holiday activities in Kenton and our city

Newcastle's Best Holiday Ever is a UK Government funded programme for children who get free school meals or are in need. However, everyone is welcome at £1.50 per day (including lunch).

Kenton councillors Ged Bell, Paula Maine and Stephen Lambert said: "This Council co-ordinated programme is designed for families in the city and Kenton during the school holidays to help youngsters and their families have a meaningful and joyful experience."

The following projects and activities will take place across Kenton this August:

- **Active Futures - Wyndham Primary**, 16 day multi-sport camp aimed at 5-12 yr olds
- **CHEF - Cooking and healthy eating, MERA Hall**, 4 days, aged 5-12 yr olds
- **Cricketube** - 16 days, ages 5-12 yr olds
- **HatTrick - Kenton Holiday Activity Fund**, 16 days, ages 12+
- **Inspire Youth** - Ages 5-12 yr olds
- **JJ Coaching - Kenton Bar Primary & Mountfield School**, ages 5-12yr olds
- **JJ Coaching - Kenton School**, 15 days, ages 8-12+
- **Kenton Sports Centre** - 29 days, ages 5-12+ yr olds
- **Teen Yoga - The Haven, North Kenton**, ages 13-18 year olds.

For more info google Newcastle Support Directory HAF or go to the Newcastle City Council website (orlo.uk/JAQww).

Youth clubs at The Haven, North Kenton

FREE activities for youngsters aged between 5 to 12 are taking place at The Haven. Activities include crafts, games and cooking. The junior youth club meets every Tuesday on August 5, 12, 19 and 26.

Call 2641959 for more info.



Hi everyone,

My life is so much busier now that I am head dog of our household. I now have to keep an eye on cousin Teddy who comes everyday, and my daughter Kinnie who comes on a Thursday and Friday. Along with that I have to put up with that new whippersnapper Gordon – he is a handful. He keeps biting my tail and chewing my ears – now I know how Ziggy felt with me! Oh well – see you next month.

Q: Hi Cally. I am tearing my hair out over my new build home and wondered if I could get some advice?

It's fully abutted by a terraced house on one side and partially abutted by a flat over a garage on the other. So on the flat side part of the wall is open to the elements. Internally, those parts of the house are cold and prone to mould. The housebuilder is claiming it has been done to job specification; yet why is a new house suffering from this affliction if that's the case?

Construction is render, block, filled cavity, block, plasterboard. Many other things about the house and garden leads me to assume it's been bodged but with the builder refusing to budge, where can

The continued adventures of...

Cally

one go for redress? (If it's at all possible?).

A: When you buy a new build house from a developer you have no consumer rights. New homes are not covered by the Sale of Goods Act. You have more rights if you buy anything from the supermarket than if you buy a new home. That's why I have always advised readers not to buy new homes.

However, the builder may have a policy which will act as a warranty for defects. But be aware that many policies, have exceptions for damp, condensation or shrinkage.

Your builder would have also completed an energy assessment. You could contact an independent party to re-evaluate this if your home feels much colder during those winter months.

Who else can I turn too? If the builder can no longer help with your complaint, the next step would be an independent dispute resolution service. You will need to provide all the evidence you have and have three months from your last communication with the builder to submit a dispute. The best info I could find is here: consumercoddeforhomebuilders.com

What does the home warranty cover me for? This depends on the policy taken out by the builder but you will be given a help guide from the builder, conveyancing solicitor or warranty provider. You should read this carefully.



Please send me your building queries through facebook - @WDLne or wdlnortheast.co.uk or through my Dad's good pal Michael at Northern Insight on michael@northern-insight.co.uk



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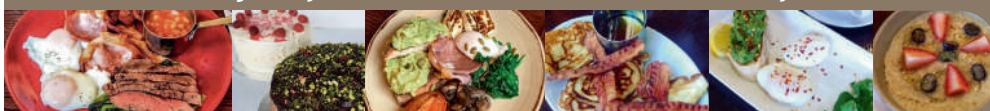
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From trainee teachers to education veterans

All are champions at
Chadwick Celebration Awards

An 80-year-old educational support worker has been honoured for the work she has done for a Sunderland school for more than 40 years.

Lunchtime supervisor Valerie Graham, who also supports the art and DT teams at St Aidan's Catholic Academy, was described as "supportive, dependable and caring" as she received the Achievement Award at Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust's annual Celebration Awards, which recognise staff who go the extra mile in their work.

"To me, I'm just doing my job," she said, "if you like your job and you're happy in your job, it's everything."

Other winners at the Ramside Hall event included:

Inspirational Staff (voted for by pupils)

Thomas Johnson, St Joseph's Academy, Hebburn

Primary Teacher of the Year

Gregory Sanderson, St Mary's Primary, Jarrow

Secondary Teacher of the Year

Daniel Wilson, St Bede's & Byron, Peterlee

Everyday Hero

Dave Vasey, St Gregory's Primary, South Shields

Healthy Lifestyles

Karen Reiling, Trust central team



Team of the Year

Theresa Armstrong and Amy Berry, office team, St Mary Magdalen Primary, Seaham

Leadership & Management (support/central team)

Rob Bullock, St Anthony's Girls' Academy, Sunderland

Leadership & Management (Education)

Julie Hill, St Godric's Primary, Thornley, and St Mary's Primary, Wingate

Gospel Values

Leigh Haggerstone, Our Lady of the Rosary Primary, Peterlee

Governance

Carly Isherwood, St Bede's Primary, Jarrow

Community Engagement

Megan Vincent, St Patrick's Primary, Sunderland

Staff Member of the Year (classroom based)

Beth Atkinson, St Gregory's Primary, South Shields

Staff Member of the Year (support/central team)

Mark Wood, St Wilfrid's RC College, South Shields

New Teacher of the Year

Juan Novas, St Joseph's Academy, Hebburn

Mentor of the Year

Harry Griffiths, St Bede's & Byron, Peterlee

SCITT Trainee of the Year

Shaniah Livingston, St Aidan's Academy, Sunderland





Offering outstanding opportunities

*Mr Will Scott, Principal at
Dame Allan's Schools, Newcastle.*

In my role as Principal at a leading Newcastle independent school, one of the things that I am most proud to offer our pupils is opportunity. In an increasingly challenging marketplace, we recognise that choosing to invest in education for your child is a significant decision for a family. So, we look at what we can offer to make sure that families are getting the best possible educational experience from us, and the extra opportunities we can provide to the young person entrusted into our care.

