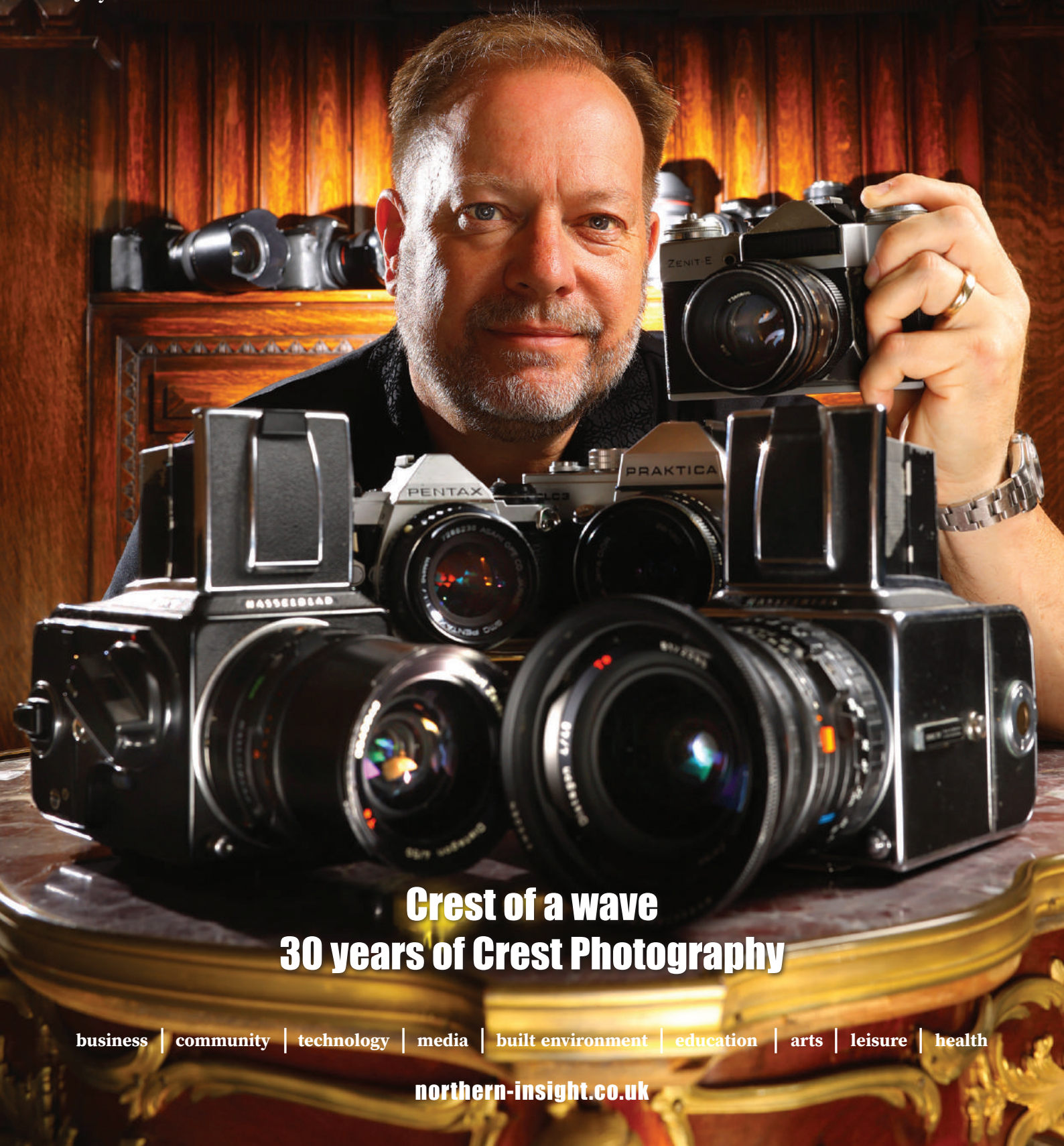


NORTHERN

# INSIGHT

July 2025

Issue 114



**Crest of a wave  
30 years of Crest Photography**

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

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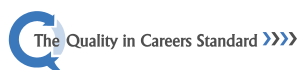


# ENROL WITH US

**Tue 26<sup>th</sup>, Wed 27<sup>th</sup> &  
Thur 28<sup>th</sup> August**



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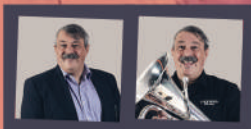


**Anderson Barrowcliff**

Business Advisers & Chartered Accountants

# Deals and Dealmakers

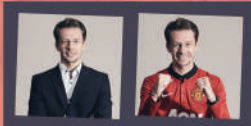
## Dealmakers



**David Shawcross** - CF & Tax Partner  
Having an impressive CV, David has advised on CF transactions across the UK for over 25 years.



**James Dale** - CF Partner  
James heads up the M&A team at AB, advising on both buy and sell side deals.



**Luke Hopkins** - CF Director  
Luke is a lead adviser on sell side transactions, achieving fantastic results for his clients.



**Andrew Hughes** - CF Executive  
Andrew prepares detailed forecast modelling for the CF team on both buy and sell side deals.



**Niall Bradley** - CF Executive  
Niall carries out CF due diligence assignments alongside IM preparation, deal origination, buyer research and buyer communications.

## Deals



This full sales process led to an exit for the shareholders of Matrix to Ipsum Utilities and included preparing the company for sale, buyer research, marketing the business, evaluating and negotiating offers, DD support, SPA negotiation and full deal management.



This buy-side transaction supported Caswells to increase its geographic presence with the acquisition of North West based Cutler Cleaning Supplies Ltd. AB advised on the structure of the transaction, undertook a tax and financial DD process and advised on the SPA.



Over the past 12 months, AB has advised on the buy out of one of the company's shareholders, a reconstruction of the company and recently, the strategic acquisition of Tolly Fabrications Ltd to secure the company's key supply chain.

*The Teesside Corporate Finance Specialist*



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# The story that led us to our name

Two travellers were together in a wood when a bear appeared. One of the travellers seized hold of the branch of a tree and hid amongst the leaves. The other, seeing no help, threw himself flat upon the ground with his face in the dust. The bear approached and, putting his muzzle close to the traveller's ear, sniffed and sniffed.

But at last with a growl he shook his head and slouched off, for bears will not touch dead meat. Then the fellow in the tree came down to his comrade and laughing, said "What was it that he whispered to you?", "He told me," said the other, "Never trust a friend who deserts you in times of trouble."

**The Bear and the Two Travellers – Aesop's Fables**

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Michael Grahamslaw

## Design

Lu O'Rourke

## Accounts Manager

Lisa Grahamslaw

## Front Cover

Tilly Thompson, Crest Photography

## Lead Photography

Crest Photography

## Editorial Contributors

Jack Grahamslaw, Holly Grahamslaw,  
Graham Courtney, Alex Nelson,  
David Fairlamb, Keith Newman

## Social Media

Jordan Marston (JAM Marketing)

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# Foreword

## FOREWORD

### Welcome to the July issue of Northern Insight

Here is your curated window into the people, enterprises, and inspirations shaping the North East and beyond.

Our mission is to celebrate the ambition, innovation, and spirit that define our region. With every issue, we aim to highlight not just success stories, but the journeys, challenges, and values behind them. From dynamic business leaders to creative pioneers, from community changemakers to cultural events, this magazine brings together the voices that make our region thrive.

In these pages, you'll discover interviews, expert analysis and insights into emerging trends, all grounded in the distinctive character and resilience of the North. Whether you're a long-time reader or picking us up for the first time, we hope you find inspiration, connection, and a renewed appreciation for the vibrancy of our community.

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

MTG

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



#### Edition Sponsors







## Start up has team-building all wrapped up

**Aoife Forbes, an entrepreneur based in Whitley Bay, launched her professional gift wrapping service 'Forbes Finishings' last winter 2024. Since then, she has been establishing a business that will be both viable and profitable all year round, and 'not just for Christmas'.**

As part of this venture, Aoife has created team building workshops along the themes of sustainability and mental wellbeing, through the practice of gift wrapping. This is a unique service within the North East.

Aoife has delivered these sessions in a number of organisations recently including North Tyneside Council, Quorum Park and Sage.

Employees at Sage enjoyed some time out of their working day by connecting and creating with one another, whilst learning lots of new skills and how to gift wrap sustainably.

Aoife said, "I love encouraging people to create personal and individual gift wrap. For example, why not use old comics, maps, wallpaper, music score, posters, nostalgic magazines and crossword puzzles. Think about the recipient and use your imagination to make it truly unique.

Gift wrapping also allows us to work with our hands, which is a proven way to boost our mental health and reduce anxiety", said Aoife.

Aoife plans to promote these workshops to all BCorp and employee-focussed organisations of every size across the North East.



## Regional business leaders bolster BIC board

**One of the North East's leading providers of business support and flexible workspace has bolstered its board with four high-profile business leaders.**

The North East BIC, which boasts almost 250,000sq ft of workspace across its four business centres in Sunderland, Washington and Darlington, has appointed four high profile business leaders to supplement its board.

Andrew Marsh, Kevin Howell, Laura Middleton and Sophie Milliken MBE have joined its board of directors, complementing existing directors John Anderson CBE, David Howell, who was previously Operations Director, Paul McEldon OBE, Chief Executive Officer and Kevan Carrick, a director of the BIC for the past eight years.

Kevan Carrick has also taken on the role as chair, replacing John Anderson, who upon stepping down will be given the title of 'Life President' in honour of his services to the BIC.

Paul McEldon OBE said: "We are thrilled that Andrew, Kevin, Laura and Sophie have agreed to join the BIC board.

"They will bring a fresh new perspective to our thinking and ensure that, as new opportunities and challenges are presented, we are best placed as an organisation to ensure the region's businesses and aspiring entrepreneurs have the support and tools required to succeed."



## Tourism boost for Sunderland

**Sunderland has seen a bumper boost in overnight stays, according to new tourism data released for 2024.**

The seaside city has seen a six per cent uplift to the economic impact brought about by visitors staying overnight, with a 1.8 per cent rise in the number of people staying in the city, as well as an increase in their length of stay.

Ten per cent of visitors to the city are now staying overnight, and food and drink is now a key driver for people coming to Sunderland, with 38.1% of the overall economic benefit of tourism to the city being felt by businesses in this sector. The food and drink sector is also the largest employer, employing 1,807 full-time employees.

Tourism brought more than £620m into the Sunderland economy in 2024 according to STEAM data.

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## From Chips to Carats

**After a decade running one of the North East's top fish and chip shops, entrepreneur Wasim Mir has returned to his roots—swapping vinegar for vintage cuts with the launch of Mir Diamonds in Gosforth.**

Wasim is the fifth generation in his family to enter the jewellery trade. His father has run the well-known Mir Jewellers in Newcastle since 1990, and now Wasim is carving his own legacy with a focus on craftsmanship, heritage, and personal service.

“Jewellery is in my blood,” says Wasim. “I was practically raised in my dad’s shop.”

His career began young, helping his father before going on to work at top jewellers including Northern Goldsmiths, where he helped grow turnover from £6 million to £10 million.

Mir Diamonds offers bespoke services including ring sizing, repairs, rhodium plating, and custom design with both natural and lab-grown diamonds. Wasim also sources luxury timepieces from brands like Rolex, Cartier, and Breitling.

“In-store, I can craft or repair jewellery from scratch,” he says. “It’s about honesty, quality, and relationships.”

Wasim is joined by his wife Anam, who left teaching to support the business. “We’re building something our children can be proud of,” he says.

Mir Diamonds is now open at 201 High Street, Gosforth (NE3 1HQ).



## Tailored Leisure Company (TLC) celebrates charitable status

**Tailored Leisure Company (TLC) is excited to announce that it has officially been granted charitable status, marking a significant milestone in the organisation's journey to better support the North East community and expand its impact.**

With founder Tara Mackings BEM, at the helm TLC are renowned in the North East for their ethos and vision to overcome the barriers and social exclusion faced by disabled people, specifically in terms of access to fitness and leisure activities.

The news comes as trailblazing social entrepreneur Tara has been announced as a finalist in the 2025 Enterprise Vision Awards (EVAS), the UK's largest celebration of women in business.

Tara will be flying the flag for the North East in the Not for Profit category for her work in supporting over 6,500 people in the region since inception to break down barriers and champion ability over disability.



## Printing and packaging giant acquires competitor in 'sensational' deal

**A major North East printing and packaging company has acquired a leading competitor, in a deal that could potentially create over 20 jobs.**

The Encore Group has acquired Heritage Envelopes Limited, bringing together two of the UK's longest established and most successful envelope manufacturers.

Already boasting a workforce of over 300 staff, the deal will not only secure many existing jobs but create new roles at Encore's sites in Washington and Dewsbury.

“Acquiring Heritage brings together two highly respected names in the envelope world and enables our group to bolster production levels,” said Encore's Managing Director, David Cooper.

The acquisition marks yet more growth for The Encore Group, which has gone from strength to strength since forming over 40 years ago – establishing itself as the leading one-stop shop for bespoke printed envelopes.

In 2023, it acquired a huge new logistics site in Peterlee to cope with soaring demand.

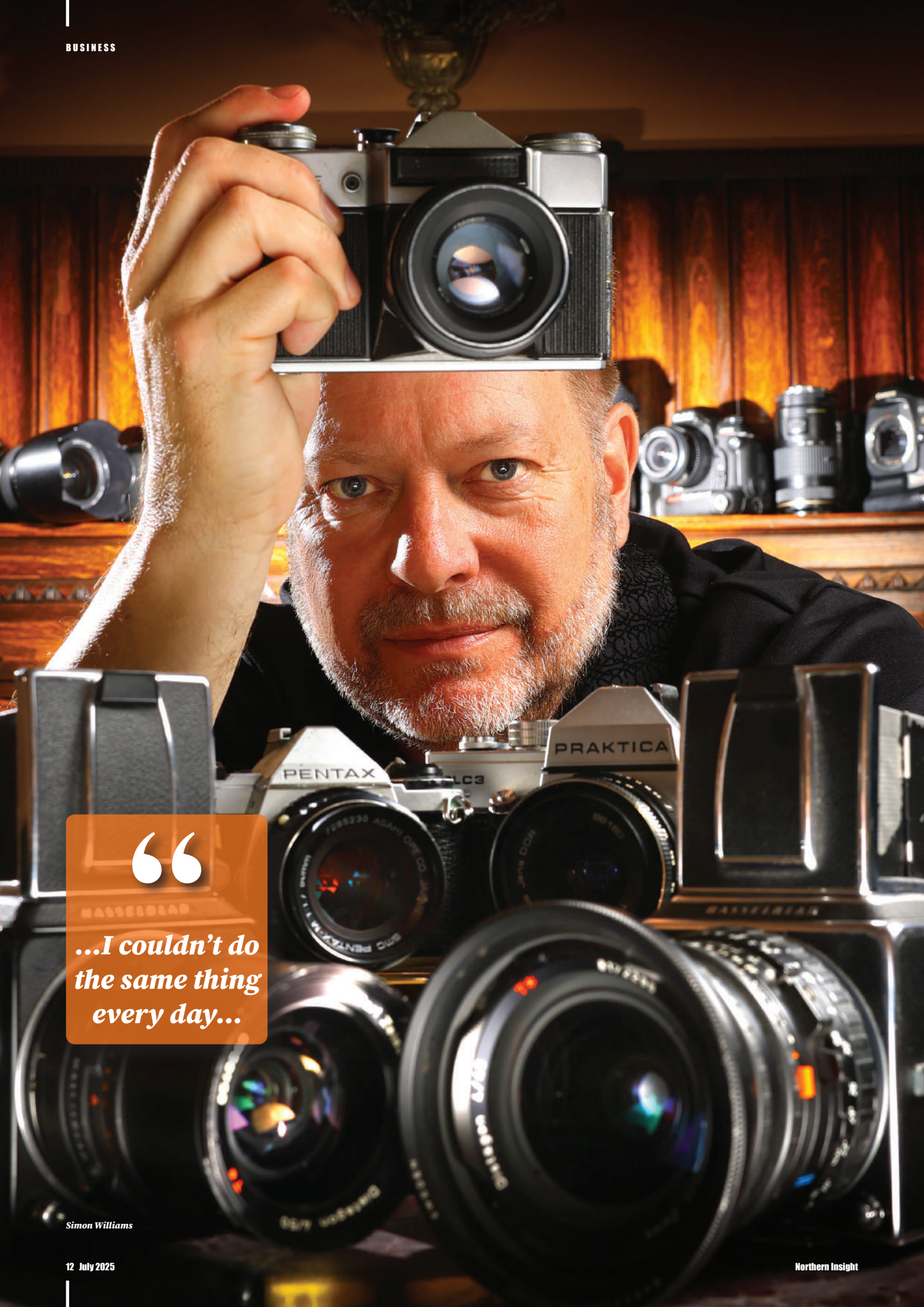
The acquisition of Heritage Envelopes Limited, from Mayer-Kuvert-network GmbH for an undisclosed sum, will provide much-needed consolidation to help maintain a healthy envelope market, throughout both the UK and Europe.

The Blackburn-based business has been acquired as a going concern and will continue to trade as a subsidiary of Encore.

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“

*...I couldn't do  
the same thing  
every day...*

Simon Williams



# Cover Story...

## Crest of a Wave

By Keith Newman

### 30 Years of Crest Photography with Simon Williams.

**There's a moment when Simon Williams talks about his work that his voice shifts — not with tiredness, not with ego, but with genuine, boyish excitement. "I still get that feeling," he says, "like when you were a kid waiting for your prints to come back in the post." After more than 30 years at the helm of Crest Photography, Simon is still clearly in love with what he does.**

We caught up with Simon in a rare moment of stillness — somewhere between a morning shoot in London and an evening job nearer to home. That's the life of a photographer whose client list stretches from Stornoway to Southampton and includes everything from NHS trusts, transport, engineering, investment, education to royalty and rock stars.

#### **Simon, how did this all start for you?**

"It began back at school, actually. We had a black-and-white darkroom in the art department, and I already loved taking photos as a kid. I always got the job of photographing my grandparents around the tree at Christmas, all the usual family snaps. But it really took off when my dad got a Russian SLR — a Zenit-E. I remember looking through the lens and thinking this is magic. That's when I got hooked."

#### **And now Crest Photography is 30 years old.**

"I know! It's flown by. Before that I spent 12 great years with Halliman Photography in Gosforth — I started there in 1983 when the company was tiny. I was just a young lad, learning everything. But I got the urge to go out on my own. Looking back, I was probably just young and hungry enough to think I could make it work — and somehow, I did."

#### **You've seen some major changes in technology since then.**

"Oh, massive changes. I started with square format film, two-and-a-quarter inch negatives. That was slow but the quality was high end. Then digital came along in the early 2000s. I remember a salesman telling me, 'You can see your exposures instantly,' and I thought, but I already know my exposures — I've got a light meter!"

#### **What does a typical day look like for you now?**

"Every day is different. Today I left London on the 8am train, was shooting in Gateshead by 11, then back to the office to sort files. I've got another shoot tonight and I'll get those images out before tomorrow starts. I've always said I'm lucky — I've got a brilliant list of clients that keeps me constantly moving."

#### **Who are some of the clients you've worked with?**

"Komatsu, Virgin, Greggs, National Grid, etc I invoice over 100 clients per year which to me is crazy and I've worked with some of them for over 30 years. I do work in retail, engineering, airports, train operators. I also work with the NHS and care organisations, which can be really moving. You find yourself photographing people sharing the most personal, powerful stories. I've honestly been in tears behind the camera more times than I can remember."

#### **You've photographed royalty too — including King Charles?**

"Yes, I had a private sitting with him when he was Prince Charles back in the '90s, out in a field in Northumberland with just his security team around. That was a big one. I was the host photographer for Queen Elizabeth too — that was a real honour."

#### **And Sting?**

"Yeah, a few times. One moment really stuck with me. We were outside Bamburgh Castle chatting about where we were born. Turns out we were both born at the same hospital. Then he asked me where I grew up and I said 'Cambois,' and he just went, 'Where the hell's that?'"

Simon laughs again. "Next thing you know, I'm on stage with the lighting guy and his guitar tech, he's singing Roxanne — and the next morning I'm photographing oil engineers in a factory. Total contrast."

#### **That variety must keep things interesting.**

"Absolutely. I couldn't do the same thing every day. I remember once going to the same client four days in a row and I found it so weird. I usually wake up and check where I'm supposed to be — I take each day as it comes."

#### **You've done over 20,000 shoots in that time — that's quite a legacy.**

"Yeah. Maybe 50,000-60,000 miles/100,000 exposures per year. It all adds up. I'm very lucky to do what I do and I'm grateful to my clients for trusting in my work."

[www.crestphotography.co.uk](http://www.crestphotography.co.uk)



# Why smart business leaders don't go it alone



**Running a business takes guts. From navigating big decisions to keeping the wheels turning day to day, most owners wear multiple hats and trust their instincts to get the job done.**

**That self-reliant mindset is often what fuels early success, but it can also make it harder to take a step back and see the bigger picture.**

We get it. When you're close to the action, it's easy to lose perspective. And when you're the one calling the shots, how often does someone really challenge your thinking? Clients? Team? Even friends and family? Not likely. That's where an external partner can make all the difference.

At 360 Growth Partners, we're not here to cheerlead or hand out templated advice. We're business people who've been in your shoes, and we work with you to stress-test ideas, uncover blind spots, and move from strategy to action with clarity and confidence.

We recently spoke with a few of the business owners we work with to hear why they decided to bring in external support and what it's meant for them.

## **What prompted the call for support?**

For many, it was about carving out space to stop and think. explained, "We'd grown fast, but that pace left little time to reflect. We knew we needed someone with an independent eye—someone who truly gets SMEs."

Another shared:

"I wasn't looking for a consultancy. I wanted a real business person—someone who could roll up their sleeves and help us build a practical strategy."

"I didn't want a consultancy. I wanted a business person, someone to get stuck in and help us build something real."

Often, it's a peer recommendation that tips the balance. One client came to us after hearing about our impact from a trusted peer: "The recommendation carried weight. I could literally see the difference in their team—the cohesion, the energy, the results."

## **So, what's changed since?**

Across the board, the recurring theme is clarity.

One client shared, "We finally carved out time to think long-term. Every session forced us to slow down and tackle the big questions."

Another remarked on the clarity our tools brought: "The Strategy House helped pull everything together—mission, vision, priorities—all on one page. We'd never have reached that without guidance."

And for some, it's been about rediscovering alignment: "It brought our management

team together. Suddenly we were all speaking the same language and working toward the same outcomes."

## **Would they recommend it?**

Let's be honest, many were sceptical at first. But as one client said:

"I didn't expect to see impact so quickly. It's been invaluable."

Another described the experience as a "total reset—exactly what I was after," while a third appreciated having "someone with no agenda, who genuinely wants the business to succeed."

And the simple ability to speak openly mattered too: "I could vent, share frustrations, and get practical, honest feedback. That alone was worth it."

## **You don't have to carry it all alone**

We know this is a tough time for business owners. There's a lot on your plate and big decisions to make. If you're feeling stuck or in need of a sounding board, we're here.

360 Growth Partners was built on a shared belief that business owners shouldn't have to face these challenges in isolation. We bring our lived experience, commercial know-how and honest support to help you unlock your business's potential, and we're in it for the long haul.

***If you think it might be time to take a step back and chat things through, we'd love to hear from you. Let's talk.***

***Get in touch with us at [start@360growthpartners.co.uk](mailto:start@360growthpartners.co.uk)***





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## Northside Farm continues growth with latest recruit

**Northside Farm in Horsley has welcomed Laura McClurg to the team as its new trainee events assistant, bringing her experience in the creative arts to the wedding industry.**

With the support of Northside Farm's in-house training development programme, Laura is working towards being fully trained to an events assistant by next year to run her own events at the award-winning venue.

Laura, 34, previously worked backstage at The Sunderland Empire's wardrobe department for 13 years, touring across the UK with major productions.

With a strong background in prop sets and design, Laura was eager to transition into a role that would still let her harness her attention to detail and artistic vision but allow her to remain in the North East by helping to create the bespoke wedding experiences Northside Farm is renowned for.

"Working in the wedding industry was the perfect fit for the next stage of my career," she said.

"I love the design, set-up, and the creative ways to plan events, it brings out my artistic side and allows me to use my skills in a completely new and rewarding way."

Laura has already hit the ground running, immersing herself in the details of wedding planning while learning new skills to ensure each couple's big day is exactly the way they want it.

## Esh's Ross Markwell appointed as Chair of CECA's Chairman's Strategic Forum

**Business Development Director at Esh Construction, Ross Markwell, has been named as the new chair of the Civil Engineering Contractor's Association (CECA) Chairman's Strategic Forum.**

As one of the longest serving members on the North East regional CECA board, Ross has held a number of positions in CECA during his 15 years served. Appointed regional vice chair in 2021, he became regional chair just two years later and earned a seat on the Chairman's Strategic Forum, where he quickly became vice chair.

He said: "I've been with Esh Construction for over 20 years and was proud to follow in the footsteps of one of our founders, Jack Lumsden, and now Deputy Chief Executive, Stephen Wilkie, when I became a member of the regional board."

"I am all too aware of both the challenges



and opportunities facing UK civil engineering contractors today, and as the new chair, in partnership with the wider forum, I'm eager to garner the strong voices from our members to continue raising the profile of civil engineering with a view to making improvements across the wider sector."

CECA is recognised by members, clients, and Governments as the preeminent body representing the interests of the UK's civil engineering contractors. The Chairmans Strategic Forum represents the voice of the members from all six of CECA's English regions and the devolved nations of Scotland and Wales.



## Swinburne Maddison announces key promotions

**One of the North East's leading law firms, Swinburne Maddison LLP, has announced a series of internal promotions.**

Five lawyers have been promoted to Managing Associate and two to Associate. Among those promoted is Amy Pyman, a solicitor in the Private Client team who has built a strong reputation for her work on estate planning, trusts, and Court of Protection matters.

In the Dispute Resolution team, Jenna Keir-Kendrew has also been promoted to Managing Associate. Within the Corporate and Commercial team, both Matt Ray and Rebecca Logue have been promoted to Managing Associate. Matt specialises in tax-efficient restructures, succession planning and employee incentives, acting for a wide range of owner-managed businesses. Rebecca, who joined the team in 2024, brings significant experience in mergers, acquisitions, and joint ventures, particularly within the hospitality and manufacturing sectors.

Rebecca Harper, a long-standing member of the Residential Property team, also steps up to Managing Associate. Her work spans a wide range of transactions, including acting for social housing providers, where her attention to detail and strong client relationships have made her a key member of the team.

Kelly Jefferson, from the Dispute Resolution team, and Mary Feather, from the Commercial Property team, have both been promoted to Associate.







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Melanie Crammond

## Go Wild in the Woods – A brilliant outdoor experience

An ideal way for children to  
enjoy the countryside.

**Most of you reading this will be involved in business in some shape or form. We suspect that you've probably got a few years on the clock! Many of you will have families.**

We also suspect that the upbringing which your children are experiencing will be different from what you had. Thanks to the computer age, many children return from school and head straight into their bedrooms to join the internet world.

When did they last go for a proper walk? When did they last learn about nature? Or mess about building a camp fire? Or have the thrill of cooking outside or even trying to catch some sticklebacks and tadpoles?

For some of your children, the answer will be...never.

Which is what Melanie Crammond is trying to put right with her new venture, Go Wild in the Woods.

"I had a life-changing experience when I lost a baby at 34 weeks," said Melanie. "I was working in the construction industry as a construction manager at the time but, after I lost Gabriel, I decided to pursue a different career. Whilst on leave, I decided to do a forest school course and qualified as a Level 3 Forest School Practitioner. I continued working in construction until 2024. I have since then been working at an outdoor alternative provision in the region attended by neurodivergent children, home educated children and





those with behavioural issues. However, I thought that it was time to go it alone and Go Wild in the Woods was born."

Everything takes place at Thorneyford Farm at Kirkley, which is only a few miles north of Newcastle, and there's plenty for children (and adults) of all ages to do. Those children which have learning or behavioural difficulties will find a day at Go Wild in the Woods particularly beneficial. It's terrific fun for everyone, as well as being a chance to get hands-on with nature.

"We have events running weekly and during the school holidays, such as holiday clubs, youth clubs on a Sunday once per month which is for children without parents, stay and play sessions for under 5's, neurodivergent family sessions and birthday parties. At Go Wild in the Woods children enjoy some free play to start with and then we get them involved in mud kitchens, arts and crafts, bird feeding and generally having a great time in the outdoors.

During holiday clubs, we set them various challenges in the woods and also take them to the stream which runs close to the woodland area. We do outdoor cooking where the children not only cook the food, they also help to prepare it too. The day ends with us toasting marshmallows over the fire and enjoying a s'more."

The holiday clubs start at 9.30 and run until 2.30 with a charge of £30 per day.

The events for under 5s and neurodivergent sessions cost £12 per session.

Melanie is also setting-up future events where companies can enjoy a corporate day out. Special events will take place at Christmas time plus additional events for single parents, school visits and more!

Oh, and if you're worried about the weather...if it rains, the events still go ahead as planned. There is no such thing as bad weather... just bad clothing!

Go Wild in the Woods...where children of all ages and abilities can find themselves.

***If you'd like to find out what's on and when, go onto...  
bookwhen.com/gowildinthewoods and you'll then see  
what's coming up. Alternatively, you can email  
mel@gowildinthewoods.co.uk with any questions or queries.***





# Turn on the Ignition: Coaching that gets you moving

By Teresa Peters, Founder of Accelerator Coaching Ltd.

We hear the word coaching a lot in business. But let's be honest – what does it actually mean?

**In today's fast-paced work world, coaching is more than a buzzword. It's a structured, thought-provoking process that helps leaders and teams unlock their full potential.**

Think of it like this: you're sitting in a campervan (or company car!) with a destination in mind – maybe improved performance, better communication, or simply the feeling that you're driving your own life again. Coaching helps you switch on the ignition and move forward with intention.

**At Accelerator Coaching, we often use car metaphors to explain the landscape:**

- **The Mentor** is your experienced driving instructor. They share stories from the road.
- **The Therapist** helps you understand why you're hesitant to drive in the first place.
- **The Consultant** brings the manual and gives you the route.
- **But the Coach?** They sit beside you, listen, ask questions, and support you to find your own best driving style – with confidence, clarity, and resilience.

## What exactly is coaching?

The International Coaching Federation (ICF) defines coaching as:

"Partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximise their personal and professional potential."

At Accelerator Coaching, we bring that to life with warmth, encouragement, and a healthy sprinkling of yellow – our way of describing empathic positivity and clarity that builds trust and momentum.

## Beyond the driver's seat: Team and group coaching

Team coaching is where the real shift happens for organisations. It's not just about individuals – it's about coaching

the team as a system. The coach supports improved collaboration, communication, and leadership – helping the team become greater than the sum of its parts.

Group coaching brings together individuals with similar challenges or goals. It's often a more cost-effective way to access coaching, while creating shared insight and accountability. When done well, it's interactive, energising, and deeply human.

## Why Invest in Coaching?

Coaching doesn't just feel good—it works. According to research by the ICF and PricewaterhouseCoopers:

- **85%** of clients report increased confidence
- **77%** improve leadership effectiveness
- **72%** make sharper, faster decisions

And for those focused on ROI, a Fortune 500 study showed that executive coaching can generate up to a 788% return on investment, driven by improved productivity, retention, and relationships. Put simply: coaching fuels performance and wellbeing—and helps individuals take the wheel of their own progress.

## It can also:

- Empower greater ownership
- Develop current and future leaders
- Boost morale and engagement
- Strengthen emotional intelligence

## ● Reveal untapped strengths

We often combine 1:1 coaching, workshops, team pods, and profiling tools like DiSC, StrengthsFinder and the Emotional Capital Report (ECR) to create real, long-term culture change.

## Credibility counts

Coaching is an unregulated industry, so it's essential to work with accredited professionals. Our team includes coaches accredited by the ICF, EMCC, and the Association for Coaching (AC) – three respected global bodies.

True accreditation involves far more than attending a course. It includes hundreds of hours of logged practice, ethical frameworks, professional supervision, and continuous learning. After all, coaching is deep mindset work – and it should be held with care, skill, and integrity.

## The journey starts here

There are many wonderful coaches, mentors, and interventions – each with their own style. We lean towards sunshine and structure: empathy, positivity and clear thinking.

So if you're ready to shift gears, check your blind spots, and take the best journey of your life – maybe it's time to turn the ignition.

[acceleratorcoaching.co.uk](https://acceleratorcoaching.co.uk)



Teresa Peters

Credit: KG Photography



# Live your best life, today!



Teresa Peters

Image: Emma Solomon Photography

## What does your best self look like and what would it take to get there?

Whether you're an executive, team leader or coach, we help you change gear – and stay on track. At Accelerator Coaching, we support individuals and teams to grow with proven strategies and positive results.

### We specialise in:

- Executive and team coaching.
- Leadership development programmes: self-leadership, leading others, and communicating for success.
- Emotional Capital Report 360s (ECR360) and EQ coaching for sport coaches and athletes.
- DiSC profiling and strengths-based development.

Our approach blends accredited tools with warmth, challenge and positivity – always human-centred and practical.



inspire . motivate . succeed

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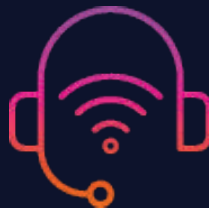
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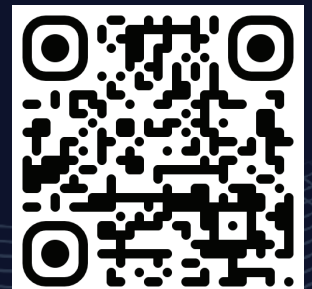
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# THE FINEST PRIVATE ESTATE IN THE CITY OF NEWCASTLE



Sanderson Young are excited to bring to the market Jesmond Towers, undoubtedly the finest residential private estate in the city of Newcastle, a stunning mansion set in just under 6 acres of gardens and grounds adjacent to the conservation area of Jesmond Dene.

The property, originally built in the early 19th Century, was extended in 1817 and then again in 1823/27 for its former owner Sir Thomas Burdon, who was the Mayor of Newcastle and a former coal mine owner. The property was later owned by local entrepreneur Charles Mitchell, who enlarged the house further in 1869 and 1884. The property was bought in 1912 by the Filles of La Sagesse, who established the Roman Catholic School until it closed in 2008.

Part of the original school site was then later developed and is now a highly desirable and prime residential estate of luxury houses. The original mansion, known as Jesmond Towers, was purchased by a private owner who remains its custodian till this present time.

Significant sums of over £14 Million have been invested since the purchase in 2009 and there is no doubt this magnificent Victorian style building represents the most unique, special, and fabulous private residence within the city of Newcastle. It has its own private entrances to the

north and south, each with their own individual detached lodges, and connects through to the private grounds which are superbly landscaped. The site is also part of the Jesmond Dene Conservation Area.

Jesmond Towers itself is a Gothic influenced Victorian mansion and has Grade II style listed features, as well as offering an ancillary independent apartment and living quarters for staff.

Its stunning interior and architectural design are indeed very special.

The principal house has over 25,500 sq.ft. of accommodation, excluding the lodges and a gymnasium, which was fire damaged 7 years ago and shows a significant opportunity for redevelopment for further ancillary uses.

Priced at £20 Million, this is an extremely rare opportunity to purchase such a magnificent private dwelling within the suburbs of Newcastle.

All enquiries in the strictest confidence to Duncan Young, on [duncan.young@sandersonyoung.co.uk](mailto:duncan.young@sandersonyoung.co.uk) or on **0191 223 3500**.

**rare!**  
From Sanderson Young

**Duncan Young**  
Chairman  
**SANDERSON YOUNG**





# Jesmond Towers

*Bemersyde Drive, Jesmond, Newcastle upon Tyne*

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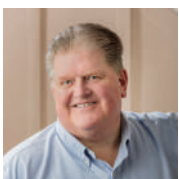
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**Price Guide:**  
£20 Million

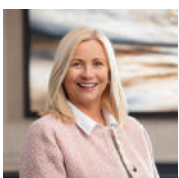
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Jesmond Towers undoubtedly provides the finest, private, residential estate within the city of Newcastle upon Tyne. This outstanding mansion house, set in just under 6 acres, is privileged to have a truly magnificent setting as it forms part of Jesmond Dene Conservation Area. Since its purchase in 2009, Jesmond Towers has seen a significant investment of over £14 Million and now offers a luxurious residence with over 25,500 sq ft of accommodation, including an independent apartment and staff living quarters, as well as two detached North and South lodges. This Gothic influenced Victorian property has stunning architecture and interiors and represents an extremely rare opportunity to purchase such a magnificent private dwelling within the suburbs of Newcastle. *Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax: Band H. EPC Rating: G*





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07715419795  
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**Ashleigh Sundin**  
0191 223 3500  
[ashleigh.sundin@sandersonyoung.co.uk](mailto:ashleigh.sundin@sandersonyoung.co.uk)

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## Smith's Dock, North Shields

### COMING SOON

Phase 3 of the very popular Smith's Dock development. This new phase of elegant modern homes will be built to high quality specifications, with a range of one, two, three and four bedroom properties.

## The Kilns, Thrunton, Alnwick

The Kilns is a unique community of 14 meticulously designed homes clustered around a village green that features the conserved brickworks' chimney – echoing the location's history.

Nestling beneath Long Crag, overlooking three lakes, the development offers a spectacular rural location with superb views, forest walks, fishing and everything that country life can offer.

With three individual house types on offer, in two contrasting styles, the traditional 'Northumbrian' and the 'Scandi', CountyLife's architects have cleverly blended a mix of traditional Northumbrian stone with cottage brickwork.

**Prices from: £585,000**



## North Farm Steading, Warendorf

### COMING SOON

An exclusive development of 6 stone built cottages, positioned to the northern periphery of the hamlet of Warendorf. The development offers good privacy, with all units benefitting from open access views to the front and southerly facing gardens.

## Kelly's Wharf, Hebburn Riverside

### COMING SOON

The first phase of development consists of 3 and 4 bedroom contemporary townhouses and a range of stylish 1 and 2 bedroom apartments, with construction commencing on site June 2025.



## Derwentdale, Ryton

### COMING SOON

Set within a mature, tree lined site in the heart of Old Ryton Village conservation area, is this luxury development of only 5 executive homes. Constructed in stone with slate roofs, these substantial detached properties will offer over 2000 sq ft of living accommodation and all boast west facing gardens. A very exclusive development in a beautiful location.





## The Maltings, Hepscoott

### COMING SOON

Launching in 2025, The Maltings will offer two exceptional 4 bedroom detached homes, each over 3,000 sq ft. Set within 0.3 acre mature gardens and accessed by a private tree lined drive in the sought after village of Hepscoott, these exclusive residences promise privacy, quality, and a truly special place to call home.

## School Street, Whickham

A select development of 7 contemporary three storey townhouses, each approx 1,900 sq. ft. Featuring four bedrooms, three bathrooms (two en-suites), private driveways, garages, and west facing gardens.

**Guide Price:** £375,950



## St Margarets Place, Glanton

Set in the village of Glanton, this exclusive development by multi award-winning Dacre Street Developments offers three stunning four bedroom detached homes. Each property combines luxurious design with the highest quality finishes, both inside and out.

**Prices from:** £850,000



## Stable Park Square, Whickham

Positioned in the heart of Whickham, Stable Park Square is an exciting development of 4 executive, detached homes. These stone built, architect designed properties extend to over 2500 sq ft and all offer four bedrooms with stunning dressing areas and en-suites. The development is set within a private courtyard with stone walled boundary and views over Chase Park. All properties benefit from south or west facing gardens, garages and double driveways.

Whickham is an extremely popular village, with high quality schooling for all ages, as well as a wealth of shops, bars and restaurants on your door step. This leafy suburb is also only 5 miles south of Newcastle city centre for those requiring good commuting links.

**Prices from:** £775,000



## Hillhead, Streetgate, Nr Sunniside

Hillhead is a luxury development of sophisticated family homes, positioned in the charming village of Streetgate, near Sunniside. Hillhead provides a stylish mix of 3 & 4 bedroom semi-detached and detached homes for a range of budgets.

**Prices from:** £775,000

## Low Hedley Farm, Near Longframlington

### COMING SOON

This delightful development comprises three distinctive barn conversions, each with its own character. Two are single storey, two bedroom homes, and one is a two storey, three bedroom property—all arranged around a central courtyard with elevated countryside views. Ideally positioned near Longframlington, Longhorsley, and Linden Hall Hotel & Country Club for golf, spa, and leisure.



## Trafalgar Drive, Swarland

This niche development of detached bungalows will feature two house types, The Holly & The Kennet. Each will offer internal accommodation of approximately 1432.2 sq.ft. and 1806.3 sq.ft respectively, with four bedrooms, two bathrooms and versatile reception spaces.

**Prices from:** £600,000





## North East family secures £175,000 funding deal to launch pet and animal cremation business

A North East family has secured a £175,000 funding deal to launch a new start-up business dedicated to meeting the growing demand for dignified and compassionate pet cremation services.

Renwick Animal & Pet Cremation Services, based near Morpeth in Northumberland, secured the working capital from Reward Funding to purchase vital equipment needed to launch the company, which uniquely provides cremation services to pets and animals of all sizes across the region.

The family business, located on the 22-acre Southwitton House estate, is run by Jane Jobling-Purser and George Renwick, a mother and son partnership with extensive experience in both the farming and equine sectors.

Jane has dedicated her career to animal welfare, having run two holiday lets for six years and a successful yard for over 20 years. George has previously worked with the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs and the Environment Agency, and more recently worked collaboratively with Peaceful Pets in Norfolk where he gained vital insights into the pet crematorium market.

Key to the finance deal being completed was the speed of lending, with Renwick able to use the working capital from Reward to purchase the equipment ahead of deadline and avoid any revenue loss through delayed openings.

The asset-based lender, which supports the growth of ambitious entrepreneurs, property investors and businesses both across the North East and nationwide, also demonstrated a pragmatic approach to funding risk. The deal with Renwick was largely based on strong projections and a solid business plan, with Reward ensuring the company didn't have to go through any unnecessary red tape to secure the finance needed to accelerate its business plans.

The deal between Reward and Renwick was brokered by Graeme Harrison from Newcastle-based Corporate and Commercial Business Solutions Group (CCBSG).



## NEL Fund Managers backs female-led gourmet deli Awesome Franks with NPIF II investment

NEL Smaller Loans, which is managed by NEL Fund Managers as part of the Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund II (NPIF II) has announced a five-figure investment into Awesome Franks, a gourmet sandwich and deli concept set to open in Jesmond next month.

Founded by North East food entrepreneur Alex Walker, co-founder of the acclaimed Scream for Pizza, Awesome Franks is using the funding to transform the former Richard Granger Wines unit into a vibrant, family-friendly venue, having acquired the licensing of the space last month. The deli will serve artisan sandwiches crafted from locally sourced ingredients and bread from Northern Rye, with unique fillings such as salt and pepper squid and Northumberland crab.

With this investment, Awesome Franks has been able to refurbish the iconic building, rewiring the electrics and installing a new plumbing system. The space has been completely reconfigured to be made fit for its exciting new purpose.

The venue, named after Alex's son and his love for superheroes, will also offer deli goods and branded flour. Looking ahead, the business plans to launch a family area and an events space in the deli, aligning with Alex's desire to create an inclusive space that caters for everyone in the community.

Alex Walker, founder of Awesome Franks commented: "Having worked with NEL in my previous business I know how well you are looked after. Susan and the team truly guide me step by step through the funding process and were in constant contact throughout. The process was clear with lots of support and practical suggestions which I am taking forward in the business. I can't thank them enough."



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# INTERESTING TIMES

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

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

## ONE SUBJECT | THREE TIPS



### HOPING FOR THE BEST

It's easy to fall into the trap of hoping for the best in business, especially when things are ticking along. But hope isn't a strategy. If you want your business to grow, or just feel more in control, you need a plan.

Many business owners find themselves working hard, putting in long hours, and constantly reacting but without a clear direction. When things are going OK, it's easy to fall into the trap of hoping the momentum will carry you forward.

Here are three simple ways to shift from reactive to proactive:

#### 1. Block out time to think

You wouldn't expect a client to hit their goals without a plan so why leave yours to chance? Book a morning or afternoon just to step back. No emails. No calls. No distractions. Use that time to look at where you are and where you want to go. Even once a quarter is enough to reset your focus.

#### 2. Set one non-financial goal

It's not always about the numbers. Maybe you want to finish early on Fridays, get back to the gym, or finally take that holiday without checking your phone. These personal goals often drive business changes, and they give your hard work more meaning.

#### 3. Review the last 90 days

Before looking ahead, take stock. What's worked? What's slipped? Write down three wins and three things to improve. It only takes ten minutes, but it'll help you make decisions based on evidence and not instinct or memory.

Hope can get you started. But if you want to get where you're going, planning gets you there faster.

## WIN

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## INTERESTING QUOTE



If you don't prioritise your life, someone else will.

Greg McKeown.

## 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?"

Before you renew that insurance, software or contract, take 60 seconds to ask yourself: "Is this still serving the business I want to run?"

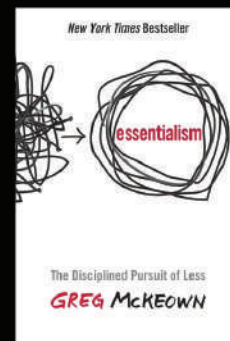
Small reviews often lead to big savings.

## HAVE A READ

Essentialism. Greg McKeown.

If your to-do list never seems to get shorter, this is worth a look. It's all about doing less, but better. About protecting your time and focusing only on the work that actually matters. It's a much-needed reminder for business owners with too much on their plate.

£10(ish) online. **Mark Melville**



## INTERESTED?

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## Johnston Carmichael welcomes leading transaction tax expert to Newcastle team

Leading UK accountancy and business advisory firm Johnston Carmichael has strengthened its presence in the North East with the appointment of experienced tax specialist, Adrienne Paterson, as Tax Director in its Newcastle office.

Adrienne is one of the region's top transaction tax specialists. She began her career at KPMG in the early 1990s before moving to EY, then joining a leading regional firm in 2004. For the past 15 years, she has focused exclusively on business sales, acquisitions, reorganisations, mergers, and demergers.

At Johnston Carmichael, Adrienne will work with the firm's established Transaction Tax team to grow its Newcastle presence. She'll focus on building relationships with business owners, entrepreneurs, and advisers across the North East seeking specialist support.

Adrienne said: "Johnston Carmichael has an excellent reputation, both in terms of its technical capability and its culture. What attracted me was the firm's collaborative ethos, its investment in people, and the depth of tax expertise already here. My focus will be to strengthen our profile in the North East, particularly around Transaction Tax."

Paul Shields, Head of Johnston Carmichael's Newcastle office, added: "Adrienne is incredibly well-respected in the North East business community and brings a wealth of experience in a highly specialised area of tax. As we continue to grow, we want to ensure



that businesses across the North East have access to the very best advisory support, and Adrienne will play a key role in that."

Johnston Carmichael's VAT and Transaction Tax teams were recently shortlisted for the 2025 Tolley's Taxation Awards, with the VAT team also a finalist at the upcoming North East Accountancy Awards.

