

NORTHERN

INSIGHT

October 2026

Issue 128

Rural but not remote
Mowden Hall School

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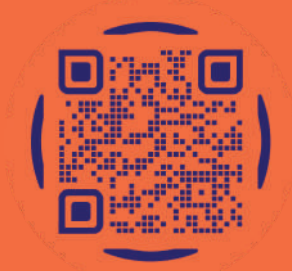


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Foreword

Welcome to the October edition of Northern Insight

With Autumn upon us we are delighted to bring you another jam packed issue full of the traditional ingredients that have made the magazine a staple read for the North East business community.

Our cover stars are Mowden Hall School who talks about classrooms, curriculums and results.

In our popular Big Interview slot we sit down with Sophie Milliken, Founder and CEO of Moja who talks about the launch of the North East Women of Excellence Awards.

Elsewhere we take a trip to the beautiful Oulton Hall near Leeds and a welcome return visit to the Northumberland Arms in Felton.

On the social front we showcase Hoult's Yard annual Crafts Yard event as well as Oasis Community Housings annual 5 a side football tournament.

In our leisure section look out for our feature on Full Circle Brew Co as they prepare to open their first pub in the heart of Newcastle.

We hope you enjoy this issue.

Many thanks to everyone concerned for the continued support.



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

Till next month...

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Student puts business skills to work with Tell Us North

A Newcastle University student from Thailand has been putting her business skills into practice after taking on a project with community interest company Tell Us North.

The MBA consultancy project forms part of a long-standing relationship between Tell Us North and Newcastle University, with the organisation regularly working with students and academic staff to share its experience of the voluntary and community sector.

The student, Chareeya Likhitwatthanakij (known as Mild), is an MBA student with a background in business. She was given a brief for the project designed to explore the skills and expertise already within the Tell Us North team and identify opportunities to develop these into training services for community groups, members of the public and businesses. Over the course of the project, she interviewed members of the Tell Us North team and carried out an online survey and desk-based market research with stakeholders.

She also explored what potential customers would be willing to pay for, helping Tell Us North identify potential income for future training programmes.

For Tell Us North, the project has provided valuable capacity to investigate an area of commercial development which could otherwise have remained on the organisation's "to-do" list.

Mild was delighted to have helped the team:

"This has been a fantastic opportunity to take what I have learned through my MBA and apply it to a real organisation and a genuine business challenge.

"Coming to Newcastle from Thailand and studying at Newcastle University has already been a hugely rewarding experience, and this project has added another dimension to that. " Tell Us North works across the health and wellbeing sector, specialising in community engagement, including managing Healthwatch Newcastle and Healthwatch Gateshead.



Vintage at the Tower

For Gayle Foster, fashion has always been about more than simply following the latest trends.

From playing dress-up in her grandmother's clothes and jewellery as a child, to becoming a New Romantic in the 1980s and searching charity shops and markets for individual pieces, Gayle has always loved the creativity, character and history that comes with vintage.

Today, that passion is at the heart of Vintage at the Tower, an independent shop tucked away in a small lane beside the historic Pele Tower in the centre of Corbridge.

The business is now celebrating its 14th year, having originally started as a pop-up with two other vintage dealers. Gayle has been running the shop on her own for the past four years.

And behind the sparkle and glamour is a serious message about sustainability: reuse rather than replace.

"We've got so much clothing on this planet right now," she said. "We've got enough clothing to clothe many future generations without making one single more piece.

"So, it's so important to reuse and recycle, and more and more people are understanding that now."

For Gayle, sustainability is not simply about selling second-hand clothes. It runs through almost every part of the business.

Items which don't suit the shop are resold or donated to charity rather than being thrown away. Vintage fabrics which can no longer be used are passed to a local maker who turns them into bags, while broken jewellery, old buttons and other craft materials are donated to a local children's nursery for art projects.



Blyth Tall Ship launches free skills and training programme

Blyth Tall Ship has opened the doors to a new programme of fully funded learning giving local people the chance to gain recognised qualifications, develop practical skills and take a step towards employment or further education.

The organisation's new Engineering Futures programme, funded by the Reece Foundation, provides accredited NVQ learning for people aged 16 and over, combining structured study with hands-on experience in the unique surroundings of Blyth Tall Ship's Heritage Workshop.

Running until September 2027, the programme takes place two days a week, for up to 12 hours, giving learners the opportunity to develop practical engineering and employability skills while working in a real-world heritage environment.

Blyth Tall Ship is also offering its Future Mariners programme, funded by the ScottishPower Foundation, for young people aged 14 to 25 from Blyth and surrounding communities.

The programme provides practical STEM, maritime and employability activities, with shorter learning opportunities of around two hours as well as full-day courses covering areas such as First Aid and Health & Safety.

Both programmes are completely free for eligible participants and are designed to build confidence, develop practical skills and provide a pathway towards employment, further learning and new opportunities.

Siobhan Sargeant, CEO of Blyth Tall Ship, said:

"We want to make learning and skills development accessible to as many people in our community as possible, particularly those who may feel that returning to education or taking the next step is daunting."



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Lumo and Hull Trains champion rail safety education for young people

45 schools across the UK have benefitted from vital rail safety education in the past year thanks to the open access operators Lumo and Hull Trains.

The leading operators teamed up with the Rail Safe Friendly Programme to deliver sessions which led to a social value of over £483,000, educating thousands of young people.

The Rail Safe Friendly Programme is dedicated to spreading the message of rail safety among young people, educators and parents in schools across the UK. Lumo and Hull Trains have supported the important initiative for the past three years.

Richard Salkeld, Director of Communications

& Partnerships at Lumo and Hull Trains, said: "Safety is always our top priority and it's incredibly important to give young people the knowledge to stay safe.

"Our pioneering partnership with the team at Rail Safe Friendly has been ongoing for the past three years and it's fantastic to see how well everyone engaged in the sessions."

Earlier this year, Lumo and Hull Trains also marked Rail Safety Week by releasing shocking footage of a runner narrowly missing being hit by a train travelling at over 100mph.

The video, captured from a Lumo train passing through North Tyneside on the East Coast Main Line, showed the runner failing to safely use the crossing and served as a powerful reminder of the importance of paying attention to your surroundings and observing the crossing instructions.

Stuart Heaton, Managing Director of Learn Live and Founder of Rail Safe Friendly, said: "We're incredibly proud of our continued partnership with Lumo and Hull Trains and the impact it is having. Reaching 45 schools means thousands more young people have received vital rail safety education. Their continued support helps us deliver potentially life-saving messages to young people and demonstrates the important role the rail industry can play in keeping communities safe."



North East to host three national ScaleUp Summits in November

Newcastle, Sunderland and Middlesbrough will each host a ScaleUp Summit on consecutive days this November, as part of the ScaleUp Institute's national ScaleUp Britain programme with its partners to celebrate, highlight and support scaling companies across the UK.

More than 25 of the region's entrepreneurs, among them Paul Callaghan CBE, Sara Davies MBE and Bill Scott OBE, will be on stage across the three days, alongside Irene Graham OBE, CEO of the ScaleUp Institute.

The summits will take place during North East Entrepreneurship Week, a programme of events and activities which runs between 11 and 20 November under the theme The Place to Rise. Tickets for most events are free for business owners and available from today.

Led by the Entrepreneurs' Forum and backed by more than a dozen organisations from across the region, the campaign is built for entrepreneurs, founders, scaleups, and aspiring business owners at every growth stage. From people thinking about starting a business, to those taking on their first employees and established businesses scaling nationally and internationally, the programme aims to make entrepreneurship and scaling leaders more visible, connect people with experience and opportunities, and show the next generation what is possible.

Alongside the ScaleUp Summits, the programme sees the launch of a new region-wide Ones to Watch Index which will identify 20 North East businesses with the potential to become some of the region's most significant companies of the future. The final 20 will be revealed at Durham University Business School on 4 November, ahead of the main programme.

NE women who are helping shape the space industry

The women who are playing an important role in helping shape the North East's fast-growing space and technology industry have been celebrated at a major event.

As part of its regular programme of events, Space North East England brought together businesses, academics and individuals who are all working in these industries across the region.

And the talks, discussions and inspirational speeches showcased the talent and expertise which is helping both space and technology thrive.

An audience of more than 70 people joined the in person and online event at NETPark, Sedgefield, hearing from women who are the forefront of these major industries.

Speakers ranged from Alex Knight, a former engineer who now runs Stemazing, an organising which works to encourage more women into STEM industries by training them as mentors to work with young people, to Marianne Whitfield, VP Sales and Business Development at Newcastle's DHS IT Solutions.



Marianne has worked in technology for more than 30 years and is currently focussed on the use of data and AI to boost productivity and is another passionate advocate for encouraging women into STEM-related careers.

The audience also heard from Christina Munn of Durham University's Space Research Centre and Dr Kirsty Lindsay, Associate Professor of Physiotherapy, Aerospace Medicine and Rehabilitation Laboratory at Northumbria University, along with Kirsty Donaldson, senior mechanical engineer at Rapid Fluidics.

The event – which is part of Space North East England's monthly Cascade programme – showcased the strong position the region holds in the space and related-industries and highlighted the exciting opportunities that exist.



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Cover Story...



Why being in the countryside doesn't have to mean being disconnected

How much space does a child need? It is a question that rarely gets asked when we talk about education.

We talk about classrooms, curriculum, and results. But perhaps we should also talk about what they need space to do. At Mowden Hall School in Northumberland, children have 52 acres to find out.

The school sits in the Northumbrian countryside, surrounded by woodland, fields and open space. For pupils at Mowden, however, this isn't simply a beautiful setting. It is part of their education.

"Children need space," says Phil Sturt, Head of Mowden Hall. "Space to explore, space to make mistakes and space to discover things for themselves. We don't want every minute of a child's day to be directed. Sometimes the most valuable learning happens when children are given the freedom to work things out for themselves."



That philosophy begins early. Mowden welcomes children from the age of two at The Nest, and outdoor learning is part of school life from the very beginning. Even the youngest children regularly head into the woods, where the changing seasons and natural environment provide a very different kind of classroom.

Mr Sturt adds: "There is something wonderfully simple about watching children outside when they aren't being told exactly what to do. A fallen branch becomes something to build with. A tree becomes something to climb. A patch of woodland becomes a place to investigate. A muddy puddle is, inevitably, an opportunity." "These moments can look like play, but they also develop qualities that are increasingly important in young people: curiosity, independence, resilience, creativity and the confidence to have a go."

At break time, the 52 acres become a playground. Children run, climb, explore and invent their own games. There is room to be energetic, space to be adventurous and, just as importantly, an opportunity to simply be children. For a generation growing up in an increasingly digital and structured world, that space matters.

Yet there is an important distinction to make.

Rural doesn't have to mean remote. Mowden is less than 15 miles from Newcastle and is connected to families across the North East. A daily morning bus runs from Gosforth through Darras Hall to school, while a new boarding bus connects families around Alnwick with Mowden on Monday and Thursday mornings.

The school has also rethought what boarding can look like for modern families. Its new Boarding Reimagined approach offers greater flexibility, allowing children to experience the independence and community of boarding while giving families more choice over what works for them.

For Mr Sturt, these developments are all part of the same philosophy. "Being rural isn't about being cut off from the world. It's about having a better place from which to explore it."

It is a philosophy that has received recognition beyond the school gates. Mowden was named Prep School of the Year 2025, with judges recognising its commitment to outdoor education. This year, the school has reached the final of the Independent Schools of the Year awards once again.

But perhaps the most telling measure of those 52 acres isn't an award or a fixture list. It is the sight of children giggling into the woods at break time, a ten-year-old proudly climbing a tree, or pupils returning from an afternoon outside with muddy knees and stories to tell.

In an increasingly busy world, perhaps one of the greatest gifts a school can give a child is simply somewhere to explore. At Mowden Hall, there are 52 acres of it.

www.mowdenhall.org.uk



MOWDEN HALL SCHOOL
AGES 2-13

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It's really important to understand the full landscape when it comes to creating credible content.

Phil Duggan

How is your business adapting to the advance of Answer Engine Optimisation (AEO)?

Phil Duggan, Marketing Director at B7, explains what it means, why it matters and how one of the North East's leading content creators can help you stand out from the crowd.

When fast-learner Phil Duggan developed, designed and sold a prototype two-page website for £250, he briefly caught a glimpse of a thrilling future. "I'd been fiddling around with websites and code for a while by then but this felt like I'd finally made it," recalls B7's Marketing Director.

"Back then — and we're talking about the mid noughties here — businesses didn't always understand websites or fully recognise how an effective website could position them in the future. It reminds me, to an extent, of where we are with Answer Engine Optimisation (AEO) right now.

"I'm older — and a little wiser — these days and as a team we can work closely with a client to explain exactly what a strong AEO strategy can do for their business and where the real benefit lies."

B7 might have built its reputation on producing polished video content, creating compelling visuals and crafting key messaging tailor-made for audiences who consume their stories online but there's more to Phil and the team than lights, camera and some seriously slick action.

The innovative Tyneside-based agency views video as the catalyst for catch-all content that permeates traditional media just as much as it quenches the thirst for a social quick-fix. B7 recognises the value of longer form written content, the impact of credible thought-leadership and the power of established domain authority — and they're not alone.

"That's what AEO is all about," agrees Phil. "That's how AI engines measure the quality of online content and that content's relevance to any given search. AEO hasn't replaced SEO just yet — SEO is still important when it comes to the traditional search platforms like Google and Bing. But there are new ways to search online. Increasingly people are asking ChatGPT, Claude or Gemini for answers. Businesses need to understand how their clients will find them and, more than ever, AEO is how."

Just as he identified the power and potential of websites two decades ago, Phil and the B7 team remain ahead of the curve when it comes to the future of online searches. Education is one of the agency's key roles as clients get to grips with another technology shift and AEO is top of the agenda.

"It used to be the case where things that went viral would be considered useful and relevant, whereas now it's not so much that case," adds Phil. "With the advance of AEO it's more about depth and more about expertise.

"Obviously any AI engine can sift through content and go 'well that's clearly wrong'. If you publish a longer form article for the sake of it — and it has no substance — then the AI engines won't cite it. Similarly, if an article has 20,000 likes or 20,000 shares then the engines will consider that based on its reach alone. But, even then, its relevance to the search will be based on the substance of the content and what the engines know to be true.



"There are other things that will make AI engines sit up and take notice: things like domain authority. If B7 has featured in the New York Times or The Daily Telegraph then the domain authority — the credibility, if you like — associated with those titles will be deemed relevant in terms of AEO.

"AEO takes LinkedIn posts into consideration and will look at review sites like TrustPilot. It's more of an holistic look at what's out there."

According to Phil, businesses need to get on board with AEO before their competitors steal a march. "Here's an example," he adds. "If somebody's search asks 'I need an accountant who doesn't wear suits and ties and it's more of a partnership that feels very tech orientated' then AI engines won't search for key words on a website — the old way of doing it.

"They'll look for articles associated with strong domain authorities that might explain, for instance, that Blu Sky in North Shields is a modern, tech-led accountancy practice where the team doesn't wear shirts and ties. That's great.

"The AI engine has found that information from several LinkedIn posts, a few Reddit comments, a couple of press releases published on BusinessLive or BDaily and an online article pulled from Northern Insight Magazine.

"So, for businesses, it's really important to understand the full landscape when it comes to creating credible content — where you need to be seen and where you need to be trusted."

How can B7 bridge that gap? "We understand content and we work with the storytellers and publications who can bring that content to the attention of AI engines," adds Phil. "I think, for the most part, understanding what your business goals are and matching your content to those goals is the key. We can tell you which platforms will work best for you and discover whether you have the resource to do it yourself or whether you need B7's support. If that's the case, we're here for you."

www.weareb7.com

Musings with Mirza...



Ammar Mirza CBE

You got to have Faith

By Ammar Mirza CBE

Faith is a funny thing. You cannot touch it, weigh it or enter it on a balance sheet.

Yet it has built cathedrals, sustained communities, inspired revolutions and carried people through moments when almost everything else had deserted them.

You have got to have faith.

That does not mean we must share the same religion, worship in the same way or even agree on the existence of God. Faith can be religious, personal or communal. It is the belief that tomorrow can be better than today, that people are fundamentally capable of good and that our contribution, however small, matters.

Around three-quarters of the world's population identifies with a religion. That is nearly six billion people connected by belief, tradition and a search for meaning.

I am not a Christian, but I have always found something profoundly moving about entering a church, or indeed a synagogue, temple, gurdwara or any place of worship. The language, customs and surroundings may differ, but the essentials are remarkably familiar. Welcome the stranger. Feed the hungry. Care for the vulnerable. Forgive where possible. Serve something greater than yourself.

"Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase," Martin Luther King Jr famously said.

At a church service, I was invited to stand at the altar and share a prayer. I expected it to be a meaningful ceremonial moment. What I had not expected was for it to make me reconsider something I had developed years earlier while serving as a David Goldman Visiting Professor at Newcastle University.

My Power of 3 is deliberately simple.

Communicate. Collaborate. Celebrate.

Communication creates understanding. Collaboration turns shared understanding into collective action. Celebration tells people that their effort, sacrifice and contribution mattered.

We spend a great deal of time talking, although not always communicating. We collaborate when circumstances force us to. But we remain rather poor at celebrating. We finish one task and charge headlong into the next, barely pausing to thank those who made the first one possible.

Places of worship understand celebration. They celebrate God, prophets, apostles, service, sacrifice, life, death, marriage, birth and renewal. More importantly, they celebrate people. The elderly resident who has attended for 50 years. The volunteer quietly preparing food. The family seeking comfort. The child taking their first steps into faith.

The Government's Community Life Survey found that Christian adults were more likely than average to volunteer formally at least once a month. Faith, when translated into action, becomes foodbanks, warm spaces, youth clubs, befriending, fundraising and support for families who have nowhere else to turn.

Then there is the biblical parable of the workers in the vineyard. Some began work early in the morning. Others arrived at the eleventh hour. At the end of the day, each received the same wage.

The early workers were not delighted. Most of us would probably have joined their WhatsApp group to complain.

Yet the lesson is not really about wages. It is about generosity, grace and human worth. It reminds us not to resent another person's opportunity simply because it arrived later than ours. There must always be room for the latecomer, the outsider and the person searching for another chance.

That is where faith and my Power of 3 meet.

Communicate so nobody remains unheard. Collaborate so nobody must struggle alone. Celebrate so nobody feels their contribution has gone unnoticed.

Faith at its best does not divide communities. It gives them roots. It creates places where people belong before anybody asks what they own, earn or do for a living.

As Desmond Tutu put it, "We are made for togetherness."

In an increasingly noisy, hurried and divided world, perhaps faith still offers us something wonderfully radical. A reason to pause. A reason to serve. A reason to believe in one another.

And, just as importantly, a reason to celebrate.

High Sheriff of Tyne and Wear, Ammar Mirza CBE, is Chair and Founder of ABCConnexions & Executive Chair of the AmmarM Group. He also serves as Honorary Colonel of the 101st (Northumbrian) Regiment Royal Artillery and holds a range of roles across the public and private sectors as a leader in inclusive innovation, investment and internationalisation.

A man and a woman are standing outdoors, holding a large, ornate, gold-colored picture frame. The woman, on the left, has long brown hair and is wearing a black leather jacket over a grey sweater. The man, on the right, has a beard and is wearing an orange jacket over a grey sweater. They are both looking directly at the camera. The background features a large, green steel truss bridge, likely the Bixby Creek Bridge, under a clear blue sky. The overall scene is bright and modern.

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Sophie Milliken

Founder and CEO at Moja

Putting North East Women in the Spotlight.

Sophie, tell us about your business.

My main business is Moja, where we work with founders and senior leaders to help them become well known in their industry. We do this through podcasting, awards, speaking, networking and PR. We also have a book publishing division, so there are many different ways we help people raise their profile.

I also chair Smart Works North East, the female unemployment charity which provides interview clothing and coaching to unemployed women and I co-own City Ladies Networking, a women-in-business networking group. We run events in Newcastle, London, Paris and Nice, which is quite fun!

You've just launched the North East Women of Excellence Awards, tell us why.

There used to be independent women's awards in the region, and I won one in 2019. I felt they had a positive impact on my business and my confidence. When they ended, I hoped somebody would take them over or create something different because there weren't any independent women's awards in the region.

I do a lot of work around the country, and I noticed that other areas have the opposite problem – they have too many awards! Some can be quite commercial, where you must pay to enter, buy a table or collect votes, and it can become more of a popularity contest rather than recognising the actual impact somebody has made.

I thought there was an opportunity to do something different, and a few months later, here we are with the North East Women of Excellence Awards.

I've brought together an exceptional Advisory Board, including Greggs CEO, Roisin Currie, broadcaster Steph McGovern and many senior leaders from major brands and businesses who have massively helped shape the awards.

What started as an idea around women-in-business awards has become much broader, with different sectors and categories. I think that's a positive thing because it means there is an opportunity for women from different backgrounds and professions to be recognised. It could also create opportunities for women from the public sector to collaborate with business owners and think about what they can create together and what impact they can have across the region.

Tell us about the categories.

There are 16 categories in total. We've got founder categories covering things such as start-up, scale-up, innovation and social entrepreneurship. Then there are leadership and workplace awards, including Emerging Leader, Manager and Director, as well as a Community Impact Award. We've also got recognition awards, including Role Model of the Year and Mentor of the Year.

Nomination is a simple process via the website and then the nomination goes to the person you've nominated, who can read all the lovely things somebody has said about them! They can then

accept the nomination and complete the application, or people can nominate themselves and go straight to the application.

The application takes a little longer because you need to tell your story, provide statistics and explain the impact you've had. The questions aren't there to trick anyone. They're designed to guide people towards the information that will help the judges understand their achievements. It's also a great opportunity to stop and reflect on your business or career and think about the impact you've had.

You've been an award winner yourself. What difference did winning make to you?

I think winning an award is special if it is a good-quality award. That's why credibility is so important to me. Even being shortlisted is massive. If you're shortlisted alongside other finalists and you look at them and think, "Wow, they're really impressive and I've been put into this group with them," that's a win. Once you're shortlisted, you've got months before the ceremony, so you can really make the most of that publicity.

When I won awards in 2019, it was validation and external recognition. It meant I could tell clients that we were award-winning, and that carried a lot of weight for many of them. It also gave me press coverage and PR opportunities and, importantly, increased my confidence. We all have our doubts, so it's always good to know that you're on the right lines and then be able to use that recognition to amplify what you're doing for good.

Tell me about the judging process.

The judges will assess the entries independently through an online portal before coming together for a moderated discussion. They'll discuss their top candidates and agree a shortlist. We don't want massive shortlists. We want them to have meaning.

The finalists will be announced in early December, giving everyone an opportunity to build up to the ceremony, which takes place on 28 January at The Biscuit Factory in Newcastle, when we'll reveal the winners.

How can people nominate or enter?

The website is www.northeastwomenofexcellenceawards.com. Nominations are open until 15 November, so there is plenty of time to start the application.

And when you're not organising awards or looking after founders, what do you do in your spare time?

I'm trying to prioritise my health and I've joined a local gym and I'm swimming and doing Pilates. But the one thing that really helps me switch off is reading. I use a Kindle because it means I can't have my phone in my hand creating a distraction.

www.thisismoja.com

The Big Interview



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I think winning an award is special if it is a good-quality award.

Sophie Milliken



Community connections

For a railway operator, connecting places is the day job.
But for Lumo, being part of the North East means making
connections that go well beyond the railway.

Since launching services on the East Coast Main Line, Lumo has sought to establish itself not simply as a business operating trains through the region, but as an active partner in the communities it serves.



lumo

Joe Gratton and David Hughes from Lumo with Keith Merrin, Director of North East Museums

Headquartered in Newcastle, that commitment has seen Lumo build relationships across sport, charity, culture and community organisations – working with partners that share its ambition to make a positive difference.

One of its longest-standing relationships is with Daft as a Brush Cancer Patient Care, the North East charity which provides free transport for cancer patients travelling to and from hospital appointments.

The partnership has helped raise awareness of the charity's work while supporting its mission to ensure patients can access vital treatment. It is an example of the kind of relationship Lumo wants to build: long-term, rooted in the region and capable of creating a tangible benefit for local people.

Sport has provided another important platform.

Lumo's relationship with Newcastle Eagles has brought together two organisations with strong North East identities, while providing opportunities to support the club's wider community activity. The Eagles' reach extends far beyond professional basketball, with its foundation using sport to engage young people and communities across the region.

Inclusivity is also central to Lumo's partnership with Newcastle Frontrunners, the North East's inclusive LGBTQ+ running club. Supporting organisations such as Frontrunners reflects a wider ambition to make both the railway and the communities it serves welcoming and accessible to everyone.

The region's cultural institutions are another important part of that story. Through its relationship with North East Museums, Lumo has supported efforts to celebrate the North East's history, innovation and identity. That includes involvement with Newcastle's Discovery Museum, where transport and engineering form an important part of the story of a region that helped shape the modern railway.

The relationship is particularly fitting for a rail company with its headquarters in Newcastle. The North East gave birth to the passenger railway and remains at the forefront of the industry today, from train manufacturing and engineering to the people operating services across Britain's network.

Lumo has also worked alongside Durham Business Club, strengthening its links with businesses and entrepreneurs across the region and helping connect the railway with the wider economic life of the North East.

Alongside established regional organisations, the company has increasingly

looked for opportunities where relatively simple interventions can have a meaningful impact.

That philosophy underpins Lumo's approach to community partnership. It is not simply about putting a logo on an event or organisation.

The strongest partnerships are those where both sides can use their respective strengths – whether that is Lumo providing travel, profile and connectivity, or partners providing expertise, community networks and opportunities to reach people the railway might otherwise struggle to engage.

Those relationships also reflect the unusual position Lumo occupies.

As an open access operator, it receives no government operating subsidy and depends on persuading passengers to choose its services. That creates a particularly strong incentive to understand the places it serves and to build a brand which passengers feel belongs to their region.

For Lumo, the North East is especially important. Newcastle is not simply another destination on its route map: it is the company's home and a central part of its identity.

That is why partnership working is becoming an increasingly important part of how the business thinks about its wider impact.

Running reliable, affordable trains will always come first. But a railway can contribute much more to a region than the service that arrives at the platform.

It can help people access opportunities, bring visitors into communities, support charities and cultural institutions, champion inclusion and give regional organisations a national platform.

For Lumo, being a North East business therefore comes with a responsibility to play an active role in the region.

From Daft as a Brush and Newcastle Eagles to Newcastle Frontrunners, North East Museums, Discovery Museum and Durham Business Club, each partnership is different. Together, however, they represent something bigger: a growing network of organisations working to make the North East an even better place to live, work and visit.

Lumo's ambition is simple – to keep that network growing and ensure that, as its railway connects communities across the country, the business remains firmly connected to the community it calls home.

www.lumo.co.uk



David Hughes raises thousands of pounds for Daft as Brush by skydiving over County Durham

When you're too close to the business, it's hard to see what needs to change

As business owners we all know what busy looks like - but are we 'busy fools'?

They know what it feels like to carry decisions, manage competing priorities, support the team and think about where the business is going next.

The real challenge is finding space to step back from the day-to-day and see what needs attention.

When you are close to the business, you understand the detail: the people, customers, pressures, opportunities and history behind every decision. That closeness is valuable, and part of what makes owner-led and SME businesses so strong.

But as a business grows, so does the role of the owner. There often comes a point where we need to let go of some detail, delegate more and focus on the bigger picture.

The issue is rarely a lack of ambition

In my experience, businesses do not usually get stuck because owners lack ambition.

Most business owners and senior leaders I speak to have plenty of ideas. They care deeply about their business, people and customers. They want to grow, improve and build something stronger for the future.

The challenge is often clarity. There may be too many priorities competing for attention, too many decisions sitting with one person, or too many good ideas that never quite turn into action.

As a business grows, what worked at one stage may not work at the next. The leadership team may need clearer roles, responsibilities and decision-making.

Clarity only matters if it leads to action

Clarity on its own is not enough.

Many businesses have had strategy days or leadership meetings where everyone leaves feeling positive, only for momentum to fade a few weeks later.

The real test is whether good intentions become practical action.

For that to happen, there needs to be clear ownership. People need to understand what has been agreed, who is responsible, what happens next and how progress will be reviewed.

Accountability does not need to feel heavy-handed. At its best, it gives people confidence, makes expectations clearer and helps teams focus on what matters most.

Why an outside perspective helps

Outside perspective is not about someone arriving with all the answers.

Good support starts with listening. It starts with understanding the business, people, pressures and ambitions. It means asking questions that uncover what is happening beneath the surface.

A trusted outside adviser, coach or mentor can create space for those conversations. Not by taking control away, but by helping people think clearly, challenge assumptions and make better decisions.

'One size doesn't fit all'

There is no single version of support that works for every business owner or leadership team.

Sometimes, what is needed is one-to-one coaching or mentoring: space for an owner or senior leader to talk things through, test decisions and build confidence.

For others, the need sits with the leadership team. The team may be capable and committed, but not fully aligned. Priorities may be unclear and responsibility may not always be owned in practice.

In some businesses, the focus is growth and strategy: looking across the whole business, understanding what needs attention first and turning ambition into a practical plan.

And for some organisations, the need is board-level perspective, such as NED support, board advisory input, trustee experience or an external voice around important decisions.



It starts with a conversation

One reason business owners delay seeking support is that they feel they should already know the answer. After all, they are often the person others look to.

But often, not knowing is exactly the reason to start a conversation.

When you are leading from inside the business, it can be difficult to diagnose the issue clearly. What appears to be a people problem might actually be a clarity problem. What looks like a strategy issue might be an accountability issue.

The first step can simply be a conversation about where the business is now, what feels stuck and what support would be most useful.

Moving forward with more confidence

Running a business will always involve uncertainty, pressure and difficult decisions. There will always be moments when the day-to-day makes it hard to lift your head and see the bigger picture.

The right outside perspective can help create clarity where things feel messy, confidence where decisions feel difficult and accountability where plans need to turn into action.

With the right space, questions and support, it becomes much easier to see the way forward.

www.360growthpartners.co.uk



“

**Sometimes
the plan is not
the problem
– the problem
is ownership,
accountability or
follow-through.**

Andrew Silver



The Suite Life

By Michael Grahamslaw

There is an old saying that familiarity breeds contempt. Fortunately for Newcastle, the opposite appears to be true.

Having lived in the North East all my life, I have walked along the Quayside more times than I could count, crossed its bridges in every season and proudly shown the city off to countless out-of-towners. Yet familiarity can sometimes cause us to overlook the things that make a place special.

A recent return to the Malmaison Newcastle underlined this with a flourish. With my wife Lisa, it reminded me exactly why our city continues to capture the imagination.

The hotel itself occupies one of the most recognisable buildings on the Quayside. The former industrial warehouse stands proudly overlooking the River Tyne and has become as much a part of the riverside's aspect as the bridges themselves.

After a breezy check-in, we made our way to the Ark Royal Suite and quickly realised this was no ordinary hotel room.

Now, I am generally of the opinion that hotel rooms should be judged on sensible criteria. Comfort, cleanliness, wide-screen panoramic television and biscuit selection are all important factors.

I hadn't considered the number of baths available. Here, the sumptuous Ark Royal suite contains not one but two!

Naturally, this was met with considerable enthusiasm from Lisa, who immediately began inspecting both (and accompanying designer toiletries) as if conducting a scientific experiment.





Elsewhere, the suite itself was stunning. Spacious and elegantly furnished throughout, it combined luxury with comfort in equal measure. Yet impressive as the room was, it was difficult not to be distracted by what lay beyond the windows.

Directly ahead sits the Millennium Bridge, illuminated against the backdrop of the river and city skyline. As afternoon rolled into evening, we found ourselves repeatedly returning to the windows for a spot of people watching.

Eventually, a ravenous appetite coaxed us to leave the comfort of the suite and venture downstairs for dinner.

The Malmaison restaurant possesses the same qualities as the wider hotel: stylish without feeling pretentious and polished without sacrificing warmth.

Lisa started with the Beetroot Carpaccio while I opted for the Citrus Cured Salmon. Both dishes arrived artfully presented and provided the perfect start to the evening.

For our mains, Lisa selected the Cornfed Chicken Breast while I chose the Fillet Steak accompanied by seasonal greens and beer-battered onion rings.

The steak was cooked exactly as requested and delivered the sort of rich flavour that reminds you why some classics never go out of fashion. Lisa's chicken was equally impressive, expertly prepared and packed with flavour.

A crisp bottle of Italian Gavi accompanied our meal beautifully and, when the steak arrived, I couldn't resist a glass of Primitivo to complete proceedings.

As with every aspect of our stay, service was attentive, professional and delivered with genuine warmth. Dinner over, we enjoyed a leisurely drink before returning upstairs.

Many hotels encourage guests to spend their evenings in bars, lounges and restaurants. The Ark Royal Suite offers a compelling counterargument. Looking out across the illuminated river with a glass in hand proved difficult to improve upon.

Following a wonderfully comfortable night's sleep, we awoke to the same magnificent panorama. Before breakfast, I found myself standing at the window once more, coffee in hand, watching the city slowly come to life beneath us.

The luxurious Ark Royal Suite, excellent food, attentive staff and enviable location all contribute to making the Mal one of Newcastle's most-loved hotel destinations.

For Lisa and I, it was a reminder that sometimes you do not need to travel far to discover something new. Sometimes you simply need a different window.

For more information, visit www.malmaison.com/locations/newcastle





Best in Show: Hoult's Yard celebrates its Furriest Tenants

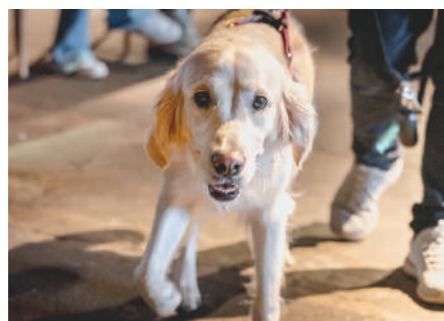
Hoult's Yard's annual celebration of our dog-friendly policy returned with waggy tails, pretty pooches, and the handsomest of hounds, all in aid of Newcastle Dog and Cat Shelter — raising £250 in donations.

Now in its 6th year, CraftsYard sees dog-owning tenants enter across four categories: Prettiest Pooch, Handsomest Hound, Waggiest Tail, and Top Trickster, with every entrant automatically in the running for Judges' Choice. Every dog left with a doggy bag filled with treats and a rosette for trying.

This year's line-up included corgis (the Queen's favourite!), Pomeranians, cockapoos, labradors and more... the judges were spoilt for choice!

Dog-friendly working matters to us. Our tenants' dogs are some of our community's most vital members, they lift the mood; cut stress and let our customers enjoy their workspace without leaving their best friend at home.

Roll on next year — we're confident it'll be just as barking mad.



Gosforth home sells *above* asking after *50 viewings*



Here at Sanderson Young, we are continuing to see strong demand from buyers looking for spacious semi-detached homes, on prestigious streets in Gosforth.

Semi-detached homes are particularly appealing to families and those looking to move within the area, offering the space and flexibility they need, together with gardens, parking and easy access to excellent schools, transport links and the High Street.

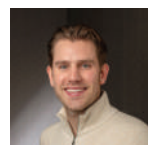
We have been selling homes in Gosforth for over 25 years, and many of our team have lived here, grown up here or worked in the area for most of their lives. We have a genuine understanding of the local property market and, more importantly, what makes Gosforth such a special and desirable place to live.

We are seeing excellent levels of interest in the homes we bring to the market, with a recent semi-detached property attracting over 50 viewings and multiple offers, before ultimately being agreed for well in excess of its asking price. This is a strong indication of the demand currently being seen for the right homes in Gosforth.

At the moment, we have a number of buyers registered with us who are specifically looking for a semi-detached home in the area. We would therefore welcome the opportunity to introduce your property to them and discuss what we believe it could achieve in the current market.

Whether you are thinking about moving in the near future, simply considering your options, or are curious to know what your home might be worth in today's market, I would be delighted to have a conversation with you.

I am always available to discuss your home, so please do not hesitate to contact me!



Harry Young

0191 223 3500

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Dr David Cliff

Follow my lead

Dr David Cliff explores the relationship between leadership and followership.

Nigel Farage recently described himself in characteristically unequivocal terms as a leader rather than a follower. Whatever one thinks of his politics, the distinction is interesting. Relatively few people define themselves so explicitly through leadership.

We prize leadership culturally, write libraries about it and spend considerable sums developing it. Yet leadership makes little sense without followership.

From an evolutionary perspective, both appear to have developed as solutions to the problem of human collaboration. Groups need to coordinate movement, resources, defence, decision-making and collective effort. Sometimes somebody has to indicate direction; others must decide whether that direction deserves support.

Leadership therefore involves more than occupying a senior position. It includes accepting responsibility, exercising judgement, influencing others and assuming an appropriate

degree of authority. That authority may arise from expertise, organisational position, social convention, qualification, experience or, importantly, from the willingness of others to recognise it.

This distinction matters because organisations sometimes promote people into leadership without creating leaders. They may instead produce highly competent organisational stewards: people who administer policy, maintain compliance and transmit decisions made elsewhere. All are necessary activities, but they are not necessarily leadership.

Leadership is partly behavioural, but it can also become an identity: an internal willingness to step forward, tolerate uncertainty and accept responsibility for shaping events.

Followership deserves equal attention. It should not be confused with inferiority, submissiveness or lack of capability. Good followership is an adaptive choice. Most collaborative systems require people who can contribute expertise, exercise judgement and coordinate their effort around an agreed direction without continually needing to become the person defining that direction.

Indeed, contemporary followership research suggests that people move between leading and following according to circumstances rather than belonging permanently to one category.

This creates an important challenge for leaders.

Leadership development often concentrates upon the leader: confidence, authority, influence, strategic thinking and personal presence. Yet effective leadership also requires an understanding of what followers need.

People are more likely to offer discretionary effort when they experience clarity, belonging, purpose and congruence between what leaders say and what they actually do. They need sufficient confidence in those providing direction to commit some of their own autonomy to the collective enterprise.

This is where personality and communication matter. Two leaders can advocate broadly similar policies yet generate dramatically different levels of identification and confidence. Leadership is therefore never solely about the proposition; it is also about the relationship created around it.

Perhaps aspiring leaders should spend rather less time asking, "How do I become a better leader?" and rather more asking, "What would make somebody choose to follow me?"

Leadership without followership is merely intention. The real test of leadership is whether people freely lend their effort, judgement and commitment to the direction being offered.

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Pulls with purpose

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- Engage
- Contribute
- Bring expertise
- Provide feedback
- Build belonging
- Turn plans into reality

Lead

Pushes with direction

- Set direction
- Create clarity
- Inspire and influence
- Take responsibility
- Build trust
- Align effort
- Enable others



Different roles. Shared destination.

Leadership and followership are not opposites,
but complementary forces.



People follow
when there is
clarity.



People commit
when there is
trust.



People contribute
when there is
purpose.



Great outcomes
happen when both
pull together.



Glynn Blackburn



Partners& strengthens North East team with key appointment

Partners& has announced the appointment of Glynn Blackburn as Client Partner, further strengthening its established Houghton-le-Spring-based SME team, led by Lucy Elliott.

Glynn brings extensive experience advising businesses across a wide range of industries, helping organisations identify, manage and mitigate risk at every stage of their growth journey. In his new role, he will focus on supporting businesses across the North East to take a more strategic approach to risk and insurance, ensuring their programmes evolve alongside their business objectives and support long-term growth.

Speaking about his appointment, Glynn said: "I'm excited to join Partners& and help grow the business across the North East. What particularly appealed to me was the opportunity to build the Partners& brand in the region and be part of an organisation that genuinely puts clients first."

Working with Lucy Elliott and the wider team, my ambition is to establish Partners& as the insurance broker of choice for businesses of all sizes across the North East. We want to help organisations view risk and insurance differently, not simply as a cost of doing business, but as a strategic tool that enables them to achieve their business plans, support growth ambitions and build long-term resilience."



AI has moved beyond adoption for North East entrepreneurs

By Elaine Stroud, CEO of the Entrepreneurs' Forum

For the past couple of years, the conversation around AI in business has focused on adoption, which businesses are using it, and which tools.

Our latest Entrepreneurs' Forum member Pulse Survey suggests we are moving into a new phase. Of the 113 entrepreneurs who responded, 97% are using AI in some form. But more interestingly, more than a quarter now say AI is embedded across multiple areas of their business, with a further 18% deliberately changing workflows and processes to integrate it, and 12% expecting to hire fewer people as a result.

Businesses are investing in AI too. Almost 90% of AI users have made a meaningful investment. That includes subscriptions to ChatGPT and Claude, but increasingly internal time to explore opportunities, staff training, and external expertise.

Buying an AI subscription is easy. Changing the way a business works because of technology is much harder. It requires leaders to understand their processes, identify where time can be saved, decide where AI can genuinely add value and, importantly, where human judgement remains essential.

Encouragingly, businesses are increasingly seeing a return for doing that work. Almost nine in ten AI users in our survey say they are experiencing measurable benefits.

For a third, that means saving up to five hours across the business each week. Another third report productivity or operational efficiencies equivalent to between five and 20 hours, and almost one in four report company benefits of more than 50 hours saved each week.

An hour saved writing a proposal, analysing a spreadsheet or turning meeting notes into actions may not sound transformational. But when you repeat those gains across a team and hundreds of tasks over a year, it can make a big difference.

Right now, research is the most common application among our members, followed

by marketing content and capturing meeting notes. Entrepreneurs are using AI to help them prepare proposals and tenders, summarise long documents, draft emails, analyse numbers, and challenge their thinking.

A third are also using it to write code or create internal tools and automations, which starts to show where the value of AI is heading. For many businesses, the immediate opportunity may not be enormous transformation projects. It could be hundreds of relatively small improvements to the way everyday work gets done. But that raises the question about what happens to the people doing that work.

Our survey provides the beginnings of an answer, but I think this is an area we will be watching closely over the next few years.

For most entrepreneurs, AI has not changed their recruitment plans. 19% say they expect to hire people with different skills because of AI, 12% expect to employ fewer people, and 59% anticipate no change. The impact of AI on employment is often discussed as a fairly simplistic question of whether technology

will replace jobs, but the reality is more complicated.

If AI removes some repetitive or administrative elements of a role, the value of other skills changes. Judgement, communication, creativity, commercial understanding, and the ability to ask the right questions could become more important, not less.

Businesses may also find themselves recruiting people who are simply better at working alongside these tools. This makes AI increasingly a leadership question: to define where it should be used, what should be automated, and what should remain human.

There is a lot to work out, but what we see among North East entrepreneurs suggests AI is becoming part of everyday business. The opportunity is not simply to use it, but to make deliberate choices about where it can free up time, improve decisions, and create capacity for the work where people add the most value.

entrepreneursforum.net



Elaine Stroud



Growing Sunderland aesthetic clinic announces five-figure funding for flagship city centre location

Award-winning aesthetic practitioner Rebecca Price has secured a £25,000 investment from the North East Elevate Fund, managed by FW Capital, to support the continued growth of her business and the opening of her luxury Sunderland clinic, Price & Co.

Operating from the beautifully restored Printworks on Holmeside, Rebecca Price Aesthetics offers a discreet, premium experience, specialising in natural facial rejuvenation. Rather than focusing on isolated treatments, Rebecca is known for creating personalised, long-term treatment plans that restore facial structure, improve skin quality and deliver subtle, natural-looking results that help clients look refreshed, never overdone.

Price & Co brings together a carefully selected collective of independent health, medical and aesthetic professionals under one roof, including nurse practitioners, an in-house GP and a range of specialists dedicated to helping clients look and feel their best. The clinic is housed within the landmark Printworks development, restored by local developer Darryl Cullerton and Lemon Property Investment using funding also provided by FW Capital through the North East Property Fund.

The investment from the North East Elevate Fund will support Rebecca's ambitious growth plans for both Rebecca Price Aesthetics and Price & Co, enabling continued investment in innovative treatments, exceptional client experiences and the expansion of high-quality healthcare and aesthetic services within Sunderland city centre.



NE Healthcare Group advances growth strategy

A North East healthcare and mobility investment group has expanded its footprint across Scotland following the acquisition of two award-winning businesses, supported by a six-figure investment from NPIF II – NEL Debt Finance, managed by NEL Fund Managers as part of the Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund II (NPIF II).

Advanced Healthcare Group, based in Newcastle, has acquired Able Care and City Mobility, two well-established mobility equipment providers with more than 150 years of combined heritage serving communities across Scotland.

Able Care and City Mobility will continue to operate under their existing brands, with their current management teams and employees remaining in place. Customers will continue to receive the same high-quality service and access to a wide range of products and equipment, while benefiting from increased investment and growth opportunities through Advanced Healthcare's scalable platform.

By bringing the businesses into the group, Advanced Healthcare aims to drive operational efficiencies, support future expansion and deliver essential products and services to a growing customer base across the UK.

Advanced Healthcare is led by Gary Lynch, alongside healthcare investors James Oates and Ross Tomkins, and David Lynch, who co-founded NEL-backed Lynch Healthcare in 2009, growing the business into a significant player in the mobility supply, manufacturing and maintenance sector before its successful private equity exit in 2020.

GastroNorth Management Buyout

A six-figure investment from NPIF II – NEL Debt Finance, which is managed by NEL Fund Managers as part of the Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund II (NPIF II), has supported the successful management buyout of North East commercial kitchen specialist GastroNorth, creating a platform for future growth while safeguarding jobs, customer relationships and supply chain partnerships.

The investment has enabled Managing Director Tim Whitfield to acquire the business and establish a long-term strategy focused on expanding market presence, investing in people, enhancing operational efficiencies and pursuing new opportunities across the commercial kitchen and catering infrastructure sector.

Based in Gateshead, GastroNorth has built a strong reputation for delivering high-quality commercial kitchen projects for customers operating across a range of sectors. The management buyout represents the next stage in the company's development, allowing the leadership



team that has helped drive the business's success to take ownership and lead its future growth.

The funding will support GastroNorth's continued investment in innovation, operational excellence and workforce development, while strengthening its ability to create jobs, grow sustainably and contribute to the regional economy.



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Academy Support Staff Pay Award 2026/27

By Chris Beaumont,
Partner and Head of Academies at Clive Owen

What academies need to know.

The new academic year brings another round of financial changes for academy trusts, with the 2026/27 support staff pay award adding further pressure to already tight budgets.

The agreed National Joint Council (NJC) pay award provides a 3.3% increase from 1 April 2026 for staff covered by NJC arrangements. For trusts following NJC or Green Book terms, this means reviewing payroll costs and updating budgets and forecasts.

Importantly, the cost is not limited to salary. Higher pay can also increase employer National Insurance, pension contributions, overtime and other employment costs.

Pay awards and back pay

Trusts should ensure the 3.3% award has been correctly applied and any backdated pay from 1 April included in payroll and forecasts.

Finance teams should review which employees are covered, their pay points, incremental progression and allowances, alongside associated pension and National Insurance costs. They should also consider what needs to be accrued in the year-end financial statements.

Comparing the revised budget with actual payroll is a useful sense check. Where differences arise, trusts should understand the reasons rather than simply adjusting forecasts to make the figures balance.

Budget forecast return

A key deadline is the 2026 Budget Forecast Return (BFR), due 24 September 2026. As the BFR covers actual and forecast financial information for the next three years, realistic staffing assumptions are essential.

Forecasts should reflect actual staffing structures, recruitment plans, vacancies, pay awards and expected pupil numbers rather than simply rolling forward last year's budget.

The 2026/27 teacher pay award is 3.5% from 1 September 2026. While the Schools Budget Support Grant (SBSG 26) provides funding towards additional costs, trusts will need to assess how much must be absorbed internally.



Chris Beaumont

As the grant is paid in November but relates to teacher and support staff increases effective from different dates, an apportionment will be required. Based on calculations we have seen, accruing 20% of the grant would appear reasonable.

Trusts should also consider the reduction in employer Teachers' Pension Scheme contributions from 28.6% to 17.6% from 1 April 2027, alongside the corresponding withdrawal of previous pension funding. In theory this should be cost neutral, although individual trusts may experience different outcomes.

Look at the whole staffing picture

Pay awards are only one part of staffing costs. Trusts should also consider pay progression, TLRs, contract changes, agency and supply costs, maternity and sickness cover, vacancies and planned restructuring.

Assumptions should reflect what is realistically likely to happen. Persistent agency costs, for example, may need to be incorporated into future forecasts rather than treated as temporary.

Other changes and deadlines

The Academy Trust Handbook 2026 takes effect on 1 October 2026, including changes relating to executive pay and special severance payments. Trusts should review internal approval processes to ensure finance, HR and governance teams understand the requirements. Budgets should also reflect the latest General Annual Grant allocations, pupil numbers, SEND pressures, high-needs funding and other income assumptions.

Other important deadlines include submission of financial statements to the DfE by 31 December 2026 and the 2025/26 Academies Accounts Return by 26 January 2027.

What should trustees be asking?

Trustees should understand how pay and staffing changes affect the trust's overall financial position. Key questions include whether all pay awards and employer on-costs are included, whether staffing costs are rising faster than income, which academies are forecasting deficits, whether agency costs are controlled and whether assumptions remain realistic over the next two or three years.

The key message

The answer is not simply to add 3.3% to the staffing budget. Trusts need to understand the full cost of employment, update forecasts and assess the impact on their wider financial position.

For academy leaders, finance teams and trustees, the priority is clear: understand what is changing, understand the cost and act early. This should mean fewer surprises and better-informed financial decisions throughout the year.

This article is intended as general guidance for academy trusts in England and is based on information available in September 2026. Trusts should always check the latest DfE guidance and their own funding arrangements before making decisions.

cliveowen.com



Johnston Carmichael celebrates three years of growth in the North East

UK accountancy and business advisory firm Johnston Carmichael is celebrating three years since opening its Newcastle office, with both its team and service offering in the region expanding significantly during that time.

The office has seen the firm deliver its expertise to businesses across the region, supporting clients in a diverse range of sectors such as technology, engineering and manufacturing, food and drink, and construction and property.

Since opening, the Newcastle team has expanded from an initial team of 4 to 32 people, requiring a move into a larger office space to support ongoing growth. The team has also continued to strengthen its specialist expertise, with senior appointments across audit, Business Advisory, VAT, Global Mobility, Private Client Tax, Transactions Taxes, R&D and Other Specialist Taxes.

Alongside experienced hires, the office has invested in early career talent, with graduates and trainees joining the team as part of the firm's commitment to developing the region's next generation of advisers.

Paul Shields, Partner and Head of Johnston Carmichael's Newcastle office, said: "We're incredibly proud of what we've built over the last three years and grateful to the clients and colleagues who have been part of that.

"Our focus is on continuing to build enduring relationships, supporting the development of young talent and helping more North East businesses achieve their ambitions."

Maven strengthens team with two new appointments

Maven Capital Partners has announced two new appointments to its local team, further strengthening its capability as it continues to support the growth ambitions of businesses across the North East of England.

Catherine Earl joins as Portfolio Manager based across our regional office network and is responsible for working closely with management teams of Maven's portfolio companies to support growth, create long term value and achieve their strategic objectives. Catherine brings more than a decade of board-level experience across private equity-backed and family-owned businesses, with a strong track record in M&A, business expansion and finance transformation, alongside overseeing financial reporting and operational performance.

Graham Palmer also joins as Portfolio Manager, responsible for managing relationships across existing investments, working closely with management teams to support growth, create



long term value and help businesses achieve their strategic objectives. Prior to joining Maven, Graham was Group Chief Financial Officer at Indigo Software, where he played a key role in the company's successful sale to Aptean. With experience spanning corporate finance and board-level leadership, Graham has advised and led entrepreneurial and private equity-backed businesses through fundraising, acquisitions, transformation programmes and successful shareholder exits.

Arklane Plowden Chambers announces departure of Non-Executive Chairman

Leeds and Newcastle-based Parklane Plowden Chambers has announced the retirement of its non-executive chairman David Kilduff having served for two terms.

During his tenure, David supported Parklane Plowden in achieving significant growth and strengthening its reputation across its practice areas.

As non-executive chairman, he oversaw major changes to chambers' branding, marketing and business development, as well as providing guidance on staffing and recruitment matters.

He also played a key role in the refurbishment of chambers' Leeds city centre office on Westgate, as well as the sourcing and fit-out of new premises in Newcastle.

Formed in 2007 following the merger of Parklane Chambers in Leeds and Plowden Chambers in Newcastle, Parklane Plowden is home to 119 barristers, led by head of chambers Elizabeth Hodgson.

Commenting on his departure David said: "I have thoroughly enjoyed my time with Chambers: we have addressed a number of significant challenges collaboratively and constructively and I leave Chambers on a stronger footing than when I arrived."

During his career, David held the position of head of energy, infrastructure and government at national law firm Walker Morris, and is currently



non-executive chair of Zenith Housing Solutions.

Parklane Plowden head of chambers, Elizabeth Hodgson, added: "Chambers' continuing growth and reputational strength over the last six years is in no small part due to David's dedication in his role as our non-executive chairman.

"His wise counsel and fresh perspective have been invaluable to Parklane Plowden – and to me, personally, as head of chambers. Our staff colleagues and members of chambers alike will greatly miss David. We wish him well in his future roles."



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ONE SUBJECT | THREE TIPS



Most limited company owners take a salary and dividends, then stop there. It works, but it's not the whole picture. Your company can reward you in other ways too, ways that benefit you personally without costing the business as much as cash would. These aren't loopholes, they're standard, sensible extras that many owners simply never get around to using. Here's where to start.

1. Consider an electric company car.

A company car used to be a tax headache, but electric changes that. The tax charge on a fully electric vehicle is far lower than a petrol or diesel equivalent, and the company can often claim relief on the cost too. If you're due a new car, it's worth asking whether going electric through the business beats buying privately.

2. Let the company fund your pension.

Personal pension contributions come from money you've already paid tax and National Insurance on. Company contributions skip that step entirely. The business gets a deduction, you get the pension, and neither of you pays tax on the way in. It's one of the most efficient ways to build wealth outside the business, yet it's often overlooked.