As a respected independent school, it is expected by parents that our pupils will achieve stellar academic success. It's true that our students do make us proud each year with fantastic grades, (we're currently thinking a lot about our current cohort, who are sure to be anxious with GCSE and A Level results days on the horizon), but it is much more than that for a lot of families.

This is where our leading co-curricular programme comes in, with more than 200 clubs and societies weekly for pupils of all ages to get involved in. From Reception onwards, pupils can participate in additional activities before school, during lunch, and after school to enrich their school experience. These include everything from hip hop dance, to Model UN, Origami Club, fencing, table tennis, rowing, gardening, Politics Club, and the Combined Cadet Force. We really do pride ourselves on having something for everyone.



So, why is this particularly beneficial? At Dame Allan's, we very much look at the 'whole child' when it comes to education, and this includes helping them to embrace their individuality through their passions and hobbies, whether that is something brand new, or something they have discovered and honed for years. Thanks to this inclusive approach, we're lucky enough to include championship dancers, badminton pros, up-and-coming footballers, passionate debaters, and talented Choristers amongst our community. We believe that allowing them to embrace these opportunities and many others during their schooling will help them become well-rounded and confident adults, as well as having a marked impact on their enjoyment of their time in education.



All of this comes from providing opportunities. It takes a lot of work and organisation to ensure so many clubs can run successfully each week, but this work means that each of our pupils knows they can find something to suit them. They can try something new, build confidence, and make friends, elevating their school experience beyond the classroom and giving them skills for life. We are very lucky to have dedicated staff who give their time and expertise to run these clubs, often leaning into their own passions to provide a first-class experience for our pupils.

This opportunity-led approach is also reflected in other facets of Dame Allan's life. We have a robust volunteering programme, where Sixth Formers can give back to the community and work to support a cause of their choosing, the largest Duke of Edinburgh programme in the region, where pupils can push themselves and learn to thrive in nature, and additional events such as our award-nominated speaker series, The Lectures, where high-profile individuals from the worlds of sport, science, business, and media, come to inspire pupils with their real life learnings.

Music, dance, and drama are also popular choices. Pupils can learn an instrument and take part in regular concerts, for example, our newly launched Endangered Instruments Scheme allows pupils to learn an instrument that is in danger of dying out within orchestras, such as the bassoon or French horn. Pupils can also join one of our hardworking dance companies and perform in both school and external events - last year pupils performed in the stunning surroundings of The Alnwick Garden at a corporate charity dinner - or take part in one of our very popular drama performances; everything from High School Musical to A Midsummer Night's Dream!

Is there an extra opportunity that you have been too afraid to grasp? I'd encourage you to take that leap. Much like a Year 7 pupil who nervously turns up to their first after-school club, it will likely benefit you in ways you have not even imagined.

Find out more at dameallans.co.uk

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DAME ALLAN'S SCHOOLS
building the future

Honouring the Past, Inspiring the Future

*By Geoffrey Stanford,
Headmaster, RGS Newcastle.*

While Royal Grammar School (RGS) Newcastle students enjoy a well-earned summer break, plans are underway for the next chapter in our 500th anniversary celebrations.

As we prepare to welcome the 500th cohort of RGS students this September, we are also looking forward to a rich programme of events that continue to honour our remarkable legacy - and look boldly to the future.

From the launch of The Story of Our School - a beautiful modern retelling of our history - to a series of uplifting celebratory events including our Founder's Service (welcoming our Year 7s and introducing them to Thomas Horsley's enduring legacy) to our magical Winter Wonderland community event - there is something for everyone to enjoy. Our alumni community will gather for special dinners in Newcastle and London, while a commemorative edition of the ONA Magazine will honour stories from across the decades. In September, Northern Insight readers and our community can explore five new themes - People, The Arts, Sport, Co-curricular and the school's impact on Newcastle - through our dedicated 500th microsite.

As we celebrate the legacy and community that have shaped RGS over five centuries, it is also a timely moment to reflect on the values and achievements that continue to define us today. One of our latest achievements came in the Telegraph's 'Value for Money' league tables, where RGS was the only independent school in the North East rated 'Very Good' for both GCSEs and A levels. While such rankings offer one perspective, we place greater value on



Geoffrey Stanford

measures like those from Alps Education, which in 2024 placed our students in the top 1% nationally for GCSE and top 10% at A level for value added, a measure of outcomes relative to cohorts of equivalent ability elsewhere. Yet, academic success is just one part of the story - at RGS, we believe great results should be the outcome of a rich, values-led education, not its sole purpose.

To that end, we were delighted that the RGS was recently recognised at the TES Awards in London, where we were named Independent Senior School of the Year and our Junior School Headmaster, Mr Miller, was shortlisted for Independent Headteacher of the Year. This proud moment reflects not only our academic excellence but also the enduring values that have shaped RGS - a sense of belonging, belief in each other, a love for learning and the ambition to succeed. The judges commended our strong value-added performance, alongside our clear focus on values and our "absolute commitment to diversity and giving back to the community". To receive this recognition in our Quincentenary year makes it all the more special.

While celebrating the past, we remain firmly focused on the future - on equipping our students not just with strong academic outcomes but with the skills, values and adaptability they will need in a rapidly evolving world. One powerful example of this is our partnership with Microsoft, which has seen Surface devices embedded across teaching and learning at RGS. Microsoft has featured our work as a case study of effective practice, sharing our story across its U.S. channels and planning to showcase it at future education events. Over the past three years, our one-to-one Surface programme has transformed classroom dynamics, enabling collaboration, creativity and critical thinking.