## Robson Laidler makes acquisition to create £9m group

Tindles Chartered Accountants of Teesside has been acquired by Robson Laidler in an undisclosed deal.

Accountancy and business advisory firm Robson Laidler has formed a new £9million group after sealing its largest acquisition since forming more than a century ago.



The firm, which has offices in Newcastle and Durham has secured Tindles for an undisclosed fee, targeting the firm for its reputation and solid client base in Teesside.

The move gives B Corp certified firm Robson Laidler, which has recently been listed one of the UK's Best Places to Work by the Sunday Times and is shortlisted as Firm of the Year in the regional accountancy awards, a group turnover of around £9million and brings its total headcount in Newcastle, Durham and now Teesside to 126 staff.

Robert Tindle, who founded Tindles Chartered Accountants 25 years ago, is staying on to integrate the businesses, which will continue to trade under their own names for a period of around six-months. Tindles partner Angela Foster will also continue to lead the business alongside Robson Laidler's current co-managing directors Amy Park and Nick Wilson and the other four directors in the firm; Michael Moran, Peter Charles, John Holbrook and Nick Cunningham.

The move will push Robson Laidler into the top 100 accountancy firms in the UK according to Accountancy Age.

Robson Laidler co-managing director Nick Wilson said: "This forms an important part of our overall growth and investment strategy where we aim to open more office locations across our five-year-vision.

"Our strategy is to remain independent whilst keeping our purpose at the forefront of everything we do, which is to make a positive difference to people's lives and that includes our clients, our people and the wider community.

"Our vision is to leave a legacy by becoming the firm of choice, growing our business in a way that makes us proud, focusing on both purpose and profit."

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we're all connected.





# I WANT TO BE BREATHLESS. WITH ACHING THIGHS. AND A SORE BOTTOM

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Concept help business leaders make the money they want, to do the things they want.

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Record Keeping is important. And Compliance. But it's not as important as exploring Direction.

Direction means taking a (proper) interest in the numbers. It's pausing. Grabbing a coffee with your Concept Account Manager. And chatting.

So, when you're interested in chatting about gears as well as gearing. And base layers as well as balance sheets. We're here.

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# Financial visibility: how SMEs can avoid cash flow surprises

Cash flow is the lifeblood of operations. Yet, too often, I've seen businesses become blindsided by unexpected cash shortfalls.

**Despite good sales, a strong reputation and steady growth, poor data practices and lack of forecasting can all put small to medium sized companies at risk of going under. But you might be surprised to learn that one of the biggest threats to your company's financial health is inadequate financial reporting.**

If your financial reports are outdated or incomplete, you'll lack the real-time insights you need to assess your company's cash position. Failing to have this information to hand can result in a range of issues that can negatively impact your business, including missing supplier payments, making mistakes within your payroll, or losing out on investment opportunities.

Without timely reports, you might also unknowingly overextend your spending or fail to spot upcoming slow revenue periods. This reactive approach to finance often results in last-minute scrambles for funding or emergency cost-cutting measures.

## The common pitfalls

In my experience, there are several recurring problems that often lead to poor financial visibility within a business:

- **Over-reliance on spreadsheets.** They are prone to human error and can lack real-time integration.
- **Inconsistent record-keeping** or failing to reconcile accounts regularly leads to incomplete or misleading financial data. This not only impacts current reporting but also undermines any future projections.
- **Lack of forecasting.** Many SMEs operate without a formal cash flow forecast (or only forecast sporadically). This short-sightedness can mask seasonal fluctuations, delayed receivables, or upcoming large expenses, leaving the owners and management team unprepared for what's to come.



Mark Brown

## The importance of cash flow forecasting

A robust cash flow forecast will give you a clear picture of your incoming and outgoing cash over time. Regular forecasting will help you plan ahead, identify cash gaps in advance, and make better informed decisions about expenditures, hiring, or investments.

I recommend that forecasting is updated monthly – or even weekly in fast-moving sectors—and is designed to account for best- and worst-case scenarios. This level of planning not only prevents surprises but also builds confidence with investors and lenders, who value transparency and proactive management.

## Take action now by:

- 1. Adopting cloud-based accounting software.** Platforms like Xero offer real-time data integration, automated bank feeds, and simplified reporting.
- 2. Automating your invoicing and payment reminders.** Doing so will ensure your customers are invoiced on time and follow-ups are consistent.
- 3. Scheduling regular financial reviews.** Monthly management accounts that include a profit and loss statement, balance sheet, and cash flow report should be a routine part of your operations – no

excuses! Reviewing these with an expert will help you identify trends and correct any issues early.

**4. Improving your budgeting and forecasting.** Many accounting platforms support forecasting modules or integrate with dedicated tools like Fathom.

Alternatively, you can enlist the help of a finance professional (like me!) to help you crunch your numbers more effectively.

Remember, financial surprises are rarely a sign of bad luck – they're usually the result of poor visibility! Make sure you prioritise accurate, timely financial reporting and embrace the incredible technology that's out there to build your company's financial resilience and stay ahead of cash flow challenges.

After all, succeeding in business is not just about surviving the next crisis. It's about growing confidently, backed by a clear and current understanding of your business's financial health.

**Contact me, Mark Brown at L4 Financial, to find out how I can help you achieve better financial visibility within your business.**

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## Continuing growth for RMT – and much more ahead

After celebrating its 70th anniversary in 2024, RMT Accountants & Business Advisors has moved into its eighth decade with a strong performance across all its service lines.

**And with a new office now open in Hexham, it's expecting to see this growth continue through the rest of this year and beyond.**

Headquartered in Gosforth, RMT provides the full range of financial and business advisory services through its specialist accountancy, tax, medical and healthcare, corporate finance and restructuring teams, and works with companies of all sizes within and outside the North East, as well as internationally.

Its medical and healthcare division is the largest dedicated specialist team in the UK outside London and acts for well over 1,000 medical professionals, with client and staff numbers increasing substantially year on year.

RMT is also one of the first independent accountancy firms to set up its own IT/technology business, RMT Technology, which helps clients across the UK to identify and implement hardware and software solutions which meet their specific business needs.

Two years ago, RMT became part of the Sumer Group, the UK and Ireland's leading mid-market accountancy practice, and has since seen staff numbers growing steadily, both organically and through the three acquisitions it has subsequently completed.

Stephen Slater, managing director at RMT Accountants, says: "Our team has grown significantly over the last two years and we now have more 150 expert staff working under the RMT banner, with plans to increase this number still further.

"The specific SME focus that being part of the Sumer Group provides has added

an extra dimension to the full range of services we can offer, and we're seeing a tangible benefit of this approach in the number of new clients that we're bringing on board.

"We're continuing to recruit right across the business and at all levels to ensure we have the colleagues and resources we need to service this growing client demand.

"The positive, supportive working culture we've created here and the value we place on our colleagues as people is the core of RMT's long-term success, and we're finding that it's a big part of our appeal to potential new recruits, alongside the opportunities we offer to do interesting client work with us."

The next stage of RMT's development will follow from the opening of a new office on Gilesgate in Hexham town centre as the practice looks to further increase its client base in West Northumberland and the surrounding regions.

It already acts for a wide range of agricultural, farming and contracting businesses in the North East, Scotland and North Yorkshire, as well as local SMEs across a range of other business sectors, and is retaining its existing offices at Hexham Mart alongside its new premises.



Stephen Slater

Stephen Slater continues: "We believe it's important for us to be part of the community that we're serving and to have a first-hand understanding of the opportunities, challenges and issues facing local business owners and managers.

"Our existing Hexham team is highly skilled and extremely knowledgeable, and we're expecting to see it grow in the coming months to support our local development plans.

"With the Big Four firms becoming ever more remote and smaller practices experiencing the pressure of an ever-increasing regulatory burden, the opportunities for firms like RMT have never been greater.

"We believe that no other regional practice offers the breadth of services that we have available while also providing the level of personal involvement and collaboration that so often makes the difference to meeting clients' commercial and personal goals."

**For further information on the range of client services and career opportunities provided by RMT Accountants & Business Advisors, please visit [www.r-m-t.co.uk](http://www.r-m-t.co.uk) or call 0191 256 9500.**



# Robson Laidler Accountants listed in The Sunday Times Best Places to Work



**Robson Laidler Accountants has been named as one of the Best Places to Work in the UK for the second year running by The Sunday Times, which has been published recently online in partnership with the leading employee experience platform, WorkL.**

**This nationwide workplace survey honours and celebrates the UK's top employers - which number over 500 organisations across industries and scale - and highlights the best workplaces for women, the LGBTQIA+ community, disabled employees, ethnic minorities, younger and older workers, as well as those that provide the best wellbeing support.**

To feature in the list businesses must have a staff engagement score of at least 70% and Robson Laidler, which has a team of 96 staff across its offices in Jesmond and Chester le Street, scored 84%, with an annual staff retention rate of 89%.

The latest best practice adopted by the 104-year-old firm as part of its people-centric culture is the introduction of a Four Day Working Week. Since its introduction, over 80% of the team have reported feeling less stressed - both at work and in their personal lives compared to previous ways of working.

Other initiatives that make Robson Laidler one of the best places to work include its own fully funded apprenticeship training academy, which sees the firm take on at least five new trainees each year, a better health at work programme, including wellbeing workshops, staff massage sessions, a walking club and free fruit. As well as an ED&I group who have introduced initiatives such as staff neurodiversity training, a dedicated multifaith room and updated policies to support specific religious practices.

The firm also allows its staff to join a quarterly Director round table to fuel creativity, generate debate, and give full transparency on the firm's future and financial information.

Robson Laidler's co-managing director Amy Park said: "I'm incredibly proud of the culture we've built at Robson Laidler - one where our people feel genuinely valued and rewarded. To be nationally recognised for the second year running as one of the UK's Best Places to Work is a true testament to

the people centric approach we take every day.

"In today's competitive labour market, building a workplace where employees feel they belong and want to stay is no small achievement. This recognition not only highlights the strength of our culture and commitment to employee wellbeing but also enhances our reputation as an employer of choice.

"What makes this even more meaningful is that it's based entirely on honest feedback from our team. It reflects the passion, dedication, and support our people show every day, not only in their work and relationships with clients, but with each other.

"Our purpose as a business is to make a positive difference to people's lives. That's embedded in everything we do - and being named one of the Best Places to Work proves we're living that purpose every day."

Robson Laidler became the first organisation in the North East to achieve B Corp certification in 2021. Other accolades the firm has achieved include; Gold Investors In People, Disability Confident Employer, Real Living Wage and Good Work Pledge certification. Additionally, Robson Laidler has been shortlisted for Firm of the Year at this year's North East Accountancy Awards.

[www.robson-laidler.co.uk](http://www.robson-laidler.co.uk)





Jess Baker and Ian McElroy Tier One Capital

## Tier One Capital tees-up support for Golfers Global Challenge

North East golfer Jess Baker is looking to grow a team of like-minded regional business partners to support her in her quest to compete on the global stage.

After joining the prestigious Ladies European Tour (LET) earlier this year, the rising star is keen to work alongside businesses determined to champion the rise of women's golf across the region.

Newcastle based wealth and fund managers, Tier One Capital, are already on board and working with Jess to support her growing commitments on the LET.

And earlier this year she was unveiled as Close House Golf Club's attached Ladies Tour Professional with the Newcastle club offering ongoing support on and off the course.





In return the 2022 Women's Amateur Champion is offering businesses a unique package of branding, B2B digital and social marketing, golf clinics, personal appearances and more to companies ready to expand their reach and connect with local communities.

Ian McElroy, Chief Executive, Tier One Capital, said: "Working with Jess is an absolute pleasure and as a Newcastle-based business she adds real value to our regional brand values and our company-wide commitment to grassroots sport.

"Her enthusiasm for her sport is infectious and her commitment to working with the next generation and passion for the North East aligns with our own core business values.

"It's fantastic to see Jess making her mark on the global stage and we are delighted to be playing a small part in that journey.

"This is only the beginning as far as Jess is concerned. It would be fantastic to see other local businesses align themselves with a rising star and get behind female golf and sport in the region."

Sir Graham Wylie, owner of Close House, added: "Jess is an excellent role model and the perfect ambassador for Close House and the North East.

"It's wonderful to see her taking the LET in her stride and showcasing our region to the rest of the world.

"Jess is an inspiration to the young players coming through at Close House and we're so excited to see where her career goes from here."

Jess has embraced life on the LET after graduating from the University of Central Florida with a BSc in Psychology and is keen to see more women and girls follow her into the sport.

"Being born and bred in Newcastle, I'm very proud to represent the North East and I recognise that I'm stepping into that role on the LET now," she added.

"As a big football fan there's always Newcastle United chat with the people I meet on tour and that helps to get the conversation started.

"I love the fact that the job I do allows me to celebrate where I'm from on a global scale. I've always benefitted from strong regional support and I'm now in a position where I can give something back to the businesses that back me.

"They're helping me to fulfil my dreams every day and so I'm happy to shout about them and the work they do whenever I'm out on tour. At the same time I'm always looking to build new relationships and grow my support network."

Jess has just wrapped up back-to-back competitions in Holland, Switzerland and Spain — before heading to Czechia and Germany later this month. And thanks to those businesses already on board, the 22-year-old is approaching her biggest summer yet with renewed confidence.

"Tour life certainly has its challenges and I wouldn't have the opportunities that I do without the financial support I've been able to secure," she added.

"As a youngster I was supported by Sport Newcastle and The Northumberland Ladies Golf Association and I'll never forget that. It's why I'll always try to give back to golf.

"Encouraging kids from a young age to take up the game is a no-brainer really. Golf gives you so many life skills.

"I've learnt the importance of hard work, perseverance and dedication as well as wider skills like communication, dealing with emotions and time management.

"I'm ready to pass on all of this experience and more — whether that's to aspiring golfers or members of the business community seeking a different perspective."

Jess has embraced more of an ambassadorial role on tour after recognising the value she can add to a region that's always backed her ambition.

And thanks to Close House she's guaranteed a base close to home that continues to set the standard for golf on Tyneside.

"It's been a big boost to have Close House on board," added Jess.

"The facilities are second to none and having access to those facilities is an essential part of my job.

"Close House is so well known across Europe and it's an honour to be associated with the club.

"I'm very grateful for the support and welcome that I've received so far from the staff and members.

"As my season slows down towards the end of the year, I'm looking forward to getting more involved with junior and ladies clinics — the goal is to get more women and girls into golf!"

**To explore partnerships with Jess please email [jbgolf2020@gmail.com](mailto:jbgolf2020@gmail.com)**







## UNW wins big at national tax awards

North East independent chartered accountancy and business advisory firm UNW is celebrating after its Employment Taxes Team was named 'Best Employment Tax Team' at the Tolley's Taxation Awards 2025.

**Widely regarded as a benchmark of excellence in the UK tax profession, the annual Tolley's Awards recognise outstanding achievements across the industry.**

This year's ceremony, held on Thursday 8th May at the Hilton Park Lane in London, brought together firms and individuals from across the country to celebrate exceptional work in practice, in-house, and the public sector.

The win marks the team's second success at the event in recent years, having picked up 'Best Specialist Team in a Law or Accounting Firm' in 2023 and been shortlisted for the employment tax category in 2024.

Part of the firm's wider tax offering, UNW's Employment Taxes Team provides comprehensive advice and support on all aspects of employment tax, covering both compliance and advisory work. Operating primarily out of its office base in Newcastle upon Tyne city centre, but with strong networks across the Midlands

and Wales as well as the South, the team advises on everything from salary sacrifice and employee benefits to termination pay, employment status, and international assignments.

The team is led by partner Lee Muter, a former Human Capital Director within a global firm. Working alongside Lee is Paul Tucker, a former partner at a mid-tier national firm and the current Vice-Chair of the CIOT Employment Tax subcommittee, David Paul, who previously worked alongside Lee at his former firm as an Associate Partner and Parm Bhachoo, who has worked in senior roles both within practice and as an in-house specialist at a large construction-based business.

They're joined by Becky Hood, Leah Harrison and Louisa Edwardson, who are each at different stages of UNW's ground-breaking Employment Taxes apprenticeship programme. All three are developing their skills while playing a valuable role in the team's work with clients.

Lee Muter, Employment Taxes Partner at UNW, said: "We were absolutely delighted to represent the firm at this national award ceremony, and to be named winners on the night was a proud moment for all of us. As an independent firm based in Newcastle, it's really pleasing to know that we can compete with larger national firms and still stand out.

"We've built a strong team here at UNW, and this win, our second national award in the last couple of years, reflects the quality of the work being done every day. What makes it extra special is that it's recognition from within the profession – from people who really understand this area of work and what excellence looks like.

"We're lucky to work with some fantastic clients across the UK, and we know that the quality of our service and advice needs to be at a high level so that they continue to trust us. It is not something we ever take for granted. To have that commitment acknowledged on a national level means a lot to us all."

Looking ahead, Lee added: "Our work takes us well beyond the North East, and we're continuing to grow. That creates more opportunities for the team and means we can keep building on the strong foundations we've put in place. I'm really proud of what we've achieved – and excited for what's next."

[unw.co.uk](http://unw.co.uk)



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# The UK Recruitment Sector in 2025

Growth, Challenges, and the Vital Role of Financial and Technological Leadership.

**The UK recruitment sector stands at a crossroads in 2025, shaped by a rapidly evolving labour market, heightened competition, and persistent economic uncertainty.**

In May 2025, hiring activity declined for the eighth consecutive month. Permanent placements continued to contract sharply, and although temporary billings decreased at the slowest pace in six months, demand remains below pre-pandemic levels. Workforce availability is high and candidate supply has surged to levels not seen since late 2020. But this abundance, driven by redundancies and fewer vacancies, has increased wage competition and squeezed margins.

The current environment presents both significant opportunities and formidable challenges. Ensuring robust financial management and leveraging advanced technology, particularly artificial intelligence (AI), are essential for agencies seeking to remain agile, competitive, and resilient.

## **The state of the market: Growth amidst uncertainty**

Despite a backdrop of cautious hiring and economic headwinds, the UK recruitment sector is positioned for an upturn in 2025, with many agencies reporting optimism about future growth. However, the landscape is far from stable. The post-pandemic hiring boom has given way to a period of consolidation, with job postings and placements particularly in IT, finance, and education, falling sharply since their 2022 peak. Temporary roles have seen a resurgence, now accounting for around three-quarters of the market value, as employers value the flexibility and reduced risk that temporary placements offer in uncertain times.

For growing agencies, whether focusing on permanent hires, temporary staffing, or executive search, the ability to adapt to these shifting demands is crucial.

Agencies that can quickly pivot their strategies, leverage technology, and maintain strong client relationships are best positioned to capitalise on emerging opportunities.

## **Key challenges facing recruitment agencies**

The challenges facing UK recruitment agencies are multifaceted:

- **Talent Shortages and Skills Gaps:** The persistent skills gap, especially in sectors like technology and healthcare, makes it difficult for agencies to source qualified candidates.
- **Increased Competition:** The rise of in-house recruitment teams, job boards, and AI-driven platforms has intensified competition, forcing agencies to differentiate themselves through expertise and service quality.
- **Economic Uncertainty and Cautious Hiring:** Inflation, Brexit-related challenges, and global instability have led to more conservative hiring behaviours, with employers and candidates alike hesitant to make bold moves.
- **Compliance and Legal Changes:** Ongoing regulatory changes, including IR35 reforms and stricter pay transparency laws, add complexity and risk to the hiring process.
- **Rising Client Expectations:** Clients now expect recruiters to act as strategic partners, providing market intelligence and long-term workforce planning, not just filling vacancies.
- **Cash Flow Pressures:** Fee pressures, reduced margins, and longer payment terms can strain agency finances, making robust cash flow management essential.

## **The growth of AI in UK recruitment firms**

AI is rapidly reshaping the UK recruitment sector, offering agencies powerful tools to streamline operations, enhance decision-making, and deliver enhanced services. According to recent surveys, around two-thirds of UK recruitment professionals now leverage AI to automate repetitive tasks such as candidate search, CV screening, interview scheduling, and initial candidate communications. This automation not only reduces administrative burdens but also allows recruiters to focus on higher-value activities—building relationships, negotiating offers, and providing strategic advice.

AI-driven analytics are transforming how recruiters make decisions, identifying patterns in candidate data and predicting job fit with increasing accuracy. Larger companies are at the forefront, with 90% of major private sector businesses using AI in their recruitment processes, but adoption is also growing among smaller agencies, with nearly half now using some form of AI technology.

AI is also enhancing the candidate experience. Automated chatbots and AI-powered communication tools enable faster, more personalised interactions, while AI-driven interview platforms allow candidates to complete assessments at their convenience. Despite these advancements, challenges such as data quality, cost, and resistance to change remain.

AI is not replacing recruiters but empowering them. The “human touch” remains essential for building trust and understanding nuanced candidate needs, but AI is handling the heavy lifting behind the scenes, surfacing data-driven insights and automating routine tasks.

## **The importance of robust financial data and management**

In this environment, the financial health of recruitment agencies is paramount. Agencies must ensure that their financial data is accurate, up-to-date, and actionable. This enables them to:

- **Monitor cash flow closely:** With longer payment cycles and increased fee pressures, agencies must track cash flow rigorously to avoid liquidity crises.
- **React quickly to market changes:** Real-time financial insights allow agencies to adjust their strategies, manage costs, and seize opportunities as they arise.
- **Plan for growth and contingencies:** Robust financial planning helps agencies invest in technology, talent, and marketing, while also preparing for downturns or unexpected shocks.

## **The role of fractional CFOs and outsourced FDs**

For many growing recruitment agencies, the appointment of a fractional Chief Financial Officer (CFO) or outsourced Finance Director (FD) is proving to be a game-changer. These professionals provide strategic financial leadership without the cost and commitment of a full-time executive, offering:

- **Expert financial guidance:** Fractional CFOs and outsourced FDs bring deep expertise in financial management, risk mitigation, and compliance, helping agencies navigate complex regulatory environment.
- **Improved cash flow management:** They implement best practices for invoicing, collections, and expense management, reducing the risk of cash flow problems.



Dan Cooper

- **Strategic Planning and Decision Support:** By providing actionable insights and scenario planning, they empower agencies to make informed decisions about growth, investment, and operational efficiency.
- **Scalability:** As agencies grow, fractional CFOs and outsourced FDs can scale their support to match the agency's evolving needs, ensuring financial stability at every stage.

#### Looking ahead

The UK recruitment sector in 2025 is defined by both opportunity and adversity. For growing agencies in permanent hire, temporary staffing, and executive search, success

will depend on their ability to adapt to market changes, differentiate themselves from competitors, and maintain strong financial health. Embracing AI and ensuring robust financial management, with the strategic guidance of fractional CFOs or outsourced FDs, are not just advantages; they are essential for agencies seeking to avoid pitfalls and thrive in a challenging environment.

By integrating technology and expert financial leadership, recruitment agencies can position themselves for sustainable growth, resilience, and long-term success in the years ahead.

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*L-R: Kerry Walker of Business Durham, Fozia Saleem of Magnitude Biosciences, Rebecca Minchella of Maven and Sarah Newbould of the British Business Bank*



# Magnitude Biosciences secures over £700,000 to accelerate in vivo high-throughput drug discovery platform

Magnitude Biosciences, a specialist contract research organisation (CRO) in County Durham that offers in vivo discovery of treatments for age-related conditions and other diseases, has secured over £700,000 in combined funding to scale up its high-throughput screening platform.

**The investment was led by Maven's managed regional funds including NPIF II - Maven Equity Finance, which is managed by Maven as part of the Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund II, the Finance Durham Fund, established by Durham County Council and overseen by Business Durham, as well as continued support from existing investors Northstar Ventures. The investment was matched with grant funding from Innovate UK through the Investor Partnerships: Digital Technologies North East programme.**

This funding will enable Magnitude Biosciences to enhance its proprietary WormGazer® technology, integrating robotics, machine learning, and liquid culture systems to create a novel HTS platform capable of screening thousands of compounds per week. By rapidly analysing whole-organism data with advanced machine-learning technology, this platform enables pharmaceutical, nutrition, and health supplement companies to quickly identify compounds that may support healthier aging—accelerating discovery, lowering costs, and reducing reliance on traditional animal models.

The expansion will create high-skilled jobs in robotics, software engineering, and biological sciences at the company's base in NETPark (Sedgefield) strengthening the North East's reputation as a growing hub for digital and life science innovation

We're incredibly grateful for the support from Innovate UK, Maven and Northstar as we scale our HTS platform," said Dr Fozia Saleem, CEO of Magnitude Biosciences. "This funding accelerates our mission to revolutionise drug discovery bringing life-changing therapies to patients faster, cutting costs and timelines, and transforming how we tackle the world's toughest-to-treat diseases while reducing dependence on traditional animal models."

"Magnitude Biosciences is building the kind of scalable, high-impact technology we look for at Maven. Their HTS platform addresses a real need in early drug discovery," said Rebecca Minchella, Investment Manager at Maven Capital Partners. "Fozia is also an excellent role model for the region, through her work at Magnitude and commitment to supporting female entrepreneurs via the Lifted Project, and also her passion to help showcase the talent and expertise we have in the North East."

"The North East is increasingly becoming an epicentre for innovation in the UK and Magnitude Biosciences is a good example of the technology-enabled businesses that NPIF II is able to champion.", added Sarah Newbould, Senior Investment Manager at British Business Bank. "Empowering female leaders in the science and technology space is also crucial to enabling a more diverse and prosperous economy. We're excited to see the impact the business will achieve, creating jobs in the region and furthering the important work they are committed to."

"Magnitude Biosciences is a fantastic example of the type of innovative, high-growth business that Finance Durham was established to support," said Kerry Walker, Business Growth Director at Business Durham: "We're proud to back their continued development at NETPark, where they are not only scaling cutting-edge drug discovery technologies but also playing a vital role in the strength and vibrancy of the science park community."

Magnitude's HTS platform will allow companies to test large compound libraries at speed and scale, creating a step-change in the generation of preclinical in vivo data for the selection of compounds for discovering new therapeutic drugs. With initial pilot work already underway with top-10 pharma clients, the new funding will help Magnitude Biosciences scale delivery, grow its team, and expand its impact on drug development.

***Maven is one of the UK's most active private equity investors and has a track record of identifying and nurturing technology-driven businesses. If you are looking at private equity as a solution to fund future growth we would love to hear from you. Find out more at [mavencp.com](https://mavencp.com)***



*Fozia Saleem of Magnitude Biosciences.*



## Mincoffs records high deal volume regionally and nationally

A leading North East law firm continues to expand its presence across the UK, with an esteemed industry report revealing high deal activity across the North East, East of England and nationally.

The Experian Market IQ M&A Review report for quarter one of 2025 has once again ranked Newcastle-based Mincoffs Solicitors as the region's number one deal adviser.

Along with recording the highest volume of deals in the region, the firm has also been ranked fourth in the table for transactions in the East of England and in the top 20 legal advisers across the UK.

The quarter one ranking is the latest in a pattern of increased deal activity for Mincoffs, which has been consistently recognised as the region's leading deal adviser for more than two years.

Paul Hughes, senior partner and head of corporate at Mincoffs, is delighted with the result.

"It is a huge achievement to be recognised as one of the UK's top 20 legal advisers, cementing what has been an incredibly strong start



to the year for the corporate team and the firm as a whole," he said.

"We are thrilled to have maintained our ongoing position as the North East's number one deal adviser and it is fantastic to see the team's performance being recognised with a high ranking in the East of England as well.

"This is an excellent result for quarter one, which the team should be very proud of, and one we hope to continue across the rest of 2025."



## EMG Solicitors awarded prestigious Investors in People Gold accreditation

EMG Solicitors, who have offices in Durham, Newcastle, Darlington, Penrith and Manchester are delighted to have

been awarded the prestigious Investors in People (IIP) Gold accreditation, a reflection of the firm's deep-rooted commitment to its people, values and purpose-driven culture.

The IIP Gold standard is awarded to organisations that demonstrate a consistent commitment to people management, training and development as well as a strong culture of valuing their people. This involves a rigorous assessment process, including interviews with colleagues selected by the assessor, a questionnaire which is sent to everyone in the firm and an analysis of evidence presented to satisfy each IIP indicator. The IIP framework being centred around how companies effectively lead, support and improve the workforce.

Only a small proportion of organisations achieve Gold status, placing EMG Solicitors amongst the top tier of employers nationally. This latest recognition follows a string of key milestones for the firm, including achieving B Corp certification last year and being named in The Times and Sunday Times UK 100 Best Places to Work 2024.

## Prominent city centre leisure venue Bar Loco acquired by Sayturk Group

Ambitious North East leisure operator, Sayturk Group has acquired Bar Loco, a popular Newcastle bar and restaurant, with legal advice from leading commercial law firm Sweeney Miller Law.

The Leazes Park Road bar sits a stone's throw from St. James' Park stadium and enjoys high footfall, particularly on match days and is a popular haunt for Newcastle students.

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.

Their dedicated team have over 50 years of experience in high-level construction and design across the UK and the Middle East.



The latest acquisition comes hot on the heels of several other high-profile deals in Newcastle's bustling hospitality sector, secured by Sweeney Miller Law's commercial property and licensing teams.



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## Swinburne Maddison celebrates double win at Northern Law Awards 2025

One of the North East's leading law firms, Swinburne Maddison, is proud to announce its double success at the Northern Law Awards 2025, where it was named Law Firm of the Year and also took home the award for Dispute Resolution Team of the Year.

**The prestigious awards ceremony, held on Thursday 12th June at the Hilton Newcastle Gateshead, brought together the region's top legal talent to celebrate excellence across the profession.**

This marks the third time Swinburne Maddison has been recognised as Law Firm of the Year, having previously won the title in 2017 and 2023.

### **A year of strategic growth and innovation**

The judges praised Swinburne Maddison for its strong team ethic, commitment to staff development, and its meticulous approach to client service. Over the past year, the firm has made significant investments in its infrastructure and brand, including the launch of their rebrand, redesigned website, and embracing change with new AI-powered case management system.

The firm's people-first culture was also highlighted, with judges noting its thoughtful approach to staff development and retention, and its commitment to community engagement.

The judges commented: "A forward-thinking, people-centred business making a real difference in the community and beyond."

### **Dispute resolution team sets the standard**

The Dispute Resolution team was recognised for its outstanding team ethos, commitment to equal opportunities, and proactive approach to client feedback. Described by the judges as "A truly impressive and forward-thinking approach all round", the team regularly engages external providers to gather honest insights

and uses this feedback to drive continuous improvement.

Jonathan Moreland, Managing Partner at Swinburne Maddison, commented: "Winning two awards is a tremendous honour and a reflection of the incredible work happening across every part of our firm. From our brilliant lawyers to our dedicated support teams, there are so many people behind the scenes who make our success possible.

"These awards are truly a celebration of the whole team and the culture we've built together."

### **Looking ahead**

This recognition comes at a pivotal time for Swinburne Maddison. The firm now employs over 90 people and recently unveiled a refreshed brand identity developed in partnership with a strategic marketing agency. The new brand message "A contemporary law firm rooted in tradition" and tagline "Reassuring to know" reflect the firm's modern approach and enduring commitment to client confidence. With a growing presence from Newcastle to Teesside and deep roots in Durham, Swinburne Maddison continues to expand its regional footprint while remaining committed to the values that have driven its success.

[swinburnemaddison.co.uk](http://swinburnemaddison.co.uk)



“

*...Prioritising  
social mobility is  
important to improve  
the opportunities  
available...*

Jessica Gray





## Unlocking potential

Lack of social mobility could be costing North East businesses.

**A new report shows that young people in the North East are more likely to enter 'working-class jobs' than peers from similar backgrounds in areas with greater social mobility. This means that businesses could be missing out on fantastic regional talent.**

Local commercial law firm Muckle LLP has been developing its social diversity policy for several years, most significantly through its involvement in creating the North East Solicitor Apprenticeship Scheme (NESA).

Jessica Gray, solicitor in the firm's real estate team, talks about her own journey and how other businesses could benefit from prioritising recruiting from diverse backgrounds.

Historically, the legal profession in the UK has been dominated by individuals from privileged backgrounds – the perception, and often reality, was 'it's not what you know, it's who you know'.

Jessica says the elitist perception around a law career was a struggle: "During my undergraduate degree, a careers adviser recommended that I speak to family friends who could potentially offer some legal work experience, as this would be difficult to find without any personal connections.

"I was disappointed and frustrated at this advice; I did not have any connections in the legal industry and was worried that this would be a barrier to securing a training contract. When participating in vacation schemes and assessment days, it was difficult not to compare my own non-legal background with candidates who had years of experience in the legal sector."

Statistics published by the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) in 2025 indicate that social mobility is improving. For example, the percentage of lawyers from an intermediate socio-economic background has increased from 5% in 2019 to 13% in 2023, and the proportion of lawyers attending fee-paying schools has decreased from 23% in 2015 to 21% in 2023.

But in a sobering report, the Sutton Trust highlighted that the top 20 constituencies with the best social mobility in England are all in London, with Newcastle upon Tyne Central and West ranking the lowest. So there is definitely more to be done, particularly in our region – across all sectors, not just law.

Muckle has long recognised the benefits of breaking down barriers to law careers. Most recently, it has started blind scoring all graduate recruitment applications. Jessica says the firm is continuously looking at ways to improve: "During my

secondary school education, I admittedly had a very limited knowledge of the legal profession, especially the commercial sector. Careers fairs at my secondary school were uninspiring, with a very limited range of businesses in attendance.

"As part of Muckle's social diversity strategy, we are now reaching out to schools where the percentage of students claiming free school meals is higher than the national average to offer career talks and attendance at careers fairs. I think this is a great step in the right direction to engage with talented students from a lower socio-economic background.

"A brief introduction to a career in law could encourage students to research the opportunities available in the legal profession at a young age. Muckle is also expanding its work experience programmes to ensure our one-week placements are offered to a more diverse range of schools and students in the North East."

Jessica took the traditional university route but says schemes like NESA are vital in attracting people from lower socio-economic backgrounds into law: "There are many reasons young people choose not to attend university, whether this is because of caring obligations or the substantial costs of an undergraduate degree. The NESA scheme offers an alternative route into law and, as the scheme grows, I think it will be a fundamental part of improving social mobility in the commercial legal profession.

"My secondary school history teacher encouraged me to apply for university, and he reassured me that a wider range of careers would become apparent once I attended university. Whilst my teacher was correct, many students at state schools may not have this kind of guidance. This is why it is important for businesses to reach out and offer career insights to these schools; a brief conversation could be the catalyst in inspiring students from less privileged backgrounds to pursue a career in any number of sectors they may not have thought were possible.

"Prioritising social mobility is important to improve the opportunities available to hard-working students, regardless of their background, as well as creating a diverse workforce that can offer a more rounded service for clients."

**For more information on Muckle's social diversity strategy, visit [www.muckle-llp.com](http://www.muckle-llp.com)**



“

*...Being a good  
listener is  
fundamental...*



# Solicitor of the month

*This month Northern Insight talks to...*

## Leah Duffield

*Partner in the private client team at Muckle LLP.*

### **What inspired you to pursue a career in law?**

I studied English Literature with Writing and Performance at the University of York, and whilst I enjoyed my degree enormously, it didn't leave me with any clear route into work. Towards the end of my degree, I did work experience at a law firm and at a school, with a view to picking between education and law. I enjoyed both but ultimately decided to pursue law.

I still have a passion for education, which I feed by training junior staff and guest lecturing in local schools, colleges and universities.

### **What are the most common legal issues people seek advice on, and how do you help them?**

I deal with wills, estate administration, lasting powers of attorney, court of protection and succession planning. This provides a lot of variety and every day looks different. The current hot topic is the Budget and the implications of pensions changes and losing 100% business and agricultural relief. Clients are starting to think seriously about gifting wealth to the next generation and I can help support them through that process.

### **What are the biggest misconceptions people have about solicitors and the legal system?**

I still have some prospective clients who are shocked that they can ring me directly. I think there is a perception that there is a gateway to legal services and you have to pay a toll to get through the door, like getting through a doctor's receptionist to speak to a doctor. I am always happy for people to email or call to have a conversation about what they need.

### **What advice would you give to someone facing a legal dispute?**

The first thing I often tell people is to take a breath. It is OK to pause and take stock of the situation before taking any action. Clients need responsive and proactive legal representatives, but there is great value in taking a moment at the start to fully understand the circumstances and agree a way forward that they are comfortable with.

### **How do you handle the emotional and ethical challenges of your job?**

I often meet clients at points of challenge in their lives, whether it's a big life change, a bereavement or planning for what will happen when they die. It is important to be kind and empathic, and focus on what I can do to help. I can't take away their pain, but I can take the legal worries off their plate. I try and focus on what I can do, rather than what I can't do.

### **What impact has technology had on the legal industry, and how do you see it evolving?**

As technology, and adoption of that technology, has evolved, the geographical limitations for working for clients has decreased and I find myself working for clients across the country. I still love a face-to-face meeting though!

The growth of AI is a big trend and its legislation and management is both a challenge and an opportunity for the legal sector. Seeing how we navigate that through the coming years is going to be interesting.

### **What are the key qualities that make a great solicitor?**

Being a good listener is fundamental. Solicitors (including myself!) love to speak but before we can advise our clients comprehensively, we need to understand what they need from us. This is particularly pertinent for private client practitioners.

### **How do you balance client advocacy with legal ethics and professional responsibility?**

It takes careful thought and sometimes difficult conversations. Ultimately, it's about doing the right thing for the client but without compromising our professional obligations. Having supportive colleagues to talk through challenging scenarios is fundamental to keeping the balance right.

### **What is the most rewarding part of being a solicitor?**

I really enjoy helping people and giving them comfort and peace of mind. I also take an inordinate amount of pleasure in balancing estate accounts. I am a loud and proud Excel spreadsheet geek!

### **What are you currently working on?**

I joined Muckle in March of this year, and I am part of our commitment to expanding our presence in Teesside. I have been focused on getting to know my new colleagues, growing my existing links with the Teesside communities and, of course, supporting clients with the new Budget changes.

### **How do you like to unwind?**

I am a working mother with two small children, so inevitably, I don't get a lot of downtime, but a glass of wine and an episode of whatever TV show I'm enjoying watching (currently, *The White Lotus*) is a lovely way to finish off a busy day.

[www.muckle-llp.com](http://www.muckle-llp.com)



# Victimisation Claims: Why the wording of a grievance isn't the whole story

Charlotte McBride, Senior Associate at specialist employment law firm Collingwood Legal, looks at why a recent Employment Appeal Tribunal decision on victimisation is important for employers and shares some pointers for handling tricky grievances.



Charlotte McBride

**The recent EAT case of *Kokomane v Boots Management Services Ltd* has shone a spotlight on the importance of how employers interpret grievances and made clear that employees don't need to explicitly allege discrimination to be protected from victimisation.**

## What happened?

In short, Ms Kokomane worked as a Customer Assistant for Boots in a store where she and only one other employee, a relief pharmacist, were non-White. After a workplace incident in which Ms Kokomane was accused of shouting, she raised a grievance complaining that the pharmacist had treated her differently when dealing with the allegation.

A second grievance followed, in which Ms Kokomane complained about the handling of her earlier grievance and alleging bullying by the pharmacist. Again, the outcome was not in her favour. A year later, she was made redundant which she claimed at Tribunal was victimisation.

## What the law says

Under the Equality Act, victimisation occurs when someone is treated detrimentally because they've made (or are believed to have made) a "protected act". This includes raising complaints about discrimination which could be informally or via internal channels like a grievance.

The key issue in this case was whether a complaint must explicitly say it relates to discrimination – for example, stating that

something was "racist" or "sexist" – to count as a protected act.

## The Tribunals' decisions

The Employment Tribunal initially rejected her claim. It concluded that because she didn't clearly state that her treatment was because of her race, her grievance didn't qualify as a protected act.

On appeal, the EAT found that the Tribunal had taken too narrow a view. Complaints didn't need to use legal terms like "discrimination" or specify a protected characteristic (such as race or sex). Instead, what matters is whether, taken in context, the complaint raises issues that could reasonably be interpreted as being about discrimination.

Importantly, the EAT noted that during her grievance Ms Kokomane had referred to a stereotype often applied to Black women of being "shouty" or "too loud". This, coupled with her comments about being treated differently and the very limited ethnic diversity at her workplace, should have been enough to put her employer (and the Tribunal) on notice that the grievance concerned potential race discrimination.

## Why this matters for employers

This decision is a helpful reminder that employers should listen carefully to what is meant, not just what is said. An employee doesn't need to use the word "discrimination" or cite the Equality Act for their complaint to be a protected act.

If there's a reasonable link to a protected characteristic – like race, sex, or disability – it could trigger legal protections.

## Practical steps for employers:

- **Context is king.** If an employee complains about being treated differently, consider all the circumstances – might their concerns relate to discrimination, even if it isn't stated outright?
- **Train your managers.** Being able to spot the signs of potential discrimination-related complaints, even where the language used is subtle or non-legal, is pivotal.
- **Take grievances seriously.** If there's any chance that an issue relates to discrimination, deal with it thoroughly and sensitively.
- **Avoid retaliation.** Any adverse treatment of an employee who has raised such concerns could lead to a costly victimisation claim.
- **Document your reasoning.** Whether you're handling a grievance or taking any action that could affect someone who has raised concerns, make sure your decision-making is well documented and based on fair, objective criteria to minimise your risk.

***If you'd like advice on grievance procedures, discrimination risks or how to navigate complaints fairly, the team at Collingwood Legal is here to help.***

**[www.collingwoodlegal.com](http://www.collingwoodlegal.com)**





Lauren Hall

## Leading the way in clinical negligence claims

Lauren Hall has been appointed to lead Hay & Kilner's growing clinical negligence team.

**From their offices in Newcastle, Hay & Kilner's medical negligence team are one of the largest and top ranking teams in the North East and are known for their extensive expertise handling a broad variety of clinical negligence claims.**

The team has been repeatedly recognised in 'The Times' Best Law Firm Awards and the fact that the majority of their clients are referred by other solicitors and professionals is testament to their reputation. Experts in their field, Lauren and the clinical negligence team pride themselves on their personable approach, expertise in both law and medicine and always going the extra mile for their clients.

The team's strength lies in its diverse skill set, working across a broad range of medical fields, providing a positive holistic and cohesive experience for the client together with tailored support ensuring

that every client receives the focused and dedicated attention they deserve.

Lauren undertakes cases in all areas of medicine and has specialist experience in inquest work regularly representing families in the Coroner's Court. She's experienced in handling a broad variety of clinical negligence claims and has a particular interest in gastro-intestinal, orthopaedic and accident and emergency cases, together with extensive experience in claims involving GP care.

On taking the position as Head of Clinical Negligence, Lauren explains: "My goal is for the team to continue to provide a high quality service for our clients, ensuring they get answers about what has gone wrong with their care and, of course, appropriate compensation to ensure they can lead the best life they can lead despite their medical accident. It can often be a daunting experience to challenge care provided by medical professionals and we support and assist our clients in asking the right questions to help clients understand what has gone wrong. We bring empathy, integrity, and legal expertise when it's needed most."

Lauren, who hails from Newcastle and studied at Northumbria University joined Hay & Kilner as a trainee solicitor, before qualifying into the department. She's worked her way up the ranks, becoming a partner in 2022. Here she shares more about her career journey and passion for wellbeing and creating a great place to work.

"I have always wanted to be involved in

clinical negligence and was attracted to Hay & Kilner due to their reputation in the field. Medical negligence is a fascinating but demanding area of law. I've watched the team grow over the last 15 years and feel privileged to be leading us into the future. I'm committed to our team's development and look forward to expanding and nurturing new talent.

"As Co-Chair of the firm's Employee Wellbeing Committee, I'm committed to providing an open, inclusive and engaging work environment as our people truly are our biggest strength and most valuable asset. We are proud of our down to earth and supportive nature with colleagues, and are dedicated to promoting equality and diversity and policies that fully support all of our employees. In the last year we have achieved Investor in People and Better Health at Work Awards."

Lauren is Vice President and Treasurer of The Women Lawyers Division North East, dedicated to supporting the needs of women lawyers in and around the North East. The organisation celebrates its ten year anniversary in 2025 and Lauren has played an integral role in its growth and success over the last decade.

***If you would like to discuss concerns regarding medical care you or a loved one has received or would like to discuss referring a potential client to us, please contact us on 0191 232 8345 or [info@hay-kilner.co.uk](mailto:info@hay-kilner.co.uk) [www.hay-kilner.co.uk](http://www.hay-kilner.co.uk)***



# Traditional auction vs Modern method auction

There are two main types of auction methods, Traditional Auction (Unconditional) and Modern Auction (Conditional). Each have pro's and con's, and it is therefore important to consider which method is best for your circumstances.

We have seen a large increase in auction sales and many sellers have now made it their preferred method of selling. There has also been an increase in the quality of properties being sold at auction. Many high-street estate agents are now moving into the auction market due to the increased demand and are therefore making it increasingly accessible.

## Traditional Auction

With the Traditional Auction method firstly, the seller sets a minimum price and if the property is being submitted to a live auction then they will set an auction date on which the auction house will attempt to sell the property. The solicitors will prepare the auction pack which will be available for any potential buyers to view. Potential buyers bid on the property with the highest bid winning and then the buyer pays a deposit to the seller, and an unconditional contract is exchanged. This makes the sale legally binding, giving both parties on average 28 days to finalise the transaction (otherwise known as completion). The number of enquiries the buyer's solicitor can raise is limited as contracts have already exchanged.

## Advantages

- As the contracts have already exchanged, the buyer is legally bound to complete. This offers the seller a higher amount of security that the sale will complete and if it doesn't the buyer forfeits the deposit they have paid.
- Contracts are exchanged to complete within an average of 28 days. This binds the buyer into completing within the agreed timescale.
- The seller can insert into the special conditions of sale, that the buyer will be responsible for the sellers' legal costs and

disbursements, so the seller retains more of the purchase price.

## Disadvantages

- Having to complete within quick timescales can often rule out using a standard mortgage. This can reduce the amount of applicable buyers to only cash buyers or those willing to use more expensive bridging finance.
- Whilst a minimum price is set, it is uncertain what the final sale price will be.
- You may achieve a lower sale price than a sale on the open market.

## Modern Auction

The second type of auction is the Modern Auction. Again, the solicitors prepare the auction pack, which the potential buyers will be able to view. With this format the auction is usually open to bidding for a period of time (around four weeks but it varies). Once the highest bid is won, the buyer will pay a reservation fee to the auction house. Once a contract pack is sent to the buyers solicitors they usually have five days to raise any enquiries on the property. In standard timescales the buyer

then has 28 days to exchange and then a further 28 days to complete the purchase or earlier by mutual agreement.

## Advantages

- The longer time of auction can allow more potential buyers to bid. Additionally, due to the increased length of time, the sale can attract both cash and mortgage buyers.
- Modern auctions still offer greater certainty of sale compared to normal sales due to the reservation payment the buyer makes.

## Disadvantages

- Increased timelines make them unsuitable for urgent sales.
- Compared to traditional auctions there is less certainty as contracts are not exchanged when the bid is accepted. Whilst the buyer would lose the reservation fee, they are not bound to complete the sale.