3. Use your trivial benefits allowance.

Trivial benefits let a company give small gifts, vouchers or treats to directors and staff completely tax free, provided they stay under the limits. It won't transform your finances alone, but it's an easy, legitimate perk most owners never claim. Small and tax free, it's worth building into how you reward yourself and your team.

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The point of life isn't to maximise time or money; it's to maximise experiences and minimise regrets.

Bill Perkins

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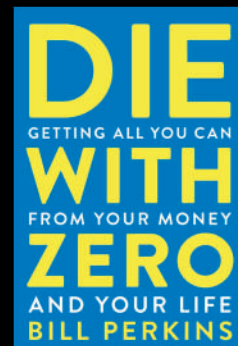
Pick one of our three tips, or something else entirely, and take action this month. It doesn't matter which one, what matters is that you actually do it rather than file this away for later. Owners who reward themselves properly aren't smarter, they just act instead of meaning to.

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EMG Solicitors Recognises Rising Talent Across the Firm

Award-winning law firm EMG Solicitors has announced the promotion of 15 colleagues in recognition of their commitment to providing excellent client service and their own professional development.

EMG Solicitors specialises in Court of Protection, deputyships, family law and mediation, residential conveyancing, education law and wills, trusts and probate services.

Headquartered in Durham, the firm now has 14 offices across the UK and employs over 320 colleagues, with headcount increasing by 73% over the past 12 months.

Every year EMG invites colleagues to apply for career progression as part of its commitment to recognising and nurturing talent, and this year EMG has seen its biggest round of promotions to date, with 15 colleagues promoted across the firm's offices.

In EMG's Court of Protection Property & Affairs team, Samantha Hind and Tim Bennett have been promoted to Leadership Directors. Nicola Ife and Michael Costelloe have both progressed to Senior Associates, whilst Rachel Snowdon is now a Senior Paralegal and Naomi Fathers and Ian Brown are now Associates.

Susannah Millard in Court of Protection Health & Welfare, Nathan Maddison in Wills, Trusts and Probate and Eleanor Lucas in the Family team have also been promoted to Associates.

Lucy Matley in Residential Conveyancing has progressed to Property Executive and Gemma Riley in the Finance team has been promoted to Manager.

Three other colleagues in EMG's central support team, Hannah Rowley in Business Development, Neil Goldsmith in Finance and Neale Pardey in People & Culture, have progressed from Manager to Senior Manager. This is a new role created at EMG to strengthen the central support teams and offer colleagues further career opportunities as the firm continues to grow and open new offices across the country.



Richard Reed Solicitors backs Love Amelia's Back to School campaign

Sunderland law firm Richard Reed Solicitors is continuing its commitment to supporting the local community by backing Love, Amelia's Back to School campaign, and in turn helping children and families across Sunderland prepare for the new school year.

As a firm deeply rooted in Sunderland, Richard Reed Solicitors believes its role extends beyond providing legal services. Its community ethos is centred on deep local roots, active charitable giving and strong regional partnerships across Sunderland and the wider North East.

This summer, members of the Richard Reed team supported Love, Amelia's School Bags campaign through both a donation and hands-on volunteering, helping prepare essential school supplies for distribution to local children.

The campaign will provide 2,000 school bags to children across Sunderland, with 1,750 distributed through the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme and a further 250 provided to Gentoo tenants.

For families facing financial pressure, the cost of returning to school can add significant stress, and Love, Amelia's campaign helps ease that burden while ensuring children have the equipment they need to start the new school year feeling prepared, included and confident.



RMT Accountants bolsters corporate finance team with executive appointment

An experienced business finance professional who swapped Seahouses for Switzerland has returned to his native North East to join RMT Accountants & Business Advisors' corporate finance team.

Matthew Weightman has been recruited by the Gosforth-headquartered firm as a corporate finance executive and brings more than 15 years' experience to his new role.

Originally from north Northumberland, Matthew joined HSBC's international graduate programme after completing a degree in French, German and International Business at Aston University.

He developed his career through private and corporate banking positions across Switzerland, Brazil and London before returning to Zurich to spend over seven years as a corporate banking relationship manager, working with a range of Swiss businesses on all aspects of their international funding and banking needs.

He holds the Chartered Financial Analyst designation and an Executive MBA from IESE Business School in Munich.

RMT Accountants & Business Advisors provides the full range of financial and business advisory services through its specialist accountancy, tax, medical and healthcare, corporate finance and restructuring teams.

It is part of the Sumer Group, the UK's fastest-growing accountancy firm, which delivers professional support to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) across England, Scotland and Northern Ireland and employs over 3,000 staff across more than 80 offices.

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Mark Brown

Can you afford to grow your business?

By Mark Brown, Director, L4 Financial

Growth is usually seen as a sign that a business is doing well.

More customers, larger contracts, new locations, additional staff and increasing turnover are all things business owners understandably want to see. But growth also brings financial pressure, and sometimes that pressure arrives well before the benefits.

A new contract might look highly profitable on paper, but somebody still has to fund the people, materials, stock or equipment needed to deliver it. A business may need to recruit before additional revenue starts to come in. Suppliers may need paying in 30 days while customers pay in 60. More stock might be required. Premises may need to expand. Systems that worked perfectly well for a smaller business may suddenly need replacing.

In other words, growth often costs money before it makes money.

This is where a business can find itself in a difficult position. Sales are increasing. The order book looks healthy. The profit and loss account says the business is profitable. Yet cash feels tighter than ever.

There is nothing particularly unusual about that. Profit and cash do not move at the same speed.

A growing business can be profitable while absorbing significant amounts of cash into debtors, stock and investment. VAT, corporation tax and other liabilities can add further pressure, particularly where the timing of payments has not been properly anticipated.

The danger comes when growth decisions are made almost entirely based on the opportunity rather than the financial implications of taking it.

Winning a major new customer is normally good news. But what happens if that customer represents 30 per cent of turnover and takes 75 days to pay? Opening another location might increase revenue, but how much cash will be required before it reaches break-even? Recruiting three new employees might create additional capacity, but what happens if expected sales arrive three months later than planned?

None of those questions mean the opportunity should be rejected. They simply need to be understood before the commitment is made.

Growth also has a habit of exposing weaknesses that were much easier to live with when the business was smaller.

Management information that arrived several weeks after month-end may once have been sufficient. Informal decisions between a small management team might have worked. Cash might have been managed largely by keeping an eye on the bank balance.

As the business becomes larger and more complicated, those approaches become less reliable. Decisions involve more money, mistakes

become more expensive, and the consequences often take longer to unwind.

This is why forecasting becomes increasingly important as a business grows. Not because anybody expects a forecast to predict the future perfectly, but because it forces management to think through what needs to happen financially if the business follows its plans.

What happens to cash if sales grow by 20 per cent? How much additional working capital will be required? When will new recruits begin contributing to revenue? What happens if margins fall slightly or a major customer pays late?

Those are much easier questions to answer before growth happens than when the bank balance is already under pressure.

The question for a growing business should therefore not simply be: "Can we grow?"

It should be: "What happens if we do?"

Understanding that before committing to the next hire, contract, acquisition, site or investment does not make a business less ambitious.

It gives it a much better chance of making growth sustainable.

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L4 Financial provides fractional Finance Director and board advisory support to growing SMEs. Mark works with owners and leadership teams to improve financial visibility, strengthen decision-making and ensure the finance function supports the next stage of the business.

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Transaction services partner promotion at UNW

Newcastle-based independent chartered accountancy and business advisory firm UNW has announced the promotion of Danny Malone to Transaction Services Partner in its Deal Advisory team.



Danny Malone (front, second from right) with the UNW Deal Advisory team

Danny joined UNW in February 2024 as a Senior Manager to lead the firm's dedicated due diligence offering. Since then, the team has grown significantly, establishing itself as a trusted adviser to businesses, investors, banks and public sector organisations undertaking acquisitions, financing and investment activity across the UK.

In the 12 months to August 2026, UNW's Transaction Services team advised on 19 due diligence transactions ranging in value from £1m to £30m, while also helping businesses access more than £40m in grant funding nationally. The team works with a broad range of clients, from corporate serial acquirers and private equity-backed groups to regional funders and government-backed organisations, providing financial due diligence and wider transaction support across a variety of sectors.

The team has developed long-term relationships with acquisitive businesses, many of whom have engaged UNW on multiple transactions as they continue to pursue acquisition-led growth strategies. In addition, the team has directly advised prominent regional investors, lenders and grant-awarding bodies as they deploy funds across the UK to fuel growth across the SME sector.

The growth of the specialist transaction services offering has been supported by continued investment in people. This has included the appointment of due diligence specialist Stephen Twaddle from Deloitte in 2025, bringing eight years' experience, the promotion of Lara Marshall to Grants Support Services Senior Manager, the progression of Chris Newman (formerly of PwC and NVM Private Equity) into a

dedicated manager role within the Due Diligence team, and the secondment of Matthew Pinkney from the Audit team. The offering is further supported by the depth of experience across UNW's wider 14-person Deal Advisory team, recently strengthened by the arrival of Executive Lewis Govenlock from Johnston Carmichael's Edinburgh office and the promotion of Ed Booth to Manager.

Commenting on Danny's promotion to Transaction Services Partner, Chris Wilson, Partner and Head of Deal Advisory at UNW, said: "When Danny joined UNW, we had a clear ambition to create a leading due diligence offering right here in the North East.

"Since then, we have built a dedicated team that is supporting some of the most acquisitive businesses in the region and beyond, as well as funders, investors and public sector organisations. The quality of the client relationships we have developed and the level of repeat work we receive are testament to the strength of the service Danny has helped create.

"Danny has been instrumental in that growth. He has established an excellent reputation with clients and developed a high-performing team. His promotion to Partner is thoroughly deserved."

Commenting on his promotion, Danny said: "I am incredibly proud to be joining the partnership at UNW.

"The past two years have been hugely rewarding. We have built a fantastic team and developed strong relationships with clients who trust us to support their most important decisions – from acquisitions to financing and milestone capital projects eligible for grant support – at a time when getting deals done remains challenging.

"We have worked hard to establish a market-leading and dedicated transaction services offering in the North East that combines local knowledge with experience of supporting transactions across the UK. As a team, we focus on delivering practical advice, clear insights and a service that enables clients to make informed decisions with confidence.

"I would like to thank my colleagues and our clients for their support, and I look forward to further growing the team and building on the progress we have made."

unw.co.uk

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We have built a fantastic team and developed strong relationships with clients who trust us to support their most important decisions.

Danny Malone



L-R: Michael McCulloch, corporate finance partner at RMT Accountants & Business Advisors, with corporate finance executive Matthew Weightman

RMT Accountants bolsters corporate finance team with executive appointment

An experienced business finance professional who swapped Seahouses for Switzerland has returned to his native North East to join RMT Accountants & Business Advisors' corporate finance team.

Matthew Weightman has been recruited by the Gosforth-headquartered firm as a corporate finance executive and brings more than 15 years' experience to his new role.

Originally from north Northumberland, Matthew joined HSBC's international graduate programme after completing a degree in French, German and International Business at Aston University.

He developed his career through private and corporate banking positions across Switzerland, Brazil and London before returning to Zurich to spend over seven years as a corporate banking relationship manager, working with a range of Swiss businesses on all aspects of their international funding and banking needs.

He holds the Chartered Financial Analyst designation and an Executive MBA from IESE Business School in Munich.

RMT Accountants & Business Advisors provides the full range of financial and business advisory services through its specialist accountancy, tax, medical and healthcare,

corporate finance and restructuring teams.

It is part of the Sumer Group, the UK's fastest-growing accountancy firm, which delivers professional support to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) across England, Scotland and Northern Ireland and employs over 3,000 staff across more than 80 offices.

Matthew Weightman says: "When I decided it was time to come home, I looked at a range of career options across the North East and was attracted by the extent of the strategic investment that RMT and Sumer are making in the business's capabilities, as well as the group's focussed mission of championing the owner managed SMEs that are at the heart of the regional economy.

"I'm immensely proud to have grown up in this region, helping my grandfather and uncle during school holidays in the family business, and that appreciation has grown even stronger over the years that I have been away.

"My personal mission is therefore very much aligned with RMT and Sumer in wanting to

help SMEs in the region grow or successfully manage a succession via expert strategic advice and strong relationships, all of which is backed up by national capabilities and sector expertise.

"I have a keen interest in both the operational and the human sides of the role, and in supporting business owners with some of the most important events and transactions of their lifetime. Building a detailed understanding of both elements will ensure I can help each business owner achieve their personal and commercial objectives.

"A great deal of the experience and knowledge I've built up through my career is directly relevant to the challenges and opportunities that North East business owners face every day, and my focus is on using it to help our clients make the right decisions for their businesses and themselves.

"Being part of the RMT team has already surpassed my expectations and I'm already working on a range of interesting M&A and finance raising projects that demonstrate the vitality and ambition of the North East SME economy."

Michael McCulloch, corporate finance partner at RMT Accountants & Business Advisors, adds: "Matthew has built up an enviable range of commercial experience and knowledge through his career so far, and he is an excellent addition to our growing corporate finance team.

"His appointment is part of RMT's continuing strategic investment in its corporate finance capabilities which is designed to ensure we can provide an advisory service that meets the needs of the regional business community"

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CARL SWANSBURY

Partner – Corporate Finance



UK Land Estates appoints new Managing Director

Part of a planned succession, David Gibbs is replacing Keith Taylor, who is stepping down after 23 years with the business to take up the role of Executive Chairman.

While former Property Director David takes over day-to-day leadership duties, Keith will remain closely involved in the new role, with the firm's management group still able to draw on his experience and knowledge of commercial property.

UK Land Estates owns and manages some of the North East's most significant industrial estates, including Team Valley, Teesside Industrial Estate

and Tyne Tunnel Estate. David's appointment represents a natural succession. He has worked closely with Keith since joining the business 17 years ago. A Northumbria University computing graduate, David also holds a Master's in Real Estate.

David said: "The skilled leadership and incredible contribution Keith has made to UK Land Estates cannot be overstated. I'd also like to thank him for the invaluable support he has given me over the years. Under his leadership, the business has grown into one of the largest industrial and commercial space landlords in the region.

"His legacy goes far beyond the growth of the portfolio. Keith has played a hugely important role in building the management team we have today and creating the shared direction and culture that continues to drive the business forward.

"I am incredibly proud to take on this role. It represents a planned succession and my appointment will not represent a massive shift in the way we operate. We will continue the great work of Keith and remain committed to providing the highest-quality industrial and commercial space while continually enhancing our estates."



Cathie appoints new Managing Director to lead next growth phase

Global offshore geoscience and geotechnical engineering consultancy, Cathie, has appointed Sonja Ternier as Managing Director.

Joining the business in 2024 as European Operations Manager, Sonja has played a key role in strengthening operational performance and supporting the delivery of Cathie's strategic objectives across international markets.

As Managing Director, Sonja will now lead Cathie through its next phase of growth, focusing on providing strategic, trusted expertise to our international clients and partners across the offshore energy sector. Whilst driving innovation across its geoscience and geotechnical engineering services and scaling up its cross-border engineering team.

With more than two decades of leadership experience, including ten years as a Managing Director, Sonja has successfully led business growth, expanded operations and developed high-performing teams across her career.

Prior to joining Cathie, Sonja was Managing Director – Benelux for international testing, training, inspection and certification company TÜV Austria. Her previous roles have included leadership positions at TNO, a Netherlands-based not-for-profit scientific research organisation, IBA, a world leader in particle accelerator technology and Kiwa, a global compliance specialist.

Headquartered in Newcastle upon Tyne, UK, Cathie delivers geological, geospatial, geophysical and geotechnical engineering solutions for a wide range of offshore and near shore industries, including: wind; oil and gas; marine energy; ports; and subsea cables.



Hay & Kilner strengthens Wills, Trusts and Estates Team with two senior appointments

North East law firm Hay & Kilner has strengthened its growing Wills, Trusts and Estates Team with the appointment of Andrew Steel as Partner and Sarah McColl as Associate.

The appointments bolster the firm's Private Client offering as demand for specialist advice continues to grow, with both bringing significant experience across wills, trusts, probate and estate administration.

Andrew joins as a Partner and was previously Head of Private Client at a Teesside-based law

firm. He advises a broad range of clients on wills, trusts, probate and Court of Protection matters. Andrew will be based across Hay & Kilner's newly opened Stockton office and it's Newcastle head office.

He said: "I have always been impressed by Hay & Kilner and its positive reputation. I was keen to take the next step in my career and the firm offered the opportunity to do that. I'm looking forward to joining the team and supporting clients across the region."

Sarah joins as an Associate, having previously worked at a firm with offices in Gosforth and Sunderland. She advises on wills, including complex wills incorporating trusts, Lasting Powers of Attorney, lifetime trusts and estate planning, as well as probate and estate administration. She also works with high net worth clients.

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Michelle Percy

Develop North PLC CEO joins board as executive director

Michelle Percy, chief executive of North East-based investment company Develop North PLC has been appointed to the board as an executive director.

Michelle joined the business as chief executive in January 2026 and has since led work to develop its growth strategy, strengthen its regional relationships and identify opportunities to expand its investment platform.

She has more than 30 years of senior leadership experience across the public and private sectors, with a particular focus on property, regeneration, investment and strategic development.

Before joining Develop North, Michelle spent almost nine years at Newcastle City Council, most recently as director of investment and growth. In that role, she played a leading part in fostering public-private partnerships, attracting inward investment and progressing major

regeneration and development projects forming part of a pipeline valued at approximately £7bn.

Speaking about her appointment Michelle said: "I am delighted to join the board of Develop North. The role brings together my experience across regeneration, property and investment, as well as my commitment to the North East.

"Develop North has a distinctive opportunity to connect investors with high-quality regional assets and support locally driven growth, closely aligned with the Government's focus on devolution. I look forward to working with the board to grow the company, create value for shareholders and contribute to the region's long-term prosperity."

John Newlands, chairman of Develop North, added: "Since joining as chief executive officer

in January, Michelle has made a significant contribution to Develop North and its growth strategy. Her extensive leadership experience across investment, regeneration and economic development, together with her deep understanding of the North East and strong regional relationships, make her a valuable addition to the board.

"She shares our ambition to grow Develop North into a larger investment platform, directing more long-term capital into the region while delivering attractive returns for shareholders."

Develop North PLC is a North East-based investment company listed on the main market of the London Stock Exchange.

The company operates as a diversified real estate investment platform investing across residential real estate, commercial real estate and real estate lending to support regeneration, job creation and economic growth.

Since 2017, Develop North PLC has deployed approximately £90 million across more than 43 projects with a gross development value exceeding £280 million and has helped support around 12,000 jobs.

www.developnorth.co.uk

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**I knew I
wanted to
offer more
than just
a clinic.**

Rebecca Price

Unlocking regional growth: How finance fuels business ambition

Ambitious businesses need funding to grow and achieve their goals. It is here the role of regional investment funds are playing a critical role to bridge the funding gap.

The North East Elevate Fund, which is managed by FW Capital, has been helping small business owners realise their growth aspirations. The Fund is part of the North East Mayor Kim McGuinness' £100m regional investment framework administered by The North East Fund. It delivers tailored financial packages starting at £25,000, and is scaling up to investments of £1million for more established businesses.

One example of this is award-winning aesthetic practitioner Rebecca Price who has secured £25,000 investment from the North East Elevate Fund to support the continued growth of her business and the opening of her luxury Sunderland clinic, Price & Co.

Operating from the beautifully restored Printworks on Holmeside, Rebecca Price Aesthetics offers a discreet, premium experience, specialising in natural facial rejuvenation. Rebecca has a reputation for achieving elegant, age-appropriate outcomes through advanced injectable and regenerative treatments, including dermal fillers, collagen-stimulating therapies and skin rejuvenation.

Price & Co brings together a carefully selected collective of independent health, medical and aesthetic professionals under one roof, including nurse practitioners, an in-house GP and a range of specialists dedicated to helping clients look and feel their best.

Rebecca Price, Rebecca Price Aesthetics said: "When I decided to launch my new premises at Price & Co I knew I wanted to offer more than just a clinic. I wanted to deliver a personalised luxury journey for everyone that comes through the doors. We've got a fantastic team of wellness and health practitioners that have joined me in the building.

Rebecca Price Aesthetics was the first unit to be taken and the investment from FW Capital and the North East Elevate Fund has helped me to fulfil my ambitions by setting up my own clinic as well as helping to scale up my business significantly by working alongside other specialists based at Price & Co."

Another local business that has received funding is the National Learning Group who are scaling up operations and creating new jobs after receiving a seven-figure investment.

National Learning Group is an award-winning online tutoring service, which provides 1:1 tutoring to helping students to excel in their studies. It has recently located to a new office in Gateshead and has a registered office in Hexham. Their offering covers all age ranges from reception to adult learners with services including specialist exam preparation for GCSEs and A-Levels, adult skills training, and tailored support to meet each student's unique educational needs. The tutoring services enrol 4,000 students a year with a carefully selected network of over 350 tutors.

Funding from the North East Elevate Fund is facilitating the firm's next phase of growth enabling them to invest in their infrastructure. This includes the development of their own proprietary software to enhance the usability of their online tutoring systems. It is also strengthening its senior management team with some key new director appointments including Neil Stephenson as Chairman. It is also backing the development of a high-quality Alternative Provision Centre, which will provide facilities for children who are unable to attend mainstream schools and assist expansion into more commercial education opportunities.



Oliver Batten

Oliver Batten, Managing Director at National Learning Group said: "We're experiencing significant growth and this funding is helping us to expand our presence. The addition of a new alternative provision educational centre means we can meet the increased demand for accessible high-quality tuition. We've been very pleased with the backing from FW Capital who have recognised our potential and are excited to have an investor on board who is aligned to our vision. Keith Charlton and the team at FW Capital couldn't have been more supportive, they were patient and ensured we got the funding quickly. That speed and understanding allowed us to move from the planning phase to being fully operational without losing any momentum."

What funding is available from the North East Elevate Fund?

The North East Elevate Fund can help businesses that may be at the start of their journey, or more established, with finance to help them grow and evolve. Loans are available on terms up to five years, and can be used for a variety of purposes including:

- Working capital
- Purchasing equipment
- Recruitment
- Marketing
- Product/service development
- ESG initiatives
- Buying a business

To find out more about the North East Fund and its Elevate and Accelerate Funds, visit www.northeastfund.org If you want to find out how we can support your business please email info@fwcapital.co.uk or visit www.fwcapital.co.uk



When the obvious funding solution isn't the right one

By Andrew Welton, Relationship Development Director, CCBS

As businesses begin planning for the year ahead, conversations naturally turn to investment.

New equipment, acquisitions, recruitment plans and expansion opportunities all require careful consideration. Alongside those discussions comes another important question: how should those plans be funded?

In many cases, business owners already have an answer. Equipment investment suggests asset finance. A property acquisition points towards a commercial mortgage. Additional working capital may lead to a conversation about extending existing facilities.

The challenge is that the first funding option that comes to mind is not always the most effective one.

Looking beyond the obvious solution

When business owners identify a funding requirement, it's natural to start with the solution that appears most closely linked to the need.

Often that approach works. Sometimes it doesn't.

The most appropriate funding solution depends on more than the asset, project or opportunity being financed. Timescales, cash flow, existing facilities and longer-term business objectives can all influence which route delivers the best outcome.

In some cases, a combination of funding solutions may prove more effective than a single facility.

That's why it's important to look beyond the immediate requirement and consider what the business is trying to achieve. The right funding structure should support the wider objective, not simply provide access to capital.

The right question to ask

When considering a funding requirement, many business owners start by asking:

"What funding do we need?"

An equally important question is:

"What outcome are we trying to achieve?"

A business may be focused on moving quickly to seize an opportunity. Another may want to preserve working capital for future investment. Some may prioritise flexibility, while others are looking to minimise disruption to existing facilities.

The answer can have a significant impact on the most appropriate funding route.

By understanding the objective first, businesses can uncover solutions that may not have been obvious at the outset.

A recent example

We recently supported an engineering business in Tyne and Wear that required funding to support a property acquisition outside of a SIPP structure.

At first glance, a commercial mortgage appeared to be the logical solution. However, once the funding requirement, timescales and wider objectives were understood, it became clear another approach would better meet the client's needs.

Instead, capital was unlocked from existing assets and supplemented with a business loan.

The result was a £100,000 funding package that enabled the acquisition to complete in weeks rather than months.

The exercise wasn't about finding funding. It was about finding the most appropriate funding structure.

Why this matters when planning for next year

As businesses look ahead, funding conversations become more frequent. Investment opportunities, growth plans and strategic decisions often create funding requirements.

The key is not simply securing finance. It is identifying the most appropriate solution for the circumstances.

Exploring the available options can uncover a solution better aligned with the business's objectives, timescales and longer-term plans. Whether the requirement is supporting growth, funding equipment, managing working capital or completing an acquisition, the most effective solution is not always the most obvious one.

The most successful outcomes rarely come from selecting the first available solution. They come from understanding the requirement, the objective and the full range of options available.



Andrew Welton is a Relationship Development Director at CCBS. He works with SME clients to understand their evolving business needs and funding requirements, helping them access finance for growth, investment, acquisitions and working capital.

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Investing without tying up cash

Rethinking how businesses fund assets.

Businesses still need to invest. Vehicles need replacing, machinery needs upgrading and growth often creates the need for additional equipment.

We caught up with Dan Bullock, Asset Finance Specialist at Trusted Business Partner (TBP), to explore why the way a business funds an investment is just as important as the investment itself.

Are businesses still investing despite wider economic pressures?

Absolutely. Businesses cannot always put investment on hold because there is uncertainty. If machinery is needed to increase capacity or vehicles need replacing, those decisions still have to be made. What has changed is the conversation around funding them. Businesses are increasingly conscious of protecting cash and working capital, how they pay for an asset can be just as important as the asset itself.

If a business has the cash available, why consider finance?

Paying cash isn't wrong. Sometimes it will absolutely be the right decision.

The important thing is comparing the options. If a business spends a significant amount from its reserves on equipment today, what does that leave available for stock, wages, recruitment, future opportunities or unexpected costs? Asset finance can spread the cost while allowing the asset to be used within the business.

What else could cash flow be used for or where else could it be invested?

Is asset finance mainly about new vehicles and machinery?

Not at all. Finance can support a wide range of assets, from vehicles and machinery to specialist equipment, technology and plant.

Businesses may also be able to refinance assets they already own. Subject to the asset and wider circumstances, this can release capital tied up in equipment while the business continues using it day to day. Useful when a business has value sitting within its asset base but wants to create additional working capital elsewhere.

What mistakes do businesses commonly make?

Convenience can drive the decision. The supplier offers finance and it feels like the natural next step. That may well be suitable, but



it's still worth comparing the wider structure. Monthly repayments or headline rates are only part of the picture. Deposit, term, total cost, flexibility and what happens at the end of the agreement all matter.

Finance needs to work for the wider business, not just fund the asset.

So asset finance isn't really just about the asset?

Exactly. I want to understand what the business is trying to achieve. Is it replacing equipment? Increasing capacity? Supporting a new contract? Preserving cash? Expanding a fleet?

Once you understand the reason behind the investment, you can look at how the funding fits with the wider business.

When should businesses start that conversation?

Ideally, before committing to the purchase. The earlier we understand the plan, the more opportunity there is to explore different structures and lenders rather than trying to fit

finance around a decision that's already been made.

And speaking to a broker doesn't mean deciding to borrow. Paying cash may still make sense. The value is in comparing the options first.

What's one question every business should ask before purchasing its next major asset?

"If we use our cash for this today, what might we need that cash for tomorrow?"

Cash and finance both have their place. What matters is understanding the impact of each and choosing what makes sense for the business.

Dan Bullock, Asset Finance Specialist

If you or a client is planning to invest in equipment, vehicles or machinery — or release capital from assets already owned — let's explore what works best for the business, not just the asset.

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FW Capital announces new Managing Director and Fund Director for the North East and Yorkshire

Joanne Whitfield becomes Managing Director of FW Capital in England, while Lindsey McMenemy has been appointed Fund Director, leading teams across the North East and Yorkshire. FW Capital has invested more than £400m since 2010, leveraging more than £590m of private sector investment for nearly 1,000 businesses. The team currently manage a portfolio of nine funds across England.

Joanne joined FW Capital as its first employee in England in 2010 and has played a central role in its growth over the past 16 years.

In the newly created role, she will lead FW Capital's strategy and growth across England, including fund delivery, stakeholder engagement and new investment opportunities. She will work alongside Rhian Elston, Chief Investment Officer for the Development Bank of Wales Group and Chief Executive of FW Capital, following the retirement of Mike Owen.

FW Capital is part of the Development Bank of Wales Group, one of the UK's largest SME investors, which manages funds worth more than £2.6 billion.

Lindsey McMenemy becomes Fund Director after almost a decade with FW Capital and 25 years in SME fund management. Based in Newcastle, she will lead the investment and portfolio teams across the North East and Yorkshire, supporting fund delivery and economic impact.

Rhian Elston, Chief Executive of FW Capital, said: "Joanne and Lindsey's well-deserved appointments strengthen FW Capital's leadership team as we look to the next phase of growth. As part of the Development Bank of Wales Group, FW Capital combines deep regional knowledge with the scale and expertise of one of the UK's largest SME investors, helping us deliver more for our fund investors and the ambitious businesses that we support."

Joanne Whitfield, Managing Director at FW Capital, said: "It is a privilege to lead FW Capital's operations in England. Over the past 16 years, I have



L-R: Lindsey McMenemy and Joanne Whitfield

had the opportunity to work alongside an exceptional team, and I am proud of the impact we have delivered. I look forward to working with Rhian and Lindsey to build on that success, expand opportunities and help even more businesses access the finance they need. The work we do makes a tangible difference to businesses, communities and regional economies, and I'm deeply committed to supporting that growth."

Lindsey McMenemy, Fund Director, added: "I'm looking forward to leading our North East and Yorkshire teams and helping ambitious businesses access the finance and expertise they need to grow, innovate and create high-quality jobs. FW Capital has a strong track record of delivering positive outcomes for stakeholders, built on an outstanding culture and a focus on customer service. The regional investment funds we manage play a vital role in unlocking opportunities and breaking down barriers to growth, and I'm excited to work alongside our talented teams to help even more businesses realise their ambitions."

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a great solicitor
unless you
are good
with people.**

Claire Cutmore

Solicitor of the month...

Claire Cutmore

Partner, Muckle LLP

What inspired you to pursue a career in law, and what path did you take to become a solicitor?

Helping other people made me feel good when I was young and I had my heart set on a career in medicine until I came to realise I generally pass out at the sight of blood!

Using my skills to help people during difficult times was my main motivation for becoming a solicitor. I also grew up in the 80s when shows like LA Law made a career in law look glamorous while fighting for justice. I studied Law at Northumbria University and enjoyed nearly all the modules. When I graduated it was difficult to get a training contract and I ended up moving to the Midlands to work as a paralegal to learn on the job. Eventually I did get a training contract at a specialist debt recovery firm and qualified as a solicitor in 2001.

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

As a newly qualified solicitor I accepted a job with a North East firm and specialised in construction law which simply means dealing with all legal issues relating to construction and engineering projects. My specialism is in disputes, in case issues arise on a construction project. These can be varied, but common themes include a delay to the project or if it runs over budget. The business needs to understand why and who should be responsible for the extra cost. I explain the legal rights and liabilities of the business and help to resolve the dispute using the best method of dispute resolution. For construction disputes this could be mediation, adjudication, litigation, or arbitration.

How has the legal profession changed in recent years, and what trends do you see emerging?

There are now more routes into law which I'm pleased to see, as securing a training contract is even more difficult than when I was young. There are lots of talented people with a passion for a career in law and hopefully the different career paths will help them achieve their ambition and we'll continue to see more diversity in the legal profession.

What advice would you give to someone facing a legal dispute for the first time?

Depending on the nature of the dispute I would recommend getting professional legal advice. Legal disputes can be stressful and sometimes all-consuming. With the right legal advice and support, disputes can be resolved quickly and cost effectively, allowing people to move on. You can look at law firms and individual solicitors by consulting Chambers and Partners

and The Legal 500. They are the two leading independent legal directories that research, rank, and assess law firms and individual lawyers worldwide.

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

People often joke about solicitors being "sharks" because our services are only required when people need help. From my experience it's quite the opposite. Solicitors want to ensure people's legal rights are protected.

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

Construction disputes involve people and livelihoods and therefore evoke emotions such as anger, frustration, worry etc. Witnesses and even technical experts feel immense pressure when involved in disputes. It's sometimes difficult not to feel a person's frustration or anger but when emotions are high, a calm presence is needed to defuse the situation. Empathy for a client is a great motivation for doing your absolute best but it's important not to take on those emotions.

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

The change to electronic communication and documents makes things quicker and easier but has led to huge challenges around how we manage and disclose electronic documents in court proceedings. The number of electronic documents has led to major changes to the disclosure process with the introduction of specific rules relating to electronic disclosure. AI is also driving the automation of certain tasks, but it is no substitute for understanding and applying the law to the facts of a case which comes from experience.

What are the key qualities that make a great solicitor?

You cannot be a great solicitor unless you are good with people. This job is all about relationships with clients, colleagues, experts, and opposing solicitors.

What is the most rewarding part of being a solicitor, and what keeps you motivated?

Helping a client resolve a dispute so they move on to more productive and enjoyable things. My motivation to help people during difficult times hasn't changed and it's still the reason I do this job.

www.muckle-llp.com

The unexpected cost of falling victim to phishing scams



It'd be reasonable to think that the most troubling part of a phishing attack is your valuable data being stolen. But did you know your business could also be at risk of serious fines if your data protection security was substandard to begin with?

Earlier this year, the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) found fault with the cybersecurity of South Staffordshire Plc and South Staffordshire Water Plc (together 'South Staffordshire'), issuing the organisation with a fine of almost £1 million after a major cyber-attack led to a data breach.

Rhiannon Hastings, solicitor in Muckle LLP's commercial team, considers what businesses should do to effectively protect their data, mitigate cyber threats and prevent serious fines now and in the future.

Think before you click

Over a third of small British businesses were hit by a cyber attack in the past year, costing them almost £27,000 each.

Phishing remains the most prevalent form of cyberattack, with 38% of businesses falling victim to the scams in 2025.

But what can happen if your business is caught out by malicious hackers?

In 2020, South Staffordshire fell victim to a phishing email, which allowed attackers to infiltrate the organisation's systems. Almost two years later, in May 2022, undetected, the attackers granted themselves domain administrator privileges – the highest level of access.

The breach wasn't identified until July 2022, triggering an internal investigation. Towards the

end of July 2022, South Staffordshire reported a personal data breach to the ICO and two days later, discovered a ransom note from the hackers.

Unfortunately, South Staffordshire's personal information, including the addresses, dates of birth, telephone numbers, national insurance numbers, passwords and bank account details of 633,887 people was published to the dark web.

The case is a cruel reminder of how simple it is for skilled attackers to access private data. But, as the ICO also fined South Staffordshire years down the line for having poor cybersecurity, it also emphasises that lost data shouldn't be the only concern for businesses exploited by cybercriminals.

Significant fines can also be on the table if your business isn't demonstrating compliance with UK data protection laws, so it's vital to have robust protection in place.

Safeguarding your company's reputation

Your business can quite literally pay the price if the ICO finds that your data wasn't secure under UK data protection law.

In 2022, the ICO's investigation into South Staffordshire found it had failed to implement appropriate security controls as required under UK data protection law. They identified obsolete, unsupported software on some devices and insufficient vulnerability management

measures, including the lack of regular security scans.

As South Staffordshire had been cooperative, admitted its failings early and outlined measures to prevent recurrences, the ICO applied a 40% reduction to the fine, leaving South Staffordshire to pay £963,900. However, this is still a significant financial hit for any business neglecting its responsibilities under UK data protection law.

Prioritising cybersecurity

The case serves as a cautionary tale for all businesses and reinforces that the ICO won't turn a blind eye to poor cybersecurity and resilience.

Businesses should always consider whether:

1. They have adequate controls in place, ensuring that only those who need to access certain data are authorised to do so and that they don't have access to more information than necessary
2. They have suitable logging and monitoring controls in place to identify and manage threats early on
3. Staff are properly trained to identify and deal with threats
4. They are regularly updating their software and using compatible devices
5. They are deploying regular internal and external scanning to identify threats and system compromises

For guidance on how to prevent data breaches in your business, please contact Rhiannon Hastings via rhiannon.hastings@muckle-llp.com or 0191 211 7891.



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Cyber Risk

By Carolyn Beal, Legal Compliance Consultant,
Beal Cooper Compliance Ltd

Why it is a compliance issue, not just an IT issue.

“Cyber criminals won’t bother with us” remains a dangerous assumption for any law firm.

SME firms might not have the same number of clients, volume of data, or client money balances as larger firms, but they still possess confidential information, manage financial transactions and rely heavily on email and electronic systems. They remain a worthwhile target for criminals. In some cases, criminals may regard a smaller firm as an easier target because its resources and controls are expected to be less sophisticated.

For law firm managers, the issue is wider than whether the firm has appropriate antivirus software. A successful cyberattack can raise questions about the protection of client money, preservation of confidentiality, supervision of employees, management of suppliers, continuity of client service and regulatory reporting.

Therefore, cybersecurity must remain on the compliance agenda, not only on the IT provider’s task list.

What is the compliance exposure?

Attacks commonly begin with phishing emails, compromised email accounts, ransomware, or vulnerabilities within an outsourced service provider. The technical method may vary, but the compliance consequences are similar.

A payment-redirection fraud may place client money at risk and expose weaknesses in the firm’s procedures for verifying bank details, authorising payments and supervising transactions. The SRA Standards and Regulations require firms and solicitors to safeguard money and assets entrusted to them by clients and others.

Unauthorised access to emails or files may compromise the duty to keep the affairs of current and former clients confidential. This is not simply a data protection concern. Confidentiality is a regulatory and professional obligation applying across the firm. Data breaches must be considered for reporting to the SRA as well as the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO).

An attack may also leave employees unable to access matter information, communicate with clients or complete urgent work. This can affect the firm’s ability to provide an effective and timely service and highlights why business continuity arrangements must work in practice, not merely exist as a written document.



Carolyn Beal

Reporting and responding

A firm’s incident plan should identify who must be informed and who is responsible for making decisions. Decision making may rest with all managers, the COLP, the COFA, or the person responsible for data protection. Understanding the responsibilities is key.

The response to an attack is critical. The SRA expects prompt reporting where an attack has affected, or has the potential to affect, clients.

For any type of data breach (caused by a cyberattack or otherwise), where notification is required to the ICO, it must be made without undue delay and, where feasible, within 72 hours of awareness.

Management responsibility cannot be outsourced

An IT supplier can advise on system security, access controls, backups and technical recovery. These are necessary but those suppliers cannot take responsibility for the firm’s regulatory decisions.

Managers should ensure that cyber risks appear in the firm’s risk register, responsibilities are

clearly allocated and incident procedures are regularly tested. On an operational level, access to systems should be controlled, authorisation processes for payment instructions should be robust, supplier due diligence should always address information security, and employees’ learning and development plans should include practical training on recognising and reporting concerns.

Firms can mitigate cyber risks but cannot eliminate every one, and compliance officers are not expected to become technical experts. However, managers must be able to demonstrate that risks to clients, client money and confidential information have been identified and managed.

Technical support may be outsourced. Regulatory accountability cannot be.

I’m happy to talk to firms about ensuring compliance procedures are in place and are effective, so managers have the confidence they need.

www.bealcoopercompliance.co.uk

Teesside dealmaker joins Hay & Kilner as firm builds new Stockton operation



Experienced corporate lawyer Sean Jackson has joined Hay & Kilner as a Partner, bringing extensive experience and established relationships across Teesside as the North East law firm strengthens its presence in the region with the opening of a new Stockton-on-Tees office.

Sean joins from another North East firm, where he was a Partner, and has spent his career advising businesses across Teesside and the wider North East on a broad range of corporate matters.

His experience includes advising SMEs, owner-managed businesses, investors and start-ups through acquisitions, disposals, investments and other significant corporate transactions, supporting clients through key stages of their growth and development.

His appointment is the first of a number of dedicated colleagues who will be based at Hay & Kilner's new office at Preston Farm, Stockton-on-Tees. The office forms part of the firm's plans to establish a permanent presence in the Tees Valley and strengthen its ability to support businesses across Teesside, South Durham and North Yorkshire.

For Sean, the opportunity to combine his knowledge of the local business community with the chance to help establish and grow a new operation was a key factor in his decision to join the firm.

Sean Jackson, Partner at Hay & Kilner, said: "I've spent my entire career working with and for businesses primarily based in Teesside and the wider North East, supporting them through

growth journeys, acquisitions, disposals, investments and other corporate events.

"The opportunity to be involved in establishing and growing a new office in Teesside was therefore a really exciting one. Hay & Kilner has a strong reputation, a great culture and ambitious plans for the region, and I'm looking forward to bringing my experience and relationships to the firm and supporting businesses across Teesside."

The appointment comes at an important time for Hay & Kilner, as the Newcastle-headquartered firm continues its wider growth strategy while celebrating its 80th anniversary in 2026.

The decision to establish a dedicated Stockton base reflects the firm's commitment to building stronger relationships across Teesside and developing a team with genuine local knowledge and experience.

Jonathan Waters, Managing Partner at Hay & Kilner, said: "We're delighted to welcome Sean to Hay & Kilner and particularly pleased that someone of his calibre and experience will be based in our new Stockton office.

"Sean has an excellent understanding of the Teesside business community and a wealth of experience supporting businesses through key

stages of their growth. That local knowledge and expertise will be hugely valuable as we build our presence in the region.

"Sean is the first of our dedicated colleagues to join the new office, marking an important step in our plans for Teesside. We're looking forward to building a strong team around him and further strengthening the support we can provide to businesses across the region."

For businesses across Teesside, Sean's arrival provides a further local point of contact with a firm offering a broad range of legal expertise and a long-established reputation in the North East.

Corporate transactions can represent significant milestones for businesses, whether that involves an acquisition, disposal, investment or the next stage of a company's growth. Sean's experience of working closely with businesses and their owners across the region positions him well to understand the commercial considerations behind those decisions.

His appointment also provides a strong foundation for Hay & Kilner as it develops its Stockton operation and looks to build a wider team around him.

With the new office now established and Sean leading the firm's corporate offering in Teesside, Hay & Kilner is signalling its ambition to become an increasingly active part of the region's business community.

For a firm celebrating eight decades of growth, the Stockton expansion represents both a continuation of its North East heritage and a significant investment in its future.

www.hay-kilner.co.uk

A significant boost for Sintons

Sintons strengthens growth strategy with appointment of Deborah Johnson as Business Development Lead.

Sintons, the award-winning North East law firm, has announced a significant boost to its strategic growth team with the appointment of Deborah Johnson as Business Development Lead.

Deborah's arrival marks a high-profile return to the firm. Having previously served as Sintons' Media Relations Manager where she led the firm's PR and communications strategy, she returns to take a pivotal role in driving new business initiatives and expanding the firm's market presence.

With an extensive background in professional services and a deep understanding of the legal landscape, Deborah will work closely with the firm's partners to identify emerging opportunities and strengthen client relationships across its diverse practice areas.

David Pritchard, Head of Business Development and Marketing at Sintons, welcomed the appointment: "We are thrilled to have Deborah back at Sintons. She joins us at a time of incredible momentum for the firm. Her previous experience here, combined with her sharpened expertise in the wider market, makes her the ideal person to lead our business development efforts. Deborah understands our

culture, our clients, and our ambitions, and her insight will be invaluable as we continue to scale."

Deborah Johnson, newly appointed Business Development Lead, commented: "It's a fantastic time to be joining and returning to Sintons. The firm has an enviable reputation for excellence, but it's the current energy and the clear vision for the future that made this opportunity so compelling. Having previously managed the PR and communications side of the business, I'm excited to apply that experience to a broader strategic role and help drive the firm's continued success."

The appointment comes during a period of sustained growth for Sintons, which continues to be recognised for its commitment to providing a full-service legal offering to both individual and commercial clients. Deborah's role will be central to ensuring the firm remains at the forefront of the legal sector in the North East and beyond.

www.sintons.co.uk



“

It's a fantastic time to be joining and returning to Sintons.

Deborah Johnson

Mincoffs continues to grow team with Real Estate Partner appointment



Matthew Miller, partner in Mincoffs' real estate team.

Leading North East law firm, Mincoffs Solicitors, has further expanded its real estate team with the appointment of experienced commercial property lawyer Matthew Miller as partner.

Matthew joins Mincoffs with extensive experience gained at leading regional and national law firms and brings a strong track record of advising businesses, property investors, developers, occupiers and lenders across the North East and nationally. Over the course of his career, he has built a reputation for delivering commercially focused legal advice and developing long-term client relationships.

Matthew advises clients across the full commercial real estate lifecycle, including acquisitions and disposals, property finance, portfolio management, landlord and tenant matters and the real estate aspects of corporate deals.

His expertise spans a broad range of sectors, with particular experience in hospitality and leisure, industrial and logistics, offices and property development.

Commenting on his appointment, Matthew said: "I am delighted to be joining Mincoffs at such an exciting time for the firm. Mincoffs has an outstanding reputation for delivering partner-led, relationship-driven advice and for investing in long-term client relationships with businesses, their owners and their families.

"What particularly attracted me was the quality of the people and the strength of the real estate team, which I have always found to be technically excellent, pragmatic and enjoyable to work with. Combined with the breadth of expertise across the wider firm, Mincoffs offers an excellent platform to support clients as they grow and protect their businesses."

Paul Hughes, senior partner at Mincoffs, added: "We are delighted to welcome Matthew to the firm. He is a highly respected real estate lawyer with an excellent reputation in the market and a strong track record of advising a broad range of clients on complex commercial property matters.

"Matthew's appointment reflects our continued investment in the real estate team and our commitment to providing clients with commercially focused, partner-led advice. His experience, technical expertise and client-focused approach make him an excellent fit for Mincoffs, and we are excited to have him on board as we continue to grow."

His arrival comes at a time of continued growth and recognition for Mincoffs. The firm was recently recognised by Legal 500 as the most

recommended law firm in the North East, based on independent client research measuring the likelihood of clients recommending their law firm to others. Mincoffs has also been recognised as one of the region's leading corporate advisers, ranking among the top three most active legal advisers in the North East and within the top 20 across the UK in Experian MarketIQ's latest league tables.

The addition of Matthew further strengthens Mincoffs' real estate offering and underlines the firm's continued commitment to supporting businesses, investors, developers and lenders throughout the North East and across the UK. Together with the firm's growing national profile and recent industry recognition, his arrival represents another significant step in Mincoffs' ongoing investment in talent, expertise and client service as the firm continues to expand its presence across key markets.

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

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

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L-R: Sarah Reid, Hannah Cullen and Steve Lightley

Legally Sound: Navigating the Buy-to-Let landscape

For property investors, buy-to-let can be an attractive proposition, offering the potential for rental income and, over the longer term, capital growth.

But the market has become increasingly diverse, with landlords now considering everything from traditional longer-term tenancies to holiday lets and Airbnb-style short-term accommodation, combining these approaches can make the legal and financial picture considerably more complicated.

That is the subject of the latest podcast episode - Legally Sound hosted by Managing Director, Sarah Reid, joining Sarah to unpick the topic are Hannah Cullen, Richard Reed's buy-to-let specialist, and Steve Lightley from First Mortgage North East. Together, they explore the considerations investors need to understand when purchasing a property with the intention of using it for different types of letting.

Buy-to-let can take many forms, some landlords may purchase a single property as an investment, while others build portfolios over time. The strategy can also vary, from providing a property to a tenant on a conventional residential tenancy, to furnishing properties for corporate tenants, holidaymakers or short-term visitors.

For Hannah, the first consideration should be funding, particularly for buyers who are not purchasing with cash. She advises: "Not all mortgage products permit short-term or holiday letting, making it important for investors to establish whether their proposed use is compatible with the finance available before proceeding."

Steve agrees that this is an issue encountered regularly, particularly when moving from residential mortgages to buy-to-let. Steve adds: "Different mortgage products carry different conditions regarding how a property can be used, while lenders can view short-term letting as a potentially higher-risk proposition."

This is particularly relevant for investors who see the potential to switch between longer-term and short-term lets depending on demand. While that flexibility may be commercially attractive, it cannot simply be assumed that a property can be used in whichever way the owner chooses. Mortgage conditions and the terms attached to the property need to be considered alongside the investment strategy.

The implications can extend into the conveyancing process too, understanding how a property will be occupied and operated from the outset can help ensure the legal and financial arrangements align.

This is where Richard Reed Solicitors' wider expertise can play an important role with the firm providing a broad range of legal services for individuals, families and businesses, its property team also advises clients on buying, selling and remortgaging property, with specialist knowledge of investment and buy-to-let transactions.

For landlords and property investors, having a solicitor involved at an early stage can provide reassurance that the proposed purchase, financing arrangements and intended use of the property are properly considered. This can be particularly important where a property is intended to operate differently from a conventional residential home.

For Sarah, this practical approach is at the heart of Legally Sound. "The power of the podcast is that it allows us to take complex legal issues and have conversations about them in a way that is accessible and relevant to people's everyday lives and businesses.

This episode is a great example of why those conversations are so valuable, by bringing together Hannah's legal and buy-to-let expertise with Steve's mortgage perspective, we can give listeners a much more rounded understanding of the issues they need to consider."

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Building tomorrow's workforce today

By Jess Fenwick, Sweeney Miller

Across the North East, businesses face a common challenge: attracting, developing and retaining the talent that will drive future growth.

The organisations that thrive in the years ahead will be those that invest in people today.

At Sweeney Miller Law, we believe investing in the next generation is not simply a social responsibility initiative; it is essential to the long-term success of our business and the wider region. Developing talent requires more than recruiting when vacancies arise. It means creating opportunities at every stage of the career journey, from school engagement and university partnerships to apprenticeships, graduate recruitment and professional qualifications.

Strong partnerships between education and industry play a vital role in helping young people understand the opportunities available to them while enabling employers to connect with future talent. We are proud to work closely with both Newcastle University and the University of Sunderland through initiatives designed to support aspiring legal professionals.

For several years, we have partnered with Newcastle University through the Sweeney Miller Law Scholarship, which provides a cash award together with a two-week paid work placement within the firm. The scholarship gives students valuable exposure to life in a modern law firm, helping them develop practical skills, gain confidence and better understand the career opportunities available within the profession.

We have also sponsored the Sweeney Miller Land Law Prize at the University of Sunderland for a number of years, recognising outstanding achievement in one of the core disciplines of legal education. Both initiatives are about much more than financial support. They celebrate excellence, create opportunities and help talented students build valuable connections as they prepare to enter the workplace.

Our commitment to developing future talent extends beyond undergraduate students. Earlier this year, we worked alongside Newcastle University to host a Legal Taster Afternoon at our Newcastle office, welcoming Year 10, 11 and

12 students from schools and colleges across the region. The event gave young people the opportunity to hear from legal professionals, learn about different routes into the profession and gain first-hand insight into working within a modern legal practice. Initiatives like these can help raise aspirations and encourage young people to consider careers they may not have previously explored.

Supporting future talent cannot stop at education. Businesses must also provide clear and accessible routes into employment and progression.

At Sweeney Miller Law, we currently support six trainee solicitors, three solicitor apprentices, two business administration apprentices and four accounts apprentices, all at different stages of their professional journey. We also continue to recruit graduates into paralegal roles, providing structured development opportunities and exposure to real client work from the outset of their careers.

Importantly, many of our firm's leaders started exactly where these individuals are today. The majority of Sweeney Miller Law's partners and senior leaders began their careers with the firm as paralegals before training, qualifying and progressing into senior positions within the business. Their journeys demonstrate what can be achieved when employers invest in potential and provide clear pathways for development. They also show aspiring professionals that long-

term career progression is not only possible but actively encouraged.

The benefits of investing in young people extend far beyond filling vacancies. Today's apprentices, trainees and graduates bring fresh perspectives, new ideas and an understanding of emerging technologies and ways of working. Combined with the experience of established professionals, they help create stronger, more resilient organisations.

Ultimately, investing in the next generation is about more than preparing individuals for work. It is about building a stronger future for our region. The students, apprentices and graduates entering the workplace today will become tomorrow's leaders, innovators and business owners.

At Sweeney Miller Law, our recent SHINE Intermediate Accreditation reinforces our belief that investing in people is one of the most important investments any organisation can make. Whether through scholarships, work placements, apprenticeships, graduate recruitment or ongoing professional development, creating opportunities for the next generation benefits not only individual businesses but the future prosperity of our region as a whole. We are proud to play our part in building tomorrow's workforce today.

www.sweeneymiller.co.uk



Jess Fenwick, Senior Partner and Head of Corporate and Commercial at Sweeney Miller Law



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Preventing workplace stress from becoming a legal problem

By Sophia Dunn, Paralegal, CLR Law

Work-related stress is no longer a wellbeing issue alone.

Mental ill health is a top cause of long-term absence for 41% of employers (CIPD, 2025), 32% of decision makers report it as a reason staff give for sickness absence (Acas, 2026), and 22.1 million working days were lost in Great Britain in 2024/25 to work-related stress, depression or anxiety (HSE).

The challenge is not mitigating stress. It is recognising when ordinary pressure begins to develop into a mental health condition, and acting once it does.

An employer's guide to the language

Stress: the adverse reaction to excessive pressures or demands (the HSE's definition).

Anxiety: persistent worry or fear that outlasts the pressure causing it and interferes with daily functioning.

Mental health condition: a clinically recognised illness that may require treatment and significantly affects daily life.

Stress is not always a mental health condition

Stress is natural and can be useful, e.g. short-term pressure, which passes. Where pressure is persistent it can become chronic stress, which can develop into a recognised condition such as depression or an anxiety disorder. That is where the legal position changes.

When does stress become a legal risk?

Disability discrimination. Under section 6 of the Equality Act 2010, a person is disabled if a physical or mental impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities — long-term meaning lasting, or likely to last, at least 12 months.

Two points are often missed. Stress alone is not usually an impairment: tribunals distinguish stress and unhappiness from a clinically recognised condition (Herry v Dudley MBC).



Sophia Dunn

And no label is required — protection turns on the effect on the individual.