Academic results may open doors, but they are no guarantee of success. At RGS, we believe true education lies in nurturing critical thinking, problem-solving and the soft skills needed to collaborate, lead and adapt. Just as generations before have stepped into careers unimaginable at the time, today's students must be ready to embrace opportunities we cannot yet foresee - as we look towards the next 500 years.

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





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In conversation with...

Shaun Porter

*Managing Director,
The Education Network*

As managing director of Newcastle-based, The Education Network, a specialist education recruitment consultancy, Shaun Porter admits that the recruitment industry often gets a bad name, but when it's done well, with integrity, passion and a people-first approach, it can make a real difference to schools, pupils and communities.

Incredibly proud of what the company has achieved, he reflects on his journey.

Did you always envisage working in the recruitment sector?

Not at all! I'd tried all sorts of jobs but I was working at the AA on Newcastle Business Park when I was 19 or 20, selling home insurance. I spotted a recruitment job advertised with a decent salary and commission structure and decided to apply. The rest is history.

What is the range of support you offer to schools?

We support schools with all aspects of workforce planning – from ad hoc daily supply teaching staff to long-term and permanent staffing solutions. We're also about to roll out a new Vendor Management System (VMS), a purpose-built platform that will transform the way schools and Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) manage contingent staffing. It's an exciting step forward for us and our partner schools.

What aspect of your role gives you the greatest satisfaction?

Without a doubt, it's working with great people. We've built an incredible team and I take real pride in supporting and developing them - and seeing them thrive within the business.

What sets The Education Network apart from its competitors?

It's absolutely our people. We've built a culture that values loyalty, trust and balance - and that shows in our staff retention. In our North East offices alone, around 10 members of staff have been with us for over a decade, which is almost unheard of in the recruitment world.



Shaun Porter

“

...10 members of staff have been with us for over a decade, which is almost unheard of in the recruitment world...

What's the best piece of advice you've received in your career - and who gave it to you?

My dad once told me: "Always be yourself." People buy into people, and trust is built through authenticity and doing what you say you're going to do. That advice has stuck with me throughout my career. It's helped me surround myself with genuine people - not just those who say what they think you want to hear.

What is your proudest career achievement - or a defining moment that changed your path?

My proudest moment was taking the leap 15 years ago to leave a good job with a stable salary and co-found The Education Network with my business partner. Building the team and our network of offices into what it is today has been a huge journey, and one I'm incredibly proud of.

How do you see the recruitment industry evolving over the next ten years?

The simple answer is technology. The pace of change is relentless – new CRMs, evolving needs within trusts and understanding how to effectively use AI. If you're not embracing it to improve your

service and add value, you'll quickly be left behind. Tech innovation will define the next decade.

How has the last academic year gone for The Education Network, and what's ahead?

It's been a really positive year. We've laid the groundwork for significant change with the development of our new IT platform and our ongoing support for local communities and voluntary work remains a key part of who we are. There are also some exciting developments in the pipeline - including potential new office locations.

What's your idea of a perfect day?

A sunny day at the coast (ideally abroad) with the family, followed by a few drinks and good food with friends overlooking the sea. Simple, but perfect.

What do you do to unwind?

I like to switch off by watching football, spending time with my wife and kids, and catching up with friends. I'm a proper foody so lovely scran and a nice bottle of red – that'll do for me!

theeducationnetwork.co.uk

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Calling all comedy writers – A Sketch for Sammy returns!

Aspiring comedy writers are being offered the chance to have their work performed live on stage in front of a packed audience as A Sketch for Sammy makes its triumphant return for 2025.

“We’re thrilled to bring back A Sketch for Sammy as part of our mission to uncover and support fresh comedy talent,” said Ray Laidlaw, producer of the Sunday for Sammy show, which will return to Newcastle’s Utilita Arena on 15th February 2026. “If you’ve got a funny idea, now’s the time to get it down on paper. This is your chance to see your sketch performed on stage and maybe even win a very special award.”

To enter, writers are asked to submit a 5-minute sketch along with a one-sentence logline summarising the sketch and a short bio (100 words max), mentioning any relevant writing experience. Entrants should also confirm if they’re happy for their contact details to be shared for future creative opportunities. Submissions should be sent to info@sundayforsammy.org.

A panel of judges – including comedians Cal Halbert and Kelly Rickard, comedy director Emma Roxburgh, writer Tony Gannie, and producer Ray Laidlaw – will select the top six scripts. These writers will receive mentoring to refine their sketches, which will then be performed live by a professional company at the Sketch for Sammy Final at Exchange 1856 in North Shields on 12th October 2025. The show, hosted by Halbert and Rickard, will also



feature a top-class bill of live music and comedy.

Each finalist will receive a pair of tickets to the Sunday for Sammy comeback show, and the winner will be presented with the prestigious Dick Clement and Ian La Frenais Comedy Award.

Deadline for entries is 31st August 2025, and finalists will be contacted by 14th September 2025.

New song honours World War I soldier

A powerful and emotional new single, No Rain for my Honey bee, has been released by The Western Quay, a Tyneside based father-and-son-inspired musical collective featuring Andy Mather, his son Michael, Mark Appleby, Finley Purvis and vocalist Poppy Keith.

The song is a moving tribute to Andy’s great uncle, Private John McGlynn, who was killed in action in September 1918 during World War I—just nine days after writing a heartfelt letter home.

In September 2022, Nigel Devine from North Shields set out on a personal journey to France to locate the grave of his own



great uncle who died in the First World War. During the trip, a family friend asked if he could also look for the grave of his relative, John McGlynn. Not knowing the name would soon take on deep personal meaning, Nigel found both graves and captured a photo of John’s final resting place.

Shortly after, back in the UK, Andy Mather discovered a dusty old suitcase while sorting through family belongings. Inside was a letter from a soldier named John McGlynn—sent to his mother and sisters back home in Wallsend just days before he died in France. It wasn’t until he saw the photo Nigel had taken that the connection clicked. This wasn’t just any soldier—this was his great uncle.