**If you are looking to sell residential or commercial property at auction call 0345 900 5401, email [enquiries@sweeneymiller.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@sweeneymiller.co.uk) or visit [sweeneymiller.co.uk](http://sweeneymiller.co.uk).**



Jess Fenwick, Partner and Head of Corporate and Commercial



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*L-R: Corporate partners Paul Hughes, Chris Hughes and John Nicholson*

## Mincoffs records high deal volume regionally and nationally

A leading North East law firm continues to expand its presence across the UK, with an esteemed industry report revealing high deal activity across the North East, East of England and nationally.

**The Experian Market IQ M&A Review report for quarter one of 2025 has once again ranked Newcastle-based Mincoffs Solicitors as the region's number one deal adviser.**

Along with recording the highest volume of deals in the region, the firm has also been ranked fourth in the table for transactions in the East of England and in the top 20 legal advisers across the UK.

The department has expanded over the last year to facilitate increased client demand, welcoming solicitors Connie Lu and Olly Moore and paralegal Holly Kirk to the team.

They work closely with partners Paul Hughes, John Nicholson and Chris Hughes, associate solicitors Daniel Bell

and Max Gilchrist, solicitor Grace Hughes and paralegal Jenny Harrison, with further recruitment for the department planned in the coming months.

The quarter one ranking is the latest in a pattern of increased deal activity for Mincoffs, which has been consistently recognised as the region's leading deal adviser for more than two years.

Paul Hughes, senior partner and head of corporate at Mincoffs, is delighted with the result.

"It is a huge achievement to be recognised as one of the UK's top 20 legal advisers, cementing what has been an incredibly strong start to the year for the corporate team and the firm as a whole," he said.

"We are thrilled to have maintained our ongoing position as the North East's number one deal adviser and it is fantastic to see the team's performance being recognised with a high ranking in the East of England as well.

"This is an excellent result for quarter one, which the team should be very proud of, and one we hope to continue across the rest of 2025."

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

The corporate team have expertise in all areas of corporate law, including company sales and acquisitions, corporate finance, flotations, share options, private equity investment, complex turnarounds, reorganisations and restructures, mergers, management buy-outs and buy-ins, as well as corporate rescues of distressed businesses.

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

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# Sarah Reid

*Managing Director, Richard Reed Solicitors*

Here, Sarah talks of driving digital innovation at Richard Reed Solicitors

**Richard Reed Solicitors is a long-standing North East law firm, and is embracing innovation by launching their own podcast, Legally Sound with Richard Reed hosted by the firms' Managing Director Sarah Reid, to deliver legal insights, in-depth interviews with industry experts and practical advice straight to listeners'.**

Underscoring the firm's commitment to accessibility, effective communication and technological innovation in today's digital age.

"With 77 years' experience and a reputation built on trust, we've supported thousands of clients across the region and as the business world transforms, we remain focused on evolving our services to meet new demands," said Managing Director and Solicitor Sarah Reid. "That's why we've invested in our digital platforms, ensuring our firm remains as dynamic and forward-thinking as the clients we serve."

"Many people find dealing with solicitors can feel overwhelming, especially if they're unsure what to expect. We wanted to show that Richard Reed Solicitors is a friendly, and approachable firm, here to support with a wide range of legal matters."

"One of the things we wanted to do with the podcast was to make the law feel less intimidating, we explore everyday situations where someone might need support from a solicitor, take a closer look at the latest legal news and changes in the law, and even demystify common misconceptions about the legal system."

"Each episode delves into key areas of our practice, corporate and commercial law, employment law, Will writing and probate, debt recovery, family law, residential and commercial conveyancing, dispute resolution and more, showcasing the full spectrum of our services and the depth of expertise that keeps clients coming back."

"Take buying your first home, for example, it's a huge milestone, but for many people, it can be quite daunting. You're often not sure what to expect. In the podcast we talk through real-life scenarios and give people the confidence to understand the process. We also chat about recent legal changes and try to clear up some of the common myths people have about the legal world."

Richard Reed Solicitors has grown steadily in recent years and now employs a team of over 40.

"Our reputation means that a lot of our work comes from repeat and referral business. With ambitious plans for continued growth and investment, we've launched our new podcast to inform and educate our listeners but also to reach a broader demographic to support our growth plans."

Combining nearly 80 years of expertise with digital innovation, Richard Reed Solicitors delivers legal insights through Legally Sound with Richard Reed, making legal guidance more accessible across the region. From complex commercial matters to everyday legal questions, the firm's blend of experience and forward-thinking ensures clients are supported every step of the way.

***To stay informed with timely legal insights, subscribe to our podcast Legally Sound at [www.richardreed.co.uk/podcast](http://www.richardreed.co.uk/podcast) or on your preferred podcast platform.***

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# Mediation in IP Disputes: A strategic advantage for UK businesses

In today's fast-paced, innovation-driven economy, intellectual property (IP) assets are often among a company's most valuable holdings.

**From trademarks and patents to copyright and design rights, protecting these assets is vital to maintaining a competitive edge. However, disputes over IP rights can be costly, time-consuming, and potentially damaging to commercial relationships.**

Last month we discussed the Opinions Service available at the UK Intellectual Property Office, a service providing business with affordable assessments of patent validity or infringement. However, mediation also offers a powerful, strategic alternative to litigation.

Mediation is a form of alternative dispute resolution (ADR) that enables parties to settle IP disputes without going to court. With the support of an impartial third party, mediation encourages open negotiation, collaboration, and creative problem-solving. Unlike court proceedings it often preserves business relationships that might otherwise be irreparably harmed in court.

One of mediation's key advantages is cost-effectiveness. IP litigation can easily escalate into hundreds of thousands of pounds in legal fees, not to mention lost time and business disruption. Mediation, by contrast, is significantly faster and more affordable. Crucially, it allows parties to retain control over the outcome, rather than leaving decisions in the hands of a judge.

Recognising the importance of ADR in the IP sphere, the UK Intellectual Property Office (UK IPO) offers a dedicated mediation service tailored to resolving a wide range of IP disputes. This includes issues relating to patents, trademarks, designs, and copyright. UK IPO mediators are experienced professionals with a deep



*Dominic Elsworth*

understanding of IP law and practice, enabling them to navigate technical and legal complexities efficiently.

The service is offered both online and in person, with flexible pricing designed to be accessible to businesses of all sizes. For example, one hour of online mediation starts at just £75 per party, while in-person sessions begin at £152.50 per party per hour. Longer sessions are available at competitive rates, making the service affordable not only for large corporations but also for SMEs, start-ups, and individual creators.

The UK IPO mediation service can assist with a wide variety of disputes, including those involving licensing agreements, ownership or entitlement, infringement, trademark oppositions, and technology or knowledge transfer arrangements between businesses.

The process is simple and user-friendly. Once both parties agree to mediate, a session is arranged—either virtually or at a

convenient location. The mediator guides the discussion, helping parties explore their interests, identify areas of agreement, and develop workable solutions. If a resolution is reached, it can be formalised in a legally binding settlement agreement.

According to the IPO, the service has a high success rate, with the majority of mediations resulting in agreement on the day. Another significant advantage is confidentiality: unlike court proceedings, which are public, mediation is private, and the details of the dispute remain confidential regardless of the outcome.

As IP continues to play an increasingly central role in business strategy, the demand for efficient and effective dispute resolution is growing. Mediation offers a pragmatic, cost-effective solution that avoids the expense, complexity, and adversarial nature of litigation while fostering constructive outcomes.

[www.heip.co.uk](http://www.heip.co.uk)



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## Rooms with a view...

**AN iconic seafront building, directly overlooking the beach at Whitley Bay, is undergoing the finishing touches of an extensive restoration programme to transform it into a striking new care home.**

The former Rex Hotel building has been almost completely rebuilt and fully refurbished at an overall cost of £12m by its owners, Prestwick Care Group.

Named Bay View House, it is expected to welcome its first residents this summer.

Behind the property's façade the building has been totally remodelled to provide 86 bedrooms over five floors.

And the top floor will provide four luxurious penthouse suites for residents who wish to be cared for while maintaining maximum independence. Each of the 86 bedrooms will have its own, private, en-suite bathroom facilities, along with specialist beds, bespoke fitted furniture, TV and free Wi-Fi.

Elsewhere within the home residents and their visitors will also be able to enjoy a bar, cinema room, restaurant and hair salon as well as numerous lounges and family rooms for social events and entertainment or simply for quiet times. Many of the bedrooms and communal rooms have windows offering uninterrupted views of the sea front, with its extensive beaches and historic St Mary's Lighthouse to the north and the coastal village of Cullercoats to the south.

Prestwick Care - which has been providing care services in the North East for more than 35 years and is part of Malhotra Group PLC - estimates that around 80 full and part-time and associated jobs will be created at Bay View House.



## Toy library secures £10,000 Bernicia Foundation grant to support North Tyneside families

**North Tyneside's Baby Equipment Loan Service and Toy Library (BELS) has secured £10,000 grant funding from The Bernicia Foundation to continue its vital work providing an affordable, high-quality toy and baby equipment loan service for families across the region.**

Founded over 40 years ago by the Young Women's Group in Rosehill, near Wallsend, BELS has grown into an invaluable independent charity, now supporting hundreds of families.

It loans items to families at minimal cost from cots to highchairs, soft toys to puzzles, all of which are professionally cleaned, inspected and ready for use. It saves families the cost of having to buy expensive items upfront which they can return when their children outgrow them.

Originally established to promote the health and wellbeing of children and young people in North Tyneside, the female-founded initiative gives members access to over 4,000 toys and educational resources for just £7 per year. This provides children with a wide variety of fun and enriching play opportunities and champions sustainability through toy reuse.

## Newcastle City Cricket Club gets clearer sight of new league challenge with Banks Group backing

**Players at a successful Newcastle community cricket club are getting a clearer sight of the game thanks to a four-figure grant from a regional employer.**

Newcastle City Cricket Club's men's first XI is playing its first ever season in the top tier of the regional cricket pyramid after winning promotion to Division One of the North East Premier League last year.

As part of making the step up, the club

had to make a number of improvements to the facilities at its Broadway West ground in Kenton, including buying a new set of sightscreens, which are required for matches at this level.

The club used a £2,000 grant from the Banks Group to bring in the sightscreens, which have helped it reach a mid-table position after the first six games of the new season.

Celebrating its 40th anniversary this year, Newcastle City Cricket Club moved to its current home in 1990 and currently has around 200 members.

As well as running six senior weekend sides, the club also has junior sides running right through the age groups, launched its first girls' team last year and is hoping to set



up a women's team this season.

It is also working towards putting new net practice facilities in place, which it hopes to have open for use later in the summer.



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## First look for young Byker residents as pioneering new community hub opens its doors for showcase event

Dozens of local residents have been taking a first look at what's going to be on offer at a pioneering new youth and community hub in Byker.

The Lighthouse Project has opened its doors for the first time for a showcase event which featured demonstrations and interactive activities from some of the people and groups that will use the new venue as a base.

More than 90 children from the nearby Byker Primary School and St Lawrence Catholic Primary School and the Byker Scout Group took part in a range of outdoor forest activities, with other activities including cookery classes, sports sessions, arts and crafts, music and breakdancing.

Ben Roman, chief executive at The Lighthouse Project, says: "The idea for the Lighthouse Project first arose out of a passion for working with young people on the Byker Estate and a frustration with the lack of purpose-built facilities in the area to support this work.

"To see this idea becoming a reality and to be able to witness the reaction of people coming through the doors for the first time was brilliant for the whole Lighthouse Project team and we're so excited at where we're going from here."

The Lighthouse Project will provide a safe, welcoming meeting place where young people and the community can flourish, and is expected to welcome around 1,500 young people and their families through its doors each year.

## Plaque unveiled to honour support for South Bank Community Grocery

A commemorative plaque has been unveiled at South Bank Community Grocery to recognise the vital support provided by the Teesworks Benevolent Foundation in helping to secure the store's future for local families.

The Foundation, incorporated in December 2023 to strengthen communities across the Tees Valley, funded the set up and first year running costs of the grocery store – ensuring affordable access to food for those who need it most.

The South Bank Community Grocery, part of the national Community Grocery network, officially opened its doors to members in April 2025. The store offers a lifeline to local people, helping to ease the pressures of rising living costs by providing low-cost groceries and free community support services.



Representatives from the Teesworks Benevolent Foundation, store volunteers and members of the community came together for the unveiling, marking the start of an ongoing partnership to tackle food poverty and social deprivation in the region.



## Foundation support tops £160,000 to help thousands more on fifth birthday

**The Bernicia Foundation celebrates its fifth birthday with more than 8,000 people benefitting from £167,000 in grants to North East charities and young people in the past year.**

A total of 30 grants were made by the charitable foundation to projects and individuals supporting communities and gifted youngsters striving to reach their goals in life.

Since it was established in 2020, The Bernicia Foundation created by North East housing association Bernicia has channelled more than £1.2m into 183 projects helping tackle poverty, promoting mental wellbeing and pathways into work across hard-pressed communities.

13 Inspiration Grants were awarded to support young people aged 24 and under over this period who demonstrate exceptional promise in areas such as sport, music and the arts.

An estimated 8,000 beneficiaries in 2024/25 are directly attributable to the Foundation's support.



The Bubble Foundation is the charity connected to Ward 3 at The Great North Children's Hospital. Supporting children with life threatening immune deficiencies. Restoring immune systems, rebuilding lives.

[bubble.foundation@nhs.net](mailto:bubble.foundation@nhs.net) • [www.bubblefoundation.org.uk](http://www.bubblefoundation.org.uk) • 07760 393 187



# The North East's biggest sports day - 280 kids, one unforgettable afternoon!

National School Sports Week is always a big deal and Wallsend pulled out all the stops. With movement, sport, and wellbeing more vital than ever for our young people, Sporting Wallsend had a bold idea: what if they created the biggest Year 6 sports day the North East has ever seen?

Enter WASP: Wallsend Active Schools Partnership. This new collaboration brings together some of the area's top sports organisations, all united by one goal: getting kids moving, healthy and happy!

Months of behind-the-scenes hard work paid off in a massive way. Eight schools. 280 students- one epic day of sport and fun. From competitive drills to high-energy fun, it was a festival of movement like no other!

The partnership includes Wallsend Rugby Club, Wallsend Boys & Girls Club, Cricketcube, Power Through Sport, Hellcats Cheerleading and Wallsend Children's Community.

But it wasn't just about fun it was also a chance for WASP to show local schools what they can offer year-round—including energising breakfast clubs, enriching afterschool sessions, and more.

The verdict? We'll let one beaming Year 6 student sum it up:

"It's been the BEST day EVER—can I come back tomorrow and do it all again?!"

**For more information about WASP contact Martyn on:**  
[martyn.wallsendboysclub@gmail.com](mailto:martyn.wallsendboysclub@gmail.com)



## Spotlight on young men: First 'Let's Hear it for the Boys' conference held in Gateshead

**The first-ever Let's Hear it for the Boys conference took place at the Baltic in Gateshead, marking a significant moment for youth-focused organisations in the North East.**

The inspiring day of sharing and learning was hosted by North East Youth Alliance and North East Young Dads and Lads (NEYDL). It was created to highlight the pressing issues facing young men and boys in the region.

It also served to celebrate and connect the dedicated individuals and organisations working tirelessly to support them.

The conversation around masculinity, identity, and youth engagement had been recently reignited by the Netflix show *Adolescence*, which brought mainstream attention to the rise of the 'manosphere', Incel culture, and influencers such as Andrew Tate who promote misogyny, 'red pill' ideology, and a culture of violence

and hostility towards women and girls.

The conference featured thought-provoking keynote talks by Dr Michael Richardson and Mark Libby, a candid expert panel discussion, and a series of practical, targeted workshops. Attendees left with deeper insight, lived experiences, and actionable knowledge that will empower them to guide young men through these complex social challenges—and help them transition confidently from adolescence into adulthood.

Over 100 delegates took part with a real energy to listen and learn.

Ongoing collaboration remains essential to making a lasting difference and ensuring better outcomes for both current and future generations of young men.

[www.neya.org.uk](http://www.neya.org.uk)





# Charity of the month...

## As daft as a brush!

**Daft as a Brush Cancer Patient Care is a heartening example of grassroots charity - locally founded, volunteer powered, making a enormous difference to the lives of cancer patients throughout the North East of England.**

**'Daft as a Brush' is a Newcastle-based charity offering free transport for cancer patients attending chemotherapy and/or radiotherapy treatment at Newcastle hospitals.**

The much-loved charity provides door-to-door transport to appointments, with volunteer drivers and companions ensuring comfort, safety, and support during their journey to recovery.

Thousands of patient journeys are completed annually, supported by a fleet of over 40 brightly coloured ambulances and over 400 passionate volunteers. The charity aims to alleviate the stress and worry associated with hospital journeys, allowing patients to focus on their treatment and recovery.

In 2018 founder, Mr Burnie set-off on an epic challenge to walk the coastal path of Great Britain and Ireland to promote free cancer patient transport. After three years and over 7,000 miles, he returned to the region determined to create 1,000,000 journeys, free of charge.

Daft as a Brush actively engages with local schools and communities through various initiatives, such as Ambulance Adoption Program and are reliant on public and corporate donations. One of the largest fundraising campaigns is their 'Last Night of the Proms' concert at Newcastle City Hall, this year on Saturday 11th October. A traditional and uplifting event boasting performances by renowned artists and hosted by local entertainer Ray Spencer MBE, who is widely admired. This unmissable experience promises an evening of unity, musical mastery and laughter.

In September local runners will take to the streets the Great North Run. Friends, family and volunteers will line the streets in support, hoping the event will raise enough funds to purchase a brand-new ambulance.

2025 sees a year of change as 81-year-old Brian intends to take a back seat with the appointment additional board members and a large portion of the ambulance fleet aims to become 100% electric.

As charity goes from strength to strength, there's no sign of it slowing down; with a fleet expansion and new leadership to help serve even more cancer patients who find it difficult, stressful and costly to travel to hospital each day for their life saving treatment.

**Donations can be made to the charity either over the phone; 0191 28 55 999 or by visiting [www.daftasabrush.org.uk](http://www.daftasabrush.org.uk) all donations go directly to helping cancer patients throughout our region.**

### **Why was the charity formed?**

Mr Burnie discovered some patients considered declining cancer treatment as it was so difficult to get to and from hospital on a daily basis.

When his wife received a breast cancer diagnosis, Brian became acutely aware of transport challenges and decided to set-up a small charity to assist patients on their journeys.

He sold his country estate, Doxford Hall, to privately fund the set-up of a single ambulance and running costs in 2010, by 2020 the fleet stood at 40-plus and boasts circa 400 volunteers who power the service. Many of whom have close associations with cancer.

### **Which area do you cover?**

From North Northumberland to North Yorkshire, we deliver a high-quality service throughout the North East. It is Mr Burnie's dream to expand nationwide.

### **What type of fundraising events do you have?**

Primarily funds are received through public generosity and fundraising initiatives.

We organise community challenges and events - such as concerts, campaigns, participation in the Great North Run and school adoptions of ambulances, to raise both awareness and funds.

We use platforms like JustGiving for peer-to-peer fundraising, where supporters raise donations for their own events and activities.

### **Who are your trustees and patrons?**

An eclectic mix; from the business community, medical professionals and councillors to grass-roots individuals and those with experience of the cancer pathway. All our Trustees are volunteers and receive no salary or payment for their time, experience or input.

### **What have been your proudest moments so far?**

The admiration and support the charity receives from patients and is exceptionally moving. Daft as a Brush has become one of the most loved originations in the region. We are proud to operate thousands of journeys each year.

On a personal level, Mr Burnie's completion of an epic 7,000-mile walk was an incredible achievement. He suffers from Parkinson's disease making the challenge more difficult, in addition, his 55 years of philanthropy for Newcastle Hospitals.

### **What are you currently working on?**

We're looking at a sustainable initiative to both expand the fleet, recruit additional volunteers and reduce our carbon footprint with electric vehicles.

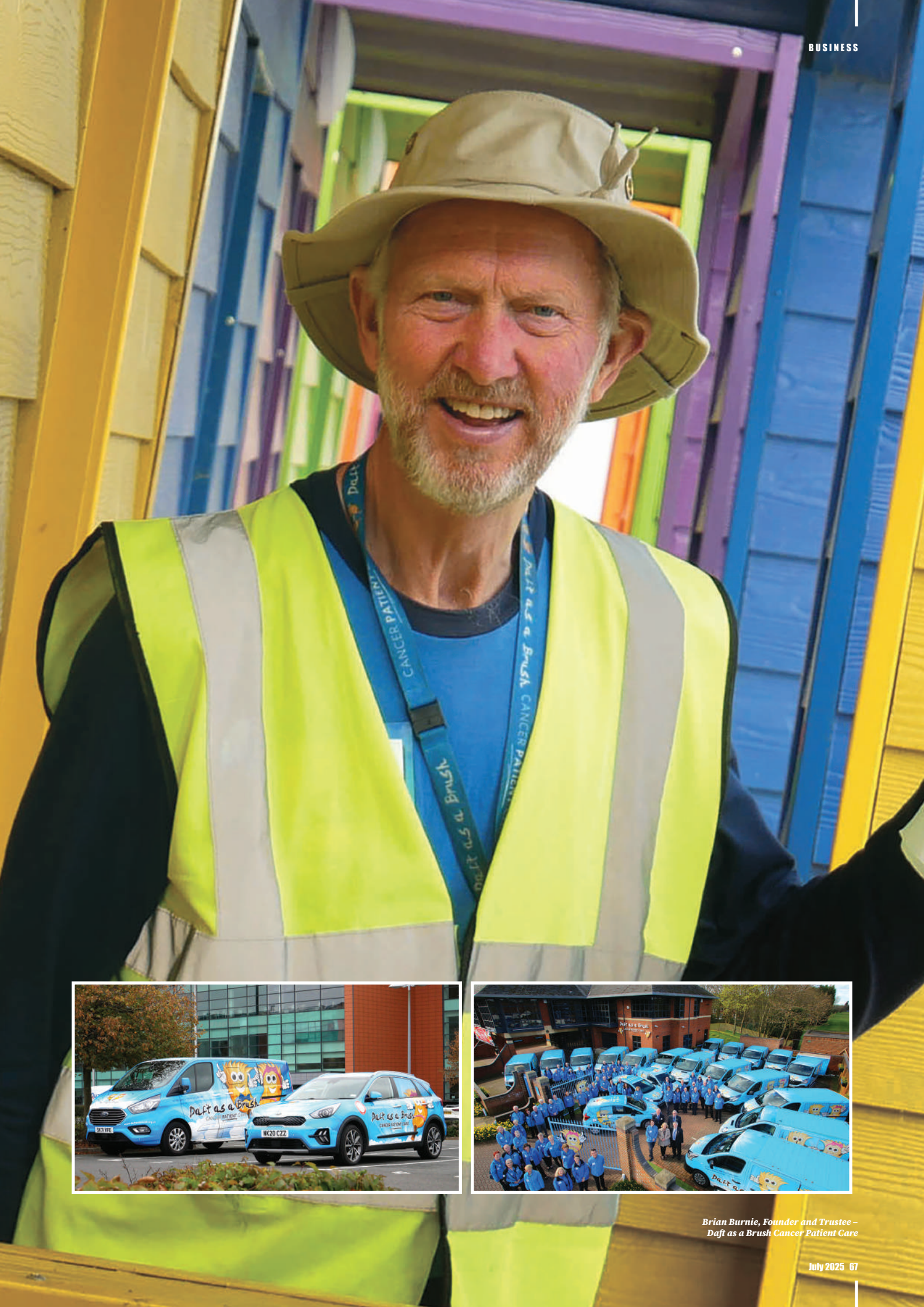
### **How do you get involved?**

Simply head over to our website and click the volunteer link; from here just enter a few details and our team will be in touch. We welcome any fund-raising activities – call 0191 28 55 999.

**Daft as a Brush Cancer Patient Care can be found at: Daft as a Brush House, Great North Road, Gosforth, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE3 2DR.**

**[info@daftasabrush.org.uk](mailto:info@daftasabrush.org.uk) | [www.daftasabrush.org.uk](http://www.daftasabrush.org.uk)**





Brian Burnie, Founder and Trustee –  
Daft as a Brush Cancer Patient Care



CHAT



## The People's Kitchen - Feeding friends for Forty Years

This year marks a momentous milestone for one of Newcastle's most cherished charities. The People's Kitchen, founded in 1985 by the late Alison Kay, is celebrating 40 years of serving the city's most vulnerable with food, friendship, and unwavering compassion.

What began as a quiet act of kindness—Alison walking the streets with flasks of soup and a caring heart—has grown into a vital lifeline. Today, The People's Kitchen serves around 350 meals daily, 365 days a year, with no government funding and no paid staff. Its incredible impact is driven entirely by donations and a dedicated army of 300 unpaid volunteers.

To mark the anniversary, the charity welcomed a very special visitor—Alison Kay's daughter, Ailie Goddard. Now living in the West Midlands, Ailie made an emotional visit to The People's Kitchen while in Newcastle visiting family.

"This place is my mum's legacy," Ailie shared, "She began this after losing my younger brother Richard in a car crash. She was grieving deeply when she read about a homeless man who'd died alone under a bush. That broke her heart—and she decided she had to act. She called the people she met 'her friends.' That's what she believed in—dignity, connection, and kindness."

Ailie's visit was filled with poignant moments as she met several of the original volunteers who stood by her mother in the charity's early days. "Mum never wanted recognition," Ailie said. "She just wanted people to feel seen and loved."





To see that spirit still alive, decades later, is beautiful. She would be so proud—not of herself—but of the volunteers and supporters who kept the flame burning.”

Trustee Maggie Pavlou said “Meeting Ailie was incredibly moving. Her mother’s vision hasn’t just endured—it has grown, evolved, and changed thousands of lives. This anniversary isn’t just a celebration of the past, but a reaffirmation of the values that guide us: humanity, kindness, a non judgemental approach, and a generosity of spirit in everything we do.”

This landmark anniversary is also being marked in a visually powerful way, thanks to a new digital art installation by socially engaged artist Conrad Milne, created in partnership with the organisation Art for Purpose.

Conrad spent several days at The People’s Kitchen, engaging with the Friends and through conversations, shared artwork, poetry, and song, he created a layered digital piece that now takes pride of place in the lounge area.

“The work is built entirely from the voices and stories of the Friends,” said Conrad. “Every word, every image comes from them. It’s not meant to be pretty or easy. It’s complex, like life. I wanted people to look closely—to be drawn in, to feel something, and maybe to think differently.”

“When you walk past someone in a sleeping bag, how often do you stop to wonder—who are you? Where have you come from? What’s your story?”

The resulting piece is deeply emotive—a mosaic of resilience, struggle, and humanity. It not only honours the Friends’ journeys but also celebrates the tireless volunteers who serve day in and day out. “Seeing it through our Friends’ eyes,” said one volunteer, “was incredibly moving. It reflects not just who they are, but how they see us—and how we see each other.”

As The People’s Kitchen looks ahead to its next chapter, one message is loud and clear: this work cannot continue without help.

The charity receives no public funding, relying entirely on donations and corporate support. While individual donations remain vital, the role of businesses—both local and national—has become increasingly important in keeping the operation running 24/7.

“Our corporate partners play a huge part in what we do,” said Maggie. “Whether it’s financial donations, staff volunteering their time, or running awareness campaigns—it all helps. We’ve had companies come in to cook, clean, sort clothing, and even offer specialist services like haircuts and legal advice. Their contributions make a real and lasting difference.”



As the cost-of-living crisis deepens, demand for services like those offered by The People’s Kitchen continues to grow.

With each meal served, each kind word offered, and each story heard, the charity stays true to its founding mission: to make sure no one in Newcastle feels alone or forgotten.

“I wish there was no need for The People’s Kitchen anymore,” Ailie said quietly during her visit. “But since there is, I’m glad it’s here—and I’m glad it’s still full of the same love my mum started it with.”

Forty years on, The People’s Kitchen remains a beacon of hope—built by ordinary people doing extraordinary things. And as long as there are Friends who need them, the dedicated volunteers will keep showing up, welcoming Friends with a smile, a hot drink, a hot meal and of course some hot soup.

**You can help at [www.peopleskitchen.co.uk/donate](http://www.peopleskitchen.co.uk/donate)**



# Foundation support tops £160,000 to help thousands more on fifth birthday



*Penelope Boisseau-Hardman, 18, received a £1,000 Inspiration Grant from the foundation to help her pursue her dream of becoming a professional classical musician*

**The Bernicia Foundation celebrates its fifth birthday with more than 8,000 people benefitting from £167,000 in grants to North East charities and young people in the past year.**

**A total of 30 grants were made by the charitable foundation to projects and individuals supporting communities and gifted youngsters striving to reach their goals in life.**

Since it was established in 2020, The Bernicia Foundation created by North East housing association Bernicia has channelled more than £1.2m into 183 projects helping tackle poverty, promoting mental wellbeing and pathways into work across hard-pressed communities.

The latest beneficiaries in the past 12 months include 17 Inclusion Grants supporting charitable organisations delivering essential services such as food

support, mental health outreach, disability access, education and helping people find employment.

And 13 Inspiration Grants were awarded to support young people aged 24 and under over this period who demonstrate exceptional promise in areas such as sport, music and the arts.

An estimated 8,000 beneficiaries in 2024/25 are directly attributable to the Foundation's support, including:

- **Penelope Boisseau-Hardman** - received a £1,000 Inspiration Grant from the foundation to help her pursue her dream of becoming a professional classical musician. Expenses range from smaller items like sheet music, shoulder rests and strings to larger overheads, including tuition fees and the instruments themselves.
- **Northumberland SpLinter Group** - received nearly £10,000 to launch the 'Waffling On' project in Amble, establishing info hubs that empower 350 neurodivergent young people to develop life and work skills.
- **Border Links** - awarded £10,000 to build a new kitchen at its Berwick Disability Hub,

offering adults with learning disabilities the chance to learn essential cooking skills, gain formal qualifications and prepare for catering industry jobs.

● **North Tyneside's Baby Equipment Loan Service & Toy Library** benefited from a £10,000 Inclusion Grant, helping them to continue offering affordable toy and baby equipment loans to over 120 local families.

Jenny Allinson, Director of The Bernicia Foundation, said: "It's a privilege to support so many incredible people and projects, especially as we celebrate five years of The Bernicia Foundation.

"We're incredibly grateful to the Foundation's Board of Trustees, who generously volunteer their time and expertise to ensure our grants go where they are needed most."

Applications for The Bernicia Foundation's latest funding round of Inclusion and Inspiration Grants open on 30 June and close on 11 August, with successful applicants announced in autumn.

**Please go to [berniciafoundation.com](https://berniciafoundation.com) for more details and to apply.**





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# The Teesside Charity expands services to Darlington extending support across the region



The Teesside Charity, a registered charity dedicated to financially supporting community groups and charities based within Teesside, is proud to announce the expansion of its services to include Darlington, broadening its reach to serve the Tees Valley region.

**This expansion marks a major milestone in The Teesside Charity's mission to bridge the gap, providing social and economic opportunities that would not otherwise have existed in the area.**

For 14 years, The Teesside Charity has provided a lifeline for young people, families, community groups, the homeless, those recovering from an addiction, the long-term unemployed, those living in poverty or living with a disability in Teesside.

"Expanding our work into Darlington and across the entire Tees Valley is an exciting new chapter for us as a charity rooted in the heart of this region. It means that we're not just helping those lucky enough to live in a TS postcode, we're helping all Teessiders. After all, we are The Teesside Charity, it's natural that we should aim to help the whole region" said Harriet Spalding, chair of trustees.

"When I first became involved with the charity, I was blown away by the innate strength and resilience that runs throughout Teesside. Over that time, however, we have seen a growing need for accessible, local support that truly helps

to tackle the challenges people face. By broadening our reach, we're ensuring that no part of the region is left behind, that people living in the local authorities of Darlington, Stockton-on-Tees, Redcar and East Cleveland, Middlesbrough and Hartlepool can all benefit from the same level of connection and opportunity."

Beginning in June 2025, The Teesside Charity will start accepting grant proposals and initiating partnerships with local organisations within the local authority of Darlington. With this expansion, the charity will now offer its full range of services, including funding schemes, caravan holidays, Teesside Hero Awards and the Christmas Toy Appeal to charities, not-for-profit organisations, CICs, CIOs and schools based within the local authority of Darlington, alongside continued support for communities within the local authority areas of Stockton-on-Tees, Redcar and East Cleveland, Middlesbrough and Hartlepool.

To help kick-start the expansion, The Teesside Charity has donated £500 to the King's Church in Darlington. The King's Church runs a referral-based food bank twice a week, on Mondays and Thursdays,

for those experiencing hardship. They were nominated to receive the charity's first grant by patron Baltic Apprenticeships who are based in Darlington.

Laura Jameson, senior safeguarding officer and IAG lead at Baltic Apprenticeships said: "We were honoured to nominate the King's Church in Darlington for support through The Teesside Charity. During a recent visit, we saw first-hand the incredible impact the foodbank is having on the local community and how hard the staff and volunteers work to provide essential support. We're proud to have been able to play a small part in enabling this work."

"As a Darlington-based business, we're delighted to welcome The Teesside Charity to our local area. Having supported them for many years, we know first-hand what a fantastic job they do, so it's amazing to see their funding now reaching charities on our doorstep. We're excited to continue backing their brilliant efforts."

Harriet added: "This expansion means stronger local networks and a louder voice for the communities we serve. Over the years, we've witnessed and experienced the incredible things that can happen when we reach out, help and connect to those in need. This move strengthens our mission to not just offer help, but to build lasting change in partnership with local people."

**Organisations interested in applying for funding or learning more about the eligibility criteria are encouraged to contact [Rachel.p@teessidecharity.org.uk](mailto:Rachel.p@teessidecharity.org.uk)**



# People *Doing* Good...

## Consett lad Dan gears up for first Great North Run in support of Stroke Association



A dedicated community voice from the North East is lacing up his running shoes for a cause close to his heart. Dan Milburn, Lead Officer at Healthwatch Newcastle, will be taking part in his very first Great North Run this September — all in aid of the Stroke Association.

From Consett, Dan is well known for championing the views of local people on health and social care issues across Newcastle. But this year, he's taking on a new kind of challenge: running the iconic 13.1-mile route from Newcastle to South Shields.

"I've always loved running, and doing the Great North Run has been a personal goal of mine for a long time," says Dan. "It's such a big event for anyone living in the North East, and I can't wait to be a part of it."

Dan's motivation goes beyond the finish line. He's running in memory of two people very close to him — his grandfather and his best friend's dad — both of whom were affected by stroke. "This run is for them," he says. "They'll be in my thoughts throughout the training and on the day itself."

Dan works for Healthwatch Newcastle, part of a network of independent Healthwatch's that listen to people's experiences of health

and social care services and use that feedback to help improve support in their communities. His work involves engaging with residents, gathering their views, and making sure decision-makers understand what matters most to local people.

He's also receiving strong backing from his colleagues. "The support from work has been incredible," he says. "They're all cheering me on and that really keeps me going."

Yvonne Probert, Director at Tell Us North CIC, the organisation that delivers Healthwatch Newcastle, said: "We're incredibly proud of Dan — not just for taking on the Great North Run, but for doing it in support of such an important cause. Dan is a real advocate for people in our communities, and it's inspiring to see him bring that same energy and compassion to his personal challenges. We'll all be cheering him on every step of the way."

## Stephen publishes children's book to support young stoma users

Stephen Jefferson has released a heartwarming children's book aimed at helping young stoma users embrace their differences with confidence and pride.

Titled *Shimmy the Shark and His Stoma*, the beautifully illustrated story follows a young shark who struggles to fit in because of his stoma bag. Through his journey, he learns that his differences make him unique — and that there's no shame in being different.

The inspiration behind the book came from Stephen's late brother-in-law Daniel, who passed away in 2024 after complications from cancer. "He had a stoma and told me there weren't enough resources for children living with them," Stephen explained. "He asked me to write something that would spread awareness and help children feel less alone."

Researching the topic, Stephen was shocked to discover that nearly 80% of stoma formations over a recent two-year period were performed on children. "That really stayed with me," he said. "There's a huge need for support and understanding at a young age."

With the help of book coach Eleanor



Baggaley, the project came to life and was independently published. *Shimmy the Shark and His Stoma* is now available on Amazon with extended distribution, and 50% of proceeds go to Colostomy UK, a charity supporting people living with stomas.

## Maritime volunteer service leads welcome parade for historic Norwegian ship on the Tyne



The Northumbria Unit of the Maritime Volunteer Service (MVS) has taken a lead role in welcoming a significant piece of maritime history to the River Tyne. The SS Hestmanden, a Norwegian museum ship with a remarkable past, visited Newcastle,

where the MVS coordinated a special parade of local small boats to mark the occasion.

Around ten small vessels accompanied the ship on its journey, along with two tugs, creating an impressive flotilla for the nine-mile voyage upriver. The SS Hestmanden's arrival turned heads along the banks of the Tyne, with maritime enthusiasts and local residents alike stopping to witness the rare sight.

Volunteer Officer Keith Newman said: "This was a great honour for the MVS. The Hestmanden is an amazing ship with a powerful story of resilience and service. It was a privilege to help welcome her to the North East in style."

Built in 1911, the SS Hestmanden is the only remaining Norwegian cargo ship that served in both World Wars. During the First World War, she transported coal and supplies under extremely dangerous conditions. In the Second World War, she joined the Nortraship fleet—Norway's government-controlled shipping line-in-exile—which was the largest shipping fleet controlled by any Allied government during the war.

Despite being a target for enemy submarines and aircraft, the Hestmanden survived, symbolising the fortitude and sacrifice of the Norwegian merchant fleet. After decades of disuse, she was restored and is now maintained as a living museum ship and a national memorial to Norwegian merchant seamen who served and died during the wars.



# Charlie & Carter leave a legacy to help others

Their Foundation supports families who are coping with a seriously ill child.

**The death of a child is an incredibly sad event. Sometimes, despite the best efforts of medical science and incredibly skilled people, the death cannot be avoided.**

But there's always hope.

And that is what parents cling on to. They'll do everything in their power to help their child survive. Some children are born with incredibly complex conditions...for others, those conditions only appear in later months and years.

However, as their child fights for their life, parents have some incredibly difficult decisions to make because, although their world has been turned upside down, everything else continues around them.

Which is precisely where Sarah and Christopher Cookson found themselves, not once, but twice. Their first son, Charlie, died in October 2013 at the age of two, and his brother, Carter, died only 25 days after he was born on Boxing Day, 2018.

Sadly, Sarah and Christopher aren't alone in facing a hugely emotional time as a family...and that's why they set-up the Charlie and Carter Foundation to help other families who are experienced what they went through.

"One or both parents sometimes have to give up work for the simple reason that any child will always receive the best care when it is given by their parents," said Laura Forbes, Charity Fundraising and Events Manager at The Charlie and Carter Foundation. "The only problem is that bills still need to be paid. Medical



Sarah with Carter

care can also be expensive purely in terms of transportation, having to shuttle from home to the hospital. Some parents are lucky in that they have supportive employers, but that's not always the case and, if someone voluntarily leaves work, they can be not only be left with zero income but they also miss out on any potential benefits.

"Nobody plans for something like this...it's something which comes at you like a bolt from the blue and means that it is very easy to slip into debt. When dealing with illness in a child, the parents will inevitably be quite young and have very limited funds in terms of savings. But what do you do? Do you go to work or do you go to the hospital? We all know what any parent would do without giving it a second thought."

Sarah and Christopher had to drastically reduce their working hours to care for Charlie and Carter. Imagine the stress of looking after a sick child but also worrying about utility bills, mortgages, car insurance etc. It was that experience which led them to set up a foundation to help people get through the difficult times.

The Charlie & Carter Foundation provides

financial support to parents of seriously ill children with life limiting conditions that require 24-hour nursing care or specialist nursing facilities. Support will generally last up to three months and can be as much as £3000. The Foundation will take care of bills and help with expenses as well as providing a bereavement fund which will help cover funeral expenses.

Every penny provided by the Charlie and Carter Foundation has come from fund raising efforts. The Foundation has a popular shop in South Shields which specialises in the sale of clothes. They also raise funds via a market stall, Facebook site and ebay.

One of their biggest fund-raising events is the annual ball in October (Charlie's anniversary month). The ball has become a key fixture in the region's social calendar. This year it will take place at the Hilton Hotel in Gateshead on October 25th. The ball, sponsored by South Shields based HTG, attracts up to 300 people. Company tables are always a big success...each table has 10 places costing £80 per head.

You can also make individual donations or become a Friend of Charlie and Carter Foundation whereby you give a monthly donation.

Out of incredible sadness, a wonderful charity has been formed. Sarah and Christopher know what some families have to go through. They want to help those parents get through a stressful time.

**Visit [thecharlieandcarterfoundation.co.uk](http://thecharlieandcarterfoundation.co.uk) or call 0191 466 1428. You can also email [contact@ccfemail.co.uk](mailto:contact@ccfemail.co.uk)**



Ezra, son of one the families we have supported



Christopher and Sarah Cookson with Charlie



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ORDINARY.**





## Businesses celebrated for social impact at homelessness charity awards

Almost 250 guests attended Oasis Community Housing's Black & Gold Ball on 13 June, which saw businesses from across the country recognised with 'Shared Value' awards.

"These awards reflect the real and lasting difference our valued corporate partners make in helping people to rebuild their lives," said Sarah Lister, Oasis Community Housing's Acting CEO.

On the night over £32,000 was raised for the charity's life-changing work with men, women and young people facing homelessness. The Black & Gold Ball was kindly supported by Hilton Newcastle Gateshead, Leonard Curtis, Muckle LLP, Accommodations UK and Northern Print Solutions.





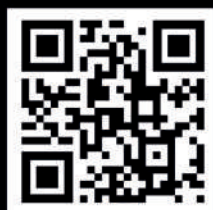
# **Tech Connect**

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# Thinking about becoming a Trustee?

Peter is the founder of The Experience Bank™, specialists in CEO, Trustee and NED recruitment for North East based charities and SMEs. Here he talks about the steps to take if you think you would like to be a trustee.

**“So, you’re considering joining the board of Trustees at a charity? That is awesome! And a great way to give something back to our North East community.**

“But before you jump in headfirst, there is a bit of due diligence you should do to make sure you’re making the right decision not just on whether you are right for the role of a Trustee but also that you are choosing the right charity for you.

## 1. Financial health

Check out the charity’s published accounts on the Charity Commission website. Look at the last three years’ worth of accounts and see if they were filed on time. If you aren’t an accountant, ask one to take a look and see if they can spot any areas of concern.

## 2. The Chair, the other Trustees, and the CEO

Your relationship with the rest of the board, and particularly the Chair, is crucial. Make sure you meet the Chair, ideally one-on-one, and as many of the Trustees as possible. Find out how long they’ve been in the role and how long they plan to stay. Ask about their understanding of strategic leadership versus day-to-day operational management. Beware of trustees who’ve been around forever and might have a ‘group think’ mentality.

If possible, have a chat with the CEO. They can give you the lowdown on the organisation’s culture and key personalities.



Peter Neal

Do your best to assess the relationship between the CEO, the Chair and the rest of the board. This is particularly important if the CEO is the founder of the charity, which can sometimes create a challenging dynamic.

## 3. Culture and Values

Make sure the organisation’s culture and values align with yours. Visit the charity and chat to some of the team to get a lay of the land. If you can, also speak to other stakeholders like funders and beneficiaries to get a feel for how the charity is perceived externally.

## 4. Regulation and Compliance

Make sure you know who the organisation’s regulators are (in addition to the Charity Commission there could be others depending on the charity’s activities, including the Fundraising Regulator and the CQC). Ask if the charity has had any recent reviews by regulators. Seek assurance that the charity is up to date on all regulatory requirements and fully compliant with relevant regulations. The same applies to any trading subsidiary of the charity.

## 5. Ability to commit

Ask about the timing of board meetings, committee meetings, and expectations

of time commitment outside of formal meetings. You can guarantee that whatever they say is the time commitment will actually be double that, so make sure you can fulfil the commitment.

## 6. Reputation

Use social media to check out the organisation and key people to assess reputational risk. LinkedIn, Facebook and X can give you a deeper insight into the culture and personalities. It is also worth googling them and checking out the ‘news’ tab to see if they have had any negative press recently.

“As you can now see there are some clear steps to take to ensure you are making the right choice for you! I do hope this helps you get a clearer picture of what to look out for before taking on that Trustee role.

“Finally, good luck! Being a Trustee at the right charity for you can be immensely rewarding....”

***If you would like to be a Trustee then do get in touch with Peter to discuss current opportunities. Similarly if you are a charity on the hunt for some fresh experience, perspectives and guidance in your board level team, then do get in touch too!***

***peter@theexperiencebank.co.uk***





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L-R: Dom Lusardi, Luke Lane, Emma McDonald, Jessica Williams, Chloe Taylor, Annie Brown

## Ten Years in the making - time to celebrate!

By Emma McDonald

2025 sees us mark our tenth birthday, the launch of an ambitious but very exciting growth plan and (drum roll, please...) raising nearly £50,000 for charities and community organisations since our inception in 2015.

**Being an active part of our community is a crucial part of who we are as a business, so as we mark our milestone year, being able to celebrate our contributions to charities and groups across the region and beyond is particularly exciting.**

Over the past decade, our expert sales and marketing teams have tackled a wide range of challenges and events including the Yorkshire Three Peaks and marathons – with our MD, Jessica, even travelling as far as Vancouver to complete a gruelling running challenge. Combining these physical challenges with networking-based bake sales in our business home of Fusion Hive, our team have managed to raise almost fifty thousand pounds for a range of good causes.

The company's charity partner for 2024-25 was the superb Catalyst, based in

Stockton on Tees, and it was through this partnership we were able to establish the Just Williams Community Fund, into which our fundraising results were donated and then distributed to a diverse selection of local organisations.

What made this Fund special was the ability to open it up to applications from a huge range of groups that had specific needs they couldn't fulfil internally. The £6,000 pot raised during the year-long partnership went to charities and groups to support everything from supplies to run a perinatal support group, advanced creative workshops, virtual reality equipment for trauma recovery and so much more.

At Just Williams, we believe that business should be used as a force for good, that belief is at the heart of everything we do, and it's why becoming the first Certified B

Corp in the region was such an important milestone for us.

When we turned 10 years old as a business, we knew we wanted to mark the occasion in a meaningful way, and that's how the Just Williams Community Fund was born – and honestly, seeing the fund in action has been incredible. It's been a truly meaningful experience and a fantastic way to mark our tenth year in business.

So, what's next?

Well, I can't say too much right now, but seeing how the business has evolved over the years has given us some really exciting direction for the decade – and beyond. And whilst we continue to be driven by delivering excellence for our sales and marketing customers, what we do know for certain is that we are exceptionally proud of our impact beyond the office walls, into the hearts of our communities and being able to truly - genuinely - use our business as a force for good, and that is something we are wholeheartedly committed to regardless of 'the next step'.

Do you want to work closer with your local communities or create a social value partnership with actual impact? Always happy to chat – connect with me on LinkedIn or contact the team today.