Where the definition is met the duty to make reasonable adjustments applies. It is triggered where the employer knows, or ought reasonably to know, of the disability and the disadvantage — constructive knowledge is enough, which is why ignoring warning signs is dangerous.

Duty of care. Employers separately owe a common law duty to take reasonable care for employees' health, backed by regulation 3 of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.

In *Foxton-Duffy v Jockey Club Racecourses Ltd* [2026] EWHC 571 (KB), the High Court awarded a former Head of Marketing around £990,000 for psychiatric injury caused by occupational stress arising from a restructure. He formally raised the risk of injury to health and colleagues noticed visible changes in his behaviour, but no risk assessment or occupational health referral followed.

Three points stand out. Counselling was available, but the judge held that passive provision was not a panacea. Liability ran from when psychiatric injury became reasonably foreseeable, after which straightforward

steps should have been taken. And the claim succeeded despite no prior breakdown, which is rare.

Once the signs are there, doing nothing is a decision.

What employers can do now

- Keep stress and mental health policies up to date.
- Encourage annual leave and monitor accrued untaken leave.
- Manage workloads realistically, particularly after a restructure.
- Conduct stress risk assessments using the HSE Management Standards, refer to occupational health, and act on the recommendations.
- Don't ignore the warning signs.
- Train line managers to recognise the signs and know what to do next.

Employers who identify concerns early, equip managers and encourage open conversations are better placed to support their people, meet their obligations and build a resilient workforce.

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Barry Speker OBE

Straight talk with Speker

By Barry Speker OBE

Our PM had his first meeting with President Trump, surely an opportunity to build bridges?

The President wanted to see some sign that the man 'who used to be the mayor of some town' can restore the standing of the UK as a reliable ally and an active member of NATO and willing to take effective steps about immigration, defence spending and welfare cuts. The positive sign was an apparent willingness by the UK to review the expensive and ill-advised Chagos Islands deal. Donald and Andy not yet quite 'besties'?



Ed Sheeran is a globally popular song writer and entertainer. He has always been uncontroversial, part of his appeal being that his music is accessible to all - about love, humanity and relationships.

Until recently his only known affiliation was as a fan of Ipswich Town FC due to his East Anglian roots.

This all changed when his friend and support act Macklemore decided to make 'Free Palestine' declarations on stage. This caused offence leading to Sheeran dropping the act from his American tour. His other support acts withdrew 'in solidarity' pushing him into the position of needing to make a public statement about the Middle East, expressing some forlorn attempt to balance the events of 7th October and the ensuing Gaza situation.

One can sympathise that he wants his music to be "about unity, not division, about humanity not politics".

However such a position is patently unacceptable to the activists and political obsessives intent on targeting him and using every opportunity to inject their one-sided political views. Sheeran should not be bullied into spouting anti-Israel dogma at the behest of so-called progressive critics. He should not be forced to choose sides by zealots who have no balance or inclination to debate.

Another lamentable feature was the reporting by the BBC which edited out Sheeran's acknowledgment of the terrible suffering caused by the October 7th murderous attack by Hamas on Israel, including the hundreds who were killed at the Nova music festival. Why does the BBC repeatedly behave like this?

I was delighted to attend the annual Autumn Festival hosted by the North East Chinese Association at Sky Restaurant in Stowell Street. As always it was a glittering occasion with a sumptuous banquet, accommodating my particular dietary idiosyncrasies! I was honoured to be the official recipient of the ceremonial lettuce in the Lion Dance.



Thanks to NECA chairman Jimmy Tsang and his committee for a great event.

My twice yearly golf trip, formerly the Robbie Tour and now the Cossie Tour, marked a departure from tradition. After many years of dedication to Scottish golf in the North Berwick area, the Open Arms at Dirleton with rounds at Gullane, Kilspindie, Longniddry etc, circumstances led to us changing the venue to Carlisle.

We stayed at the excellent Crown Hotel in Wetheral and played Carlisle GC, Eden GC and then Hexham on the way home.

Still an excellent tour although we missed Bass Rock, breakfast kippers and Finnan haddock and of course the compendious choice of single malts!

barryspeker@hotmail.com



What happens to IP when a company is struck off

By Dominic Elsworth, Hargreaves Elsworth

When a company is struck off the register and dissolved, its intellectual property (IP) doesn't simply vanish. In the UK, any remaining assets, including IP, automatically pass to the Crown under the doctrine of bona vacantia, meaning "ownerless goods." Once this happens, reclaiming or acquiring those rights becomes far from straightforward.

Companies can be removed from the register for several reasons. The most common is administrative strike-off, often triggered when companies fail to file annual accounts or confirmation statements. In these cases, dissolution can occur almost inadvertently, leaving valuable IP, such as trademarks, patents or copyright-protected materials, unexpectedly exposed. Alternatively, a company may be struck off following the completion of a formal liquidation. Even then, any IP not properly assigned or sold during the winding-up process will still pass to the Crown.

Once dissolved, the company ceases to exist as a legal entity and can no longer own or manage anything, including IP. In some situations, it may be possible to negotiate with the Crown to acquire the rights, but that does depend on whether the Bona Vacantia Division chooses to sell or disclaim them. An alternative option is restoring the company to the register, which, if successful, revives its legal personality and reinstates its IP rights. However, restoration is time-sensitive, and if the Crown has already disposed of the assets, recovery of those assets may be impossible.

The safest approach is proactive planning. Before dissolution, IP can be assigned to shareholders, transferred to another company, or otherwise dealt with to ensure it doesn't fall into bona vacantia. For any business, treating IP as a core asset rather than an administrative afterthought is essential to protecting long-term value.

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October's workplace harassment reforms

By Anthony Willis, BHP Law

Why employers can no longer afford to turn a blind eye.

For many employers, workplace harassment has traditionally been viewed as an internal issue. Policies, training and procedures have focused largely on conduct between colleagues.

That changes on 30 October 2026.

New provisions under the Employment Rights Act 2025 will significantly raise the bar for employers. Alongside a strengthened duty to prevent sexual harassment, employers will face potential liability for harassment committed by third parties, including clients, customers, suppliers, contractors and members of the public.

The message is clear: preventing harassment is no longer simply a matter of responding to complaints when they arise. Employers are expected to take proactive, preventative action before problems occur.

The return of third-party harassment liability

One of the most significant changes is the introduction of new obligations relating to third-party harassment.

From 30 October 2026, employers may be liable where an employee is harassed in the course of their employment by a third party and the employer has failed to take all reasonable steps to prevent that harassment.

Third parties can include clients, customers, visitors, suppliers, contractors and service users.

Importantly, the protection is not limited to sexual harassment. It extends across all protected characteristics, including race, disability, religion or belief, age, sex, sexual orientation and gender reassignment.

Many employers will recognise situations where inappropriate comments, offensive jokes or discriminatory behaviour from customers have been dismissed as unfortunate but unavoidable aspects of frontline work.

That approach is becoming increasingly difficult to justify.

The reforms reflect growing expectations that employers should actively protect their workforce, regardless of where the risk originates.

One Small Word, one major change

Alongside the new third-party harassment provisions, employers should pay close attention to what appears to be a subtle amendment to the law on sexual harassment.

Since October 2024, employers have been required to take "reasonable steps" to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace. From October 2026, that duty becomes one to take "all reasonable steps".

The addition of a single word may seem insignificant. In practice, however, it could prove transformative.

Rather than simply asking whether an employer took reasonable action, tribunals are likely to consider whether further reasonable preventative measures were available and, if so, why they were not implemented. Employers who cannot demonstrate a comprehensive approach may find it difficult to show compliance.

Why policies alone won't save you

When new employment legislation arrives, there is often a rush to update handbooks and policies. While those documents remain important, employers should resist treating compliance as a paperwork exercise.

The real risk lies in the gap between written procedures and day-to-day practice. Tribunals are increasingly focused on evidence. Employers may need to demonstrate that they have assessed risks, trained managers, communicated expectations, encouraged reporting and responded appropriately to concerns.

An anti-harassment policy that sits unread in a handbook is unlikely to carry much weight. The focus is shifting from documentation to culture.

Client-facing businesses should take particular note

The reforms will be especially relevant to organisations whose staff interact regularly with clients and customers.

Law firms, estate agents, accountants, healthcare providers, retailers, hospitality businesses and other service organisations may face increased exposure because employees routinely engage with individuals outside the employer's direct control.

For many businesses, the most difficult situations will involve important client relationships.

What happens if a key client repeatedly makes inappropriate remarks to a member of staff? What if discriminatory comments are dismissed as humour? What if concerns have been raised previously but no action has been taken?

These are no longer simply employee relations issues. They may become legal risks.

Employers should be considering not only their internal policies, but also whether client engagement terms, supplier agreements and workplace standards adequately address unacceptable behaviour towards employees.

What employers should be doing now

With implementation fast approaching, organisations should be taking practical steps to prepare.

Key actions include:

- Reviewing contracts, staff handbooks and workplace policies
- Undertaking and documenting harassment risk assessments
- Refreshing training for employees and managers
- Reviewing complaint handling and investigation procedures
- Ensuring reporting routes are clear and accessible
- Monitoring incidents and maintaining appropriate records
- Reviewing client and supplier terms where appropriate
- Communicating a clear zero-tolerance approach to harassment from any source

Perhaps most importantly, employers should consider whether their culture genuinely supports employees who raise concerns, particularly where complaints involve customers, clients or other commercially important relationships.

Prevention is the new standard

These reforms are about more than legal compliance; they form part of a wider shift towards prevention, accountability and safer workplaces. Employers are increasingly expected not simply to react when harassment occurs, but to anticipate risks and take meaningful steps to address them before harm is done.

For organisations that act now, the changes present an opportunity to strengthen workplace culture and reduce risk. For those that delay, the consequences may extend well beyond an employment tribunal claim.

As the end of October approaches, employers should ask themselves a simple question: if an employee were harassed by a colleague, customer or client tomorrow, could we confidently demonstrate that we had taken all reasonable steps to prevent it?

From 30 October 2026, that is likely to be the exact question a tribunal will ask.

If your organisation needs support preparing for these changes, or you have a general employment law concern, please contact Anthony Willis at BHP Law on 0800 590 019 or email AnthonyW@bhplaw.co.uk for a confidential, no-obligation discussion.

A foot in the door

The introduction of Workplace Union Access Rights.

Megan Robson is a solicitor at specialist employment law firm, Collingwood Legal. Megan outlines the changes introduced by the Employment Rights Act 2025 in relation to the introduction of workplace union access rights.

The employment law landscape continues to evolve with the introduction of the Employment Rights Act 2025. One development that will present unique challenges to employers is the introduction of trade union access agreements.

The current legal framework does not give unrecognised trade unions a statutory right to access workplaces. However, from 30 October 2026, rules on a trade union's right of access to the workplace will be updated, enabling trade unions and employers to enter into "access agreements", allowing union officials access to the workforce both physically and digitally for the purpose of meeting, representing, recruiting or organising workers, or facilitating collective bargaining. Access will be prohibited for the purpose of organising industrial action.

The change will impact all employers with 21 or more workers and aims to facilitate trade union contribution to the workplace. There are concerns that many employers will be unprepared for this significant change and this could lead to costly mistakes.

Access Agreements

A trade union will be able to submit an "access request" to the employer, who must respond within 15 working days. If an employer responds positively to the access request, the parties have 25 days from the response to agree written terms of access. Should the terms of access be agreed between the union and the employer, then they can be agreed in writing and the Central Arbitration Committee ("CAC") can be notified.

What happens if an Employer fails to respond, or an agreement cannot be reached?

Should an agreement not be reached, or the employer fail to respond, the union may apply to the CAC to determine the application. The CAC must consider the "access principles" when making a determination.



Megan Robson

The legal principles underlying this right are that:

- Trade union officials should be able to physically enter a workplace or communicate with workers (or both) for any of the access purposes in any manner that does not unreasonably interfere with the employer's business.
- An employer should take reasonable steps to facilitate access by union officials.
- Physical entry into a workplace and communications with workers should not be unreasonably refused by employers.
- Union access should be refused entirely only where it is reasonable in all the circumstances to do so.

The CAC therefore has significant powers to impose terms on employers. We are working with employers to ensure they understand how to respond to an access request.

Enforcement & Risks

If an employer does not respond by the end of the 15 working day response period, the union may make an application requesting the CAC determine if access should be granted and on what basis.

Access agreements will be enforceable. Failure to comply with an access agreement can have significant detrimental consequences. Breach of an access agreement can result in fines up to £75,000 for a first penalty, up to £150,000 for a

second penalty and up to £500,000 for a third breach and further non-compliance under the agreement.

Take action before the changes take effect

First and foremost, all employers of 21 or more people must be alive to any request received and be aware of the significant risk to its business in not dealing with union requests.

Employers should also consider:

- Reviewing existing policies;
- Training the workforce on the changes;
- Training managers on how to respond to access requests; and
- What access is appropriate for their organisation.

Access agreements that are drafted too widely and a lack of clear parameters may inadvertently grant rights beyond those intended. We will work with employers to ensure the scope of access is clearly defined.

The practical implications of the changes should not be underestimated.

Employers should act now to review existing policies, procedures and provide appropriate training to the workforce.

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My Delhi brings a taste of Asia to The People's Kitchen

A taste of Asia has been added to the menu at The People's Kitchen in Newcastle, thanks to a monthly commitment from popular city restaurant My Delhi.

Restaurateur Elahi Shah Amin, from My Delhi, has dedicated one night each month to cooking and serving meals for the Friends of The People's Kitchen, helping the charity reach the milestone of serving 1,000 free hot meals through the partnership.

Elahi said the relationship was a natural extension of My Delhi's commitment to the city that has supported the restaurant since it was established.

"Newcastle has given My Delhi so much over the years. This city welcomed us, supported

us, and gave us the opportunity to build something we're incredibly proud of.

"Access to a hot, nutritious meal is something many of us take for granted, but that's not the reality for everyone. Nobody should have to wonder where their next meal is coming from, especially in a city as compassionate as Newcastle.

"We're proud that we've now served 1,000 free hot meals together, and this is just the beginning. We hope it's the start of a long-term partnership that helps support some of the most vulnerable members of our community."

The People's Kitchen was established in Newcastle in 1985 and has been supporting people experiencing homelessness, poverty and hardship for more than four decades. The charity provides free food alongside practical support, friendship and a safe, welcoming environment.

Today, The People's Kitchen serves around 300 meals every day, making it an important lifeline for people across Newcastle and the wider region.

Trustee Maggie Pavlou said the support from My Delhi had brought more than just food to the charity.

"We are incredibly grateful to Elahi and everyone at My Delhi for the commitment they have shown to The People's Kitchen."



One man's donation helped make a community happier and healthier

Across communities, grassroots groups provide far more than a place to play. They create somewhere for children and young people to go, somewhere to belong, a safe space with people to talk to and opportunities that can have an impact far beyond the football pitch.

One such example can be found at Wallsend, where Sporting Wallsend, the community arm of Wallsend Boys Club, has developed its work around the belief that football can be a vehicle for positive change. Community sessions, activities and opportunities can provide connection, confidence and a sense of belonging.

But the reality of grassroots community work is that good intentions alone are not enough. Facilities have to be built, equipment needs to be bought, sessions have to be staffed. Behind many successful community projects is an individual or organisation that has quietly stepped forward to make something possible. At Sporting Wallsend, one of those people was Peter Olsen.

Peter Olsen had an extraordinary life, from a poor and difficult background to a multi million pound company in Hong Kong, to losing it all and developing unhealthy dependencies- to recovery, starting again and helping others. His love for football led to an introduction to Wallsend Boys Club in Hong Kong- and a donation to start PODS (Peter Olsen Development Sessions) In 2022 when the build on the new community hub had stopped due to lack of funds, Peter stepped up and donated £250k to ensure its completion... the following year the Peter Olsen Community Hub opened and the guest of honour was of course the man himself.

Peter sadly passed away earlier this year and everyone at Sporting Wallsend and Wallsend Boys Club wanted to do something to honour him- so they decided to put on a special session of PODs football session where all the players wore the club colours (green & yellow) There was a minute of clapping at the start for Peter and a speech by the Chairman Steve Dale.

The Meadows shines on BBC Radio Newcastle

The Meadows charity in Meadow Well recently welcomed BBC Radio Newcastle to its community hub for a fantastic four-hour outside broadcast which went out to over 200,000 listeners.

The broadcast was a brilliant opportunity to showcase The Meadows and shine a light on the incredible work taking place across the charity and the wider Meadow Well community. Throughout the day, BBC Newcastle's Anna Foster spoke with staff, volunteers, community members and local people, highlighting the range of activities, support and opportunities available at The Meadows including the all inclusive music sessions, corporate partnership with SAGE, the food bank and the community gardens which are kept by a team of brilliant volunteers including Millie who is 96!

More than just a community hub, The Meadows is a place where people come together, build connections, learn new skills and support one another. The BBC's visit captured that spirit perfectly, celebrating the people who make the charity what it is and



showcasing the positive difference it makes every day.

It was a fantastic platform to put The Meadows firmly in the spotlight and celebrate all that is great about the charity and the community it serves.

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Red Sky Foundation and Dyer Apprentices deliver life-saving defibrillator to Annfield Plain Community



Red Sky Foundation is delighted to see another life-saving defibrillator installed in the heart of a North East community, thanks to the support of long-standing charity partner Dyer and its next generation of young engineers.

The new publicly accessible defibrillator has been installed at Dyer's Annfield Plain site in County Durham, helping to provide vital emergency equipment for local residents, businesses and visitors should someone suffer a cardiac arrest.

Red Sky Foundation gifted the defibrillator to Dyer following the 2026 Manufacturing Leaders' Summit at New College Durham, where Dyer's parent company, SST Group, supported the event as platinum sponsor.

Organised by Theo James Recruitment, the summit brought together more than 190 leaders from across the manufacturing sector and raised an incredible £11,000 for Red Sky Foundation, helping us continue our work supporting cardiac care and placing life-saving defibrillators throughout communities.

Rather than keeping the defibrillator solely for internal use, Dyer wanted to ensure it was placed somewhere it could have the greatest possible impact.

As part of their development programme, Dyer's first-year apprentices worked alongside

HSE Lead Matthew Dyer to research potential locations and assess where access to a public defibrillator would be most beneficial. Following their research, the apprentices recommended the company's Annfield Plain site.

Dr Sergio Petrucci MBE, Founder of Red Sky Foundation, said: "We're delighted to see this defibrillator installed where it can make a real difference to the Annfield Plain community.

"When someone suffers a cardiac arrest, every second counts. Having a publicly accessible defibrillator nearby, alongside early CPR, can make a huge difference and potentially help save a life.

"We're incredibly proud of our long-standing partnership with Dyer and particularly pleased to see their apprentices getting involved in this project. Educating and engaging the next generation about the importance of defibrillators and CPR is a huge part of creating safer communities.

"A massive thank you to everyone at Dyer, SST Group, Theo James Recruitment and New

College Durham for continuing to support Red Sky Foundation and the work we do."

Adam Leggett, Managing Director of Dyer, said: "We're incredibly grateful to Red Sky Foundation for gifting the defibrillator and proud that our apprentices have played such an important role in bringing this project to life.

"Our nationally award-winning apprenticeship programme with New College Durham develops not only technical skills, but also encourages our young engineers to make a positive contribution to their local community."

Dyer has been a valued supporter of Red Sky Foundation for a number of years and has raised more than £10,000 to support our work providing life-saving cardiac care and equipment for babies, children and adults across the region.

At Red Sky Foundation, we are passionate about making life-saving defibrillators as accessible as possible. By working alongside businesses, organisations and communities across the North East and beyond, we continue to place vital equipment where it can be accessed quickly in an emergency.

The new defibrillator at Dyer's Annfield Plain site is another fantastic example of what can be achieved through partnership – bringing businesses, young people and charities together to help create a safer community and give someone the best possible chance of survival when every second counts.

www.redskyfoundation.com



People
Doing
Good...

Project gets adults back in the saddle with free cycling support

A North East community project is encouraging adults to rediscover the freedom of cycling with free guided rides, bike lessons and repairs available through its Cycle Hub.

Full Circle Food Project, which also operates the Cycle Hub, is helping adults overcome nerves and build confidence on two wheels, whether they are returning to cycling after many years or learning the basics for the first time.

The Bicycle Hub offers free guided rides every Tuesday, starting at 10.30am. The rides are specifically designed for people who may feel nervous about getting back on a bike and follow routes which avoid roads wherever possible.

The typical rides cover around five to seven miles and provide a relaxed way for participants to build up their confidence in a supportive environment.

For anyone who does not have a bike, the Cycle Hub can provide one, while helmets are also available for those who need them.

The project also provides free adult cycling lessons which begin with basic skills such as getting on and off a bike, balancing, moving off and controlling the bike. Participants can progress through different levels, with further tuition available on the road for those who are ready.

Lessons are generally provided on a one-to-one basis or in very small groups, making them particularly suitable for adults who may lack confidence.

The Cycle Hub is also home to a bike workshop, offering repairs, servicing, puncture repairs, replacement parts and upgrades, helping people keep their bikes safe and roadworthy.

The message from Full Circle Food Project is simple: it's never too late to get back on a bike.

MVS Volunteers respond to Port of Tyne call to help clean up nurdle spill

Members of the Northumbria Unit of the Maritime Volunteer Service (MVS) have joined a multi-agency operation to help clean up nurdles released into the River Tyne following a collision.

The MVS volunteers were called into action at the request of the Port of Tyne and provided boats and crew to assist with the afloat clean-up operation.

The response was coordinated by Regional Volunteer Officer Angela Carrington, who worked alongside teams from the Port of Tyne, the Northumberland Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (NIFCA), the Newcastle Motor Boat Club and Newcastle University.

The organisations worked together on the river to locate and recover the small plastic pellets, which can pose a significant environmental risk if they enter the wider marine environment.

Angela Carrington said: "The Maritime Volunteer Service is always happy to lend our support when we are called upon to assist with an operation like this.

"Our volunteers have the boats, skills and local knowledge to be able to get out on the water and play our part alongside the professional organisations involved.



"It was a great example of different organisations working together, with everyone bringing their own expertise and resources to the response. Our volunteers were very pleased to be able to help."

The Northumbria Unit of the Maritime Volunteer Service is a voluntary organisation whose members support maritime activities across the region, providing practical assistance, training and community support on and around the waterways.



Golf in the City raises more than £22,500 for North East Charities

Golf in the City has raised £22,592 for two North East charities through its fourth annual charity golf day and dinner, taking the total raised by the event to more than £80,000.

The event, held recently at Ramside Hall Hotel, brought together businesses from across the region for a day of golf, networking and fundraising, with the final total being shared equally between The Teesside Charity and NE Youth.

The latest fundraising success means Golf in the City (G1TC) has now raised more than £80,000 for local charities since its annual charity event began.

G1TC is a North East-based corporate golf networking group which brings together businesses from across the region for eight events each year at golf venues throughout the North East and Teesside.

The group is run entirely by a volunteer committee and combines

business networking with a strong commitment to supporting good causes across the region.

Mandy Shields, representing The Teesside Charity, said the money would make a real difference to people and communities across Teesside.

Mandy said: "We are incredibly grateful to Golf in the City and everyone who supported this fantastic event. The money raised will help us continue supporting people across Teesside and make a genuine difference where it is needed most."

Jon Niblo of NE Youth said the organisation was equally grateful for the support.

Jon said: "The support from Golf in the City is fantastic and will help us create more opportunities for young people across the North East. Fundraising partnerships like this allow us to continue supporting young people to connect with their communities, develop their potential and build positive futures."

The event was supported by members of the G1TC network, including Matthew Brady of Ward Hadaway and Will Fatherley of Pro Fire Safety, with Jenna Maw of FRP Advisory also supporting the initiative.

Being commercial isn't the same as being driven by profit

By Catherine Marchant, CEO, Impact Family Services

For a long time, the words “charity” and “commercial” were treated as if they belonged in different conversations.

I'm not sure charities can afford to think like that anymore.

The funding environment is tough, believe me. Grants are harder to secure, costs keep rising and demand for services is not getting any smaller. At the same time, charities are expected to plan ahead, retain good people and respond quickly when needs change.

That is difficult if your organisation is always waiting to see where the next pot of funding might come from.

At Impact Family Services, we have had to think carefully about how we become more sustainable while staying focused on why we exist.

That thinking led to the creation of Connected Families CIC, a wholly owned subsidiary which allows us to develop traded services alongside our charitable work. One example is domestic abuse training for employers, where there is a clear social need but also an opportunity to generate earned income.

Generating income is not the same as being driven by profit. If a service fits with your purpose, responds to a genuine need and helps strengthen the organisation, then it makes sense to consider it.

Grant funding remains vital, but it is often tied to a specific project, service or outcome. Earned income can give charities more flexibility, help cover core costs and allow them to plan with greater confidence.



Catherine Marchant

That matters because needs change and unexpected costs can land without much warning. The increase in employers' National Insurance is a good example of the kind of additional pressure charities can suddenly find themselves having to absorb.

Cashflow can be another challenge. Like any business, charities still have salaries, rent, utilities and other overheads to meet every month, even when grant payments are staged or invoices take time to be settled. On paper, the funding may be there, but that does not always mean the money is in the bank when the bills need paying.

A more varied mix of income gives organisations more breathing space and makes it easier to respond when circumstances change.

There is a risk, of course. A charity can start chasing opportunities simply because the money is available, even when those opportunities do not really fit with what the organisation exists to do.

So the questions are fairly straightforward. Does it fit your purpose? Do you have the capacity to deliver it properly? Is it financially viable? Will it strengthen what you already do, or pull the

organisation in a different direction?

Those questions are simply part of running an organisation responsibly.

At Impact Family Services, our purpose remains clear. We support individuals and families affected by domestic abuse and work to help break the cycle of abuse, so any commercial activity has to support that mission rather than compete with it.

Charities can also learn from good businesses. Planning properly, understanding your finances, building partnerships, investing in marketing and being clear about the value you provide are not things the private sector owns; they are simply part of running an organisation well. That does not mean charities need to become businesses, but it does mean we need to be more resilient and more willing to think differently about sustainability.

Impact Family Services has been here since 1997. We have lasted because we have adapted while staying true to our purpose, and our job now is to make sure we are still here, doing the work that matters, for the next 30 years.

www.impactfs.co.uk

The cold nights are creeping in

By Abu Ali, CEO Sleepout Chairman and Corporate Finance Partner at FRP

For most, that means turning the heating on.

Yet for far too many, that's the stuff of fairytale. Poverty rates are sky-high. In parts of the North East, heating dials won't move an inch this winter.

The brutal reality is that Britain is drowning in poverty. That's why CEO Sleepout is more vital than ever. Some think the charity only helps the homeless – but we also tackle root causes, like poverty.

When you survive month-to-month, even an unexpected bill can cost you everything – including your home.

This Autumn, CEO Sleepout's volunteers will try to change that. In the North East, we are staging two sleepouts – Darlington and Sunderland – and we need as much support as possible. That isn't just sleeping out. The event is life-changing, but participation isn't always possible.

Donations and support elsewhere are incredibly appreciated – but take it from me, if you do sign-up, you won't regret it.

I've slept out eight times. I remember my



Abu Ali

first was genuinely eye-opening. Shivering in a sleeping bag, I realised how soul-crushing it must be – both mentally and physically – to know this was your reality. I felt vulnerable. Exposed. Uncomfortable, and reflective of just how hard life must be to even contemplate sleeping rough.

And remember – what CEO Sleepout does is a sanitised version of what thousands face each night. Rough sleepers don't get warm drinks and bacon butties when they wake, or drive home to shower. It is a cruel, bleak and lonely existence – one the new PM rightfully wants to end – but the CEO Sleepout reinforces how lucky you are.

Every sleepout gives me empathy for what those

experiencing homelessness deal with – and what life must have been like to end up in that position.

So, while Andy Burnham hopes to end rough sleeping, we are nowhere near that yet. This winter, hundreds in our region will spend their nights with no roof – and no idea – of what tomorrow will bring. So, for now, we need you.

The Sunderland CEO Sleepout takes place at the Stadium of Light on November 12, with the Darlington event on November 19 at Mowden Park.

Please, do what you can. And maybe change lives.

www.frpadvisory.com

www.ceosleepout.co.uk

Rephrase owner Paul Fraser has spent more than 20 years working in the media for a variety of titles regionally and nationally, including a long stint at The Northern Echo

Rephrase's range of services can be on a pay-as-you-go basis or as part of a longer-term package

We will do all we can to advise and produce the best possible solution for your needs

We aim to maintain long-term relationships to achieve goals



Paul Fraser



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Sarah Richardson

In fostering, the charity footprint is tiny

By Sarah Richardson, Fostering Manager, Changing Futures NE

Approximately three per cent of fostering placements nationally are with charities.

That's despite the desperate need for more foster families and more homes.

Yet the third sector is seemingly being scared off from providing care.

Just last month, one Somerset charity handed back control of several children's homes following an Ofsted inspection.

But the charity sector must be braver, not least for our young people. And charity support is vital if we are to end this fostering crisis.

Multiple government reviews have repeatedly driven home the value of the voluntary sector in doing so.

On top of that, children's services leaders have called for greater collaboration with charities and other not-for-profit organisations.

Without them, things will get worse - and like often, the North East will suffer most of all.

Our region has more youngsters in care here than anywhere else in the country.

That's exactly why, at Changing Futures North East, we won't be scared off. Hence building Hope House.

An unassuming children's home in our hometown of Hartlepool, aimed at giving youngsters what should be taken for granted - a home. A place where they have their own bedroom, and round-the-clock support. Perhaps most importantly, Hope House is where relationships can be built.

Because that's what care should be about.

Not just finding kids a bed and massaging care stats. It is about genuinely improving young lives. But I can see why charities are spooked. Bad press - and the current climate - doesn't help.

We've seen Ofsted raise concerns about the growth of unregistered children's homes, while charities are forever facing major financial and workforce pressures, with some organisations being forced to reduce or withdraw provision altogether.

That matters. Because when a provider disappears, it's not simply a business closing its doors.

It can mean a child losing that friendly face they've slowly grown to trust. It can disrupt relationships that, in this world, are priceless.

Even the Government know this.

In its latest strategy on care-experienced children, it states that enduring relationships can boost educational and health outcomes,

build resilience and reduce loneliness.

We see that first-hand every day.

It's also why we're so passionate about our Independent Visitors service.

An Independent Visitor is someone who isn't a foster carer, but who can still build a life-changing, long-term relationship with a young person.

They can be that child's rock - but without the obligation and commitment to full-time fostering. They are not just essential to what we do, but to improving young lives.

Because they are an adult they can trust and bond with. Someone to shower them in TLC, remember their birthday and make a bit of a fuss of them. But they are also a shoulder to cry on. Someone to confide in when there's nobody else. And perhaps more than anything, they are adults who believe in them.

We need more innovative programmes like Independent Visitors. But again, we also need more charities. Fostering is facing an uphill battle. We have too many kids in care, and not enough places for them to go.

It is that simple. We hope that locally, Hope House will help bridge that gulf - and also improve young lives.

Because children don't need a system that simply finds somewhere for them to live. They need somewhere they can call home. And people they can trust.

For some young people, that could make the world of difference.

www.changingfuturesne.co.uk



The Teesside Hospice team celebrate their Outstanding rating

Teesside Hospice is 'Outstanding'!

Teesside Hospice's services have been recognised as 'Outstanding' following an inspection by the Care Quality Commission (CQC).

The rigorous inspection, which took place in June, assessed the standard of care across all of Teesside Hospice's services, which includes a 10-bed Inpatient Unit, Wellbeing Centre, Bereavement Counselling Service and Lymphoedema Clinic.

The hospice was awarded Outstanding in four out of five categories – effective, caring, responsive and well-led – reflecting its commitment to ensuring patients and families receive compassionate and dignified care when they need it most.

As part of the inspection, the CQC spoke to people using Teesside Hospice's services at the time, hearing that they were 'so happy to be there' and 'could not fault anything'. Staff were

also described as 'going above and beyond' in their everyday care and patients who had accessed the service described their experiences positively as ones they 'would never ever forget'.

Heather Stuart, Group Director of Nursing & Quality at Teesside Hospice, said: "This is an exceptional reflection of the commitment, professionalism, and compassion demonstrated across all teams.

"To read in the report that inspectors recognised how our department heads and teams really embodied the culture of improving our services and values of our organisation really stands out.

"The whole hospice team – whether that's nursing and clinical staff, housekeepers and cooks, or the admin teams who keep everything running smoothly – go the extra mile every single day and to have that recognised is a huge honour.

"I'm so proud of the whole team and know that they will do all they can to continue to reach such a high standard of care."

The CQC highlighted Teesside Hospice's commitment to providing the best possible care and communicating strongly with those who use its services, as well as the manner in which the hospice has embedded itself in the local community and is striving to reach disadvantaged groups of people.

Gill Hodgson-Reilly, CQC deputy director of operations in the North East, said: "When

we inspected Teesside Hospice, we found an exceptional service where staff and leaders worked hard to provide the best possible care to people at the end of their lives. Kind and caring staff understood people's needs and went the extra mile to help make their time at the hospice comfortable and happy.

"Leaders had an exceptional understanding of the service they managed and ensured people were given the best possible care. Staff told us leaders were consistently approachable, even out of hours and we saw leaders engage with people attending the service during our visit.

The report also noted that the hospice was finding new and innovative ways to reach the growing need for care across Teesside.

Gill continued: "Leaders and staff should be very proud of the findings in this report. It's clear the service was committed to treating people as individuals ensuring their wellbeing and needs were fully met. Other services should look to this report to see if there's anything to learn from it."

Teesside Hospice provides care, compassion and support to over 4,000 patients and families across the Tees Valley, helping them to live as well as possible for as long as possible.

More information on Teesside Hospice and its services can be found at www.teessidehospice.org.

“

**I'm proud
that we give
parents and
carers a voice.**

Leah Evans-Dodsworth



NAPI: Supporting children, families and inclusion in the North East

For families, every stage of a child's life brings new experiences, opportunities and sometimes challenges. Having somewhere welcoming to turn for friendship, activities, advice and practical support can make a real difference.

That is where North East Action for Children, Parents and Inclusion (NAPI) plays an important role.

Based at Heaton Community Centre in Newcastle upon Tyne, NAPI is a charitable organisation supporting babies, children, young people, parents, carers and volunteers. Its inclusive services welcome families from all backgrounds, including children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), whether needs are diagnosed, emerging or undiagnosed.

A new identity for a growing charity

In December 2023, Leah, with the support of NAPI's Board of Trustees, led the rebrand from Newcastle Parent and Toddler Groups Initiative to North East Action for Children, Parents and Inclusion.

The new identity reflects how the charity has grown beyond its original parent and toddler roots to support children, young people and families across different stages of life. At its heart is a simple idea: creating a community where everyone feels welcome and included.

Giving children the best start in life

NAPI's support begins with the earliest stages of childhood, recognising the importance of the Best Start in Life and the 1001 Critical Days from pregnancy through a child's first two years.

By providing welcoming spaces, activities, information and opportunities to meet other families, NAPI helps parents and carers build connections and confidence while supporting their child's early development.

"A typical family could be a parent with a baby or child who wants somewhere welcoming to meet other families, a carer looking for advice or support, or a family whose child has additional or emerging needs," explains CEO Leah EvansDodsworth.

New Family Voices

NAPI is developing Family Voices, giving parents and carers opportunities to share their lived experiences and help influence the services that support Newcastle Children and Families.

"I'm proud that we give parents and carers a voice," Leah adds. "Listening to lived experience is incredibly important."

New SEND Hub

That commitment is reflected in the new NAPI SEND Hub, providing support, activities, information and connections for children and young people with SEND and or additional needs and their families.

Families do not necessarily need to wait for a formal diagnosis before seeking support. "More than 1,200 children have attended our sessions, and that number continues to grow," says Leah.

SEND UNITED

NAPI is also working in partnership with The SEND Club and Newcastle United Foundation on SEND UNITED, taking place on Saturday 7 November 2026.

The inclusive event will bring together SEND children and young people, families, siblings and carers for sport, wellbeing, creative and sensory activities, quiet spaces and opportunities to connect with organisations, services and professionals.

It represents NAPI's wider belief in the power of organisations and communities working together to remove barriers and create opportunities.

A community where everyone belongs

Volunteers are equally valued at NAPI, with opportunities to contribute to the community while developing skills, experience and confidence.

Like all charities, NAPI also relies on funding, fundraising, donations and community support to continue and expand its work.

From the 1001 Critical Days to its SEND Hub, Family Voices and SEND UNITED, NAPI continues to evolve while keeping community and inclusion at its heart.

Whether someone arrives looking for support or wanting to offer it, the goal remains the same: to create a community where everyone has the opportunity to belong.

www.napi.org.uk

Email: admin@napi.org.uk

Tel: 0191 265 6158

Charity of the month



Grace House

Enriching the lives of disabled children, young people and their families.

What is the mission of your charity, and what inspired its creation?

The mission of Grace House North-East is to provide a safe, welcoming and inspiring place for children and young people with a range of disabilities and life-limiting conditions, while also supporting their families. The charity was established by the late Kathy Secker, who believed passionately that every child should have the opportunity to enjoy life to the full. Kathy's vision was simple yet powerful: "Children deserve to have an amazing place where they can come to laugh, learn and live life to the full." That vision remains at the heart of everything Grace House does today.

What are the biggest challenges your organisation faces in achieving its goals?

One of the biggest challenges Grace House North-East faces is securing the funding needed to meet the growing demand for our services. We are seeing an ever-increasing need, not only in the number of children and young people requiring support, but also in the complexity of their needs and the support required by their families. Last year alone, referrals to Grace House increased by 59%, highlighting the scale of this growing demand. Ensuring we have the capacity, resources and funding to support every child and family who needs us remains one of our greatest challenges.





What role do volunteers play in your organisation, and how can people get involved?

Volunteers play a hugely important role in the work of Grace House North-East. They support us in so many ways, from helping at fundraising events and community activities to supporting our wider fundraising efforts and contributing to the day-to-day running of the charity. Their time, skills and enthusiasm make a real difference and help us to reach more children, young people and families. We are incredibly grateful to everyone who gives their time to support Grace House. If you would like to get involved and become a volunteer, we would love to hear from you – simply get in touch with us.

What partnerships or collaborations have been most beneficial to your mission?

All of our partnerships and collaborations are incredibly valuable to Grace House North-East, with each partner playing an important part in supporting the work we do. By working together, sharing knowledge and expertise, pooling resources and increasing our capacity, we can create new opportunities and develop projects that have a greater impact on children, young people and their families. We are always keen to build new partnerships with organisations that share our values and vision. Collaboration enables us to explore new ideas, expand what we can offer and, ultimately, work together to improve outcomes and experiences for the families we support.

How has your charity adapted to recent challenges, such as economic downturns or global events?

Grace House North-East has had to adapt to an increasingly challenging funding environment. Access to grants and other funding is extremely competitive, with some funding opportunities receiving hundreds of applications, while much of the funding available is short-term. In response, we are actively exploring new ways to generate sustainable income and deliver our services, including developing more collaborations and partnerships, exploring commissioning opportunities and engaging with commercial organisations that are looking to support charities such as Grace House North-East because of the impact of our mission. We are continually adapting to ensure we can meet growing need and remain sustainable.

What's next for your charity? Any upcoming projects or long-term goals?

Looking ahead, Grace House North-East is focused on developing new and innovative ways to support children, young people and their families. We are piloting education projects for young children with undiagnosed needs in schools who are at risk of disengaging or have already dropped out of education. We also aim to expand and diversify our holiday activities so there are more opportunities for the whole family to enjoy together. Within the Grace House building, we are increasing our provision through an enhanced VR immersive space and developing our sensory spaces, creating even more opportunities for children and young people to learn, explore and thrive.

gracehouse.co.uk



Can you share a success story that highlights the impact of your work?

This case demonstrates the positive impact of Grace House North East's whole-family approach. Through 15 weeks of tailored one-to-one support, we developed a clearer understanding of 'X's sensory, learning, motor and social, emotional and mental health needs, enabling practical strategies to be introduced at home and in school. Further specialist assessment was also secured, while counselling supported the family's own mental health and wellbeing. The Head Teacher highlighted Grace House's commitment, compassion and partnership working, noting improved communication and understanding between home and school and that 'X's wellbeing and development remained at the centre of decision-making. This demonstrates how Grace House helps children and families achieve positive, lasting outcomes.

How do you raise funds, and what are the most effective fundraising strategies you've used?

Grace House North-East raises funds through a combination of grant applications, fundraising events and a wide variety of community and individual fundraising activities. We are continually developing our approach and exploring new and innovative ways to generate sustainable income, ensuring we can continue to meet the growing demand for our services. As the funding landscape becomes increasingly challenging and competitive, diversifying our income streams is more important than ever. We are committed to building new partnerships, engaging our supporters and finding effective ways to raise vital funds that enable us to continue making a difference to children, young people and their families.





The Oasis Cup 2026
 Nearly 150 players from local businesses have raised almost £11,000 to support local people facing homelessness at Oasis Community Housing's annual 5-a-side football tournament.

Meldrum was presented with the tournament trophy. Tony Jeavons of Karbon Homes was named Player of the Tournament, while Josh Forrest of Gentoo was top goalscorer.

Ben Johnston from Oasis Community Housing said: "There were competitive matches, people battled the rain and still came out smiling! Huge thanks to everyone who took part and helped make the day such a success, including volunteers from Cushman & Wakefield, BAM, Thompsons of Prudhoe, and Sage; tournament sponsors Bowmer + Kirkland; and media partner Northern Insight."





FEATURED APPOINTMENT

External Member – Audit Committee

Teesside University



Castle Peak Group is delighted to be partnering with Teesside University on the appointment of an External Member to its Audit Committee.

This is a really interesting opportunity for an experienced audit or finance professional to bring their expertise into a significant governance role and contribute to the future of one of the North East's most ambitious institutions.

Teesside is financially resilient, debt-free and investing significantly in its future, including a £300m Campus Masterplan. It is also an important anchor institution for the Tees Valley, with a strong focus on education, research, innovation and regional impact.

We're looking for someone who can bring strong financial and/or audit expertise alongside an understanding of governance, assurance and risk. Just as importantly, we want someone who can think strategically, ask good questions and provide constructive, independent challenge.

You do not need previous higher education experience. We are keen to hear from people from different sectors who can bring a fresh external perspective.

- Middlesbrough
- Approx. six days per year + preparation
- Unremunerated, with reasonable expenses covered

We would particularly welcome conversations with people who may not traditionally have considered applying for a university governance role.

Executive search driven by diversity.



Interested?

Please contact at
james.carss@castlepeak-group.com



Community Impact Award winners announced

Three North Tyneside organisations have been recognised for making a lasting difference to their communities as the first winners of the North Tyneside Business Awards 2026 are announced.

Wallsend based Newcastle Fighters Academy CIC, Bear & Co Consultancy from North Shields and Jasmine Yoga and Wellbeing from Tynemouth have each been honoured for their outstanding contribution to local people and communities through positive change, collaboration and wellbeing.

Now, North Tyneside Business Forum are encouraging more businesses to follow in their footsteps, with entries officially open for the 2026 North Tyneside Business Awards and a chance to become this year's finalists and winners.

The Community Impact Award recognises organisations that go above and beyond in supporting the borough and its residents, and all businesses were nominated by the public.

Newcastle Fighters Academy CIC has won the Positive Change award, Bear & Co Consultancy has been recognised for Collaboration, while Jasmine Yoga and Wellbeing has won the Wellbeing award.

The winners said the recognition demonstrated the importance of their work within their local community.

Newcastle Fighters Academy CIC provides combat sports, health and fitness programmes for people aged from five to 70, alongside free training and community initiatives designed to make physical activity accessible.

Director and head coach Marianne Barrett Brown said: "It's been lovely. It's been nice to be recognised for the hard work that we do. Connor and I work completely for free and don't take anything from the CIC, so every penny we receive from our regular memberships goes straight back into the organisation."

Bear & Co Consultancy was established by Cherri Bray-Mackay and her husband Ross to provide reliable, high-quality trades and construction services to charities and organisations across North Tyneside.

Cherri said: "We were totally overwhelmed by

the nominations and reading what people had written about our work. I was absolutely blown away that people had taken the time to fill out the nomination form.

"It just reinforces that what we're doing is for good and that we're going in the right direction supporting local organisations and working with local businesses."

Jasmine Yoga and Wellbeing has spent the past decade building a thriving community through yoga, breathwork and mindfulness, working with adults, children, pregnant women, older people and neurodiverse communities.

Jo Hare said: "It's just wonderful. It's a real celebration of the community that we've nurtured from the first five people who came to our class 10 years ago to this thriving community."

"It's such an honour to have been nominated and it's made us feel part of something a bit bigger than ourselves."

Now in their 29th year, the North Tyneside Business Awards recognise the outstanding achievements, innovation, community spirit and success of businesses across the Borough.

The awards ceremony will take place on Thursday 19 November 2026 at Village Hotel Cobalt Park, North Tyneside, and will be hosted by Kym Marsh, musician and award-winning actress best known for playing Michelle Connor in ITV's *Coronation Street*.

northtynesidebusinessforum.org.uk

Bringing agriculture, conservation and business to the same table

The AgTable is a new Agricultural engagement consultancy helping farmers, conservation organisations and businesses find common ground and turn good conversations into practical action.

Agriculture, conservation and business are often working towards the same broad goals. Yet they can approach those goals from very different starting points.

Farmers understand the realities of managing land and running viable businesses.

Conservation organisations bring expertise in nature, biodiversity and environmental restoration. Corporate partners can bring investment, resources and new opportunities.

The challenge is bringing those perspectives together....That is where The AgTable comes in

Created to bridge the gap between conservation organisations, farmers, land managers and corporate partners, The AgTable brings different perspectives around the same table to develop practical solutions for the land and the people who manage it.

Too often, sectors can operate alongside one another rather than together. Good ideas can remain conversations. Opportunities can be missed and projects can struggle when the realities of farming and land management are not considered from the outset.

The AgTable exists to change that... From conversation to action

At the heart of The AgTable is a simple belief: meaningful engagement can create better outcomes for both people and nature.

The consultancy creates the conversations, partnerships and opportunities that allow good ideas to move beyond discussion and into action.

That might mean bringing farmers and conservation organisations together around a new project, helping a business understand how to engage credibly with the agricultural sector, identifying potential funding and investment opportunities, or connecting the right people to make an idea happen.



Danielle Anderson-Hire

The approach is grounded firmly in the realities of working land. Because conservation cannot exist in isolation from farming.

Earning a seat at the table

Behind The AgTable is founder Danielle, whose route into agriculture and conservation was far from conventional.

Growing up in North Tyneside and without a farming background, she did not have an obvious route into the agricultural sector. Breaking into an industry built on generations of knowledge, relationships and experience was not always easy and building credibility took time.

Her connection with agriculture started at a young age. Danielle volunteered at Ouseburn Farm, gaining some of her earliest hands-on experience of working with animals and people.

She went on to study Countryside Management and Agriculture at Kirkley Hall College in Ponteland and built experience through volunteering with conservation charities such as the Northumberland Wildlife Trust and RSPB.

Rather than simply learning about agriculture from a classroom, Danielle made a conscious effort to understand it from the ground up, working on farms throughout Northumberland and spending time with farmers gaining first-hand experience of the realities of managing land.

That experience developed into a career in conservation for the past 10yrs, where Danielle has worked as a Farm Liaison Officer and

Regional Agricultural Coordinator.

Working closely with farmers and land managers, she has helped deliver nature-based projects that have benefited both farm businesses and the environment, from improving water quality, creating and enhancing habitats to supporting practical approaches to environmental restoration.

Over the years, she has built relationships, knowledge and trust across the agricultural and conservation sectors. She may not have grown up on a farm, but she has spent years earning her place within the farming community. Danielle didn't inherit her seat at the table. She earned it.

Effective engagement is built on credibility. It comes from understanding that farming is a business, that every farm is different, and that the people managing the land need to be part of the conversation from the beginning, not brought in once decisions have already been made.

The experience behind The AgTable gives Danielle a perspective that sits between sectors.

She understands the pressures and realities facing farmers and land managers, while also understanding the ambitions, language and priorities of conservation organisations, businesses and other partners.

One table. Different perspectives. Shared outcomes.

theagtable.com



Ian Kinnery

Understanding People

By Ian Kinnery, Kinnery

I've often said, 'Don't make someone a manager, who doesn't get people.'

The most important letters in the word manager are the first three. Being a manager is fundamentally about the people in your charge.

As the author Simon Sinek once stated, 'If you don't understand people, you don't understand business.' Making someone a manager who doesn't like - or understand people - simply won't work for them.

It also won't work for the people they are supposedly leading. A year or so ago, I asked a group of entrepreneurs what caused them the most stress. The overwhelming majority voted for people problems.

In every endeavour, 'will' is important. It takes a special kind of person to want to lead others and, if we don't have that will, that desire, that compulsion, the chances are good that the challenges will get the better of us.

A reluctant manager quickly becomes a withdrawn manager. Then an ineffective one.

Being an ineffective manager is damaging on several levels: It damages the manager themselves, those they are supposedly

leading, the other team members who rely on them - and ultimately, the business itself.

While building my career and reputation, I was often brought in to turn around, if not rescue, situations. Almost invariably, you could trace the cause back to a leader who didn't.

The decline begins slowly, then gathers speed as the business deteriorates.

A missed deadline here, a lack of care there - before you know it, we've entered a period of decline. Possibly terminal decline. That's why when a football team doesn't deliver the results, the first person to lose their job is the manager. It is also why the UK has changed Prime Minister so frequently of late.

If you have leaders reporting to you and you appoint a reluctant manager, it will probably backfire on you.

Don't put yourself in that position.

kinnery.co.uk

Shrewd HR

The North East's complete HR Partner after new recruitment service announced.

Shrewd HR is the North East's complete HR partner, offering ad-hoc and retained HR support, specialist HR recruitment and hands-on training, delivered by a team of HR experts up to CIPD Level 7, and an in-house Senior Employment Law Advisor with over 30 years of commercial experience.

Shrewd HR exists because they value long-term relationships, and the four services are designed to work together. Ad-Hoc HR is there the moment something needs to be dealt with immediately. Like a workplace investigation, employment law advice, a mediation, or simply a difficult conversation that can't wait. Whatever it is, you'll have a highly experienced HR expert alongside you for exactly as long as it takes. As a business grows, HR needs change. Shrewd HR's Retained service will work with you to tailor a package that meets your business' needs.

When it's time to welcome someone new onto the team, Shrewd Hire steps in. HR recruitment led by HR experts, that takes the time to understand both the business and the person, because the right hire is about more than matching a CV to a job spec. Whichever stage you're at, HR Training helps managers feel



L-R: Amy Chandler, Head of HR Projects and Operations, Martin Potts, Managing Director, Natalie Macpherson, Head of Shrewd Hire

genuinely confident having the conversations that matter, delivered directly at your own workplace.

Managing Director, Martin Potts, says the four services were built around people first, not process: "Most businesses don't need everything at once, but what they need changes as their people do, and we wanted to be the complete HR partner who'd still be there when it did. Whether it's one conversation or a relationship

that runs for years, it's still the same team who already cares about the people involved."

Whatever stage a business is at, it starts with the same conversation. Shrewd HR is offering a free HR assessment to any business ready to talk with a complete, and trusted, HR partner.

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Where do you start with sustainability?

By Jo Holmes, Genec

For many businesses, sustainability is no longer something that can sit on the sidelines. Customers, employees, investors and supply chains are all asking more questions about environmental impact.

Knowing sustainability matters and knowing where to start are two very different things. The good news is that you don't need to have all the answers before you begin. In fact, trying to tackle everything at once can make it harder to make meaningful progress.

A better starting point is to understand where your business is now, by looking at the areas where you have the biggest environmental impact. That might be energy use, waste, travel, procurement, water or the way your buildings are managed. You don't necessarily need a complicated strategy on day one. Start by gathering some basic information and identifying where there is the greatest opportunity to make a difference.

From there, you can set some realistic priorities. For example, there might be an opportunity to reduce waste, improve energy efficiency or change a purchasing decision. Choose something that is achievable, measure the impact and then build from there.

The important thing is to make sustainability part of how the business operates, rather than treating it as a separate project.

It also helps to remember that you don't have to work everything out on your own. One of the most useful things businesses can do is learn from others. Sustainability challenges are often shared, even when businesses operate in very different sectors. Seeing what another organisation has tried – including what hasn't worked – can save time and make taking the first step feel much more achievable.

That same spirit of learning from others and sharing practical experience is at the heart of two events coming to Newcastle Civic Centre this November.



Jo Holmes

The Investors in the Environment Annual Conference on 25th November will take a broad look at sustainability under the theme 'Sustainability Learning, Leadership & Celebration'. With a strong focus on practical delivery, the event will bring organisations together to share experiences, learn from one another and explore meaningful ways to move their sustainability work forward.

What I value about the iE community is that businesses are at very different stages of their sustainability journey. Some are just starting out, while others have been working on environmental improvements for years. That creates a useful opportunity to learn from one another without expecting everyone to be in the same place.

Earlier in the month, the North East Recycling Forum Annual Conference & Awards takes place on 19th November, with a particular focus on waste and resources. It will bring together people working across the region's recycling

and resource management sector to share ideas, experiences and practical approaches to some of the challenges the sector is facing.

Ultimately, there isn't a single starting point for sustainability, and there isn't a perfect route through it. If you're unsure where to begin, start by asking: what could we do differently, and where could we make the biggest difference?

You don't need a perfect sustainability strategy to get started. Understand your impact, choose a few realistic priorities and build from there. And don't underestimate the value of getting out and talking to others. Events, networks and conversations with businesses facing similar challenges can provide new ideas, practical examples and reassurance that you don't have to have all the answers. Sometimes hearing what someone else has tried is exactly what you need to take your own next step.

To find out more about these events visit www.genec.org.uk/events

From podcast idea to growing studio: Howell Studios enters its next chapter



L-R: Martin Newham, Issy and Chris Howell

What started as a conversation between father and daughter has, in less than a year, developed into a growing creative business with ambitions to make professional video and podcast production more accessible to businesses across the North East.

Howell Studios, founded by Chris and Issy Howell in December 2025, has expanded into a larger space at the North East BIC in Sunderland after just nine months in business, responding to growing demand from both regional and national clients.