“It’s a fantastic coincidence that Nigel was asked to go and find a grave in France, and it turned out that it was my great uncle and Michael’s great great uncle. We hope that this song will pay tribute to all the fallen who sacrificed their lives for freedom – something that is all too poignant today too,” said Andy.

Bay City Rollers headline Tyneside Blues and Americana Festival

Get your tartan ready—North Shields is set to feel the full force of Scottish pop nostalgia this January as the Bay City Rollers headline the third annual Tyneside Blues and Americana Festival, which fittingly closes on Burns Night January 25th.

Festival organisers Stephen Donnelly and Jonny Clegg are pulling out all the stops to make the 2026 event the biggest and boldest yet. “We’ve gone for the best line-up we’ve ever had,” says Stephen. “This year we’ve got UK Blues Federation award winners including The Dom Martin Band and The Zac Schulze Gang, along with returning favourites like The Terraplane Blues Band and Tom Killner Band.”

In a move sure to please both music lovers and nostalgia seekers, the final day of the festival falls on Burns Night, and to mark the occasion with proper Scottish flair, the legendary Bay City Rollers will take to the stage. “It just fell into place,” Jonny explains. “We thought, let’s go for something fun and iconic to close the weekend—and they said yes.”



Tickets are on sale now at www.tynefest.co.uk, with day passes, full weekend wristbands, and VIP options available. But be quick—the tartan army is already assembling, and this one’s shaping up to be a sell-out.



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HEAT UP SUMMER

A woman with curly hair, wearing a red leotard, is captured mid-air performing a backflip. A white hula hoop is positioned around her waist. The background is a solid yellow color.

HEAT UP SUMMER

A woman with dark hair, wearing a black leotard, is captured mid-air performing a backflip. A white hula hoop is positioned around her waist. The background is a blue sky with white clouds.

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Mary Ann Rogers

No rest for the wicked

By Mary Ann Rogers.

With a fabulous summer exhibition here at the gallery over for another year, most of the reserved paintings have been reunited with their new owners, and are settling in their new homes in locations from the north of Scotland, to Vashon Island, Seattle, Spain to Canada and London.

No rest for the wicked, we are off to Harrogate for 'Home & Gift' buyers festival, where buyers from galleries, shops, department stores, interior designers and garden centres source their products for the coming seasons.

Four days of meeting buyers from all sectors, and all corners of the globe lies ahead. Usually the weather is lovely, and there's a really summery feel to the event, which takes place across the grounds of the Majestic Hotel as well as the exhibition centre. We take the caravan and stay in the site at the Yorkshire Showground, which is also where the shuttle bus to the event runs from, which makes it the ideal way to wind down after a busy day, and a stress free start to each day. The lido in Knaresborough in a beautiful stretch of the River Nidd, just a few minutes drive away, so a post-show swim might be on the cards, despite a dose of e-coli last year, known locally as 'Nidd Belly'. I think I'll keep my head above the water if I go in again this year!

This year has been unusually dry and sunny, and for the first time, I've found myself drawn into the beauty of the summer landscape, with its very different atmosphere from my more moody, ominous winter landscape paintings. I plan to produce two new limited edition prints from my favourite ones. These will be ready in time for the pre-christmas season I hope.

The new e-bikes have been life changing. I rarely go anywhere locally in the car now if I can possibly help it, and turned up for a taster Pilates session in Bellingham a couple of weeks ago on the bike, despite it being a windy, rainy evening, just because I could, plus I was guaranteed a 'free' ride home with the wind behind me, and managed to beat my previous PB by several minutes. Post work evening trips to the river for a swim is always on the bike, and my free six week service turned out to be three months, which got me a stern telling off from the man in the bike shop who reiterated all the important reasons why it should have had a six week service. I pointed out that he should be pleased that I just couldn't be without it and was enjoying it too much to give it up!



The river water has never been as warm as it has been this summer that I can recall. This has led to longer sections of the river being swum with no fear of getting cold. I found myself having to walk for a short shallow stretch while exploring longer river swims lately which I will remember for the future.

New hare paintings are underway. We have a resident hare in the garden, its just half grown, and is becoming quite bold, and unafraid of us. This gives me many opportunities to quietly observe its movement and behaviour, which is such an important part of the painting process.

Mary Ann Rogers Gallery, West Woodburn, Hexham NE48 2SE

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Popular Ouseburn publican takes over historic Black Bull pub

Darren Goodwin, the publican behind the hugely popular Tanners Arms in Newcastle's Ouseburn, has taken over the historic Black Bull pub near St James' Park—rebranding it as The Blue Star and bringing a fresh new concept to the city's West End.

Once a traditional match-day hub for Newcastle United fans, the venue has undergone a major transformation.

Goodwin and his team have introduced an exciting new food and design concept that mirrors the successful formula of the Tanners Arms—bold street art, laid-back music, a strong food offering, and a welcoming atmosphere for all ages.

"We wanted to bring a slice of the Ouseburn scene to the West End," says Goodwin. "That means quality food, a bit of edge in the decor, and a vibe that's cool, creative, and family-friendly."

The Blue Star, located on Barrack Road is just a stone's throw from St James' Park with the new name being a nod to the famous Newcastle icon and the proximity to the site of the old Newcastle Brewery. Now, the venue is home to a new food offering featuring the Tanners Arms' famously in-demand street food and Sunday dinners—served by the same chefs. The Tanners' Sunday roasts often have a two- to three-month waiting list, so this expansion provides a much-needed alternative for food lovers in the area.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Goodwin adapted by launching Scranners Arms with talented head chef Stuart Hann. The popular food delivery and pick up brand was developed, and continues to operate successfully today, laying the foundations for the expansion into The Blue Star.



Step back in time

Visitors to Newcastle can step back in time thanks to a new digital heritage trail at Blackfriars.