[www.justwilliamsLtd.co.uk](http://www.justwilliamsLtd.co.uk)



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Helen Butler

## What's your backup plan – and is it good enough?

It was 7:42am on a Tuesday when the call came in. The site manager wasn't coming in. Not today, not tomorrow - not ever. No notice. No handover. No plan.

By 8:15am, the team was stood waiting at the gates, the client was chasing progress, and the only person who had half an idea of what was going on was already drowning in their own to-do list.

It's not dramatic. It's just reality. Curveballs like that happen in business every day - a key person leaves, a van breaks down, a major client changes the brief, or you get wiped out by flu the night before a big pitch.

You can't always predict them. But how you respond to them says everything about how well your business is really running.

### It's not just bad luck - it's a gap

When small businesses are hit by disruption, they often chalk it up to bad luck.

But in many cases, the issue isn't the curveball itself - it's that the business had no capacity to absorb it.

There's no handover process. No cover plan. No one else with access to the files, the passwords, or the latest update. So everything screeches to a halt - or worse, someone makes a call with half the picture. That's not resilience. That's survival.

### Who else knows how to do this?

It's a question I encourage every business owner to ask regularly. Not in a panic - but as part of how you build strength into your operations.

What happens if this person is off unexpectedly? What happens if you are?

If the answer is "we'd figure it out," that's probably not good enough.

### You don't need a crisis plan - just a little prep

You don't have to spend weeks planning for every worst-case scenario. But a few small shifts can save you huge stress:

- **Rotate knowledge.** Make sure more than one person knows how key things work. Get people to shadow each other even when they're not leaving.
- **Keep things findable.** Store information in shared locations. If something happened tomorrow, could someone else pick up where you left off?

- **Create quick handovers.** For roles with regular absence (like holidays), create a one-pager with what's in play, key contacts, and next steps.

- **Play the "what if" game.** Ask your team: What would we do if X happened? The answers are often eye-opening -and solvable.

### Build in bounce-back

Resilient businesses don't avoid problems - they bounce back quickly. That bounce-back comes from good people, yes - but also from having the right operational scaffolding underneath.

If you've been lucky so far, brilliant. But luck isn't a strategy.

So before the next curveball hits, do yourself a favour. Take a look at what would fall apart if one person (including you) had to step away tomorrow.

Then fix that bit. Not all of it. Just one bit.

### Don't wait for the next disruption

At Simplified Operations, this is exactly the kind of support we give to small businesses - helping you build calm, capable systems that hold up when things go sideways.

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# The future of work: Harnessing the Power of Coaching

Our workplaces are changing. We are seeing remote, in-person and asynchronous work coexisting together, which creates huge challenges for leaders to build multi-faceted collaborative teams.

**Combined with five generations working together, and a new wave of AI-driven tools including 'agents' transforming operations, we need to be more conscious about how we are leading than ever.**

The hybrid workplace presents unique challenges: maintaining trust across dispersed teams, ensuring clarity in communication, and nurturing a culture of inclusion and engagement without daily face-to-face interaction. Moreover, as AI agents increasingly automate routine tasks, human capabilities such as emotional intelligence, decision-making and creative thinking become more crucial.

Against this backdrop is a growing need for a human-centred approach that enables individuals, teams and organisations to navigate complexity with clarity, agility and confidence. The answer could be coaching.

## Why coaching is essential now

Let's be clear on what coaching is and isn't. The EMCC (European Mentoring and Coaching Council) define it as:

"a professionally guided, structured, and purposeful process that helps individuals or teams reflect, gain awareness, identify their goals, assess their strengths and development areas, identify solutions, and make changes in their personal or professional life."

Coaching uses non directive questioning to enable the thinker to sense make, create solutions, and identify patterns of behaviour for themselves. What the coach will not be doing is advising, giving them the answers or telling them what to do.

## So how can you harness coaching?

**1. One-to-One Coaching:** Whether for leaders or team members this provides a confidential, high-trust environment



Annabel Graham

to explore challenges, refine leadership style, and drive transformation with either an internal or external professionally trained coach. It enhances self-awareness, supports strategic thinking and enables behaviour change that cascades across the organisation. It's not just about fixing problems — but unlocking potential and achieving performance breakthroughs.

**2. Group Coaching** - brings together individuals to explore their own goals in a simultaneous facilitated process. It is particularly powerful for peer learning and building communities of practice. In a hybrid setting, where informal learning is reduced, it creates connection, trust and accountability and enables multiple people to be coached on different issues at the same time.

**3. Team Coaching:** Unlike group coaching, which focuses on individuals within a group setting, team coaching addresses the team as a living human system. It's a blend of team facilitation, individual work, and team development work, which enables teams to become high performing and resilient; maximising team strengths and delivering outcomes for themselves and the business. It supports alignment on purpose, roles, behaviours and collective goals building cohesion, improving collaboration and navigating conflict constructively.

**4. Coaching as a Management Style:** You don't have to be an accredited coach to use coaching techniques. Enabling your line managers to develop a coaching management style can be hugely beneficial in embedding coaching skills and mindset

into the business. Managers who coach are better at developing others, listening deeply, and enabling autonomy which helps drive engagement and performance.

**5. Digital or AI Coaching is an emerging marketplace.** AI-driven coaching tools provide scalable, data-informed support for employees at all levels. While not a replacement for human coaches, digital coaching democratises access to developmental support and reinforces continuous learning. It can provide real-time feedback, nudges and reflections, enhancing self-directed growth and complementing human-led interventions for individuals.

As we move into a more hybrid workplace where human and AI colleagues may exist alongside each other, the ability to possess skills that will enable both to flourish is crucial. Investing in coaching is not a 'nice-to-have' — it is a strategic imperative. Organisations that embed coaching across levels and formats are better equipped to lead through change, foster innovation and retain top talent. In an age defined by complexity and rapid transformation, coaching isn't just powerful — it's essential.

**Annabel is an Executive and Team Coach, Leadership Facilitator and Coach Supervisor. If you would value a thinking space to explore how coaching might support you or your organisation, why not reach out to Annabel for a chat via LinkedIn, [annabel@successfultraining.co.uk](mailto:annabel@successfultraining.co.uk), or visit [www.successfultraining.co.uk](http://www.successfultraining.co.uk)**



# In conversation with...



Pascal Fintoni

## Pascal Fintoni

*Managing Director,  
Arclight Marketing and Media Ltd*

### What were your career ambitions growing up?

From a very young age, I wanted to be involved with filmmaking and by extension storytelling. I fell in love with cinema when I saw *'The African Queen'* with my grandad. Little did I know would spark a career that would eventually help thousands of businesses tell their stories through digital marketing.

### Tell us about your current role.

I just feel so lucky. After years leading national digital transformation programmes and working with thousands of businesses across sectors, I launched my own training and consultancy business.

I am a professional speaker, trainer and consultant specialising in AI and digital marketing. My mission is to make digital innovation accessible and genuinely fun again for entrepreneurs and leadership teams.

### What's your proudest business achievement?

I guess transitioning from employment to self-employment in 2012, and creating distinctive courses and consultancy services that have been so well received and got many accolades.

Looking further back, I'm also proud of having been appointed CEO of the government-backed Centre for eBusiness, where I guided North East businesses

through the earliest waves of digital transformation in the early 2000s.

More recently, I am rather pleased that I finally wrote and released my first business book *'WebProud'* to celebrate three decades in digital.

### How has your industry changed in the last decade?

Where do I start?! When you consider digital marketing and the many advances in content marketing, it is clear that online business has become client-led, video-first and now audio interactive.

Today, artificial intelligence is redefining digital practices. That's why in 2023, I introduced AI across all my services and now host events to help others confidently embrace this new step change.

### What are you currently working on?

I am putting the finishing touches on one of the most comprehensive AI for Digital Marketing consultancy products, that brings 30 years of experience in creative marketing and ingenuity in content creation.

And I am also working on the second version of the *'Film Marketing Academy'*, a programme dedicated to creative professionals.

### Tell us about the clients you work with.

From local independents needing AI and digital masterclasses to large public sector teams requiring executive briefings.

What they share is a desire to cut through the noise and find digital marketing strategies that feel genuine and sustainable. That's my ultimate goal: inspiring confidence through clarity and practical insight, and movie references!

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

*'Too many moving parts'* – this piece of advice I received from one of my first bosses, I still use it to this day.

Keeping things simple has been one of my core principles when designing AI and marketing strategies. I see first-hand how simplicity leads to consistency and confidence.

### What has been your biggest challenge?

Learning and applying all the things you don't consider when starting your own business, you quickly realise how tough it is to be wearing multiple hats. It's been a steep but rewarding learning curve, and in a way I am glad as those lessons help me support other business owners through their own journey.

### Who are your heroes inside and outside of business?

I have many. My dad, who changed career and profession often to adapt to changes in industry. Sir Tim Berners-Lee, Stephen Spielberg, Philip Kotler, Grace Hopper, and so many other pioneers in innovation in technology, masterful storytelling, marketing excellence, and the art of breaking barriers.

### How do you unwind outside of work?

I watch movies, lots of them!

### Favourite book/boxset?

*Lord Of The Rings – Director's Cut.* Epic storytelling at its finest.

[pascalfintoni.com](http://pascalfintoni.com)





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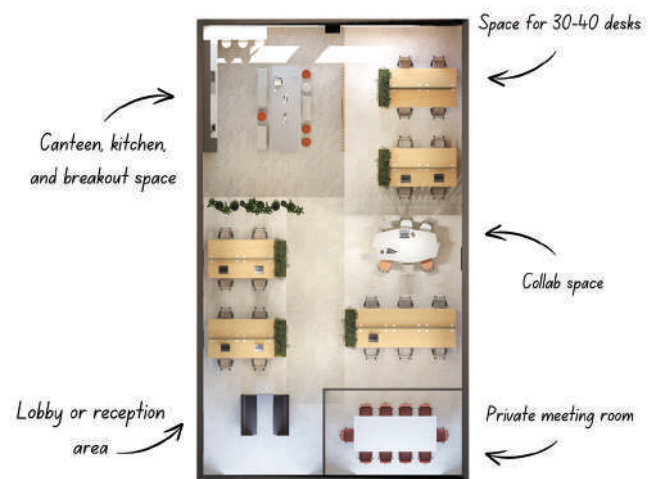
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# North Tyneside businesses inspired by life-saving innovation on doorstep



The delegation at Leica Biosystems

Lauren McWilliams Photography

**Members of the North Tyneside Business Forum paid a special visit to a global leader in cancer diagnostics this week, gaining insight into how a local company is helping to save lives around the world.**

**A delegation of Forum members and management group representatives visited Leica Biosystems, located in Benton, to learn more about the company's groundbreaking work in pathology and cancer diagnostics.**

With more than 150 years of experience in tackling pathology challenges—from improved slide production to world-leading Digital Pathology and AI development—Leica Biosystems continues to lead the way in the fight against cancer. Their mission, Advancing Cancer Diagnostics, Improving Lives, is driven by a passionate team of experts dedicated to making a global difference.

During the visit, the group explored the company's recently completed Innovation Centre at Quorum Business Park. This modern, state-of-the-art facility focuses on research and testing, while its neighbouring production plant at Balliol Business Park manufactures and distributes essential diagnostic tools to healthcare providers worldwide.

Lauren McWilliams, a local businesswoman and founder of a successful brand consultancy, shared her thoughts on the visit: "I live within a mile of this company and had no idea about the pioneering work they do to help diagnose cancer types and ensure patients receive the right treatment. It makes me very proud to be from North Tyneside."

Angela Tuplin, owner of NE Display in North Shields, was also impressed: "It was truly eye-opening to see the level of innovation happening right here in our region. As a small business owner, it's inspiring to witness the global impact a North Tyneside-based company can have. Leica Biosystems is a fantastic example of how science and technology can change lives—and how our area contributes to that change."

Sarah Johnson, Vice President of Leica

Biosystems, welcomed the delegation and reflected on the importance of engaging with the local business community: "We were delighted to host members of the North Tyneside Business Forum and showcase the vital work taking place here in Benton. Our teams are committed to transforming cancer diagnostics, and it's inspiring to share this mission with our neighbours. North Tyneside has a strong business ecosystem, and we're proud to be part of it."

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 trading within North Tyneside. The Business Forum is supported by North Tyneside Council.

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

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*Kerrey Baker,  
incoming Managing Director of  
Shared Interest Society*

## Shared Interest Society appoints new MD, marking 35 years in ethical investment

Newcastle-based ethical finance leader, Shared Interest Society, has announced the appointment of Kerrey Baker as its new Managing Director.

**The announcement comes as Shared Interest Society celebrates its 35th anniversary, receives its fourth King's Award for Enterprise in the Sustainable Development category, and marks the retirement of outgoing Managing Director, Patricia Alexander.**

Kerrey, who first joined Shared Interest in

2010, has spent the past 14 years leading on member engagement within Shared Interest, which pools more than £50.9 million in UK member investments to finance fair trade enterprises across 47 countries. Kerrey has also worked extensively at Shared Interest's charitable subsidiary, the Shared Interest Foundation. Her appointment signals a renewed focus on connection, strategic growth, and impact.

"Kerrey brings deep knowledge of our mission and a strong commitment to the values that define Shared Interest," said Patricia Alexander, outgoing Managing Director. "She has been a driving force behind our close relationship with members and will lead the Society with purpose, insight, and care."

A specialist in ethical finance and stakeholder engagement, Kerrey has helped shape the organisation's identity as a people-powered lender committed to building a fairer world through trade. She now steps into the role at a pivotal moment with plans to lead a strategic review involving members, producers, staff, and partners, setting out Shared Interest Society's vision for the next five years.

Kerrey said: "This is an exciting time to lead Shared Interest. We are listening closely to the people we serve - especially around climate resilience and gender

equality - and looking at how we grow our reach while staying true to our values."

Her vision includes strengthening ties between Shared Interest Society and the Shared Interest Foundation, to offer a more unified supporter experience. "Whether someone starts their journey as a donor or investor, we want them to feel part of the same movement for positive change," she said.

The announcement follows the Society's latest royal recognition. Shared Interest has this year been awarded the 2025 King's Award for Enterprise in Sustainable Development - a unique achievement in the financial sector - honouring its impact-led model, which supports over 416,000 people globally, including more than 156,000 women.

"Membership growth is more challenging in the current economic climate," Baker acknowledged. "But our members are different. They're making a values-based choice. If every one of our 11,800 members inspired just one more person to join, we could double our reach."

With a strong legacy and a clear path ahead, Shared Interest is combining long-term commitment with bold ambition to grow the global movement for ethical finance.

[www.shared-interest.com](http://www.shared-interest.com)



# Ethics or Snake Oil?

Dr David Cliff explores what our entrepreneurs may look like in 20 years' time.

## Part One:

**Recent surveys reveal a quiet but telling shift: the public now places greater trust in business leaders than in politicians. Why? Perhaps because entrepreneurship appears to demand a clarity of vision and an accountability to outcomes that politics has increasingly failed to demonstrate. Businesspeople, governed by profit and survival, seem grounded in measurable reality—while political discourse spins endlessly on its own axis.**

Entrepreneurs are now public intellectuals, cultural influencers, and media panelists. Their voices, once confined to shareholder meetings, are now sought on prime-time broadcasts. They represent a form of modern success, one that is self-authored and performance-measured, rather than inherited or ideologically hollowed out.

Yet this evolving stature brings weighty questions. What happens when entrepreneurial ambition outpaces ethical responsibility? When economic innovation collides with fragile social systems and a planet in distress?

Globalisation has delivered cheap goods and astonishing technological leaps. But it has also delivered consequences: a climate crisis, ecological collapse, mass inequality, and a silent epidemic of mental ill-health. Microplastics float in the oceans and flow into our cells. The virtues of privatisation wane as essential services degrade, and regulators appear ineffective.

When business and politics coalesce, the waters grow darker still. The collusion of capital and state interests too often produces a toxic hybrid: unaccountable, self-reinforcing, and vested. One need only witness the dysfunctional relationship between Donald Trump and Elon Musk—less statesmanship and democracy, more playground dramatics of wealth and privilege masquerading as influence.

The tacit belief that “business gets things done” can no longer go unexamined. When entrepreneurship dismisses community wisdom, cultural values, and environmental limits, it becomes a blunt



Dr David Cliff

tool. Efficiency is not a virtue if it flattens complexity or sacrifices the long-term for quarterly returns.

The political vacuum created by failing parties and uninspiring leadership is now being filled by entrepreneurs—some visionary, some opportunistic, others just plain narcissists. As populist narratives surge, fueled by crypto-evangelism and anti-institutional sentiment, entrepreneurs are stepping into that space. But will they build a better system or replicate the same extractive logic in a different way?

What's needed now is nuance. Behind every “fortune favours the brave” success story lies countless unspoken failures. For every unicorn business, a thousand ventures collapse. For every millionaire entrepreneur, thousands struggle in precarity. The mythos of entrepreneurial heroism often hides a deeper inequality: one in which risk is privately rewarded in success and socially distributed when in failure.

That dissonance is mirrored in climate policy. Globally, political leaders and

economic actors alike have deprioritised climate imperatives in favour of short-term economic gains. Despite the overwhelming clarity of the science, denialism has rapidly crept back into the mainstream. Political lifecycles and business pressures mean that long-term welfare—whether of people or planet—is often seen as a problem for tomorrow.

But time is a continuum, not a weight point, tomorrow is substantially already here.

The Arctic is melting. Rather than heeding this existential signal, entrepreneurs are preparing to exploit new shipping lanes and mineral deposits. Few seem to ask what happens when those same melting permafrost release billions of tons of methane, accelerating catastrophe. In such a future, today's business icons may be remembered less as pioneers than as perpetrators.

We must now ask: What kind of entrepreneur does the future require? See part two in the next edition....

[www.gedanken.co.uk](http://www.gedanken.co.uk)





Dr David Cliff

## Enjoyed this article? Take the next step!

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

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## Quantum Controls' Q-Care service partnerships exceed expectations, welcoming over 400 UK partners

Just months after its official launch, Q-Care, the service partnership programme from Quantum Controls, has rapidly become a benchmark for industrial maintenance in the UK. With over 400 businesses now partnered, Q-Care has proven itself not just as a service, but as a strategic investment in operational resilience.

### A milestone in service innovation

The launch of Q-Care was more than a new product, it marked a shift in how businesses across manufacturing, utilities, food processing, and more manage their electrical infrastructure.

Designed to prevent unplanned downtime and support mission-critical operations, Q-Care offers tiered service plans across Variable Speed Drives (VSDs), PLC/HMI systems, site electrical infrastructure, and Medium Voltage (MV) drives.

"Our vision with Q-Care was to create something that went beyond reactive maintenance," says Kevin Brown, Owner of Quantum Controls. "Now with over 400 active partnerships in place, it's clear that businesses are eager for smarter, more proactive ways to protect their assets."

### Real-world impact: Q-Care in action

One standout success comes from a major UK-based food manufacturer that joined

Q-Care Drives Proactive in January. Prior to partnering, the facility faced frequent equipment breakdowns, unpredictable repair costs, and a lack of visibility into their aging VSD fleet.

Since enrolling, they've benefited from:

- Quarterly site audits that identified 3 critical failure risks early
- A 25% drop in unplanned downtime
- Access to 24/7/365 technical support and engineer callout with priority response
- Tailored energy-saving recommendations, leading to projected £18,000 annual energy cost savings

The facility's Engineering Manager noted: "Q-Care has transformed the way we manage our electrical maintenance.

It's not just peace of mind, it's measurable performance and cost control."

### Why over 400 businesses trust Q-Care

Every Q-Care partner gains access to a

robust package of 25 benefits, tailored to meet the real-world challenges of industrial operations. These include:

- First-visit fix guarantee
- Remote diagnostics and technical support
- Access to the UK's largest VSD hire fleet
- Asset lifecycle planning and critical spares management
- Unlimited technical support for PLCs, HMIs, and drives
- Dedicated account management and monthly reporting

With flexible plans and scalable support, Q-Care fits organisations of every size, from single-site operators to nationwide manufacturers.

### Here's your move...

We'll send a qualified engineer to your site at no cost, no obligation—to carry out a full audit of your Variable Speed Drive assets.

You'll receive a detailed Resilience Report for each drive, giving you crystal-clear insight into failure risks, lifecycle status, and improvement opportunities.

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# Introducing North East Solopreneurs

Empowering Solo  
Entrepreneurs to go further!

**Are You A Solopreneur in the North East? Do you work alone, or are at the top of your owned business alone? Do you want to learn, be challenged and be a success? Tired of social media success stories, that leave you wondering if all this noise is really true? Fed up of unhealthy competitiveness instead of collaboration, of fake conversation when networking and of success only looking like oysters and champagne?**

**If so, meet NE Solopreneurs.**

Set up by Solopreneurs based in the region themselves, the company aims to stop solopreneurs from the North East losing their will to the pressure of daily grind and to prevent them slipping back into employment where their skills, talents and contribution to the business world, regional economy and our community can be lost!

The peer groups will be keeping it REAL, no glorified stories of easy success, no pots of gold at the end of the rainbow, raw and real advice from hard working determined business owners, who provide practical and proven steps for overcoming the most common challenges solopreneurs face.

By joining the group, you will gain first-hand knowledge from peers who hail from a broad range of industries and disciplines. You will widen your perspective your own organisation.

The group will serve as way of developing a trusted network of business relationships and give you access to many years of practical, focused knowledge that can prepare you to better anticipate the needs of yourself and your business with proven solutions.

Only REAL people are welcome – of all ages, from any background, in any sector. Forget your oysters and champagne, North East Solopreneurs deals with a no-nonsense pint and packet of crisps – that doesn't mean you aren't successful, it just means you are the authentic you, being the best possible you and succeeding rather than worrying about what others think or keeping up with others.

By joining the group, you will gain first-hand knowledge from peers who hail from a broad range of industries and disciplines. You will widen your perspective your own organisation.

The group will serve as way of developing a trusted network of business relationships and give you access to many years of practical, focused knowledge that can prepare you to better anticipate the needs of yourself and your business with proven solutions.

## Important information on joining...

You will have to leave any show at the door, we want you to be true to yourself, honest, accountable, focused.

If we see you in the clouds we will be re-grounding you.

This isn't the place for airs and graces, egos or fakeness.

If you feel you are better than others, this isn't the place for you.

At North East Solopreneurs all are equal, respectful and value each other.

So if you want to elevate your business performance, be raw, be kind and have fun, do get in touch!

Set to run on the last Friday morning of each month, the first peer group plans to launch in September.

***If you are interested in being a founder member and reaping some extra rewards, then visit [www.nesolopreneurs.co.uk](http://www.nesolopreneurs.co.uk) or get in touch at [hello@nesolopreneurs.co.uk](mailto:hello@nesolopreneurs.co.uk)***



# Why connected teams are more sustainable

Genee Consulting Ltd, North East based sustainability specialists who deliver Investors in the Environment (iE), in collaboration with Connection Heroes, a learning community for organisations that want to improve human connections across their workforce.

**Sustainability is often seen as the domain of calculating carbon, recycling targets, and energy-saving measures. But what if a key part of your sustainability impact lies, not in your supply chain, but in your culture - in particular - the level of human connection felt across your team?**

Human Connection - how much your people see, hear, trust and value each other - has a direct impact on engagement and performance, but it can also play a key role in how sustainable your organisation is. Let's consider how.

## Connection supports wellbeing and retention

When employees feel connected - to their team, their manager, their purpose - they're more engaged, more productive, happier, healthier and - critically - they're more likely to stay for longer. And this has a direct impact on sustainability:

- **Reducing turnover reduces waste.** Every time someone leaves, a new hire triggers carbon and resource costs: online job advertising, recruitment platforms, travel for interviews, IT kit, onboarding materials, welcome merchandise - not to mention server storage and digital emissions from onboarding platforms.
- **New tech = new emissions.** Equipping new starters with laptops, monitors, and accessories adds to your digital footprint and electronic waste. And, according to a study by HP, 80% of a laptop's carbon impact happens during manufacture.
- **High turnover drives burnout.** When people leave, others pick up the slack - increasing stress, sick days, and disengagement. A workplace that fosters strong connection keeps people well, working, and on board.



L-R: Jo Holmes, genee with Di Gates, Connection Heroes

The fewer people you lose, the fewer emissions, costs and wellbeing hits you generate.

## Connected teams collaborate more sustainably

When people feel psychologically safe (confident to share their ideas and challenge colleagues without fear of judgement) they work together more effectively and efficiently.

That translates into:

- Fewer duplicated tasks, reducing time, materials, and energy waste.
- Better aligned goals, so teams aren't pulling in different directions or creating unnecessary processes.
- More innovation because people feel confident enough to challenge outdated practices or suggest sustainable alternatives.

Disconnected teams don't just cost morale - they cost resources.

## Culture is the catalyst for behaviour change

Your sustainability strategy will also only succeed if people actually change how they work day-to-day. That means:

- Reusing instead of replacing.
- Sharing ideas across departments.
- Calling out unsustainable habits.
- Taking ownership, rather than leaving it to "the sustainability team".

These are human behaviours. And they thrive in a culture of connection, trust, and shared purpose where people want to do right by each other and achieve a common goal.

One way to embed this connection-driven approach to sustainability is by using frameworks like Investors in the Environment (iE). iE provides practical tools, templates, and guidance to help engage your people in the sustainability agenda.

Whether it's team-wide environmental challenges, green champions initiatives, or communication resources, iE supports organisations to bring their staff along on the journey. When employees are actively involved, they feel a stronger connection to the organisation's purpose and values.

This shared sense of mission not only boosts morale and cohesion but also drives more consistent, meaningful behaviour change - because people are more likely to act sustainably when they feel they're part of something bigger.

## So, what now?

If you care about sustainability, don't just measure your emissions. Measure your culture.

Build connection. Help your people feel safe, valued, and heard. Because connected teams don't just stay longer and work smarter, they care more. And caring is what drives change.

**If you'd like to learn more about how you can foster workplace connection, get in touch with Connection Heroes on [di@connectionheroes.co.uk](mailto:di@connectionheroes.co.uk).**

**To discuss your business' environmental impact and how to reduce it, contact us at [jo@genee.org.uk](mailto:jo@genee.org.uk) or visit our website [www.genee.org.uk](http://www.genee.org.uk)**





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# The Recruiter

In the latest of this popular series of features we talk to...

## Sam Spoons

Founder and Managing Director, Talentheads

### What inspired you to start your own recruitment agency?

After serving as Head of Talent Acquisition for a large national hospitality group, I noticed a significant gap in the market. Growing businesses often need external recruitment and retention support, but they also need partners who truly understand how in-house teams operate - not just suppliers.

With over 20 years in recruitment, I saw firsthand how many agencies still operate transactionally, focusing on quick placements rather than long-term success. I knew there was a better way. That's why I founded Talentheads: to disrupt the traditional model, eliminate hefty introduction fees, and help growing businesses build and retain great teams.

### Describe the biggest challenges you have faced.

One of the toughest challenges was re-educating the market. Many businesses claim to be unique, but our approach genuinely is. It took time to prove the real impact we bring. Once we demonstrated how we drive momentum and strengthen teams for long-term success - through measurable results and client stories - everything started falling into place.

To date, we've partnered with over 90 businesses across regional, national, and international markets as their internal recruitment partner. We've upskilled more than 1,750 hiring managers, helped create over 650 local jobs, and saved clients more than £1.4 million in agency fees.

### How has the industry evolved since you started, and how have you adapted your business?

Since Talentheads began, the recruitment industry has increasingly recognised that growing businesses need more than transactional support or simply filling seats. It's been exciting to see a shift toward proactive, strategic, and tailored recruitment solutions.

What excites me most is witnessing others in our industry echoing the message that people are more than just numbers, and recruitment is about more than CVs or commission. This cultural shift is essential, and it shows we're helping change the narrative.

### Tell us about your team.

Our team is unlike many traditional recruitment firms because everyone has worked inside businesses themselves. They understand what it's like when one person is juggling multiple roles, or when an executive clears a day for interviews but no candidates show up. They appreciate how important it is when a new apprentice is warmly welcomed on their first day.

### What qualities do you look for when recruiting?

For me, values are everything. Our core values at Talentheads are Community, Brave, and Legacy. We're a fast-paced,

entrepreneurial, impact-driven business, and we seek individuals who thrive in that environment.

We want people motivated not by commission or quick placements, but by the chance to make a real difference, to be heard, and to experience the real highs and lows of building something meaningful. A Talenthead is curious, accountable, and passionate about creating lasting impact.

### What advice would you give to anyone looking to work in the industry?

Spend time working in-house or within a growing business. That's where you truly see the impact of hiring the right people with the right values - and how crucial those hires are to scaling successfully.

If you choose to work for an external agency, pick one that genuinely does things differently. Look for firms that put candidates and clients at the center, who aim to make a meaningful difference. That's where you'll learn the most and do your best work.

### What is the best piece of business advice you have received?

The best advice I've had is: *'It's about the journey, not the destination.'* I'm passionate about changing our industry, so sometimes I rush past wins, always looking ahead. I'm learning to pause, celebrate the impact we're making, and appreciate the people I work with every day.

### Who are your heroes and mentors?

I'm fortunate to have a strong peer group of business owners and leaders who are generous with their time and insights. We share advice openly, support each other through challenges, and celebrate wins together.

The inspiration behind Talentheads came from my former CEO when I was Head of Talent Acquisition - a North East entrepreneur who invested deeply in both business and family. He made me believe I could build something of my own. Since then, several mentors have guided me, and I'm deeply grateful to each one.

### What does the future hold?

We want to continue spreading the message that building teams shouldn't be transactional. We're not here to fill roles for every business; we want to partner with those who understand the real impact careers have on individuals.

We believe in the power of employment to support local communities and to be part of people's life milestones. Our goal is to grow that philosophy and help more businesses build teams that last.

[www.talentheads.co.uk](http://www.talentheads.co.uk) | 0191 300 8688





“

*...A Talenthead  
is curious,  
accountable,  
and  
passionate...*



# Investment in the North East - Keep the momentum going

*By Stephen Patterson, Chief Executive of NE1 Ltd,  
the Business Improvement District company for Newcastle city centre*

**We are in a celebratory mood. It's been a great month for the North East's transport network, with good news coming in thick and fast.**

## **Kim McGuinness has given us £1.85 billion reasons to celebrate.**

The North East was due some good news after a difficult period of traffic and transport chaos, caused by decades of underinvestment in the region's infrastructure and neglect by central government.

Full credit to Kim McGuinness for securing the region's share of the national pay-out and for championing the first Metro extension for over 30 years.

The Metro extension to Washington has been long-awaited and will link tens of thousands of people to new job opportunities and economic growth.

At NE1, we are particularly delighted to see the Metro extension becoming a reality, as it was a key lobbying priority of our recent BID renewal campaign, based on the economic benefits it will deliver for the city and wider region.

Beyond the Metro, this funding is truly game-changing for transport across the region. The North East has received the largest single pot of money for transport and infrastructure in its history, a milestone that cannot be overstated. The investment will support not only vital and long overdue road maintenance, but also the expansion of safer and more accessible walking and cycling routes. The funding will also deliver hundreds of new electric vehicle charging points, and improvements to bus priority measures, making bus journeys more reliable for passengers.

This is not just about transport, it is about making the region more connected, accessible, and ready for the future.

Securing the funding is monumental. It guarantees long-term investment in the North East's transport and infrastructure network and will help build confidence in the region. It will be critical for driving regional growth and helping to attract further investment.

The dust had hardly settled on the news of the Metro expansion before we learnt that the final phase of funding for the Tyne Bridge restoration

was also secured within the overall figure. We said earlier this year that it would be a spectacular own goal for the Government to renege on commitments to fund the final stage of the Tyne Bridge renovations. We can now celebrate that the funding has been secured. It is fabulous news for the city and the region. Everyone can now get on with the job of ensuring that the bridge looks amazing for its centenary celebrations in 2028.

Full credit once again to Kim McGuinness for securing the region's share of the national transport pay-out and prioritising the restoration of the Tyne Bridge in the funding allocation. What a ringing endorsement for the role of regional mayor, someone who speaks with one voice for the whole region, who understands and champions regional priorities and links directly with the national Government. She has certainly delivered results.

From the Metro extension to the Tyne Bridge restoration and investment in active travel routes, the investment marks a turning point for North East transport and one that will build capacity and ambition along with it.

But we know infrastructure projects are not delivered overnight. They take time, patience, and planning. Having guaranteed funding in place allows local authorities, transport bodies and businesses to plan efficiently, and gives confidence to other investors that the region is committed to growth and transformation and has the wherewithal to deliver.

So yes, let's celebrate and recognise what has been achieved and how far we've come. But this is no time for complacency, we also need to keep pushing. This is the start of something exciting for the North East, but not the end of the line.

[www.newcastlene1ltd.com](http://www.newcastlene1ltd.com)





Stephen Patterson



# I'm an Alien, I'm a Legal Alien, I'm an Englishman in Engaarland

I was proudly born on the banks of the Tyne – a Geordie through and through.

The streets of the West and East End raised me, its people shaped me, and the rhythm of the North East runs through my veins. But for most of my life, despite my birthplace, despite my accent, despite my unwavering pride in this region – I've often felt like an alien. A legal alien. An Englishman in... Engaarland.

**You see, being first often comes with the irony of feeling last.**

I did what many restless young professionals do – I escaped to London. I spent time working for the British Council, surrounded by global cultures and curious minds. But nothing – and I mean nothing – could replace the feeling of home. I missed my mother, I missed our corner shops and cornerstones, I missed the warmth of our communities and the cold North Sea breeze. So, I returned. And since then, I've dedicated over three decades to making the North East the best it can be – socially, economically and spiritually.

**Yet, returning didn't mean arriving.**

Time and again, I've had to work twice, sometimes three times as hard to earn the same seat at the table. Imposter syndrome? It's more like imposter survival mode. Not because I doubted myself – but because others did. Because of the colour of my skin, the faith I quietly practised, the unfamiliar name on the name badge. There were always blockers. Inward racism – the silent assumptions, the awkward silences, the unconscious bias. And outward racism – the louder, uglier words, the outright rejections.

**But here's the twist: I never gave in.**

Through patience, positivity, and perseverance – and with the support of some truly brilliant people – I carved a path. Not just for me, but for others.



Ammar Mirza CBE

For those who looked like me. For those who didn't, but felt like me.

I became one of the first British-born Asian school governors in the region – then the youngest chair of a primary school in Newcastle. I was appointed the first ethnic minority and youngest ever Professor of Practice in Innovation and Enterprise at Newcastle University Business School. I became the youngest British-born Asian to be awarded a CBE in the North East. And the first non-military ethnic Honorary Colonel of a Royal Artillery Reserve Regiment.

**Not titles for ego. But milestones for impact.**

Each 'first' came with responsibility – to be visible so others didn't feel invisible. To climb the freestanding ladder that stood isolated in the corner of the room – and to reach back down, pulling others up with me. Many of those I've mentored have long since overtaken me – and that's the point. That's the goal.

I've given away at least 50% of my life to the service of others. Building social

enterprises. Championing inclusion. Challenging injustice. Creating platforms that others could stand on, even if I was still fighting to stay balanced.

**It's not been easy. But it's been worth it.**

Because I love my region. I believe in its people. And I will never stop fighting to make it more open, more inclusive, more representative of the greatness it holds.

Yes, I'm an alien. A legal alien.

But I'm also a Geordie. A dad. A changemaker. A connector. A son of this soil.

**And if being first means others feel like they can finally belong – then I'll keep being first. Until being "different" no longer feels alien at all.**

*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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# ISS

## FREEPORTS

GROWING GLOBAL COMMUNITY



Teesside International  
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### Freeport to the Future:

## How ISS Is Powering Trade, Investment & Innovation from Teesside to the World

What if Teesside became the beating heart of a new global trade network?

That future is already landing thanks to ISS Freeports, a bold initiative fusing capital, creativity and connectivity. As part of the ISS Airview global ecosystem, ISS Freeports transforms regional opportunity into international growth. Anchored at Teesside International Airport and led by visionary entrepreneurs **Ammar Mirza CBE** and **Atif Malik**, this fully integrated model is delivering a future where Teesside doesn't follow trends — it sets them.



With global ambition and regional impact, ISS Freeports is transforming Teesside into a globally connected trade and innovation powerhouse — led by a mission-driven team of pioneers.





# ISS FREEPORTS

GROWING GLOBAL COMMUNITY

**Are you ready to scale,  
internationally?**

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

## INTERNATIONALISATION

ISS provides soft-landing services for inward investors and launchpads for UK scaleups. With live corridors between Teesside, Riyadh, Bangalore and beyond, the model supports frictionless international growth — backed by in-country market intelligence, trade support and cultural alignment.

## INVESTMENT

Under Atif Malik's leadership, ISS Freeports is attracting sovereign wealth funds, global investors and corporate capital — transforming ambition into infrastructure. Over £200m is being mobilised for logistics, life sciences, and business hospitality infrastructure — designed not just for ROI, but regional regeneration.

## INNOVATION

ISS Freeports integrates innovation across sectors — biotech, AI, aviation, green fuels — supported by IP-protected frameworks (including Yohlar™ Business Model Innovation). This is not just R&D space; it's a sandbox for scalable transformation.

**Scale your  
business  
globally with  
ISS**



**The ultimate  
launchpad for  
Scale-Ups.**

## PEOPLE

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

## PLACE

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

## PROGRAMMES

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

### FIND US

1 Airview Park,  
Newcastle International Airport,  
NE13 8BR

### LEARN MORE

[www.issairview.com](http://www.issairview.com)

### CONTACT US

[grow.global@issairview.com](mailto:grow.global@issairview.com)





# Assets, Infrastructure & Impact

## At Teesside International Airport, the ISS Freeports Campus will deliver:

### 120,000 sq ft Cargo Distribution Centre

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### 10,000 sq ft Health & Life Sciences Innovation Zone

A catalyst for biotech, diagnostics and health tech, co-created with global partners.

### 10,000 sq ft International Trade Centre

A twin of ISS Airview Newcastle, offering coworking, investment readiness, and policy engagement.

### 5-Star Hotel & 3,000-Delegate Conference Centre

Positioning Teesside as a global destination for business tourism and investor summits.

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10,000+ New jobs  
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Gateway for over 50 global trade/investment partnerships

 **Teesside International**  
Airport



**ISS**  
**FREEPORTS**  
GROWING GLOBAL COMMUNITY



## Meet the visionaries powering the platform:

*"ISS Freeports is not just about economic zones; it's about economic empowerment. We are turning Teesside into a trade beacon for the world."*

# Ammar Mirza CBE

ISS Group

A multiple award-winning entrepreneur, policy influencer and scaleup specialist, Ammar has supported over 15,000 SMEs, raised £150M+ in investment, and built a 300+ strong network of global service providers.

Founder of ISS Airview, his mission is to co-create a scalable, successful and sustainable global community. Known for his inclusive leadership and ability to turn vision into systems, Ammar is the architect of the 3IP model — Investment, Innovation, Internationalisation underpinned by People, Programmes and Place.

*"You can't build the future by waiting for it. We're bringing capital, cargo, and collaboration directly into Teesside's economy."*

# Atif Malik

CEO ISS Freeports & Global Investor

Atif is a strategic visionary and seasoned international dealmaker, responsible for activating ISS Freeports across the UK.

With extensive relationships across sovereign wealth funds, airlines, and global logistics networks, Atif is pioneering Teesside's role in the UK's trade renaissance.

## Why now?

ISS Freeports represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity. With aligned infrastructure, strategic leadership, and global demand, Teesside is poised to become a flagship example of what Freeports should be. **Contact us to land your future.**



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# ABC Proudly Welcomes HWI Solutions as an Official Sponsor for the 2025 Awards Ceremony



ABConnexions is delighted to announce that HWI Solutions has come on board as an official sponsor for the ABC Awards 2025. This exciting partnership highlights our shared commitment to celebrating individuals and organisations making significant strides in championing diversity, inclusion, and social change across sectors.



**Trusted professionals, any time.**

As a key sponsor, HWI Solutions brings with it a deep understanding of the healthcare landscape and the challenges faced in creating truly equitable services. Specialising in providing high-quality healthcare staffing and workforce solutions, the organisation is deeply invested in ensuring that diversity and inclusion are not just statements of intent, but everyday realities across the sector.

**Amit Bahanda, Director of ABConnexions, welcomed the sponsorship with enthusiasm:**

"We are thrilled to have HWI Solutions join us as a valued sponsor for the 2025 awards. Their commitment to inclusion within healthcare and their broader social values make them an ideal partner. At the ABC Awards, we aim to recognise and amplify those working tirelessly to create a fairer, more compassionate society—and HWI Solutions exemplifies this mission in everything they do."

**Louise Woodall, MD at HWI Solutions, echoed this sentiment, highlighting the alignment of values between the two organisations:**

"Partnering with the Amit and Ammar at ABC is incredibly meaningful for us. Inclusion in healthcare isn't optional—it's essential. Every individual, whether a patient or professional, deserves to feel seen, safe, and supported. The ABC Awards offers a vital platform to honour those who are paving the way for progress, and we are proud to stand alongside them in that celebration."

HWI Solutions has long been an advocate for workforce equality, from encouraging diverse recruitment to supporting inclusive leadership within the NHS and private health settings. Their sponsorship of the ABC Awards 2025 underlines their dedication not only to healthcare excellence but to fostering a culture where difference is valued, and inclusion is a driving force.

The ABC Awards 2025 promises to be an evening of powerful storytelling, recognition, and inspiration. With categories spanning business, education, public service, arts, and community impact, the event serves as a reminder that inclusion is not confined to any one sector—it is the responsibility of all.



With the generous support of partners like HWI Solutions, the ABC Awards continues to elevate and empower those who are not only changing lives, but also shifting systems. Their involvement will help amplify voices that often go unheard and ensure the spotlight reaches the changemakers who deserve it most.

For media enquiries, interviews or sponsorship information, please contact:

**Email: [inclusion@abconnexions.org](mailto:inclusion@abconnexions.org)**

**Website: [www.abconnexions.org](http://www.abconnexions.org)**





# Supreme Court ruling on 'Sex' and what it means for employers

By Kathryn Rodgers,  
face2faceHR Newcastle

A recent Supreme Court ruling has sparked important conversations around workplace inclusion, legal compliance, and how employers manage single-sex provisions.

**While the legal outcome may seem complex, it's crucial for businesses to understand what it means in practice — especially when it comes to day-to-day decisions like toilet facilities, policies, and employee support.**

## So, what was the case all about?

At the heart of the ruling was the definition of 'sex' under the Equality Act 2010 — specifically, whether it should mean biological sex or include 'certificated sex', meaning the sex shown on a Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC). The Court concluded that for the purposes of the Equality Act, 'sex' means biological sex.

This matters because it affects provisions around single-sex spaces, such as toilets, changing rooms, and women-only services. The Court ruled that interpreting 'sex' based on legal documentation rather than biology would create confusion and undermine other protections, including those relating to pregnancy, sexual orientation, and the public sector equality duty.

Importantly, this ruling does not reduce protections for transgender people. The Equality Act continues to protect individuals against discrimination and harassment on the basis of gender reassignment, whether or not they have a GRC.

## What does this mean for employers?

For many employers, the most immediate impact will be on toilet and changing provision. While many have aimed to be inclusive by allowing self-identifying transgender individuals to access facilities aligned with their gender identity, this



Kathryn Rodgers

ruling highlights that such practices may now be unlawful under the Equality Act — particularly if they compromise the rights of other employees, such as those seeking single-sex spaces for religious or personal reasons.

This presents a challenge: how do employers support all employees respectfully and legally?

The most practical approach is to provide three options:

- Single-sex spaces (for biological males and females).
- A gender-neutral facility for anyone who prefers a non-gendered space.
- Or, where possible, fully private, lockable rooms (like those seen in many modern cafés) that can be used by anyone.

While there may be initial costs to adjusting facilities, these are small compared to the risks of legal action. And more importantly, they help create a space where everyone feels respected and protected.

## What else should employers review?

This ruling is also a prompt to revisit:

- Your HR policies and ensure they align with the legal definition of sex.

- Training content, to make sure it reflects current law and supports respectful discussion.

Equal opportunities monitoring, ensuring you're asking about sex and gender reassignment separately and clearly.

It's also important to keep communication open. You don't need to take sides in the wider debate, but you should be clear about what changes (if any) you're making and why — and reinforce your commitment to treating all employees with dignity and fairness.

## Final thoughts

This is a sensitive subject, and it's natural that employers may feel uncertain about how to proceed. But with the right guidance, it's entirely possible to stay compliant and create a workplace that is inclusive, respectful, and legally sound.

If you're unsure where to begin, whether it's reviewing facilities or updating policies, I'm always happy to chat.

**Kathryn Rodgers,**  
face2faceHR Newcastle  
[www.face2faceHR.com](http://www.face2faceHR.com), 07946 330 025.





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## What is the Fair Work Agency and what is its remit?

As the Employment Rights Bill works its way through parliament, we are focusing on the Fair Work Agency, an under-reported facet of the Bill. “Fair Work Agency” – three small words, but they will have a big impact for SME employers.

### What is the Fair Work Agency?

The Fair Work Agency (FWA) is being introduced as part of the Employment Rights Bill, aiming to provide streamlined regulation for employers and employees, combining existing agencies, like the Employment Agency Standards Inspectorate and HMRC’s National Minimum Wage Enforcement.

The FWA will also take on some major new enforcement powers: it can take businesses to court on an employee’s behalf, even if the employee has no interest in pursuing charges.

That is a major change. Here are some of the specific areas which fall under this expansive agency’s remit, all based on what we know so far:

#### Holiday pay

The FWA will enforce statutory holiday pay, and employers will be obliged to keep records of this for six years. This may be a challenge: holiday pay can be difficult to get right, and it applies to all staff – including part-year workers and staff with irregular hours. Employers could be at risk if you have a ‘wait and see’ approach to holiday pay, or if you have been issuing it correctly but not recording it.

There are steep consequences. If in breach,

you’d have to pay back the worker; as well as a fine, equalling the back pay, to the government – failure to do so promptly could result in even higher penalties.

#### Sick pay

Statutory sick pay will also now be more actively enforced, and in a similar way to how described for holiday above. This could previously only be determined by HMRC if an employee made a complaint.

#### National Minimum Wage

National Minimum Wage, currently overseen by HMRC, will be enforced by the FWA who will be able to require enforcement undertakings, with powers to name and shame, order you to make shortfall payments and impose penalties if you fail to do so.

#### Summary of Fair Work Agency powers

Having looked at some of the most common ways that the FWA may involve themselves with businesses, let’s summarise their powers:

- Enforcing failures to pay statutory payments, plus penalties.
- Power to require someone to provide information.
- Power to enter premises, view

documents and computer equipment, and seize it where they deem appropriate.

- Requesting labour market enforcement, backed by courts and criminal prosecution.
- An array of new criminal offences, including for failing to keep holiday records, providing false information and deliberately obstructing enforcement action.
- Ability to recover enforcement costs for non-compliance.
- Bringing employment tribunals on behalf of a worker (where they will not do it themselves).
- Providing legal assistance for civil proceedings relating to employment law, trade union law or labour relations.