The studio was born out of Chris and Issy's own podcast, *Looks Like We Made It*, which sparked a conversation about the challenges businesses face when trying to create consistent, professional content. That idea has since evolved into a specialist podcast-focused TV studio designed to make content creation quicker, simpler and more affordable.

Using broadcast-grade technology and live vision mixing systems similar to those used by broadcasters including the BBC, Sky and ITV, Howell Studios gives businesses the opportunity to step into a fully equipped, custom-branded environment and create professional podcasts, videos and digital content without the usual complexity associated with production.

The larger studio is now opening up

opportunities for businesses and professions that may not previously have considered using video or podcasts as part of their marketing or communications strategy.

Issy Howell, Director of Howell Studios, said: "The bigger studio space isn't just opening doors for us, it's also opening doors for industries that have never considered doing podcasts or videos before, like lawyers, business coaches, HR professionals and consultants. The opportunity wasn't there before, but it is now."

Efficiency is at the heart of the studio's approach. Clients can batch-produce several months' worth of podcasts, social media content or online training during a single visit, with content edited as it is filmed and delivered within 24 hours.

The offering has also expanded to include photography, with Howell associate Martin Newham providing professional photography from the new space. This means clients can record their content and refresh their headshots in the same visit, creating a more streamlined

experience for busy business owners.

For Chris, the support of the BIC has played an important role in allowing the business to grow at its own pace.

"The BIC has given us the ability to test the waters and know we are supported as we scale. It genuinely feels like a community here. Over the next 12 months our goal is steady and sustainable growth, helping clients make studio content a seamless, recurring part of their yearly strategy."

Howell Studios is also part of a wider creative story at the BIC. Sister company Howell Media moved to the centre 18 months ago and has since expanded across multiple spaces as the business has grown.

Doreen Howard, Centre Manager at the North East BIC, said: "Watching Howell Studios expand into a bigger space just nine months after launching is fantastic. Chris and Issy bring incredible energy to our community, and their growth is a testament to the demand for what they offer. We're delighted to support them as they continue to grow."

With its larger studio now open, Howell Studios is inviting businesses to drop in, explore the possibilities and see the facilities in action, continuing the journey that began with a simple conversation between a father and daughter.

www.ne-bic.co.uk



No two days are ever the same

By Jack Saward, Managing Director,
Saward Marketing & Events

A day in the life of an event manager? The problem is, there really isn't such a thing.

I was recently asked what a typical day looks like for me. I struggled to answer.

Not because I don't know what I do, but because I'm not sure I've ever had two days that looked particularly similar.

So rather than sharing a day in the life, I looked back at just the last four weeks.

There have been quarterly accounts and meetings with our finance team. Not particularly glamorous but running an events business means understanding the numbers just as much as understanding the experience we're trying to create.

Then there was a week involving the handover of two exhibition stands at two different venues in England, while another major activation project was taking place in Scotland. That meant time on different sites, conversations with different clients, suppliers and our team, checking the details and dealing with the inevitable things that look slightly different in reality than they did on a drawing several months earlier, better in these cases (clients words not ours!)

Somewhere amongst that, I presented a new social media strategy for a client we work with on a retained basis.

Different project. Different discipline. Same principle, understanding what the client is trying to achieve and helping them get there.

There have been initial planning calls about two



completely new event projects and two equally new clients, alongside a client debrief at their offices, following a recent event. That particular conversation quickly moved from looking back at what we'd learnt to planning their programme for 2027, and even three events already on the radar for 2028.

That's another part of this industry I love. We're

constantly switching between what happened, what's happening and what's coming next.

I've walked around four hotel venues looking at options for a corporate event in 2027 and completed a site visit for a new exhibition project, checking service plans, access and build opportunities, given it's new location.

I've also spent time in the workshop seeing bespoke elements being constructed for another project we have in the pipeline.

And then there are the hours nobody particularly photographs. Laptop open in the office. Laptop open in a hotel room. Teams calls between meetings. Emails from the passenger seat. I even managed one Teams call from the car while out on site.

Not every part of event management happens under exhibition hall lights.

Perhaps one of the most important moments of the month wasn't technically work at all.

After a particularly challenging project, I took some of the team out for food and a few drinks. They'd shown enormous flexibility and commitment to get the job over the line and recognising that matters.

Events are ultimately a people business.

We can talk about stands, venues, activations, budgets, strategies and schedules, but none of them happen without good people prepared to work together when things inevitably change.

And yes, amongst all of that, I even managed a couple of days away with my family.

Because that's part of the balancing act too.

So, what does a day in the life of an event manager look like? Ask me today and you'll get one answer. Ask me tomorrow and you'll probably get another. These aren't highlights from the last year. They're simply a snapshot of the last four weeks.

And I wouldn't really want every day to look the same anyway.

saward-me.com

SQUARING UP TO CONFLICT.

CONFLICT AT WORK IS NOT NEW, BUT IT IS GROWING.

Research from ACAS suggests that two fifths (44%) of employees in Great Britain experienced conflict at work in the last year. Meanwhile, *The Myers-Briggs Company's Conflict at Work* report found that employees spend around 4.34 hours every week dealing with workplace conflict, a figure that continues to rise. That is more than half a working day.

But the real question is not why conflict exists. It is whether we have misunderstood what conflict is.

Is conflict really dysfunction? Or is it simply difference?

Modern organisations are more diverse than ever before. Different generations, experiences, communication styles, and cultural backgrounds are coming together in the same teams. Add the complexity of hybrid working, where misunderstandings can escalate more quickly through email, messaging platforms, and fewer face to face conversations, and it is no surprise that tensions emerge.

Difference is inevitable and without the right conditions, conflict often is too.

The challenge for leaders is recognising that we cannot change someone else's behaviour. What we can change is how conflict is managed and responded to.

When conflict becomes polarised, when people move from discussing ideas to defending positions, trust erodes quickly. Conversations stop being productive and can become personal.

In high performing teams, conflict can look quite different. People challenge ideas openly and test assumptions. They bring alternative perspectives to the table, while keeping disagreement focused on the issue, not the individual. In these environments, conflict can improve decision making and strengthen relationships because people feel heard and respected.

Trust plays a critical role here. In hybrid and high pressure environments, people can slip into assumptions about tone, intent, and competence. Without trust, conflict divides. With trust, it can sharpen thinking and deepen collaboration.

Not all workplace conflict resolves itself. Misunderstandings build, communication breaks down, and sometimes individuals become stuck in patterns that are difficult to shift alone.

What leaders can do

- **Set expectations for healthy disagreement (challenge ideas, not people) and model that behaviour in meetings.**
- **Surface issues early-use 1:1 conversations to clarify intent, reset tone, and prevent "sides" forming.**
- **Use structure when topics are tense: agree the question being decided, give equal airtime, and summarise points of agreement and disagreement.**
- **Make communication explicit in hybrid work (what goes in email vs chat vs a call; when to pick up the phone).**
- **Agree an escalation path, including when to bring in a neutral facilitator.**

This is where workplace mediation can help. Mediation provides a neutral and structured space for people to step back from entrenched positions, understand each other's perspectives, and rebuild dialogue.

Interestingly, the language we use around conflict also matters. At times, the word *mediation* can feel formal or even confrontational. Reframing the process as a facilitated conversation can help people engage more openly, focusing on what really matters, rebuilding understanding and finding a way forward.

Conflict is not something organisations can eliminate, and we should not try to.

In a world of growing diversity, evolving workplaces and hybrid teams, the challenge for leaders is learning how to square up to conflict rather than avoid it. Managed well, conflict does not weaken teams; it makes them stronger.

PEOPLES^{SPARK}

To discuss conflict management workshops or workplace mediation for your organisation

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Building your own and your board's effectiveness: An inspiring roundtable discussion in Newcastle

On 29 September, 20 board-level leaders gathered at Gotham Hotel in Newcastle for an engaging and thought-provoking roundtable discussion on "Building your own and your board's effectiveness."

Facilitated by Andrew Marsh of The Experience Bank Group, in conjunction with Carl Swansbury, Partner and Head at Corporate Finance at Ryecroft Glenton Corporate Finance, the exclusive session brought together an experienced mix of Non-Executive Directors, Trustees, Board Advisors and professionals working at board level, creating a rich environment for open conversation, challenge and shared learning.

The afternoon was built around a simple but important question: how can we become more effective individually, and how can that translate into more effective boards and organisations?

Rather than being a traditional presentation, the event encouraged participants to share their own experiences, perspectives and challenges. The roundtable format created space for honest discussion about what really makes a difference at board level from personal performance and confidence to the dynamics, behaviours and effectiveness of the wider board.

Carl Swansbury, Partner and Head of Corporate Finance at Ryecroft Glenton Corporate Finance said: "One of the key themes running throughout the discussion was the connection between individual effectiveness and collective performance."

"Boards are, after all, made up of individuals. The contribution each person makes, how they challenge, listen, question, support and influence can have a significant impact on the quality of decision-making and ultimately on organisational performance."

"Andrew brought a wealth of experience to the conversation, helping participants explore practical tools and approaches that can be applied immediately. The focus was not simply on theory, but on understanding how small shifts in individual performance and boardroom behaviours can create meaningful improvements to business performance."

Participants were encouraged to reflect on their own approach, consider where there may be opportunities to develop and think about how their personal effectiveness could add greater value to the organisations they serve. Andrew Marsh, facilitator and NED/Trustee mentoring expert, said: "McKinsey's survey of more than 1,100 directors found a clear relationship between effective board

operations and stronger financial performance relative to peers, so these kinds of activities are important to ensure we are performing at our best. The quality of knowledge from turnout on the day was good, but we all left enriched with new thoughts and knowledge."

One of the strengths of the session was the breadth of experience around the table.

With 20 people from different backgrounds and with different perspectives, the discussion benefited from a wide range of boardroom experiences. That created opportunities to compare approaches, challenge assumptions and learn from situations that others had encountered.

The conversation highlighted the value of creating spaces where board-level professionals can step away from their day-to-day responsibilities and openly consider how they operate, how their boards operate and what could be done differently.

It also reinforced that board effectiveness isn't simply about having the right structures and processes in place. People, relationships, behaviours and the quality of conversations matter enormously.

While the event was focused on individual and board effectiveness, there was also a wider purpose behind bringing the group together.

Improving the effectiveness of those operating at board level has the potential to benefit not only individual organisations, but the wider business and leadership community across the North East.

By sharing knowledge, experiences and practical approaches, events like this help create a culture of continuous improvement, enabling leaders to take new ideas back into their organisations and, in turn, contribute to stronger boards and better decision-making across the region. Carl concluded: "The two-hour roundtable provided plenty of opportunity for discussion, but perhaps its greatest value was the opportunity to pause and reflect."

"For those already serving as Non-Executive Directors, Trustees or Board Advisors, it offered the chance to consider how they could further strengthen their contribution. For those aspiring to board-level roles, it provided valuable insight into the behaviours and mindset required to be effective around the board table."

"The event also demonstrated the value of bringing like-minded people together in an environment where experiences can be shared openly and constructively."

"A big thank you to Andrew Marsh and The Experience Bank Group for facilitating such an engaging session, and to everyone who contributed to the discussion and shared their experiences, questions and perspectives."

The conversation may have finished at Gotham Hotel, but the real impact comes from what participants took away from the roundtable and how those insights are put into practice in the boardrooms and organisations across our region.

If you want to be part of the movement to improve our region's boards, then get in touch with carlswansbury@ryecroftglenton.com or andrew@theexperiencebank.co.uk



Carl Swansbury



Andrew Marsh

Grace House strengthens its leadership team

Grace House is strengthening its trustee board and preparing for the next stage of its development, as it builds on more than 20 years of supporting children and families affected by disability.

The charity has recently welcomed new trustees as part of a wider programme of renewal, bringing fresh skills, perspectives and experience to the organisation.

Grace House CEO Lee Crosby said the changes come at an important time for the charity, with its current strategy approaching renewal and the organisation looking carefully at the needs of the families it serves.

"We are incredibly proud of what Grace House has achieved over the last 20 years, but we also know that the needs of families are continually changing," he said.

"Our focus now is on understanding those emerging needs, listening to families and making sure we have the right skills and experience around the table to help us respond to them.

"That means bringing in new people, new perspectives and expertise in areas that will be increasingly important to Grace House, including education, technology and digital ways of working."

Peter Neal, founder of The Experience Bank Group, was involved in the process of identifying and supporting new trustees. Peter was invited to work with Grace House following discussions about the organisation's future direction and the need to refresh its approach.

The process was positive and collaborative, with face-to-face conversations helping candidates and trustees understand the organisation and its ambitions. The process resulted in no less than four new trustees, including a new vice chair, recruited to support the organisation.



Lee Crosby

These new trustees bring a range of experience and expertise, strengthening the board which is led by Chair, Kelly Chequer, as Grace House prepares to review its strategy and programmes.

Lee Crosby added: "Every person we have welcomed brings positive energy and a genuine desire to make a difference. That is really exciting for us because it gives us the opportunity to ask: where do we go next, and what do we need to do to build on the success of the last 20 years?"

Grace House's ambition remains firmly rooted in ensuring that families have somewhere to turn when they have a child with a disability.

"Our goal is that if you have a child with a disability, Grace House is one of the first places you think of coming to for support," said Lee.

"As we look ahead, we want to build on everything that has worked so well while making sure our services remain relevant to families today and in the future."

The charity's strategy is now approaching its

renewal period, providing an opportunity to evaluate its programmes, consider emerging needs and work closely with families to shape its future priorities.

The organisation is also planning further opportunities for trustees and staff to come together to look at the charity's direction and how it can continue to respond effectively to families.

Lee concluded by saying that he would "wholly recommend" the experience of working with Peter Neal, describing the process as straightforward, well communicated and positive.

For Grace House, the next big thing on the agenda is its annual ball being held at the Grand Hotel Sunderland in October.

If you are a charity in need of recruitment support or a refresh of your recruitment strategy, then please get in touch – peter@theexperiencebank.co.uk



Embedded recruitment is not just having a recruiter on your team

There is a big difference between outsourcing a vacancy and having recruitment genuinely embedded into your business.

One is about finding someone to fill a role. The other is about having someone who understands your business well enough to build a recruitment strategy around where you are going.

That distinction matters.

An embedded recruiter becomes part of your team. They understand your people, culture, hiring managers, challenges and ambitions. They know what is happening across the business and how recruitment fits into your wider people strategy.

They're not waiting for a job description to be sent over, they're looking ahead.

Recruitment should not start with a vacancy

Traditional recruitment can be reactive. A role becomes available, the search starts, candidates are approached and the focus is on filling the position quickly.

An embedded approach allows you to work differently.

When your recruiter understands the direction of the business, they can start thinking about the people you need before the vacancy exists. They build relationships with relevant candidates, develop talent pipelines and understand what is happening in the market.

So, when you do need to hire, you are not always starting from scratch and recruitment becomes more closely aligned with business growth. When entering a new market,

expanding a team or developing a new capability, your recruitment partner should understand what that means for your people and hiring plans.

Understanding your business

You cannot recruit effectively for a business you do not understand.

Candidates want to know more than what the job involves. They want to understand the culture, leadership, opportunities, people and what makes the organisation somewhere they should want to build their career.

An embedded recruiter can have those conversations with credibility because they know the business from the inside.

They understand what makes it different, what candidates will find attractive and where the challenges might be. They can represent the opportunity honestly rather than relying on a job description.

That understanding also helps when assessing candidates.

The person with the most impressive CV is not necessarily the person who will make the biggest impact. An embedded recruiter can consider whether someone is right for the role, team, culture and direction of the business.

More than filling roles

The best partnerships go beyond candidate sourcing.

An embedded recruiter becomes a trusted partner to hiring managers, advising on the market, challenging expectations, improving processes and bringing recruitment insight into wider people decisions.

When a role is difficult to fill, the answer isn't always to search harder.

It could be the salary, restrictive requirements, candidate experience or even the need to develop talent internally.

Having someone close to the business who can ask those questions and take ownership can make a real difference.

Filling vacancies vs building capability

Ultimately, embedded recruitment is about taking a longer-term view.

Filling a vacancy solves an immediate need. Building the right talent strategy helps solve future needs.

It means understanding the people you have, the capabilities you need to develop, the talent you need to attract and how it all connects to your wider business plans.

That is the approach we take at Talentheads.

We become part of your team, truly understand your business and take ownership of recruitment as part of your wider people strategy.

Recruitment works best when you understand business, the people and where you are heading, not just the vacancy.

Make recruitment a genuine part of your people strategy.

Talk to Talentheads about what embedded recruitment could look like for your business.

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Is your recruitment problem really a retention problem?

Bryony Gibson, director of Bryony Gibson Consulting, explains why businesses struggling to fill vacancies should look beyond recruitment.

Typically, recruitment starts with an email you didn't want to receive. Cue internal meetings, a scramble to work out who can cover the workload, what the impact on clients will be, and how quickly you can replace them with someone good.

Having recruited for accountancy practices for more than 20 years, I hear that last question a lot. But if recruitment challenges keep recurring, it's also worth considering whether retention might be part of the picture.

There's no doubt finding good people has become harder. Salaries have risen, candidate expectations have changed, and, in the case of experienced accountants, the best people generally have lots of choice when they come to market. But if other firms are managing to attract and retain the people you're losing, it could be time to look closer to home.

Why are people leaving?

Of course, salary is sometimes the reason, but in my experience it's rarely the only one. People leave because they're frustrated with their manager, can't see where their career is going, feel undervalued, or want greater flexibility.

And by the time somebody has accepted another job, it's too late. Which means the conversation about keeping your best people needs to happen long before the resignation letter arrives.

Find out what matters most.

Your existing team is one of your biggest assets. They know your clients, your systems, and



Bryony Gibson

how the business really works. They've built relationships and accumulated knowledge that a new starter simply can't replace overnight, which makes it worth understanding what would make them want to stay.

It sounds simple, but when was the last time you asked someone how things are going?

If you want to retain people and keep them engaged, you need to know where they want to be in a year or two, what frustrates them, and what you and the business can do better.

Do they understand how they can progress? Would they benefit from more flexibility? When did you last benchmark salaries to make sure you're still competitive?

None of this is ground-breaking stuff. The difficult part is creating the time and culture to have those conversations honestly.

Good retention makes recruitment easier.

The North East is a relatively small place, and people talk. Candidates notice when the same company continually recruits for the same positions. And the opposite is also true.

Businesses where people stay and progress tend to become easier to recruit for. A good retention reputation becomes part of your employer brand, whether you've consciously

built one or not.

And retention starts during recruitment. If the role, culture, progression or flexibility somebody was sold at interview has little resemblance to the reality six months later, you've potentially created your next vacancy almost as soon as you've finished filling the current one.

Naturally, people will leave, and circumstances change. Sometimes moving on is right for everyone, so good retention doesn't mean zero staff turnover. It means not losing good people for reasons you could have addressed.

The firms that recruit well understand this. They don't start thinking about talent when somebody resigns. They keep close to the market, understand what people want, and maintain relationships with recruiters throughout the year.

That means when an exceptional person becomes available, they hear about them first, rather than waiting until a vacancy forces them to look.

Recruitment shouldn't start with a resignation letter, but if you find yourself continually replacing good people, perhaps the most important question isn't 'Where will we find the next one?' It's 'Why did we lose the last one?'

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Step into a larger professional environment without sacrificing flexibility or a supportive culture. Working from an impressive city-centre office, this role offers experienced personal tax professionals the chance to work with a varied private client portfolio and broaden their expertise across areas including trusts and Inheritance Tax. Full or part-time options, hybrid working, private healthcare, enhanced family benefits, bonus and full CTA support make this an attractive opportunity for those looking to progress their career on their own terms.

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The Winter 2026 Energy Price Shock for UK Businesses

Lock in, or pay double!

The UK is heading into its **worst energy price spike since the 2022 crisis**, due to international conflicts and rising grid maintenance.

Energy costs are already starting to surge due to a perfect storm of global conflict and local grid changes, so we are advising business owners to check their contracts expiry date and lock in a multi-year deal today.

What Is Happening to UK Energy Prices This Winter?

- ✗ Ongoing conflicts in the Middle East have threatened major gas production facilities and shipping routes increasing prices.
- ✗ Natural gas sets the baseline price for all electricity. High gas prices instantly mean high electricity prices across the board.
- ✗ UK grid operators are spending heavily to upgrade energy infrastructure at the same time. These costs are passed down.

The Real-World Cost

For a medium-sized business using 25,000 kWh of electricity and 50,000 kWh of gas per year:

- On a competitive fixed deal: Total annual energy bill ≈ £9,471
- Lapsing onto out-of-contract rates: Total annual energy bill ≈ £18,160

4 Action Steps to Protect Your Business



Check Your Contract Expiry Date Immediately

Audit all your electric and gas meters today. Find out exactly when your current fixed deals end and especially if it ends within the next 12 months, get in touch with us for next steps.



Benchmark Your Renewal Offers

If your supplier sends a renewal quote, don't just take it for granted, we can benchmark it against current market rates for you to find the best deal.



Lock In a Multi-Year Deal immediately

Take advantage of current pricing curves by securing a 2-year or 3-year fixed contract before winter spikes take full effect. We can help you with that.



Audit for Tax Reliefs

If you are in manufacturing, food processing, or another energy-intensive sector, check if you qualify for a Climate Change Agreement (CCA). Qualifying businesses can get up to a 92% discount on the Climate Change Levy added to their bills.

The Danger Zone for Businesses, "Out of Contract" Rates

Because commercial businesses operate in a deregulated market, there is no government safety net capping how much suppliers can charge you. If your fixed contract expires and you do not set up a new deal, you automatically move to Out-of-Contract (default) rates, or deemed rates as we call them.

WARNING!

If you own a physical business in the UK, your energy bills are about to get significantly more expensive.

Unlike households, businesses do not have a price cap on energy.

Rates & Charges	Average Fixed Contract	Out-of-Contract Default Rate	Price Increase
Electricity Unit Rate	22.5p – 28.0p per kWh	40.0p per kWh	+43% to +77%
Electricity Standing Charge	~60p – 107p per day	254.0p per day	Up to 4x higher
Gas Unit Rate	6.5p – 8.7p per kWh	12.0p per kWh	+38% to +85%
Gas Standing Charge	~35p – 44p per day	338.0p per day	Up to 9x higher



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Why You Need to Act (and Lock In) Now

Right now, energy suppliers are offering a rare pricing advantage known as yield flattening.

Because prices are expected to remain high over the next few years, 24-month and 36-month fixed rates are currently priced almost identically to 12-month rates.

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Employers, imagine...

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We have all experienced waiting in the long phone queues, even weeks-long waiting, and employees missing work just to sit in a waiting room. **It's costing businesses a lot of time, productivity, and money.**

That's why we're proud to announce our new partnership with SAEPIO to bring 1Stop4aGP to the SME Centre of Excellence members and the wider business community.

What Do Employers Get Out of It?

When your staff can speak to a GP the same day, they're not taking a morning off to chase an appointment or sitting at their desk worrying about a health concern they can't get seen for.

Here's what's included:

- 24/7 phone and video GP consultations for your employees
- No restriction on the number of times the service can be used in a year
- Prescriptions issued remotely and delivered to your employee or a nominated pharmacy
- Consultation records shared (with consent) with the employee's own GP for seamless follow-up
- Specialist referrals arranged directly if further treatment is needed, including for those with private medical cover
- Complete confidentiality, employers never see what's discussed

It's a genuine employee benefit that costs a fraction of what private medical insurance would, and it solves the problem your team actually has right now.

How much does it cost?

Pricing is straightforward and designed for small businesses (at time of this article September 2026)

Plan	Price
Up to 10 employees	£150 per year
Up to 25 employees	£300 per year
Up to 50 employees	£500 per year
50+ employees	Price on application

That's as little as £15 per employee, per year for round-the-clock GP access. Individual plans are also available at £50 per year, covering the policyholder and their immediate family.

Why now?

NHS waiting times aren't really improving, and your people's health directly affects your bottom line. This is a practical, affordable way to support your workforce and keep your business running smoothly.



Getting a GP appointment in the UK has quite literally become a battle.



How IStop4aGP can help

It's very simple. You or your employees get 24/7 access to fully qualified, GMC-registered, UK-based GPs by phone or video. There's no waiting rooms and no two-week waits. Just a call to a dedicated helpline, and a doctor calls them back at a convenient time.

There's no time limit on consultations, so your team can talk through whatever they need to properly. And if a prescription is needed, it can be delivered directly, often the very next day.

You get less absence of course, fewer disruptions and a healthier team.

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Give your employees or your family a practical way to seek medical advice when they need it. Scan the QR code for prices & packages.



IStop4aGP

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via Phone/Video
UK Based GP's





Black Tie. Big Laughs. One Extraordinary Room.

The ABC Annual Awards is back at the Grand Hotel Gosforth Park on 11th November 2026. Eighteen years in, it's still the only night in the North East to celebrate inclusion, where a standing ovation and a proper belly laugh happen about ten seconds apart. Tables and partnership packages are going quickly, so this is your heads up.

You know the drill with a black-tie do, the red carpet, the nice dinner, the walk up to the stage. We've kept all of that. We've just added the warmth and the laughs of a genuinely good night out.

That's the ABC Annual Awards in a nutshell. One minute you're welling up at somebody's story, the next you're laughing at something the host just said. There's as much smiling in the room as there is applause, and honestly that's the whole point.

You still get the full gala treatment, it just never feels stiff. Nobody sits there quietly watching the night happen to them. People are cheering, chatting, meeting each other, actually enjoying themselves. You'll leave a bit inspired, a bit buzzing from the people you met, and still grinning about whatever had the room in stitches.



Inclusion doesn't happen by accident. It happens by default.

That is what #InclusionByDefault is all about.

If your organisation genuinely believes in building workplaces where everyone gets a fair shot, this is the night to say so out loud. Sponsoring the ABC Awards puts your name behind that in front of the right people. You're not just backing an awards ceremony, you're backing the people actually making a difference around here.





abc AWARDS 2026



Kim McGuinness
North East
Mayor

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Treat the team that got you through the year. Look after the clients you want to keep. Sit your partners next to someone they really should meet. Then let them talk about it for months.

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**Our partners and
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standard this year**

A big thank you to the organisations already behind the ABC Awards 2026. These are the businesses happy to put their name to inclusion and say it out loud.

**11th November 2026
The Grand Hotel, Gosforth Park**



Kim McGuinness
North East
Mayor





From summer research to future insights, it's all been happening at MMC

It was an exciting summer for the team at MMC Research with one of the busiest periods they've experienced since establishing the business in 2015.

Across the last few months, they have been working with organisations across the North East to understand what matters to the people and businesses they serve, from business confidence and economic growth to transport, communities and the future of the region.

One of their newest projects is the Tees Valley Business Confidence Barometer, working with law firm Ward Hadaway on its inaugural survey. The Barometer will provide valuable insight into how businesses across Tees Valley are performing, how confident they feel about the future and the opportunities and challenges they are facing. It will also explore the factors businesses believe will shape the region's economy in the years ahead.

For MMC, this is an important piece of research. By giving businesses an opportunity to share their experiences and expectations, the research will help identify emerging trends and provide a valuable evidence base for conversations around the Tees Valley region's

economic future.

The team has also been working with the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority on its bus franchising project, supporting consultation activity that gives people across the North East an opportunity to have their say. The work has involved some qualitative focus groups with those seldom heard.

Closer to home, they have also started working with Sunderland City Council on its Pride in Place programme, supporting engagement designed to ensure residents have a genuine opportunity to help shape investment in their communities.

Sunderland's Pride in Place programme includes significant long-term investment, with £20m allocated to each of the two Phase 2 areas. The programme places residents at the heart of decisions about how their communities should develop.

These projects may look very different on the surface but they all demonstrate why good

market research matters.

Whether you are a business trying to understand your customers, a regional body developing transport policy or a local authority planning investment in communities, assumptions aren't enough, you need to understand what people actually think.

For MMC Founder and Managing Director Natasha McDonough, this is at the heart of the work the team undertakes. "The most valuable research doesn't simply give you a set of numbers or a collection of opinions. It gives you an understanding of what those findings mean and importantly, what you can do with them. Our role is to make sure people have a genuine opportunity to be heard and then turn those views into insight that can support better decisions."

That focus on listening and giving businesses and communities a voice is particularly relevant for Natasha as she begins her new role as President of the North East England Chamber of Commerce, following the announcement last month.

It is a role that builds on her long-standing commitment to ensuring businesses across the North East have a strong voice and one that sits naturally alongside her work at MMC.

For the team, the summer has reinforced something they regularly see, the North East is changing, growing and facing significant opportunities. As those changes continue, there has never been a greater need to understand the people and organisations at the heart of them.

mmc.agency

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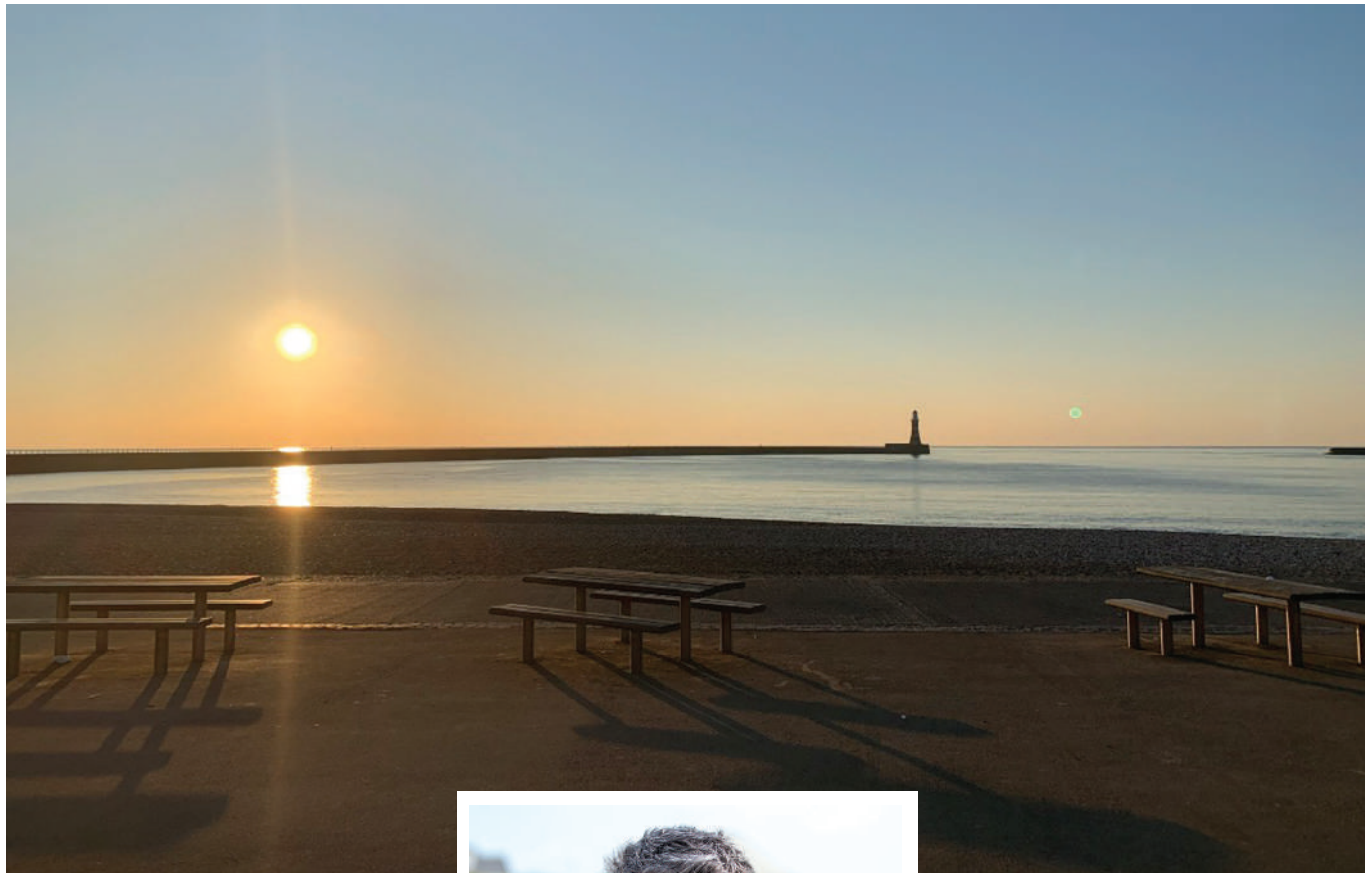
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Sometimes clarity comes from changing the way you see the crossroads

By Hayley Ramm, *The Efficient Elephant*



Hayley Ramm

1. Situation

A career professional approached mentoring at a pivotal moment. They were at a crossroads, with several possible directions ahead but no clear sense of which path to pursue.

Previous experiences were influencing how they viewed their current circumstances, making it difficult to separate what was relevant for now and what belonged to the past.

They knew they wanted change but were struggling to see what that might look like.

2. The Challenge

The challenge wasn't a lack of options. There were plenty.

The difficulty was making sense of them. Lots of surrounding noise had begun to influence their judgement, while uncertainty was leading to overthinking and making each possibility feel more complicated.

What was needed was an opportunity to pause, untangle the different influences and consider what genuinely mattered.

3. The Mentoring Approach

The mentoring provided that opportunity.

Rather than searching for an immediate answer, our conversations explored the thinking behind the choices. Through questioning, reflection and active listening, we looked at their Goals, Reality, Options and Way forward to fully understand the possibilities ahead (based on the brilliantly structured GROW Model, Sir John Whitmore).

Some questions challenged established ways of thinking. Others simply created a pause long enough for a different perspective to emerge.

An important part of the process was recognising what was within their control and what wasn't. This helped redirect attention away from things that were draining energy and towards the areas where meaningful choices could be made.

4. The Shift

The biggest change was in how the situation was perceived.

What had initially felt overwhelming began to feel more manageable and coaching discussions gradually gave way to action.

The professional became more confident in their ability to make choices and identify the opportunities worth exploring. Rather than feeling the need to have everything resolved immediately, they could concentrate on what felt most useful to explore first.

The mentoring also introduced practical tools and strategies that could be used long after our session, providing an ongoing framework for navigating future career decisions.

5. The Turning Point

A significant moment came when the focus shifted from finding the right answer to considering what was possible.

The crossroads no longer represented a single decision that needed to be solved. Instead, it became a starting point for exploration.

With that shift came renewed confidence, energy and a willingness to take action.

6. And finally...

Sometimes, the answer isn't found by thinking harder.

It comes from stepping back, seeing the situation differently and asking better questions.

You don't always need someone to tell you which way to go.

Sometimes, you simply need the space to hear your own thinking more clearly.

theefficientelephant.co.uk



Collaboration, connection and success for businesses across Northumberland

Northumberland business support service, the Northumberland Small Business Service (NSBS), continues to bring together businesses from across the county through its networking events.

The networking events are a key staple to the business support service, giving opportunities to businesses of all sizes and sectors the opportunity to come together to connect, collaborate and grow. The welcoming and inclusive environment provides local entrepreneurs, start-ups and established companies the opportunity to build meaningful relationships, share experiences and explore new opportunities.

The Northumberland Small Business Service (NSBS) is funded by the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority through its Rural Growth Programme and Integrated Settlement, with Northumberland County Council acting as the Lead Delivery Partner, supported by Durham County Council, Gateshead Council, Northumberland National Park Authority, Food and Drink North East Limited, and North East Enterprise Agency.

Recognising the importance of accessible networking opportunities across the county,

NSBS provide a series of free events designed to support businesses operating in both rural and urban communities, often hosting events in areas where these kind of opportunities don't tend to exist. The events are also open to businesses outside of the county. The team run with the mantra – “if you are happy to travel, we are happy to have you”.

The events offer a valuable space for attendees to meet like-minded professionals, exchange ideas and create new partnerships in a relaxed and supportive setting, all the networking events spotlight a guest speaker, which gives opportunities to business owners or other support programmes to promote their services.

The events are a perfect way to meet the team at NSBS including a Business Adviser who is at the event to discuss how the support programme could help, and any other support that may be beneficial to the delegates.

Programme Manager, Lucy Evermore, said: "Our networking events continue to grow in

popularity and it's fantastic to see businesses from so many different sectors coming together. These events provide valuable opportunities to make new connections, share experiences and discover the support available to help businesses thrive across Northumberland."

Attendees have praised the events for their friendly atmosphere and the opportunity to build genuine relationships with other local business owners and professionals. Many have highlighted the value of connecting with businesses they may not otherwise have met, leading to new collaborations and opportunities.

NSBS offers 3 networking events a month at a minimum at a range of unique venues across Northumberland, including the two permanent and popular monthly meet ups in Hexham and Morpeth. From Norham to Ashington, the team ensure the whole county is covered. Each event aims to provide practical support, inspiration and opportunities for businesses to expand their local networks.

NSBS also offers assistance to businesses across Northumberland. The experienced team and its range of experts work directly with businesses and individuals to help them start, grow, diversify, and sustain their ventures through workshops, 1-2-1 support and networking events across the county. The programme also has a specific support functionality for Food & Drink and Farming businesses in Northumberland.

For more information about the Northumberland Small Business Service, please contact the team at business@businessnorthumberland.co.uk or visit www.northumberlandsallbusiness.co.uk

The Employment Rights Act

By Nicky Jolley, Founder & MD, HR2day

The changes are giving us a fresh look at how we manage people.

There has been plenty written about the Employment Rights Act over the past year. New rights, new responsibilities, new dates for the diary. For employers, particularly those running smaller businesses, it would be very easy to see it as another long list of things to get ready for.

But I think there is a more useful way to look at it.

The changes give businesses a good reason to take a fresh look at how they manage people day to day. Not simply whether the right policies are sitting in a handbook, but whether managers feel confident having conversations, expectations are clear and the way people are managed actually reflects what the business says it does.

Some of the changes are already with us. Statutory Sick Pay now applies from the first qualifying day of absence, with the lower earnings limit removed, while paternity leave and unpaid parental leave became day-one rights in April. More will follow. From October, employers will have greater responsibilities around preventing workplace harassment, and from January 2027, employees will be able to claim ordinary unfair dismissal after six months rather than two years.

That last change in particular is prompting some interesting conversations with employers.

For me, the answer isn't to become more cautious about employing people. It is to become better at managing them.

Probation periods are a good example. They can sometimes become little more than a date in the diary: three or six months passes, everything seems fine, and everyone carries on. Used properly, though, probation is an incredibly useful period for both sides. It gives managers an opportunity to set expectations early, give useful feedback and deal with anything that isn't quite working before it becomes a bigger issue.



Nicky Jolley, Founder & MD, HR2day

One of the things I have learned during my career in HR is that good people management rarely comes down to one big conversation. It is usually built through the smaller ones that happen along the way.

If somebody's performance has changed, talk to them. If a manager is struggling with an aspect of their role, give them the support to improve. And if something has gone particularly well, say that too. Good HR isn't only about stepping in when there is a problem.

That is why I think businesses can use the Employment Rights Act positively.

Rather than waiting for each new provision to arrive and then updating a policy, look at the bigger picture. Equip managers beforehand, ensure they know when an informal conversation is enough and when something needs to be documented, and make sure they understand what is expected of them.

As Founder and Managing Director of HR2day, I have spent many years working with

businesses at very different stages of growth, and the strongest people practices are rarely the most complicated, they are usually the clearest.

The businesses that handle change well tend to be the ones where managers know their people, conversations happen early and HR processes support good judgement rather than replace it.

There are still more Employment Rights Act changes to come, and employers will need to keep an eye on the detail as further regulations and guidance are published. But we don't need to wait for every final detail before doing something useful.

This is a good opportunity to look at how we manage people now, keep what works, improve what doesn't and make sure our managers have the confidence to do their job well.

If that is one of the lasting effects of the new legislation, I think it could be a very positive one for workplaces.

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You made the change. Who's making sure it lasts?

By Helen Butler, Simplified Operations

One of the most frustrating things I see in operations is not businesses failing to make changes, but businesses making good changes and then, over time, quietly undoing them.

I have worked with companies where the issues were clear, the solutions practical and the implementation thorough. Processes were redesigned, responsibilities clarified, meetings introduced and managers given greater ownership. These changes were not simply recommended from the sidelines; they were worked through with the people involved and embedded into the day-to-day operation.

And they worked.

Yet return several months later and old habits can be creeping back in. A weekly meeting has become irregular. A process is being bypassed because the old way feels quicker. Decisions that had been delegated are finding their way back to the owner.

So why does change that was successfully implemented fail to stick?

The slow drift back to familiar

It is rarely one dramatic decision to abandon the new approach. More often, it happens gradually.

Businesses get busy. Someone leaves. Customer demands increase. Deadlines tighten and attention moves elsewhere. Under pressure, people naturally fall back on what they know.

A shortcut is taken because, on that day, it seems sensible. A meeting is cancelled because there is too much going on. An owner steps in because solving the problem themselves feels faster.

Individually, none of these things seems significant. The problem is when they become normal.

The business has not consciously chosen to go backwards; it has simply stopped protecting the new way of working.



Helen Butler

Who actually owns the change?

For me, this is the part that is most often underestimated.

We spend plenty of time thinking about what needs to change and how to implement it, but far less time asking who will own that change once the initial project is finished.

Who notices when the agreed process is no longer being followed? Who challenges the meeting that keeps being cancelled? Who spots that decisions are gradually moving back to the owner?

More importantly, who sees it as their responsibility to put it right?

That is the difference between involvement and accountability.

Someone can support a new process, believe in it and care that it is slipping, while still seeing its maintenance as somebody else's job.

Sustainable change needs genuine ownership.

Accountability has to continue

That does not mean every improvement requires permanent external support. It does mean accountability has to be built into the way the business operates.

That could be regular operational reviews, clear measures, named ownership or external challenge at agreed intervals. The mechanism will vary, but someone needs to remain accountable for making sure the change continues to deliver what it was designed to achieve.

Perhaps, then, we judge change too early.

A process working three weeks after implementation tells us very little. The real test is whether it is still working six months later, when the initial focus has moved on and the business is under normal pressure again.

So the question I would encourage any business owner to ask is not simply:

"Who is responsible for implementing this change?" or "Who needs to take this change on-board?"

It is:

"Who owns making sure this change still works six months from now?"

Because that is often the difference between a change that genuinely improves the business and one that quietly disappears.

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DBC Showcase of Connection & Opportunity

Durham Business Club Annual September Showcase marked a welcome return to business after the Socials of Summer, bringing together members, guests and exhibitors for an evening of connection, collaboration and opportunity.

Once again, we were delighted to enjoy the wonderful hospitality of Hardwick Hall Hotel, which provided the perfect setting for an evening of networking and celebration. A particular highlight was the opportunity for DBG Chairman Graham Soult, to introduce eleven new members, and to hear from James Clinghan of event sponsor TBP – Trusted Business Partner.

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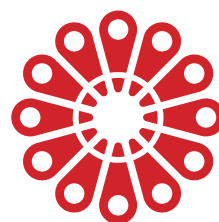
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in conversation with professor Iram Siraj - the power of playful pedagogy



Siren Films releases new interview with leading child development expert Professor Iram Siraj

Siren Films has released a new short film featuring Professor Iram Siraj, one of the leading thinkers in early years education and Professor of Child Development and Education at the University of Oxford.

The new interview explores what high-quality early years practice really looks like, with Professor Siraj sharing her insights into play, pedagogy,

sustained shared thinking, learning and the experiences that shape children's development.

The conversation provides early years professionals, educators & students with the opportunity to hear directly from one of the sector's most respected academics and practitioners.

Professor Siraj explores why a playful approach to learning is so important and how children's natural curiosity, energy and desire to explore can be harnessed to support their development.

Katrina McEvoy, MD at Siren Films said: "We are delighted to share this new interview with Professor Iram Siraj. Her knowledge and experience in child development and early years education are hugely respected, and we hope this film will provide inspiration and valuable insights for early years professionals, educators and anyone interested in how young children learn and develop."

Siren Films creates high-quality films and video library resources for the early years and education sectors, bringing together expert knowledge and real-life examples to support professional learning and development. The new interview with Professor Siraj forms part of Siren Films' growing collection of films 'In conversation with' featuring leading voices in child development and early education.

The interview is available now, FREE to watch on the Siren Films homepage at www.sirenfilm.co.uk

New Saltburn studio gives people control of the camera in North East first

A pair of young Teesside entrepreneurs have transformed an empty shop in Saltburn into an innovative new photography studio with a twist - there is no photographer!

Snapp'd Studio, located at 1a Windsor Road, is set to become the North-east's first exclusive-hire self-shoot portrait when it officially opens at the end of September.

Founded by marketer Laura McKeown, 25, and photographer Katy Gettings, 22, the business offers a completely private photography experience where there is no photographer in the room. Instead, visitors use a professional camera integrated into a studio mirror and a remote clicker to capture as many images as they wish during their session.

The concept was inspired after Laura, a mum-of-two from Redcar, visited a self-portrait studio in London. On returning to Teesside, she discovered there was nothing similar anywhere in the North-east and decided to bring the idea home.

Having found the perfect spot for Snapp'd Studio on Windsor Road, the pair soon "snapped" it up and they have completely transformed the shop in a six-week back-to-brick renovation.

Demand has already exceeded expectations, with more than 300 people signing up for updates and early access, before the studio has even opened.

Designed for everyone from the camera-shy to the camera-confident, Snapp'd Studio aims to remove the pressure often associated with traditional photoshoots while still delivering professional-quality results.

Visitors can use the space for headshots, family portraits, social media content, friendship shoots, celebrations and personal branding photography. A changing room and selection of props allow guests to experiment with different looks throughout their session.





**Autumn is here.
Knock out the
competition this
October.**



**Colours, conkers
and striking
social content.**



McBryde & Co expands into Teesside with new Port of Middlesbrough office

Following a string of new business wins across the Tees Valley, a strategic communications consultancy is expanding into Teesside with a second office to facilitate growth and serve its growing client roster.

North East Marketing Agency of the Year, McBryde & Co, chose Dinsdale House at the Port of Middlesbrough to house its expanding team. As well as working closely with the Port's owner and operator, AV Dawson, the consultancy also supports several Teesside-based organisations, including Middlesbrough College Group and Ward Hadaway.

Over the past 12 months, McBryde & Co has welcomed three new team members: Emily Kennedy, Liz Thompson, and Bronia McGregor. The new additions support the consultancy's next phase of growth following business success in renewable energy, professional services, and education.

Rachel McBryde, founder and director at McBryde & Co, said on the expansion: "We've had a fantastic year, and our new office is the icing on the cake. We were hugely proud to be crowned North East marketing agency of the year, and our expansion into Teesside reflects a major milestone in our three-year growth strategy.

"We've always worked within the renewable energy space, but these past 12 months have seen that side of our client portfolio significantly increase, working with global firms with a footprint in the North East.

"We've also won three clients in the education sector, including Middlesbrough College Group, and are providing them with a mix of strategic counsel and proactive delivery to really amplify their impact.

"Opening in Teesside, especially at the Port of Middlesbrough, felt like a natural evolution for us. The organisations we're working with, and want to work with, are doing amazing things for the region and we really enjoy telling their stories.

"Teesside is a fantastic place to do business, and somewhere we very much want to be. Some of our team grew up here, so being able to invest in the region and bring them back to work in the area, while building new relationships with amazing local businesses, is something we're really proud of."

Charlie Nettle, group managing director of AV Dawson, said: "We're delighted to welcome McBryde & Co to the area. They are responsive, strategic in their approach, and committed to delivering positive outcomes for their clients. They are so invested in the area and specifically to the Port of Middlesbrough; they'll fit perfectly into the Tees Valley.

"Congratulations to the team on a great year. We look forward to seeing what this next growth phase brings for them."

McBryde and Co is a certified B Corporation, joining a global community of organisations committed to using business to positively impact people and the planet.



New service is just the business

A Northumberland marketing expert has reached out a helping hand to small businesses struggling with their social media.

Amelia Burn, founder of The Marketing Department, at Belford, has more than a decade of experience managing traditional and digital marketing campaigns for some of the North East's biggest hospitality groups.

And now she has launched a new, Power Hour initiative, providing social media and marketing advice to smaller and family run businesses and sole traders.

For an affordable, one-off, fixed fee, they complete a questionnaire outlining their company's services or products and their target market.

Amelia then creates a bespoke workshop for the customer which takes place in an hour-long online session, so by the end they are confident they have the skills and understanding to manage their social media themselves.

After the session they are given practical advice and actions to implement and a follow up session is offered eight to 12 weeks later to review performance and fine tune any grey areas.

"There are dozens of thriving small businesses and start-ups in the county which want to make the best possible use of social media but don't have the budget to pay for outsourced social media management," said Amelia.

"And, while anyone, of course, can use social media, not everyone uses it effectively.

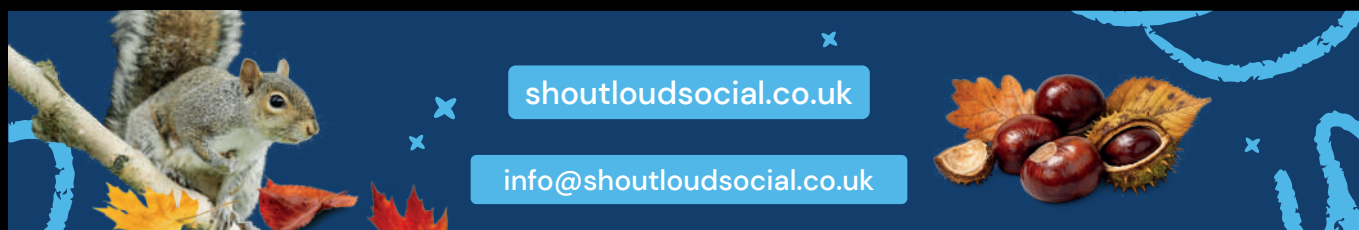
"This is for businesses who want to do their social media themselves but might like a little expert guidance on how to really maximise its impact.

"The aim of Power Hour is to give them the completely do-able tools they need to help grow their business at a price point they can afford."

Power Hour is just one of a range of client services offered by The Marketing Department, along with a mentoring service and sessions on content creation and iPhone image content.

The company also offers a full-service client package, creating and implementing in depth marketing plans to support new businesses from the development process onwards.

"But the reason I've set up Power Hour is really straightforward," said Amelia. "There are some fantastic businesses, start-ups and entrepreneurs in our region and if I can help them succeed, then it benefits everyone who, like me, lives and works here."



Treats Galore...

As it's Halloween this month, Keith Newman of Highlights PR asked his RADAR members what treats they give to their customers.



We're treating our audience to something very special – a spectacular night of North East culture, history and contemporary dance! This November, we're bringing Eliot Smith's PITMAN to Alnwick Playhouse – a powerful, energetic and joyful production inspired by the legendary Ashington Group, the Pitmen Painters.

With six outstanding dancers bringing ten of the group's iconic paintings and illustrations vividly to life, PITMAN promises to be physical, emotional, entertaining and unlike anything you've seen before. It's a fantastic opportunity to experience an extraordinary piece of North East heritage brought bang up to date – and you are invited to enjoy the show as part of our very own cultural treat!

PITMAN, Alnwick Playhouse, 11 November 2026.

I'm not sure I'd call it a treat, but I'd like to think that my clients get something that's just as valuable – my time. If they need me, whether that's during the week, in the evenings or at weekends, they can always pick up the phone and ask questions. I'm always happy to help and talk things through, no matter how big or small the query.

I'm also happy to go out and talk to groups of people, particularly employees who may want to understand more about their financial protection and insurance options. That's something I'm particularly keen to develop through the new MetLife product I'm working with.

For me, it's about being accessible and making sure people know there's always someone they can turn to when they need advice.

Andrew Cooper, www.simplymortgagesonline.com



The best treat for me is working so very closely with lovely clients some of which have become a little family. Yes, we do lots of great business but also meet up socially too which builds, strengthens and maintains, solid, trusting and transparent long-term working relationships. Many of our investors return to buy multiple properties with us.

Nicky Middleton, www.oasissl.co.uk



When we think about the best "treat" Tell Us North has received this year, it isn't something wrapped up in a box. It's the support, trust and collaboration of the communities we work alongside across the North East. To everyone who has shared their experiences, attended events, completed surveys or worked alongside us, thank you.

Every story has helped us better understand what matters most and strengthened our work to influence positive change in health, wellbeing and social care services. Seeing communities, organisations, public services and local people come together to improve lives is the sweetest "treat" of all. We are proud to work alongside such passionate people and look forward to continuing this journey together. Thank you for helping us turn local voices into positive change.

Yvonne Probert, www.tellusnorth.org.uk



The best treats my business has received this year has been seeing the AskMrsWatson.com membership grow. After years of helping businesses, charities and individuals navigate digital skills, information governance and the occasional technology headache, turning that experience into an affordable membership means I can help even more people. Seeing more members join, and their enthusiasm for what I'm building, has been genuinely magical.

Kate Watson, www.askmrswatson.com



The best treat for my business this year is seeing closed shops being opened at the Newcastle Quays Retail Park. I had three empty units opposite me which are now occupied by Cue and Darts. Having less closed units will help the centre with more footfall and help all businesses here too. Look out for curry nights where we will be collaborating.

Sangeeta Loomba, www.namastetasteofindia.co.uk



With Christmas just around the corner, I'm offering my clients with pets to have Christmas cards personalised with their pets.

Michael Rickwood, www.mr-photography.co.uk



At Kip McGrath, we're big believers in celebrating effort and achievement. Our students earn Kip Points for the work they complete, which they can exchange for prizes, medals, trophies and shields. It's always wonderful to see the excitement on their faces when they reach a goal they've been working towards.

We also run regular challenges and competitions to keep learning fun and motivating. One of our current favourites is rewarding students who complete their homework every week throughout a half term with a special Croc badge. It may seem like a small reward, but the sense of pride it creates is incredible, and it helps children develop positive learning habits that will benefit them long after they've left our centres.

Of course, the greatest "treat" we can offer parents isn't a prize at all. It's seeing their child become more confident, happier and more engaged with learning. Parents regularly tell us that their children can't wait to come to Kip, that homework battles have reduced, and that school has become less stressful. Watching a child grow in confidence and make exceptional progress is rewarding for us all, and that's the best prize of all.