The new augmented-reality walking trail brings the medieval site to life through a series of interpretation panels located around Blackfriars' Cloister Garden. Each panel features a QR code linking to a specially created interactive trail app with audio guides, historical overlays, 3D reconstructions, and augmented reality features suitable for all the family.

The idea for the trail was developed by Andy Hook, owner of Blackfriars Restaurant, and Professor Giles Gasper, professor of High Medieval History at Durham University who collaborated with a team of academics, historians, archaeologists and digital experts on the project.

The trail app was created by Animmersion UK, leaders in immersive 3D content, alongside New Visions Heritage, known for historical engagement through storytelling and technology. Renowned local archaeologists Dr Eric Cambridge and Alan Williams were also brought in to ensure historical accuracy and develop new visual interpretations of the Dominican friary.

The project was supported by Durham University, the HITS Programme (funded by the North of Tyne Combined Authority and delivered by NewcastleGateshead Initiative, Food and Drink North East, and NBSL). This latest development follows the restoration of the Cloister Garden, now a vibrant, public space used for performances, markets, and community events at Blackfriars and St Dominic's Brewery within the historic Chapter House which launched last year. Events in the garden have included a Christmas market and beer festival with many more being planned in the future.

After the trail, visitors can also enjoy one of Dominic Brewery's beers or enjoy a bit to eat in the restaurant or Cloister Garden.

New commercial team drives next phase of growth at Cairn Hotel Group

Cairn Hotel Group today announces two promotions within its commercial leadership team as part of a companywide drive to accelerate growth and innovation. The promotions come as the Group enters its next phase of strategic development, with a renewed focus on performance, structure and digital transformation.

Sarah Powell-Abrams joins the commercial leadership team as Director of Marketing following four years as Head of Marketing at the Group, while Clare Hughes steps into the role of Director of Sales following a successful six-year tenure at the Group. Clare first joined the business in 2019 as Director of Sales and Marketing for Holiday Inn Birmingham, before progressing to Head of Sales.

The appointments strengthen a newly established commercial leadership team, led by Commercial Director, Tina O'Hara.



Sarah and Clare now join forces with Gregory Coing-Roy, Revenue Director, who joined the team in 2024 to oversee the pricing and distribution strategy across the Group. Gregory brings extensive expertise in revenue management following his time at Klarent Hospitality and Radisson. Together, the team brings a sharpened focus on performance across all revenue streams including rooms, spa, leisure and F&B, and move towards ambitious FY26 growth targets.



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EVNT Inspirations – Putting the WOW factor into events

Christmas in Newcastle is of course the most magical time of year – but as well as delighting children and adults alike, it's also commercially important to the city.

Having the right attractions to draw residents and visitors in is key, which is why both business improvement district, NE1 and Newcastle City Council partners with to help deliver their ambitions.

Enter EVNT Inspirations, the Tyneside-based company which has a long pedigree in adding originality, variety and sheer joy to an event.

The company is behind the annual Moosenwirt – the pop-up Alpine bar at Gray Street – the North Pole at Gray's Monument where visitors could wine and dine in pop-up igloo pods and Newcastle Christmas Village at Old Eldon Square, which offered everything from Santa Stories to the Rockin' Reindeer stage with daily performances.

EVNT Inspirations is currently putting the finishing touches on



its plans for this festive season, which promises to be bigger and better than ever before, but that's not to say the company is just for Christmas.

Because it had carved itself a huge niche in the events industry, thanks to its ability to think outside of the box and deliver both its homegrown attractions and bespoke events for clients.

The most recent addition to its fast growing portfolio is the UK's largest pop-up pub, made of shipping containers and which got its first outing at Plate Day and Ladies Day at Newcastle Racecourse.

Named The Jockey's Rest, this two level bar is also heading to Doncaster Racecourse for the St Leger and will also appear at The Come Together Festival – starring Robbie Williams and The Kings of Leon – at Newcastle's Town Moor.

According to Nigel Holliday, one of the directors of EVNT Inspirations, the travelling tavern is a great addition to any occasion.

“While it was branded as The Jockey’s Rest for the racing events, the beauty of it is that we can create any name for it and adapt it to suit any particular need,” said Nigel.

“It might be for a corporate event or a private party, it can be renamed and tweaked to reflect the company or the individual.”

Its versatility was highlighted at a recent corporate booking for Northumbria Water, where it was used in their innovation festival.

EVNT Inspirations now has one of the largest collections of shipping container bar in the UK, which it can use to create pop-ups at spaces across the country.

It’s their experience at delivering unique experiences that has put the company in such high demand – from North East street food market and drinks venue HWKRLAND to the current Summer on the South Side, which is operating at the By The River Brew site on the Gateshead side of the river.

Along with delivering a huge range of events for other people, EVNT Inspirations has been behind some of the region’s most exciting experiences.

Paddyfest, the celebration of all-things Irish, the staging for Northern Pride, the highly successful Flight Night darts extravaganza, – which is about to be repeated this November at Times Square and Newcastle’s two biggest fanzones created to watch the city sweep to victory in the Carabao Cup, were all organised by EVNT Inspirations.

And the football connection doesn’t end there, with EVNT Inspirations helping NUFC to co-ordinate and run the street food traders at the trophy lifting on the Town Moor – which attracted around 150,000 fans.

Also looming on the horizon is the return of Oktoberfest which will take place on three consecutive Saturdays in October, when Times Square will be transformed into a 2000 capacity Bavarian beer hall, where guests can enjoy overflowing steins filled with German beer,



tuck into bratwurst, currywurst, frankfurters, pretzels and all the traditional favourites, while enjoying some of the best live Oompah bands from across Europe.

For Mike Hesketh, one of the co-directors of EVNT Inspirations, the experience of the team is vital in creating experiences people want to attend.

“Between us we have years of experience in the events industry and delivering both large scale public events and offering everything from pop-up bars to tipis to add an extra dimension to any occasion,” he said.

“We’re can offer a one stop shop which makes a huge difference and we have such a great creative team that we can make everything bespoke to add that wow factor for our clients.”