#### Preparing for the Fair Work Agency

The FWA won’t be functional before late 2026 but, with new regulations and changes to existing ones, lack of awareness could put your business at risk of serious penalties.

It’s crucial for you to already comply with existing regulations the FWA are set to adopt – especially the ones backed by criminal or civil penalties.

But you need to keep in mind that under the FWA, the “small stuff” is about to get a lot more important. You’ll want to ensure that statutory requirements like holiday and sick pay aren’t only in order, but also efficiently documented for the correct amount of time.

If you require any help with any aspect of HR, The HR Dept is here to help.

**Alison Schreiber, HR Dept – Durham & Newcastle South. Call 01325 526 036 or email: [alison.schreiber@hrdept.co.uk](mailto:alison.schreiber@hrdept.co.uk)**





James Carss

## Castle Peak Group - Driving business forward

**Diversity and equality in the workplace – it's the right thing to do and it's good for your business.**

**Over the past few months here in Northern Insight, we've been following the fortunes of Castle Peak Group CEO James Carss.**

For the past 15 years, his company has been a leading light in executive search, finding the right senior people to fit into seriously important roles.

When James and his team begin their search, they place emphasis on not only finding the right person who can do the job but also ensure that they fit into the company in terms of diversity, inclusivity and equality. Employees and customers will always look to a company's senior people to see what sort of leadership is in place and whether they reflect the company ethos. If they don't like what they see, some will walk away and take their business elsewhere.

Which is why Castle Peak Group has been so successful in one particular area... the housing industry...and in particular those firms working within communities providing social housing.

"Social housing is an industry that serves a distinctly diverse customer base so it's important that the companies who work in that sector are similarly diverse," says James. "The research which we have conducted - 'Progress Under Pressure: Insights on diversity from the housing sector' – shows the importance of ensuring that the senior executives within any business should reflect their workforce and the communities and customers which they serve.

"That has certainly been the case when we have conducted executive search for many of the region's leading housing groups... names which many of you reading this article will have heard of.

"Bernicia is one of the largest housing firms in the North East. They own and manage over 14,000 houses across the region and have a 600-strong team. We found them a new Finance Director.

"Livin manages nearly 9000 houses across Co. Durham. Such is their drive for equality, diversity and inclusivity, they have Disability Confident Leader status. We found them five new non-executive directors.

"Keelman, who have delivered more than 300 houses for people in Gateshead as well as smaller developments in places like Ryton, Pelaw, Dunston and Felling,

were looking to appoint a new Chair and Trustee. We compiled a list of suitable candidates and quickly filled the two positions.

In the south of our region, we work closely with Thirteen...they're responsible for 36,000 houses across the Tees Valley. They were looking for new committee members and placed a keen emphasis on not only finding the right people with the relevant skills and experience but also at the values and cultural fit which would be suitable for Thirteen."

In other words, when it comes to executive search, Castle Peak Group not only looks for a person who can do the job, they also look for a person who will ensure diversity and equality in that particular workplace. It's the right thing to do and it's good for any business. As we've seen above, the housing industry is fully on board with how James and the Castle Peak Group find the right people. They can do the same for your business.

***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](mailto: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](http://www.castlepeak-group.com)***



# It's all in the mindset

Back in 2006, Stanford psychology professor Carol Dweck's book introduced the world to her groundbreaking theory.

**In *Mindset*, she explained people tend to operate from one of two core mental frameworks: a fixed mindset or a growth mindset.**

At its simplest, a fixed mindset assumes that intelligence and ability are static. People with this mindset typically avoid challenges, fear failure, and view constructive criticism as a personal attack.

In their view, effort doesn't change much—so why bother?

In contrast, those with a growth mindset believe that intelligence and abilities can be developed. They seek out challenges, view setbacks as opportunities to improve, and actively welcome feedback.

For them, growth is the goal.

One person once described the growth mindset as “the intention and commitment to grow. To take on the unknown. To turn an ordeal into an adventure. To step into the discomfort zone.”

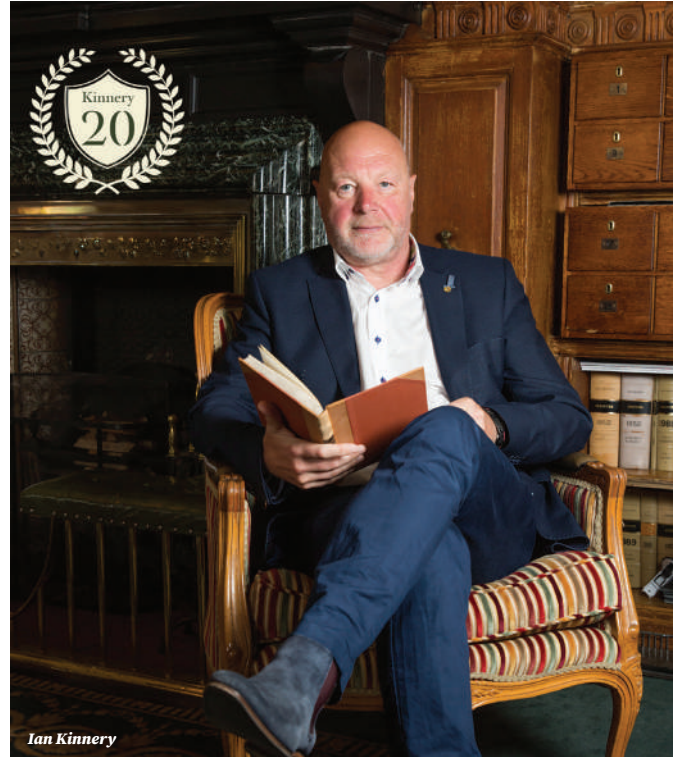
Perhaps it isn't surprising that I see a growth mindset as a critical trait—especially for anyone starting or leading a business.

But more than that, I believe it's essential for everyone navigating a world that's evolving faster than ever.

Frankly, I find it hard to justify hiring someone who doesn't show clear signs of a growth mindset.

Your business today won't look the same a year from now. It will evolve.

And the person who seems perfect for the current moment may quickly fall behind if they're not committed to learning and adapting.



Ian Kinnery

So ask yourself this: why would you bring anyone onboard who doesn't exhibit a growth mindset?

I speak about this often, and if you're a parent, I strongly encourage you to explore Carol Dweck's work in more depth.

Her research clearly shows how the way we raise our children influences whether they grow up with a fixed or growth mindset.

[Kinnery.co.uk](http://Kinnery.co.uk)



Charlotte Nichols

## The impact of business coaching with Ian Kinnery

Q&A with Charlotte Nichols,  
Managing Director of  
Harvey & Hugo

**Charlotte, as an experienced business owner, what led you to seek out leadership coaching?**

Running Harvey & Hugo for 16 years has been incredibly rewarding, but also emotionally demanding. Like many entrepreneurs, I've faced moments of self-doubt, burnout, and the challenge of aligning business growth with personal fulfilment. That's why I turned to Ian Kinnery.

**What makes Ian's coaching style stand out?**

Ian's approach is very human. He doesn't give you textbook advice – he draws on real-life experience and always encourages you to stretch beyond your comfort zone. One

phrase that's stuck with me is: “There's no growth in the comfort zone, and no comfort in the growth zone.” It's tough, but it works.

**How has coaching with Ian impacted you personally?**

He's helped me reconnect with why I run my business and ensured it supports not only financial goals, but personal ones too. That clarity has been game-changing.

**And how has it affected Harvey & Hugo as a company?**

Ian's guidance has helped me build a stronger team. We now have the right people – those who share our values and drive. He's also helped me shift the team's mindset to be more sales-focused through his interactive workshops, which covered sales psychology and building rapport. It's made a real, measurable difference.

**Would you recommend Ian's coaching to others?**

Absolutely. If you're scaling, stuck, or looking to realign your business with your life, Ian offers more than strategy – he offers support. Working with him has been one of the most valuable decisions I've made as a leader.

**To find out more visit [www.kinnery.co.uk](http://www.kinnery.co.uk)**





# The Alpha Factor

## Preparing Today's Business for Tomorrow's Workforce.

**Gen Alpha (born between 2010 – 2024) is the first generation to be fully raised in a world dominated by smart technology, artificial intelligence, and constant connectivity. They've grown up with iPads instead of books and smart speakers as bedtime storytellers.**

They're not just tech-savvy, they're tech-native. Unlike previous generations who have learned to use digital tools, Gen Alpha has been immersed in them from birth. They're also being raised in an era of accelerated social change, climate urgency, and heightened awareness around issues like diversity, mental health, and sustainability.

The first wave of Gen Alpha will begin stepping into internships, apprenticeships, and early job roles as soon as 2028. That's just three years away.

### Why businesses should start planning now

Three years might seem like a long runway, but workplace change takes time, particularly when it involves reshaping culture, training, infrastructure, and leadership mindsets. The companies that thrive in the 2030s will be those that start evolving in the 2020s.

Here are five key areas where businesses should focus:

#### 1. Digital-first mindset

Gen Alpha will expect seamless digital experiences, not just for customers, but in their own roles as employees. Clunky intranets, outdated systems, and paper-based processes will not only frustrate them but signal to them that a company isn't future-ready. Now is the time to audit internal systems and invest in intuitive, mobile-first, AI-augmented tools. Don't forget to prepare your existing workforce for this change to ensure you keep critical people and retain the knowledge, skills and experience of longer-serving employees.

#### 2. Education integration

Fewer people are moving through the university-to-career pipeline and Gen Alpha is likely to explore more modular, skills-based learning pathways. Businesses should begin collaborating with schools, colleges, and tech education platforms to co-create programs, apprenticeships, and certifications that match real-world job needs. These partnerships will be key to attracting the best young talent early.

#### 3. Purpose-driven culture

Gen Alpha cares about what a company stands for as much as what it sells. They'll seek out employers that align with their values, particularly around sustainability, equity, and global impact. Transparency, authentic storytelling, and a strong social mission will be crucial in employer

branding. This is not a box-ticking generation; they can spot inauthenticity in a heartbeat.

#### 4. AI Collaboration

By the time Gen Alpha enters the workplace, AI will be deeply integrated into most industries. But rather than fearing automation, this generation is likely to see AI as a collaborative partner. Businesses need to ensure their workflows and cultures are designed around "human-AI teaming", where emotional intelligence and creativity complement each other.

#### 5. Flexibility and mental health focus

The pandemic reshaped views on work-life balance, and Gen Alpha will take this expectation even further. Mental health, flexible schedules, and meaningful time off won't be perks, they'll be the baseline. Companies that fail to embrace a holistic approach to employee wellbeing may struggle to attract or retain this generation.

#### Looking ahead

Generation Alpha may still be in school but Businesses that take a proactive approach to their arrival will not only attract top-tier talent but gain a competitive edge in innovation, relevance, and resilience.

The Alpha Factor is coming. It's not a question of if your business needs to adapt, it's how fast you can start.

**Jen.tait@riselearninggroup.com**  
**www.riselearninggroup.com**



# Struggling to recruit? The problem might be you

Bryony Gibson, director of Bryony Gibson Consulting, shares why you might be the recruitment problem, and a few small shifts in approach could unlock a new world of talent.

**Finding it harder than ever to convince great people to join your team? You're not alone. The talent shortage is real. But while competition is fierce, some of the biggest hiring barriers are the ones employers unknowingly create themselves.**

Working throughout the North East, I've been supporting accountancy firms with recruitment for over 20 years, and if there's one piece of advice I could give, it's this: be flexible. Whatever you're hiring for, a simple mindset shift from "What do we need?" to "What can we offer?" will transform your results. And here's how:

## Know your audience

Recruitment is about tailoring your offer to the right people, and that could mean marketing your business to a new generation. One with new expectations. For example, Gen Z is motivated differently from Gen X. They want flexibility, a sense of purpose, growth opportunities and, crucially, a company that lives its values. Ask yourself if your culture and benefits package appeal only to those people. If they don't, you're missing out on a host of fresh talent who could bring digital skills and new energy to your team.

## Flex your wishlist

The perfect ready-to-go candidate rarely exists. And too many hiring managers stick rigidly to their "wish list", waiting for someone to tick every box, only to find themselves still waiting six months later. Instead, try to be open to training someone who is 70% of the way there.



Bryony Gibson

Look for attitude, aptitude and cultural fit. Upskilling can be quicker than a never-ending search.

## Speed up or lose out

The best candidates are in demand, and a lot of companies lose out simply because they took too long to act or dragged out the interview process. If you want the best people, you need to act fast and show them that you're serious.

## Put your best foot forward

Do you know what your USP as an employer is? Why should someone choose you over another firm in the same city? If you don't know, how will they? Throughout the recruitment process, you should be selling your culture, people, vision and career development pathways. That doesn't mean overpromising, but it does mean giving a true flavour of what life inside your organisation is like, and why people stay.

## Invest in the whole package

You need a competitive salary to sit at the table, but it's your benefits that show how much you genuinely value your people. Think beyond the basics: private healthcare, professional development, flexible hours and wellbeing support

are increasingly expected. Would you be excited to join your company if you saw the package advertised?

## Flexibility is a dealbreaker

The pandemic changed how we work, and it's not going away. True, some firms are trying to drag people back into the office full-time again, but the majority of candidates I speak to won't even apply for those roles. Hybrid or remote options, flexible start times, and outcomes-based performance measurement all show that you trust your people. For many accountants - especially younger ones - that's become a non-negotiable.

In summary, if you're struggling to hire well, it might be time to look inward. The companies winning the talent war aren't necessarily paying the most; they're listening, adapting, and showing up as a place people want to work.

You don't have to overhaul everything overnight. But ask yourself this: next time a recruiter or candidate asks, "Can you offer this?", instead of saying "no", take a moment to think about what might happen if you said "yes".

Sometimes, the first barrier to attracting talent is simply being willing to flex.

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A growing North East business in the luxury retail space is hiring an experienced Indirect Tax professional to lead on VAT and overseas tax compliance. You'll be the go-to expert across the business, driving process improvements, handling advisory work, and managing international tax obligations. Full or part-time hours available, flexible working, excellent benefits and a supportive team culture. Hybrid.

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### ACCOUNTS SEMI-SENIOR

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A growing, ambitious accountancy firm is seeking an Accounts Semi-Senior to join their vibrant team. This varied 360° role includes preparing micro and small company accounts, VAT returns, bookkeeping, and some tax and payroll. Ideal for AAT Level 4 or part-qualified ACCA candidates with 2+ years' practice experience. Flexible hours, free parking, birthday off, and a supportive environment. Office Based.

**To express your interest in a vacancy, or for a confidential discussion, contact Bryony Gibson, Bryony Gibson Consulting, on 0191 375 9983 or visit [BryonyGibson.com/Vacancies](https://BryonyGibson.com/Vacancies)**



# THE ULTRAMAPGLOBAL SERIES

“I’ve thought about what resilience means to UltramapGlobal. More than anything else, I think the key is preparing for, managing and mastering change. Resilience has played a big part in getting us from client number one, to world number one.”

## This issue: RESILIENCE

Martin Connelly is Co-Founder of UltramapGlobal, protecting many of the world’s most important subsea cables. UltramapGlobal monitor 100 million vessel movements daily. If a cable is threatened, Global Monitoring Teams intervene. Nobody has monitored more, for longer. That’s why UltramapGlobal’s AssetMonitor software is the world’s most used.

In the early days however, if Martin hadn’t been resilient, the UltramapGlobal story would have been very different.

### Confidence Trick.

UltramapGlobal’s flagship product is its AssetMonitor software. Over a decade ago, version one was developed inside the large, well known and well established company that Martin worked for.

And when the opportunity to acquire the software and set up a brand new, much smaller business around it arose, Martin and his business partner took it. The prospects were good, but in the immediacy, there were many challenges. Martin explains:

“From the beginning, we loved the software and the opportunity to own and grow it. But the greatest trick was persuading customers that had confidence in the previous much bigger owner – to have confidence in us.

“People don’t like change. Business doesn’t like change. Even with the long-term prospect of more focussed leadership.

“We persuaded existing customers we’d deliver seamlessly. Thankfully, every customer of the bigger company had the confidence to come with UltramapGlobal.”

### Excitement and Responsibility.

In the beginning, UltramapGlobal was just two people. It was exciting! But Martin soon realised that with the big excitement – comes big responsibility.

“Suddenly, it was just Des and I. That was it. We were protecting client assets worth millions. Resilience came in once more when we were faced with rapid early growth. We needed the best infrastructure, the best partnerships and the best people. And we were doing most things for the very first time. It was hard.”

One lesson Martin learned early on was the importance of choosing good partners and suppliers.

“In the very early days, one mission critical supplier let us down. They were going through similar things to us, so whilst we could empathise, we still had to be resilient enough to react and replace them. When it comes to key partnerships, their performance and reputation – is our performance and reputation.”

### Build Resilience In.

For UltramapGlobal today, resilience is key for the core offering, as well as how the business runs. “Our work is binary. A client cable is either safe, or it isn’t safe. We’re proud that all our clients have fewer cable strikes once we have been appointed. And over half of UltramapGlobal customers have no cable strikes at all. We save clients billions. We build resilience in. Because our resilience – is their resilience.”

[www.ultramapglobal.com](http://www.ultramapglobal.com)

PATIENCE | RESILIENCE | STORYTELLING | TRAVEL | TEAM | CONSISTENCY | NUMBERS





*Martin Connelly*  
Co-Founder & Commercial Director



## Talented NE Leaders Emerge

The latest cohort of North East managerial talent has graduated this month, from the Emerging and Inspiring Leaders course run by Andrew Marsh.

As Vistage Chair for the North East and Northumberland, Andrew runs peer groups for C-Suite Executives and Business Owners, as well as peer groups for existing and aspiring NEDs, trustees, board advisors and consultants working at board level. A few years ago, Andrew saw a need to help the next generation of leaders and formed his Emerging Leaders groups (now renamed Inspiring Leaders).

This graduating cohort is his third group of talented and inspiring managers who have a bright future. Over the course of two years, they have focused on learning skills from leading business speakers, have processed issues and challenges together and have expanded both their network and networking capability.

Companies benefitting from the improved knowledge of the graduating future leaders of this cohort included names such as Viking Arms, Gateshead Council, Durham Lane, Citizens Advice Gateshead, Age UK Northumberland, and Trade Interchange. Andrew said: "I particularly enjoyed working with this cohort as everyone applied themselves fully, were open to learning and sharing and brought real energy, interest and value to each other. As well as our bimonthly full-day meetings, we interacted daily on our what's app group meaning that the support, knowledge share and communication continued between sessions.

"It is not an easy two-year course, but this cohort excelled! Well done to everyone. I do hope that your futures are as bright as they seem they will be!"

Feedback from the cohort members was glowing, with comments including the following: 'It's enabled me to develop as a leader and has empowered me to make my own decisions, whilst leading a team to successful performance.'

"Thoroughly enjoyed it, it is worth investing the time if you want to develop your leadership skills and improve your work processes."

"I've learnt lots of things about myself and how to manage people better – it has given me the confidence to be a role model in my work environment."

"It was brilliant and has completely changed my attitude, belief in myself and confidence in my performance."

"I learnt loads that I have taken away and actioned in my day to day job to be even better at what I do!"

"This was a really valuable course to learn leadership skills, giving me a great framework to build upon for my future career."



Andrew's newest Inspiring Leaders cohort starts this month and has just a few places left. Or if that is too soon, another cohort will be launching later this year. Please do get in touch for more information.

[Andrew@marshbusinesstransformation.co.uk](mailto:Andrew@marshbusinesstransformation.co.uk)



“

*...Well done  
everyone...*





L-R: Karen Robinson with Brenda Beveridge

## Understanding property ownership – Joint Tenants vs Tenants in Common

When purchasing a property with another person—whether a partner, spouse, family member, or friend—it's essential to understand how your ownership is legally structured.

At Brenda Beveridge Wills & Trusts, we frequently meet clients who are unaware of the significant differences between joint tenants and tenants in common, and how these can affect inheritance, tax, and financial planning.

### What's the difference?

Joint Tenancy means that all owners have an equal interest in the whole property. Each person owns 100% of the property jointly with the others, and crucially, when one owner dies, their share automatically passes to the surviving joint owner(s). This is known as the right of survivorship, and while it may sound convenient, it can create unintended consequences for your estate.

In contrast, Tenancy in Common allows each owner to hold a specific share of the property—either equal or unequal—and crucially, to leave their share to someone of their choice in their will.

### Why it matters

#### Joint Tenancy

- **Equal Ownership** – Everyone owns the full property equally.
- **No control over inheritance** – You cannot leave your share in a will; it automatically transfers to the other owner(s).

- **Limited flexibility** – You cannot independently sell or mortgage your share.

#### Tenancy in Common

- **Defined shares** – Each person owns a percentage, reflecting their contribution.
- **Control over inheritance** – You can leave your share to whomever you choose in your will.
- **Financial freedom** – Your share can be sold or mortgaged without needing the other owner's consent.

#### Choosing the right ownership

Choosing the right structure depends on your personal circumstances and intentions for the future.

- Joint tenancy may suit couples who want their property to automatically pass to the surviving partner. However, this can mean children can lose their inheritance if the survivor remarries and doesn't put appropriate planning in place to ensure their children inherit.
- Tenancy in common offers more control, especially in blended families or if contributions toward the purchase or mortgage are unequal. It can also help with inheritance tax planning, avoiding care home fees, and ensuring that

individual wishes are honoured.

#### Key benefits of Tenancy in Common for Married couples

- **Protecting children, especially those from previous relationships** – Ensures your those to choose inherit your share.
- **Avoiding care Costs** – With the correct planning in place for a couple, if one passes away & the other enters care, only the survivors share is assessed for care home fees & potentially the whole property is exempt.
- **Tax efficiency** – Each owner is taxed on their share, not the full property value.
- **Relationship breakdown protection** – Enables each person to manage or sell their share independently.

#### Don't forget the legal essentials

If you choose tenancy in common, it is vital to have:

- A properly drafted will
- The appropriate trusts in place to protect your interests
- Expert guidance to avoid costly errors

At Brenda Beveridge Wills & Trusts, we guide clients through these decisions every day, helping them protect their assets, secure their family's future, and achieve peace of mind.

#### Ready to make informed decisions?

Whether you're buying your first home, entering a new relationship, or planning your estate—ownership structure matters.

**Let us help you make the right choice for your future. Call: 07485 619 415 or visit [www.brendabeveridge.co.uk](http://www.brendabeveridge.co.uk)**  
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## 2025 Entrepreneurial Awards Finalists Revealed

We're delighted to announce the finalists for our 2025 Entrepreneurial Awards - join us this September as we celebrate their success and reveal our winners!

**Open to everyone in the North East business community, this year's awards dinner takes place on Thursday 18th September at the Hilton Newcastle Gateshead with official after-party at PILGRIM. It's a night dedicated to shining a spotlight on the remarkable people building brilliant ventures right here in the region.**

It's an unforgettable evening packed with the North East's most exciting and inspiring business leaders. At the heart of the event is our brilliant host Jo Darby, who swaps her heels for sparkly trainers as she dashes from table to table, mic in hand and cameraman in tow, capturing the real stories behind the success. The finalists will bring objects and photographs that sum up their entrepreneurial journeys, setting the scene for Jo's uniquely fun interviews – expect surprises, authentic answers and plenty of personality. It's fast-paced, full of energy and captures everything we love about our community.

Plus, for the very first time, our award celebrations will continue late into the night as PILGRIM opens their famous doors for our official after-party. From 10pm, winners, nominees, partners, guests and crew will join us for dancing and drinks as we celebrate the best the region has to offer – all sound-tracked by top DJs.





I always say this is one of my favourite nights of the year, not just because it's fun (which it really is), but because it reminds us just how much talent, resilience and creativity we have across the region. From first-time founders to seasoned leaders, the stories we'll hear are full of passion and purpose.

Before then, let me introduce you to the brilliant people you'll be cheering for...

Supported by UMi, One to Watch recognises those at the beginning of something big. This award will be presented to an entrepreneur who is building a business with exceptional potential, while also making a positive impact on the region. This year's finalists are:

- Alex and Ross Longton, Tiba Tempeh
- Victoria Taylor, Probe Industries
- Stewart Dickson, Weardale Lithium
- Kayleigh Laverick, Mamma Social Co.
- Jonny and Antonia Philip, Nursem
- Chris Wood, Tanglewood Games

Our Impact Award was created to recognise entrepreneurs who are making business a force for good, leading resilient and inclusive companies that contribute to improvement of the North East by meeting one or more of the United Nations Sustainability Goals. This year's finalists are:

- Nicki Clark, UMi
- Sam Spoors, Talentheads
- Nicola Wood, The Wonderful Wig Company

Supported by Ward Hadaway, Entrepreneur of the Year recognises an entrepreneur who has demonstrated remarkable resilience and strength in leading a high-growth business to exceptional success. This award recognises their innovation, teamwork and leadership, as well as their positive economic impact on our region. Having previously been won by John Hays (Hays Travel), Phil Cronin (Tombola) and Lianne Walker MBE (Walker Filtration), this year's finalists are:

- Brinsley Sheridan, RE:GEN Group
- Mark Thompson, Ryder Architecture

- Lee Hartley, Fairstone Group
- Dr Arnab Basu MBE, Kromek

Chosen by the Entrepreneurs' Forum board, the Caroline Theobald Award honours those who serve as an exemplary role model for entrepreneurship, giving their time to inspire, mentor and support others. Supported by RTC North, this year's finalists are:

- Richard Bradley, Dyer Engineering
- Tania Cooper MBE, Steel Benders
- Ammar Mirza CBE, AmmarM Group
- Kate Cooper-Fay, Cooper-Fay Harris

Also chosen by the Entrepreneurs' Forum board, our most prestigious award - the Lifetime Achievement - recognises someone who's made a long-lasting impact on the region and inspired a generation of business leaders. Our previous winners include Forum founders Sir Peter Vardy and Lorna Moran OBE, Sir John Hall and Dame Margaret Barbour.

Open to everyone in the North East business community, this is your invitation to raise a glass with us, make new connections, be inspired and help illuminate the brilliant entrepreneurs who are building the future of the region.

If you are someone who loves great company, good vibes and cheering on the North East's brightest business stars, why not book your seat now?

*I can't wait to celebrate with you,*



**Elaine Stroud, CEO, Entrepreneurs' Forum**

## ILLUMINATING NORTH EAST SUCCESS

2025 Entrepreneurial Awards

Open to all in the North East business community  
Thursday 18th September  
6pm - 10.30pm  
Hilton Newcastle Gateshead

Followed by official after party at PILGRIM, Newcastle

Tickets cost £120 + VAT per person with tables seating 10



**Book your ticket today!**

Visit [entrepreneursforum.net](https://entrepreneursforum.net) or scan the QR code.



# Sunderland counsellor transforms her own life with new business

Sunderland counsellor Kirsty Laing has turned one of the lowest points of her life into a thriving new therapy business – and says she's never felt prouder of who she is.

**Kirsty, who lives in Pennywell with her daughters Poppy and Millie, launched Rain or Shine Counselling in July last year with help from the North East BIC after a difficult period in her personal life.**

"I felt like a Stretch Armstrong," Kirsty says. "I was pulled in every direction trying to please everyone but pleasing nobody – especially not myself."

A single parent, juggling demands of motherhood, full-time employment as a therapist and personal struggles, Kirsty reached a point where something needed to change.

That change began by starting to invest in herself – through her own personal counselling, holistic therapies and goal-setting. And though she'd always considered self-employment as an unrealistic goal, she began to view it as something achievable.

"I walked into a sound bath session one day, and the man running it asked me what I did for a living. When I told him I was a counsellor, he asked me for my business page. I didn't have one. In that moment I realised I wanted to start my own business and I knew I could do it," Kirsty says.

"By working on myself in my own therapy, I'd found the confidence to take myself seriously and that's how Rain or Shine was born. By growing as a person, I've been able to grow a business. I've reinvented life for me and my children and now I want to help others to do the same."

Rain or Shine Counselling offers one-to-one therapy, group sessions, wellbeing workshops and remote support by telephone and video. Kirsty has a particular passion for working with young people and families and is on a mission to make therapy feel more human, accessible and even joyful.

"People often think of counselling as something heavy or clinical, but I've had more laughs in the counselling room than tears," she says. "It's about connection, honesty, and growth and that often includes humour and joy, even when you are having the most difficult conversations."

Kirsty got in touch with the BIC after a recommendation from a fellow counsellor and began turning her business dream into a reality.

She took part in a series of workshops, accessed mentoring and was introduced to Hina Joshi, her own dedicated Business Adviser, who guided her through registering her business, building a plan and growing her confidence.

"We actually registered Kirsty with HMRC the very first day we met!" Hina says. "She was nervous about her decision at that point but she knew she wanted to help others. She was lacking in confidence and suffering with imposter syndrome but we knew we could work on that."

"Since then, her confidence has blossomed. She's now delivering wellbeing sessions for corporate clients, has spoken at the BIC's Inspire Lab event where she was once an aspiring entrepreneur, and is a real inspiration to others thinking of starting their own venture."

The start-up support from the BIC forms part of Enterprising Sunderland which has received £523,541 from the Government's UK Shared Prosperity Fund Programme, managed in Sunderland by Sunderland City Council on behalf of the Sunderland Partnership.

Kirsty added: "Being part of Enterprising Sunderland has made me feel less alone. It's easy to feel isolated when you're self-employed, especially in a caring profession, but the support has given me a real sense of community, and I've made friends for life."

"I've had many laughs along the way too. I like that there is a sense of connection and the encouragement I've received has been just as important as the business support."

Now working part-time for the NHS and part-time in her own business, Kirsty has also hit a personal milestone – coming off benefits entirely.

"I've always worked full-time, but I've always struggled. One of my biggest goals was to be financially independent and I've done that. I'm so proud of myself," she adds.

"When I look in the mirror now, I see a different person looking back. I keep having pinch-me moments when I get paid for doing something I love. The endorphin hit I get from every client I help is just incredible."

"My message to anyone thinking about starting a business is to just go for it. The worst that can happen is you learn something. The best that can happen is you create something that's truly yours, something that reflects your values, your passion and your purpose – just like I have."

Cllr Kevin Johnston, Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and Business at Sunderland City Council, said: "Enterprising Sunderland has made such a positive contribution to the city's economy, and it's great to see start-ups like Rain or Shine take shape, offering mental health and wellness support in the region."

"We want to ensure entrepreneurs are equipped with the necessary tools to grow, and thanks to Enterprising Sunderland, Kirsty has built something that supports her family and surrounding community and I'm sure her story will inspire others to that first step in starting their own business."

Kirsty's next goal is to find a permanent home for Rain or Shine Counselling, a space where she can grow the services offered and reach even more people in need of support.

**To contact Kirsty, connect with her on LinkedIn or visit the company Facebook page. Alternatively, you can call 0191 704 2311.**



“

*...By growing  
as a person,  
I've been able  
to grow a  
business...*

Kirsty Laing





## North East could be vital to UK's bid to lead in data centre technology

**A new report has highlighted how the North East can lead the way in helping the UK develop the data centres of tomorrow.**

The Shaping the Future of Data Centres and Cloud Innovation report by Dynamo North East C.I.C. has outlined key recommendations from senior tech sector stakeholders to help the region capitalise on the global demand for data centres.

As demand for new, data-intensive technologies such as AI and cloud storage continues to increase, the Government has outlined bold ambitions to establish the UK as the best place in the world to invest in data centres and digital infrastructure.

The North East has already benefited significantly from this, securing a £10 billion investment from Blackstone for a new artificial intelligence data centre in Blyth, and those working in the sector believe there is no reason why this can't be a firing pistol for further investment in the region.

Earlier this year, the Dynamo Leadership Forum brought together a wide range of regional experts and stakeholders to explore how the region could support the Government's efforts to grow the sector. The concluding report, 'Shaping the Future of Data Centres and Cloud Innovation', captured the key themes discussed and highlighted strategic recommendations to ensure the region realises its full potential.

## CyberNorth to surge forward with Sage backing to position the NE as a vibrant global innovation hub

**North East Cyber Security Cluster organisation, CyberNorth, and Sage, the leader in accounting, financial, HR and payroll technology for small and mid-sized businesses (SMBs) recently announced a pivotal partnership to spearhead and leverage the capabilities of the North East cyber security community.**

FTSE 100 company, Sage, is heavily rooted in the region with global headquarters in Newcastle employing more than 1,200 colleagues at the Cobalt Park HQ. The partnership will see both CyberNorth and Sage join forces to accelerate the growth and innovation of the cyber security capabilities in the North East region, which include the launch of an ambitious plan for the creation of the North East Innovation Zone, which would provide a physical home for technology businesses to grow and thrive.



## Carbon opens Newcastle business hub

**Carbon, a leading provider of sustainable print and digital workflow solutions, has announced the opening of a new regional base in Newcastle, its first English office and a significant step in the company's UK expansion strategy.**

Located at Cobalt Business Park in North Tyneside, the six-figure investment in the new base marks a new chapter in Carbon's long-term growth plan and establishes a strategic foothold in North East England.

Launched to provide enhanced support to clients across Newcastle, Sunderland, Durham, Teesside and the wider region, the new regional base reinforces Carbon's commitment to delivering local service on a national scale.

Providing top quality multifunctional printers and scanners, Carbon focuses on helping businesses transition to digital through a suite of workflow solutions. The company has played a key role in helping companies streamline operations, reduce costs, and meet environmental goals through cloud-based print management and digitised systems.

Headquartered in Aberdeen, Carbon has grown significantly in recent years, achieving 150% growth and £3.8 million in revenue by the end of its 2025 financial year. The recently opened Newcastle office represents the next logical step in its expansion journey following its move into Scotland's Central Belt.



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## Mighty Dub Fest 2025

Katy Emmett MD of Mighty Dub Fest said; "Mighty Dub Fest 2025 at the Alnwick Castle was mega and for first time in 10 years, we were connected to ultrafast fibre by our sponsors Northumberland rural broadband experts Alncom. It's simply unheard of in the festival world, literally fibre to a field".



Almost 10,000 people attended the "van life" festival. Aimed at families and inclusive for disability, the festival was a great success. Thousands of multi-coloured campervans, tipis and tents basked in the heat in view of the majestic castle, river and Lilidorei. Lawrie Stevenson, Director of Alncom said; "our team worked very hard to put fibre into the pastures, consequently the traders were able to trade on chip and pin. Katy, her father and founder Bruce and their whole team were delighted and we gave back to the community. That's a win win for Alncom. Big thanks to our Team Alncom".

[www.alncom.co.uk](http://www.alncom.co.uk)





# Talking Tech and Digital

*In the latest of this popular series of features, we talk to...*

## Simon Honeywood

*Owner, Readysalted*



### What first got you into digital and technology?

Without sounding like Moss from The IT Crowd, I was always interested in technology, although I originally came from a creative background. I'm from Suffolk, so I suppose I was looking for the polar opposite of nature and countryside life. The real catalyst was a digital-focused degree course at Northumbria University, which really opened my eyes. It was the early days of the internet, fast moving and full of energy. Great fun.

### You've hit 20 years in business, what's changed and what's stayed the same?

For me, it's the amount of technology you need to stay on top of now. Just when you think you've got a handle on things, something else important lands. It never stands still. There's so much more to keep up with than when I first started. I can't even imagine how students feel trying to take it all in. Also, every business is a tech business today.

What hasn't changed is people. Old school values still matter. A face-to-face meeting and a good chat go a long way.

### What makes Readysalted different?

We're good listeners. We take the time to properly understand our clients, their users, and how their business works. Then we build websites and software that make life easier. I'm not sure if that counts as a USP, but we're good at it.

### What sectors are you seeing real momentum in?

There's real momentum in offshore wind and renewable energy at the moment, especially here in the North East. It's great to see the region becoming such an important part of the UK's transition to net zero. There's also growing interest in carbon capture, which feels like the next big area to watch.

### What kind of work gets you excited?

I enjoy working with different types of businesses and getting to know the people behind them. The part that really gets me going is joining up all the digital dots and finding smart, simple ways to make things work better. It's like a puzzle. Every company is different and at a different point in their journey. With larger organisations, the stakes are often higher and the pressure's on, but I enjoy the challenge. You might not know exactly what the end result will look like at the start, but you trust the process and get there together. With smaller businesses, it's often more consultative. You can bring your experience to the table and make a real difference. Both ends of the scale are great fun in their own way.

### What are your long-term plans for the business?

This might sound a bit generic, but steady growth is key. I've no plans to become the next Google. What matters more to me is attracting the right people and keeping our core values in place. That's really why I started all this.

We've got our roots in the North East. Newcastle is where I studied and later set up Readysalted, but we're continuing to build work in and around London too. It's a natural progression for us, and we're getting more and more opportunities there.

There's also real momentum in the renewable energy supply chain, which we're already involved in.

### What advice would you give someone starting a digital business?

It's easy to build a lovely digital shop front and think the job's done. But it's just the start. You've still got to get out there, talk to people, and build trust. At the end of the day, people buy from people.

### When you're not working, how do you unwind?

I'm not great at switching off, to be honest. But when I do step away, you'll usually find me out by the coast or in the gym. It helps balance out all the time sat at a desk. That, and a decent cup of coffee of course.

[www.readysalted.co.uk](http://www.readysalted.co.uk)



“

*...What hasn't changed is people. Old school values still matter....*

Simon Honeywood



# Building digital products for all

*By Jo Larby, Accessibility Community Lead, Leighton*

## The overlooked link between accessibility, innovation and customer loyalty.

**Accessibility is still too often treated as a late-stage fix. Something that gets bolted on after launch. A checkbox for compliance. But this mindset is increasingly risky and outdated.**

With new regulation raising the bar and expectations rising, the stakes are higher than ever. But ensuring accessibility should be about more than avoiding fines. Building accessible digital products from the start leads to better outcomes across the board. It strengthens user experience, improves code quality, reduces rework and helps teams move faster.

Most importantly, it makes your product usable by more people, in more situations, which builds trust and long-term customer loyalty.

### Change is coming. Ready or not?

The regulatory landscape is shifting. The European Accessibility Act (EAA) is now in effect, requiring many private sector organisations to meet clear accessibility standards across digital services. In the UK, the public sector already faces legal obligations under the Public Sector Bodies Accessibility Regulations, with further changes expected. Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) continue to shape what "good" looks like in digital products, and organisations that fall short risk legal, reputational and commercial consequences.

The risk of non-compliance is growing. Beyond legal penalties, there's the potential for reputational damage and lost trust. Compliance should be seen as the baseline, not as the goal. Forward-thinking organisations treat accessibility as a strategic priority, not a last-minute fix.

### Designing and building for all = better for everyone

Accessibility isn't just about supporting users with disabilities. It benefits everyone. Captions help people in noisy environments. High-contrast designs improve visibility in bright sunlight. Voice control supports hands-free use. These features, originally developed with accessibility in mind, quickly become everyday essentials.

Inclusive products are often simpler, clearer and more intuitive. That's because designing for a broader range of needs encourages teams to remove friction, focus on usability and reduce complexity. The result is a better experience for everyone.

Customers notice when a product just works. It builds trust. It shows that a business has thought about real people in real-world contexts, and that builds loyalty.

### From culture to code

Accessibility isn't one person's job. It's a shared responsibility. When it's built into the culture of the business, not just the code, the results are stronger across the board.

Embedding accessibility starts at the design stage and should include users with lived experience where possible. That means using semantic structure to support screen readers, ensuring colour contrast meets readability standards, and enabling full

keyboard navigation. In front-end development, it continues with meaningful ARIA roles, logical tab order, and a mindset of progressive enhancement.

Testing also plays a critical role. Automated checks catch common issues early, while manual testing ensures the experience works for real users, not just systems.

Cross-functional ownership is key. Designers, developers, testers and delivery leads all contribute to accessibility. When everyone is on board, accessibility stops being seen as a blocker and starts being what it truly is, a driver of better performance, faster delivery, and more resilient products.

### Faster time to value and reduced technical debt

When accessibility is considered from the outset, teams avoid the cost, delay and frustration of retrofitting fixes later. It's far easier, and more efficient, to build it in than to bolt it on.

Accessible products often result in cleaner, more consistent code. That means fewer bugs, smoother handovers between teams, and reduced maintenance overhead in the long run. These foundations make products easier to scale and adapt over time.

Good accessibility practices naturally align with solid engineering, scalable front-end architecture, and effective QA processes. They encourage teams to think ahead, simplify complexity and design systems that work for everyone from day one.

### Unlocking market reach and innovation

More than one billion people globally live with some form of disability. That's a huge, often underserved audience with real buying power. By prioritising accessibility, businesses can widen their reach, improve brand perception, and tap into new markets that they should already be catering for.

Designing for a broader range of needs also encourages innovation. It highlights gaps in existing experiences that impact more users than you might expect. What starts as an edge case often reveals a universal issue.

Beyond commercial benefits, accessibility signals ethical leadership. It matters to employees, investors and customers who increasingly expect companies to act with purpose and inclusion in mind.

### Build differently, build better

Accessibility isn't an extra feature. It's part of the foundation of any well-built digital product. When it's embedded in culture, process and code, it strengthens quality, improves experience and unlocks long-term value.

Inclusive products are smarter, more resilient, and more commercially successful. Start early, build with intent, and you'll create products that work better for everyone.

[leighton.com](https://leighton.com)



“

*...Accessibility  
isn't one person's  
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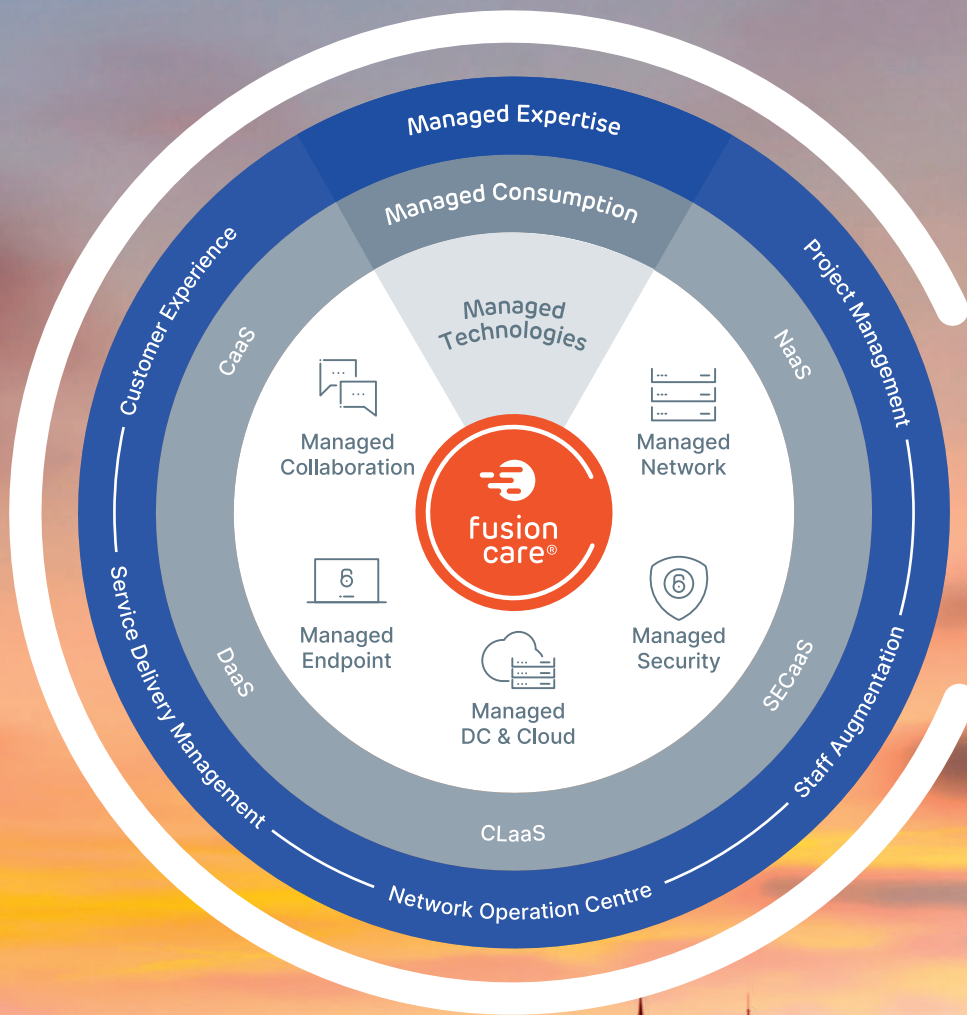
*Jo Larby*





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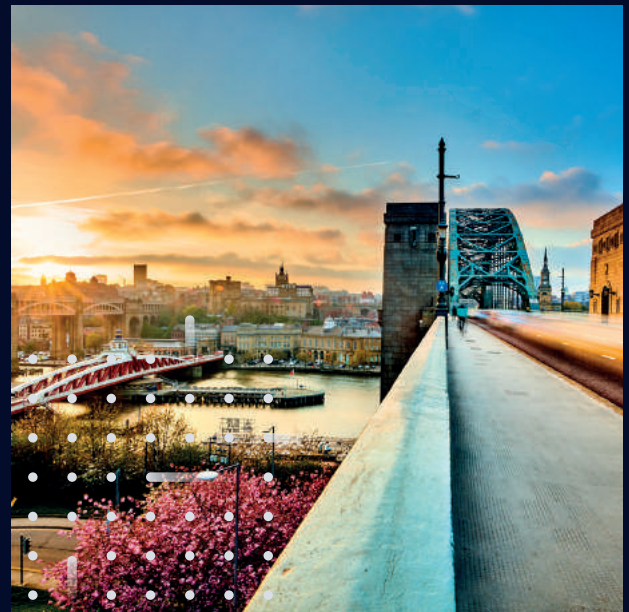
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George Young  
(Director at SOS Group)

## Green solutions to improve businesses

Gateshead-based office technology company, SOS Group, is helping businesses and organisations towards their sustainability goals by supplying practical solutions to improve efficiency.

**Key to this is their partnership with Epson, that brings the addition of heat-free business inkjet technology to the SOS Group solutions portfolio, supporting clients to reduce their energy usage and waste.**

George Young, a director at SOS Group, explains: "Every workplace or organisation is looking closely at areas where efficiency can be improved from an environmental and cost perspective.

"For our clients, our role is to simplify that process and provide solutions that fulfil both objectives.

"Many businesses labour too long with older technology and devices that were simply not designed with modern energy

efficiency standards in mind. Outdated office equipment consumes significantly more electricity, resulting in higher energy bills and a larger carbon footprint.

"Switching to newer, energy-efficient models like Epson's heat-free technology can dramatically lower operating costs and support sustainability goals."

Epson's heat-free inkjet printers offer significant cost-saving and environmental benefits by consuming dramatically less energy than equivalent laser printers, using fewer consumables, producing lower CO2 emissions and requiring less intervention from engineers.

Recently, Newcastle Eagles began using Epson's heat-free business inkjet technology at the Vertu Motors Arena as part of their commitment to reducing environmental impact and waste at both the basketball club and the Eagles Community Foundation.

And now North East workplace training specialists, UTraining, have turned to SOS Group to help reduce their own energy usage and associated carbon emissions.

UTraining works with companies to support employee development and boost workplace productivity and recognised a need to improve their own environmental performance.

Like an increasing number of SOS Group clients, they were attracted by the many benefits offered by Epson's heat-free inkjet technology.