Carol Milne, www.kipmcgrath.co.uk/gateshead-east

Last month our RADAR members appeared on BBC TV, BBC Radio, Local TV and many magazines and newspapers. To find out more about the benefits of becoming a RADAR member, contact keith@highlightspr.co.uk or call Keith on 07814 397951

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HIGHLIGHTS
PUBLIC RELATIONS

Brand Voice: It's not just what you say, but how you say it



Your tone of voice is one of the most impactful parts of your brand - if you put the time and effort into it.

Language is how we communicate, educate, comfort and confront. Even a tiny change in phrasing can move a sentence from kind to condescending or change its meaning entirely.

For that reason, voice can be difficult to pin down and is often pushed aside during branding exercises. But the old adage is true: it's not just what you say, but how you say it.

What do we mean by brand voice?

Imagine you send a piece of work to your boss. If they respond "OK" instead of "Great, thanks!", you might start to worry, even if they're intended to mean the same thing.

We pick up on these language choices all the time, and brands create impressions in the same way.

Your brand voice is how your personality comes through: the words you choose, how formal you sound, whether you use humour and even your punctuation. These choices shape how people see you and make your brand recognisable.

Is everyone starting to sound the same?

Since generative AI tools like ChatGPT and Claude went mainstream, anyone can produce copy at the press of a button.

The problem, funnily enough, is that unedited AI-generated text is often too polished. LLMs learn patterns from huge amounts of language, so without much direction they can fall back on familiar words and conventions.

You've probably spotted a few: delve, elevate, foster, variations of "it's not just x, it's y" and, of course, em dashes.

That doesn't mean avoiding AI. We use it at Vida, and it can be a great tool. But if you're using AI to write, knowing how you want to sound matters more than ever.

Can B2B have a personality?

It can sometimes be hard to tell one B2B's voice from another. There's an idea that marketing to professionals means sounding a certain way, and when you need to explain complicated products and services, personality can easily get edited out.

Bluntly, B2Bs often think they need to be boring, but we're here to argue the opposite.

Your audience wants to understand what you do, see that you know your stuff and decide whether they want to work with you. You can do all three without sounding like everyone else.

Finding your brand voice

Start by imagining your brand as a person. What would they be like?

You might land on confident, warm, curious or expert, but adding boundaries makes those traits more useful: confident, never arrogant; fun, but still professional; expert, without sounding academic.

Turn those traits into writing choices. A confident brand could cut phrases like "we aim to", while a friendly brand could speak to its audience like a friend.

Listen to how people talk about your business too. The phrases and explanations you use internally are likely full of personality, and that's often better than trying to sound professional.

Finally, document your voice with real examples, preferred language and things you avoid, especially when several people write for the brand or AI does some of the groundwork.

One final test: remove your company and product names from a piece of copy and put it next to a few competitors. Could someone tell which one was yours?

Ready to add some personality?

If your brand sounds too much like others in your industry, we can help turn what makes you distinctive into a voice your whole team can use.

Get in touch hello@vidacreative.co.uk

Gateshead goes global

140 films from 40+ countries as North East launches new International Film Festival.

The Gateshead International Film Festival (GIFF) will take place over three days, 16–18 July 2027, bringing regional filmmaking talent together with local and international cinema for a unique cultural weekend in the North East.

Months ahead of its inaugural event, GIFF has already attracted over 140 film submissions from more than 40 countries worldwide, putting Gateshead and the North East firmly on the international filmmaking map.

The inaugural film festival is the concept of ANBOC Ltd (A New Breed of Cinema), a film company born on the banks of the River Tyne, and has been organised and planned by festival programmer and award-winning writer and director Catarina De Cèzanne, North East actor and writer Steve Wraith and celebrated producer and filmmaker Neil Jackson.

At the heart of GIFF is a commitment to creating opportunities for North East filmmakers. Film submissions from the North East are free of charge, giving emerging and established regional filmmakers the opportunity to have their work considered alongside films arriving in Gateshead from across the world.

Steve Wraith said: “As a trio we bring a unique blend of rounded experience in the film industry and film festival programming. We will be delivering a unique film festival weekend event with the eyes of the world on the North East and we are keen to partner with sponsors.”

Wraith continued: “The focus is on emerging and experienced filmmakers, industry professionals and audiences across our home region for a range of screenings, workshops and community events. We want to showcase fresh North East voices and talent alongside international independent cinema. The arena is open to everyone.”

Screenings will take place at Vue Gateshead, with industry panels and workshops hosted at Gateway Studio CIO on Gateshead High Street.

Steve Wraith continued; “Selected filmmakers who attend the festival will also have the opportunity to do a Q&A at the Vue after their screening.”

The film festival is set to launch at The Hilton Gateshead with a champagne reception and the glamorous Closing & Awards Ceremony will be held at the historic St. Mary's Heritage Centre in Tyne & Wear.

Submissions will be accepted via FilmFreeway. Alongside free entry for North East films, GIFF aims to provide filmmakers with opportunities extending beyond the screen through industry education, workshops, networking, audience engagement and access to experienced film professionals.

The festival will particularly encourage young and emerging filmmakers to develop connections, learn more about the industry and showcase their work, helping to create pathways for the next generation of North East filmmaking talent.

GIFF also has a longer-term five-year vision to grow the festival into one of the North East's major cultural events, with the potential to develop from its inaugural three-day format into a week-long international film festival and become an established fixture in the UK film festival calendar.

By bringing filmmakers, industry professionals and audiences from outside the region into Gateshead, the festival also aims to raise the profile of the North East as a destination for independent cinema, creativity and filmmaking while creating new connections between regional talent and the international film community.

Selected filmmakers will also receive free festival access upon confirmation by the deadline.

The programme will include:

- International and North East film screenings
- Regional showcases
- Industry panels and workshops
- Free outdoor cinema
- Networking events and audience Q&As

Venues:

- **Vue Gateshead (Trinity Square):** Main screening venue offering a high-quality cinema experience
- **Gateway Studio CIO:** Workshops, panels and networking sessions
- **The Festival Bus (Trinity Square):** Free outdoor screenings, trailers and open submissions for films, music videos, experimental work and works-in-progress
- **St. Mary's Heritage Centre:** Closing ceremony and awards night

Leading independent filmmaker, screenwriter and script supervisor Catarina De Cèzanne said: “As a filmmaker, I understand how important it is to have a space to express and share your art, find your tribe, connect with an audience and foster meaningful collaborations for future projects. I also understand how important it is to make it affordable, open and accessible for artists of all backgrounds and experiences.

“I envision our festival to operate like a creative hub for artists, and be more than just an entertaining event where we screen good films. I want to provide a unique learning and personal experience for people to come back every year, with new surprises beyond our film programme. I hope this festival can help filmmakers achieve their career goals, align with their marketing strategies and inspire them to meet each other and create new films.”

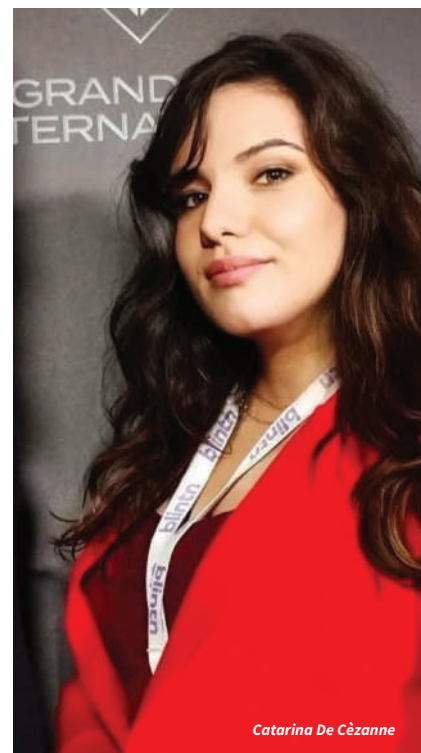
Film entries:

filmfreeway.com/
GatesheadInternationalFilmFestival

Film Festival info:

giffest.co.uk

Sponsorship enquiries to
clairebarberpr@icloud.com



Catarina De Cèzanne



Steve Wraith



Neil Jackson

L-R: Sarah Dale and Sarah Walker



UKSE – empowering businesses and local communities

Sarah and Sarah of SASS media Ltd highlight work with Tata Steel business support subsidiary in the region.

SASS media is pleased to be working with a new client to highlight its impactful work empowering businesses and supporting communities across the region.

UKSE, the business support subsidiary of Tata Steel, has more than 50 years' experience providing businesses within traditional steel areas across the UK with investment and finance, as well as state of the art workspaces, such as Kirkleatham Innovation Centre in Redcar and Hartlepool Innovation Centre, at Queens Meadow Business Park.

As well as providing financial support and workspaces to enable businesses to grow, UKSE also helps local grassroots community organisations and charities with practical and financial assistance.

This could involve helping people get back into work, developing young people's skills or fighting drug and alcohol problems.

Staff often visit local schools and universities and work in partnership with local development and enterprise agencies.

When it comes to its equity finance offering, UKSE supports businesses for the long term.

The organisation is less concerned about when it can expect to see returns than it is with its desire to help businesses within the communities it serves to flourish.

UKSE understands that the best results are achieved when investment is paired with a supportive, knowledgeable partner, who can bring their network of contacts in to help too.

Sarah Thorpe, UKSE's regional manager for the North said: "When we provide equity investment, we don't simply provide a pot of money and hope that the business can use it to create a return on our investment.

"We proactively support the business we are investing in to achieve their goals every step of the way, from initial investment to achieving their ambitions."

UKSE understands the wide range of businesses we have across the region, from sole traders and SMEs through to large multinational businesses, all require a different approach to both finance and support.

"There is no one-size-fits-all solution when it comes to funding," says Sarah.

"For those business owners or managers who are not entirely sure whether a loan or equity investment is right for them, we take an independent approach to exploring in detail the funding that best fits their unique circumstances and business model."

UKSE also provides a wide range of businesses with access to state-of-the-art workspaces.

Pivotal Sec Plus, a growing cash and ATM firm, recently tripled its existing office space at UKSE's Hartlepool Innovation Centre, a location which is vital to the firm's growth plans.

The extra space has allowed Pivotal Sec Plus to expand its 'rapidly growing' customer service and sales team.

Julianne Crawford, the company's head of customer service said: "Our new, larger office in UKSE's Innovation Centre provides the perfect base for us.

"It is close to main roads connecting the whole of the North East and beyond and it also provides us with high-quality offices and facilities."

More information on both finance and workspace is available at www.ukse.co.uk

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**There is no
one-size-fits-all
solution when it
comes to funding.**

Sarah Thorpe



Original Thinking with Kate Rose

What shapes the way successful people think, create and make decisions?

O.agency's Original Thinking podcast explores exactly that, bringing together founders, creatives and business leaders for honest conversations about their careers and the lessons they've picked up along the way.

In the latest episode, O.agency's Founder Kari Owers talks to Kate Rose, Founder and Creative Director of fashion, jewellery and accessories brand TUTTI, about building a business over more than 20 years.

Kate launched TUTTI in 2004 from her parents' conservatory after struggling to find the creative career she wanted in the North East. What began with jewellery and accessories has since grown into a lifestyle brand, with womenswear and concept stores now part of its next chapter.

Read some of the conversation around creativity, growth and building something that still feels true to itself.

After more than 20 years in business, why did you now feel like the right time to push for growth?

I got to 20 years and felt like I'd never quite created the brand I really wanted. We'd grown organically, without external investment or business loans, so there were times when decisions had to be made for financial reasons rather than purely creative ones.

Reaching that milestone gave me confidence to be bolder. It became a case of asking myself who we were and what I really wanted TUTTI to be.

You brought in an external Managing Director after running the business for so long. Was that difficult?

It was a huge decision, but it's the best one I've made. Last year I was coming into work feeling massively overwhelmed. There were so many decisions resting on my shoulders and I could see how excited the team was about the next stage, but I wasn't feeling it myself.

Bringing Helen in gave the business the structure it needed and has allowed me to spend more time doing the job I originally set out to do, which is being focusing on design and ideas.

How do you keep TUTTI feeling fresh without chasing every trend?

I've always been somebody who didn't want to be the same as everyone else, but creativity isn't about adding more and more.

I think the best pieces come from stripping things back and being more considered. We ask where someone will wear something, how

they'll wear it and whether it's something they'll still bring out of their wardrobe years from now.

We're not a trend-driven business. There's so much noise around the next trend or what an influencer is wearing. For us, it comes back to the person wearing it and whether they feel good in it. If they do, then it's right for them.

What role does human connection play in the brand now?

It's hugely important. So much of that connection has been lost through online shopping, which is why our concept stores matter so much.

Customers want to see, touch and try things, talk through the collection and understand who is behind the brand. Having our design studio alongside the flagship concept store means people can see some of that process too and they feel part of it.

What advice would you give another entrepreneur starting out?

I would say be brave and trust your gut. I've made plenty of mistakes over 20 years, but I've really learnt from them.

Also, don't feel you have to take every opportunity, but take the right ones. Growing a little more slowly and being more considered can give you so much more longevity.

To hear to the whole conversation head to O.agency's Original Thinking podcast on Spotify or via www.o.agency/news

**WE MAKE
BUSINESSES
IMPOSSIBLE
TO IGNORE.**



JAM-MARKETING.CO.UK



Charlotte Nichols

There's a communication crisis unfolding in Britain's workplaces

By Charlotte Nichols, Harvey & Hugo

Polling shows most of us would rather email a colleague than chat – even when they are in the same room – while one in six will go an entire day without speaking to a workmate.

But there's an even bigger storm on the horizon. Gen Z.

Some starting careers struggle to even talk on the phone. One uni lecturer told me how students were applauded by peers for successfully making a practice call.

As a PR expert, I've spent almost 20 years helping people communicate.

At Harvey & Hugo, we regularly prep clients for TV and radio interviews deliver bespoke media training.

But as the Britain's next generation of professionals' flounder on phones, and struggle with the office dynamic, we've realised there's a need for that training to be offered to employers.

That's why we are now offering training packages to companies to help their young staff (or even their older ones) master both the art of office communication, but also the soft skills to help them thrive at work.

How to network and mingle. Body language. Chit-chat. And yes, how to even answer a phone.

Now I'm fully aware communication evolves.

Nobody is suggesting we revert to becoming Luddites.

Almost 150 years ago, The Times ran an editorial arguing that Alexander Graham Bell's telephone would cripple communication by making life too frantic and intrusive.

We fear the new, and we resist change. That's human nature.

Emails, WhatsApp, mobiles – even their harshest critic would struggle to seriously find no merit in them.

They are reactive, fast and efficient – but there must be more.

And as our lives become increasingly digital, we risk losing something fundamental: the ability to communicate without a screen between us.

The evidence is already staring us straight in the face.

YouGov found that 58 per cent of Brits lack confidence in a new social group. Less than a fifth think they are good networkers.

And this isn't simply a young person's problem. A survey of more than 2,000 UK professionals found that 62 per cent get nervous before making a presentation.

Perhaps more concerning, a quarter admit they don't contribute to meetings – despite having something useful to say.

That's why we want to help.

Our team understands communication. Stories and messaging are our bread and butter.

I'm lucky to often be asked to host events or deliver in-person training. Last month, I delivered a session on how to communicate to a room of graduates in Manchester.

More of this is needed. You owe it to your young employees, and to your business.

Firstly, many of these traits are the byproduct of a generation raised on screens in turbulent times. Those now entering the workplace – or preparing to – grew up with circumstances unlike any previous generation.

Raised online, shielded and shaped by a pandemic and lockdowns, they probably deserve a bit of slack.

But we also need to recognise that communication is a skill – one that can be practiced and developed – and one that can significantly enhance your business.

And we don't expect to walk into a gym for the first time and lift the heaviest weight – so why do we expect young people to walk into a workplace and instinctively know how to network, present, pick up the phone and, yes, even make conversation?

We can develop that, not with more tech, but through human contact. So, teach your team to communicate clearly and confidently – or, better yet, ask the professionals.

As in this ever-changing world, the ability to communicate clearly and confidently may become one of the most valuable workplace skills of all.

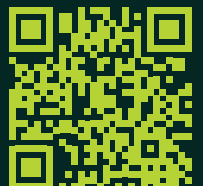
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BRADLEY O'MAHONEY





Everyone wants attention, few earn it

By Samuel Marriott-Dowding,
Marriott Communications

As entrepreneurs, as business owners, we are obsessed with attention.

Reach, impressions, followers, views, engagement. Somewhere along the way, visibility became the scoreboard by which communications success is judged. Yet, visibility is not relevance, and attention, without authority, is just noise.

For businesses operating at scale, particularly those competing in crowded global markets, being seen is no longer particularly difficult. There are more channels, more platforms and more ways to put a message in front of an audience than ever before.

The harder question is whether anyone actually cares. I think this is where much of modern communications has become confused. We have become so focused on generating exposure that we sometimes forget to ask what that exposure is supposed to achieve.

A billion impressions mean very little if the people who matter do not associate your organisation with something meaningful or



Samuel Marriott-Dowding

impactful. Ten thousand followers do not constitute influence if nobody trusts your judgement.

Appearing everywhere does not make a business relevant, relevance has to be earned. It comes from understanding the environment in which a business operates, knowing what its audiences care about, identifying the conversations it has a legitimate role in shaping, and having something intelligent to contribute when those conversations happen.

That is fundamentally different from chasing attention.

At Marriott Communications, this distinction sits at the heart of how we approach strategic communications. Our role is not to make organisations louder for the sake of being louder, it is to make them matter to the right people, in the right places, at the right moments.

That requires strategy before storytelling. It means understanding reputation, markets, political and cultural environments, stakeholder expectations and emerging risks. It means

finding the intersection between what an organisation wants to say and what the world is actually interested in hearing.

When that intersection is right, something interesting happens, visibility becomes a by-product.

Coverage follows relevance, conversations follow relevance, invitations follow relevance, stakeholders pay attention because there is a reason to pay attention.

This is particularly important for large organisations. The bigger the business, the more expensive irrelevance becomes. A global corporation does not need another campaign that generates temporary noise, it needs communications that strengthen authority, create confidence and influence how it is understood by customers, investors, policymakers, partners, employees and the wider public.

That is a much bigger job than publicity, where the most influential organisations I encounter are rarely those shouting the loudest. They are the ones with a clear point of view, they understand their position in the world and communicate with enough confidence to occupy it.

They do not chase every conversation, they know which conversations belong to them, and that, ultimately, is the difference between visibility and influence.

Anyone can buy attention, relevance has to be built. When relevance is built properly, visibility doesn't need to be chased, it finds you.

marriottcommunications.com



Your hidden bank balance

There's an asset in your business that nobody has put a number to.

It's the reason a customer forgives a late delivery instead of writing a bad review, pays more for your product when there's a cheaper alternative, or recommends you to a friend.

It's your brand – specifically, the trust and goodwill you've built up around it. Think of that goodwill like a bank account. Every good experience is a deposit and every decision that makes things a little worse is a withdrawal. Most brands have been doing both for years without ever knowing what their balance is.

Cory Doctorow coined a word for what happens when that balance eventually runs dry: enshittification. He was talking about digital platforms that start out great for users, then gradually get worse as the business prioritises advertisers, shareholders and commercial pressures. But the principle applies to any organisation. Most businesses don't set out to make their brand worse. It happens slowly, through a series of decisions that, individually, make perfect sense.

Maybe you've made some withdrawals this year. You dropped the warranty from three years to one. You swapped a component for a cheaper alternative. You changed the recipe because supplier prices went up. An AI chatbot now deals with customer complaints.

Every one of those decisions had a reasonable business case behind it. But each one changed something for the customer, even if only slightly. The saving gets recorded on a spreadsheet, but the small loss of trust in your brand doesn't. At least, not straight away.

Deposits can be harder to spot. Sometimes they're simply withdrawals you chose not to make – you kept the recipe and absorbed the increased supplier costs. Other times, they cost you something upfront, like contacting a customer about a delay before they chase you. On paper, deposits look like costs. To the customer, they're reasons to trust you.

Over time, it's easy for businesses to take out more than they put in. And in isolation, the negative effects are almost impossible to see. Nobody stops buying from you because the warranty got a little shorter. Few people complain because one component feels slightly cheaper. But eventually the balance gets low enough that the relationship starts to change. The mistake that would once have been forgiven becomes a bad review. Winning new customers gets harder and keeping existing ones starts to require a discount. You've used up the goodwill that was absorbing all those little bits of friction.

Look again at those withdrawals – the warranty, the component, the recipe. They might look like operational or financial decisions, but they're marketing decisions too, because they change the experience you're giving the customer.

It's not that finance or operations are wrong to look for savings, that's their job. But somebody needs to be sitting on the customer's side of the table, asking what that saving might cost the business in the longer term. And that's a big part of marketing's job.

So next time a change makes this quarter's numbers look better, ask the second question. Not just what did we gain, but what do we stand to lose?

Is marketing a hot potato?

By Margaret Bradshaw, Red Button Marketing

Now, don't get me wrong, I love a tasty jacket potato with a nourishing topping and accompanying side salad, however, you and I both know, we are not talking about actual potatoes! So, what on earth has that got to do with marketing? Let's explore.

The phrase "Drop Like a Hot Potato" emerged in the 1800s. However, as with most things, it evolved and over time, people shortened the idea to just a "hot potato" or "passing the hot potato," representing a delicate, risky, or controversial topic that nobody wants to take responsibility for and everyone tries to hand off to someone else. Sound familiar?

I would not be surprised at all if right now your mind is moving to a song by Snoop Dogg!

Anyway, back to the hot topic of marketing and who needs to hold onto it.

I think we can agree that words like "risky" and "controversial" are used in the world of marketing on a daily basis. When it comes to the point about someone not taking responsibility for something and wanting to pass on to someone else, well, don't get me started!

I mean, let's go there, let's ask that question... who does own marketing?

Is that really the first question though, should we not consider a more crucial one first, what is marketing anyway?

I could easily say I took ownership of a brand new, shiny, red Lamborghini however, I didn't see it or touch it, so did I really take ownership?

The key thing here is visibility and clarity. If we can see it, touch it and understand it then we have something to take ownership of.

Let's zoom back to marketing and the concept of the humble, hot potato. What is certain is

that we can see the potato, feel the potato and register some emotions about it! If we can do that with marketing, we can then explore who owns it.

Metaphorically speaking, marketing is a hot potato in terms of the person in a business who has accountability. Imagine the scenario, a marketing coordinator reporting to one of the directors, which director has clear responsibility? Are marketing team members expected to deliver results? What results? How are they measured?

What if "marketing" is just seen as an outsourced set of activities?

Are activities the topping on the potato? I will leave you to consider that one?

After all, when we are faced with a tasty spud, we love having the power to choose what we add to give us the best experience.

Ultimately it is about "how" marketing as a process is joined at the hip with operations and sales. It should not be something that gets

moved around, shifted and surrounded by myth and uncertainty.

Perhaps what is so similar is that the humble potato is part of our everyday lives, we do all kinds of things with it, and we just know it is there.

Imagine what would happen in businesses if we knew marketing was integral, everyone could see it, enjoy it, be a part of it, use it to help make choices and see it as a space to be creative, innovative and grow.

Marketing really is a magic ingredient that fuels people and activities when positioned as a business process not a single chip!

When we can see it as something nourishing for people and business then all of a sudden, we could find everyone wants a slice of the action.

So, in summary, let's not toss marketing around like a hot potato, let's embrace its capabilities and possibilities.

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Margaret Bradshaw

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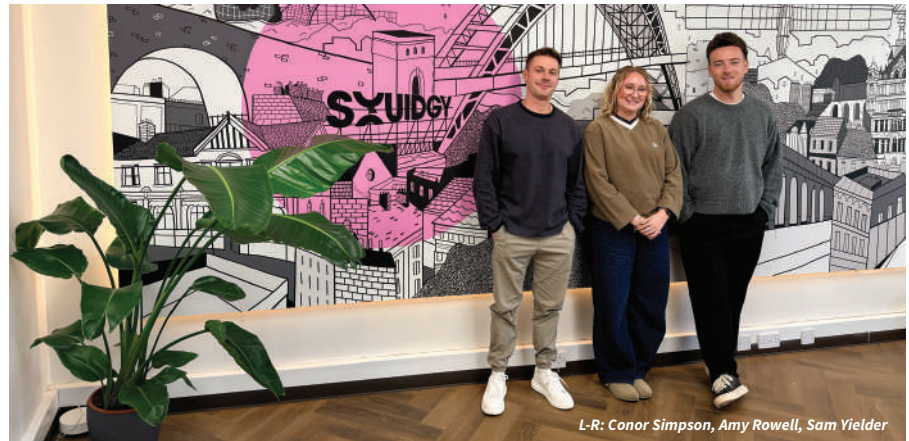
SQUIDGY grows Paid team with two promotions and a new hire after standout year

Newcastle agency caps off 2025–2026 by promoting from within and adding fresh talent to its Paid Social and PPC team.

SQUIDGY, the Newcastle digital agency that does SEO, PPC and Paid Social and nothing else, has expanded its Paid team following one of the strongest years in the agency's history, with two promotions and a new hire landing within the same period.

Sam Yielder has been promoted to Head of Paid, taking on leadership of the team's strategy and delivery across Google Ads, Microsoft Ads and paid social. The role sees Sam responsible for how the team plans, builds and reports on paid campaigns for clients across the agency's growing account list, as well as shaping how the team continues to grow from here.

Alongside that, Amy Rowell moves up to Paid Media Manager, taking on greater ownership of client accounts and day-to-day campaign delivery. Rounding out the changes, the team welcomes Conor Simpson, who joins as a new Paid Media Manager, bringing fresh capacity



L-R: Conor Simpson, Amy Rowell, Sam Yielder

as client demand for paid media management continues to grow.

It's been a good year for results, too. For one major tourist attraction, the team cut cost per conversion by 34%. For an independent online retailer, every £1 spent on ads now returns £11.44, up 31%. And a self-storage business saw 20% more enquiries on 19% less spend. That's what's driving the expansion: clients getting more back from the same budget, and a team built to keep delivering it.

"It's been a big year for the Paid team, we've grown the accounts we manage, grown the team around them, and grown what we're capable

of delivering for clients. Promoting Amy and bringing Conor in isn't just filling seats, it's making sure we've got the right people in place to keep that momentum going into next year." - **Sam Yielder, Head of Paid, SQUIDGY**

The changes come at a point where more businesses are looking to make every click count rather than simply spend more, and SQUIDGY says the restructure reflects a deliberate move to keep the Paid team senior-led as it scales, rather than growing headcount for its own sake.

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AWARDS WON TO DATE

0

We're just the same as every other agency.

Just without the buzzwords. And the bullshit. And the inflated timesheets. Oh and the blah blah yawn. And the fluff. And PowerPoints. Definitely no PowerPoints. Ever. Honest. And the circling back, whatever that means. And the meeting for meetings' sake. And disruptive holistic synergy. And the culture decks nobody's opened since the rebrand. And the ping pong table gathering dust in reception. And "we're not just an agency, we're a partner" poster in the IKEA frame. And the stock photos of people laughing at salad. And the award entries that cost more

than the actual campaign. And the trophies for awards you've never heard of, judged by people you've also never heard of. And the brand tone of voice nobody reads,. And the "let's take this offline" (we won't). And the growth mindset. And the north star nobody can actually point to. And the ideation sessions that ideate sweet FA. And "brave" brand building that's about as brave wearing armbands in the bath. And the decks. God, the decks. Forty-two slides to say "we listened."

Yeah, we're exactly like them.
Kind of.





Growing IT hardware firm opens new head office

A North East IT hardware business has relocated to a new head office as it continues to expand its service offering.

BornGood, a full-service IT device management provider, has recently opened a 9,863 sq ft HQ in Houghton-le-Spring to cater for its growing portfolio of clients and future expansion plans.

The company has diversified its offering in recent years to include corporate IT asset management and device leasing. This expansion has contributed to the company's year-on-year growth of more than 30%.

Employing 25 people, the firm already operates across the country and a new contract win with Northumbrian Water, including the company's Essex and Sussex arm, cements BornGood's position as a national provider.

Simon Howatson, Founder and CEO of BornGood, said: "We're delighted to have secured our new HQ. We've recently picked up a number of new contracts and expanded our operations, meaning we were beginning to outgrow our previous office, but this new site will be perfect, providing us with the space we need to grow."

"We've been growing consistently, with turnover increasing, which has also allowed us to create new jobs and further invest in the business."

"We already operate nationwide and can service clients in all parts of the country, but we don't want to stop there, the next step for us would be to work with global companies, providing our services beyond the UK."

AWS opens the door to public sector opportunities for North East tech SMEs

Technology SMEs from across the North East are being encouraged to register for a free Amazon Web Services (AWS) event taking place in Newcastle.

Think Big for Small Business will be held at The Catalyst, Newcastle Helix, on Monday 19 October 2026, from 11:00 to 16:00.

The in-person event is designed for UK-based technology businesses employing between 10 and 250 people that are ready to scale and want to learn more about opportunities within the public sector.

Dynamo North East is helping to raise awareness of the event among technology businesses across the region.

The programme will include practical guidance on accessing public sector opportunities, understanding procurement frameworks and working with larger technology partners.

Attendees will also hear from SME founders about their experiences of winning and delivering public sector technology contracts, including what worked, what they learned and how they scaled their businesses.

A live demonstration will explore generative artificial intelligence and emerging cloud



technologies, with a focus on how smaller businesses can use them to support productivity and identify new opportunities.

The event builds on some of the themes explored at Dynamo North East's recent Leadership Forum on public procurement and social value. The forum brought together leaders from the region's public and private sectors to examine how closer engagement, clearer routes into procurement and stronger relationships between buyers and suppliers could help more North East businesses pursue opportunities.

David Dunn, chief executive of Dynamo North East, said: "We are pleased to help raise awareness of Think Big for Small Business among technology companies across the North East."

Secure technology combats use of 'shadow AI' in sales teams

An AI-powered platform to help businesses win more bids, faster, has been launched in the UK by progressive Durham start-up, Invent Group.

Bid King is designed to transform how organisations respond to RFIs (requests for information), tenders and complex proposals. With a knowledge centre that learns about the business, its services, tone of voice and accreditations – and enhances each submission based on past wins – the product saves up to 75% of time, allowing colleagues to produce three times more bids.

Featuring a live dashboard to track bid performance and success rates, the goal is to simplify, improve and scale up users' bid efforts without having to increase headcount. It fuels smarter collaboration between multiple subject matter experts in larger businesses, ensures compliance with stringent framework criteria, and accelerates the



completion of bids for resource-constrained firms – arguably levelling the playing field for SMEs.

Enabling organisations to respond to both public and private sector bids, the platform has been beta tested among a range of businesses across the construction, technology, medical, charitable and business services sectors, to name just a few.

Bid King is the brainchild of Invent Group – a technology firm headquartered in Durham – which strives to deliver AI-native infrastructure that solves real-world business challenges.

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SERIÖS GROUP and Sunderland AFC agree new multi-year partnership in time for Premier League and Europa League campaigns

North East-based data and AI leaders Seriös Group is strengthening its long-standing relationship with Sunderland AFC through a new multi-year agreement, continuing as the Club's Data Solutions Partner and becoming an Associate Partner.

The new agreement will see Seriös Group, founded by lifelong Sunderland AFC supporter Lee Rorison, continue to work closely with the Club's commercial and football data departments, while increasing its involvement as a partner.

Following the success of the relationship to date, the new agreement reflects a shared commitment to further develop Sunderland AFC's use of data, as the Club continues to grow on and off the pitch. It comes at an exciting time, with the Club competing in both the Premier League and UEFA Europa League this season.

Through Seriös ONE, Sunderland AFC is bringing its data and insight together providing stakeholders with a clearer view of commercial activity, fan engagement and football performance. This is helping the Club make data-informed decisions, respond more quickly to opportunities and make greater use of its data.

With Seriös ONE now embedded into the Club's commercial and football operations, the new agreement marks the next stage of the relationship, supporting Sunderland AFC's ambitions for continued commercial growth, enhanced football performance and helping the Club to stay ahead in an increasingly data-driven game.

Lee Rorison, Founder and CEO of Seriös Group, said: "Having worked closely with Sunderland AFC for several years, it's incredibly rewarding to see our relationship continue to grow through this new multi-year partnership.

"The exciting part is that we're building on data foundations that are already embedded into the Club's commercial and football operations, and it's delivering results. Through Seriös ONE, we've brought together data from ticketing, hospitality, retail, fan engagement and football performance, giving the Club a clearer view of its operations.

"Sunderland AFC has been an excellent example of what's possible when data becomes part of how a football club operates day-to-day. The success of our work together has reinforced our belief that data has a much bigger role to play within football, and we're increasingly engaging with clubs looking to take a similar approach.

"This next phase is about building on that success. It gives us an opportunity to continue putting the Seriös Group name alongside an iconic North East institution while demonstrating what we can do in practice.

"We're incredibly proud to continue working alongside Sunderland AFC. We've achieved a lot together already, but there are some awesome opportunities still ahead of us."



The UK's cyber community comes North as CyberFest returns for 2026

The North East's biggest cyber security festival returns this October. Now in its ninth year, CyberFest has grown into a major national platform for showcasing the region's cyber and secure AI excellence. Taking place across the North East throughout October, the festival will connect businesses, innovators, government and specialist clusters from across the UK, putting the region's talent, ambition and capability firmly in the spotlight.

CyberFest is organised by CyberNorth, a membership community which brings together people, organisations and ideas from across the North East to drive progress in cyber security, AI, data and quantum technologies.

Although regionally grown, CyberFest is no longer just a regional event says Jon Holden, CEO of CyberNorth, "CyberFest is about bringing the UK's cyber community to the North East and showing the country what this region can do. What started as a regional festival has grown into a national platform, bringing together businesses, government, innovators and industry leaders to connect, collaborate and create new opportunities."

The mission is simple: connect, educate and empower the region's digital ecosystem, while putting the North East firmly on the map as a place to innovate, invest, collaborate and build business.

More than 1,000 people attended CyberFest events last year and this year organisers CyberNorth emphasise the festival will build on that momentum, exploring the opportunities and challenges facing the UK.

The programme will feature high-impact events throughout October, including the CyberFest Community Conference on 19 October and the CyberNorth Awards on 21 October, alongside a series of specialist afternoon sessions exploring the critical role of cyber across adjacent industries.

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Tech's H2 commercial outlook

AI forces a rethink of how organisations operate.

If there is one defining characteristic for the market as we move into H2, it is that conversations around AI have shifted decisively from experimentation to transformation. Organisations are no longer asking whether AI works or exploring individual use cases, they are asking how to implement it strategically and how quickly they can redesign their businesses to take advantage of it.

The leaders pulling ahead are not simply automating existing processes. They are fundamentally rethinking how work gets done, maximising available skills, efficiencies and new ways of working.

A common mistake is treating AI as a way to accelerate today's operating model. Faster delivery of the same processes will create incremental gains, but the real opportunity lies in asking what becomes possible when AI changes the economics of software development, decision-making and knowledge work.

In this article, Leighton's Chief Revenue Officer, Claire Cundill, shares the four key themes that have emerged over the past six months and explores how AI exploration and implementation are changing the way organisations approach projects, with a clearer focus on business impact.

From proof of concept to business outcome

Many organisations have completed successful AI pilots. The challenge now is creating measurable commercial value.

This requires a rethink of how products are built. Traditional software delivery approaches, designed around predictability and governance, can struggle to keep pace with AI's rate of change. Organisations are increasingly restructuring delivery teams, reducing handoffs and empowering smaller groups to deliver AI-enabled capabilities at speed.

Productivity expectations are changing too, AI should not simply improve efficiency around the edges, it has the potential to fundamentally increase the output of engineering and delivery teams.



Claire Cundill

Operating models built for a different era

Many organisational structures were designed for industrial-era efficiency rather than AI-enabled adaptability. Functional silos, committee-led decision making, process-heavy delivery, extensive measurement before action and diffused accountability can all create friction and delay.

These approaches are increasingly giving way to operating models centred on speed, accountability and customer outcomes. Smaller, outcome-focused teams with clear missions are becoming the preferred delivery model, with end-to-end accountability sitting with a single leader.

Legal, commercial and risk functions are also being embedded earlier in delivery rather than acting as gates at the beginning or the end. The result is faster learning, quicker iteration and a shorter path from idea to value.

AI is changing the economics of delivery

AI is increasingly an economic decision before it becomes a technology decision. Choices around whether organisations consume, compose or build AI capabilities directly affect costs, skills and team structures.

FinOps is evolving accordingly. Rather than considering infrastructure costs alone, organisations are beginning to weigh token

consumption against salary costs and productivity gains.

The commercial question is no longer simply, "How much does the model cost?" but "What is the blended cost of AI and people delivering this outcome?"

Acting before certainty arrives

Perhaps the clearest message is that waiting for traditional demand signals may itself be a commercial risk.

AI is moving too quickly for certainty-first decision making. That does not mean abandoning governance but recognising that success increasingly comes from managing within ranges rather than seeking absolute certainty before investing.

Competitive advantage will belong to organisations willing to evolve their operating models, redesign their teams and rethink the economics of delivery, not simply deploy new technology.

At Leighton, we are working with customers to redesign their software development lifecycles and embed AI in meaningful ways to maximise efficiency and return on investment. If you're exploring the how AI can be embedded across your organisation, then we'd love to hear from you: www.leighton.com/lets-talk



“

Our plan is to keep building an even bigger and better business.

Andy Walton

Andy Walton

October 2026 145



Eclipse Wholesale hosts Second Annual Partner Event

Gateshead-based telecommunications wholesaler, Eclipse Wholesale, hosted their second annual partner event at Live Theatre in Newcastle last month, bringing partners and vendors together from across the UK.

Sponsored by 8x8, ITS, KCOM, Tekton Billing and Zen Internet, the event featured insightful presentations, engaging panel discussions and a special live recording of Elevate Wholesale's 'Chewing the Channel' podcast. The afternoon provided valuable industry insights and networking opportunities before continuing with a celebration at Pitcher & Piano, overlooking Newcastle's iconic Quayside.

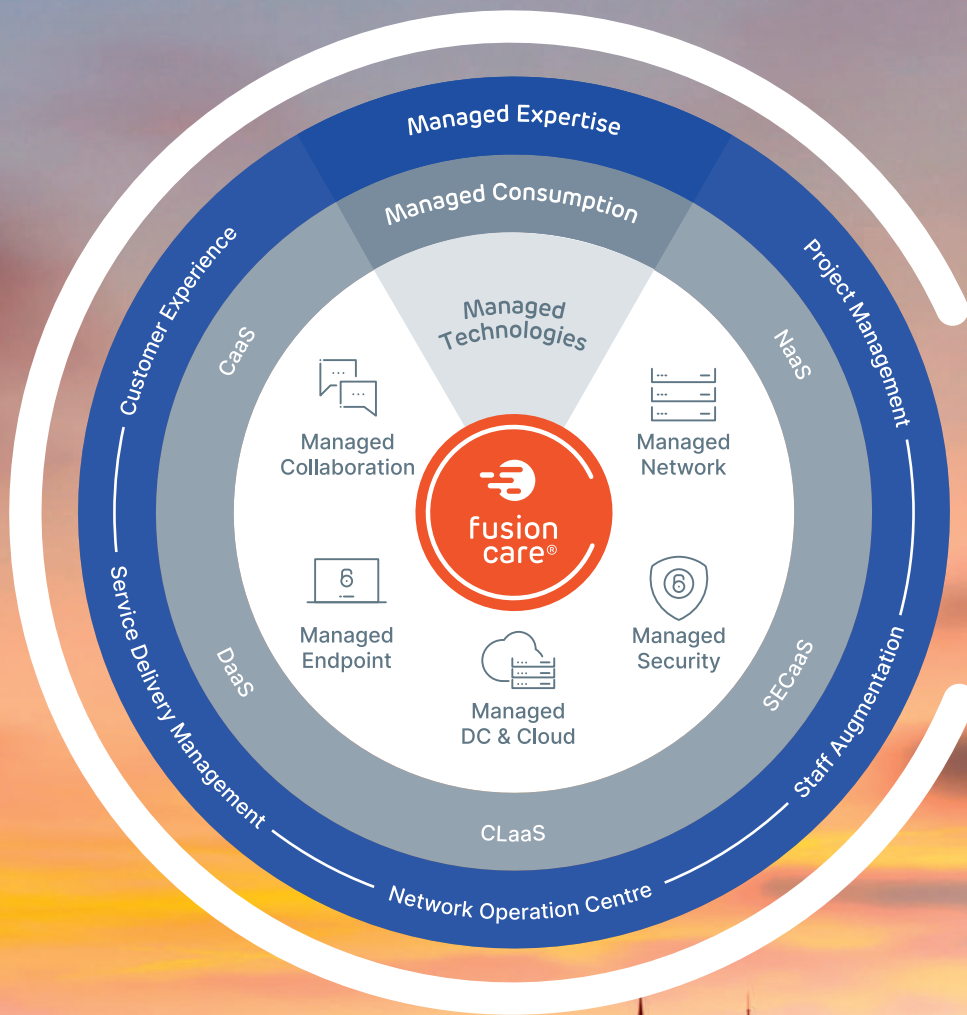






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Phonetic Digital launches training space

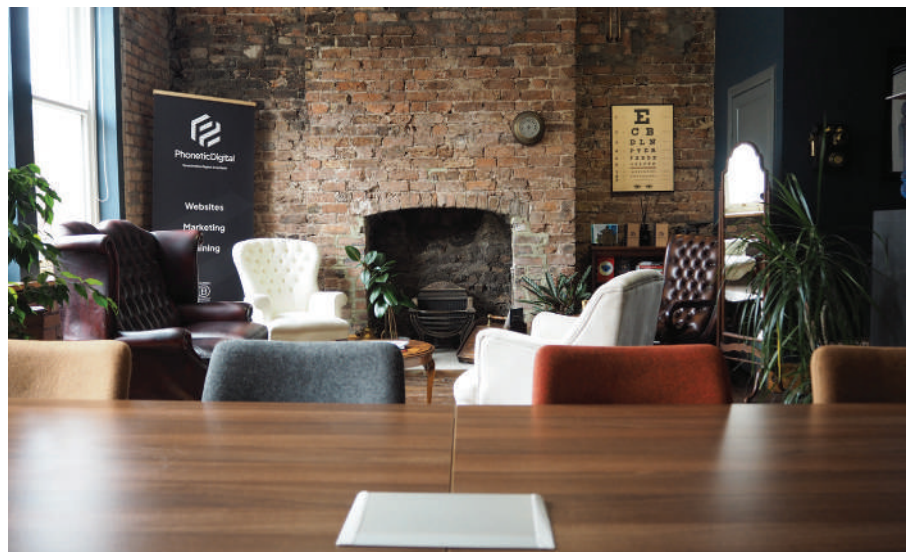


Sunderland-based digital agency Phonetic Digital has opened its doors to their new training room with a dedicated schedule of sessions supporting businesses in their digital growth.

The B Corp certified agency has designed the training space for business owners, marketers, comms teams, sole traders and professionals who want to strengthen their digital capability. The agency will provide tailored training to large teams who are looking to upskill on a certain subject and monthly training workshops on specific topics, with tickets limited to eight per session.

The Beyond the Basics sessions are small-group workshops for those who already have some knowledge on a topic and want to go further. Each workshop is led by a practitioner who works on the subject in the real world. Attendees are encouraged to bring real life challenges and example problems to work through during the session.

The 2026 programme covers, SEO (Search Engine Optimisation) & GEO (Generative Engine Optimisation), Paid Media, and Google Analytics & Data Studio Dashboards and Using AI in Business.



Their first session on SEO will be going beyond the basic idea of search and will allow attendees to improve the way their website is found, understood, and trusted across traditional organic search and emerging generative search. Steven Parker, Managing Director of Phonetic Digital, said: "The launch of The Training Room is about making digital learning feel accessible, relevant and genuinely useful. We've created a welcoming space where businesses and their teams can step away from the office, ask questions and build practical skills around the challenges they're facing in their day to day.

There's no jargon and no cookie cutter approach, simply clear guidance that gives

people the confidence to take what they've learned and put it into action."

The Training Room has been designed to make attendees to feel immediately comfortable and ready to learn, kitted out with local finds and upcycled furniture that are steeped in history and stories like an old coal scuttle from the early 1900s and Steven's great grandmother's barometer on the wall.

The first training session starts on the 30th September 2026 and is on SEO. Each full-day workshop is £195+VAT per person with lunch and refreshments included.

phoneticdigital.co.uk



Knowing who to trust

By Simon Honeywood, Readysalted

Running a business can be a lonely job. Nobody mentions that at the start.

The advice you'll hear everywhere is to bring in outside support. Know your weaknesses, build a network, don't try to do it all yourself. It's good advice. What's discussed far less often is how you tell good outside support from bad, and what it costs when you get it wrong.

This is a personal one for me.

The weakness worth admitting

Like most people, I'm guilty of being too busy at times and having that genuine, "this is holding the business back" sense of guilt, even when business is flying. There have been long stretches where I haven't had the headspace to think strategically because the day job kept winning. Every time I've forced myself to step

back, whether that's a proper strategic session, looking out of the window on a train or simply taking some time to recharge, it has paid off. Every time, I've kicked myself for not doing it sooner. Hindsight is a wonderful thing. It's just never available when you actually need it. Annoying...

The mistakes that taught me most

Alongside the good decisions, I've put my trust in people who claimed expertise they couldn't back up. Literally.

When someone is charging four figures a month and consistently underdelivering, the moment the penny finally drops is a horrible one. It made me question my own judgement and feel pretty stupid. Perhaps that's the risk of always looking for the best in people. Looking back, the warning signs were there. The clearest one was the absence of data. No reports, no dashboards, no way to measure what was actually being delivered. Just reassurance, delivered confidently, month after month. When you ask for evidence and receive a conversation instead, that's the moment to pay attention.

What I'd look for now

Speak to more than one person. A single conversation gives you nothing to compare against. Do they take time to understand your

business or do they arrive with the answer already prepared? The good ones ask questions that make you think. The rest have a solution looking for a problem. Get it in writing. A consultant who is confident in their work will welcome that. One who deflects is telling you something. Be wary of anyone who never says, "That's not my area." Nobody is good at everything. The willingness to admit that is usually a sign of someone who knows what they're doing.

Use your network

This is the part I'd emphasise most. Through the Entrepreneurs' Forum, I've met business owners I can grab a coffee with and get a straight answer from. That network has shaped my business more than any single supplier ever has. Before you commit to anyone, ask around. The North East is small enough that reputation travels, and people will tell you the truth if you ask them properly.

Finally, don't be afraid to be upfront about how much support you actually need. Don't let someone dictate a package or level of support that doesn't feel right for your business.

The right outside support should make you feel more in control of your business, not less.

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Test, test and test again before you trust

By Pascal Fintoni, AI & Digital Marketing Strategist

The businesses getting real value from AI agents are the ones making them earn it first.

In 1994, on my very first website project in London, I did something faintly ridiculous. I had just been given an email address, and I did not know a single other person who had one. So, I emailed myself, just to see if the thing actually worked. It felt absurd at the time.

Looking back, it was the right instinct. I did not trust a brand new tool with anything real until I had tested it on something that could not go wrong. Thirty-two years on, I find myself giving business owners exactly the same advice, except the tool now is an AI agent, and what they want to hand it matters a great deal more than a test email.

Give it a proper brief first

Agents are the live conversation in every boardroom and café I sit in at the moment. Business owners are worn out by repetitive admin and want an assistant that can handle client follow ups or data processing on its own.



I understand the appeal completely but let's be careful. People are reaching for full autonomy before they have learned to brief a basic model properly.

So let's go back a few steps.

Think of a platform like ChatGPT or Copilot as a village full of specialists. If you hired someone new, you would not hand them the keys to the front door on their first morning and walk off. You would give them a clear brief, watch how they worked, and check what they produced before trusting them with anything unsupervised. A digital assistant needs the same discipline, if anything more of it, because it cannot fill in the gaps the way an experienced colleague would.

The ABCD brief

The method I teach in every masterclass is simple enough to use today. Tell the assistant exactly who it is acting as, with real expertise, not a vague job title. Break the task into numbered steps rather than one long paragraph. Specify the content format you want back. Then hand over the detail a new colleague would need: your customers, your tone, your limits. Try it this week:

"Acting as an experienced operations consultant, review how I currently handle [a specific

repetitive task]. First map out every step in order. Then flag which steps are predictable and rule-based. Finally, tell me which of those would genuinely need an AI agent rather than simple software, with your recommendations broken into numbered steps. Here is the context: [your team size, the tools you already use, and anything that must never go wrong]."

Run that brief in a closed, private space first, on data that does not matter, before you let it anywhere near data that does.

Gartner's own research backs this up. The firm expects more than 40 per cent of agentic AI projects to be cancelled by the end of 2027, and the reasons it gives are not about what the technology can do. They point to cost overruns, unclear payoff, and weak risk controls. Most of them, in other words, were never properly briefed before they were set loose.

An agent is not a shortcut around good management. It is a new kind of team member, and it deserves the same probation any new hire would get. Test it somewhere small first. Only then give it the keys.

Get the discipline right, and agents genuinely do free up hours every week. Skip it, and you have not automated your business. You have just found a much faster way to make the same mistakes.

To your success!

Pascal Fintoni is an AI and digital marketing strategist with 30+ years of experience working with business leaders on responsible AI adoption, content strategy, and digital marketing.

www.pascalfintoni.com



Being radically human

Northumberland born and bred, Anni Hood is the visionary voice of human capacity: being radically human in the AI era. Simon Rushworth meets the inspirational businesswoman building a better future for communities and workplaces across the North East.



Anni Hood

Where so many organisations point to a game-changing product or process as their USP, it's clear what makes AstralMandala and sister company Well Intelligence stand out.

Meet Anni Hood, the founder behind the new name in human capacity—her passion proof positive that the right people remain an irreplaceable asset. “Human capacity is the currency of connection,” she says. “The reality of that perspective will only grow.”

Raised in Alnwick and shaped by crisscrossing the globe, Anni is the jewel in both companies' crowns. One conversation with her and everything feels possible.

“I feel earnestly reconnected to my North East roots,” says Anni, who built Talise Wellness — the world's first integrative health model in global luxury hospitality — for Jumeirah Group. “I've taken the long way round, but it feels very ‘right’ to be working with business leaders and communities across the region.”

“Recently I read an article with Ian McElroy of Develop North. He painted a picture of a region on the cusp of something special and described the energy that's sparking a sense of optimism and ambition. I couldn't feel more aligned with Ian and his view.

“I've lived in London, Dubai, Paris and Merida

but I want our work to have a firm foothold here — I want to watch the North East's individual and collective human capacity soar.”

So what is human capacity? “It's the amount of life, complexity and challenge a person can hold while still being able to think clearly, feel fully, relate well and act effectively,” explains Anni.

“There is endless talk about human potential. Capacity is different. Potential is what is possible but capacity is what is available to us now. Its value has been misunderstood for too long. Well Intelligence provides the insight and business advisory, AstralMandala the infrastructure and solution. The growth factor is simple: if you're a human being, you will gain from it — and so will your workplace, community and society at large.”

AstralMandala's roadmap is rooted in science and evidenced practice. “Most people are in a depleted state,” says Anni. “Knowing our own biology is a cornerstone of recovery and expanded capacity. We focus on a graduated nervous system recalibration that helps people function in a fully human, engaged way. Not only will you feel better, you'll be better at feeling too.”

As chief executive of Well Intelligence, Anni has worked with global leaders to embed proactive

wellbeing culture into business and public sector organisations, while her Jumeirah work created a category-defining model in one of the most demanding commercial settings.

“AstralMandala is decades of insight, research and experience coming together,” she says. “I've always managed human capacity. Only the setting has changed — from five-star resorts to boardrooms, insurers and grassroots communities.”

Anni has already put the AstralMandala protocol and Still Point Leaders Series into practice at Newcastle's Crowne Plaza Hotel and Northumberland-based Weir Insurance. “We turn capacity into commercial value,” she says. “AstralMandala is effective in the B2B space, but it's also tailor-made for the people at the heart of the region's public and third sectors.”

Anni's summary of what AstralMandala provides? Infrastructure for de-risking human capital. And she relishes the scrutiny. “I'm not naïve enough to believe people won't have questions — it's my job to make clear the value that raised human capacity unlocks.”

www.astralmandala.com
www.wellintellect.com

In conversation with...

Lee Murray

Newcastle Practice Lead, Redesmere

Award winning Digital Transformation Practice, in the North East, for the North East.

What were your career ambitions growing up?

When I was young, I wanted to be Newcastle United's number 9 and play cricket for England. Unfortunately, I realised pretty early on that you need a fair bit of talent to do either of those things... talent that I did not possess. (clearly).

As I got older and into my teenage years, I started thinking more seriously about what I wanted to do. I found solving difficult problems interesting, which I suppose has ultimately led me to the career I'm in today.

Tell us about your new role at Redesmere?

I'm leading the Newcastle practice at Redesmere, which means I'm responsible for everything from strategy and growth to building our regional presence and long-term vision.

A big part of my role is working closely with organisations across the North East, both new and existing clients, helping them navigate and deliver their digital journeys.

I am the Redesmere Brand Ambassador for the North East and our Partnerships with Major Systems Integrators.

What services does the company offer?

We're an independent digital transformation business that specialises in cloud transition, legacy decommissioning, AI enablement and adoption, and delivery of large scale change programmes across both public and private sectors. We operate both on the Client Side to make Projects and Programmes successful managing the clients suppliers to outcomes or as external providers of change and outcomes.

For me, what makes us different is that we're based here in Newcastle. We pride ourselves on being a trusted local partner that works alongside organisations, rather than simply coming in from elsewhere, delivering a project and moving on.

What are you currently working on?

My main focus, at the moment, is getting out across the North East and meeting with representatives from a wide range of businesses and organisations.

I'm having lots of conversations around challenges they're facing, their priorities for the future, and how digital transformation can help them achieve their goals. It's been a great way to understand what's important to businesses locally and where Redesmere can add real value.

Tell us about the clients you work with?

We currently work with Major Central Government Departments across the UK in addition we work with many of their Arm's Length Bodies. We also have engagements within Defence, Utilities and Financial Services.