For further information visit www.evntinspirations.co.uk



Places to go...Henley on Thames



Henley on Thames in Oxfordshire (pop 12,200) stands at the end of a railway branch line operated by GWR from Twyford. This is on the Elizabeth line one stop before the Reading terminus, but you're better to use the GWR service from Paddington which is faster.

Connections by Underground from King's Cross. As it happens, Twyford was due to open its new ticket office the day after my visit. The single-track Henley branch runs every half hour and delivers you close to the town centre.

Turn right towards the river and the recommended hotel is just after the only bridge over the river, this being The Relais Hotel on Hart Street, formerly known as the Red Lion. An efficient Sunday afternoon check-in led to a very pleasant room overlooking the courtyard on the inside and the view over the river from the opposite window, with a lovely deep pile carpet between the two. You could not be more central, first building west of the Bridge on the road up to the Town Hall.

My first excursion to was to the home of William Morris, the motor manufacturer of Oxford. Travel to Nuffield Place (National Trust) using daily bus no.33 from Hart Street. Look for the big brown sign after Nettlebed, ring the bell and you'll be dropped on the Common for the entrance drive. Morris amassed huge wealth through building cars, and who became Lord Nuffield, after the name of his estate, eventually giving away £30 million at those days' prices to medical and other charities. The side entrance was annoyingly signposted for deliveries and disabled drivers, but not for pedestrians, so I followed the much longer route via the car park and arrived two minutes after last admission. I politely protested that I would have been in good time had I used the short cut. A kind curator took pity and took me round (just as all the room volunteers left!) and it was fascinating to see how the house was preserved following Lord Nuffield's childless death in 1963.

On a sunny afternoon the cool bus shelter waiting for the 33 back was welcome. I walked the Riverside as the Henley Women's Regatta was finishing, which explained all the stripy blazers. Plenty of choice for dining, I chose Café Raj on the Reading Road. Later, I discovered Magoo's on Hart Street, the only late bar in town used by bar staff elsewhere to gather after closing time.

Monday morning, after an excellent breakfast, I walked out to the Fairmile Vineyard a mile northwest of the town, to see where English sparkling wine was produced in the verdant uplands of Henley. I was received by the friendly couple who in 2013 planted the same three grape varieties which traditionally go into the

world's greatest fizz – Pinot Noir, Pinot Meunier, and Chardonnay. 12,000 vines were established across 3 hectares using GPS-guided machinery for accuracy and optimum spacing. After an interesting conversation on viticulture, I bought a bottle to secrete in my luggage. Bus 33 back into town.

I had lunch at the River and Rowing Museum (Art Fund free) which is a marvellous museum featuring an immersive Wind in the Willows exhibition, and sections on the town, the River Thames and its management, and Olympic and other rowing all over the world. This innovative museum allows entry in the last hour for half price. Then down to the river for a lovely hour's Hobbs cruise along the Thames both ways, with plenty of rowing action to watch on the Berkshire side before sadly collecting my bag from The Relais and off towards the station.

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Diary of a GM



Jeff Hodgson

Counting pennies, perks, and panic attacks – with a smile

By Jeff Hodgson, General Manager, Lumley Castle.

Welcome to the glamorous world of hotel finance—where spreadsheets reign supreme, budgets haunt your dreams, and you can calculate the cost of a broken minibar item faster than you can say “complimentary robe.”

To the untrained eye, hotel finance might seem dry—just numbers on a screen, a calculator, and the occasional mysterious coffee stain on a profit-and-loss report. But behind the scenes, it's a high stake balancing act of revenue, expenses, forecasting, and trying to figure out how someone managed to spend £50 on cashew nuts in one night.

The Art of Budgeting: Also known as Creative Fiction Writing

Let's begin with budgeting. Each year, finance teams across the industry sit down to predict the future. It's less crystal ball, more optimistic fanfiction about how next year's profits might look—if absolutely everything goes perfectly.

We start with last year's figures, adjust for inflation, toss in a dash of “projected growth,” and cross our fingers that no bachelor party ends in a £5,000 room repair bill.

Then comes feedback: “Trim expenses by 10%” and “increase revenue by 20%.” No problem—we'll just conjure up guests out of thin air and upsell them to the King James Suite because the soap's a bit fancier.

Revenue management: Playing tetris with room rates

Hotel finance isn't just about reigning in costs. It's also about squeezing every penny from every available room. That's where revenue management enters—an alchemy of data, strategy, and occasionally, pure gut instinct.

Rates shift constantly based on seasonality, occupancy, and local events. If Beyoncé's in town? Double the price. Rainy Tuesday in February? Throw in a free breakfast and hope for the best.

Few things match the thrill of a fully booked weekend—followed by the heartbreak of discovering the last guest paid with points, a 40% discount, and a loyalty voucher from 2011.

The joy of auditing: “Who spent £800 on candles?!”

Every month brings the sacred ritual of reviewing expenses. That's when you stumble upon financial gems like:

- A mysterious £400 bar tab charged to the maintenance team.
- An invoice for “emergency lightbulb delivery”.

- A trail of full-colour printing despite repeated memos (and printer warnings).

Auditing is part financial control, part detective work. You track receipts, chase down missing invoices, and occasionally question a line cook about a curious entry labelled “cheese emergency.”

And when the books finally balance? That's nirvana. You feel like a rock star—albeit a sleep-deprived, coffee-fuelled one armed with a calculator.

Capex: Big dreams, bigger bills

Capital expenditure—Capex—is where finance really breaks a sweat. The Castle wants a swimming pool Fantastic—just find the six-figure funding.

From renovations and tech upgrades to new furniture and infrastructure overhauls, Capex requires planning, strong ROI projections, and at least one painfully detailed PowerPoint.

And then, of course, there's the classic: “Let's replace all 300 room carpets—next week!” Sure. Just let us check the petty cash drawer.

Behind the scenes - but running the show

Here's the thing: guests rarely think about hotel finance. They check in, relax, and (hopefully) pay their bill—never knowing there's a team behind the curtain keeping the lights on, the spreadsheets balanced, and the filet mignon profitable.