L-R: Andrew Skelton (Director at SOS Group) and Darren Bain (Director at UTraining)

Darren Bain, Director of Utraining, says: "We're committed to reducing our carbon footprint in line with our company values of sustainability and low carbon practices."

"Working with SOS Group, we were able to specifically identify areas where improvements could be made, and this new print technology is helping us significantly reduce our energy and consumables usage."

"It's a simple but very effective step to take and we're now looking at using SOS Group's zero-waste recycling programme to give all our used ink and toner cartridges a new life."

Many printer cartridges are unable to be remanufactured, so SOS Group's zero-waste recycling programme enables the creation of new products from what were previously 'single-use' plastics.

Plastics and metals from all makes and models of printer consumables can be separated and cleaned ready for re-use ensuring a zero-to-landfill process.

It provides a specialist solution for used printer and copier consumables and has significant environmental benefits including reduced landfill waste, resource conservation and lowered pollution.

HSE compliant, it is a practical, reliable and sustainable solution to waste products and is becoming increasingly popular with SOS Group clients.

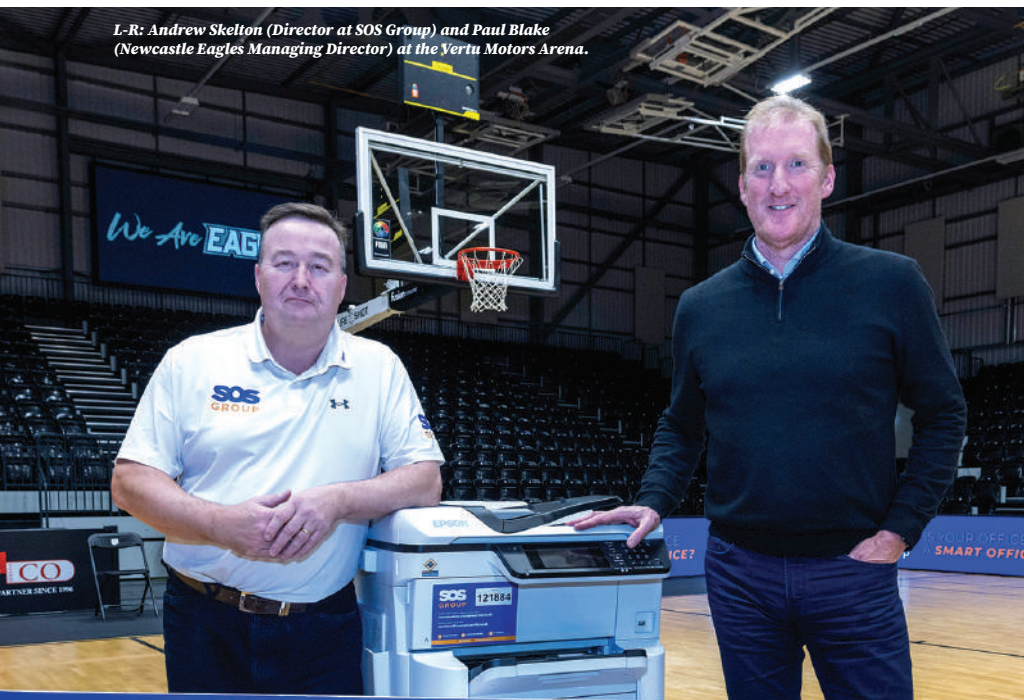
Established in 2002, SOS Group is an award-winning office technology company facilitating business requirements across all sectors.

Based on the Team Valley and specialising in providing copy, print, scan solutions, the company has grown into an SME that counts multinationals within its established client base and the company helps deliver internationally significant sporting and political party events.

Its own growth was achieved by creating successful, long-term client relationships and each of the company's directors has a passion to help others do the same, working closely with small businesses and supporting start-ups as they grow.

George Young adds: "Our aim is always to work with clients to support their own sustainability goals and to promote innovation in energy usage and waste management technologies."

"Be that within a major sporting arena or at a workplace training provider, we can make a difference to environmental performance and business efficiency very simply for the benefit of us all."



L-R: Andrew Skelton (Director at SOS Group) and Paul Blake (Newcastle Eagles Managing Director) at the Vertu Motors Arena.

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Chris Carroll

## Resolving your web issues

Chris Carroll,  
Managing Director of The  
Resolved Group talks of  
cyber-security issues.

### It has been one of the most damaging events in the history of retail.

The M&S cyber-attack caused sales to plummet – with profits expected to be down by around £300m – and the company's reputation dented.

The damage has been colossal. However, M&S won't be the last British business targeted by hackers.

From a cyber-security perspective, we've never lived in more dangerous times.

The threats are ever-growing and ever-present: Phishing, ransomware, supply chain attacks and malware all pose grave risks to the security and finances of a business – while the emergence of AI will only further muddy these murky waters.

As a global retail giant with a multi-billion-pound turnover, M&S was an obvious target for a cyber-attack.

But don't be fooled into thinking hackers won't target smaller companies.

Government data shows that 612,000 business – equivalent of 43 per cent of companies – identified cyber security breaches or attacks in the past 12 months.

With online sales doubling this decade, and 30 per cent of our total spending done on the web, businesses relying on apps, systems and e-commerce platforms to trade need to ensure their systems are up-to-date and resilient.

At The Resolved Group, we help clients big and small to ensure their platforms run smoothly – without the need for costly rebuilds – and that can be everything apps and e-commerce to CRM or entire websites. Even companies using WordPress websites – and we've seen first-hand across the North East how hackers can have them in their sight.

Often the problem was easily avoidable; One common cause is that WordPress users simply didn't take half an hour to update the site's plugins.

For an independent SME, that can be catastrophic; With one local client who didn't update their plugins, our team spent a week following a getting their site live again post-cyber attack.

For M&S, losing £300m is crushing. However, for a small business that is dependent on their digital platforms, losing a week's trade can be make or break.

For 25 years, I've helped businesses safeguard their platforms. Through The Resolved Group – which started in Hartlepool – we're now trusted by companies globally to do just that.

Through Resolve Beyond – one arm of The Resolved Group, – we also offer a maintenance service to ensure your systems stay ahead of any threats. It's not just about security – it's about peace of mind.

Proactivity not only avoids bigger clean-

up bills, it also prevents the kind of costly downtime that can hurt a business.

So, here are five simple things you can do to avoid website security issues before they become serious:

### Keep everything up to date

Outdated plugins or platforms are the easiest way in for hackers. Keeping your site and tools updated is one of the most effective things you can do – and one of the first things we take care of in our support plans.

### Don't cut corners on hosting

It's tempting to go cheap, but poor hosting means more risk, slower sites, and less support when things go wrong. Good hosting with daily backups is your safety net.

### Limit who has access

Not everyone needs admin rights. Use strong passwords, keep access to a minimum, and turn on two-factor authentication. Most breaches come from someone getting through a door that should've been locked.

### Scan and monitor regularly.

You can't fix what you don't know is broken. Regular scans and monitoring help spot problems early – long before they turn into major headaches.

### Stay ahead, not behind

It's always better (and cheaper) to be proactive than reactive. Waiting for a problem usually ends up in lost time, lost money, and plenty of stress.

[www.resolvedgroup.co.uk](http://www.resolvedgroup.co.uk)



# Let's talk services

What we actually do at Phonetic Digital.

**You may have clocked our banner stands or even seen us pop up on the big screens around Sunderland talking about websites, marketing and training. Simple enough right? That's what we specialise in. But, each one of these areas is huge, so let's break it down and look into the services we offer within each sector.**

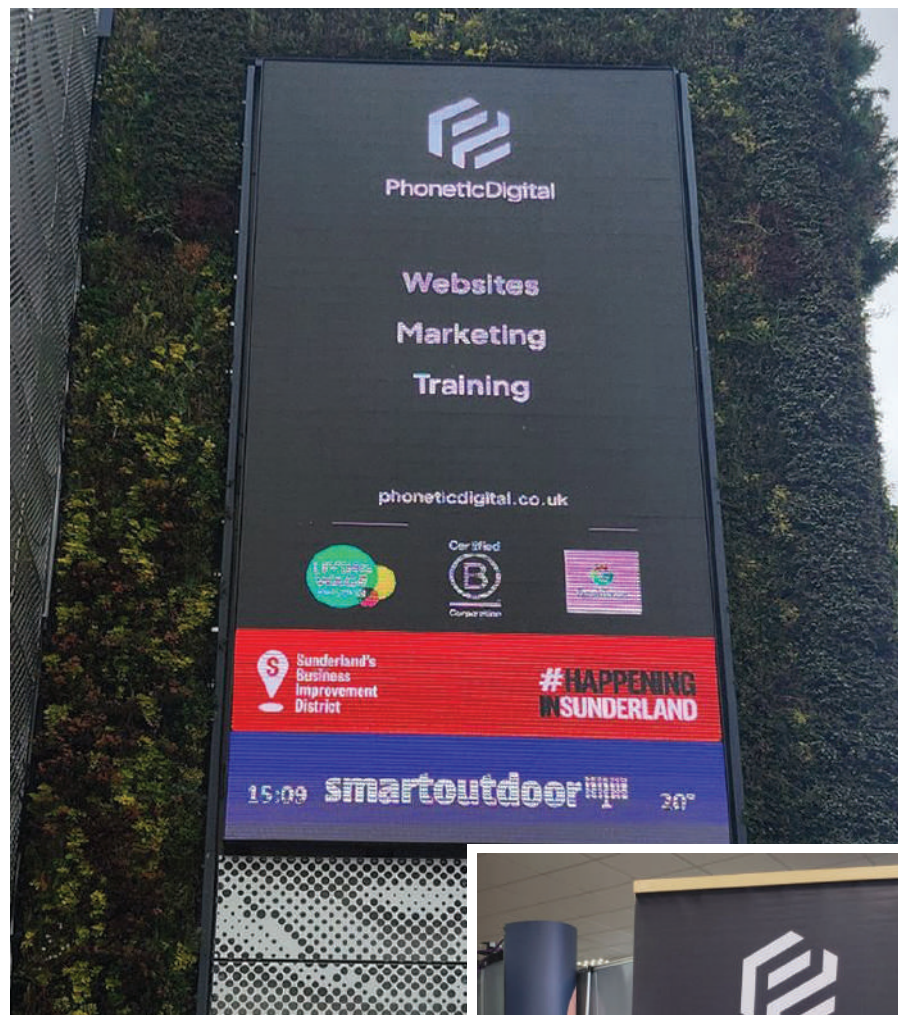
Whether you're looking for a completely bespoke website or complex web applications, our team of experts can build something to suit your needs. While our banner stands say 'websites' we do much more than that, we create digital experiences that embody clarity, purpose, and innovation.

We could tell you all about our work building websites, but we think it's better to just show you. We've included some real life examples of the work we've done with previous clients that really showcases our ability to meet your custom needs.

GFW, a leading expert in the Residential, Commercial, Development and Rural property sectors, approached us for a new website that could match the scale and size of their business. Normally, the plugin Property Hive is used to build sites for estate agents, but for this design we just used Property Hive as a starting platform. GFW needed more from their site, so we built a custom solution on top. We took a hybrid approach, combining Property Hive and our custom solution to create website features that would support GFW's needs.

Oculus HR approached us in September last year, looking for a revamped website that would expand their online presence and reflect their vision. Alongside the design and build of their new site, we also took on the task of creating the content for each new page. Working with the Oculus HR team, we made sure the messaging hit the right balance, with every word being written with clarity and SEO in mind. Our goal was to make sure their brand voice came through clearly with content helping guide users effortlessly through the site.

Website accessibility matters to us. Every website we build comes with the option to include enhanced accessibility features as standard, because we believe the web should work for everyone.



Creating brilliant websites is just the start, once we've built them we can also help maintain them, offering proactive website management.

We can handle all the intricacies of site maintenance, monitoring security or even optimising your site for performance reasons. Our proactive approach anticipates needs and adapts swiftly, making sure your site stays relevant and resilient. Even if your website wasn't built by us, we still offer website management. A well looked after site is better for your users, your brand and your peace of mind.

But where do our marketing services fit into this? Well, our team has over a century of collective expertise in the digital world. We can help with all of your digital needs. From SEO and PPC to social media and content marketing, our comprehensive services are designed to increase your visibility and drive engagement in a competitive digital market.

We're all about getting stuck into the data, we specialise in transforming complex data sets into clear, actionable insights. We go beyond basic analytics, instead implementing bespoke tracking solutions through Google Analytics 4 (GA4), Google Tag Manager and more.

Whilst we have extensive knowledge on these tools, not everyone does, we understand that diving into tools like Google Analytics 4 (GA4) or Tag Manager



can feel daunting, especially if you have no previous experience.

We offer an introductory and advanced GA4 course and an introductory Google Tag Manager course. All training courses are designed to show you how to find the data that matters most to your business.

***Intrigued? If you want to get in contact about any of the services we offer, just drop us an email at [hello.phoneticdigital.co.uk](mailto:hello.phoneticdigital.co.uk)***

***So next time you see websites, marketing and training on a banner stand or screen, know it's not just a catchy tagline. It's what we do best.***

**[phoneticdigital.co.uk](https://phoneticdigital.co.uk)**





## Perfect Office for Sail

After a decade of stories, interviews, and scenic riverside meetings, one of the North East's most unusual office spaces is now up for sale. Highlights PR's floating office — a Viking 24 cabin cruiser — has been a familiar and much-loved sight on the River Tyne, hosting more than 500 guests during its ten years in service.

Keith Newman, founder of Highlights PR, has operated his business from the boat since 2014. "This has been the best office ever and I will miss her," he said. "But the time has come for someone else to enjoy her."

The vessel, which comfortably sleeps four, features a fully functional galley and has recently undergone a full engine service. The hull has been anti-fouled and new accessories have been fitted, ensuring she's ready for her next adventure.

"She'll make a great working boat for someone, or even a unique holiday home on a canal or lake," Keith added.

The boat has been more than just an office — it's been a talking point, a retreat, and a creative hub that reflects Highlights PR's innovative spirit. As she sets sail toward a new future, there's no doubt this well-loved cruiser will continue to inspire, entertain, and provide a warm welcome on the water.

**Enquiries about the sale are now being welcomed at [www.boatpoint.co.uk/boats/viking-24-high-line-widebeam-834765](http://www.boatpoint.co.uk/boats/viking-24-high-line-widebeam-834765)**

## North East Content Agency Uses AI to Tell Global Stories with Local Flair

Contentifai, a Gateshead based marketing agency founded by creative strategist and copywriter Jeremy Rodgers, is making waves from the North East to Silicon Valley with its innovative approach to content creation.

Specialising in telling complex stories simply, the agency utilises the latest AI tools alongside human creativity to help businesses better communicate their values, elevate user experience, and drive measurable results.

With a background in B2B storytelling for high-growth industries like AI, blockchain, and fintech, Jeremy Rodgers brings a unique blend of technical insight and narrative clarity. His work is rooted in the belief that effective content should engage audiences and reflect a brand's core purpose across every digital touchpoint.

At the heart of Contentifai's approach is the strategic use of AI. Rodgers has been following the development of AI closely since the release of GPT-3.5 in late 2022 and sees it not as a threat, but a powerful tool that complements the creative process.

"We've never seen AI as a replacement for creativity," Rodgers



explains. "It's an ally. Used properly, AI lets us analyse more data, respond faster to user needs, and build stronger brand narratives. Not all AI tools are useful. Indeed, I think most of us can spot poor quality AI-generated content immediately. But when AI tools are used carefully and combined with expert intent, the results can be far greater than the sum of their parts."

While based in Gateshead, Contentifai serves clients globally including in the US, Israel, and across Europe to help them stay ahead of market trends and connect with their audiences more effectively.



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## Hollywood comes to the North East and Kaleidoscope were there to capture it all!

A few months back, Craig Hawkes—creative mastermind and MD of Kaleidoscope got a surprise call that most filmmakers only dream of. His former film lecturer, the brilliant Tina Gharavi called to ask him if he wanted to shoot behind-the-scenes footage for her new movie! A movie with a stellar cast including Jennifer Saunders, Jack Whitehall, and Lily Allen? Craig's answer was a very enthusiastic YES!

Tina, an acclaimed American-Iranian director who's called the North East home on and off for over 30 years, is known for her bold storytelling and passion for the region. Now a full-time lecturer at Newcastle University, she was determined to shoot her latest film, *Night & Day*, right here in the North East—and she fought hard to make it happen.

For Kaleidoscope, the North East's leading video and film agency, this was a dream gig. Big productions like this don't roll into town every day, so being asked to join the crew was a massive honour.

Their role? Capture all the magic behind the scenes, the real, raw moments you don't see in the final cut. This exclusive content helps fans connect with the film in a more personal way, and of course, makes for some top-notch social media teasers.

And the North East clearly made quite the impression on the cast. Jennifer Saunders gushed: "I love it—honestly, I think everything should be made up here. The countryside is perfect, there's so much that's unique about it. The coastline is spectacular, you've got these wild Northumbrian landscapes, castles galore, country houses galore, and Newcastle, which has the most extraordinary architecture."

So if you're thinking about creating a film or video that tells your story in a bold and beautiful way—whether it's for your brand, business, or next big project—you don't need a Hollywood budget. Just drop Craig a line.

craig@kaleidoscopecfa.com  
www.kaleidoscopecfa.com

## Marriott Communications CEO, Samuel Marriott-Dowding, shortlisted for Great British Entrepreneur Award 2025

Marriott Communications is delighted to announce that their Founder and CEO, Samuel Marriott-Dowding, has been shortlisted in the prestigious Young Entrepreneur of the Year category at the Great British Entrepreneur Awards 2025.

Since establishing the agency in 2021, Marriott Communications has seen rapid growth - securing 34+ strategic clients across various sectors across the UK, consulting with The United Nations, supporting Bhatt Murphy during the Parliamentary UK COVID Inquiry, launching international creative campaigns, and expanding operations into France and the U.S.

This nomination reflects the Agency's big dreams, bold ambitions, and commitment to innovative, socially responsible communications.

Marriott Communications has previously won PR Agency of the Year in the UK



Enterprise Awards, Inspiring Scotland's Changemaker Award, and Samuel Marriott-Dowding has also been awarded FSB North East's Young Entrepreneur of the Year 2023. The Great British Entrepreneur Awards ceremony is scheduled for November 2025, spotlighting Britain's most dynamic and innovative leaders.



## SmartOutdoor and Redu Group launch 'Smart Offers'

**Smart Outdoor, one of the UK's leading Digital Out-of-Home (DOOH) media providers, and Redu Group, the digital marketing and voucher powerhouse behind Ashleigh Money Saver, have joined forces to launch Smart Offers—a powerful new solution giving brands access to nationwide digital screen advertising with no upfront cash investment.**

Brands can now exchange their products, services, or unsold vouchers for digital media space across Smart Outdoor and Redu's extensive network—spanning over 1000 DOOH screens, social media channels, email databases, and an established influencer network. These deals are sold directly to consumers via Redu's trusted Ashleigh Money Saver platform—home to an engaged audience of over 4 million UK shoppers. The revenue generated from voucher sales

directly funds DOOH campaigns—ensuring brands receive full-value media exposure, regardless of how many vouchers are redeemed.

A strategic collaboration between media and commerce leaders at the heart of Smart Offers is a true partnership—combining Smart Outdoor's premium digital screen network with Redu Group's proven ecommerce and social marketing power. Redu Group brings not only Ashleigh Money Saver's loyal and engaged audience but also a full funnel of support—handling everything from consumer sales and fulfilment to influencer marketing and paid digital campaigns. Redu also powers valuable firstparty data capture to fuel ongoing brand CRM strategies.

"This partnership levels the playing field for brands," said Angela Goggins, Managing Director of Redu Group. "Together, we're giving brands an entirely new way to reach millions—through a media model that sells product, builds brand awareness, and generates usable customer data, all without upfront spend."

Mark Catterall, CEO of Smart Outdoor, added: "Smart Offers removes the traditional cost barrier from DOOH advertising. By combining our network with Redu's commercial engine, we're delivering a fully integrated, performance-driven media solution for brands of every size."



Time to turn up the *heat* on your marketing!  
We'll bring the *flavour*.

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Rudby Hall

## Discover the true potential of your business with SASS media

PR firm SASS media holds Discovery Days at its Teesside-based office to delve into a company's story and vision for growth to curate a bespoke PR strategy and content calendar.

Recently, the new custodians of Rudby Hall, North Yorkshire joined Sarah and Sarah at SASS media HQ for a Discovery Day to define goals, brainstorm content ideas for press releases, website and social media, and create a bespoke strategy to increase brand awareness with innovative promotion.

When Suze Chomo and Mark Booth first walked through the doors of Grade II listed Rudby Hall, they were absolutely smitten.



Sarah Dale and Sarah Walker



A hidden gem located between Yarm and Stokesley in the North Yorkshire countryside, Rudby Hall was originally built as a country house for King William IV's daughter and stepping through the grand porch into the hall makes every visitor feel like royalty too.

Behind its grand doorway are a wealth of secret doorways, opulent rooms and stunning views across the 10 acres of private grounds. It is the perfect place to enjoy luxury, serenity and history, however, many people across the North-east have never even stepped inside, something which the new custodians want to change.

The couple, pictured with Sarah and Sarah right, took over the hall in January and have been busy behind the scenes curating a vision to futureproof the historic hall and widen its offering from its previous use of hosting weddings and exclusive hire to opening as a boutique hotel and creating luxury retreats for guests to relax and re-energise. They have also launched a Friends of Rudby Hall group for people with an interest in the hall.

When Suze and Mark gave us a tour of the hotel, we could see the true potential of their vision and they joined us at our office for a Discovery Day. While the strategy days follow an itinerary exploring different



aspects of support we can provide, there is also an opportunity to go with the flow of where an idea may take us! We were soon brainstorming ideas and devising a PR strategy and content plan for the next six months, and planning two staging day events for the couple to meet business owners whose products and services would complement the new retreats planned to launch later this year.

**For more information,  
email: [hello@rudbyhall.com](mailto:hello@rudbyhall.com) or  
visit [www.rudbyhall.com](http://www.rudbyhall.com)**

## What is a Discovery Day?

**A Discovery Day is an opportunity for clients to join us – SASS media directors Sarah Walker and Sarah Dale – at our office in Thornaby, Teesside, for a face-to-face PR strategy day.**

Prior to the day, we will send out a questionnaire to identify your PR requirements, goals, what you do already and what you would like to achieve. The day runs from 10am to 4pm and lunch and refreshments are provided. We create an itinerary for the day which is bespoke to each client and following the Discovery Day, we write a tailored, six-month PR strategy plan with a calendar of press releases and other content.

### Would it help me?

In a word, yes! Discovery Days are a great way of delving deeper into your business and exploring how a new PR strategy can help you boost brand awareness and reputation in your field and to customers. We can give you an objective, professional assessment.

We can explore your goals, what you need, what you already do in terms of PR and marketing, what is working for you and what isn't. We can then show you the range of services we provide – from writing press releases and magazine features for the media to ghost-writing blogs, creating social media content and dealing with challenging times with our crisis communications expertise.

### Why choose SASS media?

Our retainer clients benefit from our experience and expertise on both sides of the media in journalism and public relations. As an SME too, we also know the challenges and triumphs of running a business.

SASS media is an award-winning business and every client benefits from director-level PR support. We also take an agency approach when required and team up with experts in other complementary fields to provide our clients with a joined-up approach to their business development and growth. We also have a team of highly experienced freelance writers to support our client portfolio.

However, don't just take our word for it – check out our client testimonials in the Clients section on our website!

**To arrange a chat about booking a Discovery Day or to find out more about our services, visit [www.sassmedialtd.co.uk](http://www.sassmedialtd.co.uk) or email: [sarah.dale@sassmedialtd.co.uk](mailto:sarah.dale@sassmedialtd.co.uk)**







**Veronica Swindale FCIM MCIPR**  
Founder and Managing Director at nesma

## Build teams that grow

Why smart marketing leaders invest in skills, not just courses

**New platforms emerge quarterly, customer behaviours change overnight, and AI tools revolutionise how we work. Amidst all this chaos, one thing is clear: if you're not investing in developing your team's skills, you're falling behind.**

Which is why we are developing our business to help you stay ahead.

As a marketing leader, you are not merely running campaigns but building capability. This entails far more than merely enrolling individuals in a few training courses. You are working to reduce attrition, enhance performance, retain talent, and create award-winning teams, all while managing diverse learning styles, personal ambitions, and availability constraints.

So, where do you start?

### **Your skills toolbox: More than just training**

Forward-thinking leaders are moving beyond a one-size-fits-all approach to learning. They are embracing a combined strategy that includes personal and team skills, analytics, knowledge and action training, and ongoing coaching. This trio fosters genuine performance, adaptability, and hopefully a commitment to continuous learning.

And to do it well, you need insight. What are your team's learning styles? What motivates them? What are their ambitions? Understanding this allows you to provide flexible, appealing learning options that align with current attitudes in the workplace. A Gen Z is not a millennial and

has a different learning attitude.

### **Step one: Training lays the foundation**

Training is where it all begins.

Microlearning, masterclasses, boot camps, and qualifications are designed to enhance knowledge and confidence. Whether it's refreshing skills in SEO, launching Meta Ads, or mastering automation, training ensures that your team stays current.

Why it works:

- Delivers up-to-date, industry-relevant knowledge
- Standardises skills across your team
- Builds confidence with structured how-to guidance

But let's be honest — training alone may be insufficient.

### **Step two: Practical learning builds confidence**

This is where action-based learning comes into play. The best training is hands-on—live briefs, simulated challenges, and platform walkthroughs. Your team learns by doing, not merely observing. This serves as the bridge between learning and execution, and it's where your team can test, experiment, and develop aptitude in a safe environment.



**Step three:****Coaching turns knowledge into momentum**

Effective coaching bridges the gap between theoretical understanding and practical application. It transforms newly acquired knowledge into actionable skills, enabling team members to approach real-world challenges with confidence and agility. Coaching doesn't just reiterate; it reinforces learning through application, creating a continuous improvement and growth cycle.

Coaching aids marketers in applying new skills to real-time situations. It fosters reflection, enhances confidence, and offers consistent feedback. It is tailored, personal, and essential.

Why coaching matters:

- Helps embed learning in real work
- Promotes problem-solving and smart decision-making
- Encourages accountability and continuous improvement
- Supports creativity, resilience, and professional growth

Coaching isn't about having all the answers — it's about asking the right questions and guiding your team to discover their own. When done effectively, it helps learning to stick and evolve. Add training and coaching together, and you will benefit from real, tangible growth

**The Leader's Role: From instructor to enabler**

In this new learning culture, your role changes too. You're not the expert in everything (and you don't need to be). You're the enabler who builds the environment where learning thrives.

Your job is to:

- Identify skills gaps and curate relevant training
- Create space for practical application (not just courses)
- Facilitate access to coaching and peer support
- Foster a culture of experimentation and feedback

Most importantly, trust your team. Empower them to take ownership of their development and make learning an integral part of the everyday rhythm of work.

**Enter SkillsPartner™**

That's where SkillsPartner™ from nesma becomes essential — your vital leadership tool for enhancing marketing team capability.

We offer over 100 live, online, and on-demand programmes from reputable marketing educators and practitioners. Whether your team seeks bespoke training, qualifications, bootcamps, day courses or lunchtime learning, we have it covered.

We work with you to:

- Understand your team's goals
- Create tailored learning pathways
- Offer flexible, cost-effective, and self-directed options

Moreover, our SkillsPartner™ programme provides free and discounted places, on-demand coaching, and even leadership mentoring—all customised to suit your team's unique requirements.

**Final thought: Build a team that grows as well as knows**

In marketing, knowledge from yesterday becomes obsolete quickly. The best teams are innovative, adaptive, resilient, and dedicated to continuous learning.

If you want your team to keep up and lead the way, start with skills. Combine structured learning with coaching and action, making curiosity contagious and the driving force of your team's success.

Ready to build your future-ready team?

**Contact Jen Lorimer or Veronica Swindale at 07734 222 254 or [jen.lorimer@nesma.co.uk](mailto:jen.lorimer@nesma.co.uk), and let's start the conversation.**

***Because the best marketing teams don't just know more, they do more, better.***

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Jen Lorimer



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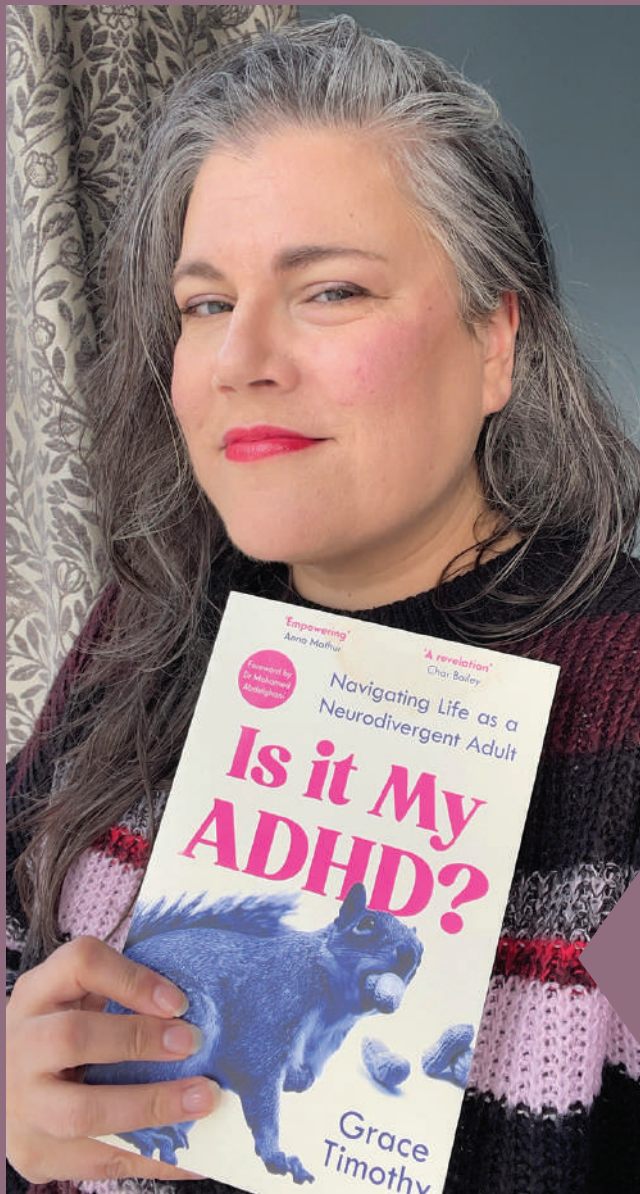
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# ...We're all going on a summer holiday..

*Highlights PR's Keith Newman asked some of his RADAR members to tell us...  
What's the best book, podcast, or event you'd recommend this summer?*



If I'm on a cruise, I love to sit out on the balcony with a book about the sea – it really helps me get immersed in the experience. One fabulous read is *Flares Up*, which tells the incredible true story of two rowers' near-impossible journey across the Atlantic. I know one of the rowers, Phil Pugh, so that made it even more special.

I'm also a fan of paranormal podcasts. In fact, I host my own – *Phantom Frequencies UK* – where we share extraordinary stories from ordinary people. It's the perfect blend of mystery and real-life intrigue, great for holiday listening!

**Keith Newman, [www.highlightspr.co.uk](http://www.highlightspr.co.uk)**

I would recommend *Is It My ADHD?* by Grace Timothy. Having been diagnosed at the age of 49 with ADHD, this book has been a revelation. It's tough coming to terms with 'what might have been' had the system been in place to diagnose and help me navigate my neurodivergence. But I am all about making peace with the past and focussing on the present to fully enjoy what the future holds. Diagnosis has helped me find my purpose. My purpose is to help the next generation of neurodivergent creatives, to give them a sense of hope and a clear pathway to a future where they can thrive. I do this through developing creative projects through my company Creative Heritage Studios CiC. You will find us on social media, and we also have a website and a Substack publication if you would like to find out what we are doing next.

**Corinne Lewis Ward, [www.powderbutterfly.com](http://www.powderbutterfly.com)**

When I go on holiday I like to buy a new book in the departure lounge. You have time to check out the new releases and look at the bargain offers, while the time passes until you board your flight. Then once airborne you can settle back with your new book and enjoy your holiday.

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**John Dixon, [www.dbyg.co.uk](http://www.dbyg.co.uk)**





This is a tough one as there are so many good ones to be honest! When I was away in Skye on holiday recently, I listened to a podcast called The Last Podcast on the Left which was good. I also like Phantom Frequencies and have appeared on an episode which was great fun!

Book wise as community radio is my hobby, I'm currently reading 'Radio Secrets' by David Lloyd which is crammed full of advice by professional broadcasters, so I think I'll learn lots. I've also just bought 'A Little Book of Leadership Lessons' written by the CEO of St. Oswald's Hospice, Steph Edusei so looking forward to diving into that.

Events wise, I love a festival and Blyth Live is coming up as I write but at the very tail end of Summer, I'm getting tickets for Georgie Carroll, Saturday 27th Sep 2025 at Alnwick Playhouse, Northumberland, if you haven't seen her online check her out, she is laugh out loud funny and full of heart! I also had the best time seeing Sam Fender at SJP with my youngest, check out our smiles!

Kate Watson, [www.askmrswatson.com](http://www.askmrswatson.com)



Last month our RADAR members appeared on BBC TV, BBC Radio, Local TV and many magazines and newspapers. To find out more about the benefits of becoming a RADAR member, contact [keith@highlightspr.co.uk](mailto:keith@highlightspr.co.uk) or call Keith on 07814 397951.

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## Rooted in the North: Supporting local print and people

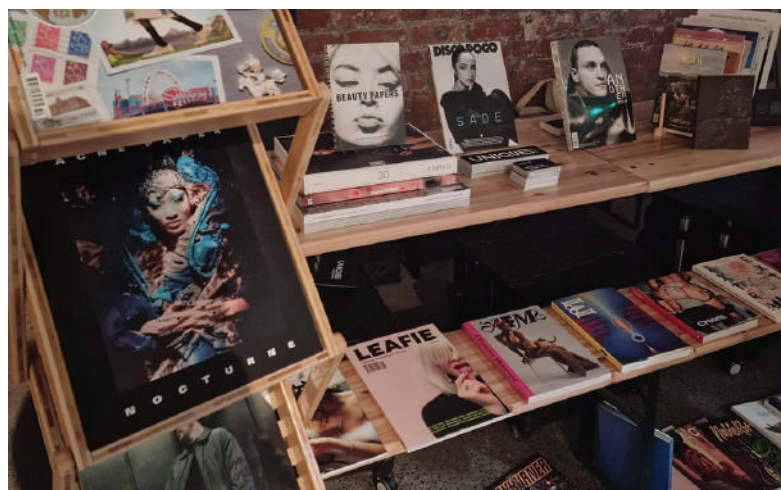
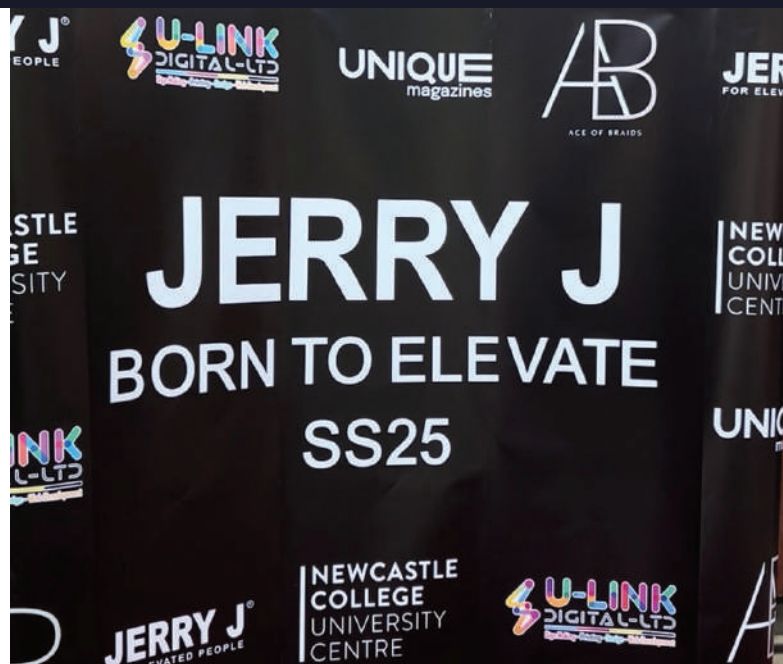
Our hub here in the North East of England is all about two things: print and people.

We strive to make this space one of exploration and opportunity – especially for our local community.

As Northerners ourselves, one thing we recognise is the limited opportunity here in the North, something you may have heard us speak about before. But instead of dwelling on what's lacking, we decided to be the change – the kind that fuels our current and aspiring creatives to move forward with their goals and budding future.

When Darkus magazine reached out to explore the possibility of stocking their printed magazine in our store, we were thrilled to be on board but even more excited when we learned this would be a milestone moment for them. We became the only store in the UK to stock their publication, and in doing so, gave them the platform to expand into more locations. People could now buy Darkus physically, right here from our mag room.

Since then, the founder of Darkus has been back to collaborate with us on social media and in video interviews, diving deeper into the story behind the publication and his wider mission. During our chat, he described himself as a “dreamer” something that really stood out to me. Many of us Northerners have the passion and grit to get things done, but when





opportunities feel scarce, those dreams can seem just out of reach. We want to help change that mindset. We want to support local people with big ambitions and be part of their journey.

But it's not just established publishers we support — we love being part of the very beginning of creative stories too. Recently, we met Meg, a Northumbria University fashion graduate, who decided to turn her final year project into her first-ever publication. It's a fresh take on the world of print, spotlighting local talent and ideas from the working-class economy, and proudly embracing Northern culture and identity.

As the first store to stock her magazine 'Radge', we feel honoured to be part of something so bold and exciting. It speaks to us deeply — especially as proud Geordies — and we're thrilled to support her as she continues her journey into bold print.

Our commitment goes beyond publishers it extends to the whole community. We've visited local colleges and universities with our pop-up stalls and a wide selection of print, offering inspiration and support to students. Recently, we donated magazines to Newcastle College students on art and design courses, giving them affordable access to quality resources that spark creativity. Shortly after, we became an official sponsor for the college — excited to get involved in their future events and support the next generation of creatives.



In December, we attended an event for Northumbria's Magazine Society, sharing the spirit of local students and offering a range of inspirational material to help them take their next steps in creativity.

We've also celebrated local talent at events like the Born To Elevate fashion show, where one local designer showcased work honouring his Gambian heritage through British contemporary fashion. His mission to celebrate community and creative talent in the Northeast completely aligned with our own values.

These are just some of the ways we support our local creative communities — with even more to come. We're currently connecting with local charitable organisations, including Changing Lives, who do vital work tackling homelessness in the region, to see if there are ways, we can support local even more.

We may seem small, but our voice is huge — and we'll always use it to champion local people, publishers, community spirit, and new opportunities.

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# If your customers are using ChatGPT to search, will they find your business?

AI is changing how people find things online. Whether it's ChatGPT, Google's AI Overviews or voice search, the way people look for information (including business services) is evolving fast.

**If your content isn't built with AI in mind, you could be missing a huge trick when it comes to your sales and marketing. SEO still matters, but it's not just about Google rankings anymore.**

So how do you get your business noticed in an increasingly AI first world?

## Write for your audience (and AI)

Search engines like Google favour things like backlinks and keywords. And while this is still very important, AI tools also look for clear, helpful content that sounds natural, like how people actually talk.

That means your content needs to answer questions quickly, speak in plain English, and make sense without needing context. If it's vague, messy or hard to follow, AI (and your audience) will move on.

## Structure matters more than ever

Just like other search engines, AI finds it easier to process structured content. So, make things easy to read.

Ensure your website heading styles are set up correctly, then make sure they're used properly too.

Use a clear H1 (i.e. article and page titles) and break content up with H2s and H3s. Get to the point in your first few lines on the page and use headings that reflect real questions, like "How do I get my content found by AI?" not "Content strategy tips."

## Write for people, not systems

Yes, we're talking about writing for AI tools, but don't forget that what you write is



just as important (if not more) as how you structure it.

Be sure to focus on relevance and be specific in your points. Use short paragraphs and cut the fluff. If your content doesn't say anything useful or new, it won't be promoted in the first place.

For unique takes on well-known topics, speak to the experts in your team for the specifics and turn that into marketing content.

## Don't let your site hold you back

Strong content needs a solid foundation.

If your site is slow, cluttered or hard to navigate, AI tools won't surface your content. Prioritise fast load times, clean layouts and a mobile-friendly design.

Add structure behind the scenes too. Schema markup is a type of code you add to your site that helps search engines and AI tools understand what your content means, not just what it says. It tags key information like the type of page (e.g. article, product), the author, published date, reviews, and more.

To boost visibility, check how your site performs on a phone. If your content is hard to read or navigate on mobile, AI tools may not interpret it clearly. Make sure text is easy to read, buttons are easy to tap and all design elements work as intended.

## Keep it current and focused

AI prioritises recent and relevant content, so refresh your core pages regularly. If your blog hasn't been updated or your site includes old pages, you could be missing out.

AI tools are designed to match content to specific needs (i.e. give specific answers). So rather than trying to appeal to everyone in every piece of content, define your specific audiences and keep them in mind.

## Build trust beyond your website

Tools like ChatGPT look at more than just your website when deciding which sources to reference in their answers. They pay attention to how your business shows up elsewhere too.

Publishing thoughtful content regularly helps. But so does giving people a reason to engage. If your content is shared or linked on platforms AI trusts like social media channels or established online forums, it reinforces your authority.

## SEO isn't dead. It's evolving.

Many SEO principles still matter. Structure, clarity and authority help content perform, whether it's ranked in a browser or summarised in ChatGPT.

What's changed is the goal. It's no longer just about being number one in search engines. It's about being clear, useful and visible wherever people are looking for what they need online.

## Make your content worth showing

AI has increased the value your business can get from publishing a great piece of content. The tools people use to find answers are getting smarter. So when your content is helpful, well-structured and genuinely relevant, it has a better chance of showing up.

If it's vague, rushed or purely written for algorithms, it likely won't make the cut.

Whether someone finds you through search or a chatbot, your job is the same. Show up clearly. Offer something useful. Be easy to understand.

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# Christine Dodds: Keeping Bonded Running

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.

**Christine Dodd's, Business Support Administrator at Bonded, reflects on her move from the charity sector to agency life, the joy she finds in supporting others, and the connections that keep the Bonded team thriving.**



**Christine Dodds**  
Business Support  
Administrator

You need attention to detail, the ability to manage multiple tasks, and to be friendly, approachable, and flexible. Communication is key — I'm always speaking to different people across the agency. It's all about keeping things ticking behind the scenes so everyone else can focus on what they do best.

**Q: Where is your favourite place to visit in Newcastle?**

**Christine:** I enjoy a nice walk along the Quayside — it's such a lovely part of the city. I also love going to St James' Park to watch the match, and I like to go for the occasional meal and cocktails on a Saturday afternoon.

**Q: Introduce yourself, your role and what brought you to Bonded**

**Christine:** Hi, I'm Christine, and I'm the Business Support Administrator at Bonded. I'm a married Mam and have two children. I have over 40 years of experience working in office administration and I joined the agency in September 2022.

I was introduced to Bonded through Hannah, Steve's wife, following my redundancy from a charity I'd worked at for 15 years. After a catch-up with Steve, I was offered a new role here. It felt like a fresh start in a completely different sector, and although it was a big change, I was excited by the challenge. I'd also worked in insurance for 20 years before that, so adapting to different environments has always been part of my journey.

**Q: What are the key skills you need to be good at your role?**

**Christine:** Being organised, punctual, and having strong decision-making skills are all important.

**“It's all about keeping things ticking behind the scenes so everyone else can focus on what they do best.”**

**Q: And finally, what does connection mean to you?**

**Christine:** A good working connection is really important to me. I love being able to support the team, and through my role I get to meet new people regularly. It's a two-way thing — connection is not just about how I feel, but also how the people I work with feel. At Bonded, the team is so close-knit, and everyone is there to help each other. That sense of community is something I really value.

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# Esh Construction appointed to £160m Northumbrian Water repairs and maintenance framework



## North of England contractor named as sole delivery partner on eight-year contract.

**Northumbrian Water has named Esh Construction as its sole delivery partner for its Wastewater Networks Framework, a planned and reactive repairs and maintenance contract across the region's wastewater network.**

The framework appointment underpins a long-standing collaborative partnership between Esh and Northumbrian Water spanning more than 25 years. The eight-year framework agreement is worth up to £20 million per annum and will see Esh deliver essential maintenance and rehabilitation works on a 24/7 365 days a year service across the sewage network, ensuring an excellent customer journey throughout.

David Pratt, Divisional Director at Esh Construction, said: "This framework is where it all started for Esh and Northumbrian Water – it is the bedrock of our relationship.

"The contract award is a real testament to the hard work, performance and expertise of our teams and our collaboration with Northumbrian Water."

The contract will include a range of trenchless and traditional sewer repairs,

including manhole replacement, pipework rehabilitation and reactive emergency responses, with the most common service being the clearance of sewer blockages. These works will be delivered in collaboration with Jet Aire – Esh's primary delivery partner.

David Jarvis, Managing Director at Jet Aire, said: "We're proud to be partnering with Esh Construction once again to deliver this vital framework for Northumbrian Water. With over 25 years of experience pioneering drainage solutions across the North East, our collaboration with Esh and Northumbrian Water has consistently driven innovation and efficiency."

Building on Esh's appointment last year to Northumbrian Water's Ecosystem Framework and joint-venture Esh-Stantec's appointment to the 12-year Living Water Enterprise Framework, this contract ensures continued job security and progression opportunities for operatives, apprentices and graduates alike across Esh Construction.

Stephen Wilkie, Deputy Chief Executive at Esh, said: "This framework award brings Esh full circle in its relationship with Northumbrian Water and it holds a special place in our business. I started my journey on this framework as a quantity surveyor more than 25 years ago, and it's where many of our people – including some of today's leaders – began their careers.

"The reactive and planned repairs and maintenance framework has enabled us to build an expert reputation within the

sector, and we are proud to have been appointed as sole delivery partner for another eight years."

Operating from offices in County Durham and Cramlington, Esh will provide a regional delivery model, bolstered by a local supply chain and workforce.

Northumbrian Water's Cheryl Lang, Commercial & Contracts Manager for Wastewater Networks, said: "Esh Construction has been our trusted framework partner in wastewater sewer repair and maintenance for a number of years now. In that time, we have seen our performance in sewer flooding and pollution reduction as well as customer satisfaction improve year on year and undoubtedly Esh have played a key part in this success.

"I am delighted that following a robust procurement process, Esh Construction have once again proven themselves to be a top performer throughout the tender, and have been awarded the Sewer Repair and Maintenance Framework for a further eight years. We face great challenges in the next few years as we build further on key successes and address new challenges in our bid to be national leader in the provision of water and wastewater services and I know our continued partnership with Esh Construction will help us deliver our ambitious goals and continue to provide excellent service to our customers."