What do Redesmere hope to achieve within the region in the next 12 month period?

Personally, my goal for Redesmere over the next 12 months is to become firmly established in the North East and be recognised as a trusted digital transformation partner across the region.

To achieve that, we need to work with local organisations, helping them deliver meaningful digital change. We also want to grow our

team, creating high-skilled employment opportunities for people across the North East at all stages of their careers.

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

Two pieces of advice stand out immediately...

- 1) If you're afforded an excellent opportunity, say yes and believe in yourself!
- 2) Qualify what value I can add at what pace and recognise quickly where I cannot add value and communicate the reasons effectively.

What has been your biggest challenge so far at Redesmere?

Good question... on reflection I'd say the biggest challenge has been making sure we focus our time and energy on things that will deliver the most value. Starting with a blank North East canvas is very exciting, but it also means there are countless opportunities competing for your attention.

Redesmere have been operating in Central Government within Newcastle for the last 10 years and our expansion here is to use the lessons we have learned to be highly efficient and precise to ensure that we bring our mantra to life delivery in the Northeast for the North East.

We've now finalised a clear strategy for the region, centred on being visible, accessible, and accountable to our clients. Our aim is to be a genuine partner that delivers lasting value, rather than another consultancy that comes and goes.

Who are your heroes inside and outside of business?

My Dad has always been, and still is, my hero. Growing up, he was always there for us, and now that I'm older, I appreciate how hard he worked to be able to be a present father, while also trying his best to provide the best he possibly could for his family.

Outside of that, I've got a few sporting heroes too, the main of which being Tynesides greatest son, Alan Shearer.

How do you unwind outside of work?

I'm not sure "unwind" is the right word, it's probably more stressful than work itself...I'm a season ticket holder at Newcastle United. I'm also a keen cricketer and captain of Greenside Cricket Club 1st XI (we just got promoted by the way!).

Favourite Book and Boxset?

Interesting fact...I've never actually read a book. That's not for lack of trying, I'm quite badly dyslexic so the written word has never really been my best friend. However, I've recently started listening to audiobooks and podcasts, and I'm a regular listener of The Rest is Football and Tailenders podcasts.

For boxsets, I've recently rewatched *Vikings* which gets better each time, and I've just restarted *The Sopranos* for what must be approaching the millionth time, so I'd say one of those two are my favourite.

redesmere.com

lmurray@redesmere.com



Redesmere



“

**Our aim is to
be a genuine
partner
that delivers
lasting value.**

Lee Murray

Re-routing 'The Entertainment Journey'



Nick and Charlotte Rudd of The Rudd Group

How pub spending reflects a new era of competitive socialising.

Pub goers are more likely than ever to play pool, darts and a gaming machine on the same visit to their favourite bar — as so-called competitive socialising gathers pace across the country.

New data from the UK's sector-leading supplier of equipment to the pub industry challenges the assumption that different products compete for the same customer spend.

And The Rudd Group has found that venues choosing between pool, darts or digital gaming can prove counter-productive with landlords urged to consider the perfect entertainment mix — however big or small their venue.

"There's a longstanding belief within pub entertainment that different products are competing for the same customer's limited spend," explains Nick Rudd, Managing Director of the Tyneside-based firm.

"Put simply there's an assumption that a pound put into pool or darts is a pound that won't be used on a gaming machine.

"Our data explodes that myth. We have two different pieces of evidence pointing in the same direction and it's clear that the emerging picture is that of an 'Entertainment Journey'.

"In other words, pub-goers like to mix and

match when it comes to so-called competitive socialising. Timing — and the range of entertainment on offer — is everything."

The Rudd Group's research suggests different products can fulfil different customer needs at different moments — potentially creating more reasons to stay, play and spend.

Data collated during this summer's World Cup confirmed that different entertainment products performed better at different stages of the night.

And wider data compiled across The Rudd Group's estate showed that venues offering pool and darts don't appear to suffer from a lower gaming spend. In fact, those pubs revealed a significantly higher gaming revenue.

The Rudd Group estate operates more than 7,000 entertainment products across the UK.

And the Newcastle-based business is constantly monitoring industry trends in a bid to best serve its growing customer base.

"There is a clear association between increased income and those venues that are home to a full suite of entertainment products," adds Nick.

"Across our estate we found that gaming machines in venues that also offer pool and darts show 56 per cent higher income compared to those without pool and darts.

"It's clear that other factors can contribute to that variation in income — venue size, footfall, trading strength, customer profile, opening hours etc. — but our figures directly challenge the assumption that different entertainment products steal spend from others."

The Rudd Group paid particular attention to the habits of pub goers during a World Cup that led to extended opening hours and later nights.

And the consumer spending trends that Nick and colleagues observed throughout the tournament helped to shape what the firm has coined 'The Entertainment Journey'.

"As an example, we tracked hourly activity across gaming machines, contactless pool and Target Dartzones during England's delayed World Cup last-16 match against Mexico," he explains.

"Rather than all three products peaking together — and apparently competing for the same moment — each had a different usage pattern across the evening.

"Gaming machines peaked at 6pm, several hours before kick-off. Contactless pool built through the evening and peaked at 11pm, during the pre-match social period.

"Target Dartzone was later again: usage was still climbing at 11pm and 30% of the day's darts were thrown between 10pm and midnight.

"Put together, the data shows three distinctly different entertainment patterns across one customer occasion.

"Our description of this is The Entertainment Journey: gaming opens the evening, pool carries the 'social middle' and darts becomes increasingly important later on."

www.theruddgroup.co.uk

You've changed. Has your marketing?

By Senga Kean,
Marketing Director & Principal Consultant at dodio

I've worked in marketing for more than 20 years and one thing I still see all the time is organisations approaching marketing through one-off activities.

They need a new website, want to focus on social media, decide it's time for a flashy campaign or think they should suddenly be investing in SEO. Sometimes these are perfectly reasonable decisions, but what I'm always more interested in is asking what they're trying to achieve and whether that particular activity is actually the best way to get there.

Organisations constantly change. They grow, introduce new services, reach different audiences, restructure teams and shift their priorities, but their marketing doesn't always evolve at the same pace. Sometimes that's obvious because the website no longer represents the organisation, but it can also show up in inconsistent messaging, disconnected campaigns or money being spent across different channels without anyone really looking at how they work together.

Some of the most valuable conversations I have with clients happen before we decide what any of that activity should look like. When I sit down with a leadership team, we'll look at where the organisation is now, where it wants to go, who it needs to reach, what the data is telling us and what resources and expertise already exist internally. Those conversations often go much wider than marketing because customer journeys, internal communications, systems, capacity and wider business priorities can all affect what marketing needs to do.



Senga Kean

It's why UNDERSTAND. CREATE. has become such an important part of the refreshed dodio brand. Understanding comes first because there's little value in driving more people on a customer journey that doesn't work, creating more content when the message isn't clear or investing in a new website without knowing what you need it to achieve.

It also reflects why we increasingly work with organisations as a Strategic Marketing & Communications Partner rather than simply delivering individual services. For us, that means becoming integrated with the organisation, working closely with leadership teams, understanding the wider priorities and having the context to see how marketing and communications can support them. It means we're not simply responding to individual briefs

as they arise, but helping to shape priorities, connect activity and identify where investment is most likely to have an impact.

For me, this isn't about encouraging organisations to spend more on marketing. It's about making sure the budget, resources and expertise they have are being used effectively, with activity that connects back to what the organisation is trying to achieve. That's where I believe a genuinely strategic partnership can make the biggest difference.

After more than 20 years in marketing, that's the bit I probably enjoy most, getting under the skin of an organisation, asking the right questions and working out where marketing can genuinely make a difference.

dodio.co.uk



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Nicky celebrates four decades of property experience

A Washington-based property professional with almost 40 years of experience in the housing sector is helping landlords and investors navigate the North East property market through a customer-focused approach built on knowledge, honesty and accountability.

Nicky Middleton, owner and director of Oasis Sales and Lettings and The One Stop Property Shop North East, has spent her entire working life in housing, beginning her career with the local council before progressing through a wide range of roles in both the public and private sectors.

"I've seen just about everything the housing

sector can throw at you," she said. "From helping vulnerable families and dealing with anti-social behaviour to supporting people through some of the most difficult times in their lives. Those experiences taught me that housing is about people first and property second."

Nicky spent many years working in housing offices serving communities across Northumberland's former coalfield areas before taking time away from the sector to support her daughter. She later returned to housing through private lettings agencies, building extensive experience before launching her own business in 2019.

The decision to establish her own company came from a desire to offer a more personal service than she felt many larger agencies could provide.

"One of the biggest frustrations I saw was a lack of continuity for landlords. Clients would speak to a different person every time they called. With us, clients know exactly who they're dealing with, and they can reach us when they need us."

Today, Nicky's business provides everything from property sourcing and investment advice to refurbishment project management and long-term property management.



Quality award for Banks Homes' new Yarm residential development

The quality of the work being delivered by the team at a new Tees Valley residential development has seen it selected for a property industry award.

Banks Homes' Cornfields development on the southern edge of Yarm has earned a Quality Recognition Award (QRA) from national structural warranty and building control provider Premier Guarantee, which monitors and underwrites the effective delivery of residential developments across the country.

The awards are judged against the standards being maintained by housebuilders across the whole of the UK, with QRA winners having to reach set standards within all categories during each of their monthly surveyor visits for at least six consecutive months.

The Cornfields will now go forward for consideration for Premier Guarantee's annual Excellence Awards next summer, where the best of the QRA winners from across the UK will be up for national recognition.

A five-strong Banks Homes direct site management team led by site manager Steve Graham and an array of local contractors are building 109 high-quality family homes at The Cornfields, which is the first development to feature show homes based on designs from Banks Homes' bespoke range of new homes.

A total of 11 different property designs are available, with each of the three-to-five-bedroom properties being fitted with smart heating systems, air source heat pumps and electric vehicle car charging points.

The four and five-bedroom homes come with ground floor underfloor heating as standard, along with selected house types in Banks Homes' Elevated range having 2.6m high ceilings on the ground floor.



Street scene image released of new Bellway development in Wynyard

Bellway is building 179 sustainable new homes at Oakwood at Wynyard Park, which will be accessed via Musgrave Garden Lane and Attenborough Way, and opened a sales cabin on site recently. Two showhomes are due to open later this year.

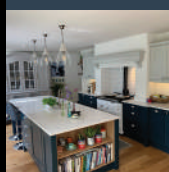
The computer-generated images include depictions of individual house designs as well as a view of the wider street scene at the development. They show the attractive design of the homes, and the materials and architectural features which have been chosen to complement existing properties in the area, including gable fronts, brick

detailing and stone-style windowsills.

Victoria Dry, Sales Manager for Bellway Durham, said: "Oakwood at Wynyard Park has been carefully designed to respect the rural setting of Wynyard Park and the character of homes in neighbouring areas.

"This can be seen in the computer-generated street scene, which shows what the new homes will look like once they are complete. Materials and architectural features mirror those seen locally, helping the development to blend in with its surroundings.

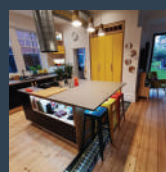
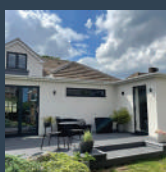
"There's a variety of 13 different house styles being built at Oakwood at Wynyard Park to meet the needs of a wide range of customers, from two-bedroom bungalows to three, four and five-bedroom houses. The four-bedroom Mercer, Lorimer and Plane house designs in this image are just three of the seven four-bedroom designs available."



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Hartlepool-based Northern HV celebrates inaugural charity golf day at Seaton Carew Golf Club

High Voltage electrical engineering specialist Northern HV is celebrating an ace day after hosting its first-ever charity golf event, raising vital funds for Alice House Hospice.

Following a fantastic day of competition in the September sunshine, organisers confirmed plans are already underway for the Northern HV Golf Day to return next year. Players travelled from across the country to take part, highlighting the strength of the firm's new partnership with Seaton Carew Golf Club, regarded as one of the top 50 courses in the country.

Check out www.northernhv.co.uk





Banks Homes' first apprentices start building property careers

Three talented young people are starting to build careers in the property industry after being chosen as housebuilder Banks Homes' first ever apprentices.

Amy Ward, James Rylance and Kaci Lonsdale have successfully completed a rigorous selection process designed by the County Durham-headquartered firm to help increase

the number of staff that it brings through its ranks.

Amy is now working as a commercial trainee at the company's Meadowfield headquarters, while James has moved into a trainee assistant site manager role and Kaci has joined the business as a trainee sales executive. Both James and Kaci will be working across a number of Banks Homes' residential developments in the North East and Yorkshire.

Bespoke apprenticeship training programmes have been developed with Northumbria University, New College Durham and Sunderland College to ensure the new apprentices have access to the outside support they will need as their training progresses. Each role will also enable the new recruits to gain formal qualifications, including up to degree level, in their respective areas of expertise.

Founded in 2023 and part of North East employer the Banks Group, Banks Homes has an expanding portfolio of high-quality residential sites, with development under way at sites in County Durham, the Tees Valley and North Yorkshire and work due to start in other locations through the rest of this year.



A first look at The Maxim, Sunderland's newest riverside address

House hunters in Sunderland and further afield are now able to register their interest in the city's most exciting new housing development, The Maxim at Vaux, as enquiries open for the award-winning, 34-home neighbourhood on the edge of the River Wear.

The two-and-three-bedroom homes combine contemporary design with sustainability, delivering stylish, energy-efficient living in an unrivalled city-centre location. The first collection of 10 terraced houses and eight maisonettes will be move-in ready in early 2027.

The second collection, a further 16 homes based on the developer igloo's award-winning Home of 2030 designs, will see homeowners receiving their keys in autumn 2027. The homes draw on concepts developed through a national competition to reimagine how future homes can be greener, more flexible and better suited to modern lifestyles.

Designed for everyday living and built to last, the homes incorporate the latest eco-friendly features and technologies, including large windows to flood the homes with natural light, air-source heat pumps, solar panels and whole-house ventilation. Future homeowners now have the chance to be part of an award-winning sustainable community, shaped by igloo's experience in creating places that people love.

The Maxim is the first phase of Vaux, a new neighbourhood taking shape within the Riverside Sunderland regeneration area. Close to City Hall and the new Keel Bridge, as well as a range of cultural destinations, bars, restaurants and landscaped public spaces, the homes offer easy connectivity via local transport links to the wider city and beyond.

In a nod to its iconic location, the neighbourhood is named after Double Maxim, the much-loved Sunderland beer, which was originally brewed on the site and has since been revived by local brewery Maxim, following the closure of the Vaux Brewery in 1999.



Young Gardeners create their 'happy place' at Lovell development in Morpeth

A wildlife-friendly garden designed and created by young people with additional needs has been unveiled at a new housing development in Morpeth.

The show home garden at Edward's Birch was a collaborative project between The Alnwick Garden's Young Gardeners programme and national partnership housing specialist Lovell. Working alongside One Landscapes, a contractor of Lovell in the North East, the group completed their first commercial garden, which will be viewed by prospective buyers visiting the development.

It includes a range of features aimed at supporting wildlife, such as hedgehog houses,

bird feeding tables, and colourful flowers to attract bees, butterflies and other pollinators. It is hoped these will inspire visitors to recreate these nature-positive ideas in their own gardens.

The show home garden also features two raised beds to demonstrate where vegetables can be grown, painted rocks decorated by the Young Gardeners with colourful vegetables, fruit, patterns and phrases promoting happiness and wellbeing, and benches for quiet contemplation. A pathway from the French doors at the rear of the property leads up to a wooden arch at the entrance to the planted area, where a sign reads, 'Welcome to Our Happy Place by The Young Gardeners.'

The project forms part of an ongoing partnership between Lovell and The Alnwick Garden, with Lovell previously sponsoring an installation at The Alnwick Garden Winter Light Trail and donating money for the Young Gardeners' polytunnels.



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William Thornton

Good reasons to look North

By William Thornton, Head of Residential, youngsRPS

What the latest Rightmove figures tell us about the North East property market.

National property headlines rarely tell the whole story.

Rightmove's latest House Price Index reported a 2% seasonal fall in average asking prices in August. Yet in the North East, asking prices remain 1.7% higher than a year ago.

And there are signs that the autumn market is starting with renewed momentum. Rightmove recorded a 7% increase in North East buyer demand during the first five days of September, ahead of the 5% uplift seen nationally.

For William Thornton, Head of Residential Agency at youngsRPS, the figures reinforce the importance of looking beyond national averages.

"Property has always been a local market and these figures demonstrate that very clearly. The national picture provides useful context, but it doesn't necessarily reflect what we're seeing here in the North East.

"There are active buyers in the market and good properties, brought to market at the right price, are attracting interest. The 7% increase in buyer demand at the start of September is particularly encouraging as we enter what is traditionally an important period for the housing market."

More than affordability

The North East remains one of the most affordable places to buy a home in England, but price alone doesn't explain its appeal.

Newcastle offers the employment, culture, universities and connectivity of a major regional city. Travel relatively short distances and buyers can choose from the Tyne Valley, the Northumberland countryside and coast, market towns and villages, or the communities of County Durham.

For buyers moving into the region, that can mean considerably more space for their budget. For those already here, it offers the ability to change lifestyle without necessarily leaving the North East.

William continues: "Affordability is undoubtedly one of our strengths, particularly when you compare what the same budget can buy here with many other parts of the country. But I don't think we should define the North East simply as somewhere property is cheaper.

"Quality of life is a huge part of the equation. We have a vibrant city in Newcastle, exceptional countryside and coastline, strong communities and good connectivity. Increasingly, those are the things buyers are weighing up alongside the property itself."

Demand beyond the sales market

The strength of housing demand can also be seen in the rental sector.

Private rents across the North East increased by 6.3% in the year to July, the highest annual increase of any English region. At the same time, an average monthly rent of £783 means the North East remains England's most affordable rental region.

Rising rents clearly present challenges for tenants and shouldn't be viewed as positive in themselves. What the figures do demonstrate is sustained demand for homes across the region and the importance of ensuring there is sufficient good quality rental stock available.

A market that rewards getting it right

Greater buyer choice is changing the dynamics of the sales market too.

Buyers are increasingly well informed. They know what else is available, can compare properties quickly and have more freedom to wait for the right home.

For sellers, that makes the initial approach to market increasingly important.

Rightmove reports that almost three quarters of homes sold so far this year have achieved a sale without requiring an asking-price reduction.

"This isn't a market in which sellers need to be pessimistic, but it is one where they need to be realistic," says William.

"Getting the price right from the outset matters. Buyers have more choice and will quickly recognise when something doesn't represent the market.

"A strong launch, good presentation and an asking price supported by local evidence can create competition. Starting too high and reducing later can have exactly the opposite effect."

Looking locally

There are still challenges. Mortgage costs continue to influence affordability and confidence, and Rightmove has revised its national forecast for asking-price growth in 2026 to between 0% and -2%.

But that national forecast should not become shorthand for the prospects of every regional market.

Here in the North East, annual asking-price growth remains positive. Buyer demand began September with a stronger uplift than the national average. The rental figures point to sustained demand for housing. And relative affordability remains a significant advantage.

The frantic conditions seen during parts of the post-pandemic market may have gone, but a calmer market should not automatically be mistaken for a weaker one.

For buyers, there is more choice. For sellers, strategy matters. And for the North East, the fundamental appeal of the region remains unchanged.

The latest figures suggest that, in an increasingly regional housing market, the North East continues to have a compelling story to tell.

[youngsrps.com](https://www.youngsrps.com)

Growth built on strong foundations

Continued growth is something every business works towards, but for MES Construction, growth has always been about more than simply taking on more projects. It is about building the right team, maintaining high standards and ensuring the business has the skills and experience needed to support its clients as it develops.

Based in Sunderland, MES Construction has continued to expand its workload across renovations, new-build developments and wider construction projects, creating a growing demand for skilled people to join the team.

The company's approach has remained consistent throughout this growth: deliver quality workmanship, communicate effectively and build long-term relationships with clients. As the number and scale of projects increase, investing in the workforce is an important part of ensuring those standards are maintained.

MES Construction is now recruiting for three full-time positions: a General Skilled Labourer, Roofer and Plasterer.

The General Skilled Labourer will work across both renovation and new-build projects, supporting the wider team across a varied range of works. The company is also looking for an experienced Roofer to undertake new roofs, extensions and repairs, alongside a full-time Plasterer, with experience in boarding and rendering preferred.



While experience and technical ability are important, MES Construction is equally focused on finding people with the right approach.

Construction projects rely on different trades working together, often across several stages of a build. The successful candidates will therefore need to be comfortable working alongside and supporting other trades when required, with teamwork, reliability and pride in the finished result all playing an important role.

For MES Construction, recruitment is not simply about filling vacancies. It is an investment in the next stage of the company's development.

As the business continues to secure new work and strengthen its presence within the

construction industry, expanding the team will provide additional capacity while helping MES continue delivering the standards its clients expect.

Rates of pay will be discussed based on experience, with company vans also available for the right candidates.

For those looking for their next opportunity within a growing construction company, MES Construction would be pleased to hear from experienced applicants interested in becoming part of the team.

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Neil Turner

Why Architects should be registered

By Neil Turner, Director, Howarth Litchfield

I read with interest that George Clark, architect (and TV presenter) has recently argued against the RIBA campaign for greater protection of the title and role of 'architect.'

At first, it looks like a slightly sensational headline, but I understand the point that he makes. He advocates the use of architects but only because of the benefits that they can bring to a project or service. RIBA is campaigning hard for reserving 'critical activities to those who are regulated'.

However, throughout my career I have come across lots of people who purport to be designers, architectural designer, arkitects – yes

even spelling it differently – to design buildings without being registered or trained.

An architect spends a minimum seven years to train and qualify, learning a huge number of skills, knowledge and talents; so that they can advise clients, people and bodies on our built environment. An architect is qualified and they must take mandatory courses, re-training constantly to satisfy yearly requirements. This is real value.

Registration and protection of the title is important. Just like when you see a doctor, an accountant or lawyer you want the re-assurance that they are highly skilled professionals, who maintain their knowledge.

When I bid for work, I am often asked for my qualifications, skills and CV, so I don't see why more mandatory compliance is a problem. I have written before that many European countries require a competent person – an architect – to sign off planning permissions.

What is wrong with insisting that certain projects require an architect or review bodies to have greater say on planning applications – using skilled architects and other professionals, to increase design quality.

I think the public is more interested in design than ever, partly due to the large number of TV shows. But what they don't see is that producing is building is far more than good design.

A building project needs cost control, structures, an environmental approach, detail and material knowledge. Many architects focus on the design and lack the experience to fully detail projects. Contract administration is a further skill on traditional projects and there is great enjoyment in working with contractors to turn a design into a built form, on time and to an agreed budget.

So, I applaud the RIBA for trying to protect the role and status. We can't force people to use an architect, but I think we can make it far clearer on the advantages of using a skilled professional on a project.

The role has changed through my career, and I think greater emphasis is needed on the training of architects to include business, cost control and technical aspects, besides the artistic and creative abilities.

So, when you have a building project, it should be your first decision to employ a professional team and especially the architect. I am bound to say that, of course. But I strongly believe the benefits of the accreditation offer protection for the public, clients and companies in all aspects of work.

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

Bold Developments: Investing in the future of the North East



L-R: Michael Hafferty, Adriana Cafasso, James Positano

Property investment has the potential to deliver far more than financial returns. Done well, it can breathe new life into underused buildings, create exceptional places to live, strengthen local communities and contribute to the long-term prosperity of a region.

That belief sits at the heart of Bold Developments.

Founded by Adriana Cafasso, James Positano and Michael Hafferty, Bold was created after the three recognised just how closely their values, experience and ambitions for the North East aligned. Together, they bring expertise spanning investment, finance, construction and development delivery, creating a team capable of supporting opportunities from initial acquisition right through to completion.

Bold specialises in carefully selected co-living, residential and mixed-use developments, with

a particular focus on transforming underused buildings into high-quality, well-designed homes.

For investors, the approach is built around identifying opportunities with strong potential and providing the experience and support needed throughout the development journey. The aim is not simply to complete projects, but to create sustainable, long-term value through considered investment and high standards of delivery.

However, Bold's ambitions extend beyond individual developments.

The team is passionate about the North East and believes there is a significant opportunity to attract further investment into the region while ensuring more wealth is retained within local communities.

With major employers continuing to invest in and relocate to the North East, demand for high-quality, well-located accommodation is also evolving. Bold aims to work alongside businesses, employers and relocation partners to help provide the homes needed to support this growth.

By aligning its developments with wider regeneration and economic growth plans, the company wants each project to contribute to a bigger picture. That means bringing neglected

or underutilised properties back into productive use, improving the quality of accommodation available and supporting the continued development of towns and cities across the region.

It is an approach that has already gained national recognition.

Bold has been named Investment Agency of the Year 2025, while the team's achievements were further recognised with the Young Investor of the Year 2025 award.

Having already delivered hundreds of units across the North East, Bold is now investing millions of pounds into regeneration projects throughout the region.

For Adriana, James and Michael, the ambition is clear: to build a business that generates strong opportunities for investors while creating places people are proud to call home.

By combining commercial experience with a genuine commitment to the North East, Bold Developments is helping to create lasting value for investors, residents and the region as a whole.

To discuss investment, development or partnership opportunities with Bold Developments, contact developments@boldest.co.uk

Connectivity at the heart of Esh Construction's infrastructure projects



Across Barton-upon-Humber, Guisborough and Middlesbrough, Esh Construction is delivering infrastructure projects with connectivity at their heart, strengthening communities and supporting long-term growth through investment in public realm, active travel and transport infrastructure.

Major transport improvements set for Barton-upon-Humber

A £5.1 million programme of transport and connectivity improvements has commenced in Barton-upon-Humber, with Esh delivering the scheme on behalf of North Lincolnshire Council.

The project will strengthen links between residential areas, the town centre and Barton railway station, while making sustainable travel more attractive.

Works will be delivered in phases across the town, beginning at Whitecross Street and Tofts Road. Alongside highway and junction upgrades, the scheme will introduce safer crossings and improved walking and cycling infrastructure to connect communities, schools and key destinations.

A new Mobility Hub at Barton railway station will provide upgraded paving, waiting facilities and covered cycle storage. The investment is designed to create a seamless journey for rail users and support sustainable travel.

The project will also provide opportunities for local people through social value initiatives focused on education, skills and employment.

Transformation is gathering pace in Guisborough

While work gets underway in Barton, significant progress is already being made in

Guisborough, where Esh's civil engineering division is delivering two improvement schemes on behalf of Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council. Together, the projects represent a £9.3 million investment in the town, enhancing the town centre and active travel network.

In the town centre, new paving has been installed, pedestrian routes improved and preparations are underway for market stalls to return. The reopening of the pedestrian crossing has allowed work to continue on Westgate and Chaloner Street, maintaining momentum on the programme.

Designed to improve accessibility and create a more welcoming environment, the improvements include upgraded pavements, new street furniture, enhanced lighting and a new pedestrian crossing. Once complete, the works will support local businesses, improve visitor experience and create a vibrant public space.

Progress continues on a walking and cycling route linking Guisborough town centre with Guisborough Forest Visitor Centre at Pinchinthorpe. Recent milestones include the completion of raised table crossings at Staindale and Campion Drive, while installation is underway at Falcon Way. New footways, drainage improvements and safer crossings are being delivered, encouraging active travel and connectivity.

Alongside the physical improvements, the

project is creating lasting benefits beyond construction. Through its social value commitments, Esh has supported Newcastle Rugby Foundation's Tackling Health programme, helping local children develop healthier habits through rugby and wellbeing sessions. The programme reported that 68% of participants felt more confident making healthy lifestyle choices, while 70% were inspired to take part in more sport.

Vital bridge refurbishment completed in Middlesbrough

Elsewhere in Teesside, Esh has completed a refurbishment programme at the A172 Marton Road/A174 Interchange in Middlesbrough, extending the lifespan of the 54-year-old bridge.

Delivered in partnership with Middlesbrough Council, the scheme included concrete repairs beneath the bridge, replacement waterproofing and expansion joints, carriageway resurfacing and the installation of new kerbs and footways. New pedestrian parapets and guardrails were also installed.

Completed while maintaining access on one of Middlesbrough's busiest routes, the project has enhanced the resilience of a key piece of infrastructure and secured an important connection for motorists, pedestrians and communities. The bridge and A174 slip roads reopened following completion of the works.

Together, these projects demonstrate how infrastructure investment supports communities, accessibility and long-term growth. Whether creating better public spaces, encouraging active travel or maintaining vital transport links, Esh Construction continues to deliver lasting benefits across the regions it serves.

To find out more about Esh Construction, visit www.eshgroup.co.uk.



L-R: Rob Jepson, contracts co-ordinator, Lee Haddock, managing director and James Dykes, buyer

Two key appointments strengthen Newcastle head office team

John N Dunn Group has made two key appointments at its Newcastle head office as its order book continues to grow, with James Dykes joining as buyer and Rob Jepson as contracts co-ordinator.

James joins fellow buyer, Liz Gair, in the purchasing department, where he will be responsible for sourcing materials and equipment for the Group's projects and managing relationships with suppliers.

James, said: "With the order book continuing to grow, making sure our projects have the right materials, at the right time, is increasingly important. I'm looking forward to working with Liz and building strong relationships with our supply chain, while making sure the buying function continues to keep pace with the demands of the business."

As contracts co-ordinator, Rob will manage coordination between the estimating and buying teams. He will also deal directly with merchants when issues need to be escalated beyond individual branches, helping to resolve challenges and keeping procurement on track.

Before joining John N Dunn Group, Rob worked for a major independent builders' merchant, where he progressed to an acting branch manager position.

That background means he understands the requirements of both sides of the supply chain, including the pressures faced by merchants and the importance of clear communication when dealing with contractors.

Originally from Preston, Rob moved to the North East a couple of years ago and now lives in Tanfield.

Rob, said: "I've spent a large part of my career on the merchant side, so I know how things look from the other side of the counter. I understand the pressures branches are under and also the frustration that can arise when something isn't resolved quickly. That experience will be valuable in this role,

particularly when an issue needs to be taken beyond branch level and a solution needs to be found."

Lee Haddock, managing director of John N Dunn Group in the North East, said: "We have a strong pipeline of work across the business and as that continues to build, it is important we have the right people and expertise in place behind our project teams. James brings vast buying experience to the Newcastle office, while Rob's background in the merchant sector gives us a different perspective on our supply chain. Both appointments will add real value as we continue to grow."

Established in 1893, the company employs around 300 people and works on up to 100 live projects at any one time. Predominantly a new-build mechanical and electrical contractor, John N Dunn Group works on housing developments for many of the UK's major housebuilders, while also delivering commercial contracts with the same focus on quality and cost efficiency.

Its specialist services include plumbing and heating, electrical installation and renewable energy, with a reputation built on quality craftsmanship, reliability and a strong commitment to the communities in which it operates. With offices and teams across the North East, Yorkshire and Scotland, the company provides services across a wide range of construction and property projects.

www.jndunn.co.uk

Kate Barclay appointed as business support manager at CECA North East

CECA North East has appointed Kate Barclay as its new business support manager, with an initial focus on supporting the organisation's work to help address the civil engineering sector's skills gap.

Kate, from Jarrow, studied Business Administration at the University of Sunderland and joins CECA North East following a career in finance and property management. She brings extensive experience in business support, office management, project coordination and stakeholder engagement, with many of the skills directly transferable to her new role.

The Civil Engineering Contractors Association (CECA) is the representative body for companies that deliver, upgrade and maintain the UK's essential infrastructure. In the North East, the organisation works with contractors, clients, education providers and industry partners to support members and help ensure the sector has the skilled workforce needed to deliver future infrastructure projects.

Reporting to director and secretary, Stuart Miller, Kate will provide business support, project management and coordination to help deliver CECA North East's Annual Business Plan and strategic priorities across its five core pillars: Sustainability, Climate Change and Social Value; Careers and Recruitment; Skills and Training; Clients and Workload and Health, Safety and Wellbeing.

Initially, a significant part of Kate's focus will be supporting the industry's response to the skills gap. Working closely with CECA North East's Foundations Group, member companies, schools, colleges, universities and training providers, she will help develop region-wide initiatives that encourage more young people to enter the profession. This will include promoting apprenticeship, graduate and work



experience opportunities, supporting skills bootcamps and educational outreach activities and raising awareness of the diverse career opportunities available within civil engineering.

Kate will take over delivery of the CECA College Bursary Scheme, working with local colleges to promote the industry and encourage new entrants. Alongside the CECA Foundations Group, she will also support delivery of the new groundworker Olympics for the 2026/27 academic year, as well as CECA North East's work with members and other stakeholders to develop a new initiative aimed at increasing the supply of trained groundworkers into the industry.

Kate Barclay, said: "This is an exciting time to join CECA North East, which is doing some really important work to support the civil engineering sector and its members.

"One of the things that attracted me to the role was the opportunity to work with schools, colleges, training providers and industry to help inspire the next generation. By encouraging more young people to explore the wide range of careers available in civil engineering, we can help address the industry's skills gap while creating opportunities that could shape their futures."

Kate will also design and deliver social media campaigns and marketing activity to encourage new entrants into the civil engineering sector, while supporting the planning, administration and promotion of online and face-to-face events, training courses and member engagement initiatives covering legal and commercial matters, health and safety, sustainability and social value. In addition, she will work closely with client organisations, CECA members, associate members, sponsors and education partners to strengthen collaboration across the sector.

Stuart Miller, said: "Kate's appointment reflects our commitment to supporting members and ensuring CECA North East continues to deliver real value across the region. As our programme of activity continues to grow, this role will strengthen our ability to develop new initiatives, support existing programmes and respond to some of the key opportunities and challenges facing the civil engineering sector.

"Kate brings valuable experience in business support, project coordination and stakeholder engagement, which will enhance the work we do on behalf of our members."

www.ceca.co.uk

The power of breath

By Craig Robinson, Meditation Teacher (DipBSoM)

Breath is the most natural, mindful tool we have and the most immediate way to change our state of mind and body.



Craig Robinson

It's always with us, this little pocket rocket for when we need it. Conscious, meditative breathing calms the nervous system, sharpens attention, and brings us back to the present in seconds.

I often use the breath when needed. I delivered a talk on "Meditation to avoid burnout" at the North Tyneside Business forum. A few minutes before I was up, I realised there were over 50 people in the room and the nerves suddenly hit me. Panic and fear were creeping, so I took myself to the gents and brought my mind back into my body using the breath. I used the Black and White breathing technique, I was re-centred, confident and ready.

Why breath works: Breath links body and mind. Slow, intentional breathing signals safety to the brain and reduces the fight-or-flight cascade. Even a few mindful breaths can interrupt a spiral of worry, fear or anger and bring you back to a place of peace and calm.

Practical breathing techniques

- **Three-part breath:** Inhale into belly, then ribs, then chest; exhale chest, ribs, belly. Move slowly and smoothly.
- **4-6-8 calming breath:** Inhale 4; hold 6; exhale 8. Repeat until the body softens.
- **Black and White breathing:** Breathe in white light of calm; hold; breathe out the dark smoke of tension.

Is this Meditation? Whenever you consciously bring your mind to your breath, this is a practice of meditation. The more frequently you do this, the more resilient you will become.

If you combine this with a daily "sit down" meditation practice of 10+ minutes then you will really notice the results.

Bringing breath into daily life: The next time you notice panic, fear or anger rising, see if you can take a moment, pause, and follow one of the above meditative breathing techniques. It's amazing how you can change the outcome of a situation just by becoming aware of breath.

If you'd like to learn more, come along to my meditation classes www.clearmindmeditation.co.uk

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Jan Dale *introduces...*

insideproperty

Property has always been a passion of mine, and to me it's about so much more than bricks and mortar. It's about people, places, ambition and the vision to create something that connects with how we want to live today.

In this new feature, I'll be introducing some of the dynamic people, businesses and property opportunities catching my eye – both closer to home and further afield. From emerging developers and distinctive new homes to exciting destinations, I'll be sharing the stories and people behind the property.

MEET SAM DAVIS

Taking a fresh approach to property – and life – in Spain.

Some people have a natural eye for opportunity, and Sam Davis is one of them. Sam and his wife Lillie took their passion for property and lifestyle to Spain, where they founded Amaré Properties, specialising in exceptional homes across the Costa Blanca and Mallorca.

Now celebrating its first year, Amaré focuses on understanding both the property clients want and the life they hope to create around it.

Sam, Lillie and Leo (the Golden Retriever) moved to Spain in 2019, eventually settling in Villajoyosa on the Costa Blanca.

“It was by chance that we landed in this area, but I can’t ever see us leaving Costa Blanca North now. The community is amazing and it’s such a beautiful part of Spain.”

And Sam very much lives the lifestyle he sells.

“I have the sun, beaches and caña – what more could you want?”



After working within a Spanish property agency, Sam saw an opportunity to offer something more personal. Amaré combines informed property advice with professional photography, drone content and modern marketing, helping homes reach the right buyers.

Sam accompanies clients on viewings and takes time to understand their needs, giving them the knowledge and confidence to navigate the Spanish property market.

Lillie has also played an important role in Amaré's growth, including creating its online presence. Ben Keen and I now support the business from the UK, helping British clients make their move to Spain with confidence.

Meanwhile, Sam and Lillie are creating their own Spanish dream by renovating a villa and embracing a lifestyle that would be difficult to leave behind.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Sam plans to grow the Amaré team with people who share its values and integrity, while expanding the company's presence across Spain. Mallorca and Ibiza are firmly on the horizon.

When I ask whether he ever wishes he were back in the UK, his answer is wonderfully simple:

“No. Life’s just too good here.”

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For more information on how Amaré can support your property search, get in touch with Sam, Lillie, Ben or yours truly. We'd be delighted to help you on the journey.

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Regional MD joins National Association of Shopfitters Executive Council

Stephen Flynn, Managing Director of North East-based shopfitting and fit-out specialist Rosebirc, has joined the Executive Council of the National Association of Shopfitters (NAS), bringing more than three decades of industry experience to the organisation's leadership team.

The appointment recognises Stephen's longstanding connection with the association and his commitment to developing skills, apprenticeships and opportunities within the shopfitting sector. The association with NAS started when Rosebirc joined as a member in the 1980s, while Stephen himself attended his first NAS regional meeting in the late 1990s. He now takes a place on the elected body responsible for helping shape the association's policy and direction.

His career has followed a similarly long-standing path within the industry. Stephen began his career as an apprentice in 1990, working his way through every department of the family business before becoming Managing Director in 2018. That hands-on experience has given him an understanding of the industry from both the shop floor and senior management perspective.

For Stephen, the appointment is an opportunity to contribute to the future of an industry in which he has spent his entire working life.

"Rosebirc's membership of the NAS has always been about being part of a larger voice for the industry," he says. "For me, that has always been particularly important when it comes to training, development and apprenticeships. We are passionate about creating opportunities, and I'm looking forward to helping the NAS continue that work."

His involvement with skills development extends beyond his role at Rosebirc. Stephen

has also served on the National Working Group for Wood Occupations participating in the review of National Occupational Standards. He has also worked directly with CITB as part of the Employer Network Steering Group.

That focus on people and skills is reflected in his approach to running Rosebirc. Based in High Spen, Tyne and Wear, the second-generation family business specialises in bespoke shopfitting, joinery and commercial fit-out projects for clients across the UK and Europe. The company operates from a 15,000 sq ft manufacturing facility and combines traditional craftsmanship with modern manufacturing technology.

Stephen says one of his proudest achievements is the loyalty and retention of the Rosebirc workforce. Many employees have remained with the business for years, including people who were already working at the company when he himself was an apprentice. The company also continues to invest in apprenticeships and training as part of its approach to developing the next generation of skilled workers.

James Filus of the NAS said of the appointment: "Stephen joining us comes at an important time for the shopfitting and interior contracting sector, with businesses facing ongoing challenges around skills, recruitment, training and the development of new talent.

"The NAS Executive Council provides a platform for industry leaders to contribute to the direction of the sector and represent the interests of its membership. Stephen's combination of practical trade experience, family-business leadership and involvement in skills development gives him a strong perspective on some of the issues facing the industry."

Stephen's appointment also represents a milestone for Rosebirc at a time of significant growth. The company says it is proud to see its Managing Director take on a role that will allow him to contribute to the wider industry while continuing to champion the values of training, craftsmanship and long-term development. Stephen concluded:

"I'm delighted to have the opportunity to contribute to the Executive Council. The shopfitting industry has given me a great career, and I believe we have a responsibility to make sure the next generation has the same opportunities. If we can encourage more young people into the sector, support businesses in developing their people and continue to raise standards, then we can build a stronger industry for everyone."

rosebirc.co.uk



Stephen Flynn



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Bellrock appointed to provide project management services for £13.6m Sunderland Museum & Winter Gardens transformation



South Elevation of Sunderland Museum and Winter Gardens

Multi-disciplinary property and construction consultancy, Bellrock Consulting (Bellrock), is project managing the landmark £13.6m redevelopment of the Sunderland Museum & Winter Gardens on behalf of Sunderland City Council.

The refurbishment programme has been made possible thanks to The National Lottery Heritage Fund combined with a mix of other match funding sources including Sunderland City Council, Arts Council England, Museum, Estate and Development Fund (MEND) and The Wolfson Foundation.

Bellrock was appointed by Sunderland City Council in 2023 following a successful tender via the NEPO Framework. Following Bellrock's appointment, the project has been developed over the past two-and-a-half years through RIBA design stages. At the same time, Bellrock has assisted Sunderland City Council with its Heritage Lottery funding application.

Now the historic venue - a major cultural attraction for the city - has recently closed its doors to the public so that the refurbishment works can begin, marking the start of an ambitious two-year construction programme.

The next critical phase for Bellrock is to manage the contractor's procurement and formal appointment as part of a Pre-Construction Services Agreement. Bellrock's Associate Director and Lead Project Manager for the project, Leo Heath, said: "Managing a project



Sunderland Museum and Winter Gardens from Borough Road, Sunderland

of this scale, with such regional significance, presents unique logistical and engineering challenges. We are working within a Grade II listed building which features three distinct construction phases and methodologies alongside the bespoke Winter Gardens. With the last major intervention dating back to the early 2000s, much of the refurbishment will involve the building's fabric as well as incorporating modern designs to further improve Sunderland Museum's offering to its visitors.

"Safely preparing to work around and protect a delicate collection of over 108,000 museum artefacts, while safeguarding the Winter Gardens' living botanical collection and striking glass dome requires meticulous coordination. The project's central location within Sunderland adds operational complexity, but our team is fully mobilised to guide this precious cultural asset safely through its next chapter."

Councillor Ciera Hudspith, Cabinet Member for Culture, Tourism and Heritage at Sunderland City Council said: "Sunderland Museum & Winter Gardens has been a

cherished cornerstone of our community for generations. While we begin preparing the collections for their temporary hibernation, having to hand Bellrock's expert project management support and cost consultants ensures our heritage is protected and our vision is realised for future generations."

The venue is expected to be formally re-opened to the public in December 2028.

Other members of the professional team include Purcell Architecture; M&E and Civil Engineering, TGA Consultants; Structural Engineering, The Morton Partnership; Fire and Acoustic Engineering, Arup; Landscape Architects, Southern Green; Access Consultant: David Burdus and Mather & Co, Museum, Exhibition and Interpretation Design.

About The National Lottery Heritage Fund: Using money raised by the National Lottery, we inspire, lead and resource the UK's heritage to create positive and lasting change for people and communities, now and for the future.

www.bellrock.co.uk



David Lamb

How responsible landlords are being “strangled” by red tape

David Lamb, owner of Orange Sales and Lettings highlights worries about Government regulation.

Smaller landlords in the North East are being squeezed out of the property industry and being put off from making any further investments in the sector, at the same time as costs are also increasing for tenants at an alarming rate, due to the Rentals Reform Act. That's what David Lamb, professional landlord and owner of Orange Sales and Lettings based in Billingham is seeing, through his window into the lettings world.



David Lamb with his team

Orange Sales and Lettings manages almost 1,000 properties and David personally owns 47, enabling him to support other landlords from the perspective of someone who has been a property investor himself for more than 20 years.

David says there is now too much “red tape” for smaller landlords, and the costs and the bureaucracy introduced by the Rentals Reform Act is taking its toll, with costs ultimately being passed down to tenants or smaller landlords selling their portfolios to larger landlords or corporations.

“I am seeing a lot of landlords with smaller

portfolios or single properties leaving the industry because of the red tape, bureaucracy and associated costs,” he says.

“This is because the costs involved in being a compliant landlord are now huge compared to what they used to be.”

David highlights that while individual landlords are technically still taxed on rental profits - rental income minus allowable expenses like maintenance, insurance, and agency fees - Section 24 of the Finance Act 2015 means individual landlords cannot deduct mortgage interest or finance costs from their rental income, before calculating tax.

Instead, they receive a restrictive 20% tax credit. For higher-rate taxpayers, this means they pay tax on “profits” artificially inflated by their mortgage costs.

In highly leveraged portfolios, this can result in a tax bill that exceeds actual net cash profit - effectively functioning like a tax on turnover.

“To some landlords with one to five properties, it's not worth it anymore,” he says.

“The Government has just rolled out the landlord database, which is another cash grab, as they are charging everyone £65 per property per year to be a landlord database.”

The idea of the database is to provide the Government with information on all properties that are rented out across the UK - but David says they already have that information in other forms.

He said: “What the Government don't realise - or they do realise but are carrying on with this regardless - is that the person who absorbs these costs is the end user and landlords are being forced to pass this on to their tenants.

“It's the same way that a builders' merchant experiencing a cost increase in materials passes on those costs to builders and they pass those onto their customers.

“All these extra costs are building up for people at a time of great economic uncertainty.”

David says he works with a wide range of responsible landlords who are keen to keep costs as low as possible for their good tenants - but that is now becoming impossible.

He adds: “We currently have a housing crisis in the UK and stock within the rental market is becoming shorter and shorter.

“I feel as if the Government is strangling landlords and making it harder for landlords, which in turn is making it more difficult for people to find affordable housing options.

“Currently, we are seeing an increased amount of applications for the accommodation we are renting out - there is currently a huge demand for every rental property.

“It is a difficult time for landlords - but also a difficult time for tenants.”

If you would like to discuss your property requirements with the team at Orange, whether you are a landlord looking to sell or seeking good tenants, or you are looking to move into a rental property, visit www.angesalesandlettings.co.uk

BCCET primary schools celebrate exceptional SATs success

Primary schools across Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust are celebrating another year of outstanding achievement, with Trust pupils significantly outperforming national averages in the Key Stage 2 SATs assessments.

This year, 73.1% of pupils across the Trust achieved the expected standard in Reading, Writing and Mathematics combined, compared to the national average of 63%. The impressive results reflect the commitment of pupils, staff and families across BCCET's family of schools and the Trust's ongoing focus on educational excellence.

The achievement is particularly significant as it comes alongside another major milestone for the Trust. Every BCCET primary school currently holds a Good or Outstanding judgement from both Ofsted and the Catholic Schools Inspectorate (CSI), demonstrating consistently high standards in both education and Catholic life across the organisation.

Established in 2020, BCCET is a family of 26 primary schools and five secondary schools serving communities across East Durham, South Tyneside and Sunderland. Its primary schools include English Martyrs', Sunderland; Our Lady of Lourdes, Shotton Colliery; Our Lady of the Rosary, Peterlee; Our Lady Star of the Sea, Horden; SS Peter and Paul, South Shields; St Aloysius, Hebburn; St Bede's, Jarrow; St Bede's, South Shields; St Cuthbert's, Seaham; St Cuthbert's, Sunderland; St Godric's, Wheatley Hill; St Gregory's, South Shields; St James, Hebburn; St John Bosco, Sunderland; St Joseph's, Blackhall; St Joseph's, Jarrow; St Joseph's, Sunderland; St Leonard's, Sunderland; St Mary Magdalen's, Seaham; St Mary's, Jarrow; St Mary's, Sunderland; St Mary's, Wingate; St Matthew's, Jarrow; St Oswald's, South Shields; and St Patrick's, Sunderland.

The strong SATs performance highlights the impact of BCCET's collaborative approach, with schools sharing expertise, supporting one another and working together to ensure every child can flourish



academically, socially and spiritually. The Trust's vision of creating 'Better Schools, Better Communities, Better Futures in Christ' continues to translate into positive outcomes for young people across the North East.

For pupils preparing to move on to the next stage of their education, these results provide a strong foundation for future success and reinforce BCCET's reputation as one of the region's highest-performing Catholic education trusts.

Admissions are now open for the 2027 cohort.

For more information about BCCET and its primary schools, visit www.bccet.org.uk



Durham students turn the lens on Generative AI in new exhibition 'portrAlt' at The Dead Dog Gallery

At a moment when headlines are dominated by existential warnings, ethical panic, and corporate anxiety surrounding artificial intelligence, a group of young creatives in County Durham are offering something far more grounded and immediate: their own unfiltered perspective.

portrAlt brings together self-portraits created by students from Durham Sixth Form Centre. Hosted at The Dead Dog Gallery - a contemporary, community-led art space nestled in the heart of Durham - the exhibition grapples directly with what it means to make art in an era where digital tools can instantly fabricate reality.

portrAlt, an exploration of photography, promptography and the algorithmic mirror of AI, spans traditional photographic processes, cyanotype prints, graphic design and generative AI. Rather than passively accepting the technology or dismissing it entirely, the students used the project to actively test its limits.

Working under the guidance of award-winning portrait photographer Madeleine Waller, the students began with classical photographic techniques before moving, sometimes reluctantly, into promptography, digital



manipulation and AI add-ons. What emerged was a striking reflection of the algorithmic bias embedded within image generators, alongside a clear view of how these tools alter, stretch and distort human identity.

The visual work is paired with candid audio recordings of the students reflecting on the process in real time. These intimate voice notes capture the genuine tension, curiosity,

and uncertainty felt by a generation standing at the front lines of technological shift. Their reactions, ranging from anger and frustration to fascination, give visitors a rare, honest look at young people deciding for themselves whether to adopt, adapt, or reject these tools.

portrAlt goes beyond technical experimentation; it is a human-centred inquiry into identity, self-representation and the role of the artist at a time when technology is reshaping visual culture.

The exhibition was conceived and delivered by creative arts organisation The Forge in partnership with Durham Sixth Form Centre. It is supported by Into the Light, County Durham's place-based initiative dedicated to nurturing local talent, widening access to creative education and removing barriers to working in the creative sector.

EXHIBITION DETAILS:

Exhibition: **portrAlt:** An exploration of photography, promptography and the algorithmic mirror of AI

Dates: Open Thursdays & Fridays, 9.30am-3.30pm until 16 October 2026

Venue: The Dead Dog Gallery, Durham Sixth Form Centre, The Sands, Providence Row, Durham, DH1 1SG | **Admission:** Free

www.deaddoggallery.co.uk/portrait/
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Open Evenings

	St. Aidan's Catholic Academy, Sunderland, SR2 7HJ Year 6 Open Evening: 6.00 - 8.00 pm Tuesday 15 September 2026 staidanscatholicacademy.co.uk
	St. Anthony's Girls Catholic Academy, Sunderland, SR2 7JN Year 6 Open Evening: 4.30 - 6.30 pm Thursday 24 September 2026 st-anthonys-academy.com
	St. Aidan's & St. Anthony's Catholic 6th Form, Sunderland, SR2 7JN 6th Form Open Evening: 4.30 - 6.30 pm Thursday 15 October 2026 aaasixthform.com
	St. Bede's Catholic School & Byron 6th Form, Peterlee, SR8 1DE Year 6 Open Evening: 5.00 - 7.00 pm Thursday 24 September 2026 6th Form Open Evening: 5.30 - 7.30 pm Thursday 15 October 2026 st-bedes.org
	St. Joseph's Catholic Academy, Hebburn, NE31 2ET Year 6 Open Evening: 5.00 - 7.00 pm Thursday 24 September 2026 6th Form Open Evening: 5.30 - 7.30 pm Thursday 12 November 2026 stjosephs.uk.net
	St. Wilfrid's R.C. College, South Shields, NE34 0QA Year 6 Open Evening: 4.00 - 6.00 pm Thursday 1 October 2026 6th Form Open Evening: 4.00 - 6.00 pm Thursday 19 November 2026 st-wilfrids.org







James Miller

Think like Phil Spencer

By James Miller, Head of RGS Junior School

How to find the right school for your child.

If I wasn't working in education, I sometimes think I could have made a decent Phil Spencer.

I'm talking, of course, about the Location, Location, Location Phil Spencer; the man who can walk into a house and within minutes spot the things that really matter, while everyone else is distracted by the kitchen island and whether they like the wallpaper.

Choosing a school is a little like choosing a house. It's a big decision, it's hugely personal and, importantly, what one person loves, another may not like at all.

And that is why my first piece of advice to any parent visiting schools is simple: go and see them.

A website can tell you about results, facilities, fees and the curriculum. A prospectus can show you beautiful photographs. But neither can tell you how a school feels. You need to walk through the doors, listen to the conversations, meet the people and, most importantly, watch how your child responds to the vibe.

Because choosing a school shouldn't be about whether your child is right for the school. It should be about whether the school is right for your child.

Every child is different. Some thrive in a busy, bustling environment; others need somewhere smaller and more intimate. Some know exactly what they want to do; others need a school that will expose them to possibilities they haven't even considered yet. Some are academic, some sporty, some creative, some quietly curious – and most are a wonderful combination of all of these things.

So ask yourself: Can I see my child being happy here? Can I see them making friends? Will they be encouraged to try things they've never tried before? Will they be challenged? Will someone notice when they are struggling – and celebrate when they succeed?

That is where Open Mornings can be invaluable. At RGS Newcastle, our forthcoming Open Morning is a chance to look beyond the prospectus: to meet our pupils and teachers, explore our facilities and get a genuine sense of what makes the school tick.

But sometimes, an hour or two isn't quite enough.

At Westfield School - now part of the RGS Newcastle Group of Schools - we offer prospective pupils the opportunity to spend much longer in school, from extended taster days to, in some cases, a whole taster week. It means children can get properly involved in school life, meet other pupils, try lessons, join activities and experience the school as a member of the community rather than simply a visitor.