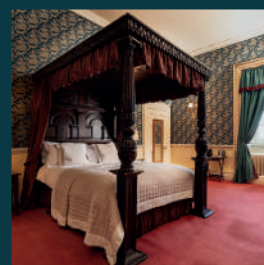
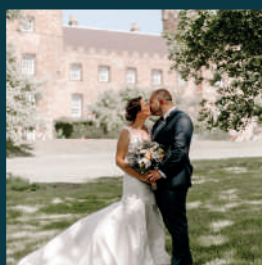
Hotel finance is equal parts math, forecasting, troubleshooting, and a constant chorus of “wait, what now?”

It may not always be glamorous, but it is essential—and yes, occasionally hilarious.

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16th Birthday Celebrations

The multi award winning Staybridge Suites in Newcastle recently held a party for invited guests and corporate partners to celebrate their 16th birthday.

Opened in 2009 after an initial £28 million investment the hotel has, at its core, a loyal and passionate team. Many have served since the opening and helped shape their signature friendly welcoming atmosphere which has been embraced by guests, many of whom return year after year.

From 2010 to 2024, Staybridge held the No.1 hotel ranking on TripAdvisor for Newcastle, a rare feat in the competitive hospitality landscape. The hotel has also consistently been IHG's top UK performer for guest loyalty and satisfaction, achieving national recognition in the TripAdvisor Travellers' Choice Awards in both 2014 and 2019, where it was ranked 22nd and 21st respectively among the top 25 hotels in the UK.

Innovation has been crucial to the success of Staybridge. They were one of the first hotels in Newcastle to install electric vehicle chargers and also introduced pet friendly suites in 2018 to strengthen their "home away from home" ethos.

More recently they have introduced the "Great North Buzz" running packages which sold out within two hours of the ballot opening, a testament to the venues popularity with returning guests.

They remained open throughout the pandemic, providing a safe haven for NHS nurses and frontline workers and supporting essential companies developing Covid Test kits.

2019 saw a £1.8million refurbishment of the hotels communal areas and 2024 saw a full upgrade of all 128 suites with a £1.3 million investment during their highest revenue year to date.

Reflecting on their birthday General Manager Lisa Crocker said "We are delighted to reach this landmark and the party was a fitting way to mark our achievements. Thank you to everyone who has supported us along the way."







In the heart of High Gosforth Park

Now at the height of the flat racing season, the Border Minstrel Pub is a venue which really comes into its own. The pub is the perfect spot for lapping up the excitement of raceday, but also has much to offer non-racing punters on a daily basis.

The pub serves food from 12 o'clock daily and is a sage choice for a business meeting, pub lunch, family meal or Sunday dinner. Named after the winner of the 1927 Northumberland Plate, this Grade II listed building is situated at the heart of High Gosforth Park, an area encompassing Newcastle Racecourse, two golf courses and many acres of surrounding woodland.

As a result, the area is very popular on the dog-walking circuit with the pub keen to accommodate dog-walkers.

We visited on a mid-week evening and found that the crowded raceday boozier had transformed into a contemporary

gastropub serving freshly-cooked pub grub with a smile. On a glorious summer's evening we first sharpened our appetites in the beer garden before repairing inside to find a table and look over the menus.

Featuring a mix of main plates, steaks, burgers and salads, the Border Minstrel's menu is hearty and eclectic, offering something for all of the family. Their drinks selection is also worth noting with a range of traditional ales, craft beers and specially selected wines and spirits available.

We kicked off with a couple of tantalising starters. I opted for Cajun Chicken Tenders in light batter with a sweet chilli dip whilst my wife Lisa chose Pear & Stilton Salad with creamy blue stilton on a bed of rocket with croutons. Lovely fayre which we thoroughly enjoyed.

Main courses followed shortly after and proved to be of a similar high standard. The Thai Chicken Curry was wholesome and hearty with thick cut chips proving a suitably stodgy accompaniment. Lisa meanwhile enjoyed chicken fajitas served on a hot sizzling plate with salsa, guacamole and sour cream.

Washed down with a lovely bottle of Pinot Grigio this was a lovely midweek treat.

Throughout our meal, we were waited on superbly by long standing manageress Katherine who tried to coax us into dessert which we politely declined. Next time for sure as there were some very tempting options!

Our meal had been memorable for all the right reasons and at an extremely cost-effective price. If you do not have the time for the "full monty" at lunchtime, there's



also a light bites/sandwich menu along with a children's menu for those with young family.

The pub is also a popular Sunday lunch outpost, serving a weekly carvery from 12pm to 5pm. If the food is of the same high quality as our recent meal, I shall be taking the family there shortly.

Once you add Sky Sports, weekly quiz nights and ample free parking to the mix, this is a place with a lot going for it.

The Pub in the Park has much to offer its visitors whether raceday or not.

For further information visit the excellent website www.borderminstrel.co.uk

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Holiday health & fitness tips

Feeling confident in your own skin is incredibly rewarding and for many, it can set the tone for your entire summer holiday.

But if you're keen to maintain your progress without sacrificing the fun, here are a few simple tips to help you stay on track:

Skip the airport blowout

That full English breakfast with extra bread and muffins might seem tempting, but loading up on calories before your flight can leave you feeling sluggish and bloated before your holiday even begins.

Plan ahead for travel

Eat a light, healthy meal before heading to the airport. Instead of grabbing cheese-laden sandwiches or mayo-heavy snacks on the plane, pick up something fresh and nutritious beforehand to take with you.

Smarter breakfast choices

Steer clear of heavy options like white bread, pancakes, or syrup. Opt for protein-rich and refreshing alternatives like eggs, ham, and fruit, melons and berries are great choices to kick off your day right.



David Fairlamb

Keep moving

Daily walks are a great way to stay active and burn calories. Remember, the heat will naturally elevate your heart rate, so take it steady and stay hydrated.