**To find out more about Esh Construction, visit [www.eshgroup.co.uk](http://www.eshgroup.co.uk)**



NORTHERN

# INSIGHT

## The Built Environment

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## National recognition for Banks Group in prestigious UK Best Managed Companies programme

County Durham-headquartered property, housebuilding and mining firm the Banks Group has been recognised as one of the UK's top-performing private businesses in a major national business excellence initiative.

Banks has been named as a winner in the inaugural UK Best Managed Companies programme, which is run by global advisory firm Deloitte and which aims to shine a spotlight on private businesses from across the UK and the exceptional performance that drives them.

The programme is judged on four key business 'pillars' – strategy, culture & commitment, capabilities & innovation and governance & financials.

It ranks entrants against a range of global benchmarks for success and ask them to demonstrate their superior performance over the past three years in relation to their peers.

As part of the assessment process, a Deloitte team visited the business's Meadowfield headquarters to run an executive team workshop which focused on the strategic growth of the business and the factors that made it stand out from other programme entrants.

This latest success follows Banks Group gaining both a gold level accreditation from Investors In People for our performance in people management and the highest level of accreditation – 'Maintaining Excellence' – in the Better Health At Work Awards health initiative.



## iamproperty reports record revenue

Newcastle-headquartered iamproperty has announced strong financial results for the year ending 31 October 2024, leading with record revenue of £51m which has increased by over 18% year-on-year.

EBITDA also increased, rising by over 22% to £15.1m. Both figures are the highest ever achieved by the company since it was founded in 2009 by entrepreneurs Ben Ridgway and Jamie Cooke, who still lead the business today.

iamproperty provides digital solutions to over 6,500 Estate Agency branches across the UK. The company's strong performance follows major growth in its residential auction sales as the UK's market leader, as well as the launch of multiple new innovations.

During the financial year, iamproperty supported Estate Agents to sell over £1bn worth of property from more than 10,000 sales via auction, as appetite for the speed and security that auction offers continued to grow. New innovations to launch included a prospecting platform and a cloud-based CRM, seeing iamproperty make significant progress in delivering on its vision to create an integrated ecosystem of solutions for agents.

Over 120 new employees were welcomed with headcount rising to over 700 people across the UK. A further recruitment drive of 100 new roles was announced as iamproperty marked its 15th year in business towards the end of the financial year, to add more talent across multiple departments.

Further growth is forecast, and the business has seen a strong start to the current financial year. More new innovations have launched, and auction sales continue to rise, in part supported by heightened market activity as consumers rushed to complete transactions before the Stamp Duty Land Tax increase earlier this year.

## French fund snaps-up £14.5m Newcastle Quayside asset

Knight Frank has acquired a prime, historic leisure and retail property on Newcastle Quayside for £14.5m, in an off-market deal.

French SCPI fund Iroko Zen has purchased the Exchange Buildings which incorporate 9-15 Lombard Street, 9 Quayside, 16 Queen Street and 6-10 King Street.

The property, which was built around 1860 and is located in the heart of a prime leisure area of the city, is let to tenants, Premier Inn Hotels, Stonegate Pub Company and Spirit Group Retail.

The freehold sale represents a net initial yield of 7.42% and total rent is £1,152,478 per annum. The income is well-secured with 75% of the rent accounted for by Premier Inn and the hotel rent is reviewed five-yearly linked to CPI (1% and 4%).



Francesca Sidoli, in Knight Frank's Operational Long Income team alongside Richard Stewart in the European Team represented the purchaser, Iroko Zen. Robert Irving Burns represented the vendor, United Property Services, on the transaction.

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## Launch of Newcastle Veterans Hub in Kenton

The Newcastle Veterans Hub was unveiled at St. Andrews Church in Spring. Local councillors, Ged Bell, Paula Maines, Stephen Lambert and Karen Kilgour, Leader of the Council were delighted to have supported the opening of the Hub with attendance from the Lord Mayor and the Lord-Lieutenant of Tyne & Wear representing his majesty King Charles along scores of veterans.

The councillors are proud of residents both in the city and Kenton who have served in the armed forces and put their lives on the line for the safety and security of our nation.

Life outside the military can be hard. The new Hub will play an important role making sure that every veteran can access help if needed. Making sure our veterans have access to housing, job and mental health support can be crucial for verbenas and their families.

Congratulations to all who helped with the event and who support the hub going forwards.

## Local Community Partnership update

A number of projects across Kenton have been supported by the Local community Partnership (LCP). Between July 2023 and March 2025 the LCP has delivered a £1.5m grant scheme for voluntary bodies across the north of the city including Kenton.

The UK Government has extended the LCP programme for another year. Kenton projects that have received funding from their programme include:

### ● Kenton Park Sports Centre

Their project 'One Community' were granted £82,877 to strengthen partnership working. The Sports Centre are supporting smaller organisations to build capacity such as Montagu Estates Residents Association (MERA)

### ● Projects4Change

Their project Caring4Kenton have been awarded £42K to work with young people to build on and create pride in the local area promoting care for each other and the environment. Activities include litter picks, forest school training, making bird boxes and wild flower sowing.

### ● Centre West

Their project CHEFF is providing sessions for primary school children in preparing and cooking healthy snacks and meals in a "fun, social environment" in Kenton and West Denton. The project was awarded £14,790.



## The continued adventures of...

# Cally

Hi everyone,

Cally here in my new role taking over from my brother, Ziggy. Things are really hectic at the moment as we are very busy. I have a new cousin – Gordon – so I am not the only naughty one now. His teeth are really sharp and now I know how brother Ziggy felt when I arrived. He is coming over for a sleepover this week. I'll let you know how it goes next month. See ya!

**Q. Several years ago I had my windows replaced with double glazing.** After a few years, the south-facing ones became subject to occasional, unsightly internal misting. As there was a ten-year guarantee I claimed for renewal of the windows. The insurance company claimed that the condensation was normal and therefore refused the claim.

**A.** One of the great unspoken truths of sealed double-glazed units (SGUs) is that eventually they will all mist up. The time scale should be twenty-ish years in a perfectly made and

installed window. But in poorly made ones it can be a lot less. Five months has been reported.

So, in a way, the condensation is 'normal', in that it will happen eventually in all windows. But I would have thought you could expect that a ten-year guarantee would reasonably cover you against misting within that time. It depends on the insurers' small print.



Please send me your building queries through facebook - @WDLne, website: [wdlnortheast.co.uk](http://wdlnortheast.co.uk) or through my Dad's good pal Michael at Northern Insight on [micahael@northern-insight.co.uk](mailto:micahael@northern-insight.co.uk)





L-R: Dan Hutton, Stuart Miller and Ross Markwell

## Dan Hutton appointed Chair at CECA North East

The Civil Engineering Contractors Association (CECA) North East has appointed Dan Hutton, group commercial director at MGL Group, as its new chair.

**He takes over from Ross Markwell, business development director at Esh Construction, who steps down after two years in the role.**

Ross will remain on the board after 15 years of service, including terms as vice chair and chair. He now moves into a national leadership role as chair of the CECA Chairman's Strategic Forum.

CECA North East was established in 1996 and represents 80 regional and national civil engineering contractors. The organisation advocates for its members,

supports skills development and works to ensure the sector remains a key driver of economic growth across the North East.

It operates under a structured core pillars model incorporating sustainability, climate change & social value, clients, policy & workload, health, safety & wellbeing, careers & recruitment and skills & training.

Having joined the board in 2019, Dan has a strong focus on improving transparency, access and confidence within the regional infrastructure sector.

Dan, said: "There are clear opportunities ahead for CECA North East and our members as new funding comes into the region and infrastructure projects gain momentum. It is essential members have access to reliable information about upcoming work so they can plan, invest and grow with confidence.

"The recent announcement of nearly £2 billion for roads and public transport is a significant step that provides a solid foundation for sustained growth in the sector.

"CECA North East will continue to engage closely with government and regional partners to improve transparency and ensure members can connect directly with decision-makers. Our focus is on unlocking potential and supporting our members to deliver the infrastructure that strengthens the North East economy."

Ross, said: "Over the past two years, CECA North East has played a key role in helping our members navigate challenging conditions. I've worked closely with the board and CECA North East director, Stuart Miller, to make sure we're delivering real value for members and creating meaningful connections across the infrastructure landscape.

"Dan brings a sharp commercial understanding and a clear focus on the challenges our members face. I look forward to supporting him in his new role and continuing to contribute to the work of CECA, both regionally and nationally."

Stuart Miller, director and company secretary of CECA North East, said: "This is a significant moment for CECA North East. Ross has shown real leadership and commitment during his time as chair and I want to thank him for the contribution he has made. Dan steps into the role with a strong grasp of what our members need right now, particularly around workload confidence and visibility.

"Our members are deeply rooted in the North East. They live here, employ here and spend over £1 billion here. Ensuring they have confidence in the future is vital, not just for our sector but for the wider economy. With greater transparency comes investment and that benefits everyone."

[www.ceca.co.uk](http://www.ceca.co.uk)





Neil Turner

## What would I do if I wasn't an Architect?

*By Neil Turner, Director,  
Howarth Litchfield.*

**Occasionally in life I am sure we all ask what would have happened if we had made different choices or taken different exams at school.**

**It's a question I never ask, so maybe I have never needed to ask it. Nonetheless, an interesting question is does a job define us in life or do we define what we do?**

For my part, I love the variety of the architecture profession and the massive range of people, skills and talents that I come across. I get to engage in a huge cross section of industries, sectors and life stories. Our busy practice works across so many specialist sectors that I can be discussing design and construction with anyone from managing directors, professors and politicians to bricklayers,

craftsmen and end users. Each person brings their own unique perspective on my design.

I first became interested in this career when my parents built a house extension and I followed around the builders for a summer - going to collect materials in their van! Blimey you couldn't do that now, but it was great fun watching the building emerge from the architect's drawings.

I went to university to study without really knowing what I was undertaking, other than a determination to qualify. A seven-year course - a mammoth commitment in time when there are other shorter courses leading to more lucrative and simpler lives.

But this job does give you excitement and enjoyment, the ability to draw and design, create new things, alter existing buildings and be constantly challenged.

There are of course the down sides, which come with every challenging job, but life is about dealing with this and making a successful design even when the odds are against you.

I am often asked what my favourite building is, but the answer is always 'the last one', as that is where you have most recently invested your energy and efforts and now, as ever, will be moving onto the latest challenge.

So, architecture is great, frustrating, hard

work and immensely satisfying in equal measure.

I have probably avoided my initial question. Certainly, this vocation does absorb you and I wonder what else would give the same level of satisfaction. The role is constantly changing as technology, legislation and society changes its position on what it wants, expects and desires.

When I was younger, I thought about car design and I am still fascinated by the beauty of cars through the ages. I did consider law, but a left handed artist is somewhat limited in law opportunities. So, my summer spent 'helping the builders' marked the start of my life journey.

I have been fortunate to follow one career path rather than several and even now, new opportunities open up, requiring new skills and knowledge. How many people can say that in one week they have worked on a listed house, factory, medical centre, listed railway station restoration, a new bridge, a hunting lodge and a castle garden/theatre?

So, even with its challenges and sometimes, setbacks, I can confidently say I am happy to keep running in this crazy, mad vocation called architecture!

**Neil Turner, Director, Howarth Litchfield can be contacted on 0191 384 9470 or email [n.turner@hlpuk.com](mailto:n.turner@hlpuk.com) [www.howarthlitchfield.com](http://www.howarthlitchfield.com)**



# First residents move in at Banks Homes' new West Rainton Development

Housebuilder Banks Homes has welcomed the first residents to its first large-scale development – Cathedral Meadows in West Rainton, just a stone's throw from historic Durham City.

**Banks is building 150 high specification new homes at Cathedral Meadows, which will include 120 detached, three-to-five bedroomed family homes.**

The first property reservations were taken by local homebuyers almost as soon as Banks opened its two show homes on the site.

And now, the owners of the first four Cathedral Meadows properties have moved into their new homes, with several others set to follow in the coming weeks as more and more properties are completed by the Banks Homes construction team.

Aisling Ramshaw, head of sales and marketing at Banks Homes, says: "Welcoming our first homebuyers to Cathedral Meadows is a real landmark for Banks Homes and signals the start of the creation of a high-quality new neighbourhood in this lovely County Durham village.

"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 as Cathedral Meadows evolves."

A bespoke range of seven different house types has been designed for the development, 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.



*First homeowners moving in at Cathedral Meadows, alongside new Sales Executive, Julie*

The new homes all feature an advanced Hive heating system, an Omega kitchen, Porcelanosa bathrooms, a Ring video doorbell, a full range of kitchen appliances, bi-fold doors and turfed gardens.

Cathedral Meadows will also include a new play area, new landscaped areas and new areas of public open space.

Banks Homes has launched a Move Assist scheme in partnership with the UK's leading assisted move provider, The New Homes Group, to make the process of buying a new home at Cathedral Meadows and selling an existing property as easy as possible for homebuyers.

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

"We had so much positive feedback from the couples and families that have visited Cathedral Meadows, with the build quality,

high design specification and attention to detail in our show homes all going down particularly well.

"It offers excellent transport links and sweeping views of open countryside, while also staying close to the vibrant cultural life, shops, restaurants and attractions of nearby Durham, and we're all set to welcome more buyers into their new homes here over the summer."

The Cathedral Meadows show homes and marketing suite are open from Thursday to Monday between 10am and 5pm.

**For further information on Cathedral Meadows, please visit call 0191 378 6200 or visit [www.bankshomes.co.uk/development/cathedral-meadows-development](http://www.bankshomes.co.uk/development/cathedral-meadows-development)**

**Banks Homes is building a growing portfolio of high-quality residential developments across North East England and Yorkshire, with several new sites set to come forward through the rest of the year. For further information, please visit [www.bankshomes.co.uk](http://www.bankshomes.co.uk)**





*The Hodgson Sayers senior management team:  
Marie Errington (Beckwith),  
Peter Condren, Billy Hodgson, Steve Simpson,  
David Greenwood and John Sayers*

## Hodgson Sayers strengthens board of directors

Stanley-based, Hodgson Sayers, has bolstered its board of directors with the appointment of Marie Errington (Beckwith) and Peter Condren.

**Both are long-established members of the senior management team, with Marie moving from office manager to bid and administration director and Peter from operations manager to operations director.**

Employing 100 staff, Hodgson Sayers, a roofing, building maintenance and security products specialist, operates across the north of England and the Midlands, where it has a depot in Nottingham.

Marie joined the firm as sales ledger in 2006, progressing through a number of roles to office manager. As director, Marie

is responsible for business-critical areas such as bid management, alignment of bids with business strategy, business compliance and quality control, leadership and management of all administration functions within the business, staff management, social value, business management systems including ISO 9001:2015 & 14001:2015 and customer care priorities.

Marie, said: "I am delighted with my new appointment as bid and administration director. Throughout my journey at Hodgson Sayers, I have worked in collaboration with some wonderful people who have supported and mentored me, helping me to develop my knowledge and skills and, for that, I am truly grateful.

"I am fortunate to have been part of Hodgson Sayers over the past 19 years and I am excited for the future of the business and look forward to the next phase of my own personal growth within the company."

Peter, joined Hodgson Sayers as an apprentice bricklayer when he was 17, having been introduced by his uncle who was a slate tiler at the firm. In 2008, Peter stepped away from the business to travel the world, returning to the company a year later.

After qualifying as a bricklayer, Peter focussed on site supervision, assisting contract managers with planning, then became a contract manager, operations

manager and, now, operations director.

Peter is responsible for the management of ten contract managers, two qualified and one trainee quantity surveyor, a BIM specialist and a support and administrative team.

"Throughout my career at Hodgson Sayers the senior management team has always supported and encouraged me to develop, learn new skills and to progress to the next level. Becoming operations director is the outcome of the investment the company has placed in me over the years and all the effort I have put in. The reason why I, and so many other colleagues, have forged great careers with the firm, is that it encourages staff to move forward and it always delivers on its promise."

John Sayers, managing director, Hodgson Sayers, said: "Marie and Peter are tremendous assets to our business. They are talented, totally committed and have worked closely with other members of the senior management team for many years. Despite the time they have both been with us, they represent a new, younger generation of directors who will lead the company forward well into the future. I am delighted they have accepted the role of director and I look forward to working even more closely with them going forward."

[hodgson-sayers.co.uk](http://hodgson-sayers.co.uk)



# Choosing the right letting agent: What landlords need to know

Whether you're a seasoned investor or an accidental landlord, choosing the right letting agent can make all the difference in ensuring your rental property is managed legally, safely, and efficiently.

**Letting agents do far more than simply find tenants; they're often the first line of support when it comes to navigating complex legislation, conducting essential checks, and managing a smooth tenancy from start to finish.**

## The role of a letting agent

At its core, a letting agent's primary role is to find the right tenant for your property. This involves marketing the property effectively, managing viewings, and performing thorough background checks to ensure prospective tenants are suitable. An experienced letting agent will collect and verify key information such as employment status, credit history, and previous landlord references. This significantly reduces the risk of late payments or disputes later down the line.

However, a good letting agent offers much more than tenant sourcing. In today's regulatory landscape, especially with legislative changes like the upcoming Renters' Reform Bill, staying compliant is essential. Letting agents help landlords meet their legal obligations, including safety certifications, deposit protection, right-to-rent checks, and more. These services are not just helpful; they are crucial in avoiding costly fines or legal action.

## Choosing a service that matches your needs

Letting agents typically offer different levels of service, for example tenant-find only, or full property management. Understanding which option suits

your needs can help you manage your responsibilities more effectively.

● **Tenant-Find Only:** Ideal for landlords who want to manage the property themselves but need help finding a reliable tenant.

● **Full Management:** Best suited for landlords who prefer a hands-off approach. This service includes everything from rent collection to routine inspections and emergency maintenance handling.

If you're unsure, a reputable letting agent can walk you through your options and tailor their services to suit your level of involvement.

## Don't choose on price alone

Comparing letting agent fees is important when making your decision. However, it's worth remembering that the cheapest option is not always the best. Low fees can sometimes be an indicator of limited service quality, inexperience, or insufficient compliance knowledge, all of which could cost you more in the long run.

Instead, focus on value for money. Ask potential agents what is included in their fee structure and how they handle critical responsibilities such as tenant vetting, compliance, and ongoing communication. A higher fee may be worthwhile if it means fewer headaches and better tenant retention.

## Communication and local knowledge matter

Another key factor when choosing a letting agent is their level of communication and local market knowledge. A good agent should be responsive, transparent, and willing to keep you informed throughout the letting process. They should also have a solid understanding of the local rental market, including typical rental values, demand, and tenant expectations, so they can advise you on setting the right price and marketing your property effectively.

## Get expert advice today

If you're currently letting a property or planning to in the future, it's worth taking the time to find a letting agent who truly understands your needs. The right partnership can save you time, stress, and money in the long term.

For landlords looking to arrange a free market appraisal, discuss new legislation and regulations, or explore service options tailored to your situation, our team is here to help.

**Contact us today on 0333 920 2220 to speak with an experienced member of our experienced Lettings team.**

**[gfwllp.co.uk](http://gfwllp.co.uk)**



*Ashley Barnes, Associate at GFW*





*Celebrating the topping out ceremony with (Front L-R): Chris Dixon from FW Capital being presented the topping out trowel by Robert Hall, Hall Construction*

## Topping out' celebrated at Merchant Park's multi-million development

There's lots going on in the North East property sector with exciting plans for regeneration seen across the region. We've seen first-hand how important it is to have the right backing and we're proud to invest in local businesses and play our role in supporting growth and generating prosperity.

**This month there we're putting a spotlight on Aycliffe Business Park where developer Merchant Park has celebrated its 'topping out' event for the Phase One 17 acre development in Newton Aycliffe.**

The latest milestone marks a significant step forward for the commercial development on Millennium Way at Aycliffe Business Park which will provide 52,500 sq ft and bring 198 jobs to the local area.

Having reached this important milestone, the project is due to complete in September 2025. Infrastructure works are well underway for Phase 2 and 3 covering 89,000 sq ft and 126,500 sq ft premises, with plans to create a total of 1014 jobs when all three phases of the site are completed.

The 'topping out' ceremony was held at Millennium Way by Merchant Park, FW Capital and Hall Construction. FW Capital

has provided investment for Phase One using a seven-figure senior debt package from the North East Commercial Property Investment Fund (CPIF) which is managed by FW Capital and backed by the North East Combined Authority (North East CA). An incentive has also been provided by the North East CA to support the immediate financial viability gap for the first phase which includes infrastructure costs for the following two phases.

Adrian Goodall, Merchant Park Developments, said: "I've been impressed by the progress on site by our contractors Hall Construction. After months of planning and preparation work it's fantastic to hit this milestone which brings us closer to supporting North East businesses looking to scale up and locate to new premises."

Chris Dixon, Senior Investment Executive at FW Capital said: "It's great to be involved with the 'topping out' ceremony and see first-hand how investment from the CPIF is helping meet the demand for commercial property space in the North East. We share Merchant Park's vision to create quality commercial warehouse and office space, regenerating a previous barren land."

Merchant Park's development team includes contractors Hall Construction Services, Helm Consulting, letting agents Connect Property North East and CBRE and investment backing from FW Capital and the North East CA.

The North East Commercial Property Investment Fund is a £35million fund which provides loans of up to £7 million to support both non speculative and speculative developments for new build or refurbished commercial projects. This includes industrial units, distribution facilities or office schemes located in the seven authority areas: Northumberland, County Durham, Gateshead, Newcastle upon Tyne, North Tyneside, South Tyneside and Sunderland. Repayments will be reinvested in new schemes, creating a total investment of £119 million into commercial property in 15 years. It aims to create 5,600 jobs and develop 140,000 sq m of commercial space.

***If you want to find out how we can support your business please email [info@fwcapital.co.uk](mailto:info@fwcapital.co.uk) or visit our website [www.fwcapital.co.uk](http://www.fwcapital.co.uk)***



# Wright Residential expands across Sunderland: 100% focused on rentals, not sales

Wright Residential, a specialist in residential lettings and property management, is proud to announce the expansion of its operations into Sunderland and the surrounding areas. Known for its dedicated rental-only service, the company is now actively seeking landlords looking for a hands-on, experienced team to manage their properties with care and professionalism.

Unlike many estate agents who divide their attention between sales and lettings, Wright Residential is different. The team focuses exclusively on the rental market—meaning every decision, every strategy, and every bit of advice is geared towards maximising rental returns and keeping tenants happy. It's this sharp focus that has earned them a strong reputation for reliability and results.

With demand for quality rental properties in Sunderland on the rise, there's never been a better time for landlords to take advantage of Wright Residential's expanding presence. Whether you're an experienced portfolio landlord or letting out a single property for the first time, their tailored approach ensures your investment is in safe hands.

Their services include tenant sourcing, full



property management, legal compliance, maintenance coordination, and rent collection—giving landlords complete peace of mind. Plus, with their in-depth local knowledge and commitment to staying up to date with the latest legislation, Wright Residential ensures your property stays profitable and protected.

"We don't do sales. Rentals are our one and only focus," says the team. "That means we

can offer a level of service and expertise that general estate agents simply can't match."

***If you're a landlord in Sunderland or nearby and want to work with a lettings agent that puts your needs first, contact Wright Residential today.***

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# How infrastructure and regeneration are powering commercial growth

By *Stephanie Dixon, Commercial Surveyor with youngsRPS*

The North East is undergoing a major transformation, driven by strategic regeneration, enhanced infrastructure, and a growing focus on unlocking commercial potential.

## Built for Business

Across the region, public and private sector partnerships are laying the foundations for long-term economic growth, with improved connectivity and targeted development breathing new life into local towns and coastal destinations.

For commercial property stakeholders, this changing landscape presents real opportunity - whether through new retail, leisure and office schemes, or the revitalisation of high streets and brownfield sites.

## Infrastructure-Led Growth: The Northumberland Line

A standout example of how investment in infrastructure is catalysing regional regeneration is the newly operational Northumberland Line. Reopened to passengers in December 2024 - for the first time in 60 years - the line has already seen over 250,000 journeys in less than six months.

Connecting key communities such as Blyth, Bedlington, and Seaton Delaval to Newcastle, the line has significantly enhanced accessibility across the region. More than just a transport project, the service is unlocking development potential,



Stephanie Dixon

attracting footfall, and supporting local economic activity - key enablers for successful commercial ventures.

## South Beach Blyth: Coastal Regeneration in Motion

Running parallel to this transport success is the South Beach Blyth project, a flagship regeneration scheme that is re-establishing Blyth as a commercial and leisure destination of choice.

Phase 1, completed in mid 2023, has been a resounding success. The development is now fully let, with tenants including Co-op, Greggs, Dicksons, Saltrock, Breeze Lounge, Caffè Ginevra, Shorelocks Hair & Beauty, and Little Hubbers Day Nursery - an appealing mix that enhances the area's offer to both residents and visitors.

youngsRPS was appointed as management contractor at the project's launch in July 2023 and continues to play a key role in its delivery.

## The Bigger Picture: A Region on the Rise

From town centres to transport corridors, regeneration is gaining momentum across the North East.

Alongside initiatives like South Beach and the Northumberland Line, the region is seeing increased attention from developers, occupiers, and investors who recognise its long-term potential.

For commercial property clients, now is the time to look ahead - whether investing in future-facing locations, developing sites with improved connectivity, or capitalising on changing demographics and demand.

As an established regional consultancy with deep-rooted expertise, youngsRPS is proud to be supporting these regeneration journeys and advising clients on how best to take advantage of the North East's next chapter.

[www.youngsrps.com](http://www.youngsrps.com)





## Pupils gear up for exciting careers thanks to skills partnership

**A skills partnership between Nissan, Sunderland College and St Wilfrid's RC College in South Shields bridges the gap between education and the world of work.**

Students can study for a specialised engineering qualification (Level 2 in Engineering, GCSE equivalent), alongside their GCSEs. Supported by school, Sunderland College, and a team of experts from Nissan, students can hone the technical skills needed for a career in advanced manufacturing and engineering. On successful completion of the programme, they are guaranteed an apprenticeship interview with Nissan and receive a guaranteed unconditional offer to continue their education at Sunderland College should they wish to do so.

So far more than 75% of the cohort have applied to the Nissan Apprenticeship Scheme and are eagerly awaiting their interviews. Their remaining classmates will either continue their studies at sixth form or decide their next steps once they receive their GCSE results, which could include progressing to Sunderland College's T Levels in engineering at City Campus.



Year 10 student Evan said: "It's amazing seeing how many parts go into one car. I didn't realise how much teamwork it takes."

Ellie said: "I've learnt that engineering isn't just for boys or just about cars – it's loads of different things."

Her classmate Erin shared this sentiment: "Talking to a female engineer from Nissan made me realise I could do this too."

The partnership started in 2023, and the current Year 11 cohort are the first group to complete the programme and are in the process of securing apprenticeships with Nissan.

Students spend two days a week at Sunderland College learning practical skills and three days at school studying GCSEs, plus regular visits to Nissan to get authentic work experience.

Paul Given, senior assistant headteacher at St. Wilfrid's, part of Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust, said: "It's an exciting opportunity providing pupils with great qualifications, high-quality work experience and support to develop the attributes expected by future employers. Giving our students a real advantage in an increasingly competitive jobs market."

**Places are available at St. Wilfrid's RC College, visit [www.st-wilfrids.org](http://www.st-wilfrids.org)**

## St Joseph's rated 'Outstanding' by Catholic Schools Inspectorate

**"Joyful" pupils love learning and staff feel "valued" at St Joseph's Catholic Primary School in Blackhall Colliery, according to a new report by the Catholic Schools Inspectorate.**

The school, part of Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust, was visited by the Catholic Schools Inspectorate, on behalf of Bishop Stephen Wright, Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle, and rated 'Outstanding'. It follows a glowing report earlier this year from Ofsted, which praised the school for its "nurturing and aspirational" atmosphere.

CSI lead inspector Barbara Reilly-O'Donnell said in her report: "Pupils love school. They display joyful dispositions and create a culture of mutual respect and inclusiveness."

"The pastoral care offered to pupils and staff is exemplary. Pupils know they are loved and feel a sense of belonging. Adults know they are greatly valued."

"Leaders are highly dedicated. They are aspirational for all and pursue excellence for their pupils with determination and relentless ambition. They ensure that the religious education curriculum is rigorous and aspirational."

"Staff are determined to ensure that all pupils flourish and they work relentlessly to remove barriers to success. The headteacher's

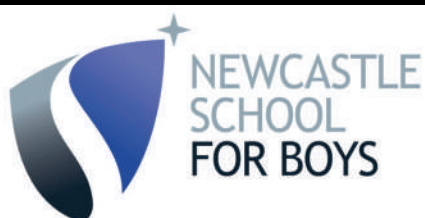
energy has a ripple effect across the community and consequently, she inspires all stakeholders to feel a deep sense of pride."

Executive headteacher Lisa Ashton said: "We are delighted that our report recognises the strong values that underpin our school community. Also, how our pupils are nurtured to become responsible, committed citizens, who understand their uniqueness and feel truly loved and valued."

"I would like to thank our wonderful children, dedicated staff, supportive parents, governors and Parish family for making this Outstanding outcome possible. We are very proud of our lovely school."

There are places available at Nursery and Reception for September. To arrange a visit, visit [www.stjosephsblackhall.net](http://www.stjosephsblackhall.net)

**Find out more about BCCET at [www.bccet.org.uk](http://www.bccet.org.uk)**



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## Navigating change

By Geoffrey Stanford, Headmaster, RGS Newcastle

The enduring value of a Royal Grammar School (RGS) Newcastle education.

**At RGS Newcastle, we recognise that parents make significant sacrifices to afford an independent education and naturally, they seek reassurance that it continues to offer lasting value.**

Much has been written about how the decision to impose VAT on school fees has increased the financial burden on hard-working parents striving to send their children to schools like RGS Newcastle. While schools have worked hard to find efficiencies to ease this additional cost, it is also important that students continue to receive the high-quality education that parents are paying for—one that delivers not only strong academic outcomes but also a rich array of opportunities, from enrichment and leadership to co-curricular activities that build confidence, teamwork, and character.

We are proud to be Newcastle's only fully co-educational independent school across every year group, where co-education is not just part of what we do, it is at the heart of who we are in the 21st century. While others may look to emulate this, over the last twenty-five years we have established an RGS community from Junior School to Sixth Form where our students experience gender-inclusive collaboration as a norm—one that enhances learning, fosters mutual respect, and inspires growth. Boys watching their female peers excel in STEM subjects and girls observing male peers flourish in languages or the arts quietly dismantle outdated stereotypes. Indeed, last year, one of our female students achieved the highest mark in the country for English A level, another topped the nation in Computer Science, and a third was the only student in



RGS Newcastle's stained glass window by artist Maralyn O'Keefe, commemorating the introduction of co-education in 2001 (Credit: RGS Newcastle)

the UK to score a perfect 300/300 in Further Maths.

With an academically selective intake, the key question is: how do we help each student reach their full academic potential and surpass peers of similar ability elsewhere? In 2024, our GCSE results for both boys and girls ranked in the top 1% nationally for value added, and our A level outcomes placed us in the top 10%, even when adjusted for prior attainment. Remarkably, our SEND students were also in the top 1% for value added.

But education is about more than just grades. Life beyond school is co-educational - universities, workplaces, and society are richly diverse. At RGS, students grow up learning side-by-side, developing mutual respect, confidence, and the ability to collaborate with anyone. In classrooms, diverse perspectives spark deeper thinking; in debates, contrasting styles sharpen arguments; and in music and drama, shared rehearsals elevate performance for all.

At a recent new parents' induction, I shared a belief central to our ethos: academic results should be the outcome of a great education



- not its sole purpose. The true value of an RGS education goes far beyond grades or even value-added metrics. While we never take success for granted, parents can be confident in our academic standards and instead focus on the breadth of opportunities available beyond the classroom. We refer to these as co-curricular - not extracurricular - because they are integral to the holistic education we offer. From music, drama, and student-led societies to the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and Combined Cadet Force, we ensure both wide participation and high achievement. One student, for example, helped win the U19 British national team gymnastics title one weekend, then flew to Texas the next day to earn a Judges' Award at the VEX Robotics World Championships. Not every student will reach that level, but all are encouraged to explore their passions and develop the teamwork, leadership, and life skills essential for their future.

While speaking to our new parents, I highlighted a key point from our recent inspection report: RGS's approach to diversity and inclusion was recognised as a "significant strength." For us, this is not just a statement - it reflects our deep commitment to ensuring every student feels valued for who they are. A strong sense of belonging creates the foundation for happy, confident learners. Co-education at RGS is far more than simple inclusion; it is an energising dynamic in which students challenge one another and lift each other higher. Research consistently shows that mixed-gender teams outperform single-gender groups because they draw on broader approaches and problem-solving strategies, something we witness every day at the RGS. The common claim that single-sex schools boost results by removing "distractions" and tailoring teaching to gender, misses a deeper truth: emotional intelligence flourishes when boys and girls learn together. Co-education classrooms promote balanced behaviour, break down outdated stereotypes, and ensure that effective teaching - not segregation - meets the needs of every individual.

The voice of our parents offers a meaningful reflection of our impact on students' RGS experience - both academically and personally. One parent captures this in their experience of seeing both their children thrive in our co-educational environment: "Watching both my son and daughter thrive at RGS has been incredibly rewarding. My daughter has grown more confident speaking up in mixed settings, learning to assert herself and express her ideas clearly among diverse perspectives. My son, on the other hand, has developed stronger emotional intelligence and communication skills, learning to collaborate respectfully and understand different viewpoints. This balanced environment has helped each of them grow in ways that go far beyond academics." - RGS Newcastle parent

[www.rgs.newcastle.sch.uk](http://www.rgs.newcastle.sch.uk)





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TO SHARE**

TO  
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## Durham Sixth Form Centre enrolling in August

If you are leaving secondary school this year and are thinking about your next steps, then Durham Sixth Form Centre will make an excellent choice.

programme, alongside personalised support to aid with future careers decisions, including the UCAS application process and alternative routes. We have been awarded the Quality in Careers Standard in recognition of outstanding careers and progression provision.

In addition to academic success, there is a wide range of activities and experiences to broaden horizons, develop and enhance skills and encourage students to aspire! Students will be equipped with all they need to become as successful and competitive as possible during their time at Durham Sixth Form Centre and beyond. Programmes such as: Fiona Hill Award, student-led clubs and societies,

charity work and fundraising, health and wellbeing programmes, curriculum trips and visits, Duke of Edinburgh Award, Extended Project Qualification and much more. Plus, with our enviable city centre location, students have easy access to all the amenities Durham has to offer.

We look forward to welcoming students who have been offered a place to study with us this September at enrolment, which takes place from 26th-28th August.

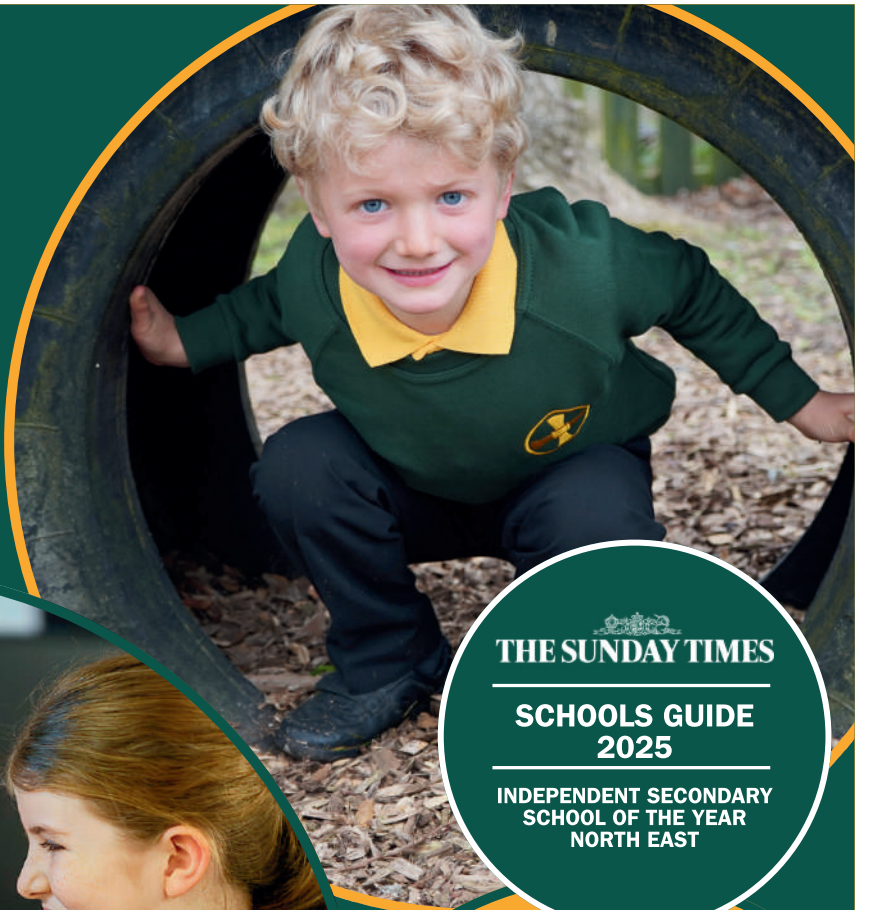
***If you have any questions or for more information please visit [durhamsixthformcentre.org.uk](http://durhamsixthformcentre.org.uk) or call 0191 383 0708.***

**With our 'outstanding' Ofsted rating and A Level results in the top 6% of schools and colleges nationally, we know our students' experience will be both successful and enjoyable.**

We're honoured to be recognised as a high-performing, trusted, values-driven organisation with a recent Investors in People Platinum award, also Artsmark Platinum and Science Mark Gold to name a few of our awards, ensuring students receive first-class teaching and learning in a specialist post-16 environment.

We are very proud of our long-standing reputation for helping students make the most of their abilities and aptitudes, based upon many years of consistent achievement and high academic success. Students are offered a comprehensive careers





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# More fun, less fear: How we revamped our admissions assessments

*By Mrs Rebecca Miller,  
Head of Admissions at Dame Allan's  
Schools, Newcastle.*

Entrance assessments, in many ways, are like mini job interviews for the young people hoping to attend an independent school.

**They often have an in-person interview, an aptitude test, and that air of seeing if someone will be a 'good fit' for the organisation. I think you will agree, this can be somewhat overwhelming at 11 years old!**

So, at Dame Allan's in Newcastle, where I am Head of Admissions, we sought to shake up this process, removing the fear and injecting some fun along the way!

Step one was to launch a digital format assessment, replacing the old paper exams. This allows prospective pupils to complete their assessments in much less time, and removes the need for teachers to spend hours marking exams. Our digital exams also adapt to the level of each pupil, giving us a strong idea of their academic abilities, without causing undue stress or anxiety.

This new format also means that pupils can be assessed in a single day session. Previously, pupils would have to return on two separate occasions - once for the initial written assessment, which could take up to three hours - and again for an interview with staff members. Not only is this less nerve-wracking for pupils undergoing assessment, but logistically it is a lot easier for families too. We want to make sure that any prospective pupil will feel happy and comfortable with life at Dame Allan's, inside and outside the classroom, and get to know them as individuals.

We also make sure that prospective pupils

are warmly welcomed from the moment they come into the school. They're met by volunteer Sixth Form 'buddies' who offer a vital friendly face and can help with any questions. Pupils also wear their own clothes to make them feel as comfortable as possible; previously assessment days required that pupils come in in their current school uniform, so this change is an indicator of our new, less rigid approach to assessment.

Arrival times are staggered to make the day less intense for the young people taking assessments. They are registered and put into small groups of no more than fifteen pupils to take their assessment. Following this stage, the children are divided further into groups of four. They will have an informal chat with a teacher to help us learn a bit more about them and their personalities and interests. During these informal chats, there will be an activity to take part in too - such as building a LEGO model. Not only is this a bit more fun, but it allows teachers to observe a pupil's social and teambuilding skills in a discreet way.

Finally, pupils are welcomed into the Sports Hall to take part in a host of different activities designed to encourage conversation, teambuilding, and to blow off steam. These range from sports day classics like egg and spoon races, to obstacle courses, and logic puzzles - like working out how to 'cross a river' using limited materials.



Rebecca Miller



All of this combines to make a fun-filled day that prospective families can enjoy, whilst helping our staff to get a true picture of all of the young people who attend. The result? Happier young people, glowing feedback from parents, and a national award win for our Admissions Team!

So, the next time you are evaluating your hiring and interview process, consider if there is a way you can inject a little more fun, and remove some of the anxiety. You'll likely see rapid improvements for all involved.

**Find out more at [dameallans.co.uk](http://dameallans.co.uk)**



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# BUILDING BLOCKS Insights

Inspiration for the next generation of STEM talent.

**A groundbreaking event, returning for its biggest year yet, saw hundreds of North East primary school children take a special trip to the regional innovation district of Newcastle Helix for two whole days of learning, play and inspiration.**

On 21st and 22nd May 2025, BUILDING BLOCKS Insights welcomed 240 Year 5 students for a series of interactive sessions with a range of experts across tech, AI and data science.

The schools were identified by the North East Combined Authority's Child Poverty Reduction Unit (CPRU). Many of the students are in receipt of Free School Meals, some have Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, whilst others come from households where English is an additional language.

Hosted by Newcastle Helix Community Engagement Manager Charlie Charlton, the event enabled the children to have fun with STEM outside of the classroom, as well as see first-hand what it is like to spend time in a hub of innovation and industry on a regular working day.

Charlie welcomed pupils from Canning Street Primary School, Moorside Primary School, St John's Primary School, St. Paul's C of E Primary School, Walkergate Community School and Wingrove Primary School over the two-day initiative.

Before embarking on their day of STEM fun, the 9 and 10 year olds were introduced to the building and teams supporting the event, giving them a rare and invaluable inside glimpse of an innovation hub and a real-life workplace on a typical working day.

Over the two days, children were then welcomed into various workshops, facilitated by Helix occupiers and trusted partners National Innovation Centre for Data (NICD), Altitude Foundation, RTC North, Mi-box Live, CGI and Newcastle United Foundation (NUF).

Helix occupier NICD showed the children how data is gathered and used in the real world as well as the tech jobs that exist on their doorstep, while Altitude Foundation, also based at the Helix, taught participants how to light up LED light strips using coding.



Charlie Charlton

Mi-box Live made maths fun for the children through its combined board game and iPad app format, which was developed alongside the National Innovation Centre for Ageing at Newcastle Helix.

Business support organisation RTC North, now based at Newcastle Helix, led a creative and illuminating session on serious play using everyone's favourite modular toy, LEGO, where children created a series of objects - from building towers to their secret superpowers.

IT and business consulting firm CGI used Minecraft and Chat GPT to help the children build virtual cities and intergalactic machines, and NUF invited participants to play a game of dodgeball in an immersive digital arena using virtual reality (VR).

BUILDING BLOCKS Insights gave the children an opportunity to interact with technology in a new way, as well as spark their creativity and an interest in future STEM careers - and give them a real-life look at a dynamic innovation district in action.

For the teachers of the participating schools, the event showed them how



pupils could be inspired and invigorated by off-site learning in a real working environment.

Emma Hay, Year 5 teacher from Wingrove Primary School, commented: "The benefit [of Building Blocks] is the children being in a working environment and having all the experts with all the expert equipment around them, so they can really have a hands-on experience."

As well as supporting STEM learning, BUILDING BLOCKS Insights played an important role in sparking career curiosity among children way ahead of career conversations.

Charlie Charlton, Community Engagement Manager at Newcastle Helix, added: "BUILDING BLOCKS is a chance for education and industry to come together and inspire each other. After all, these children could be the future workforce of businesses at Helix. Now that's exciting!"

**Visit [www.newcastlehelix.com](http://www.newcastlehelix.com) for further information.**

Images: Tynesight photography



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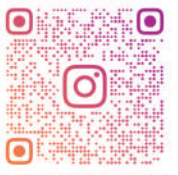
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# In conversation with

*As we approach the end of another school year Michael Grahamslaw spoke to...*

## Gemma Strong

*Headteacher, Newcastle Preparatory School.*

### What were the biggest successes and achievements for the school this year?

It has certainly been another bumper year of offers for our fantastic Year 6s. In total we have had 62 offers for 28 children and we are now working closely with children to help them in taking the next step.

We have also become a NACE school which has been exciting for both staff and children alike. This philosophy and way of teaching is about providing challenge and open-ended tasks where there are no limits. It is amazing what our young minds can explore and the vocabulary they can acquire!

In addition, we are now preparing for our 140th anniversary which is terribly exciting. Northumbria University undergraduates have been compiling an archive on how the school has played a pivotal role in the city in this time which the children have played a part in and found very stimulating. We are also appealing for past alumni to contact us and get involved in this exciting project.

We've also found time to launch our own podcast. It really has been an action-packed year.

### What were the biggest challenges and how were they addressed?

The wider economic impact of VAT being imposed on school fees has unquestionably affected families and we have provided as much support and stability as we can. Generally, costs have increased in most sectors, so it is about finding balance. We offer incredible opportunities to our children and such high quality provision, but also demonstrate excellent value, which is key in the current economic climate.

### Any key changes in staff, curriculum or policy this year?

We introduced new themed weeks with cross-curricular topics which allowed children to be very hands-on and explore new and exciting themes. We have hosted a number of parent workshops and used other people's expertise to enhance a range of areas. One themed week even involved talent shows which included singing, dancing, magic and comedy. Our HomeToon Horizons project also enabled children to learn more about the city around us which we are sharing through an exhibition.

### How did the school support student wellbeing and mental health this year?

This is very much a daily process with staff regularly supporting and engaging with children to build up trust. Children are known on a personal level with such small class sizes; daily wellbeing check ins and worry monsters ensure that children can receive the help they need as and when they require it.

We have a PSED teacher (personal, social, emotional development) as well as a school counsellor who are on hand should any issues arise and we offer the Rainbows programme which helps children navigate significant life changes.

### What initiatives are in place to further support teachers' professional development?

Many of our staff have added further professional qualifications which were funded by the school. We also have a development programme for teachers and teaching assistants which is very popular. In a school, even the staff never stop learning!

### How has the school strengthened its partnership with parents and the wider community?

Parents have been fully engaged with 'stay and play' sessions whilst older children have worked extensively on showcase events, proudly guiding parents to specialist rooms to show off their art portfolios, computing work, constructions in DT alongside their beautiful books.

We have developed great local links with Jesmond Pegasus Assembly and Fleming Court where we have held singing events with children of all ages. Some of our pupils have also done consultation work with a RIBA architect on the sustainability and development of Jesmond Library.

As one of many outreach projects, our specialist music teacher provided local schools with a programme of study to learn more about orchestral instruments before inviting them to attend a short concert, hosted by NPS in collaboration with Newcastle University.

The wealth of engagement with different groups and organisations across the city really helps our children, and staff, to feel part of a wider community.

### Finally, after what I'm sure has been a rewarding year, how do you plan to relax over the Summer?

It will be lovely to be at home and spend some time with my family and our chickens as well as reading plenty. I also hope to take a trip abroad and embrace some lovely food, drink and culture.

[www.newcastleprepschool.org.uk](http://www.newcastleprepschool.org.uk)







Gemma Strong





# Sunshine and smiles at Mowden Summer Fete

Families gathered at Mowden Hall School for the annual Summer Fete, bringing a burst of sunshine and community spirit to an otherwise drizzly day.