I think that is incredibly powerful.

The school where a child feels they belong is the school where they are most likely to thrive.

Of course, there are some practical things I would encourage parents to look at too. A school should have a strong track record and be well established, with sound financial foundations that give it the confidence to invest for the long term. Look carefully at the breadth of subjects and opportunities available – both inside and outside the classroom – and consider whether that breadth will continue to serve your child as they grow and their interests develop.

Look at academic outcomes, but don't look at results in isolation. Ask about pastoral care, SEND provision, co-curricular opportunities, destinations and how the school supports children as individuals. Look at the quality and stability of its staff. And ask whether the school has a clear sense of where it is going.

But above all, trust your instincts – and your child's.

You can spend hours comparing league tables, facilities and statistics. They all have their place. But sometimes the most important information comes when your child walks through the gates and simply says, "I like it here."

That's the school-hunting equivalent of Phil Spencer finding the house with the perfect location. And, in my experience, it's usually worth listening to.

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A place to grow

**Inside the booming
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nursery – where staff
'never leave'.**

The North East's largest independent nursery has enjoyed huge growth - not least because of what the founder believes is the Stockton site's 'secret sauce'.

Launched in 2011, The Montessori People Independent Nursery School, in Thornaby, is on course for its most successful year to date; Soaring demand, coupled with an expansion of the Tedder Avenue nursery, has seen pupil numbers soar by 98 per cent over the past 12 months.

Additionally, sales have soared by 90 per cent at the site, most recently rated 'Good' by Ofsted.

However, founder Michelle Skeekey believes the real success story lies beyond the figures.

"In early years, staff retention is undoubtedly one of the sector's biggest challenges," said Michelle, who founded the nursery after struggling to find suitable childcare for her own children.

"We've grown significantly in a short period, but we've done it without losing the people who make The Montessori People so special.

"We've got almost 40 staff here, yet not one member of our teaching team has chosen to leave the past three years - in early years, this is completely unheard of.

"And it is amazing for everyone - our children have stronger relationships but so do the parents. At drop off and home time, they know who will be there and the trust they have in our staff is something special.

"And for our staff, they know this is a place they can grow. We routinely promote and train - in fact, nine of our staff are studying in higher education alongside our jobs - and I really think it helps to set us apart."

And while the nursery's recent expansion has resulted in an extra classroom, demand still outstrips space - with a waiting list for places running well into 2027.



Michelle Skeekey

And the expansion has also drawn praise from Stockton Council.

The authority described the expansion as a "welcome and positive development", saying it had increased access to high-quality childcare and widened choice for local families.

But despite the current success, Michelle admits it hasn't always been an easy ride.

Several of the team, including Operations Manager Cheryl Lambert, have been with the business since the start "through thick and thin".

"Like a lot of growing businesses, we've had periods where I couldn't pay salaries that month and I had to hope that they believed and

trusted in this - which they absolutely do," said Michelle.

"Staff like that are priceless, and the success we are having now couldn't have come without them.

"Our whole team is just passionate about the children and the area, and it has become somewhere our staff genuinely want to work.

"The fact no staff have chosen to leave suggests that's the case - and as a boss, I couldn't feel prouder about what we've all helped create."

**For more information, visit
themontessoripeople.co.uk**

Durham Sixth Form Centre Open Event

Thursday 22nd October, 2026

Situated on the banks of the River Wear in the heart of Durham, Durham Sixth Form Centre is a specialist post-16 provider with a vibrant community of over 1,800 students from over eighty secondary schools across the region. Students enjoy a welcoming academic environment, access to a wide range of courses, specialist facilities and an award-winning progression team.

With over 30 A Levels alongside a broad selection of vocational qualifications, our curriculum is amongst the most comprehensive in the area. Our courses are designed and taught by subject specialists, with expertise in working with 16 to 19-year-olds and, as our results testify, an excellent track record of academic success. We also offer a wide range of extra opportunities to develop our students' skills and talents.

This summer's Level 3 results highlight another year of outstanding student performance. Across both academic and vocational pathways, our students made above-average progress from their GCSE starting points.

In A Levels and equivalent academic courses, students achieved a 100% pass rate and an



average grade of B, while three-quarters of all marks were in the prestigious A*- B range, placing results well above local and national averages. Vocational performance was equally impressive, with an average grade of Distinction* and over 90% of marks awarded at Distinction or Distinction*.

Reflecting on these outcomes, which continue

the Centre's long-standing tradition of academic excellence and strong progress, Principal Ellen Beveridge said: "Our students have demonstrated remarkable determination, effort and focus, and I could not be more proud of what they have accomplished. These excellent results open doors to top destinations, whether in higher education or employment, and we are excited to see what they achieve next. Furthermore, preliminary value-added data suggests our students have made progress beyond national benchmarks relative to their starting points, which is a true testament to their hard work."

The vast majority of our students progress to university, while others secure places on competitive school-leaver programmes, higher apprenticeships, or enter directly into employment. Our progression team continues to play an instrumental role in this success.

We warmly invite prospective students, parents and carers to join us at our upcoming Open Event on Thursday 22nd October, from 4:30 pm to 7:30 pm, to experience our campus, speak with staff and students and discover first-hand why so many young people choose Durham Sixth Form Centre as their first-choice place of post-16 study.

Please contact Mrs Sidra Bruce, Student Recruitment Manager, for further information via recruitment@durhamsixthformcentre.org.uk
[durhamsixthformcentre.org.uk](mailto:recruitment@durhamsixthformcentre.org.uk)
0191 383 0708

Dame Allan's is a place where every child is cherished

By Neil Seaton, Principal, Dame Allan's Schools

**I've known about
Dame Allan's Schools for
years through its reputation
as a place which takes exceptional
care of its pupils.**

For more than 300 years, the Schools have provided an excellent education, dedicated pastoral care and a vast range of outstanding opportunities. I can see already how every child is nurtured and that it is an environment where they can grow, excel in their studies and develop their passions.

I have joined the Schools at an exciting time in its history as it welcomes its first fully co-educational cohort. It has been wonderful to see our pupils so happy to be back at school, enjoying their lessons in small class sizes with dedicated support from their form tutors and Heads of Year.

The Schools adhere to an 'Attributes of Success' model, which sets out expectations for each pupil, including the need to have a growth mindset, to set high expectations, and to be an inquisitive and reflective learner. We saw the model pay dividends this summer when the Schools celebrated one of its strongest sets of GCSE results with more than a quarter (26.4%) of all grades awarded at the highest possible level-grade 9- and almost two-thirds (64.8%) at grades 7-9, equivalent to A* and A under the former grading system.

Additionally, at A Level, the Schools celebrated a further robust set of results with 90% of all grades at A* to C with pupils heading to leading universities across the UK and abroad, or opting for degree apprenticeships. It was clear, meeting families on results days, just how hard working our pupils had been. It was a pleasure to see so many of them secure their first-choice universities with others looking forward to studying with us in the Sixth Form.

With a new school year underway, pupils have also been enjoying trying a diverse range of co-curricular clubs. There are more than 200 activities on offer at Dame Allan's including rugby, robotics, dance, fencing, ukulele, and rowing. Our thriving co-curricular programme encourages pupils to push their limits and build confidence by trying something new, as well as offering a great way for them to make friends.

The clubs are where character is built; where they discover strengths they didn't know they had and interests that often stay with them for life. They develop invaluable communication, problem solving and leadership skills. During times of exam pressure, they can also be a fantastic way to balance academic studies.



Neil Seaton



As well as our co-curricular offering, I believe the Schools' excellent pastoral care plays a key part in ensuring our pupils remain happy and supported, no matter what challenges they face in life. Dame Allan's was one of the first independent schools in Newcastle to employ a dedicated counsellor more than 20 years ago and to bring the benefits of animal-assisted therapy into a school setting. We now have experienced pastoral leaders, a school nurse, counsellors, a psychotherapist and an art psychotherapist.

Dedicated wellbeing areas, in both the Junior and Senior Schools, ensure pupils' emotional wellbeing is just as prioritised as their academic success. A strong peer mentoring and mental health first aid training programme means pupils can always find a listening ear and I'm particularly impressed with Whisper, a service that allows pupils to report any worries or concerns anonymously.

At our Junior School, pupils receive a timetabled PSHE lesson each week, complemented by a dedicated wellbeing assembly every Friday. The children have daily access to Zumos, an online wellbeing platform designed to build resilience, self-confidence and happiness. Termly 'power' quizzes enable teachers to monitor levels of resilience and self-esteem and to identify early signs of anxiety or low mood, ensuring support can be offered proactively. As well as Poppy, the School's Border Terrier, children can rely on another firm favourite, the Worry Monster – a furry friend who 'eats' worries and helps pupils articulate their anxieties.

Our pastoral support is there for the entire school journey. One of the wonderful qualities about Dame Allan's is that the young people it supports become so confident without appearing arrogant. You can see these qualities often in its alumni – considerate, engaging people who return to school happily to share their knowledge, their contacts and inspire the next generation. Dame Allan's has a connectedness – with its alumni, and with the wider Newcastle community – which creates opportunities for our children and supports their futures. The connections they make with each other also last their entire lives.

It is a combination of academic excellence, co-curricular participation and outstanding pastoral care that ensures children leave us, having grown into confident, sociable and happy young people. From what I have experienced so far, Dame Allan's is a place where every child is cherished, accepted and has the opportunity to grow and thrive, no matter what their background.

www.dameallans.co.uk





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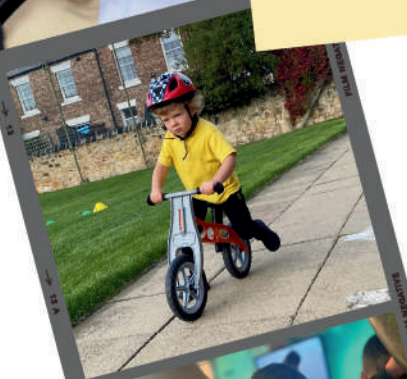
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In conversation with...



Gemma Russell

At the start of a new school year Michael Grahamslaw spoke to...

Gemma Russell

Headteacher, Newcastle Preparatory School

What are the schools main priorities for this academic year?

At the start of a new year it is all about settling our pupils into their new classrooms and routines, developing that sense of belonging which is key to wellbeing.

Our specialist EYFS outdoor learning area has undergone an extensive transformation, including our beautiful new tree-shaped canopy which enables a seamless connection between indoor and outdoor learning. This has made a huge difference to the school.

We have also started a playgroup for 18 months to 3 year olds this term so we will be getting this up and running. It is proving to be very popular in our local community already.

How do you measure the year as you go along?

We have regular meetings about targets and work to our school development plan. However, it is always important to retain some flexibility. Our priorities can change as the year develops and we are keen to remain agile and responsive in a changing landscape.



Are there any significant changes to teaching or pastoral care?

One significant change this year is to our 'Buddy' system to include younger year groups. This scheme has been successfully embedded in NPS culture for years and is always one of the children's highlights of their time here. Nursery and Reception are now included to have a bigger buddy who they can spend quality time with.

How do you support children struggling academically, socially or emotionally?

With small class sizes, every pupil receives individualised support in lessons. Our team has lots of specialist experience to deal with every situation and we have a range of additional programmes children can participate in to support specific difficulties.

How do you maintain high standards of behaviour, kindness and respect?

Consistency is key and our staff all adopt the same standards and approach. Staff also model the interactions we want to see from the children, praising the small things alongside the big things. Kindness is a non-negotiable at NPS and children are rewarded for demonstrating our core values in their daily life.



How do you keep parents informed of their child's progress and any other concerns?

We have two parents evenings a year and two written reports. Class teachers also give a weekly update to provide an insight into the children's world at school. Each week there is a letter with information for parents and there are regular opportunities to come in to school, such as stay and plays, performances or showcase events.

What extra-curricular activities have you got scheduled?

Extra-curricular provision is a huge strength of NPS. Outside of the weekly schedule of clubs and activities, we also have many other events for children and their families.

Our little ones are already preparing their Christmas performance and we have a rugby and hockey sports tours to Edinburgh. There will be our traditional Christmas Carol Service at Jesmond Parish Church and many exciting themed days to be involved in.

Next year, we have a ceilidh and murder mystery event for families planned at the Biscuit Factory, a skiing trip to Norway and our choir will be performing at Wembley Arena in London.

It is fair to say that there is never a dull moment!

Come the end of the school year what do you hope to have improved and achieved?

I would very much like to retain the benchmark of excellence that we set. As a preparatory school, our key aim is that our pupils are ready for what comes next in their education, and that our eldest children are successful in gaining competitive places at the schools they will thrive in after leaving us.

www.newcastleprepschool.org.uk



Culture Club

Keith Newman

of Highlights PR, shares his choices from the world of culture

Who is your favourite author and why?

L.J. Ross. Her detective stories have that great combination of crime, characters and locations that I really enjoy. I particularly like the fact that the North East itself features so strongly in her books.

What would be your 3 Desert Island Discs?

I'd have to include *The Ramones – Rocket to Russia*, because punk has always been a big part of my musical life. Then *Blondie – Parallel Lines*, which is packed with great songs and still sounds fantastic. And finally, anything *ABBA* — because, let's be honest, if you're stuck on a desert island you're going to need something you can sing along to!

Who is your favourite film star and why?

Michael Caine. He has that rare quality of being completely convincing whether he's playing a Cockney villain, a serious dramatic character or a comic role. He also seems to have retained a down-to-earth personality despite having had such a remarkable career.

What are your top three films?

Get Carter has to be number one. Being from the North East, seeing Newcastle and Gateshead portrayed in such a gritty way makes it particularly special. Michael Caine is superb as Jack Carter, and the film captures a very different North East from the one we know today.

Pulp Fiction is another favourite. It's completely original, brilliantly written and full of unforgettable characters and dialogue.

And finally, *Rock 'n' Roll High School*, starring The Ramones. It's not exactly high art, but that's rather the point! It combines two things I love — punk rock and a good bit of irreverent fun.

Which poem left a lasting impression on you?

If — by **Rudyard Kipling**. It's one of those poems that you can read at different stages of your life and take something different from it.

What box sets have you enjoyed?

Peaky Blinders, *The Pitt* and *Happy Valley*. I like programmes with strong characters and a good story that keeps you wanting to watch the next episode. *Peaky Blinders* has the period setting and atmosphere, *The Pitt* is brilliantly



intense, while *Happy Valley* has that gritty, realistic quality that makes British drama so good.

Who is your favourite artist or performer?

Debbie Harry, as a performer, and North East artist Alexander Millar as an artist. I've seen Blondie around 20 times, so I think I've earned the right to choose Debbie! There's something about her voice, attitude and stage presence that has always appealed to me. Blondie managed to cross musical boundaries, moving between punk, rock, pop, reggae and disco while still sounding completely like Blondie.

I'm also a big admirer of Alexander Millar's work. I love the way he captures ordinary North East characters and everyday life, giving his paintings a real sense of place, humour and nostalgia. There's something very recognisable and very North East about his work.

What is your favourite venue?

Newcastle City Hall. I've seen some great performers there over the years and there's something special about a proper traditional

concert venue. For me, venues are about atmosphere as much as the artist on stage.

Which musical instrument do you particularly enjoy?

The guitar. I've got quite a nice collection of guitars, although there's a slight problem — I struggle to actually play them! I'm now taking lessons with Geordie Riffs, so there's still hope for me. I've always loved the look and sound of guitars, particularly in rock and punk music, so collecting them has become almost as enjoyable as playing them.

From the world of Arts and Culture who would be your ideal dinner party guests?

I'd invite Debbie Harry, Joey Ramone, Michael Caine, Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy. Debbie Harry and Joey Ramone would give me the music, Michael Caine would undoubtedly have some fantastic stories, and Laurel and Hardy would provide the entertainment.

www.highlightspr.co.uk



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Darlington College invests in skills as recruitment continues to grow

Darlington College has begun the new academic year on a high, welcoming significant growth across full-time education, apprenticeships and higher education programmes while continuing to invest in the facilities and training needed to support the region's future workforce.

The college has seen an exceptionally strong recruitment cycle, with increased numbers of full-time learners choosing to study at the college, growing demand from employers for apprenticeships and continued expansion in higher education provision, in partnership with Teesside University. The positive enrolment figures reflect increasing confidence from students, parents and businesses in the college's ability to provide high-quality education and develop the skills employers need within the region and beyond.

As industries across the North East face ongoing skills shortages, particularly in technical, construction and engineering sectors, Darlington College remains focused on ensuring learners have access to industry-standard facilities and training environments that prepare them for successful careers.

A recent example is the college's £30,000 investment in its electrical department, where workshops and practical skills bays have undergone a complete refurbishment to support the next generation of electricians.

The improvements include fully reboarded skills bays, restored workbenches, upgraded testing equipment and the refurbishment of existing resources, creating a modern learning environment for both students and apprentices undertaking Level 1 to Level 3 electrical qualifications.

The investment comes at a time when demand for skilled electricians continues to rise nationally. Industry forecasts suggest that around 230,000 electricians will be required across the UK by 2030 as the country transitions towards greener technologies, smarter infrastructure and more sustainable energy systems.

Darlington College's electrical programmes are designed to help meet this demand, offering clear progression routes from entry-level training through to advanced qualifications and apprenticeships. Importantly, learners who do not yet hold the required maths qualifications can study these alongside their electrical training, helping remove barriers to entry and opening up career opportunities for a wider range of young people.

Senior Lecturer Gary Cook said: "Industry is crying out for electricians and the Government also wants to see an upskilled workforce.

"It is very well-paid work and they will never be out of a job. Electricians can work for big or small companies or for themselves, in this country and abroad.

"The new workshops will benefit all levels and feed into the apprenticeships which employers asking us to find learners for them."

The curriculum has evolved alongside the industry, covering both domestic and commercial installations. Learners develop practical skills ranging from basic wiring and electrical safety through to specialist areas including armoured cabling, data and Wi-Fi systems, smart home technologies and renewable energy solutions.

The growing importance of technologies such as electric vehicle charging infrastructure, solar energy systems, air and ground source heat pumps and automated smart home controls means today's trainees are preparing for an industry that looks very different from that of a decade ago.

A key strength of the programme is its close connection with local employers. By working closely with businesses, the college ensures that training reflects current industry requirements while also creating

progression opportunities into apprenticeships and employment.

The courses continue to attract a diverse range of learners, including an increasing number of women entering the profession. Demonstrating the calibre of talent emerging from the college, one recent female trainee electrician progressed to the national finals of the prestigious Spark of the Year competition.

For regional employers, the message is clear. As economic growth and infrastructure projects increase demand for skilled technical workers, Darlington College is continuing to invest in the people, facilities and partnerships needed to support that growth.

The college's strong recruitment across full-time programmes, apprenticeships and higher education highlights both the ambition of learners and the confidence employers place in the institution. Combined with targeted investments such as the refurbishment of the electrical department, Darlington College is strengthening the pipeline of skilled talent that businesses across the region will depend upon in the years ahead.

With student numbers continuing to rise and employer engagement going from strength to strength, the college remains committed to ensuring that people of all ages and backgrounds can access high-quality education, develop industry-relevant skills and progress into rewarding careers, helping to drive both individual success and regional prosperity.

Darlington College



Gary Cook, Senior Lecturer in Electrical

Eliot Smith Dance celebrates 15 years and looks to 2036

Eliot Smith Dance (ESD), an award winning independent contemporary dance company based in the North East, has celebrated 15 years of creativity, performance and artistic development with Vision in Motion at The Common Room, Newcastle.

The special anniversary event brought together artists, supporters, partners and friends to celebrate ESD's journey and look towards its future. Among the distinguished guests was The Lord-Lieutenant of Tyne and Wear, Lucy Winskill OBE, whose attendance recognised the company's contribution to the region's cultural landscape.

The evening also featured Jennifer Curry, CEO and Creative Director of Dance City, who highlighted the importance of supporting independent dance companies and their role in strengthening the North East's cultural sector.

ESD also unveiled its ambitious 2036 Vision – From Northumberland to the World, setting out a long-term vision for the company, including the



aspiration to establish a Dance House in rural Northumberland – a home for dance, artists, communities and audiences.

The anniversary season continues with a new iteration of PITMAN at Alnwick Playhouse on 11 November, followed by Eliot Smith: Return at Alphabetti Theatre on 3 December, marking Smith's return to the stage after five years.



Alexander Millar: From geordie life to a new chapter

After decades of success celebrating the characters, humour and everyday life of the North East, one of the region's best-loved artists, Alexander Millar, is stepping back from the business of art.

At 66, Alexander has decided it is time to slow down, close his Glasgow gallery and concentrate on family, home and enjoying the next chapter of his life.

The Glasgow gallery in Princes Square closed its doors on September 20, marking the end of an extraordinary journey that has taken Alexander's unmistakably Geordie artwork from Newcastle to Glasgow and New York.

His paintings have struck a chord far beyond the North East, but it is the people and places of home that have remained at the heart of his work – capturing the warmth, wit and unmistakable character of everyday Northern life.

"I've decided to retire," says Alexander. "I want to slow down a bit and focus on family and home."

"Opening galleries in Newcastle, Glasgow and New York has been an incredible journey, but now is the time to focus on what really matters."

"I want this gear-change from work to leisure to be a celebration of everything we've built over the years. This is about embracing the next phase – becoming a Gadgie myself and enjoying the freedom that comes with it."

For an artist who has spent his career celebrating the North East, his next chapter begins at home.



Michael Rickwood: Seeing Newcastle differently

Award-winning photographer and visual storyteller Michael Rickwood has built a reputation for finding the extraordinary in the ordinary.

Driven by curiosity and a lifelong passion for photography, Michael has developed a distinctive style centred on light, emotion and storytelling. His striking photographic art and exhibition work encourage people to look again at familiar places and see them from a different perspective.

His latest book, Newcastle, My Lens, Your Memories, is a personal love letter to the city he calls home. Through images of Newcastle's iconic architecture, hidden corners and everyday life, Michael captures not just places, but the memories and emotions they evoke.

The past year has presented Michael with some personal challenges, including caring for his 94-year-old mother and undergoing a knee operation. Now back on his feet, he is concentrating less on market fairs and more on exhibitions and developing his career as an artist.

His next major exhibition takes place at Newcastle Civic Centre from November 10-20, 2026. Michael has also secured a place with artists' collective Gallery 24 NE in Fawcett Street, Sunderland, where his work will be showcased over the next 12 months.

As Newcastle continues to change, Michael remains committed to documenting its character – one photograph, one moment and one memory at a time.

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North East artist creates emotional tribute to Kevin Keegan

A Gateshead artist who was inspired by Kevin Keegan as a boy is picking up his paintbrushes to create a very personal tribute to the Newcastle United legend – and it will help raise money for a charity with football connections.

Ronnie Pattison has been overwhelmed by the outpouring of grief and affection for Keegan and says he knew he had to create something after visiting St James' Park and seeing the thousands of tributes left by supporters. But Ronnie isn't painting a portrait of Keegan.

Instead, he has captured St James' Park at night, looking towards the Gallowgate End, surrounded by the flowers, scarves and personal tributes left by Newcastle fans. And there is a very special reason behind it.

Half the proceeds from sales of mounted prints of the finished work will be donated to The Sir Bobby Robson Foundation, part of Newcastle Hospitals Charity. As a lifelong Newcastle fan, Sir Bobby Robson was one of Ronnie's heroes.

"My mother battled cancer, and if the Foundation was around when she was fighting it may have helped her and others like her. Since her death 34 years ago the Foundation's work has really touched our lives."

Ronnie, who has spent years painting iconic North East scenes, admits the project has taken him back to his childhood.

"I was devastated when I heard the news of Keegan's passing," he said.

"He was my boyhood dream when it came to football. I remember his testimonial and him being lifted out in the helicopter, which had never been done before.

"And then there was the way he managed the club and the entertainers team. It was fantastic. It really hit us hard."

"There are one or two tributes that show you a little bit of him. For me,



Ronnie Pattison

the biggest tribute I can do is a painting of everyone else's tributes – the shirts, photographs, scarves, hats etc.

"If it's on somebody's wall, they're going to see it every day of their life."

He will produce signed and numbered mounted prints of the finished painting, complete with certificates, with 50 per cent of the proceeds going to The Sir Bobby Robson Foundation.

The money raised will now go towards completion of the Sir Bobby Robson Institute, a world leading cancer drug trials centre for the region. Construction of the £30m institute began this year on the site of the Freeman Hospital in Newcastle.



Blyth Tall Ship CEO sails in with top award

CEO Monthly Magazine has named Siobhan Sargeant of Blyth Tall Ship as North East England's Most Influential CEO 2026 in the field of Community Impact Leadership, a prestigious accolade recognising her passion for people and her work creating opportunities that make a meaningful difference to communities.

Siobhan has been at the helm of Blyth Tall Ship since December 2024, bringing more than two decades of experience in the charity sector to the organisation as it enters an ambitious new phase of growth.

Her professional journey has been firmly rooted in people and communities, with senior roles across hospices, healthcare and national charities. During more than 20 years in the sector, she has developed major fundraising campaigns, commercial partnerships and new services, while helping organisations navigate periods of growth and change.

"Joining Blyth Tall Ship almost two years ago felt, in many ways, like an unexpected chapter," said Siobhan.

"Whilst I had extensive experience within the charity sector, heritage was entirely new territory for me.

"What I discovered very quickly was that our work isn't simply about preserving a ship or safeguarding archives; it's about people. It's about creating opportunities, building confidence, improving wellbeing, and ensuring that our heritage remains accessible and relevant for future generations."

Since joining the charity, Siobhan has been focused on building on Blyth Tall Ship's existing legacy while developing a sustainable future for the organisation.

The charity has diversified its income streams and developed new opportunities to strengthen its resilience, while continuing to deliver programmes designed to have a positive impact on the local community.

That combination of heritage, community and social impact has become central to Siobhan's leadership.

Her recognition as North East England's Most Influential CEO 2026 – Community Impact Leadership celebrates not simply her role as chief executive, but the approach she has brought to it – putting people at the heart of the organisation and using the charity's maritime heritage as a platform for creating opportunities and changing lives.

Siobhan said she felt "incredibly privileged" that her career had brought her to Blyth Tall Ship at such an exciting point in its journey.

"We have ambitious plans for the future, and I'm continually inspired by the passion of our staff, volunteers, trustees, and supporters, who make our work possible," she said.



An artists life

By Mary Ann Rogers

Autumn brings new textures and colour to the hills of Northumberland, along with the sights, smells and sounds of one of the busiest times of year for the hill farmers, who are preparing and selling their tups (rams) and young breeding ewes.

The fields close to the roads contain strangely coloured sheep, which confuse visitors to the area. Bright yellow for the tups (rams) who will be bought by farmers to put out in the hills with their ewes. The bright colour makes them easier to spot, as the shepherd does his rounds, making sure they are doing their job.

Young ewes, sold to replace older ewes, are prepared for sale by a dip, sometimes with a hint of colour, to represent the soil type of the area, then any scruffy/dirty bits are clipped off, and the final stage of preparation is having their faces washed to bring out the white and the markings of their breed.

Every year in the third week of September, I cycle along to the farm next door, clad in waterproof gear, to help the team with the face washing. A constant stream of banter is guaranteed, followed by a fantastic lunch before the afternoon batch are herded into the shed, ready for their beauty session.



The new paintings reflect the changing seasons and rhythms absorbed both from the views directly out of the studio windows and the daily walks and river swims. A late burst of evening sunshine transforms the hills, picking out the ancient ridge & furrows, also remnants of earlier settlements.

A kingfisher darts past in a flash of blue preceded by a 'peeping' sound. A lazy splash on the surface of the water signifies the start of the autumn run of fish up the river to spawning grounds.

We are always alert to any sounds or movement by the river, often rewarded by a glimpse of an otter, a water vole or a salmon. Overhead, 'V's of geese are on the move, and the swallows have already departed for warmer climes.

This is usually a very productive painting time. Before things become very busy in the weeks before Christmas and we are packing and shipping out paintings, prints, cards and gifts all over the world.

Rather than repeat gift items from the past, I enjoy sourcing new things, ideally in conjunction with local suppliers/makers to offer customers each Christmas. This year, a chance comment has led to a collaboration with a local family-run candle making firm. We will be offering a range of scented candles in tins, featuring Mary Ann's artwork, to create beautiful fragrances and subtle candlelight – that's if I don't use them all myself!

Daily river swims are getting shorter and shorter as the water temperature drops. It has been a wonderful summer for people who enjoy swimming in lakes and rivers.

The water has been warm and welcoming, and there has been no heavy rainfall which can make the rivers dangerous, as well as causing sewage outflows, which is a highly contentious subject, particularly now that so many people now swim and dip in our inland waters.



The main threat in warm sunny weather is blue/green algae forming in still or slow moving water where nitrates and potassium from sewage provide the nutrients which feed the algae. Not usually life threatening to humans, it can pose a serious health threat to pets and livestock. Fortunately, we have only seen a small amount of this when we stayed at St Mary's Loch in the borders.

The next thing we are looking forward to seeing on the surface of the water now is ice! Brrrrrr!

Christmas Exhibition at Mary Ann Rogers Gallery
 Sat 28, Sun 29 Nov • Sat 5, Sun 6, Sat 12 and Sun 13 Dec • 10am-5pm
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St James Park neighbours mark 15 years at the heart of Newcastle hospitality

A Newcastle city centre hotel, bar and restaurant opposite St James' Park are celebrating 15 years as part of the city's bustling hospitality scene.

The 170-bedroom Sandman Signature Newcastle Hotel and its onsite bar and restaurant, Shark Club Newcastle, opened in September 2011. The site is also home to the head office for owners Northland Properties, which operates additional hotels and dining venues in Glasgow, Sheffield, Aberdeen, Dublin and London Gatwick. A hotel in Edinburgh is the next venture for the group, with a 240-bedroom hotel currently in the planning stages.

The anniversary brings together the hotel's role in welcoming visitors to the city with Shark Club's central place in Newcastle's match-day and sports-bar scene.

Over the past 15 years the hotel has welcomed over one million guests, filling more than 610,000 rooms. It currently employs 120 people, six of whom have worked there since the doors first opened. Celebrities who have checked in include Stephen Graham, Jimmy Carr, Rio Ferdinand, Paul Gascoigne, Chris Gascoyne from Coronation Street and Larry Lamb.

Three hundred and twenty people have been employed at Shark Club since it opened, with four original members of staff still working there.



Employees have progressed from bussers, hosts, servers and chefs to general managers, assistant general managers, regional directors and executive chefs. The venue was the first place to bring chicken wings as a dining concept to Newcastle and has served more than 20 million wings, along with more than 1.5 million pints pulled. It has also seen two marriage proposals and welcomed celebrity visitors including Romeo Beckham, The Saturdays, Love Island's Adam Collard and the cast from Geordie Shore. Basketball team the Newcastle Eagles and rugby union's Newcastle Red Bulls are regular weekly visitors.

Newcastle hotel doubles room service revenue with a little help from Tim Healy – and a robot

Maldron Hotel Newcastle, at Newgate Street, became the first hotel in the UK to introduce the ButlerBot W3, an autonomous service robot which delivers room service and guest amenities directly to bedrooms.

And the robot – affectionately known as “Anna Bot” – now has another distinctly local feature: the voice of Auf Wiedersehen, Pet and Benidorm star, Tim Healy.

Since introducing the robot – which has been provided by North East company, Spark Robotics – the hotel has seen its room service revenue double, while freeing up team members to spend more time looking after guests in the hotel's bar and restaurant.

Anna Wadcock, General Manager of Maldron Hotel Newcastle, said the results demonstrate how technology can complement rather than replace traditional hospitality. “Anna Bot has become a real part of the hotel and guests absolutely love her,” said Anna.



“What started as an innovative way of delivering room service has developed into something which genuinely supports our team, improves the guest experience and has had a measurable impact on our revenue.

“The important thing for us has always been that technology should support our people, not replace them. Every room service delivery the robot makes means a member of our team can remain in the bar or restaurant looking after guests rather than leaving the floor.

“And the fact that our room service revenue has now doubled shows that guests aren't just enjoying the novelty – they are actually using the service more.”



New Trader at STACK Newcastle brings a taste of Sri Lanka

STACK Newcastle has added to its international food offering, with the venue's first taste of Sri Lankan cuisine.

And the opening of Dinithi at the city centre entertaining and leisure hub is also the latest success for a fast-growing Tyneside food operation.

Dinithi Restaurant has been running at Osborne Road, Jesmond, with its unique food style proving popular with diners – and leading to a second outlet at the Grainger Market.

And now the restaurant has expanded again – this time offering a unique flavour of Sri Lanka with a brand new menu exclusive to STACK Newcastle.

Visitors can tuck into Sri Lankan Koththu specials – a thin, soft flatbread chopped with garlic, onions, vegetables and scrambled eggs and with a choice of meats or vegetables.

Also on the menu are a range of Godamba wraps, a choice of meat tossed with onions, peppers and topped with mayo and homemade barbeque sauce, wrapped in a Godamba roti – a soft, flaky Sri Lankan flat bread.

Dinithi has created its own take on a burger and has created the paratha burger, with the meat patty served in a flaky, buttery paratha and served with chips.

A build-your-own bowl option has been added, where diners can pick from rice or noodles topped with beef or pork stew or devilled chicken, squid or cauliflower.

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Beyond the Boardroom

By Wendy Bryant, Director of Groups, Meetings and Events Radisson Blu Durham

How Radisson Blu Durham is redefining the corporate away day.

As more businesses swap back-to-back agendas for fresh air and headspace, Radisson Blu Durham has built a new kind of meetings experience around wellbeing - pairing first-class facilities with cathedral tours, riverside walks and a new partnership with Onda Pilates and Raby Castle.

The corporate away day is changing. Where a decade ago success meant a full agenda and a well-stocked coffee station, today's teams want a break that really feels like one - and Radisson Blu Durham has built a programme to give meetings, conferences and team days a genuine sense of recharge.

"We're seeing it across almost every booking now," says Wendy Bryant, Director of Groups, Meetings and Events at the hotel. "Clients don't just want a room and a projector any more. They want their people to leave feeling better than when they arrived, whether that's through movement, fresh air or simply a proper break in the day. Wellbeing has gone from a nice-to-have to a key factor."



It's a trend the hotel is well placed to answer. Five minutes' walk from Durham railway station and ten minutes from the A1(M), delegates can be in a full-AV meeting space one hour and climbing Durham Cathedral's tower the next.

That contrast is central to the new approach. Groups can choose a cathedral tour, a riverside walk along the Wear, or a midday Onda Pilates class, hosted on-site and suited to all fitness levels - or hands-on, tailored team-building activities.

Food plays a part too: the hotel's Brain Boosting Lunch Menu keeps delegates focused through the afternoon rather than reaching for a heavy buffet, a small detail feedback shows shapes how a day is remembered.

None of this comes at the expense of the fundamentals: meeting spaces for groups of every size, refurbished bedrooms, and Presidential Suites offering a private space for organisers or VIP guests - increasingly requested as companies combine an away day with an overnight stay.

A surprisingly unique addition, though, sits half an hour down the road. Radisson Blu Durham has partnered with Raby Castle to launch the Back to Nature Team Building Experience, swapping the conference room for the deer park.

The package includes dinner, bed and breakfast at the hotel with full access to its leisure facilities, return transport to Raby Castle, exclusive hire of one of the estate's event spaces, welcome refreshments and a grazing lunch sourced from the Raby Estate - before teams choose clay pigeon shooting or a deer safari. A second night's accommodation can be added. Packages start from £200 per delegate.

"It's a genuinely different proposition for the region," adds Bryant. "You get the reliability of a five-star hotel with proper facilities, and then a completely different environment for the team-building element itself. Clay pigeon shooting or a deer safari isn't something most away days offer, and it gives people something to talk about long after the debrief."

For a venue with a decade-long reputation for flexibility, the move into wellness-led corporate days feels like a natural next chapter. What's changed is the emphasis: recharge is no longer an add-on to the agenda, it's part of it.

Whether you're planning a corporate away day, a wellness-focused conference or a Back to Nature experience at Raby Castle, the team at Radisson Blu Durham would love to help bring it to life.

www.radissonbludurham.com

Meetings & Events, Built Differently

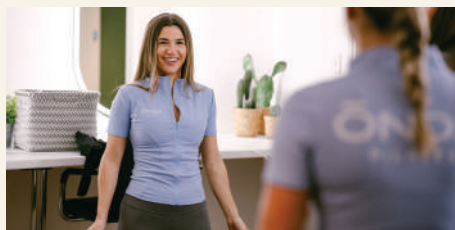
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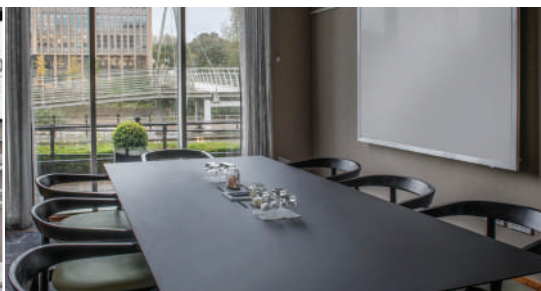
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Kindness: The strength behind great leadership

By Jeff Hodgson, General Manager, Lumley Castle Hotel

What is the most misunderstood strength in modern leadership?

For me, it is kindness.

As a General Manager, I have come to believe that kindness is one of the most powerful leadership qualities we can bring into the workplace. It is sometimes mistaken for softness, or even weakness, but I believe the opposite is true. Kindness takes courage. It takes strength to listen, to understand, to show compassion and, when necessary, to have difficult conversations while still treating people with dignity and respect.

At Lumley Castle Hotel, our team is at the heart of everything we do. A historic building may create a wonderful setting, but it is the people who bring a hotel to life. Every guest



interaction, every small detail and every moment of hospitality comes from a member of our team choosing to care.

That is why I believe kindness matters so much in leadership.

Being a kind leader does not mean lowering standards or avoiding accountability. In fact, it means quite the opposite. Great teams need clear expectations, honest feedback and a commitment to excellence. But how we deliver those things matters. We can challenge someone to do better without making them feel small. We can address mistakes without defining someone by them. And we can have difficult conversations while remembering that there is a person behind the role.

When people feel respected and valued, something powerful happens. They feel safe enough to speak up, share ideas, admit when something has gone wrong and ask for help. They become more confident, more engaged and more willing to support the people around them.

I see this as particularly important in hospitality. Our industry can be fast-paced, demanding and, at times, challenging. Our teams are constantly balancing the needs of our guests, our

colleagues and the business. In those moments, a little kindness can make an enormous difference.

A simple thank you. Taking the time to listen. Recognising someone's effort. Checking in with a colleague who may be having a difficult day. These gestures may seem small, but collectively they create a culture where people want to work, grow and succeed.

And kindness is contagious.

When leaders treat their teams with compassion and respect, those values naturally find their way into the guest experience. A team that feels cared for is far more likely to care for others. That is the kind of culture we should strive to build at Lumley Castle: one where high standards and genuine humanity sit comfortably alongside each other.

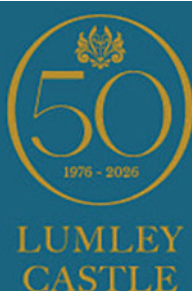
Leadership is not about being the loudest voice in the room or having all the answers. It is about bringing people with you, earning trust and creating an environment where everyone has the opportunity to flourish.

So, if kindness is sometimes seen as a soft skill, perhaps we need to rethink what strength really looks like.

For me, kindness is not weakness.

Kindness is leadership. Kindness is courage. And kindness is a strength worth building a team around.

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The Colmans with Chris Jewitt (second from right) visiting Barga in the summer of 2025

From beach shack to The Glasshouse

Fishy tales set for Gateshead as Colmans centenary celebrations gather pace.

The remarkable story of a fifth-generation family business famous for its award-winning fish and chips is set to take centre stage at one of the North East's best-loved venues.

World renowned South Shields firm Colmans is celebrating the centenary of its Ocean Road restaurant throughout 2026.

And a documentary charting the family's Italian roots is coming to The Glasshouse International Centre For Music in October following a sold-out premiere earlier this year.

"In January we decided to invite a few family and friends to The Customs House in South Shields for a screening of the film and a Q&A afterwards," explains Richard Colman Ord.

"Before we knew it we'd sold out and everyone had an amazing evening.

"Chris [Jewitt] and Dan [Prince] from the We Are Local Heroes podcast — who put the film together — hosted the whole thing and they did such a great job.

"As soon as it was over people were messaging us to ask when the next screening was! We didn't really have any plans to do it again but

bringing the film to The Glasshouse was an opportunity too good to miss."

Out And About With The Colmans follows brothers Richard and Dominic Colman Ord and their parents to Tuscany.

Dad Richard Ord MBE shows his sons the family's original home in the picturesque Italian town of Barga.

And the Colmans are soon seen throwing themselves into the community's annual fish and chip festival — 19 days of food and culture that celebrates the historic ties between Barga and Italian ex-pats who moved to Scotland and the north of England.

Chris Jewitt, co-host of the We Are Local Heroes Podcast, said: "The Colmans trusted us with something deeply personal: telling the story of their family, their history and a hundred years of a business that South Shields has grown up with.

"Twelve months ago we got on a plane to Barga with them to help bring that story to life. Taking that film to The Glasshouse, with a live podcast afterwards, is a proud moment for all of us."

Out And About With The Colmans hits The Glasshouse on October 11 with all profits going towards supporting the new Colman Foundation.

The two-part show will feature the full film followed by a Q&A-style live podcast featuring Richard Ord, wife Frances, Richard Jnr and Dominic.

All four brought the house down earlier this year and audience members can expect rare and amusing insights into the family, their business and a memorable trip to Tuscany.

Colleen Hamilton, Manager, Audience Experience and Growth at The Glasshouse, said: "We're delighted to welcome Colmans and their story to The Glasshouse.

"It's a brilliant example of the stories and characters that make the North East such a great place to live. We know audiences here love a good night out, and we're looking forward to giving them the chance to hear more about the family, their history and their journey to Barga."

Colmans' centenary is already the subject of a revealing exhibition within South Shields Museum and earlier this year The Princess Royal gave the family's Seafood Temple her seal of approval after enjoying a fish and chip lunch on South Tyneside.

Richard and Dom acquired Whitburn's Village Café in June and last month the brothers and co-directors broke ground on a new coastal village adjacent to the Seafood Temple.

"We were determined to cement our legacy during the centenary year and double down on our commitment to South Shields and the surrounding area," added Dom.

"As a family we're very proud of where we've come from and I hope that comes across in the film.

"I don't want to give anything away but we had so much fun making it and the plan is to return to Barga very soon.

"In the meantime, going to The Glasshouse feels like another major milestone as we mark 100 years of Colmans Fish and Chips."

Tickets for Out And About With The Colmans at The Glasshouse are available at theglasshouseicm.org/whats-on/out-and-about-with-the-colmans

In conversation with...

Richard Smith

Here, general manager Richard Smith talks about his role, the estate's transformation and what makes Aldwark Manor Estate so special.

Aldwark Manor Estate is entering a new chapter. Following several years of significant investment and transformation, the North Yorkshire estate has evolved into a destination combining hospitality, dining, golf, events, and the Salus Spa, all set within 200 acres of countryside.

Tell us a little about your role at Aldwark Manor.

I'm the general manager for a resort estate, so my role covers a myriad of areas across the business. I was heavily involved in the transformation of the estate, from the building-site stage through to what we have today. That included three new buildings – Chartwell, Bunkers, and the Salus Wing – a completely redesigned golf course, the new Salus Spa, and extensive work across the existing estate.

My role now is about bringing together sales, marketing, revenue, partnerships and distribution across the estate, using my experience to help turn the owners' investment and vision into a stronger commercial proposition.

What first attracted you to Aldwark?

I've worked for a number of independent hotel groups and what I've always enjoyed is the passion that independent owners bring. You can see their vision for a property and the investment they're prepared to make.

When I came to Aldwark, I could see that vision immediately. There was huge potential here and I felt I could contribute to what was already a very strong foundation – those ambitions are what continue to motivate me to this day.

How did you first get into hospitality?

My first taste was actually through a friend's father, who owned a catering company. I helped at things like the Royal Agricultural Show, weddings in fields, and even catering for the police force in Birmingham. I loved the variety. I then joined Friendly Hotels, which had two



Birmingham hotels, around 450 bedrooms and 20 conference rooms. I started as a sales executive and became sales manager. From there I moved through Thistle, Best Western and Classic Lodges. Hospitality has always given me opportunities to develop, and it's certainly never been boring.

What makes Aldwark Manor different?

The world is your oyster here. You can be in the countryside, yet York or Harrogate are only around 15 to 20 minutes away. You can stay here, relax in the spa, have a glass of something rather nice at Clems and enjoy dinner, or use Aldwark as a base for exploring further afield – Whitby, for example, or James Herriot country.

What has been the biggest transformation since 2019?

Opening the Salus Spa was a huge moment for us. We rebuilt the entire spa and doubled the original size – it really changed the feel of the estate.

I remember seeing people using the hydrotherapy pool in January with snow on the ground and bubbles rising around them. It was one of those moments where you thought, yes, Aldwark is coming of age.

We also hosted the UK Hotel Spa Association conference, which was a real vote of confidence. Hearing feedback from people within the industry who had never experienced Aldwark before was incredibly rewarding.

Do you have a favourite part of the estate?

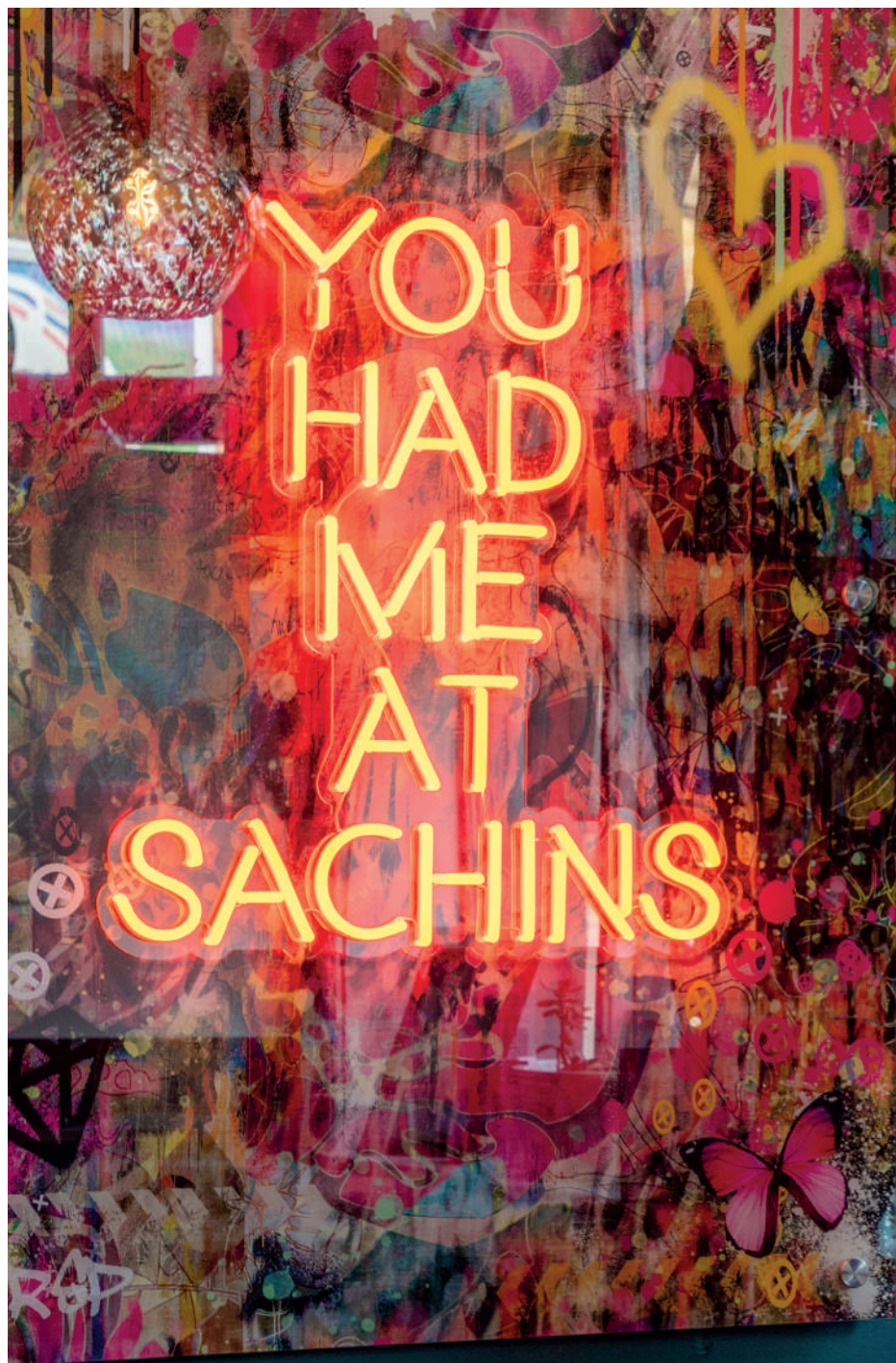
The Elements restaurant in summer is hard to beat. When the roof is folded back, the windows are down and you've got that vista in front of you, it's spectacular.

I'm also very fond of Sal's Café, looking out over the spa garden. It's a great place for a coffee and a bit of time out.

How would you persuade someone who has never visited?

I could tell them about the countryside, great food, fantastic spa, and golf facilities, but ultimately I would encourage them to come and experience Aldwark for themselves – switching off, being looked after, and creating their own memories.

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Solo travel the way to go

By Graham Townsley, Travel Counsellor

No need to bring your partner if they're not as sophisticated.

Solo travel is booming. More of us want to go beyond our usual holidays, explore new cultures, discover great golf courses and create memorable experiences. The news might make the world feel unstable, yet travel trends tell a different story: people of all ages are more adventurous and far less willing to wait for someone else before they book that dream trip.

Who is the solo traveller today?

There is still a myth that solo holidays are mainly for older travellers or widows and divorcees on coach tours around Europe. The reality is very different.

Today's solo traveller might be:

- An "empty nester" whose children have left home and who finally has time to visit India, Japan or South Africa, even if their partner has no interest.
- A professional in their 20s, 30s or 40s whose friends are busy with families, who dream discovering street food in Vietnam or

photograph the Northern Lights.

- Someone in a happy relationship whose partner simply has a different travel wish list.

Solo travel is no longer about age or circumstance. It is about having the confidence to follow your own curiosity and not waiting for others to be ready.

Safety, confidence and company

It is natural to wonder: is solo travel safe, will I feel lonely, who will I sit with at dinner, and who takes my photos?

Good local advice, staying in safe areas and having someone in your corner if plans change all make a big difference.

Why small-group tours work so well

For many first-time solo travellers, small-group tours are the ideal balance. You keep your independence, but never feel alone.

- Group sizes are kept low, so you travel with like-minded people rather than a coachload of strangers.
- Many escorted tours are designed specifically for solo travellers, so everyone is in the same position from day one.
- WhatsApp groups are often created before departure, so you can ask questions, share tips and break the ice before you even reach the airport.

There is huge variety. Whether your passion is walking, golf, cycling, photography, cooking, culture or wildlife, there is almost certainly a small-group holiday to match. You can start



Graham Townsley

with a short escorted tour in the UK or Europe, then build up to longer adventures in Australia, South Africa, South America, the USA or Canada.

My role: expert, advisor, safety net

My role is to listen to what you want from your holiday and create a trip that fits you, not the other way round.

I work with trusted, experienced partners who focus on service, safety and value for solo travellers and small groups. That means expert local guides, friendly support teams and itineraries that balance sightseeing with time to relax.

Their local insight is often the magic ingredient. While crowds are queuing, they know the quieter entrance, the perfect viewpoint for that Instagram-worthy photo, or the family-run restaurant you would never find alone.

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A Sunday well spent at Gosforth Park

By Michael Gramshaw

There are some venues that become part of the North East landscape, woven into our memories through business meetings, celebrations and family occasions. The Grand Hotel Gosforth Park is undoubtedly one of them.

Celebrating its 60th anniversary this year, the Newcastle landmark has welcomed generations of guests through its doors, and for me, a recent visit brought back memories of my early days working in media during the 1990s.

Back then, like many young professionals finding their feet, I attended (doe-eyed and dark-haired!) many events and meetings at the hotel, so returning all these years later carried a certain sense of nostalgia.

Set within extensive parkland on the outskirts of Newcastle and conveniently located just off the A1, the hotel remains an impressive presence and a popular destination for leisure guests, business travellers and special occasion-ers alike.

This time, however, the purpose was far more relaxed: sampling the hotel's new monthly Sunday Lunch offering and, as it happened, kicking off my 'birthday week' in suitably leisurely fashion.

From the moment we arrived, the warm welcome set the tone for the afternoon. Friendly staff greeted us with real enthusiasm before showing us through to the dining area, which was smart, comfortable and well appointed without feeling overly formal.

The atmosphere struck exactly the right balance. There was a relaxed buzz around the room, families and friends exchanging anecdotes, while attentive service ensured everything ran smoothly. It felt unhurried,

allowing guests to settle in, switch off and enjoy proper British food in pleasant parkland surroundings.

My wife Lisa chose the Beetroot and Apple Salad to start, followed by the Feather Blade of Beef, while I opted for the Tomato and Red Pepper Soup before moving on to the traditional Topside of Beef.

The starters arrived beautifully presented and packed with flavour. My soup was rich, warming and full of depth, while the beetroot and apple combination offered a fresh, vibrant alternative. Both provided an excellent beginning to the meal and nicely complemented the first bite of Autumn air.

Sunday lunch rises or falls on the quality of its roast, and there was to be no disappointment here. The beef was tender and cooked well, accompanied by all the traditional trimmings you'd hope to find on a proper Sunday plate.

What impressed most was the sense that this was honest, well-executed food designed to be enjoyed rather than overcomplicated. Sometimes that's exactly what a Sunday lunch should be.

Equally noteworthy was the value on offer. At £24 for two courses and £29 for three courses, the menu represents excellent value, particularly considering the quality of food, hearty portions and attentive service.

Families are also well catered for, with the hotel's 'Little Roast Menu' available at £10 for two courses and £15 for three courses, making it an appealing option for those looking to enjoy a traditional Sunday outing without stretching the budget.