Hit the gym (if you want to)

If your accommodation has a gym and you're used to training, try squeezing in 2–3 short sessions of around 45 minutes. That's enough to maintain your fitness. If you're consistent all year, a week off might be just what your body needs—rest is important too!

Train early

If you do want to exercise, do it in the morning when it's cooler. That way, you've got the rest of the day to relax and enjoy yourself.

Beach bodyweight workout

No gym? No problem. A 20-minute beach session using bodyweight movements can work wonders. Focus on big muscle groups—squats, lunges, star jumps,

crunches, press-ups, planks, and short sprints (20–30 metres).

You might even inspire a few onlookers with your dedication.

My Tynemouth Longsands Beach Bootcamp includes all of these, come and join us and learn how it's done.

Sunbed crunches

Even lying on your sunbed, you can sneak in a mini workout. Do 10–30 crunches every couple of hours you'll hit over 100 before the day is done without breaking a sweat.

Stay hydrated

Aim to drink 2–3 litres of water daily. Avoid fizzy drinks and energy drinks, some contain up to 20 teaspoons of sugar in a single bottle!

Watch the cocktails

Creamy, indulgent cocktails are loaded with calories. Opt for spirits with slimline mixers, a glass of wine, or a light spritzer instead. Beer and lager can leave you feeling bloated.

Mindless snacking

It's easy to overdo it on nuts and crisps at the bar. If you need a nibble, take a small portion and move the rest out of reach.

www.davidfairlambfitness.co.uk

David's Summing Up

Remember the goal is to enjoy your holiday while making small adjustments that help you feel your best. A few healthy habits can go a long way toward keeping you energized, happy, and confident all summer.



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Barry Speker OBE

Comment

By Barry Speker OBE

Eagle-eyed readers of Northern Insight may have scoured the July issue in vain to locate my Comment column. A line from the Editor inside the back page suggesting I was on holiday, would have been partially correct.

In fact we went to Israel for a week to celebrate the wedding of a friend's granddaughter. Two days after the splendid wedding celebration, war broke out between Israel and Iran, the airport was closed and all flights were cancelled - indefinitely.

Alarms, sirens, missiles and a war environment in what became the Twelve-Day War.



That President Trump concluded that the prospect of Iran developing nuclear weapons was indeed a real likelihood and a risk not only to Israel, America and the western world, produced the US bombing of the uranium enrichment plant in Iran. This led to ceasefire and enabled us to fly back to the UK by El Al on 27th June, after an extended stay of 20 days. Many thanks to expat friends for their support.

Arriving back home we were greeted by a heat wave, and the temperature has remained high politically, with strains on public finances, tears on the front bench, cross-Channel boats more crowded than ever and further crises in the BBC.

Despite the government's massive majority, the Labour Party appears beleaguered by leftie mainly newbie MPs, unhappy at having to toe the party line. Sir Keir deserves some praise in exacting some party discipline upon Labour rebel MPs, suspending four of them and stripping another three of their trade envoy jobs.

Will this encourage them to join the as yet unnamed new extreme left party being set up by Jeremy Corbyn and Zahrah Sultana?

Added to this, the mother of the house, Dianne Abbott MP, has succeeded in getting herself suspended from the Labour Party - again. Having apologised for her letter to the Observer in April 2023 making offensive race comments (she said it was a draft published in error), she then in a recent BBC4 interview said she did not regret the comments and repeated them. Another candidate for the new Corbyn party?

Rod Stewart and other octogenarians were a hit at Glastonbury. The long waited reunion of Noel and Liam drew in massive crowds. Almost as momentous was my reunion with my old friend Peter Collins. We were a dazzling duo as teenagers in the 1960s and he suggested we sing a few songs at a summer Barbeque in Gosforth.

We turned up with our guitars and provided a varied set including Beatles favourites, Simon and Garfunkel, Where have all the flowers gone? and some ethnic classics. All went well despite it being over 60 years since our previous performance! Open for bookings!

Polls demonstrate that there is no



widespread enthusiasm for extending the franchise. In addition, electoral reform is not a top priority for many people. Therefore, is the Government plan to give the vote to 16 and 17 year olds flagrant political expediency?

Labour is seeking to capitalise on being perceived to be the most popular party among the young. However it can not be assumed that adding 1.6million of them will boost hopes of re-election.

It is not too much to suggest that most 16 and 17 year olds are not mature enough to make measured political choices - when they are regarded as too young to buy an alcoholic drink, enter into legal contracts or marry without parental consent. Let them expect the adult population to select and elect those who govern us.

All praise for the achievements of Newcastle Hospitals, Newcastle University and the Newcastle Fertility Centre. Their pioneering IVF treatment has succeeded in healthy babies being born to women with a high risk of transmitting complications causing mitochondrial disease. (New England Journal of Medicine).

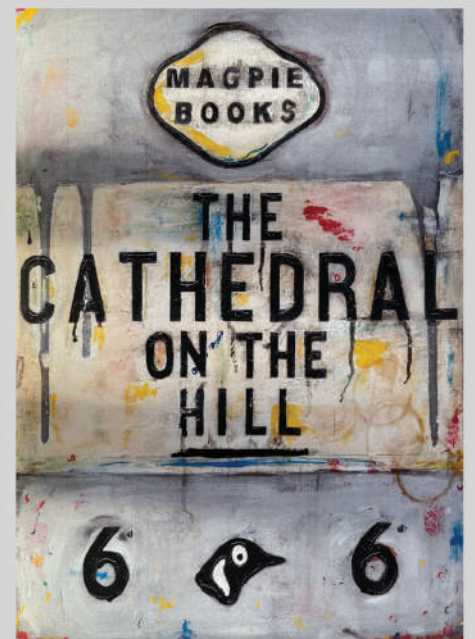
The process known as mitochondrial donation treatment involves scientists taking the genetic embryo from the two parents and transplanting into a separate fertilised embryo with healthy mitochondria donated by a third woman. The procedure is approved on a case by case basis by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority.

After a change in the law in 2015, Newcastle became the first and only national centre licensed to perform the amazing treatment.

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