Despite the weather, the event was a resounding success, with families coming together to enjoy a fun-filled afternoon of traditional games, delicious food, and charitable giving.

From sizzling BBQs and creamy ice creams to laughter-filled bouncy castles, there was something for everyone. Children and adults alike got stuck into much-loved fete favourites including Beat the Goalie, a Coconut Shy, Splat the Rat, Donut on a String, and a bustling tombola.

This year's fete also had a fundraising focus, with almost £900 raised for the Great North Air Ambulance Service – a vital charity that provides emergency pre-hospital care across the North East, North Yorkshire, and Cumbria.

Phil Sturt, the Head of Mowden Hall School, praised the event: "It was wonderful to see so many families come together and enjoy a classic summer celebration, regardless of the weather."

"The atmosphere was fantastic, and we're thrilled to have raised funds for such a worthwhile cause. The Great North Air Ambulance provides a truly life-saving service across our region, and we're proud to support their work."

[www.mowdenhallpst.org](http://www.mowdenhallpst.org)





## Mowden seeking top spot at Tatler Schools Awards

Mowden Hall School is vying for a place as one of the top Prep schools in the country.

Renowned for highlighting the very best in the sector, the Tatler Schools Awards form part of the esteemed Tatler Schools Guide, a comprehensive publication that showcases 250 of the UK's finest independent schools. Nominations for the awards come from parents, educators, and the wider public, before a panel of experts carefully selects the winners from a highly competitive shortlist.

Now, with voting open to the public, Mowden Hall School is calling on its community and supporters to help secure its place among the very best.

**To cast your vote for Mowden Hall School, visit [tinyurl.com/tatlerawards25](https://tinyurl.com/tatlerawards25)**



## New Summer adventure camp coming to Mowden

**Calling all young adventurers - get ready for the ultimate holiday escape at Mowden Hall School!**

**Mowden Hall is delighted to be partnering with The Wild Outdoors to offer an action-packed journey this Summer, filled with thrills, laughter and long lasting friendships.**

Based in the Scottish Borders, The Wild Outdoors has been operating since 2018, building on over a decade of prior experience in outdoor education. They offer affordable childcare solutions for parents during school holidays, with activity camps available at multiple locations.

Their aim is to give children and young people a safe environment to adventure and explore, with children spending all day involved in activities they will find fun and engaging. From zorb suits, to archery, water fights, slip n slides to peddle go-karts, from lawn games to ninja lines, they offer activities that children will love and will be desperate to come back to again and again.

We are excited that The Wild Outdoors will be hosting a four-day summer camp at Mowden Hall School from Tuesday 26 to Friday 29 August 2025.

**To find out more, and to book your place, visit [thewildoutdoors.org/venue/mowden-hall-school](https://thewildoutdoors.org/venue/mowden-hall-school).**





# The end of another school year, time to relax!



The Education Network has certainly had a busy year in 2025 so we thought we'd take a moment to reflect on what we've been up to.

**We expanded into Leeds and reopened our Leeds office in December after closing it during the pandemic.**

We appointed two highly experienced members of staff to get business underway. Firstly, Vikki Lowrey, director of Yorkshire, has responsibility for establishing and growing the business, while Matthew Shone, a specialist in Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) took up the role of branch manager.

With such a massive focus on SEND provision generally, we were delighted to make two new specialist appointments in the North East region too.

Genna Sinclair joined as SEND recruitment manager and was recently joined by Rachael Chapman, SEND recruitment consultant. Both Genna and Rachael are focusing on sourcing SEND professionals for schools in Gateshead, Newcastle and across the North East.

Giving back is in our DNA and 2025 has seen us supporting and sponsoring numerous charitable endeavours throughout the school year, too.

We're passionate about the role that physical activity can play in making a difference to the communities that need it

most and were headline sponsors for the Early Years Celebration organised by RISE in partnership with North East Combined Authority. As a leading health and wellbeing charity, RISE is all about transforming lives through physical activity.

In May, our North East SEND team launched its Sunflower Showdown. Children, who have a SEND diagnosis or are in alternative provision can grow a giant sunflower from scratch over the summer.

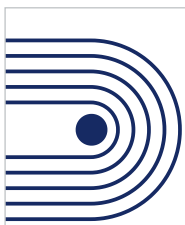
We were thrilled to sponsor Leam Rangers U7s Greens, a talented young team based in Gateshead so that we can give back while keeping kids active and we supported Heworth Grange School with football strips for all their year groups.

During the year, we also had something to shout about when we achieved an outstanding 99.79% in our latest APSCo Compliance+ Audit - APSCo audits us annually to ensure we uphold the highest standards of safeguarding compliance.

We even won the accolade of '2025 England Business Awards Regional Winners' and are now Grand Finalists, so we are keeping our fingers crossed for the Grand Final in Birmingham in November! Winning this was a huge surprise to the team, who were nominated for the highly competitive category anonymously.

Well, as we all wind down, we want to take this opportunity to wish all our candidates and clients a happy summer holiday. We hope you really enjoy your well-earned rest and remember, if you do need to speak to us over the summer, we will be in the office, so just give us a ring!

[www.theeducationnetwork.co.uk](http://www.theeducationnetwork.co.uk)



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## Bulgarian author inspires Newcastle's youth with creativity and philosophy

Zanara, also known as Sabina Nedelcheva Williams, is a third-generation artist drawing from her rich heritage and the remarkable legacy of her father, Radi Nedelcheva. Radi was a celebrated Bulgarian naive artist whose evocative works captured the essence of Bulgarian village life, festivals, and traditions, resonating with audiences worldwide.

"My father's art was a celebration of Bulgarian tradition, evoking memories of childhood, community, and connection," says Sabina. "I've inherited his passion for creativity, and I hope to inspire a new generation to think deeply, explore their emotions, and dream big."

Now based in Newcastle after 15 years in London, Sabina is dedicated to fostering imagination and sparking meaningful discussions about life and society through her art and books with inspiration coming from folklore and fairytales from around the globe. She is also trained in Philosophy for Children (P4C), a method that encourages young minds to question



and focus their creativity on learning while provoking critical thinking and curiosity.

"In a world driven by social media and rapid change, it's crucial to give children the tools to think critically and nurture their imaginations," Sabina explains.

Sabina is also currently working on a book to celebrate her father's artistic legacy,

ensuring that his timeless work continues to inspire future generations.

Under her artistic name, ZANARA, she has authored six picture books for children and adults. With an MA in Arts and studies in Myths and Cosmology at the prestigious University of Canterbury, she brings a unique perspective to storytelling.



## Sunderland's Slalom D's powerful hometown anthem

Slalom D, one of Sunderland's long-standing punk outfits, are back with a revitalised lineup and a powerful new

single, "Harbour Walls"—a heartfelt ode to their hometown that captures both its grit and warmth.

Proudly rooted in the vibrant and ever-growing Sunderland music scene, Slalom D's new release lands at a time when the city is buzzing with creative energy.

"There's a real buzz about the city right now," says bass player Tony Lindstedt. "Sunderland's a music city through and through—there are new bands popping up, venues thriving, and it just feels like something is really happening here."

"Harbour Walls" is a celebration of home—a song that blends nostalgia with resilience and speaks to anyone who's ever found sanctuary in their hometown. "It's about that feeling of safety when you return home, but also about being a welcoming place," Tony explains. "It's personal, but universal too—you could be from anywhere and relate to this song."

Singer Fiona Duncan adds: "Sunderland has this deep heritage—shipbuilding, industry, community—and it's still got that character. It's a city that doesn't shut its doors. Whether you've lived here all your life or you've only just arrived, Sunderland has a way of saying 'you belong.' That's the spirit we tried to bottle in 'Harbour Walls.'"

Adding fresh firepower to the band is new guitarist Antony Bircham, also known for his work with The Band for Disease Control and Prevention.

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# Investing in the future of dance

In a region defined by reinvention and resilience, Dance City has stood for four decades as a cultural anchor in the North East.

But now, at its 40th anniversary, it is not resting on legacy. Instead, under the visionary leadership of Artistic Director and CEO Anand Bhatt, it is launching its boldest mission yet—the £4 million ‘40 Million Minutes’ fundraising campaign, an ambitious call to action that invites the region to help deliver 40 million minutes of life-changing dance experiences over the next ten years.

Dance City is asking the North East business community to consider an investment—not just in the arts, but in a future where health, education and creativity intersect to strengthen communities and unlock potential. The message is clear: now is the time for businesses to step meaningfully into the region’s cultural story.

Anand Bhatt is no ordinary arts leader. A dancer, producer and passionate advocate for access and equity, Anand speaks with purpose about dance not only as performance, but as a tool for societal change.

“This campaign is not only about raising money—it’s about raising our sights,” he says. “Dance transforms lives. It builds confidence, connection, discipline, empathy. These are not luxuries—they are the foundations of thriving communities.

“In a time when public funding for the arts is shrinking, we’re having to ask bigger questions: who steps in to protect what



Anand Bhatt

matters? Who helps us keep culture alive in the places that need it most?

“With 40 Million Minutes, we’re planting a flag for what this region deserves and what the next generation needs. Arts Council funding has been static for 15 years while the Department for Education has reduced the funding for our CAT programme by £27,000 this year alone. We need the support of businesses to protect our future and to ensure every young person in this region—no matter their background – can see themselves reflected on our stages and in the stories we tell through dance.”

The campaign represents a strategic scaling up of Dance City’s proven model: from youth training and community classes to professional support and pioneering programmes for those living with Parkinson’s and dementia. In total, Dance City engages with over 8,000 people a year in community settings and has 70,000 annual visits to the Dance City Newcastle centre. The new campaign will supercharge that reach.

The potential benefits for partners are equally compelling. At a time when businesses are seeking meaningful ways to embed ESG strategies, support wellbeing and boost their community visibility, Dance City presents a rare opportunity. Corporate partnerships and sponsorships are being structured not just around giving—but around collaboration, branding and lasting community legacy.

It’s an offer made all the more powerful by Dance City’s deep regional roots

and credibility. As a National Portfolio Organisation part-funded by Arts Council England, Dance City has grown from grassroots beginnings in 1985 to become one of the largest and most inclusive dance centres outside London. And its role is more critical than ever.

“The North East deserves a vibrant dance offer delivered by expert practitioners,” says Lyndsey Turner Swift, newly appointed Chair. “In a region with some of the highest poverty and lowest health outcomes in the UK, dance has a proven role in changing lives.”

This isn’t just arts philanthropy—it’s regional investment. And it’s an investment in people: in children discovering confidence on a dance floor; in older adults moving again with joy; in the next generation of creative leaders being trained in Newcastle.

As the campaign gains momentum, Anand’s gaze is firmly set on the future.

“We’re not just asking for support—we’re inviting the business community to help shape a more vibrant, more equal future and to invest in creativity and in movement itself,” he says. “We’re asking them to help strengthen the society they live in—the same communities their staff work in and their customers belong to.”

**To find out how your business can partner with Dance City visit [www.dancecity.co.uk/support](http://www.dancecity.co.uk/support) or contact [fundraising@dancecity.co.uk](mailto:fundraising@dancecity.co.uk)**





# Northern Stage names new Chief Executive

Northern Stage, the largest producing theatre in the North East, has announced the appointment of Michael Slavin as its new Chief Executive, marking the start of an exciting new chapter for the theatre and the wider cultural community across the North East.

**Michael brings with him a wealth of experience in theatre leadership, commercial operations and hospitality, most recently as Chief Operating Officer at 11Arches, the charity behind Kynren, the UK's biggest live-action outdoor show based in County Durham. Previously Michael served as Interim Chief Executive of York Theatre Royal.**

This appointment is also a homecoming for the new Chief Executive, who first fell in love with Northern Stage (or Newcastle Playhouse as it was then) more than 20 years ago while studying at Newcastle University. That early connection, combined with his deep roots in the region and a lifelong passion for performance, marks an important step in the future of the organisation.

Speaking about his appointment, Michael said, "I am absolutely delighted to be joining Northern Stage as Chief Executive. I first visited Northern Stage over 20 years



Michael Slavin announced as new chief executive of Northern Stage

Images/photography credit: Christopher Owens

ago and have been a frequent visitor ever since. This theatre holds, along with the city of Newcastle and its people, a very special place in my heart. The chance to work with Natalie and the team is profoundly exciting, and I look forward to delighting our audiences over the coming years.

"My time at Kynren has been unique and memorable - I will miss all the wonderful volunteers and the amazing team there. However, after my time at York Theatre Royal, including as Interim CEO, the opportunity to return to producing theatre, particularly in the North East and especially at Northern Stage, was irresistible and I can't wait to get started!"

Michael's arrival signals a new leadership structure for Northern Stage, with the creation of the sole Chief Executive leadership role to work in close partnership with Artistic Director Natalie Ibu. Together, they will steer the organisation through its next stage of development, strengthening its role as a beacon for creativity, community and cultural life in the North East.

Artistic Director Natalie Ibu said: "I'm thrilled to welcome Michael to Northern Stage and am very much looking forward to working alongside him as he brings his infectious sense of possibility, curiosity and passion for theatre, for Northern Stage

and for the North East. Since Michael's relationship began with Northern Stage when he studied at Newcastle University, this is really a welcome back!"

Northern Stage's Chair of the Trustees, Simon Elliott, added, "I am excited to announce the appointment of Michael Slavin as Chief Executive of Northern Stage. Michael's history in Newcastle, York and County Durham, together with his track record of delivery at senior levels in theatre and performance made him the outstanding candidate for this role. I look forward to the partnership that Michael will form with Artistic Director Natalie Ibu to enable Northern Stage to go from strength to strength for our present and future audiences, for makers, creators and for the people of the city and the region."

Upon joining Northern Stage in October 2025, Michael will be the sole CEO with Natalie Ibu continuing as Artistic Director, bringing a renewed sense of ambition and energy to Northern Stage as it continues to produce bold, inclusive and joyful theatre from its city centre home. Interim arrangements will continue until then with Sian Alexander as Interim Executive Director and Amy Fawdington as Interim Deputy Executive Director supporting the organisation during this transition period.

[northernstage.co.uk](http://northernstage.co.uk)



Artistic Director Natalie Ibu with newly appointed Chief Executive Michael Slavin



# Places to go...Innerleithen



Whilst the majority of these articles feature travel by rail, the same principles of minimising carbon emissions apply to trips by bus.

**I have had three trips to the Scottish Borders in the last year starting from Jedburgh which is reached by really useful service X74 Peter Hogg service from Eldon Square Bus Station in Newcastle.**

Within England, that is until Carter Bar and the Scottish Border, the Day Saver is valid. Also the £2.50 fare cap which applies in Durham, Tyne and Wear and Northumberland does not cover all the way to Jedburgh so rebook if necessary at the border. The through fare is £6.50. The Peter Hogg drivers must drive one of the fastest routes in the UK, covering 56.5 miles in 97 minutes, which is an astonishing average speed of 35.25 miles per hour. There are three rotations a day on the X74 and the last bus south from Jedburgh is at 1513 (not Sundays) which doesn't really permit a full day out. The alternative is to use the Borders Buses X95 via Carlisle then bus or train across the Tyne Valley.

Borders Buses is related to West Coast Motors on the other side of Scotland, same red and cream livery, and they have an easy to use app which sells a range of mobile tickets. Best value is the 24 hour ticket at £10.70 covering the Scottish Borders, Berwick, Lothian, Edinburgh and Carlisle, and since my travels with Border Buses commenced with the 1049 service 68 from Jedburgh to Galashiels I was able to finish off my travels with an early Sunday trip to Carlisle.

Innerleithen is a small Borders town, close to Peebles which is the next town west. I elected to stay overnight at the diminutive St Ronan's Hotel where the room was a family one with bunk beds. Apart from sleeping, I was barely in the room at all, dividing my time between the National Trust for Scotland's Printing Works, Traquair House and an evening bus trip up to Penicuik for a meal. Robert Smail's was a printing works which never modernised and when its founder died the NTS bought it in a time warp. Smail's kept a copy of everything they ever printed, as shown in the photo, which had become a social history of the area. For a while they published a weekly newspaper, printing the train times set in letter type as an advertisement on the front page. It is best visited on a Monday when there are tours of the whole site. I was permitted to visit the office. Traquair, a mile south, is the oldest inhabited house in Scotland, visited by 27 Kings and Queens (not sure if Charles III has been yet) with impressive gardens and a maze laid out in

1980 in which to get quite disorientated and/or lost. There was a medieval event over the weekend of my visit, and many young people attending went home to Edinburgh on the same X62 which took me to Penicuik. I had booked a table at Koshi, an excellent Nepali and Indian restaurant, and was pleased to be welcomed by name when I put a foot through the door.

I slipped out of the hotel early for the 0733 to Galashiels, connecting to the X95 to Hawick for breakfast in Morrisons, and then picked up the first of three through services to Carlisle via Langholm. At Carlisle I transferred to the train to Newcastle, but could have taken the cheaper and slower bus 685 into Eldon Square, after a short immersive trip into the centre of the Borders.

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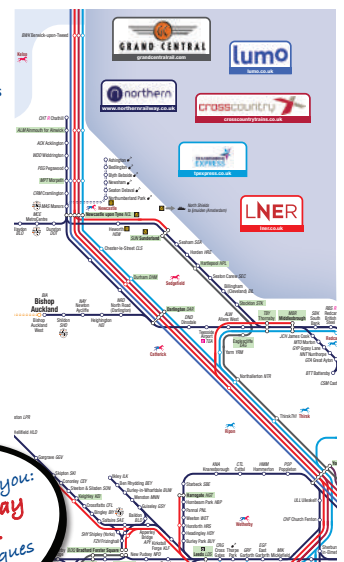
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## Maguires Country Parks honour family legacy with special 60th birthday tribute

Maguires Country Parks, a Darlington-based family business founded over 30 years ago, has grown from a single site into a portfolio of 11 award-winning parks across the North East and Yorkshire. To thank the man who helped make it all possible, sons Billy (39), Gilbert (37), and Nathan (26) Maguire have unveiled “The William”—a bespoke holiday home named in honour of their father, Billy Maguire.

As children, the Maguire brothers were immersed in the family business, doing everything from delivering gas bottles to unblocking drains. It was their father and grandfather—both named Billy—who instilled in them the values, knowledge, and work ethic that continue to shape the company today.

“The William” is available across multiple Maguires Country Parks and is designed to reflect the family’s commitment to quality, comfort, and connection with nature. With a spacious open-plan lounge, stylish dining area, fully fitted kitchen, two bedrooms, two



bathrooms, and private decking, this luxury lodge offers refined countryside living with a personal story at its heart.

“Our dad started everything. We just wanted to say thank you in a way he’d never forget. Naming a holiday home after him—well, it’s something that’ll always be part of the parks, just like he is.”

Maguires Country Parks now spans sites from Berwick in Northumberland to Topcliffe in North Yorkshire, offering touring, residential, and holiday accommodation across 11 (soon to be 12) parks. Each site reflects the family’s passion for creating peaceful, high-quality environments for holidaymakers and residents alike.

## Inn Collection Group recognised as a UK’s best privately managed company

The Inn Collection Group is delighted to announce they have been recognised as one of ten top-performing private businesses in the UK’s 2025 Best Managed Companies awards.

The UK’s Best Managed Companies programme shines a spotlight on private businesses from across the UK and the performance that drives them. The programme is an initiative of Deloitte Private, which provides personalised solutions to privately owned businesses and family enterprises.

Sean Donkin, CEO of The Inn Collection Group commented: “We are thrilled to be acknowledged as one of the UK’s top managed private companies. We are honoured to be a winner of this award as it shows the hard work and dedication of the entire business from housekeepers, front of house teams, maintenance and support centre colleagues. We are very proud of the recognition and thank everyone involved.

This is the inaugural year of the UK’s Best Managed Companies awards, with the programme already established in over 45 territories across the world. It recognises top private companies for their organisational success and contributions to their industry and the economy.

## St. James’ STACK awarded a five-year extension

Following a momentous first year, city planners have awarded the hugely popular ‘St. James’ STACK, presented by Sela’ an additional five years of planning permission.

The 2,000-capacity fanzone and leisure destination – located beneath the iconic Gallowgate End of St. James’ Park, Newcastle—was initially granted a three-year planning permission in 2023 before officially opening in 2024.

Now, ahead of the first anniversary of its launch, the venue has received the green light to remain on the site until 2031 – giving football fans, concert goers and the wider public continued access to its unique blend of live entertainment, bars and globally-inspired street food.



Crafted from 56 repurposed shipping containers, the site is a collaboration between STACK and Newcastle United. It has transformed a former car park at Strawberry Place into a vibrant social space that includes a central plaza, main stage and large, immersive screens.

The site now employs 175 people and is a base for eight small businesses. It also continues to support local and national talent, with 1,426 stage performances at the venue since it first opened its doors last summer.



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A woman with curly hair, wearing a red leotard, is captured mid-air performing a backflip. A white hula hoop is around her waist. The background is a bright yellow gradient.

# HEAT UP SUMMER

A woman with dark hair, wearing a black leotard, is captured mid-air performing a backflip. A white hula hoop is around her waist. The background is a blue gradient with white water splashes.

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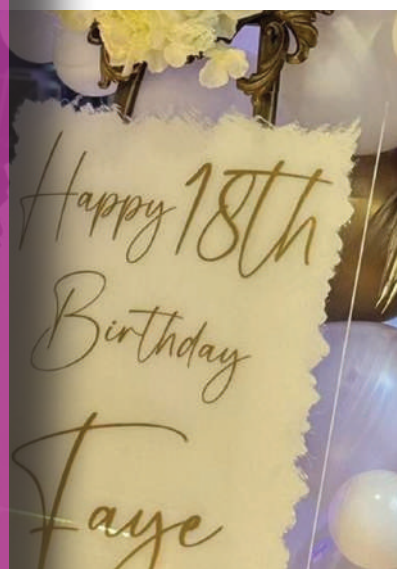
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# Diary of a GM



## Hunting the unicorn called work-life balance

By Jeff Hodgson

Let's get something straight—when you work in hospitality, “work-life balance” often sounds like a punchline. It's that mythical creature everyone talks about, but no one's seen.

**I've been in this game for over a few decades, and let me tell you, balance isn't about finding serenity—it's about staying sane when the coffee machine breaks during Sunday brunch and a wedding party walks in unannounced.**

Still, I'm here to say it's not impossible. Elusive? Definitely. But with some hard-earned lessons (and a few mistakes along the way), I've learned that balance in this industry doesn't mean 50/50. It means flexibility, perspective, and picking your battles wisely.

### **Lesson 1: Forget Perfect—aim for possible**

Early in my career, I thought balance meant being home by 6 p.m. three nights a week. Reality check: Some days are 14-hour slogs. You live on adrenaline, black coffee, and whatever pastry the chefs have left behind. But then comes the odd quiet Tuesday, where I make it home in time to eat dinner with my family—while sitting down. That's balance, too.

It's not about rigid hours. It's about knowing when to push and when to pull back. I call it the see-saw method: you're always adjusting, never static.

### **Lesson 2: Schedules Matter (but be ready to improvise)**

As a GM, I've seen scheduling go from Tetris to total chaos in the blink of an eye. But good scheduling is where balance starts. I'm relentless about fair shift rotations—everyone deserves a weekend off now and then, even if it means I take the hit now and then.

And I use my calendar like its gospel. Birthdays, appointments, even 30 minutes to grab a coffee uninterrupted—it's all blocked out. Because if you don't defend your time, no one will.

### **Lesson 3: “No” is not a dirty word**

Hospitality breeds people-pleasers.

We want to fix everything, say yes to everyone. But over the years, I've learned that saying “no” can make you better at your job—and a lot happier at home.

No, I won't take that 10pm meeting on my day off. No, I won't approve a last-minute schedule swap that leaves the team short-staffed. And no, the guest cannot have a suite upgrade because it's their cat's birthday.

### **Lesson 4: If you can't laugh, you're in trouble**

Hospitality is absurd. That's part of the charm. A guest once asked me if we could serve non-frozen ice. Another insisted their room smelled “too clean.” You learn to laugh, or you drown in frustration. I encourage my team to find humour in the chaos. We trade stories like a group of football fans in our local pub, and those laughs, those moments of connection, are what get you through the 12-hour marathons.

### **Lesson 5: Treat your days off like gold**

On my days off, I unplug. I don't check email. I don't respond to “just a quick question” texts. I recharge. That might mean breakfast with my family a walk by the seafront or just watching a football match without being WhatsApp to fix a broken ice machine. The secret? Plan your rest like you plan your shifts. Because if you don't rest, you burn out. And in this business, burnout doesn't knock—it kicks the door in.

### **Final Thought: Balance is personal**

No two GMs will define work-life balance the same way. For me, it's about protecting the time that matters, knowing when to step back, and leading by example—so my team feels they can do the same.

Will I ever achieve perfect harmony between work and life? Probably not. But I've made peace with the idea that even unicorns need a coffee break. And sometimes, that's more than enough. Oh and having my next holiday planned.

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## Dabbawal's early evening menu assumes centre stage

By Michael Grahamslaw

Nothing beats a Summer in the city. Sun-scorched streets, skies of blueberry and cream, a packed-programme of events at Newcastle's Theatre Royal. It was the latter that brought my son Jack and I into town.

**Pre-theatre dining can pose its challenges: too much of a dash to prepare a home-cooked meal from work; too ceremonious an occasion for a hurried, on-the-hoof light bite.**

Fortunately, one of the city's best Indian restaurants has the answer.

I have long been a fan of the Dabbawal chain. First, its venue on Newcastle's High Bridge and more recently, its other culinary outpost on Jesmond's Brentwood Avenue.

Just a stone's throw away from the Theatre Royal, it would be Dabbawal Newcastle in the spotlight this time round, a venue so well-placed you can order your bill at the two-minute bell and be in your seat for the curtain-raising. (Don't hold me to this!)

Dabbawaal offer a sumptuous early evening



menu available 5pm to 6.15pm Sunday – Friday, with value available with two courses for £18 per person.

Meeting Jack from work, we were impressed to find a packed dining area at 5.30pm – clearly an encouraging sign.

Its classy façade is framed by a block maroon paint while inside, the restaurants aims to capture all the colour and vibrancy of the Indian street. Of course, this means the warmest of welcomes on arrival as we shown to our smart, subterranean corner table and offered up a couple of crispy, cool cobras.

The early evening menu is suitably on brand with a collection of Indian street food and snacks, not to mention some flavourful and authentic roadside curries.

The name "Dabbawal" is itself nod to the legendary lunchbox delivery men of India (and in particular, Mumbai) known as dabbawalas. These form a famously efficient network that delivers thousands of home-cooked meals to office workers across the city each day.

It's a symbol of care, consistency, and

culinary tradition—values that Dabbawal Newcastle clearly channels into its food.

With a show to catch, we wasted to no time in ordering up. Jack enjoyed a bold opener in the chicken chilli fry. This featured shredded chicken tossed with julienned peppers and onions, tied together by a whisper of black pepper and a hint of heat that lingers just long enough to wake up your palate.

Across the table, yours truly waded in to another standout in the Tamarind Salmon. Marinated in honey, dill, and saffron, the fish arrives delicately cooked, its sweetness offset by the pleasant tang of tamarind and the warmth of the spices. It's a dish that feels both luxurious yet grounded in reality.

Following on, the Railway Lamb Curry proved a nod to the Anglo-Indian era, when such dishes were served aboard long train journeys across the subcontinent.

Equally good was Jack's Old Delhi Butter Chicken. Smoked chicken tikka arrived bathed in a creamy, tomato-based sauce, proving an aromatic feast for all the senses.

Paired with soft, pillowy naan and elvety black lentils, it's a dish that satisfies on every level.

With service this slick, we even had time for a short perusal of the dessert menu. Not normally one for a pudding, Jack couldn't resist his all time favourite mango kulfi which provided a fitting finale.

This was polished off with gusto before heading back out into the early evening light.

Incidentally, our evening showing was fantastic, but, regardless, this Dabbawaal early evening menu was a real crowd pleaser.

**For more information, visit [dabbawal.com](http://dabbawal.com)**





# BAILIFFGATE HOTEL



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# Bailiffgate Hotel – A new chapter in Northumbrian luxury

A refined new chapter for Northumbrian hospitality, where heritage, craftsmanship and comfort come together in the heart of Alnwick

**Set in the heart of historic Alnwick, just a stone's throw from the Castle gates, the Bailiffgate Hotel is Northumberland's newest luxury retreat — and one that brings fresh energy and ambition to the region's hospitality landscape.**

Housed in a sensitively restored Georgian building, the five-star standard hotel, which welcomed its first guests at the end of May, combines architectural heritage with modern comfort, offering guests a refined base from which to explore one of the UK's most captivating corners.

The grand Georgian building, which once served as the Duke's Commissioner's House and later the Duchess's School, has undergone an ambitious and thoughtful transformation under the direction of its owners, Northumberland Estates. Now home to 48 beautifully appointed rooms and suites, the hotel blends heritage with contemporary elegance to stunning effect — from the opulent Grand Commissioner Suite to dog-friendly courtyard doubles and Castle View rooms that offer guests cinematic vistas of Alnwick Castle.

At the helm of the hotel is General Manager Bernard Bloodworth, whose connection to the building is deeply personal. "To lead this team and open the doors of a place I once knew as a schoolboy is something I could never have imagined," Bernard says. "There's a sense of legacy here — not just

architectural, but human. Every guest who checks in becomes part of this building's new story."

That story is as much about people as it is about bricks and mortar. With over 70 permanent jobs created, more than 250 local tradespeople involved in the construction, and over 200 weeks of apprenticeships offered during the build, the hotel's opening has provided a significant boost to the local economy. Bernard adds: "This hotel is more than a luxury experience — it's an investment in Alnwick's future, in skills, careers, and regional pride."

Central to the hotel's appeal is Motte & Bailey, its signature restaurant led by Executive Head Chef Paul Blakey, whose track record includes two AA Rosette kitchens at some of the region's finest venues. Paul describes the dining concept as "a celebration of comfort and craft, led by flavour and Northumbrian seasonality."

His menus are a love letter to the region's produce — from Craster kipper hash and lamb with shoulder curry, to vegan creations like wild mushroom and truffle tarts. "It's about offering generosity and elegance on every plate," says Paul, "without ever being intimidating."

The food, however, is only part of the draw. The Commissioner's Bar offers a relaxed space for cocktails and local spirits, while afternoon teas in the light-filled Garden Room or on the courtyard terrace channel timeless English indulgence. Private events are catered for in Mrs Bowmaker's Room, named for the school's redoubtable first headmistress.

As a destination, Bailiffgate Hotel is perfectly positioned — not just next to one of the UK's most iconic castles, but within easy reach of The Alnwick Garden, Lilidorei, and Northumberland's spectacular coastline. From romance to retreat, culture to cuisine, this hotel delivers with confidence and style.

As Bernard puts it: "We want people to feel like they've discovered something truly special — a place that honours its past while offering something fresh and unforgettable."

With its combination of story, service, and setting, the Bailiffgate Hotel looks set to become a defining feature of the North East's hospitality landscape — and a proud standard bearer for Alnwick's next chapter.

[www.bailiffgatehotel.com](http://www.bailiffgatehotel.com)



A view through to the Garden Room



The Georgian Suite





**The Bailiffgate Hotel**

**The Bailiffgate Hotel recently marked its official opening with a special event attended by guests from across the region.**

The hotel was formally opened by His Grace The Duke of Northumberland and Earl Percy, who unveiled a commemorative plaque to mark the occasion.

Set against the dramatic backdrop of Alnwick Castle, the celebration included speeches and a reception in the hotel's Garden Room and courtyard terrace, showcasing the transformation of the former Duchess's School into a five-star Northumbrian retreat.





# JC Events has become the North East's leading top AV and events company – and it's not hard to see why...



The entrepreneurial spirit which has helped put South Shields-based JC Events at the top of its game is down to its namesake founder.

**While other youngsters may have been thinking about their homework or meeting their mates in town, Jacqui Chapman was being taught by her dad to French polish – and then rescued old furniture and gave it a new lease of life.**

It was this that gave Jacqui her work ethic – something that has lasted a lifetime.

The ability to create something unique – and to grow a business at the same time – is

something that has held Jacqui in good stead across the years and made JC Events the go-to company for anyone wanting a combination of technological nous and creative genius.

JC Events clients read like the who's who of top companies and organisations – from the NHS to Amazon, from Karbon Homes to The Alan Shearer Foundation, from Lockheed Martin to Learning Curve.

Add to that list Northern Power Grid, North East Screen and Thirteen Housing Group and you're going some way to understanding the quality the company delivers.

It may be conferences, award ceremonies or launches, a film premiere or a fund-raising event indoor or outdoors – whatever it is, it will get the same level of JC Events magic.







Working in events was not on Jacqui's radar, having originally graduated from college after completing a graphic design course.

"I went to work for a printer and learned all about large format printing, so was producing work for exhibitions and events," she said.

"Then one of the reps left and I was asked if I would like the job and was then seconded to the exhibition division."

This gave Jacqui her first taste of working with conferences and events and she eventually left, deciding to set up her own company.

"I could see what was needed for change and we started to provide different reactive events," she said.

The company started to get noticed and the work started to pour in, mainly due to Jacqui's creative abilities.

"I always looked at things a bit differently," she said.

"It was important for me that things were aesthetically pleasing so I started to come up with different ideas for how we could make things look, which nobody else was doing."

Lights were put on plinths instead of trusses, cables and wires which traditionally would be trailed across the floor were well hidden away including adding smell machines which was a trailblazing way of creating events at the time.

"I thought about the whole room and how it looked and felt for the delegate or guest," she said.

From those early days the company continued to up its game, with Jacqui launching her new company – JC Events – 12 years ago as a one-stop shop for every conceivable kind of event solution.

The JC touches are not hard to recognise. It could be an underwater themed dinner complete with large inflatables and exciting projections or an impactful conference which makes use of the company's latest investment – the region's only 336 panel screen for ultra sharp video imaging – which cost more than £400,000.

Creating solutions is JC Events forte. Forget an event where attendees queue up to get their name ticked off a list and are handed an eco-lanyard – Jacqui's team has come up with a stylish system which immediately prints out a delegate badge in a fingertip touch.

Being ahead of the game is like breathing to Jacqui, who currently employs nine full time staff and has 120 freelancers.

Building the company's eco credentials are now high on the agenda, from both a personal and a client perspective.

"Many of our clients have strict social value standards and environmental commitments and we have taken steps to help them achieve that," said Jacqui.

"We can repurpose and rebrand existing collateral which not only saves money but also helps with sustainability.

"I'm constantly looking for new innovations and we are looking at a whole host of eco measures we can offer our clients which we believe will be hugely appealing without compromising on any quality of an event."

JC Events continues to go from strength to strength – with Jacqui laser focussed about the future.

"We want to continue to elevate across the North East and beyond to the next level," she said.

**For further information visit [www.jc-events.co.uk](http://www.jc-events.co.uk)**



# Culture Club...

## Chris Kendall

An internationally represented, Multi-award-winning Actor, Voice Over Actor, Comedian and Professional Father Christmas based in Morpeth Northumberland. His voice has been used in many TV programmes and adverts. He is also a volunteer at Radio Northumberland.

### Who is your favourite author and why?

I've always been drawn to older, darker tales — the kind that feel like they've lived through generations. The original *Brothers Grimm* stories and *Edgar Allan Poe's* works are my favourites. There's a raw honesty in those tales. Poe especially had a way of creating atmosphere and emotion that sticks with you.

### What would be your three Desert Island Discs?

*Tenacious D*, without a doubt — their humour and energy would keep my spirits up. Then *Disturbed* for that driving, intense sound that gets you moving. And *System of a Down* — their creativity and unpredictability mean I'd never get bored listening.

### Who is your favourite film star and why?

Keanu Reeves. He's talented, versatile, and seems like a genuinely humble person. In an industry full of ego, he stands out as someone who's stayed grounded and kind.

### What are your top three films?

*Pirates of the Caribbean* — all of them! I love the adventure and the characters. *Tenacious D: The Pick of Destiny* is a hilarious, feel-good favourite. And *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* — pure comic genius. You can watch it a hundred times and still laugh.



Chris Kendall

### Which poem left a lasting impression on you?

I'm not into traditional poetry much, but there's a silly little rhyme my stepdad used to say: "There was a cow, upon a plough. It's not there now...it must have gone."

It's stayed with me more than anything from school. Sometimes it's those odd, personal things that leave the biggest mark.

### What box sets have you enjoyed?

*Breaking Bad* had me hooked — great writing and character development. *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* is just feel-good fun, and *Monk* blends humour and mystery in a way that's really comforting.

### Who is your favourite artist or performer?

Salvador Dalí. I love surrealism — it forces you to question what you're seeing and what it means. His work stays with you long after you've seen it.

### What is your favourite venue?

I don't have a standout venue for performances, but I really like "The Wallow" Wetherspoons in Blyth. It's not glamorous, but it's full of local history and character.

### Which musical instrument do you particularly enjoy?

The piano — it's expressive and emotional. And strings, like a violin or cello, can give you goosebumps. There's something powerful in those sounds.

### From the world of arts and culture, who would be your ideal dinner party guests?

Patrick Stewart, Robin Williams, David Attenborough, and Jim Carrey. That group would bring laughter, wisdom, insight, and incredible stories. I think it'd be a night to remember.

[www.chriskendallvo.com](http://www.chriskendallvo.com)



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## Country & western bar Ruby Rae's "Nashville comes to Newcastle" opening night

The North East's first country and western live country music bar Ruby Rae's opened this month.

Host to some of the best country singers in the UK, expect high quality authentic cocktails, Bourbon, American beers, line dancing nights and a night of true Nashville.

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## Fresh flavours and familiar charm

By Michael Grahmslaw

The ever popular Three Mile at Gosforth has recently swept into summer with a new menu and outside seating area.

**Part of the Malhotra Group PLC portfolio of leisure venues this landmark site has invested £150k into a new wraparound terrace, complete with heating and weatherproof TV screens.**

On a lazy Bank Holiday afternoon my wife Lisa and I made the short journey from basecamp to take a look and certainly weren't left disappointed.

Shown to a comfortable table by our very attentive waiter we perused the exciting new menu over an agreeable glass of Pinot Grigio.

There is a mouthwatering selection of small plates, including crispy Korean beef tacos and popcorn chicken and chorizo.

After much deliberation I opted for Vietnamese prawns which embodied

the essence of South East Asian cuisine. Marinated in chilli, ginger and lime these were plump and tender and perfect for any seafood lover.

Lisa meanwhile kicked off with smoked salmon and avocado crumpet which blended rich texture with lots of fresh clean flavours. She declared this to be absolutely delicious.

If the starters were impressive then the mains were no less so.

Carrying on the Asian theme I devoured Thai spiced chicken burger with lots of accompanying "fixtures and fittings." Lisa enjoyed chicken gyros, a Greek classic full of Mediterranean flavour accompanied by a hearty kick.

These are just two of a wide selection of meat dishes on offer cooked on the Three Mile's open flame barbecue.

Pizza and pasta lovers are also well catered for with gluten free options available whilst chip lovers can also enjoy salt and pepper, surf and turf or spiced cheese and dirty bacon fries.

Feeling replete we swerved a lovely dessert menu in favour of repairing to the comfortable main bar for a drink or two.

I first visited this iconic venue when "I wore a younger man's clothes" in the early 90s. Thirty years on The Three Mile is very much alive and kicking.

Highly recommended.

[www.threemile.co.uk](http://www.threemile.co.uk)





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Elahi Shah Amin and Cllr Kevin Johnston

## Indian restaurant chain to serve up new North East venue

A fast-growing Indian restaurant chain has been named as the first new operator to take space at one of the North East's most exciting hospitality and leisure developments.



CGI of the soon to be redeveloped Sunnyside Social development

**My Delhi has signed a lease for a 4,089sqft restaurant at Sunnyside Social, a new hospitality and leisure hub which is being delivered as part of the regeneration of the Sunnyside neighbourhood in Sunderland city centre.**

The move is part of the restaurant chain's ambitious growth plans, which over the coming years will see it open several new restaurants across the UK.

It also coincides with the third anniversary of the group's first restaurant in the city, which opened in June 2022 and has since welcomed tens of thousands of people through its doors.

Elahi Shah Amin, Director at My Delhi Indian Streetery, said: "We're incredibly excited to be opening a new and improved venue at Sunnyside Social in Sunderland city centre.

"Anyone who has been to one of our restaurants will know we take great pride in bringing the authentic tastes, sights and sounds of Delhi to our customers here in the UK, and this new venue will take that concept even further.

"We've been back to Delhi a couple of times recently, seeking inspiration for new experiential concepts which we can introduce to the new Sunderland site and then roll out across our existing and upcoming venues, and it's really got our creative juices flowing.

"We have some fantastic plans for making our restaurants even more experiential and more importantly, for some delicious new additions to our menus, which we're sure will be a huge hit and hopefully see us take home more National Curry Awards!"

**[www.mydelhistreetfood.com](http://www.mydelhistreetfood.com)**

**Interested in finding out more about Sunnyside Social?**

**Contact [sarah@atretail.co.uk](mailto:sarah@atretail.co.uk) or [Mario@Lofthouseandpartners.co.uk](mailto:Mario@Lofthouseandpartners.co.uk)**







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David Fairlamb

## Achieving your goals

Living a long and healthy life is a goal shared by many, but achieving it requires consistent effort and sensible lifestyle choices.

**Longevity isn't just about reaching an old age, it's about reaching it in good health, with a high quality of life. The foundation of a long, healthy life is built on daily habits that accumulate over time, and the earlier these habits start, the greater the benefits.**

### When to start

The ideal time to adopt a longevity-focused lifestyle is in early adulthood, even as early as the late teens or twenties. This is when the body is still highly resilient and responsive to healthy behaviors. However, it's never too late to make positive changes.

The most critical time to sort out one's lifestyle is in midlife, roughly between the ages of 40 and 60. This is the period when poor habits often begin to catch up with people, manifesting as high blood pressure,

weight gain, insulin resistance, and other chronic conditions. Taking control at this stage can significantly reduce the risk of heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and cognitive decline in later years.

### The most crucial habits for longevity

#### Nutrition

What we eat is arguably the most powerful tool for promoting longevity. Diets rich in whole foods, vegetables, fruits, legumes, whole grains, nuts, seeds, and healthy fats (like olive oil and omega-3s) are consistently associated with longer, healthier lives. The Mediterranean and Okinawan diets are two models linked to longevity. Avoiding processed foods, excess sugar, red meat, and trans fats is crucial. Intermittent fasting or time-restricted eating may also support metabolic health and longevity.

#### Physical activity

Regular exercise is one of the most evidence based behaviors that promote long life. Aim for at least 150 minutes of

moderate aerobic activity per week (like walking, swimming, or cycling), along with strength training exercises at least twice a week. Movement maintains muscle mass, improves cardiovascular health, and supports brain function. Even light daily activity, such as walking or gardening, is beneficial, sedentary lifestyles are strongly associated with chronic disease and earlier death.

### Sleep

Sleep is often overlooked, but it's foundational to long-term health. Most adults need 7–9 hours of quality sleep per night. Poor sleep is linked to obesity, heart disease, depression, and shorter life span. Sleep hygiene, regular bedtimes, limiting screens before bed, and creating a quiet, dark environment can drastically improve sleep quality.

### Stress management

Chronic stress is a silent killer. It increases inflammation, disrupts hormones, and damages the cardiovascular system. Effective strategies include mindfulness, meditation, deep breathing, spending time in nature, and social connection. Hobbies, pets, and religious or spiritual practices can also help alleviate stress and promote emotional well-being.

### Avoiding harmful substances

Smoking, excessive alcohol consumption, and recreational drug use are strongly linked to disease and reduced lifespan. Avoiding or quitting these behaviors is one of the most powerful changes a person can make, even later in life.

### Social connection and purpose

Strong relationships and a sense of purpose are common traits among the longest-living people in Blue Zones, areas of the world with high concentrations of centenarians. Loneliness and social isolation are linked to early mortality. Investing in friendships, community, and meaningful activities can be just as vital as diet or exercise.

### The cumulative effect

While each of these factors is powerful on its own, the real magic happens when they are combined and sustained over time. Small, consistent improvements in daily routines add up to significant long-term benefits. Think of health like a bank account, a very healthy choice is a deposit. The earlier and more often you invest, the greater the returns.

[www.davidfairlambfitness.co.uk](http://www.davidfairlambfitness.co.uk)

## ...David's summing up...

**The ideal time to adopt a longevity-focused lifestyle is in early adulthood, even as early as the late teens or twenties. This is when the body is still highly resilient and responsive to healthy behaviors. However, it's never too late to make positive changes.**





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# Beyond the Boy, beyond the brand: In conversation with Jay George

Few voices resonate with the kind of emotional clarity and quiet rebellion that Jay George brings to the table. As the Founder & Creative Director of Beyond the Boy, a fashion label rooted in self-expression, Jay is redefining what it means to style from the soul. His work transcends aesthetics - it's therapy, rebellion, celebration, and storytelling stitched together in fabric.

## What sparked your journey into fashion styling and eventually led you to launch Beyond the Boy?

It all started with needing a way to express what I couldn't always say. Styling became my language when words felt too heavy. Over time, I realised it wasn't just about how I dressed myself—it was about helping others feel seen in ways they didn't know they needed. Beyond the Boy was born from that space: part healing, part rebellion, part celebration. It's about creating something for anyone who's ever felt like they didn't fit the mold, and giving them a new one—one they shape themselves.

## Has fashion ever saved you, softened you, or helped you become more yourself?

Absolutely. Fashion has been a lifeline at times. It's helped me reclaim parts of myself I thought I'd lost, and imagine new ones I didn't know were there. It gave me freedom and control when everything else felt uncertain. And sometimes, it just made me feel good—and that in itself was enough.

## Beyond the Boy isn't just clothing - it feels like a movement. What message do you want people to feel when they wear your pieces?

I want them to feel brave. Whether they're showing up in softness, in power, or somewhere in between—I want them to feel like they're claiming space on their own terms. It's about the freedom to feel joy, to express your identity, to honour your journey—even the difficult parts—and still feel good doing it.

## Building a brand from the ground up is no easy feat. What's one challenge that tested you - and how did you push through it?

Learning to stay rooted in the vision when things got tough—financially, emotionally, creatively—was a real test. There's pressure to water yourself down to be more palatable or profitable, but I chose to stay honest. I reminded myself that this brand was never about chasing trends—it was about holding space for truth, style, and connection.

## What kind of impact do you hope Beyond the Boy has on the next generation of creatives and designers?

I want it to give them permission—to take risks, to lead with feeling, to create from their lived experiences. I hope it shows them that fashion can be activism, therapy, celebration—whatever they need it to be. There's no one way to do this, and that's the point.

## How do you want people to remember your work - as a stylist, a brand founder, and as a voice in fashion?

As work that helped people feel more themselves. Whether it was through a jacket that made them feel powerful or a campaign that spoke to something they'd lived through—I want it to feel honest. A little defiant, a little soft. Always human.

Find out more about Beyond the Boy at [beyondtheboy.com](https://beyondtheboy.com)





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