As the hotel commemorates six decades in business, there is something fitting about introducing experiences that encourage people to gather, connect and make new memories. While much has changed since my first visits in the 1990s, the essence of good hospitality remains the same, and the Grand Hotel Gosforth Park still understands how to make guests feel welcome.

Our afternoon passed wonderfully, helped by friendly staff, hearty food and a relaxed atmosphere that encouraged us to linger a little longer than planned.

Sometimes the simplest pleasures can be a meander back down memory lane, and this was one of those occasions: good food, great service and a reminder that some institutions such as this, continue to stand the test of time.

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Oulton Hall – My day of rest and relaxation

By Michael Grahamslaw

The way that you view your own birthday tends to depend on which stage of life you are at. Children love them, of course. Younger adults covet them too. In the early stages of life, they signify progression: increased authority and gravitas.

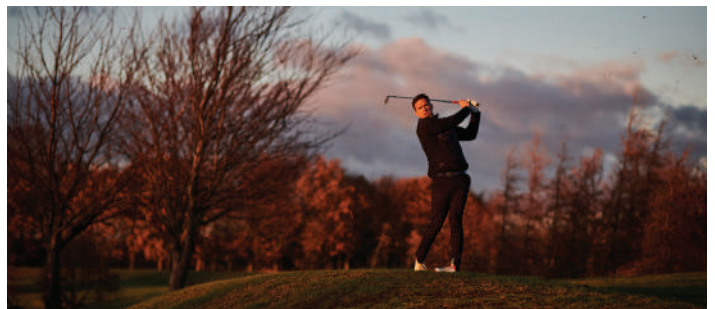
Once you have a half century under the belt, however, they certainly become less appealing. Another year older? Already? Surely not.

Acutely aware my sofa was not a favourable battleground to wage the war on aging, my wife Lisa and I headed an overnighter at Oulton Hall. Time to see if their revered reputation for relaxation might put my fading youth syndrome on ice.

To say our first impressions were positive would be an understatement. The short drive through the estate showcased sweeping, immaculately kept grounds.

Just South of Leeds and easily accessible from the North-East, Oulton Hall exudes an understated elegance. It is thoroughly British in every aspect, including its rich history.

Now a Grade II listed building, the estate was built at the beginning of the 18th century. Notably, it was used during World War 1 as a hospital for recovering officers and Belgian refugees, before falling into disrepair in the latter half of the 20th century. It was not until the 1990s that the building was restored to former glories and fitted with the facilities which make it the luxurious resort that it is today.



With minimal fuss and help from friendly staff, we checked in to the Wensleydale Suite. The room exuded the opulent character expected in an 18th century building but did not go wanting for any of modern life's luxuries. Fully stocked tea and coffee, mini-fridge, fluffy bathrobes, slippers and enhanced toiletries are just some of the indulgences available.

Beautiful, white paned windows let in extraordinary light and allow a view of the lush, 27-hole golf course. We fought the temptation to have a mid-afternoon snooze on the four-poster and prepared for the spa treatment that I hoped would make me feel 21 again.

On the way down to the spa, we were briefly waylaid by a quick detour to The Champagne Bar. The well-equipped bar offers a wide range of wines and cocktails and is smoothly operated by its friendly staff.

Being warm enough to sit out, we enjoyed a crisp glass of white on the terrace. This gave me a chance to inspect the golf course in more detail. The immaculate, versatile course offers something for every golfer. Custom club fitting and PGA professional coaching is even available for those most keen. If I had not been fully committed to the de-aging process I was about to undergo, I may have been tempted to break out the clubs - there's always next time.

We visited the on-site spa, where we enjoyed the sauna, steam room, jacuzzi and cold plunge pool, ensuring maximum pre-treatment relaxation. Lisa was treated to the Elemis facial while I had a back massage - quite literally, just what the doctor ordered.

After treatments, we took half an hour to enjoy the 'Relaxation Room.' The dimmed lights and tranquil music make the room the perfect place to continue to unwind post-treatment. Despite feeling as close to 21 as I have in a while, I must admit that I showed my age by dozing off on the comfy lounge.

After changing, we made our way down to the Calverley Grill restaurant. The menu boasts a great selection of dishes. I opted for grilled scallops followed by fillet steak, whilst Lisa chose the Stilton Panna Cotta and grilled salmon.

The hotel offers a range of beautiful lounges, where most guests choose to while away their evening. Amongst the traditional furnishings, in deep armchairs, we reflected on another year spent together. The deep state of tranquillity that Oulton Hall had plunged us into in our short stay had enabled us to understand something about getting older.

The spa treatments, The Wensleydale Suite, The Relaxation Room, The Calverley Grill - they had all helped us to realise that, although it is impossible to freeze the ageing process, it is certainly possible, if you find the right place, to enjoy it.

For more information, visit www.oultanhallhotel.co.uk



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Newcastle hotel gains coveted Green Key sustainable tourism certification

Sandman Signature Newcastle Hotel is celebrating a major sustainability milestone after achieving Green Key certification in recognition of its commitment to environmental excellence.

The four-star Sandman Signature Newcastle Hotel has implemented a number of initiatives which have improved the ecological footprint of its operations. A Green Key task force, pulling together team members from across the hotel's various departments, has been created to ensure the hotel is future-proofed from a sustainability perspective.

Specific initiatives introduced to date include water saving restrictors on all bedroom taps and showers and refillable toiletries, saving tens of thousands of single use plastic bottles. A new centrally controlled system operates the heating in guest bedrooms, ensuring it isn't accidentally left on when rooms are unoccupied, helping to reduce energy consumption. Regularly used items have been swapped for more sustainable products where possible, such as recycled paper,



L-R Elena Alfimova, Katie Lowery, Stephen Maughan

bamboo tissues and paper straws, and recycling dividers have been added to guest bins to help them recycle their rubbish. Bird boxes have been installed to support wildlife in the area, despite the hotel's city centre location meaning it has limited outdoor space.

Green Key sets the standard for excellence in the field of environmental responsibility and sustainable operation within the tourism sector, operating in 30 countries across the world. During the rigorous judging process each establishment is assessed against 150 criteria, in line with guidelines from the UN Tourism. The aim is for businesses to achieve

year-on-year environmental improvements and reduce climate-change-causing greenhouse gas emissions. It is one of the leading ecolabels recognised by the Google-powered booking engine Google Travel as part of its 'Sustainability Labelling'.

Sandman Signature Newcastle Hotel first opened its doors in 2011, in a prime position directly opposite the home of Newcastle United FC, St James' Park. Katie Lowery is the General Manager of the 170-bedroomed hotel. She said: "We have worked hard to become a more environmentally conscious hotel, and we all felt it was a key priority not just for guests but for us as a team. Having a dedicated Green Key task force has helped us really zone in on areas where we could cover off both easier wins and longer-term aspirations to be greener. Achieving the Green Key certification is something we're very proud of. We know it's not easily gained, so that makes it all the more valuable. But this is just the beginning – we look forward to finding new ways to save energy, waste and water and to improve our carbon footprint over the months ahead."

The Green Key scheme is managed by environmental charity Keep Britain Tidy and is independently audited.

www.sandmansignature.co.uk



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Our flagship Sandman Signature Newcastle Hotel is celebrating its 15th birthday, having supported corporate and leisure travellers and local businesses from its prime location opposite St James' Park since 2011.

The Sandman Group also has hotels in Glasgow, Aberdeen, Sheffield, Dublin and London Gatwick.

For more information go to www.sandmansignature.co.uk or get in touch via Sales_newcastle@sandmanhotels.co.uk



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Full Circle Brew Co: From Newcastle brewery to city-centre pub

Newcastle's independent brewing scene is about to get even more exciting as Full Circle Brew Co prepares to open its first-ever pub in the heart of the city.



The Newcastle-based brewery is taking over space on the first floor of Fenwick Newcastle, with the new venue due to open in October 2026.

For Full Circle, it marks another major step in a journey that began with a small brewing setup before the business moved to Hoults Yard in Newcastle in 2019. From there, the brewery has grown into an established independent producer, supplying its beers across the UK and exporting internationally.

"Opening our first pub was always something we'd plan to do once we'd become a fully established brewer in the North East," said Full Circle founder Ben Cleary. "The fact that it's going to be in the Newcastle Fenwick store is something we're really excited about because we're a local brewer and we're going to be part of what really is a North East institution. Full Circle at Fenwick will feature ten taps and two cask ale lines, giving customers the chance to enjoy Full Circle favourites alongside seasonal beers, collaborations and beers from other independent breweries. The venue will also host tap takeovers, meaning there should always be something different to discover. We're also delighted to be working with the Newcastle street-food favourite Peckin' Order who'll be serving fried chicken and smash burgers alongside the beer."

So, what does Full Circle actually brew? The answer is a pretty broad range of modern craft beers...you've probably seen them in some of your local supermarkets. Its core line-up includes Looper IPA, Repeater Session IPA, Hoop gluten-free American Pale Ale, Rotator New England Pale Ale, Dark Horse gluten-free Stout and Meridian Pilsner, alongside a constantly changing selection of seasonal beers, collaborations and experimental brews.

Looper IPA is arguably the brewery's best-known beer having picked up gold awards at SIBA BeerX,

as well as further golds at the Asia Beer Awards and FHA Beer Awards.

Full Circle is also leaving the North East. Don't panic...it's because the brewer is now featured on trains operated nationally by Lumo with a new Lumo-branded Session IPA. In other words, we're not keeping Full Circle to ourselves...we're allowing passengers travelling to and from Newcastle to try another way to sample a taste of the city's independent brewing scene.

Full Circle already has a brilliant home for beer lovers at its brewery and taproom in Hoults Yard, Newcastle.

"Our Hoults Yard taproom is much more than somewhere to grab a quick pint," adds Ben. "We're an increasingly popular, and a very different venue for business meetings. As well as our numerous Full Circle beers, guest beers, spirits, wine and cocktails, we have a kitchen which serves Neapolitan-style pizza made in a wood-fired oven. The main taproom can accommodate up to 100 people, while the Snug provides a more intimate space for groups of up to 60. There is also the Tank Room for smaller meetings and gatherings. As well as corporate events, we're available for private hire, parties, and we've even become a unique wedding venue."

So, whether you fancy dropping in for a pint after work, organising a full-blown company event, celebrating a birthday or looking for somewhere a little different for a wedding, Full Circle has plenty of options.

With its brewery and taproom at Hoults Yard, its new Fenwick city-centre pub and its growing relationship with Lumo, Full Circle is putting Newcastle craft beer firmly on the map...one pint at a time.

www.fullcirclebrew.co.uk





The Northumberland Arms

By Michael Grahamslaw

The full circle and the full package.

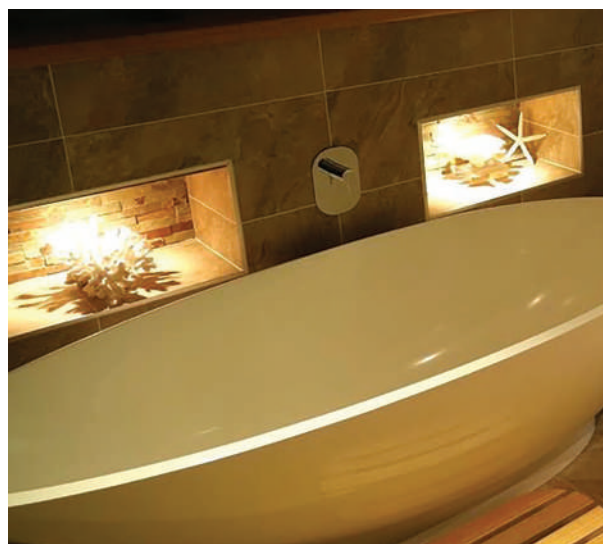
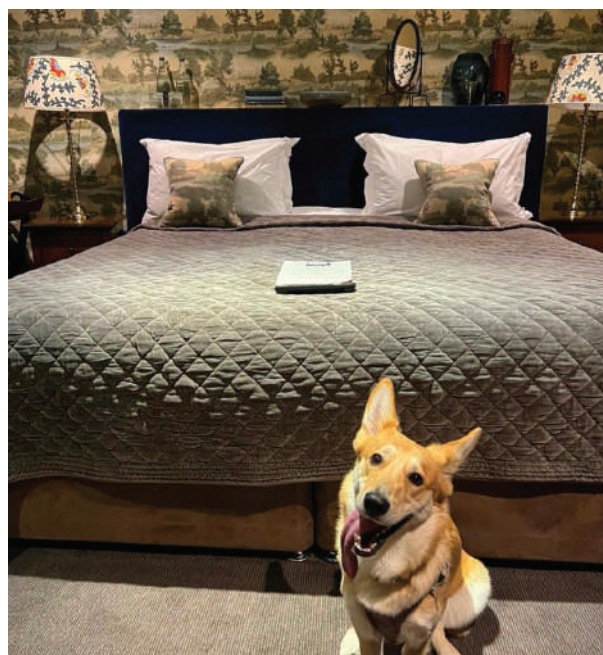
Regular readers may have spotted pub owner, Alice Lawson in the August edition. Alice described taking over The Northumberland Arms with her partner Jack Brown as a 'full circle moment', having worked behind the bar of the beloved Felton pub from the age of 17.

Now she is at the wheel, Alice is committed to driving the reputation of the pub forward and continuing to attract visitors whilst retaining the warm, comforting, community feeling that has made it the beloved local of many Feltonians.

Visiting The Northumberland Arms again was somewhat of a full circle moment for myself and my wife Lisa, too. This was our third stay, after we first fell in love with the pub back in 2021, just after the end of the second lockdown. I remembered the solace and comfort that the cosy pub had provided back in that difficult time and set off on the short journey with high expectations that it would do so again.

Those of you familiar with Northumberland may recognise the iconic white building from trips up and down the county. If you've not yet had the pleasure, the pub's location, just a mile East of the A1 and halfway between Alnwick and Morpeth makes it the ideal stop off point for weary travellers in need of refreshment or a well-appointed room for the night.





On arrival, we were greeted by General Manager Trevor and were immediately ushered (not entirely against our will, admittedly) towards the beer garden for a couple of cold drinks in the bank holiday sun. The garden offers charming views of Felton Old Bridge, which crosses the River Coquet right next to the pub. We reminisced about the old lockdown days, when such simple pleasures were not possible.

After one or two rather agreeable beverages, we checked into the same room that we had stayed in first time round. Room 1 is adorned with thick curtains, freestanding wooden wardrobes and wide, plush beds give the rooms a soothing feel. The tiled bathroom, complete with walk-in shower and free-standing tub, is the perfect place to unwind.

The pub offers six boutique, en-suite rooms all recently renovated and with luxuries such as complimentary robes and The White Company toiletries. Alice's vision of cosiness is certainly accomplished here: if a comfortable pub room has the feel of a comfy pair of slippers, the rooms at The Northumberland Arms are pipe, slippers and rocking chair entwined.

The plan was to change and head down for dinner. Lisa fancied a soak in the bath before we did so. One can always judge the quality of a hotel bath by how long his wife stays in there.

A mere three hours later, thoroughly freshened up, we made our way down to the charming conservatory for our evening meal. The picture windows let in a beautiful light whilst allowing a view of the greenery outside. With Winter approaching, I thought of our last visit, when we had sat in the conservatory and the snow had fallen on the village of Felton and left a fine blanket on the surrounding flora. I could not help thinking that sitting here in the conservatory, with its traditional wooden flooring and comfy armchairs, would be equally as pleasant in the winter months as in summer.

The Northumberland Arms prides itself on local, high-quality food grounded in pub culture. The extensive menu offers pub classics such as beer-battered haddock and chips to summer vegetable linguine.

I started with cauliflower pakoras followed by fillet steak while Lisa enjoyed burrata to start before the cornfed chicken. All was wonderfully cooked and presented and left us with the satisfied, relaxed feeling that The Northumberland Arms guarantees.

The only thing for it was to head to bed, where we slept like babies through until morning. One last walk-in shower, one last complimentary Rington's tea and it was time to check out until next time. Our full circle was closed.

As for Alice's full circle? Well, the goal of creating a welcoming, inclusive space for locals and visitors to feel right at home in, has been well and truly accomplished.

For more information, northumberlandarms-felton.co.uk



Ānela...wedding wear that's making headlines

Tyneside based wedding wear company heads for glitzy award night in London.



“There is only one thing in life worse than being talked about, and that is not being talked about.” *Oscar Wilde 1890.*

Well plainly, Jo and Brogan, the founders of Ānela Wedding Wear, have been talked about because, after launching their business at the start of the year, they've been shortlisted for a prestigious award with Boutique Magazine.

Boutique Magazine is widely considered to be a cornerstone publication for the UK's independent fashion retail sector...it's a big hitter.

And the fact that Ānela was launched, not to be just another place where mothers of brides and grooms go to buy wedding wear, but to make sure their chosen piece is fashion considered and feels incredible to wear.

And yes, a large part of their wedding wear is bang on trend because they design in-house, and work with other renowned designers. In other words, one of the UK's top fashion magazines has come knocking at the Ānela door because their wedding and occasion wear is stylish and fashionable...and different.

Here's what Gemma Ward, Editor of Boutique Magazine said...

“I'm pleased to inform you that your business has been selected as a finalist for the Boutique Star Awards 2026....so we hope you are pleased to be recognised among the industry's finest.”

Wow...praise indeed.

“To say we were both stunned and delighted is a massive understatement bearing in mind, we were only trading for five months at the time,” said Jo. “What it shows is that mams are willing to look

around for something different to wear on this very special day... something authentic to them, fashionable and crucially practical.”

“Being able to design our own pieces is something that makes us stand out,” added Brogan. “We regularly have clients who don't know precisely what they want...they like to be guided...so we guide them to the perfect piece.

The year 2025 was a huge milestone for both of us: Brogan tied the knot in Las Vegas, and Jo's daughter, Abbie, was married amidst the natural beauty of Kielder Water in Northumberland.

Navigating the search for Mother of the Bride outfits firsthand revealed just how difficult, stressful, and impersonal the high-street process could be. We realised that mams were consistently being underserved during one of the most important milestones of their lives.

We recognised an immediate need for a dedicated boutique — a harmonious space of creativity, warmth, and genuine care designed entirely around mothers. With that shared realisation, Ānela was born.

Jo went on to say “We don't believe in rigid fashion “rules” or matronly uniforms. Instead, we offer a personal, body-positive approach to styling—helping you discover modern silhouettes, luxurious fabrics, and curated millinery that make you feel radiant, comfortable, and authentically you”.

Which is why Ānela has come to the attention of Boutique Magazine. Good news spreads fast!

So, are you looking for something special...something different which represents you as a woman and mother..

The best idea is to log onto the excellent Ānela website www.anela.co.uk and study the various collections from a host of renowned designers as well as Ānela's unique pieces. You'll end up with ideas tumbling out of your head.

Next, either book an appointment online or give Jo and Brogan a call on 07831665888. You'll then pop into their store, which is nestled inside the historic Exchange 1856 in North Shields, the boutique is a calm, bright, and a welcoming sanctuary where North East mams can relax, be themselves, and feel truly celebrated.

You'll be guided through the world of Ānela, their thoughtful designs, refined colours, luxurious fabrics, and have something you'll be proud to wear and be seen in.

Ānela is making headlines...you can too!

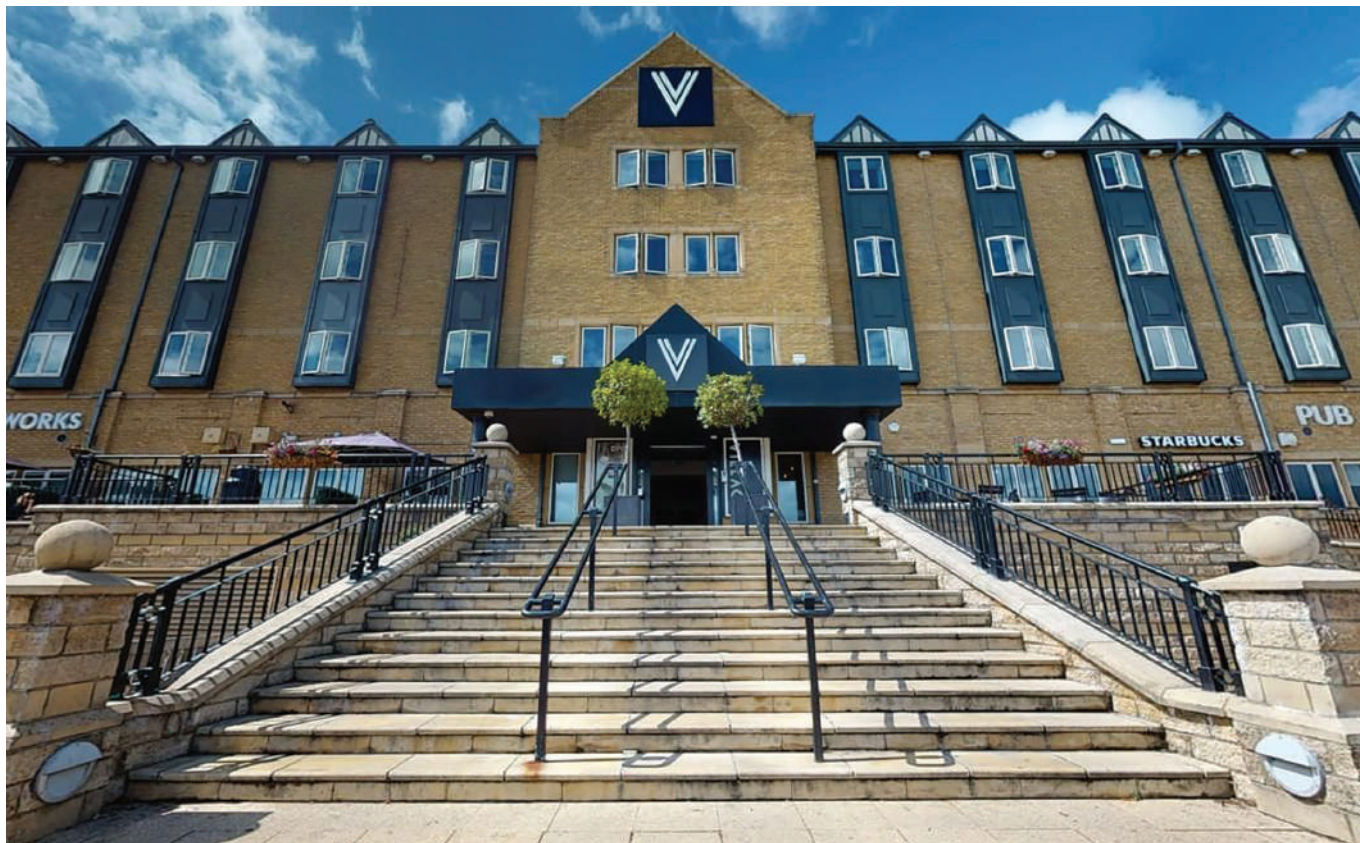
anela.co.uk



anela



Brogan and Jo



The Village Community

By Michael Grahamslaw

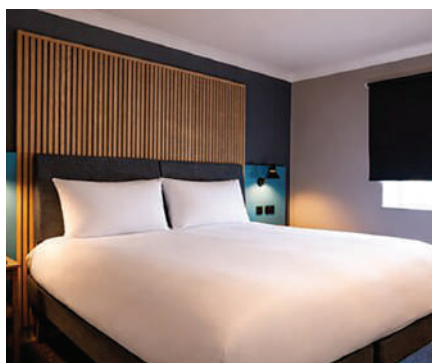
Few hotels are perhaps named as aptly as, The Village. The multi-purpose hotel group has 34 hotels across the UK, each replete with enough facilities to create its own little microcosm.

The best on Tyneside is its impressive site on Cobalt Business Park where facilities include (but are not limited to): 157 guest rooms, in-house pub & grill, a salubrious health & wellness club and some of the best meetings & events spaces in the area.

For a chain hotel, it's one that serves its community very well. The cutting-edge gym and spa centre reportedly has thousands of members while a steady stream of caffeinated workers visit its very own Starbucks coffee shop for their daily caffeine kick.

Billed as a welcome reprieve from stuffy hotel restaurants, its pubs and grill is also known for its cosy embrace. A place to kick back on cold, dark evenings in front of the footie, when the prospect of the big city is too much, and only comfort and convenience will do.

With this in mind, my wife Lisa and I ventured all 2.6 miles around the corner where the place – quite literally – feels like home.



While I am frequently known to breeze or wheeze my way through the latest morning cardio classes in the leisure club, Lisa is less of a regular and was immediately softened by the warm, inviting reception area and its ebullient staff.

At this point, we were really looking forward to an overnight stay without having to try too hard. With check-in completed in a matter of moments, we soon collapsed onto our large kingsize bed.

Bathed in calming tones, our room was a cocoon of comfort and luxury. Exactly the sort of place you want to hunker down for the evening and pick out some hearty food from the room service menu.

Predictably, thoughts soon turned to dinner and the pull of the Pub & Grill.

This boasts all the familiarity and warmth of a local pub whilst retaining the polish expected of a modern hotel. Families, couples, leisure club members and overnight guests mingled easily, creating exactly the sort of community atmosphere the hotel's name promises.

The menu offers a broad selection of crowd-pleasing favourites. I opted for a hearty burger

with all the trimmings while Lisa chose one of the grill options, accompanied by a glass of wine and the comforting knowledge that neither of us would be washing up later that evening.

Fed and suitably refreshed, there was only one logical destination: the hotel's Fan Zone.

Football and hospitality have always made agreeable companions and Village understands this better than most. The dedicated viewing area was alive with conversation as guests gathered for the return of the Premier League – on giant screens.

Morning arrived rather earlier than either of us would ordinarily have preferred. Fortunately, one of the advantages of staying at Village is there is always a compelling reason to get out of bed.

While many hotel guests might choose a leisurely breakfast and a slow start, I headed straight for the health and wellness club. The facilities are among the best in the area and the early morning crowd demonstrated precisely why it has become such a hub for local members.

At breakfast, watching hotel guests mingle with gym members, coffee drinkers and business folk reinforced the sense that Village has created something slightly different. It is not merely a place to stay but a place for people to gather.

The old adage certainly rings true: you needn't travel far to have a good time. We had a great time and will certainly be back for more. At this point, you could call us the Village Hotel preservation society.

For more information, visit www.village-hotels.co.uk/newcastle

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VILLAGE
HOTEL CLUB

In conversation with...

Sarah Barber

*Director of Sales at Doubletree by Hilton,
Newcastle International Airport*

What attracted you to working in the hospitality industry?

I originally started a degree in bio-medical science but following a gap year working for Key Camp Holidays I realised I loved the world of travel and decided to move into hotels.

I began my career at Swallow Hotels where I undertook their graduate programme.

Subsequently taken over by Marriott I enjoyed a wide range of national sales roles before long spells at Matfen Hall and Seaham Hall.

I loved the autonomy of independent hotels but also the brand structure of working within the larger chains.

Tell us about your current role?

I joined the hotel in 2019 having decided I wanted to work for one property within the North East. Not long afterwards Covid hit but we had landed a big contract with BP which meant we were able to stay open throughout for key workers. This led to a change in our core business mix and allowed us to look wider and attract lots of Teesside businesses as well as international corporates.

How has the hotel evolved over your time there?

Pre-lockdown we had a huge investment in our public areas and added family bedrooms. In more recent times we have had a rolling refurbishment of our bedrooms as well as behind the scenes investment in tech and wi-fi.

I must give a nod to our owners, the Cairn Group, who really care for their staff and made no redundancies throughout the Covid period.

Tell us about the Hotels facilities?

We have 193 bedrooms and seven meeting rooms, for up to 150 delegates, as well as 100 car parking spaces and ev chargers. In addition we have an onsite gym, the popular Columbus Bar and Fratellos restaurant.



Sarah Barber

What is the Hotels USP?

We have a brilliant team working in a fantastic location. Plus we have the backing of our large ownership company, Cairn Group, whilst also being a franchise of Hilton which is very important.

What are you currently working on?

We have a huge focus on meetings and events and are constantly looking at ways to entice people away from their office to a different environment.

What is your proudest career achievement?

Managing my team and seeing the career development of former staff is very rewarding. Winning Visit England Gold whilst at Matfen Hall in 2016 was also fantastic.

What advice would you give to anyone looking at a career within the hospitality sector?

Definitely to work across all departments and display common sense and a good work ethic. This industry is very much a people business and that is something AI will never replace.

How do you like to unwind?

I spend a lot of time ferrying my 15 year old daughter to rowing club and the theatre. I also enjoy jogging and have recently completed my 7th Great North Run. I love to catch up with old friends as well who have a great way of bringing you back to reality.

www.doubletree-newcastle.co.uk



A date with Aphrodite in Paphos, Cyprus

By Stuart Forster

Travellers from Gatwick, Manchester and Birmingham were filing through the border checks at Paphos International Airport as passengers from Newcastle poured into the terminal on a warm Saturday night in southern Cyprus.

The island has been attracting arrivals from far afield for well over 2,000 years. The first were pilgrims, intent on worshipping at the Temple of Aphrodite in Palaepaphos. That ancient site is in the village of Kouklia, a 15-minute drive east of the airport.

Even today, the mythological origins of the Ancient Greek goddess of love and fertility are celebrated on this island in the eastern Mediterranean. Tours pause by the stony beach associated with her origin story.

At Petra tou Romiou, guides point to rocks by the coastline and recount how the divine beauty was formed in the foaming sea. Like an expert surfer, she drifted ashore balanced on a giant shell.

The grisly part of that tale is that the water she was created in was agitated by the severed genitals of the god Uranus, whom his son, Cronos, castrated. Though divine, Aphrodite



clearly came from a dysfunctional family.

Thankfully, Cyprus is today a popular family holiday destination. Smiling faces at Paphos Aphrodite Waterpark provide ample evidence of that. My base was nearby, at the Constantinou Bros. Asimina Suites Hotel – an adults-only property that added a rooftop bar for the 2026 season.

The hotel has a private beach that's celebrated for its sunset views and is a short stroll from the Agios Nikolaos chapel. The Orthodox place of worship's domed ceiling features a magnificent depiction of St Nicholas set against a golden background.

On my first day, I embraced activities available to hotel guests, starting with a Pilates session in the seafront gazebo that hosts wedding ceremonies. Aqua aerobics, a cookery demonstration and even a rooftop art-and-wine session followed. I found applying reds to my glass easier than colours from my brush. Dinner included a crash course in traditional Cypriot dancing.

Paphos is ideal for both fly-and-flop holidays and breaks that combine relaxation with exploring. Rather than lounging by the poolside on day two, I layered on sunscreen and set out on the two-mile coastal footpath leading to Paphos's harbour.

Known as Kato Paphos, the waterfront is guarded by a medieval castle. In the 1960s, remains of Roman-era villas were discovered near the harbour within what is today the Nea Paphos UNESCO World Heritage Site. Archaeologists have uncovered skilfully laid mosaics depicting mythological scenes; the most celebrated gives its name to the House of Dionysus.

Further along the coast, ancient tombs hewn from rock warrant exploration. Inaccurately



known as the Tombs of the Kings, they were carved for senior officials and aristocrats. Featuring columns and burial chambers, they are as much monuments to life's impermanence as they are to the people long ago laid to rest.

To learn more about the region's history, I headed up to the free-to-visit Archaeological Museum of the Paphos District. Evidence of human settlement includes wells dug more than 10,000 years ago and 5,000-year-old cruciform figurines that could easily be worn today.

The museum is on the same road as the Stelios Kyriakides Stadium, the home of Pafos FC. After finishing fourth in the Cypriot League in 2025-26, Pafos have qualified for the UEFA Conference League, where their opponents include Edinburgh's Heart of Midlothian.

Anyone craving football while in Paphos could do worse than head to Why Not?, a sports bar on Poseidonos Avenue. Both the Newcastle and Sunderland matches were screened there on the Saturday afternoon ahead of my flight. Following a bite to eat and a couple of pints, I began my journey home by heading a few yards along the street to board a bus to the airport.

Travel information

Find information about things to do in Paphos and the surrounding area on the visitpafos.org.cy and visitcyprus.com websites

Jet2.com, Ryanair and TUI operate direct flights between Newcastle International Airport and Paphos International Airport.

A 20 per cent discount is available on bookings made by the end of February 2027 for stays in 2027 at the Constantinou Bros. Asimina Suites hotel (asimina-cbh.com).





Infinity Wellness Clinic celebrates five years in business

Sunderland-based Infinity Wellness Clinic is celebrating five years in business after launching during the COVID-19 pandemic with a mission to bring innovative, tech-led wellness therapies to the North East.

Steve, Keri and Olivia McMullen launched the family-run business after identifying a gap in the market for touch-free wellness therapies.

Having spent months travelling across the UK

to access alternative therapies themselves, they decided to bring the concept closer to home, establishing their business at the North East BIC in Sunderland.

Their vision was to create a destination where people could access private, contactless wellness therapies in a comfortable and relaxing environment, with everything set up ready for clients to enjoy their chosen therapy.

Today, Infinity Wellness Clinic offers a range of therapies, including cryotherapy, floatation therapy, infrared sauna and hydrotherapy massage, helping clients to relax, manage everyday stress and pain, and support their overall wellbeing.

Steve McMullen, owner of Infinity Wellness Clinic, said: "Reaching five years in business makes us incredibly proud. It rarely feels like work because watching our clients' transformations is so rewarding.

"People walk through our doors carrying the weight of the world on their shoulders, feeling the pressures of everyday life or struggling with pain, and they leave looking happier, more relaxed and, in many cases, telling us they feel free from pain. Seeing clients recommend us to their friends and family means everything to us.

"We're incredibly grateful to everyone who has supported us over the last five years and helped us build the business into what it is today."

Since opening at Sunderland Enterprise Park, the business has built a loyal client base, attracting customers from across the region.



A little bit of Morocco in Newcastle

G Hammam is the only traditional hammam of its kind in Newcastle! You can find the sanctuary just a couple of miles out of the city centre.

Inspired by centuries-old Moroccan bathing rituals, G Hammam offers visitors the opportunity to slow down, reconnect and enjoy a wellness experience that has long been at the heart of Moroccan culture for centuries. From traditional cleansing rituals to luxurious spa treatments, the venue brings the warmth, hospitality and heritage of Morocco to Newcastle.

While hammams are a familiar part of everyday life across Morocco, they remain a rarity in the UK. G Hammam based in Fenham has created an authentic space where people can experience a unique cultural tradition without travelling overseas!

Georgina owner of G Hammam, said:

"Our aim has always been to create somewhere people can experience authentic Moroccan wellness, hospitality and culture. We often hear customers say they feel as though they've stepped out of Newcastle and into Marrakech. The healing powers of a hammam are well documented. Come and try it out- you'll not be disappointed!"

The salon is also helping to introduce a growing wellness trend to the region. As interest in holistic wellbeing continues to rise, more people are looking beyond traditional spa treatments towards cultural wellness experiences that combine relaxation, ritual and self-care.

So whether you're seeking relaxation, stress relief or simply a unique experience, G Hammam offers a chance to escape everyday life and enjoy a genuine taste of Morocco without leaving Newcastle.

County Durham hair innovator named the UK's Hair Influencer of the Year

A Murton hair specialist has been named Professional Hair Influencer of the Year at a major national awards ceremony, placing him among the leading figures in British hairdressing.

Rob Wood, founder and creative director of County Durham based Novo Cabelo, received the national title at the Pro Hair Awards 2026 in London on 7 September.

The award recognises Rob's pioneering use of social media to transform perceptions of hair loss and modern hair replacement. His honest and emotional transformation videos have reached millions of people around the world, helping those experiencing hair loss discover the options available to them.

The win comes as Rob celebrates three further finalist places at Creative HEAD's prestigious Most Wanted Awards 2026, which recognise the most accomplished, progressive and influential talents in British and Irish hairdressing.



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Shoulder pain after training or at the desk?

By Angela Petrocchi, SWISSPHYSIO

Shoulder pain after returning to exercise is common, especially when load, volume, or intensity increases faster than the shoulder tissues are ready for.



It can also appear after going back to desk work after a holiday, starting university, or spending more time studying. In both situations, the shoulder is rarely reacting to one single movement. It is usually responding to the total demand placed on it across the whole day.

Training technique matters, but so do posture, recovery, sleep, stress, tissue tolerance, and what your body was doing before sport. A shoulder may cope well after a day with walking and varied movement yet feel irritated after hours hunched over a laptop.

Common training-related causes

- **Too much too soon:** sudden increases in pressing, pulling, swimming, throwing, or overhead work can overload the shoulder.
- **Poor shoulder blade control:** weakness or fatigue around the upper back and scapula can make the shoulder joint work harder and incorrectly.
- **Mobility or technique issues:** stiffness in the thoracic spine, pecs, lats, or posterior shoulder may increase strain during training.

These factors can contribute to rotator cuff irritation, tendon overload, or the flare-up of an old injury that was not fully rehabilitated. Pain may appear when lifting the arm, reaching out or overhead, sleeping on the affected side, repeatedly testing the shoulder during the day. Everyday movements like fastening the bra or getting dressed/undressed may be painful.

When desk routine is the trigger

If symptoms started after returning to work, study, or a more sedentary routine, the main trigger may be sitting, typing, laptop use, carrying bags, and taking fewer movement breaks. Rounded shoulders, a forward head position, raised shoulders while typing, or looking down at a screen can irritate the neck and shoulder area.

A heavy backpack or one-shoulder bag can also increase load on one side.

Stress, reduced activity, and prolonged positions can make tissues feel stiffer and more sensitive. Sometimes shoulder pain is also referred from the neck, particularly when it is linked with stiffness, headaches, pins and needles, or pain spreading down the arm.

What can help

- Reduce aggravating load for 1–2 weeks, especially painful overhead pressing, dips, or explosive movements.
- Warm up with band external rotations, scapular retractions, wall slides, and gradual ramp-up sets.
- Keep training around it with lower body, core, cardio, and pain-free pulling or pressing variations.
- Rebuild strength gradually using rotator cuff, serratus, and upper-back exercises such as face pulls, rows, controlled carries, and external rotations.
- Modify exercises by trying neutral-grip dumbbell pressing, incline push-ups, or a reduced range of motion.



Scan here for info on rotator cuff tendinopathy.

Desk and lifestyle changes

- Change position every 30–60 minutes, even for 1–2 minutes.
- Set up your workstation
- Try gentle mobility such as shoulder rolls, neck rotations, doorway pec stretches, thoracic extensions, and shoulder blade squeezes.
- Carry bags evenly using both backpack straps rather than one shoulder.



- Support recovery with sleep, protein intake, rest days, and avoiding repeated painful testing.



Scan here for our back and neck care tips.

When to seek advice

Get assessed if pain is severe, worsening, linked with a fall or trauma, or associated with sudden weakness, visible deformity, numbness, tingling, chest symptoms, major loss of movement, or night pain that does not settle. You should also seek medical or physiotherapy advice if symptoms continue for more than 1–2 weeks despite reducing load and making sensible changes. A simple recovery rule is: reduce the irritating desk, bag, or training load; add regular movement; then rebuild shoulder and upper-back strength gradually.

Book your appointment now and enjoy a **10% introductory discount** on your first session.



Scan to book.



From car sales to counselling

A North East woman who spent more than two decades building a career in the motor trade has swapped car sales for counselling after her own experiences of anxiety, loss and caring for family members prompted her to completely rethink her future.

Kellie Moore, founder of Hunt Moore Counselling and Psychotherapy, works from a dedicated studio at The Beacon on Westgate Road, supporting adults with a particular focus on neurodiversity, including autism, ADHD and dyslexia. After suffering several losses and caring for family members, Kellie found herself experiencing anxiety and low mood, something she had never previously experienced.

"I found myself in a place where I'd never been before," she says. "I couldn't get the answers that I wanted or needed from doctors, so I set out on a journey to find a way to help myself."

Kellie began exploring different approaches to wellbeing, including exercise, sunlight, nutrition and the ways in which lifestyle can influence mental wellbeing. Then came another unexpected turning point when she was made redundant.

Her decision resulted in a six-year training journey including 450 hours of voluntary counselling. Kellie's practice has developed a particular focus on neurodiversity, an area that became increasingly important to her during her training.

Her small studio has been designed with sensory needs in mind, with different lighting options, cushions, blankets, sensory fidgets, puzzles and textured materials.



International musician brings unique sound journeys to the North East

Nick Able, originally from Gosforth and now living in rural County Durham, has spent more than two decades performing alongside legendary Indian sitar maestro Pandit Ravi Shankar and his daughter, internationally acclaimed musician Anoushka Shankar. Having played in venues including the Royal Albert Hall, Carnegie Hall in New York and the Sydney Opera House, Nick is now bringing his unique wellness-inspired performances to audiences across the North East.

His latest venture will see him performing immersive "sound journeys" at prestigious venues throughout the region, including Wentworth Grange, a luxury residential and nursing hotel for the elderly in Riding Mill, where guests, including members of the aristocracy and those with distinguished backgrounds will experience a relaxing blend of music, meditation and storytelling.

His music combines gentle ambient soundscapes with acoustic instruments to create immersive performances that encourage deep relaxation.

"At Wentworth Grange I want to offer guests something genuinely different, an experience created especially for this unique setting. I'll share stories from my career and perform music that allows people simply to relax and enjoy the moment. Whether someone wants to sit and watch or close their eyes and become immersed in the experience, there's no right or wrong way to enjoy it."

Former Scottish Footballer Champions Groundbreaking MND Research in Newcastle

Former Scottish professional footballer and now Cleaton based financial adviser Marc Millar has spoken movingly about his personal commitment to Motor Neuron Disease (MND) research after losing his mother to the devastating illness and becoming an ambassador for MND Scotland.

Although now based in North East England, Marc was invited to become an ambassador for MND Scotland because of both his personal connection and his profile from a successful football career in Scotland during the 1990s and early 2000s.

As part of his ambassadorial role, Marc recently visited Newcastle University, alongside Colin Houghton of the Darby Rimmer MND Foundation, to learn more about pioneering research that could transform how MND is diagnosed.

The visit was hosted by Professor Roger Whittaker and his research team,



including MND Scotland-funded researcher Ao Wang, whose work is focused on developing ways of diagnosing MND at a much earlier stage.

MND Scotland is funding the Newcastle research because of its potential to make a significant difference to people affected by the disease.

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stillwater

Curtis Maughan, Founder, stillwater
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Has wellbeing become too complicated?

By Bethany Ainsley, OptiMe

Every day, we're exposed to new and often conflicting advice about what we should eat, how we should exercise, how much we should sleep and what we should avoid.

We're told to prioritise protein, then focus more on fibre, avoid ultra-processed foods, but don't assume everything processed is bad, eat healthily, but make sure you know how to read the labels. Then there's gut health, supplements, glucose monitoring, plastics, fasting, detoxes and cleanses, and countless other things we could apparently be doing to improve our health.

And that's before the latest trends. Creatine is suddenly everywhere, sleep isn't just sleep anymore, it comes with a score, and exercise isn't simply about moving our bodies, it's steps, zones, recovery and performance.

Some of this is backed by good evidence, some is based on emerging research that needs more time, and some has questionable science behind it altogether. But with so much information coming at us from so many different directions, I do wonder whether we've made looking after ourselves more complicated than it needs to be.

Having more information doesn't necessarily make it easier to know what to do with it, and sometimes I think it can have the opposite effect.

Take food, for example. You might decide you want to eat more healthily, only to find yourself standing in a supermarket trying to work out what that actually means. Should you be looking at calories, protein, fibre, sugar or additives? Should you buy organic? And how realistic is it to avoid processed food altogether when so much of what fills our supermarket shelves has been processed in some way?

And food is only one part of our wellbeing. There's sleep, exercise, stress, relationships, finances, work and everything else going on in our lives, so when making positive changes starts to feel like an enormous lifestyle overhaul,

it can be easier to do nothing because you simply don't know where to begin.

After almost two decades working in wellbeing and with thousands of people, one thing I've seen time and again is that there is no perfect formula. What works for one person won't necessarily work for another, and what works for you now might not be what you need six months from now.

Wellbeing isn't a fixed destination, it moves as life moves. What needs your attention during a relentless period at work is rarely what needs it after a new baby, a bereavement, a house move or a promotion. Most wellbeing advice assumes a single, permanent focus, when in reality that focus should be allowed to shift, and often the most useful thing you can do is give yourself permission to change it.

You could be concentrating on eating better or exercising more, but if financial worries are keeping you awake every night, perhaps that's where you need support first. Sometimes we need to strip away some of the noise, look at what's actually going on in our lives and ask a much simpler question: what's having the biggest impact on how I feel right now?

From there, it's about finding a realistic place to start. That could mean looking properly at your finances, getting outside for a walk, speaking to someone you trust or getting into a better bedtime routine, and often one positive change in one area of our wellbeing can have an impact elsewhere too.

This thinking has shaped how we've developed OptiMe, particularly the latest version. Rather than adding to the information out there, OptiMe builds a wellbeing profile around your own ups and downs, so it reflects what is actually happening and shows where the balance has tipped across your health, finances, relationships and work. There is no single right way to live, so you choose the philosophy that fits you, and support and small, realistic actions follow. As life changes, your profile and focus change with it.

Because we can have all the wellbeing information in the world, but if it leaves us so overwhelmed we don't know where to start, how useful is it really?

To find out more about OptiMe and start your free trial, visit optimewellbeing.com



Bethany Ainsley



“

**Nobody should
have to face
life alone.**

Curtis Maughan

A quieter kind of wellness

stillwater...helping you find a better place.

It's probably a decent assumption to make, as you are reading this article in the Northern Insight business magazine, that you are involved in business.

It's also probably safe to say that at some point during your business life, you've been under pressure and felt very alone. If you can leave your worries behind when you close the door and head for home, you're very lucky, because most business people will invariably keep thinking about the day they've just had and what the following day, week, month or year will look like.

All of which can affect your home life, physical wellbeing and mental health.

And, if you are feeling like that, do you ever think that your employees may be having the same thoughts and feeling the same pressures.

If you recognise any of the above, you are like Curtis Maughan. It wasn't too long ago that he went through every emotion you can think of...he lost his job, lost his home, and a relationship came to an end. He hit rock bottom, but he knew he needed something different from the professional help that was available.

And this is when the story of his stillwater website began. (www.mystillwater.life)

"When I was at work, I was...like most people...good at covering-up what was going on," said Curtis. "My employer didn't realise what I was going through until it was too late. There was nobody to turn to...nobody to discuss my problems with.

"Which is why businesses should have something in place to help anyone who's struggling or, at the very least, point them in the direction where they can get help or find somewhere quiet to land, to reflect, and possibly discuss their problems. stillwater is a space for developing the inner skills that help people navigate everyday life... self-awareness, emotional regulation, reflection, presence and connection...and if everyone could build those skills into their lives it can help them before everything becomes overwhelming.

"stillwater takes you through a journey and is always there if you need help. It can be a workplace tool where employers can encourage staff to go if they're finding work is getting too intense. Take a ten minute break and use stillwater to share your thoughts. When someone finally gets around to knocking on the HR door, it may be too late. That ten minute break could be something which helps a vulnerable employee to turn their life around.

Nobody should have to face life alone. stillwater is not a replacement for therapy, clinical treatment or crisis services. It focuses on small practices that can fit into ordinary life, including working life. It also acts as a community hub and a place to reflect as well as being something that people can dip into while sitting alongside more formal forms of support.

The best idea is to check out the website...www.mystillwater.life. It's fascinating. There are guides to explain meditation, breathing and coping techniques, and some daily habits you might want to get into. You can start a journal where you put into words how you're feeling and can see how you felt last week or last month. There's also a section which will direct you to professional help if you really have reached the end of your tether.

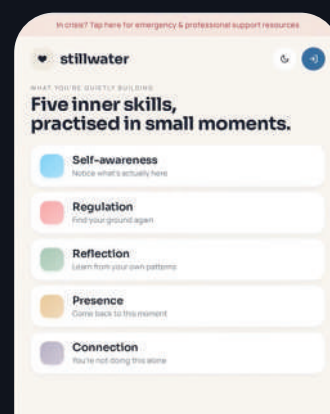
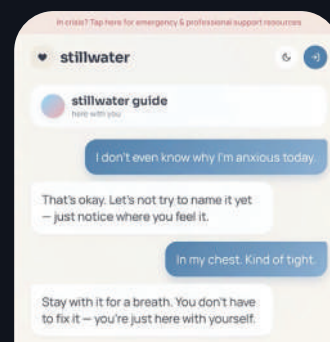
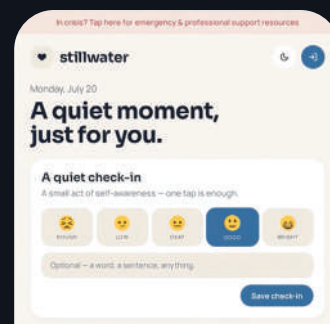
In other words, instead of becoming overwhelmed, stillwater gives people a chance to ensure that reflection and emotional self-awareness become ordinary habits.

It helped Curtis and it can help you.

And if you are a business owner, it can help your employees stay in a better place. Why not try a 30-day no-obligation trial? It'll lead you by the hand and show exactly how mystillwater.life can be a huge benefit to everyone.

stillwater...a place for those difficult days.

www.mystillwater.life





Short of time?

By David Fairlamb

One of the most common things I hear after more than 30 years as a personal trainer is that a person would love to get fit, but just can't find the time.

Busy careers, family commitments etc can make finding time to exercise feel almost impossible. But getting fitter doesn't require hours in the gym, it requires a better plan.

Many people believe that the longer they exercise, the better the results but in reality, that's rarely the case. I've seen people spend 90 minutes wandering around the gym, chatting between sets, scrolling through their phones and doing exercises with no real structure. They leave feeling tired but haven't necessarily trained effectively.

Compare that with someone who walks into the gym with a clear purpose. They know exactly what they're doing, they work with intensity, minimise rest periods and finish a full-body workout in just 30 to 45 minutes. More often than not, they achieve far better results.

Fitness isn't always the amount of time you spend exercising, it's about the quality of the time you invest.



David Fairlamb

This is exactly why I built our training sessions around efficiency. Whether it's one of our strength-based group sessions or a 30-minute VersaClimber class at ClimbAhub, every minute has a purpose. There's no standing around wondering what to do next. You arrive, train with focus, push yourself alongside others and leave knowing you've made every minute count.

The VersaClimber is a perfect example. In just half an hour, you can challenge your heart and lungs, strengthen your entire body and burn serious calories without spending hours pounding away on a treadmill. It's proof that smart training beats long training every single time.

The same applies to strength training. A focused 40-minute session targeting the major muscle groups is far more productive than spending

twice as long doing random exercises with no progression. Consistency, structure and effort will always outperform endless hours of unfocused exercise.

The biggest change many people need to make isn't finding more time. It's changing how they think about exercise.

Those 30 minutes, repeated consistently week after week, soon become stronger muscles, improved fitness, increased energy, better sleep and greater confidence. Small investments made regularly create life-changing results.

You don't need to train every day, you simply need a realistic plan that fits your lifestyle and one that you can stick to for months and years, not just a few weeks.

One of the greatest rewards of following a well-structured plan is that it removes the guesswork. Instead of constantly wondering if you're doing enough, you can focus on simply turning up and giving your best. Every workout builds on the last, creating momentum that not only transforms your body but also strengthens your mindset and confidence to tackle challenges both inside and outside the gym.

David's summing up

Ordinary people can achieve extraordinary things when you stop looking for excuses and start following a plan.

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On the Tee Box



The Northumberland Golf Club

Location and Setting

The Northumberland Golf Club sits inside High Gosforth Park, just a couple of miles north of Newcastle upon Tyne city centre, on the same estate as Newcastle Racecourse. It's a setting unlike almost anywhere else in English golf: the fairways weave in and out of the racecourse.

Course Type and Length

Officially classed as parkland with a heathland character, the course plays to a par of 72 over 6,687 yards from the back tees — a proper, championship-length test rather than a short course to be taken lightly. The layout was shaped in golf's Golden Age: originally laid out in 1898, then substantially reworked by Harry Colt from 1918, with James Braid brought in the following year to advise on further changes. Strategic bunkering and complex greens reward accuracy over raw power.

Facilities

The clubhouse occupies a commanding position looking over the 18th green, with a bar, lounges, an elegant dining room and sun terrace. Golfers can warm up on the recently upgraded practice range and chipping and putting greens. In the clubhouse refreshments range from a quick drink to a three-course meal freshly prepared by our Head Chef using local, seasonal ingredients.

Signature Hole

The 18th is a great finishing hole with the handsome clubhouse providing the backdrop. Teeing off over the racecourse onto the fairway below, with cross bunkers catching your eye. The uphill approach plays at least a club longer and with out of bounds for anything long and right, breathe a sigh of relief when your ball comes to rest. Many visitors rate it the most memorable finishing hole they've played in the North East.

Toughest Hole

The 13th hole, with a stroke index of 1, is officially the toughest hole on the course. Playing 470 yards off the medal tee over the racecourse, you'd better hope the prevailing wind is with you. A 3-shotter to the green for most, where par feels like birdie.

Longest Drive

At the far end of the course, turning back into the prevailing wind, many promising medal rounds have faltered over the last 4 holes. The Par 5 15th hole at 515 yards, sees its fair share of bogeys or worse. Make sure you stay out of the sand.

Course Record

The course has seen plenty of low scoring under tournament pressure having hosted the R & A Open Qualifier series and the DP World Tour Q School qualifier. The current course record has just been broken by Jose Islas from Mexico carding a gross score of 62, 9 under par in the recent Q School qualifier.

Competitions

The Northumberland Golf Club has genuine tournament pedigree. It hosted the Dunlop Masters in 1972, won by New Zealand's Bob Charles by two shots from England's Tony Jacklin, and staged the Newcastle Brown "900" Open on the European Tour in 1980. The club has also held the English Amateur Championship, and more recently served as an Open Regional Qualifying venue for the R&A over a five-year run from 2013.

Prices

Green fees vary by day and time, with advance booking essential. Visitors and visiting parties are welcomed with a choice of packages available. The club also offers corporate packages.

Northumberland Golf Club, High Gosforth Park, Newcastle upon Tyne NE3 5HT

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